

Together, you bring me your candle, shining  
into my darkest night

The night  
I waved to my childhood

To my little town Koya

To my mother

To the little house that was shining under  
the sun

Together, you bring me amity

Together, we are gifted to speak  
with the wind

Together, we are gifted to be in  
the moment of the future

Together, we are  
Never to be alone.

- from *Harmony*, by Sabahat Tahir<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Poem written for *A celebration of multidisciplinary artwork by a network of immigrant artists*, March 8 & 15, 2008. Excerpt used with permission of the author.

University of Alberta

Working (in) the gap:  
A critical examination of the race/culture divide in human services

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of Human Ecology

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Fall 2010  
Edmonton, Alberta

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to my parents, Mary Wolfe and the late Samuel Wolfe, who were ahead of their time, and taught me that it is never too late.

## Abstract

This project entails a critical examination of the race/culture divide in human services from the vantage point of middle women – non-professional grassroots advocates who emerged in the 1990s to address inequities that minoritized immigrants experience with main stream human services in Canada. The *race/culture divide* denotes critical race theorists' critique of a focus on cultural difference that obscures racism. Shaped by critical race theory and critical research methods, and drawing on interviews and participant observation involving 25 middle women, my findings reveal that the middle women's articulations of barriers and gaps as systemic inequities are at odds with main stream services' tendencies to focus on cultural challenges. This tension results in the discursive production of a *cultural niche*, a gendered space of exploitation of a culturally defined *Middle Woman*, who is thus rendered perpetually immigrant. The study illuminates how the Middle Woman navigates a complex and perilous tension between jeopardizing relationships with main stream organizations and simultaneously resisting what she experiences as disrespectful, unacceptable, unethical and overtly racist interfaces with human services. Although the middle women recounted numerous, visceral and detailed culturalist-racist interfaces in systemically racialized human service systems, they were equivocal about *naming* racism until I raised it directly. They gave meaning to "in Canada" experiences through their particular pre-migration realities in a process of continuous comparison between "back home" and "here," positioning

them differentially in relation to Canada, and therefore also to the *possibility* of naming racism in Canada. The middle women engage in a continuous process of *discerning* racism, always weighing it against other explanations for inequitable treatment. The project thus draws attention to the toll that navigating the race/culture divide takes in embodying the sensed and draining the spirit. It draws attention to the process through which I, as a white researcher, came to see the workings of our racialized society. My research contributes to the literature on the race/culture divide and whiteness studies, and has implications for research on racism, dialogue about cultural competence and anti-racist practice, and conceptualizing settlement and responsive human services.

## Acknowledgements

This study would not have been possible without the unparalleled dedication and commitment of the “middle women” who joined me in exploring and examining the sensitive and painful topic of race and racism in human services. I am humbled by your humility. To you, I owe the deepest respect and gratitude. Our learning continues.

Each member of my doctoral committee was an outstanding source of inspiration, not the least because of her own passion and commitment to addressing issues of equity and equality through scholarly and other pursuits. I am indebted to each of you for important insights and the substantive challenges you posed along the way. A committee comprised of scholars from four disciplines and departments was daunting at times, and I could not have asked for better collaboration in supporting me throughout the development and conduct of my doctoral research.

Special thanks to Deanna Williamson for your unbridled confidence in me, commitment of time, careful reading and attention to detail, and drive for scholarly work. You provided unhesitatingly warm and crucial support during some very difficult times. This research done in this way would not have happened without Sara Dorow’s course in “race, culture and identity” at the beginning of my doctoral program. You were pivotal to my thinking through the issues relevant to this project, and a source of support from beginning to end. Jennifer Kelly provided an astute ear, and asked tough questions that called for nuanced examination. You helped me *see*. Maria Mayan was a consummate mentor in qualitative inquiry during my two-year residency at the International Institute for Qualitative Methodology. Your openness to the breadth and depth of possibilities was a gift. And for that final question on the meaning of the *post!* And, finally, thanks to Janice Morse for getting me started on the doctoral journey.

Thanks also to Yasmeen Abu-Laban, who served as the external examiner for my doctoral candidacy. You encouraged me to consider the significance of my research within its broader context(s), which gave me

the second wind I needed for the work ahead. I appreciated the subsequent informal chats about postdoctoral possibilities. Josephine Etowa was a “find” as external examiner for my doctoral defense. Your work to surface racism in health care instilled confidence in the importance and timeliness of my research. I anticipate and hope that we will engage in fruitful collaboration in the future.

Doctoral awards made it much easier for me to complete this work. I gratefully acknowledge the following sources of funding: a CIHR Strategic Training Fellowship (EQUIPP), Province of Alberta Graduate Fellowships, Queen Elizabeth II Graduate Scholarship (Doctoral), Department of Human Ecology tuition subsidy, Canadian Federation of University Women Graduate Student Award, and the Prairie Metropolis Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Integration Graduate Student Award and subsequent travel grant.

Lynda Workman, Julie Gellner, and Beth Lange set precedents that motivated me to return to academic studies. Seeing that it was possible made it possible. Yvonne Chiu has been at my side from before the beginning, as an act of trust. Goze Dogu and Tunca Ataoglu, Julie Gellner, Ann Goldblatt, and Lynda Workman were constant companions when I surfaced from the depths. Thanks for always being there – no matter what – and for celebrating my milestones.

My sons, Adam Wolfe Gordon and Eric Wolfe-Gordon, grew up during this doctoral project. Your engagement with what interests you made space for me to do what I needed to do, but your pursuits were also a welcome distraction from the task at hand.

Lastly. I am eternally grateful to Ken Gordon, the love of my life, for enduring this long and winding trek. Your absolute loving and approving support, and acceptance of my need for preoccupied dedication and focus elsewhere, made it doable. It’s time to dance.



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## Notes on anonymity

I have used the following practices to maximize anonymity of the site and the research participants:

1. All research participants' names are pseudonyms.
2. The name of the research setting is a pseudonym.

In addition to maximizing anonymity, the name Grassroots Multicultural Community-based Non-governmental Organization, referred to as GMCNO throughout the thesis, is meant to signify the position of the organization in relation to other organizations dedicated to supporting (im)migrants, such as immigrant-serving organizations, which receive government funding to provide government-designated resettlement services and supports to new immigrants.

### 3. Middle Woman

Middle Woman is a pseudonym for the actual title of the worker adopted and used by the GMCNO involved in this study. Middle Woman denotes the *position*, whereas *middle woman* (or women) refers to the *individual* (or individuals) who occupy the position.

Although a small number of men also fill a "middle" position in the research setting, women overwhelmingly fill the position. I have chosen to use Middle Woman and middle woman or women to draw attention to the gendered nature of both the position and the work the Middle Woman does.

### 4. References

In a number of places throughout the thesis, I have referred to research and other documents that, if identified, would reveal the research setting or participants. To protect their anonymity I have anonymized these sources by citing them in one of the following ways, as applicable: Researcher, GMCNO document, GMCNO report, Report, or Personal communication with middle woman, with date. I have kept a separate confidential list of these sources elsewhere for my own reference.

## Notes on language

*As I write, I face the inescapability of reductionism. Language is delimitation, a strategic limitation of possible meanings. It frames; it brings into focus by that which goes unremarked. (Lather, 1991, p. xix)*

*Language use [is] a form of social practice. (Fairclough, 1992, p. 63)*

The above quotes suggest the tension that is an inherent part of (the act of) writing. I am ever more aware that all concepts are contested (or at least contestable). I have therefore tried to avoid (and evade) *defining* terms (as if they could be defined). Still, I must write. A guide to how I have used particular terms that have contested meanings, and that appear throughout the thesis, follows. They are listed in order of first use in the thesis.

### 1. Migrant(s) and Immigrant(s)

My research focused on the race/culture divide in human services as it relates to people who have migrated to Canada. It is difficult to write about my research and the setting in which I carried it out, without use of the term immigrant. The participants in my research describe the focus of their work as immigrants and refugees.

Yet, immigrant and refugee are ascribed categories and problematic in ways that are central to my research project. Many authors have argued that it is important to remember that a) there is nothing natural about being immigrant, and b) those who comprise any ascribed category are not homogeneous (see, for example, Bannerji, 2000; Folsom & Park, 2004).

The term "migrant" can apply to anyone who moves, whether from one country to another across national borders, or within a country across other types of geographical borders. In the context of my research it refers to anyone who has moved across the border into Canada from another country. In short, for my purposes "migrant" refers to immigrants, refugees and temporary workers, regardless of ascribed immigration category.

In general, I have chosen to use the term "(im)migrant" to signal the combination of movement to Canada from another country *and* ascribed

status. This reduction, or collapsing of immigrant, refugee and temporary foreign worker is problematic in potentially obscuring important differences among these groups. However, for the most part, I have risked doing this, because the GMCNO works across these groups in ways that do not ascribe them to discrete categories, except where strategically necessary to do so (as in funding applications and requirements, for example). Even then, the GMCNO most often describes the people with whom it works as "immigrant" and "new emerging." The relevance and implications of this distinction are made visible through this research.

Furthermore, clearly all (im)migrants to Canada do not require post-migration assistance of the sorts provided by the GMCNO and the Middle Woman who is at the centre of my study. It is important, then, to highlight the fact that (im)migrants' experiences with human services vary with their particular identities and positionalities (class, gender, racialized identities, immigration statuses, etc.) both within and between ascribed categories in not always predictable ways. The ways in which participants are differentially situated in relation to the issues central to this study are made visible in the findings. In general, however, the people who make their way into contact with the GMCNO do so *because* they experience significant short- or long-term challenges in which human services are (already) implicated. Otherwise, they would have no need for the GMCNO or the Middle Woman.

Notwithstanding the above, I use the terms immigrant, refugee, and temporary foreign worker, where relevant, in a) citing others' work, b) referring to the uses of the concepts in particular contexts, and c) quoting participants or documents.

## 2. Minoritized

I borrow the term "minoritize" from Burman, Smailes, & Chantler (2004) to draw attention to the fact that minority is not a natural category. It is constituted through social relations of power. Minoritized connotes the active production of a minority status.



In my study, I use minoritized to refer to (im)migrants to Canada who experience persistent barriers and other issues with accessing and using human services for reasons related to their "characteristics," the nature of which are made visible through this study.

### 3. Racialization

The meanings and uses of the term "racialization" and its usefulness are the subject of debate (see Murji & Solomos, 2005; Rattansi, 2005; Satzewich, 1998). For my purposes, Malik's (2006) notion of racialization as "the lens or medium through which race-thinking operates" (as cited in Murji & Solomos, 2005, p. 3) is helpful. Racialization, then, "summarizes" the systematic practices that differentiate and position groups of people (and the individuals ascribed to these groups) unequally (hierarchically) in relation to one another, on the basis of physical and/or social characteristics. Satzewich (1998) suggests, "The crucial element to the process of racialization is the delineation of group boundaries and identities by references to physical and/or genetic criteria or by reference to the term race" (p. 32). Racialization "refers to the process that produces and constructs the meaning of race and to the structures that accompany such a process" (Small, 1999, as cited in Agnew, 2007, p. 9).

The term racialization is often applied (only) to people of (non-white) colour who, as a group, are positioned hierarchically as inferior or subordinate. I understand racialization to apply to the processes through which all people are positioned in relation to each other through the way race-thinking operates. This means that "racialized" applies (equally) to white people, who as a group, are positioned as superior or dominant. I use racialization and racialized in this way throughout this thesis.

### 4. Racially minoritized (im)migrants

I could simply use "minoritized." But (im)migrants may be minoritized in non-racialized ways as well. For example, through disability, sexual orientation, class, gender, and so on. Although these types of minoritization apply to the context of my study, I set out

explicitly to examine how (im)migrants are or might be minoritized through race-thinking. The people who occupy the position of Middle Woman in my study clearly have differing amounts of pigment in their skin, ranging from (what appears to be) white skin to yellow skin to brown skin to black skin and variations within each. That some of the participants appeared to have white skin did not render them less racially minoritized insofar as race-thinking ascribed them to inferior positions on the basis of other characteristics related to their origins, such as country, type of language (and related accented English), and so on, all in relation to a normative standard. (As will be clear in Chapter 7.)

Whether "racially" is the appropriate term for the above-noted types of minoritization, rather than "culturally" or "ethnically," is arguable. Following Li (1999a), I suggest that although race, culture and ethnicity do have different connotations and usages, insofar as they a) reference origins, and b) are used as the basis for distinguishing among and allocating people to categories, they are based on race-thinking. It is therefore appropriate to use racially in this context. Furthermore, it is precisely the distinction between race and culture and the way in which a focus on culture (or ethnicity) can obscure racism that is the central focus of my research. For these reasons, I sometimes use "racially minoritized (im)migrants" as a reminder that the (im)migrants of concern in this research are minoritized *through* race.

## 5. Equality, inequality/disparity and equity

Equality and equity concepts are central to the issues underlying the research for this thesis. I have drawn on literature that examines the contested meanings and uses of these terms (for example, Bell, 1974; Macinko & Starfield, 2002). In addition, the uses of these terms in gender studies and health studies, in particular, have shaped my uses of these terms in this thesis.

"Equality" means that all people "enjoy the same status in society. This means having equal conditions to participate and contribute to social, legal, political, economic and cultural development at all levels of society,

and to benefit from the results" (DAWN, 2003, P13). "It does not mean that [groups] have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are [in a particular group]" (instraw, 2004a).

"Inequality" means that there are differences between individuals in some respect. Disparity is a synonym for inequality. Applied to my research, this means differences in access to, use of, treatment through, or outcomes of, human services. (As will be clear, my research is concerned primarily with services in the education, social services, employment, and health sectors.)

The concept of "equity" brings *judgment* into analysis of equality and inequality as they relate to access, use, treatment and outcomes. Are differences problematic in terms of fairness and principles of social justice? When "equality means everyone is treated the same" (Illinois Humanities Council, 2007, P1), it ignores salient conditions that shape patterned differences between individuals and groups (Birch & Abelson, 1993; see also Bell, 1974). It is for this reason that "more equality" (more equal treatment) does not necessarily result in "more equity" (more fairness) (Bell, 1974). Operating on the abstract *universal assumption* that everyone is equal does not take "into consideration the fact that this society has many groups ... who have not always been given and/or have not had a level field on which to play. These groups have frequently been made to feel inferior to those in the mainstream and some have been oppressed" (Illinois Humanities Council, 2007, P3). The meaning and accomplishment of equality, therefore, have come to be both the core and the critique of debates about social justice in western liberal democracies (Bannerji, 2000; Razack, 1998).

"Equity means everybody is treated fairly. [It] confronts difference" (Illinois Humanities Council, 2007, P3), taking into account the conditions that result in *unfair* or *unjust* disparities. "The concept of equity provides a case for *unequal treatment*" (Illinois Humanities Council, 2007, P3, emphasis added). It can provide for "special treatment" in the interests of

leveling the playing field for those who have been disadvantaged through histories of marginalization on the basis of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, etc. (Illinois Humanities Council, 2007; Nazroo, 2003). In this way, “equity leads to equality” (DAWN, 2003, P13). Thus, “equity means fairness of treatment for [different groups], according to their respective needs” (Instraw, 2004b). In short, then, inequity can be understood as unfairness or injustice.

Clearly, assessments of equality and equity involve comparisons (Bell, 1974). In relation to the issues underlying my research, the concepts of horizontal and vertical equity are helpful (Birch & Abelson, 1993; Macinko & Starfield, 2002). Horizontal equity involves assessments of equality and inequality between equals, on the basis of the principle of “equal treatment for equivalent needs” (Macinko & Starfield, 2002, p. 2), while vertical equity involves assessments of equality and inequality between unequals, on the basis of the principle of “preferential treatment for those with greater needs” (Macinko & Starfield, 2002, p. 2).

Meaningful assessment of fairness and justice is, by definition, messy: “Equity of what in relation to whom?” (Birch & Abelson, 1993, p. 630). For example, equity has been considered in relation to, among others, the following: equal *access* for equal need – equity of access can be interpreted as “the opportunity to use services when needed without explicit financial barriers” (Birch & Abelson, 1993, p. 633); equal *use* for equal need – which takes into account the “burden of use” and “differential preferences” (Birch & Abelson, 1993); equity and *need* defined as the “ability to benefit” from what is available (Culyer, 1991, as cited in Birch & Abelson, 1993, p. 641); and distribution of opportunities, processes of allocation, and outcomes (Bell, 1974).

I especially like the notion that “more equal distribution of health is the true ethical imperative... What must dominate is the distribution of health and how health care interventions alter that for the better” (Culyer, 1991, as cited in Birch & Abelson, 1993, p. 641). As Bell (1974) put it, what allocations (or inputs) “will rectify the situation by either producing

“legitimate” inequalities or eliminating “illegitimate” inequalities and, thus, creating equity?” (p. 20) I extend this idea to all human services.

But, as Bell (1974) astutely observed, “at least two long-term trends can be identified with respect to social stratification and differentiation. One is the increase of *inequality*. A second is the increase of *equality*” (p. 24, emphasis added), depending on what aspects of society are involved. For example, while inequality has been reproduced and sustained through increasing social differentiation and specialization, and amassing of power and wealth, at the same time a “democratic revolution” has resulted in improved conditions and protections that mitigate structural inequalities.

Racialized disparities or inequalities, then, denote the differential effects of differentiating practices. Since disparities that are shaped through ascribed racial identities are, by definition, essentialist, they contain the connotation of inequity.

Taking into account all of the above, in this thesis, unless citing other authors’ explicit uses of the terms, I use inequality or disparity interchangeably to refer to differences between groups in terms of access, use, treatment, or outcomes of human services. I use inequity to refer to inequality or disparity deemed unfair or unjust based on relevant assessments that take into consideration the conditions that shape even or uneven playing fields. Here, Carens’ (2000) extended notion of justice as not only *fairness*, but also *evenhandedness* is helpful in positing criteria for thinking through and weighing such relevant assessments (see Chapter 10).

As will be clear, participants in my study call for comparable treatment of (im)migrants (to main stream) through unequal treatment (or “special treatment”) that addresses inequitable disparities – that is, it remedies racialized disadvantages.

## 6. Main stream

I intentionally use the term “main stream” rather than “mainstream” to draw attention to the word “main” as in predominant and dominant.

## Notes on formatting

Throughout the thesis, I have used the following formatting practices for citing sources:

### 1. Quotations from interview transcripts

Short quotes or verbatim phrases from interview transcripts are included in the main text in "quotation marks."

Segments of more than 39 words are shown in indented single spaced paragraphs (rather than 1 ½ spaced as in the main text), in font size of 11 (rather than 12 used for the main text).

I have used *italics* for indented quotes from interviewees, who are identified in brackets by pseudonym, first name only, following the quote – for example, (Sary) or (Siobahn). I interviewed a small number of participants more than once. In these cases, I have denoted the relevant interview with a number following the pseudonym – for example, (Lisa1) or (Siobahn7).

I have used plain text for quotes from me as researcher. I am identified in brackets as Ruth, followed by the name of the interviewee – for example, (Ruth in Lenore1).

### 2. Quotations from other research materials

I have cited fieldnotes, my researcher's journal, coding annotations and memos, according to the source, title of the observation or note (if applicable), and date.

As above, short segments are included in the main text in quotations marks; longer segments are shown in indented single-spaced 11-point plain type. For example:

(Excerpt from Researcher's Journal, February 28, 2009)

(Memo Excerpt, "Positionally different," June 3, 2008)

### 3. Quotations from the organization's documents and the literature

I have formatted all other references cited according to standard American Psychological Association (APA) style.

## Foreword

I have organized the thesis in four parts. Part I, comprising three chapters, sets the stage for the subsequent parts. It provides a background and orientation to the research topic and focus (Chapter 1), positions the research theoretically and methodologically (Chapter 2), and finally within relevant literature (Chapter 3).

Part II, also comprising three chapters, draws attention to the ways in which minoritized (im)migrants' experiential realities are articulated in terms of inequities and cultural and linguistic barriers (Chapter 4), and points to how they come to be articulated in these ways as discursive effects of power relations (Chapters 5 and 6). In a sense, Part II focuses on the *culture* in the race/culture divide.

Part III then focuses in on the *race* in the race/culture divide. Here, I question what in Part II appeared as an "absence" of race. I first examine the participants' narratives more closely, showing the implicit (covert) race-thinking underlying participants' explications of their own day-to-day experiences with human services and those of the people they support. I then use participants' responses to my explicitly questioning the absence of race and racism in their talk, to uncover routine overtly racist culturalist-racist interfaces in society and across human services sectors (Chapter 7). But I then check what, following the explicit focus on race and racism, seemed to be a pervasive expression of the significance of race and racism to participants, by illuminating the nuanced ways in which participants did talk about race and racism (Chapter 8).

Part IV returns to the tension of the race/culture divide. I examine how the participants navigate the divide – "there are many dances that you do," and the toll it takes (Chapter 9). Finally, I revisit the race/culture divide in human services, drawing tentative conclusions and discussing implications of my research (Chapter 10).

## PART I

### Chapter 1. Orientation and background

#### Introduction

In response to increasing cultural diversity of the population in North America during the past 30 years (Chin, 2000; Drevdahl, Canales, & Dorcy, 2008; Kumas-Tan, Beagan, Loppie, MacLeod, & Frank, 2007), cultural competence has become a requirement and a goal in human service organizations.<sup>2</sup> Critical race studies<sup>3</sup> scholars, however, contest the very premises underlying the concept of cultural competence (Bannerji, 2000; Li, 1999a; Razack, 1998; Schick, 2002; Schick & St. Denis, 2005). As Sherene Razack (1998) has put it, there are “risks of talking culture ... when, as so often happens, it is the dominant group that controls the interpretation of what it means to take culture into account” (p. 59). The 5th Annual Canadian Critical Race Conference coined *The race/culture divide in education, law and the helping professions* (Race/Culture, 2006)<sup>4</sup> to draw attention to how a focus on culture can obscure racism. According to one of the conference organizers, “a growing number of professionals maintain that paying attention to culture alone and notions of “cultural difference” carries the risk of avoiding issues of racism” (Carol Schick, as cited in Conference, 2006, P2).

The goal of my research was to examine how the race/culture divide operates through human services from the vantage point of middle

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<sup>2</sup> This is in itself noteworthy, obscuring the fact that the presence of Aboriginal and Black peoples in Canada and the U.S., and associated racialized inequities, did not provide the impetus for cultural responsiveness. Since my focus in this project was cultural competence and anti-racism with respect to (im)migrants (that is, settlers), I will not discuss this issue further.

<sup>3</sup> I use “critical race studies” to refer to an interdisciplinary academic field. Thus I use it in a “singular” form throughout.

<sup>4</sup> An edited collection of papers from this conference was released in late 2009: Schick, C., & McNinch, J. (Eds.), *“I Thought Pocahontas Was a Movie”: Perspectives on Race/Culture Binaries in Education and Service Professions*. “These papers presented at the 2006 Canadian Critical Race Conference reflect on the state of Canadian critical race pedagogy and practice in fields such as education, social work, healthcare, and justice.” Retrieved from <http://www.cprc.ca/forthcomingtitles.htm>



women – grassroots advocates for equality of health and well being of minoritized (im)migrants in contemporary Canada. Middle women have emerged since the mid-1990s to address minoritized (im)migrants' inequitable experiences with human services, which contribute to racialized inequities in social and health outcomes. The timing of emergence of contemporary middle women is not accidental. Historically "middle people" have emerged under conditions of asymmetrical power relations (Paine, 1971; Szasz, 1994). They have existed in the form of brokers, liaisons, and go-betweens throughout the history of colonization of North America and in the relations between anthropologists and communities (Ghorayshi, 2002; Researcher, 2003).<sup>5</sup> The middle women in my study arose at the intersection of global forces of migration and national, provincial and municipal action and inaction.

There has been little if any investigation of the race/culture divide from the vantage point of grassroots non-professional workers who (by definition) work at the edges of main stream human services in Canada. With few exceptions, existing research emanates from the disciplines of education, social work and nursing, and focuses on professionals involved in main stream organizations including schools, social service agencies, hospitals and other health care settings.

Both experience and theory shaped my research. First, my research arose from 10 years of working with the middle women in the role of community-based evaluation consultant. In my research, I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the conditions of emergence of the middle women and how these conditions are implicated in the particular foci and practices of their work. Second, the dialogue underlying the theme of the 2006 conference entitled *The race/culture divide* prompted me to examine the social relations of power implicated in the emergence and practices of

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<sup>5</sup> Contemporarily, Community Health Representatives working in Aboriginal communities have been conceptualized in a similar way (see, for example, Satterfield, Burd, Valdez, Hosey, & Shield, 2002).

middle women. Bridging experience and theory, I sought to understand what I perceived as contradictions in the middle women's practices, contradictions that seemed to signal the race/culture divide.

In this chapter, I briefly situate the significance of my research within the literature and within (or under) Canadian conditions of (im)migration. I then introduce the research setting and identify contradictions that gave rise to my interest in the race/culture divide. Finally, I briefly outline upcoming chapters of the thesis.

### **Situating the research**

#### ***Cultural competence and anti-racism***

While the initial impetus for cultural competence in human services was the increasing diversity of the population following World War II (Elder, 2003; Leininger, 2001; Wells, 2000), recent focus on cultural competence has been attributed to recognition of racialized inequities in the human services sector, especially in the health field (Beach, Saha, & Cooper, 2006; Betancourt, Green, & Carrillo, 2002; Brach & Fraserirector, 2000; Jezewski & Sotnik, 2001). This shift in focus to cultural competence as a mechanism for addressing racialized inequities has been accompanied by a dramatic increase in the literature promoting cultural competence during the past 10 years. At the same time, however, critical race studies scholars have criticized the very premises that underlie conceiving of *cultural* solutions to *racialized* inequities. Despite the overwhelming focus on cultural competency, it is clear that racialized inequities in access, use and treatment in the human services sector persist. In light of an absence of evidence of the efficacy of cultural competence to reduce racialized inequities, some human services scholars<sup>6</sup> have concluded that main

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<sup>6</sup> "Human services scholars." A strange descriptor. Here I mean to include scholars involved in educating those who become professionals in human service delivery, such as nurses, teachers, social workers, psychologists, *and* those who research inequities in human services and pedagogies relevant to addressing such inequities. This latter group includes some critical race studies scholars. Here, of course, I am most concerned with racialized inequities, and pedagogies relevant to addressing them.

stream services have largely failed disadvantaged and minoritized populations (Chin, 2000; Mitchell, 2007; Nazroo, 2003; Oxman-Martinez & Hanley, 2005). As I discuss in Chapter 3, just as cultural competence has come under attack from a number of vantage points, resistance to anti-racism among main stream pre-service professionals (that is, students) has also resulted in critique of anti-racism as a strategy for addressing racialized inequities in human services. Some critical race scholars have argued that anti-racism needs to be rethought (Anthias & Lloyd, 2002; Essed, 2007). My research was therefore timely, as both cultural competence and anti-racism have come under the microscope.

### *The Canadian context*

The theorized race/culture divide in human services is particularly important in Canada because Canada touts a reputation as one of the most and increasingly diverse, open and tolerant societies in the world (CIC, 2008; Kenney, 2008). Indeed, in 2006 immigrants<sup>7</sup> comprised one-fifth of Canada's population, the largest proportion since 1931 (Statistics Canada, 2008). With Canada's economic needs continuing to drive (im)migration policy, more than two-thirds of Canada's population growth between 2001 and 2006 was attributable to immigration (Statistics Canada, 2008). Prior to the 1960s, immigrants to Canada were primarily white Europeans, but there has been a gradual shift in the countries from which (im)migrants arrive since the mid-1970s. Whereas 62 percent of immigrants to Canada in 1971 were from Europe, 84 percent of immigrants who arrived between 2001 and 2006 were born in regions other than Europe (Statistics Canada, 2009a).

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<sup>7</sup> "The immigrant population refers to those who have, or have ever had, landed-immigrant status, whether or not they are currently Canadian citizens. ... Non-permanent residents, such as foreign workers or students or refugee claimants, are not included in the immigrant population, though they are included in the total population" (Statistics Canada, 2001, p. 3).

As these policy changes shifted immigration from predominately white to increasingly non-white<sup>8</sup> populations, in the early 1980s the Government of Canada coined the phrase *visible minorities* to which it ascribed non-white people (except Aboriginal peoples).<sup>9,10</sup> Between 1981 and 2006, the visible minority population grew from five percent to 16 percent, of whom 70 percent were (im)migrants (Statistics Canada, 2009b). Between 2001 and 2006, this population increased at a much faster pace than the overall population of Canada, with a rate of growth of 27 percent compared to 5 percent for the population as a whole (Statistics Canada, 2009b).

Despite the Government of Canada's control over the nation's (im)migrant admission, recruitment and selection criteria, it has historically provided few formal supports and services to assist with resettlement (Beyene, Butcher, Joe, & Richmond, 1996). In fact, Beyene et al. (1996) suggest that government responsibility for resettlement services is relatively recent, having begun in the 1970s in recognition of the acute needs of Vietnamese (im)migrants. Prior to that, church groups and informal ethno-specific organizations historically assumed major responsibility for supporting (im)migrants. Government funding to such organizations has increased since the 1970s, as a direct result of "enormous amounts of human energy ... each year in re-justifying and re-packaging their activities to suit the changing political priorities of a multitude of funders" (Beyene et al., 1996, p. 175). Despite the increase in funding, Government continues to provide few formal supports and services (CIC,

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<sup>8</sup> Unless citing a specific author or context such as the U.S., I use "non-white" rather than "people of colour" to recognize that white is (also) a colour, what Sherene Razack (1998) refers to as the "colour of domination" (p. 11). (See also, Li, 2007.)

<sup>9</sup> The separation between immigrants and Aboriginals has also been shaped through social relations of power. Immigrants and Aboriginals are rarely discussed together in relation to taking culture into account. But that discussion is for another project.

<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that the term *visible minority* is actively contested. In March 2007, for example, the UN's anti-racism watchdog said the term "might contravene an international treaty aimed at combating racism" (P2) and called Canada racist for using this term (CanWest, 2007).

2009a, 2009b). Furthermore, the Government provides funding for a narrowly-defined set of resettlement supports and services, for up to three years following arrival of newcomers to Canada, depending on their ascribed immigration category (Beyene et al., 1996; Thobani, 2007). Many of the challenges that (im)migrants face go beyond the nature, scope and time frames of Government-designated resettlement programs (Beyene et al., 1996; GMCNO document, 2009a). For many (im)migrants, settling in Canada is simultaneously a continuous life-long process of adjustment to a new script and a process punctuated by pivotal moments in the life course that resurface unfamiliarity – such as finding employment, working, becoming pregnant, enrolling children in school for the first time, and parenting in two cultures.

Just as the political and economic climate of Canada shaped the need for non-racist immigration policy in the 1960s (Jakubowski, 1997), neo-liberal and neo-conservative policies have shaped a shift away from the welfare state since the 1990s (Frideres, 2006). In recent years, Canadian government departments responsible for immigration, and their counterparts at the provincial level, have increasingly formalized contractual relationships between federal and provincial governments and community-based organizations. This has resulted in, and at times required, tighter organizational mandates, service parameters and accountability mechanisms, limits on the range of services provided and styles of delivery, and restrictions in service eligibility (Baines, 2004; Frideres, 2006; Mitchell, 2007; Oxman-Martinez & Hanley, 2005; Wayland, 2006). It is not surprising, then, that the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC) (CIC, 2004) indicates that remarkably large proportions<sup>11</sup> of immigrants had difficulty accessing employment (70 percent), training opportunities (40 percent), housing (38 percent), and health services (22 percent), even within the first six months after their

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<sup>11</sup> Proportions of immigrants who had tried to access such assistance.

arrival. Beyond initial resettlement, although two-thirds of new immigrants reported that "life in Canada has lived up to their expectations," significantly large proportions also reported major difficulties with such basic challenges as finding an adequate job (46 percent) and learning English or French (26 percent) (Statistics Canada, 2007a).

Coinciding with the shift in immigration patterns and the rising prevalence of neo-liberal and neo-conservative politics and policies, scholars across many disciplines have drawn attention to the reality that many (im)migrants to Canada, especially those of non-white, non-European origins, disproportionately experience exclusion from employment and education opportunities, health services, housing and other resources, as well as community participation (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002; Anderson & Reimer Kirkham, 1998; Beyene et al., 1996; Etowa, 2009; Gagnon, 2002; Galabuzi, 2004; Hyman, 2009). Racialized inequities in health and social outcomes have been linked to inequitable access to such services, resources, and opportunities (CIC, 2004; Galabuzi, 2004; Hyman, 2009; Jackson, 2001; Mitchell, 2007; Report, 2003a; Smith & Jackson, 2002; Wayland, 2006; Williams, 2002; Zanchetta & Poureslami, 2006). There is also evidence that non-white children and youth are *over*represented in some kinds of human services, such as child welfare and juvenile prisons (GMNCO documentation, 2008;<sup>12</sup> Mirchandani & Chan, 2005; van Ryn & Fu, 2003).

Further, there is mounting evidence that the ability to access services and opportunities does not ensure equitable treatment. Inequities persist in the scope and quality of services that are offered to and utilized by racially minoritized populations (Etowa, 2009; Geiger, 2001; van Ryn & Fu, 2003). In fact, many scholars, arguing from different vantage points, have suggested that racialized inequities are sustained in and through

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<sup>12</sup> Participants in my research reported disproportionately high numbers of selected refugee populations on child welfare intervention caseloads in particular neighbourhoods of the city.

human services (Etowa, 2009; Johnson et al., 2004; Nazroo, 2003; Schwalbe et al., 2000; van Ryn & Fu, 2003; Williams, 2002; Wolfe, Mayan, & Tanesescu, in preparation).

According to the 2002 Canadian Ethnic Diversity Survey (EDS),<sup>14</sup> 20 percent of visible minorities (compared to five percent who were not visible minorities) reported experiencing discrimination during the previous five years. Discrimination was most prevalent among people with black skin, and South Asian and Chinese populations (Statistics Canada, 2003a). In addition to discriminatory behaviours on the part of individuals, there is growing documentation of organizational and institutional<sup>15</sup> racisms (Galabuzi, 2004; GMCNO report, 2004; Kunz, Milan, & Schetagne, 2000; Mirchandani & Chen, 2005; Oxman-Martinez et al., 2005; Scott, Selbee, & Reed, 2006; Smith & Jackson, 2002; Solomon & Rezai-Rashti, 2001; Statistics Canada, 2003a, 2007b).

Many community-based non-governmental organizations have emerged to fill gaps in the resettlement sector and to address the inequitable access and treatment that many minoritized (im)migrants routinely experience (Beyene et al., 1996; Chekki, 2006; Das Gupta, 2007; Gagne, 2008; Researcher, 2003; Wayland, 2006). The emergence of middle women in the mid-1990s ultimately resulted in the establishment of one such organization in Alberta – the Grassroots Multicultural Community-based Non-governmental Organization (GMCNO). My research investigated how the race/culture divide operates through the social relations of power implicated in the emergence of this organization.

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<sup>14</sup>The (EDS) is a sample survey with a cross-sectional design with a sample chosen according to two categories: "CBFA+ (Canadian or British or French or Americans or Australians and/or New Zealanders) and Non-CBFA+ (all other responses containing at least one origin other than CBFA+). This final category was divided into European origins and non-European origins." "In addition to the two official languages, interviews were conducted in seven non-official languages: Mandarin, Cantonese, Italian, Punjabi, Portuguese, Vietnamese and Spanish" (Statistics Canada, 2003b).

<sup>15</sup> I use *organization* to refer to an individual agency and *institution*, following Smith (2001), to refer to interconnected organizations that collectively act in broader and more systemic ways, such as a school system, health system, and immigration system. I use institutional and systemic interchangeably. Practices become institutionalized (embedded systematically) through organizations.

## The research setting

Established in 1998, the GMCNO's mandate is "to support immigrant and refugee individuals and families in attaining optimum health through relevant health education, community development and advocacy support," based on principles of democratic governance, direct responsiveness and accountability, and equity and social justice (GMCNO document, n.d.a). The space that middle women take up, or occupy, was a particularly relevant site for investigation of the race/culture divide in human services because the GMCNO both recognizes the significance of cultural demands and also explicitly names racism and discrimination as barriers to addressing inequities. Out of recognition that "some health and social services are not culturally sensitive to immigrants and refugees [*sic*] needs" (GMCNO document, n.d.b, p. 1), the GMCNO has called for an expansion of cultural competency training for human services staff and organizations (e.g., GMCNO document, 2003). At the same time, it understands that "beyond the cultural explanation of inability to access health care<sup>16</sup> is a deeper issue of racism and discrimination that immigrants and refugees are vulnerable [*sic*], as members of visible minorities" (GMCNO document, n.d.b, p. 1). Indeed, the middle women have conceptualized their position as the "critical link" in a cultural divide – "ethnic minority culture and the Eurocanadian [*sic*] majority culture" – in providing health and social support (p. 2). Importantly, however, they have experienced that it is

*a persistent challenge for advocates of minority health to transform the content of the health and social services sector so that they can accommodate different cultural norms and patterns [because] this transformation not only transcends the process of organizational change but also strikes at the root of power structures in the political and economic spheres of society. (GMCNO document, n.d.b, p. 1, also citing Li, 1999)*

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<sup>16</sup> Although this vision document talks about "health care," the GMCNO addresses issues that minoritized (im)migrants face across sectors, consistent with a health promotion orientation to the social determinants of health (see Labonte, 1993; Raphael, 2004). I therefore did *not* narrow my study to their involvement in "health care" in its more narrow sense.



Integral to the GMCNO's day-to-day work involving individuals and families, service providers and organizations, is its role as a catalyst in building community partnerships and, more broadly, developing culturally responsive community resources. In 2003, the GMCNO was pivotal in establishing a health forum, which has evolved into a coalition for equity in health and well-being (Tanesescu, n.d.). Responding to emerging issues of refugee families, the GMCNO was a catalyst for developing a health centre for newly arrived refugees. A number of other innovative models for service and support have resulted from projects for which the GMCNO was a catalyst or partner.

How is it that the middle woman tells a story of racial discrimination and also promotes cultural competence as a solution? How are race and racism implicated in the middle women's work? How do the middle women conceive of cultural competence from their position on the edges of main stream services? How do they imagine the potential for catalyzing organizational or institutional change? How do the middle women navigate the race/culture divide? My research set out to investigate these questions.

### *Impetus for my research*

Between 1993 and 2003, as a member of a team, I evaluated a number of GMCNO demonstration projects designed to prevent people who had (im)migrated to Canada from falling through the cracks as they attempted to access employment, health, education, social services, and other community resources and opportunities. During these projects, I observed intransigence on the part of many professional service providers, program managers, agencies and large bureaucratic systems across human services sectors. I was struck by the incredible commitment and persistence of the middle women who make up the GMCNO, especially in the face of what seem like such incremental outcomes of their efforts to catalyze organizational and system change. While I became almost despondent about the possibility of a more equitable future, the middle

women seemed hardy in their capacities to endure the slow process of achieving one.

But as previously mentioned, I also began to see what I perceived as contradictions in the middle women's practice. First, I noticed that as the middle women bridged (im)migrants to main stream services, they sometimes delineated cultural beliefs, values and practices of the (im)migrant populations they supported in ways that, it seemed to me, reinforced cultural stereotypes. This approach seemed to attribute barriers to cultural clashes or communicative conflicts resulting from a combination of language and cultural differences, rather than to structural or systemic factors. Moreover, I noticed that often these delineated cultures did not "fit," represent, or apply to, the middle women themselves.

Second, in mid-2003, as I was completing a project evaluation report, project participants debated naming systemic racism as an underlying barrier for many (im)migrants. Although project participants – middle women, service providers and members of minoritized (im)migrant communities – had spoken about systematic barriers throughout the pilot project, I had not named racism in the draft of the final report. Stakeholders connected to the GMCNO asked that racism be incorporated into the report as an underlying explanation for inequities. Selected main stream service providers, on the other hand, suggested that such strong language might jeopardize fragile relationships between the GMCNO and their organizations. What struck me at the time was how participants representing the dominant, main stream partners in the project could talk about jeopardizing fragile relationships in a context where the GMCNO was struggling to get by on piecemeal funding in the face of funding cuts.

Attempting to understand these seeming contradictions shaped the focus of some of my doctoral work. First, my interest in the GMCNO and the middle women *intensified* through my reading in critical race and

cultural studies. In the intertwined histories of nation building and legalized racism in Canada, and their implications for immigration and settlement, I came to understand culture as a site of historical struggles between dominant and subordinate social forces. Second, then, my interest *shifted* to the GMCNO as a site of cultural struggle – that is, a site in and through which social relations of power operate. As Razack (1998) implies: Who defines the need for, and approach to, “taking culture into account?” (pp. 59,84) Whose interests does cultural responsiveness serve? At the heart of the middle women's work is the idea that those who are minoritized in and through human services should have a voice in defining what is culturally appropriate. I began to reframe my understanding of the persistence of issues that many minoritized (im)migrants experience, along with the ascribed position of the GMCNO and the middle women, as implications of the power relations through which middle women are seen as addressing the needs of a “special interest group” (Personal communication, senior manager, 1998).<sup>17</sup>

The starting point for my research was the middle women's own succinct description of their practice as “working in the gap.”<sup>18</sup> *Working in the gap* clearly refers to “cracks” in human services, through which people fall as they try to access supports, services and other community resources and opportunities. I have come to understand that *working in the gap*, in an immediate sense, is about creating bridges across the cracks to prevent people from falling through. This is one way in which the middle women seek to address inequities in access to health and well-being – by being a bridge. Yet, simply bridging (im)migrants to existing services and resources can be seen as a strategy of assimilation (Beyene et al., 1996; Pina

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<sup>17</sup> In presenting final evaluation findings and implications to a stakeholder group in 1998, a senior manager commented that it would be difficult to take forward strategies to address the interests of a “special interest group” when the board is faced with so many competing interests. Later another senior manager accused me of sabotaging the work of the GMCNO by making such recommendations, although I had understood that we were all “on the same side.”

<sup>18</sup> This description came up during a project in 2002 (Report, 2003).

& Canty-Swapp, 1999) in that it does not object to, or resist, the gaps themselves.

For this reason, the GMCNO's concern with catalyzing organizational change was of particular interest to me. It seems to me that *working in the gap* is poignant in at least two other senses. First, it indexes the particular vantage point of the middle women – their position on the edges of the main stream of human services. The middle women “often refer to themselves as being in the “third space”; that *invisible* area between two cultures [*sic*]” (Researcher, 2003, p. 141, emphasis added), at the “borders between cultural patterns” (p. 188). The middle women are on the edges in a number of ways. They are outside the main stream, but positioned between main stream services and the minoritized (im)migrants whom they support. Furthermore, the GMCNO is not a recognized immigrant serving organization;<sup>19</sup> it does not receive funding for designated resettlement services. Nor is it an “ethno-specific” organization since its membership comprises individuals who have experienced inequities associated with migration, regardless of their particular racial, cultural or ethnic identifications, or ascribed (im)migrant classifications. Moreover, the middle women are not ascribed professional status by human service organizations, and the middle women's practice is not recognized as a profession in its own right. Thus, *working in the gap* denotes not only minoritized (im)migrant community members, but also the position of the middle women, falling through the cracks. In this way, the middle women's own experiences of the inequities associated with (im)migration are a resource in their everyday work.

As a group composed of members of minoritized (im)migrant communities, the GMCNO appears to be well-positioned to “contextualize oppressed groups’ claims” (Razack, 1998). Indeed, there is considerable

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<sup>19</sup> The GMCNO is not listed as a community resource for newcomers on Citizenship & Immigration Canada’s website (<http://www.servicesfornewcomers.cic.gc.ca/result.php>) or on the Government of Alberta “Welcoming Communities” website (<http://www.healthyalberta.com/HealthyPlaces/759.htm>).

evidence that the GMCNO alleviates some of the challenges that many minoritized (im)migrants experience, by facilitating access to main stream services and other community resources (Report, 1998; Report, 2001a; Report, 2001b Report, 2003b). The GMCNO argues that it assists main stream service organizations to fulfill *their* mandates (Researcher, 2003).

The second way in which *working in the gap* is poignant is that, although a crack can reference inequity – as in falling through the cracks, a crack is also a space in which or out of which things can grow and proliferate – most often weeds!<sup>20</sup> *Working in the gap* also refers to addressing inequities by “catalyzing institutional change for cultural competence” (Researcher, 2003, p. 95). In this sense, the GMCNO might be seen as a strategic coalition that works across groups of minoritized (im)migrants that share a common experience. I have come to understand *working in the gap* as a powerful metaphor for the broader forces that shape the need for middle women. Insofar as the GMCNO sees itself as an innovative project oriented to social transformation, middle women not only work *in* the gap; they also work *the* gap. My research examined just what is implicated in *working (in) the gap*.

### **An outline of the thesis**

In Anne Fadiman's (1997) ethnography of a Hmong family's experience with health care in America, the author retells an anecdotal story in which a professor cited a Hmong student's presentation on the topic of fish soup. According to Fadiman, in describing the presentation the professor commented, "Fish Soup. That's the essence of the Hmong" (p. 12). In making sense of this anecdote, Fadiman extends the connotation of "Fish Soup" to make the argument that sometimes understanding what is visible on the surface requires digging deeper. She writes,

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<sup>20</sup> *Weed*: "a plant, especially a wild plant, growing where it is not wanted." Encarta® World English Dictionary © 1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. Developed for Microsoft by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

*The Hmong have a phrase, hais cuaj txub kaum txub, which means "to speak of all kinds of things." It is often used at the beginning of an oral narrative as a way of reminding the listeners that the world is full of things that may not seem to be connected but actually are; that no event occurs in isolation; that you can miss a lot by sticking to the point; and that the storyteller is likely to be rather long-winded. (pp. 12-13)*

Along these lines, then, Fadiman uses Fish Soup as a metaphor for the salience of reading what is seen (in the here and now) through an understanding of the past. Fadiman continues,

*If I were Hmong, I might feel that what happened when Lia Lee and her family encountered the American medical system could be understood fully only by beginning with the first beginning of the world. But since I am not Hmong, I will go back only a few hundred generations, to the time when the Hmong were living in the river plains of north-central China. .... For as long as it has been recorded, the history of the Hmong has been a marathon series of bloody scrimmages, punctuated by occasional periods of peace, though hardly any of plenty. Over and over again, the Hmong have responded to persecution and to pressures to assimilate by either fighting or migrating. (p. 13)*

Although I am alert to the problematic "essence" in the professor's anecdote, I find Fish Soup to be a compelling metaphor for the process of my research – data generating, analyses and rendering of findings. My research involved *building* a case study of racism as a mode of social relations of power in contemporary Canada, through dialogues in which race and racism sometimes did not surface at all. Moreover, inasmuch as my research revealed much about how race and racism operate through (im)migrants' interfaces with human services, Fish Soup is a particularly apt metaphor for the ways in which racism operates in overt and covert ways *simultaneously*. This shifting "now-you-see-it"- "now-you-don't" (clear then opaque) mode of operation means that racism *becomes* clear; it is not clear all at once. Moreover, it is often not clear in its *pieces*. This suggests that it is in the working together of simultaneous covert and overt operations that racism is constituted as a *system* of oppression. The chapters in my thesis *build* this case. As Wetherell & Potter (1992) argue, "Racist practices may not fit together into a neat whole. Yet they have an organization, and that organization can be discovered and recorded" (p. 2).

In Chapter 2, I discuss the theoretical perspectives that shaped my research, and link them to the methods I employed in this study. Chapter 3 examines relevant literature that surfaces the premises underlying the theorized race/culture divide in human services. As will be seen in Part II, race and racism were virtually invisible as the middle women disguised them in the language of inequities, barriers and gaps. Following Fadiman (1997) (above), I surface how post-migration conditions and circumstances are layered over pre-migration inequities in ways that render many minoritized (im)migrants particularly vulnerable (Chapter 4). I then *extend* participants' narratives to examine external forces that contribute to these inequities – specifically, government policies and practices, and their underlying (but unstated) assumptions, which also seep into and shape the organization and delivery of human services (Chapter 5). I then *extend* this examination in a second way – illuminating how both the *niche* that the middle women (are able to) carve out, and ultimately the *Middle Woman*, are discursively produced as effects of legitimate (dominant) discourses (Chapter 6). Here I show how it is that despite articulating the realities of minoritized (im)migrants in terms of inequities, barriers and gaps, nevertheless the middle women and the GMCNO are drawn into being *cultural* resources to human services systems.

Part III then examines what appeared as an *absence* of race and racism thus far – thus far in the thesis, but more important, thus far in the research. In Chapter 7, I therefore examine the middle women's framings of inequities more closely, revealing the daily culturalist-racist interfaces in which they and the people they support dwell. But I also draw attention to how it was (only) through my directly raising the question of whether and how race and racism are implicated in their work that some of the middle women named these daily experiences as racism. In a parallel way, I then extend this discussion to the discourse the middle women used to talk about the way the system operates through a "one-size-fits-all" approach (discussed in Chapter 5), but now illuminating how racialized

assumptions are institutionalized in the "one-size-fits-all" approach in ways that both render them invisible and also constitute exclusions. In Chapter 8, I pay attention to apparent anomalies in the middle women's naming of race and racism as pervasive realities, illuminating one of the most important findings of my research – namely that, rather than *a* vantage point, the middle women offered *multiple* vantage points. Although they identified some common issues across the minoritized (im)migrant groups they support, the ways in which middle women situated these issues differed. As I sought to understand why some of the women ultimately did *name* racism while others did not, I observed that the middle women give meaning to "in Canada" experiences *through* their particular pre-migration realities, in processes of continuous comparison between "here" and "there."

If Parts II and III treat culture and race separately, Part IV brings the race/culture divide back into focus, first surfacing what is entailed in navigating the race/culture divide in order to buffer the racialized relations of power that minoritized (im)migrants face in their everyday interfaces in human services (Chapter 9). Finally, in Chapter 10, I revisit the race/culture divide in human services through the vantage points gleaned in my research as whole. I discuss the contributions and implications of my research, and gesture towards future directions for continuing to unpack the race/culture divide.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, I have introduced my research focus and situated its significance. I have argued that the dominant response of human services to increasing diversity of the population during the past 30 years has been cultural competence, framed largely within disciplinary and professional discourses. Working against the premises of this response, critical race studies scholars recently coined the *race/culture divide* to draw attention to the social relations of power through which a focus on culture can obscure



racism. There is limited research that explicitly examines the race/culture divide in human services.

Investigating the race/culture divide from the vantage point of middle women who are ascribed non-professional status, is important for two reasons. First, with increasingly transparent evidence of racialized inequities in access, use, treatment and outcomes of human services has come a (re)emergence of grassroots community-based resources to fill cracks in existing human services and to address (im)migrants' emergent issues (Beyene et al., 1996; Chekki, 2006; Das Gupta, 1999; Gagne, 2008; Wayland, 2006). Middle women are one such community-based resource. In my research, I therefore examined how the social relations of power implicated in the race/culture divide in Canada are articulated through the emergence of middle women.

The research setting, the GMCNO, sits outside, or between, both officially recognized immigrant serving and main stream service organizations. Community resources such as this one are often as marginalized as the people they try to support (Baines, 2002; Das Gupta, 2007). I have hinted that being situated in the gaps between organizations makes the middle women vulnerable to exploitation. However, I have also suggested that a gap can be a productive space. I have argued that the impetus for my research was precisely the contradictions that I observed in the GMCNO's particular position within contemporary asymmetrical social relations of power, contradictions that are suggestive of the race/culture divide. The second reason, then, that it was important to investigate the race/culture divide from the vantage point of the middle women was that it is important to expose how social relations of power operate in particular contested sites, a stance that I discuss further in Chapter 2.

## Chapter 2. Thinking theory, working theory

In this chapter, I delineate the contours of a critical theoretical approach and critical race theory specifically. Then, situating my study within a paradigm that I call *critical constructivism with a post sensibility*, I make the case for the extended case method (ECM) (Burawoy, 1991a, 1998) with careful attention to discourse, as a particularly relevant method for my study. In articulating the theory-method with which I engaged, I elaborate briefly on how I conceived of my position in the research. Finally, in this chapter, I link theory to method by explicating the implications of a theoretical orientation for engaging in the research, from sampling to generating and analyzing the data. That is, I discuss how I operationalized theory through practice.

### Thinking theory

#### *Critical theory to critical race theory*

Most of what I have pursued as an adult has been grounded in a desire for social justice. But many scholars have asserted that, far from addressing injustice and contributing to equality, human services may actually contribute to racial injustice (e.g., Etowa, 2009; McGibbon & Etowa, 2009; van Ryn & Fu, 2003; Razack, 1998; Schick & St. Denis, 2005). In addition, a number of scholars have argued that social scientists are implicated in the perpetuation of racial injustices in their sometimes unconscious adoption, production and dissemination of concepts in taken-for-granted ways, thereby shaping policy making and other social practices (Bolaria & Li, 1988; Day, 2000; Miles & Torres, 1996). “What is theory for?” In the first instance, I respond, “Theory is for thinking.” My thinking and my research were shaped by a critical theoretical approach, and critical race theory in particular.

Once grounded in an arguably static Marxist conception of dominant-subordinate power relations, critical theory has undergone several iterations, marked by a shift in emphasis from material-structural explanations of society to admitting of the *social* nature of society and

(thus) the possibility that people can and do act, albeit under historically specific conditions. According to Agger (1991), "critical theory targets positivism both on the level of everyday life and in social theories that reduce the social world to patterns of cause and effect" (p. 109).

Generated by non-white scholars, critical race theory extends these notions, to oppose and undermine the taken-for-granted assumption that racism is unusual or irrational (Ladson-Billings, 2003, p. 408, citing Delgado, 1995b, p. xiv). Critical race studies focuses specifically on the contested concept of race (Satzewich, 1998). Both critical theory and critical race theory are concerned with how multiple facets of society work together to construct its system-ness (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). I understand system-ness to refer to patterned social relations of power, through which not only the existence, but also the persistence, of inequity is normalized. Normalization doubly obscures inequities – first placing them at the edges of significance – outside the normal, aberrant. Second, their taken-for-granted-ness – beyond significance – renders them invisible.

Some contemporary critical and critical race theorists lean toward seeing the global capitalist economic system as the primary structural shaper of inequality (e.g., Bannerji, 2000; Li, 1999a, 2003; Smith, 1987, 2001). But as Dhamoon (2009) argues, "critical race theory encompasses a rich, wide, and diverse, often conflicting body of interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary ideas" (p. 24). Accordingly, there is a growing body of literature that debates the contemporary meanings, relevance and usefulness of race concepts (Doane, 2006; Lee & Lutz, 2005; Hier & Bolaria, 2007). Goldberg (1994) suggests that racism's contexts of definition, explanation, and rationalization are dynamic. Consequently, there are racisms of many kinds, shaped through shifting socio-political conditions (Omi & Winant, 1994; Winant, 2000). "Racisms are [thus] sets of conditions" (Goldberg, 1994, p. 7), which, in contemporary times, are "generally engaged in the articulation of modern relations of power – of

the power not only to dominate, conquer, and destroy, but of the basic power to exclude, distance, and ignore" (p. 4). Goldberg (1994) posits that systematic "racist exclusions" – embedded *within* the institutions of society such that they are taken-for-granted, comprise "racist culture(s)" (1994). These ideas suggest that neither the particular form that society's systemness takes, nor the mechanisms used to accomplish and perpetuate it, are determinate.

### *From critical to post*

Hinting that concepts are contestable, and their uses malleable, is consistent with a *post* paradigm, although it too has been deployed in numerous ways (Agger, 1991; Klages, 2007; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). For example, while some scholars distinguish between postmodernism and poststructuralism (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003), others blur the boundaries between the genres. Agger (1991) conceptualizes postmodernism as "a theory of society, culture, and history," and poststructuralism as "a theory of knowledge and language" (p. 112). Postmodernism rejects all totalizing tendencies as the universalizing offshoots of modernity. On one hand, postmodernism (re)conceptualizes power, working against the dominant-subordinate binary, instead conceiving of power in wholly relational terms. Here, power is not the domain of the dominant; we all play a part in the social relations of power (Foucault, 2003b). But postmodernism is also concerned with the ways in which particular types of knowledge come to be legitimized to the exclusion of other types, through discourse practices. Poststructuralism is concerned with the undecidability of language (or text) *because* it always signals more than what appears – that is, language is a deeply constitutive *practice*.

I argue that both poststructuralism and postmodernism are theories of society and culture. Both have an anti-deterministic theoretical orientation that creates space for seeing all social relations as contingent – thus, the "openness of the social" (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 120).

The differing emphases of these *post* theoretical stances are helpful to examining social relations of power. As Agger (1991) claims, “postmodernism rejects the view that science can be spoken in a singular universal voice” and “poststructuralism reveals how language itself helps constitute reality” (p. 117).

Many feminist critical race theorists underscore the necessity of intersectional analyses that unpack how race, gender and class work together and need each other in order to maintain the status quo (see, for example, Dua, 2007; Fellows & Razack, 1998; Razack, 1998; Schick & St. Denis, 2005; Stasiulis, 1999). In keeping with a post-essentialist mode of critique (Dhamoon, 2009; Narayan, 1998), other feminist critical race scholars have emphasized both the need to go beyond the race/gender/class triad in intersectional analyses (Dua, 2007; Yuval-Davis, 2006) and to contest all types of subordination (Dhamoon, 2009; Razack, 1998). They have also explored the importance and the challenges of undertaking such complex analyses (Essed, 2007; Wilkinson, 2009; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Insofar as positivism itself has become a dominant ideology “in the sense that people everywhere are taught to accept the world ‘as it is,’ thus unthinkingly perpetuating it” (Agger, 1991, p. 109), critical theories point to the necessity of subverting taken-for-granted assumptions that work to sustain domination (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). In these senses, then, critical race theories and critical feminist race theories are themselves modes of resistance (Dhamoon, 2009). Critical race scholars contest the mode and content of forms of dominant storytelling that are deeply embedded in the social institutions of society, by recognizing and integrating “counterstories” – experiential knowledge of a shared history as ‘other’ – into examination of contemporary struggles for justice (Ladson-Billings, 2003; Razack, 1998; Schick & St. Denis, 2005). For

example, Razack (1998) troubles<sup>21</sup> any easy solution to addressing inequality that comes from the position of those who are dominant. She exposes, for example, how mechanisms of inclusion that attempt to “take culture into account” often involve deploying racialized and gendered stereotypes that remount conditions of oppression in new forms. Such mechanisms are exemplified in the ways that society’s dominant interests are enacted by individuals in local sites, such as schools and human service organizations (Pina & Canty-Swapp, 1999; Smith, 2001), and also in organizations established to resist them (Ng, 1988).

Accordingly, critical race theorists' critique of liberalism's reliance on incremental change is grounded in observing the effects of practices ostensibly intended to create racial equality, including the talk and text of law and policy (Jakubowski, 1997). According to Fairclough (1992), conceiving of “language use as a form of social practice” (p. 63),

*First, implies that discourse is a mode of action, one form in which people may act upon the world and especially upon each other, as well as a mode of representation. ... Secondly, it implies that there is a dialectical relationship between discourse and social structure, there being more generally such a relationship between social practice and social structure: the latter is both a condition for, and an effect of, the former. On the one hand, discourse is shaped and constrained by social structure in the widest sense and at all levels ... On the other hand, discourse is socially constitutive. (p. 64)*

Because “discourses do not simply describe the social world, but categorize it, they bring phenomena into sight” (Parker, 1992, p. 252). Discourse is therefore central to analyses in critical race studies (e.g., Folson & Park, 2004; Jiwani, 2006; Schick & St. Denis, 2005). Discursive practices refer to language-in-use and especially to the collection of social institutions and practices thus constituted, which set boundaries and reference points, and shape the terms of political and civic engagement (Bannerji, 2000; Folson & Park, 2004; Haque, 2004; Jiwani, 2006; Ng, 1981, 1986, 1988; Smith, 2001). One of the ways in which racism is maintained in

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<sup>21</sup> The word “troubles” is frequently used in the critical and post literature to mean “make problematic” or “problematize.” I interpret “to trouble” as an intention to work against simplified and unified answers, solutions or, importantly, patterns.

Canada is through “discourses of denial” (Jiwani, 2006; Razack, 1998; Schick & St. Denis, 2005). As such, discourses are coordinated in the “actualities” of everyday activities and how we experience them. This is so because, as Fairclough (1992) argues, discourse is socially constructive in three inter-related ways. It contributes to “the construction of ... ‘social identities’ and ‘subject positions’ for social ‘subjects’ and types of ‘self’”; it “helps construct social relationships between people”; and it “contributes to the construction of systems of knowledge and belief” (p. 64). These inter-related, and dialectical, individual and social aspects of discourse help to explain the nature of social relations of power – for example, how they bring “into being an objectified organization of social relations that exist only in people’s activities but that come to stand over against them, overpowering their lives” (Smith, 2002, p. 41). Discourse is, then, embodied (Bannerji, 2000; Haque, 2004; Jiwani, 2006; Smith, 2002).

Although racisms may be articulated in multiple, contradictory and even indeterminate ways, I suggest that this does not necessarily make space for their undecidability. Indeterminacy can allow for recognizing multiple guises of racism and resisting norms without undoing assumptions about the shape of power relations. Insofar as critical theory tends toward casting power within a dominant-subordinate relations frame – a binary that fixes the mechanics of power relations, it is a tension that is hard to ignore. I was therefore drawn to theorists who argue that oppressive conditions give rise to oppositions as a matter of course (Burawoy, 1991a; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 1992; Foucault, 1990). As Burawoy (1991a) argues, “Too often, the system is seen as all-determining, so that forms of resistance such as innovation, negotiation, and rebellion are not taken seriously” (p. 284). “The lifeworld is not an inert body but a source of continual contestation” (p. 287). Equilibrium is therefore suspect. As Hays (1994) puts it, “the dynamic logic of systems of meaning and systems of social relations generally

operates behind our backs, although we do, occasionally, turn around" (p. 70).

Theorizing the shape of power relations themselves as indeterminate (Fairclough, 1992; Foucault, 2003a, 2003b) opens up the potential for both structurally reproductive agency *and* structurally transformative agency (Hays, 1994). Structurally reproductive agency maintains the connections between structure and agency that reproduce ideology, position (dominant/subordinate), and status (Giddens, 1984, as cited in Hays, 1994, p. 63). Structurally transformative agency, on the other hand, involves the power to not only produce the social, but to produce social *change* – it focuses on “those human social choices that have ‘non-trivial consequences’ ... actions that affect the pattern of social structures in some observable way” (p. 64). The sets of conditions in which race is implicated can be seen as "racial projects" that entail linking the construction of particular meanings of race and the ways in which these meanings organize both institutions and everyday experiences, including racisms (Omi & Winant, 1994).

It follows that *anti-racism* cannot be conceived in a singular way. Recently theorists have declared a "crisis in anti-racism" (Anthias & Lloyd, 2002, p. 17). In the face of global social changes and transnationalism, there is a need for "rethinking anti-racisms" (Anthias & Lloyd, 2002; see also Essed, 2007) to take account of multiple identifications and shifting forms of racisms. As my study makes visible, (im)migrants have "complex relationships to different locales" (Anthias, 2006; see also Dhamoon, 2009; Essed, 2007).

As Rita Dhamoon (2009) suggests, "while distinct from one another,"

*theories of anti-racism, post-colonialism, anti-colonialism, decolonization, anti-imperialism, and empire ... all examine and resist how social meanings of race and /or racialization shape historically constituted relations of privilege and penalty through local and global economic structures, territorial consolidation, and regulated boundaries of citizenship, belonging, and nationhood. (p. 30)*



But, as Philomena Essed posits, "differing conceptions of racism are conceptually linked to differing notions of antiracism" (p. 234; see also Omi & Winant, 1994), and yet "there are many definitions of racism. [While] in contrast, antiracism is not well defined; as a concept, it is neither self-evident nor unproblematic" (p. 236). Indeed, depending on the meanings of race and the ways in which they shape the organization of everyday life, seemingly anti-racist forms of resistance may be built upon obscured /ing racist premises, reproducing, working and maintaining white supremacy (perhaps, following Goldberg, I should say supremacies) (Omi & Winant, 1994).

Such *post* sensibilities work against the kinds of fixed and final meanings found in modernist notions of definition and classification that underpin positivist thinking – completeness, "totalizing perspectives" or "grand narratives" that "attempt to explain the world in terms of patterned interrelationships" (Agger, 1991, p. 116). They gesture instead toward contradiction *and* undecidability as the norms, and caution against seeking definitive answers, since concepts contain their own contradictions (Agger, 1991). Modes of power are inherently sites of struggle (Fairclough, 1992; Foucault, 1990, 2003b). "The crucial aspect ... is whose story will be accepted and become part of the general currency of explanation, whose version of events, whose account of the way things are?" (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 62).

### **Working theory**

I have used the notion of *working theory* to explicitly recognize that theory is for thinking and can therefore be "worked" (Pratt, 2004). Following from the orientations that shaped the ways in which I thought through and conducted my research (discussed above), I align myself with what I want to call a *critical constructivist* paradigm with a *post sensibility* (Lincoln & Guba, 2003). I say "call" because the concepts that comprise such paradigms are in constant flux (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Mayan, 2009).

Theory is never complete (Burawoy, 1991b). *Working* theory makes space for decentred knowledges and knowledge productions made possible only by examining the social world from the multiple and heterogeneous subject positions of “class, race, gender and other identifying group affiliations” (Agger, 1991, p. 116). How social relations of power operate through particular sites, and with what effects, is a matter for empirical investigation. Theorists working with a *post* sensibility argue that we need to “recognize the partiality of and limits to any theoretical lens, such that theorizing might be thought of as a continuous process of opening the limits of one conceptual frame through the technologies of another” (Pratt, 2004, p. 145). Such theorists expose surprising, unpredicted, creative efforts to achieve resiliency against the odds, to resist overwhelming pressures to conform to dominant norms, and to create alternate (more) just spaces (Burawoy, 1998; Burawoy et al., 1991; Dossa, 2005; Lowe, 1996; Manning, 2003; Pratt, 2004). My research reserved a space for *working* the theorized race / culture divide in human services through “a concrete case to see how well it works, and what it is capable of producing ... while [holding] an appreciation for the empirical in tension with a respect for the work that theorists can and have the responsibility to do” (Pratt, 2004, p. 3).

A critical theoretical approach calls for examination of the ways in which inequities have been produced historically. Situating critical theory within a liminal perspective – the standpoint of those who live their lives on the margins – critical race scholars critique research practices, raising questions about and challenges to knowledge production. They call particularly for reflexive accountability with regard to producing knowledge *about* non-white people. Ladson-Billings (2003) argues that the liminal is the perspective of those who “do not seek to move from the margins to the mainstream because they understand the corrupting influence of the mainstream – its pull to maintain status quo relations of power and inequities” (Ladson-Billings, 2003, p. 407). I suggest that the

premises of race and culture, and nation and nationalism (Wetherell & Potter, 1992) shape discourses that allow for, and actually constitute, the race/culture divide. It is possible to understand, then, how “culture talk” can refer to a range of types of talk, each drawing on different conceptions of culture.

Social science has a role to play in what Carroll (2004) calls the “ethical-political project” of subverting injustices (p. 2). Critical research, then, has an agenda – it takes a standpoint inside the social relations of interest. Unpacking the present can make way for imagining and shaping different futures. Based on these perspectives, then, adopting a critical theoretical approach with a post sensibility encourages attention to the *ongoing* and *shifting* construction of concepts, and the *uses* to which they are put. The question is what work do such constructions do for whom and under what circumstances? Under what circumstances can (do) recognitions and resistances be(come) subversive or transgressive?

What does it mean to put theory to work in a concrete case? Because social relations of power are seemingly elusive – operating in ways that seem simultaneously invisible and overwhelmingly encompassing, their explication requires examination of how particular social relations are intimately connected with forces that seem to be beyond them (Burawoy, 1998; Burawoy et al., 1991; Massey, 1994; Pratt, 2004; Smith, 1987). Experience cannot be grasped or explained (only) from within it – thus the “everyday world as problematic” (Smith, 1987). Still, as Massey (1994) argues, what seems to be outside immediate experience is “unequivocally concrete,” or material. Therefore, understanding of any locality must precisely draw on the links beyond its boundaries” (Massey, 1994, p. 120). “Localness” – or *place* – is constituted through “intersecting social relations, nets of which have over time been constructed, laid down, interacted with one another, decayed and renewed” (Massey, 1994, p. 120). A site is a “constellation of institutions located in time and space that shape domination and resistance” (Burawoy, 1991b, p. 281). Local studies

are, therefore, not only *possible* but *necessary* for understanding social phenomena (Massey, 1994). The particular traditions and resources in a local community shape how it experiences and responds to forces beyond it. As such, these broader influences, such as national policies, are often “unsubstantiable” at the national level insofar as much of politics has an “*explicitly local base*” (p. 127, emphasis in original). Conceptualizing space as “stretched out social relations” (p. 4) links place to the broader forces through which it is articulated.

Seeing that science and education are implicated in social relations of power calls for a “reflexive science” (Burawoy, 1998). Critical research strategies themselves contest the authority of received (dominant) knowledge, including academic scientific discourse, and work to make space for and to articulate different systems of knowing. Critical research is dialectical, dialogic and reflexive (Carroll, 2004). I understand *dialectical* to mean perceiving the world as relational – what is experienced as reality is “put together” (Burawoy et al., 1991; Carroll, 2004; Smith, 1987). Therefore, the relationship between researcher and researched is an active context in the research. I understand *dialogic* to mean the joint construction of understanding. Data are generated through the relationship between researcher and researched. Sense making constitutes and is constituted in the dynamic interplay between us. As active participants in the research we are (all) changed (Burawoy, 1998; Lather, 1991). I understand *reflexivity* to be reflection coupled with self-critique, an ongoing awareness and explicit acknowledgement of positionality on the part of both researcher and researched (Lather, 1991).

### *Positioning myself*

So how am I using *critical constructivism with a post sensibility*? Clearly I am working from a post-post positivist or anti-positivist ontological and epistemological stance. A basic post-positivist tenet is that no research is value-free (Guba, 1990; Mayan, 2009). From the *critical* paradigm, I take as given that what we think of as reality has been

constructed historically through social, political, cultural, economic, and other actions and inactions, and therefore can be reconstructed. Moreover, critical theory has an agenda – it is political. A critical theorist is explicitly oriented to social change to undermine and overturn inequities that comprise oppression. From the *constructivist* paradigm, I take as given that reality is subjective. It is not knowable in any objective and static sense; it is historically, temporally and spatially contingent. A critical constructivist understands reality as researchable only in the sense that it is experiential. It therefore *has* to be examined through a dialogical, dialectical, reflexive process – reality is co-constructed through the process of interaction between researcher and researched.

I take from the *posts* an understanding that concepts are malleable (exemplified in this discussion) *because* they do not exist in the absence of their deployment – that is, concepts are practiced. Postmodernism is not uncomfortable with complexity, contradiction, ambiguity, or layered understandings of social phenomena. Rather than being concerned with the positivist need for order, postmodernists celebrate chaos as possibility (Klages, 2007; see also Bauman, 1999). For participants in my research, for example, this means it is possible to speak of “hope and despair” in the same breath. A post sensibility allows that “anything is possible” (Day, 2000), but also recognizes that because concepts are practices, they can be put to work in multiple ways, including for political purposes – indeed for both radical and conservative purposes (Omi & Winant, 1994).

The implication of adding a *post* sensibility to a critical constructivist stance is that, although experiential reality can be co-constructed through the interaction between researcher and researched, the *particular* experiential reality is shaped by practices that are not immediately apparent within it. It is necessary to examine not only the experience *as* experienced – what I later refer to as experiential realities, but to also seek to understand and explicate how it is that reality is experienced *this way* or in *these ways* under *these* conditions. A critical

constructivist stance with a post sensibility suggests that there are senses in which social life *is* structured – (therefore) patterns are discernible – for example, inequities are structured into society. Indeed, as Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) argue, “discursive constitution of the social is also in part the discursive production of structures” (p. 120). Yet, the shape of the structural is contingent. This is only in part because people have the capacity to act against structural impositions – even if their actions are constrained, not necessarily or entirely voluntary (Burawoy, 1991b; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). The *critical* (already) accounts for *resistance* – the goal of critical theory is societal transformation. A *post* sensibility aims to explicate how *particular* patterns of social life are contingent because social life is *practice(d)* through language and its discursive effects. Accordingly, critical constructivism with a post sensibility calls for examining social phenomena from multiple perspectives but always within or from their particular historical, social and cultural conditions. In this way, it collapses the distinction between micro and macro. Goldberg's (1994) suggestion that exclusions are contained "within" is important to opening up the significance of the need for unpacking how system-ness is constituted through social practices (Knowles, 2003; Rattansi, 2007).

I borrowed Michael Agar's (1996) question, "Who am I to do this?" (p. 91), extending it to heed Ladson-Billings' caution, by asking Razack's question: What story did I tell myself about the position of a white researcher researching in a non-white setting? I do not claim to take the perspective of the liminal, or to represent it. Rather, I intended to engage the relational space afforded by the research itself as an opportunity for reflection on our respective parts – the middle women's and mine – in exploring and defining the problem that underlies their work, and what shapes it.

Feminist theorists have debated the question of whether "a fully feminist ethnography can ever be achieved" (Behar, 1995, p. 14) insofar as

the thesis is ultimately that of the researcher. I convinced myself that this project was more about *power in our society* than it was *about* non-white people. The site was necessary to its revealing. I did not consider my research to be *cross-cultural*; I saw myself studying the social relations of power in which I too am implicated. From an academic standpoint, researching (in) community-based organizations and initiatives can be fraught with (cultural) struggles of its own. I was aware that I initiated this research from a stance of critiquing the cultural competence concepts that the GMCNO has taken up. Like Pratt (2004), I anticipated that participants in my project might not share some of my (theoretical) insights, or would deem them irrelevant. I was despondent about the possibility of change. Moreover, "others' truths can be hard to swallow, especially when they implicate you and yours" (Rawlins, 2003, p. 122). Still, my affinity for both the sense of "responsible disillusionment" that Schick (2000) calls for (citing Mercer, 1997) and critical race and cultural studies made me optimistic about this research.

Clearly, then, research is itself a discursive project. Lather (1991) suggests, "We consciously use our research to help participants understand and change their situations" (p. 57). I am mindful that as researcher, I shaped and guided the focus of inquiry and that my questions made sense to me from where I sat. As a white woman, relatively privileged by my skin colour, education and the opportunities that have been afforded me, I invited a group comprising primarily non-white women into research that I had shaped. Had I formulated a project that could not make space for others' conceptions? It is important to

*listen diligently for clues concerning how our questions are being heard and regarded. We need to risk discovering that our projects are misguided. In short, we need to experience our conversations with others as opportunities to learn the questions we should be asking, as well as to hear and respond to the questions the other has for us. (Rawlins, 2003, p. 121)*

It was necessary to bring my situated knowledge – generated in multiple sites – into dialogue with the participants in my research and also with the literature. That is, I saw myself always working with

“intersecting dialogues, one with those who are members of the [setting] to be described and the other with the discourse [my] description is to be read in” (Smith, 2002, p. 20). I do not see the academy as the sole domain of theorizing. My aim, then, was to bring together theories from these different sites of knowledge generation – lifeworlds (my own and those of the participants in my research) and social science, to explicate how the race/culture divide operates through a particular site, and with what effects. Could I do so without “making my own speech deafening” (Rawlins, 2003, p. 121)? Rawlins calls for a “hearing that speaks louder than your saying” (p. 123). (How) could I use my whiteness as a vehicle for making visible how power relations operate? Like Jenks (2003), who researched sight from the vantage point of the blind, perhaps “I assumed I was one of the enlightened” (p. 133). Jenks:

*It turns out my choices were far more stereotypical than enlightened. ... The first time I interviewed a fourteen year old, totally blind camper, I couldn't believe she couldn't see anything. Of course, that sounds absurd to admit, because I was interviewing her because she was blind. (p. 133, emphasis in original)*

The challenge Jenks puts forward is how to unlearn “sighted-self thoughts” (p. 134). Trying to look at power from the vantage point of those who occupy a more liminal space is potentially fraught. While building a network of allies is part of what middle women do, my prior evaluation work made clear that not only could more people do more, but also that voices of white people could sometimes be heard when voices of non-white people could not. It is important that anti-racism/anti-white privilege work not be left only to non-white people who remain minoritized and cannot change institutions that are based on white privilege (Kujawa-Holbrook, 2002; Wilmot, 2005). Being an “ally” in anti-racist struggle, Cynthia Wilmot (2005) argues, should mean “taking responsibility and direction at the same time” (p. 92). We need to recognize and “ask ourselves probing questions about our position in a multiracial project” (p. 92). Identity-based or driven anti-racist strategies can be problematic when they do not engage with the source of racism.



Collective power, she argues, does not lie in oppression(s); it lies in resistance to and struggle against oppression(s) (p. 81).

### *Thinking qualitatively*

I set out to investigate the theorized race/culture divide from the vantage point of middle women. The theoretical insights sketched above suggested avenues for exploration within my case. I sought to understand and expose how the social relations of power implicated in the race/culture divide in contemporary Canada operate through working (in) the gap. Following Agger (1991), I conceived of the middle women's work as a site through which multiple and heterogeneous subject positions intersect in navigating the gap. I sought to uncover how middle women articulate and make sense of the inequities that shape the need for their work.

Examining how the race/culture divide operates through social relations of power demanded qualitative research methods. Qualitative inquiry has been described as the "primarily naturalistic, interpretive, and inductive" study of "naturally occurring phenomena" (Mayan, 2009, p. 11). Qualitative inquiry inherently contests the positivist premise that the only legitimate knowledge is that which emerges from hypothesis testing and measurement carried out by the researcher as a virtually absent and objective conduit who "controls for" or "controls out" extraneous influences on the phenomenon under investigation. As such, it is oriented to understanding the complexities inherent in social phenomena.

But of course qualitative inquiry comprises a wide and growing range of theory-informed approaches, which vary markedly in their paradigmatic alignments, along a continuum from positivist to post (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Mayan, 2009). Indeed, the very idea that phenomena can be seen as "naturally occurring" is a contested theoretical construct. A *post* sensibility inserts a question into this notion, inquiring into how the seemingly natural has come to be seen *as* natural and is, therefore, almost invisible. The notion of *working theory*, then, conceives of

theorizing as (a) practice. As Guba (1990) suggests, a constructivist stance collapses the distinction between ontology and epistemology (see also Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

### *Critical ethnography and the extended case method (ECM)*

Accordingly, I opted for what I conceptualize as a “theory-method” for conducting my research. Taking as my point of departure an understanding of racialized disparities as the norm rather than the exception in (our) society called for examining social relations of power. This oriented me to the need for a critical research approach. I drew on Burawoy’s (1991b, 1998) extended case method (ECM), as a mode of critical ethnography. If ethnography historically was primarily descriptive (Burawoy, 1991a; Morse, 1991; Vidich & Lyman, 2003), *critical* ethnography emerged as an antidote to the problematic way in which descriptive ethnography tended to fix culture(s) into place *through* encompassing or “thick” description. Critical ethnography was “suspicious of any model of interpretation that claims to reveal the final truth” – “the essence of any form of experience” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003, p. 449). It involves identifying and addressing the “power/knowledge relations that shape, mold and limit [people’s] rational pursuit of justice” (Street, 1992, p. 125). It is concerned with *how* power is put together in particular sites under specific historic conditions. A constructivist orientation to ethnography assumes that “the meaning of human experience can never be fully disclosed” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003, p. 449).

With the ECM, Burawoy takes the *critical* to the edges of a *post* sensibility by “unbinding” ethnography. “Ethnography unbound” (Burawoy et al., 1991) requires that any (cultural) site be understood only within its context(s) of determination (1998) – a notion that Burawoy does not use deterministically! The particularity of social practice demands

examination of “small stories” from multiple and heterogeneous subject positions (Agger, 1991), and while the local and particular<sup>22</sup> *experience* is not generalizable, the ECM is oriented to how the particular can contribute to explicating the social world (Burawoy, 1991b) – “the importance of a single case lies in what it tells us about society as a whole rather than about the population of similar cases” (p. 281). The ECM is concerned with “[explicating] the link between micro and macro, [and] constitutes the social situation in terms of the particular external forces that shape it” (Burawoy, 1991, p. 274).<sup>23</sup>

Burawoy (1991b) argues that theory is activated for reconstruction through nuanced examination of a particular case. The ECM begins with a particular site or setting – a *case*, and *extends* out. The local setting thus provides a *case* through which to observe how external forces not visible to them in the day-to-day shape the actions of local actors. Interestingly, although qualitative inquiry pins its rigour on the notion of being inductive, Burawoy countered the notion of induction that underpins interpretive ethnography. Arguing that the very idea of a *tabula rasa* – a blank slate or an empty landscape to be discovered – is itself a worldview that takes as its reference point the normative position of the researcher, Burawoy suggested that there are no new theories to be found. Instead, the ECM is explicitly oriented to *working* theory rather than confirming or rejecting it as a positivist science would. Thus, while the ECM *begins* with theory, it does not *impose* theory on the case. It deliberately sets out to complicate theory. Burawoy (1998) argued that conventional ethnography’s thick description ignored anomalies within the cultures it studied – for example, resistance to the norms that comprise dominant

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<sup>22</sup> “Local and particular” uses Massey and Burawoy’s notions together.

<sup>23</sup> There is an interesting tension in the way that Burawoy distinguishes between micro and macro here, which reflects the binary thinking of a pre-post time, and casts the relation in structural terms. However, if we take his emphasis on *link* between micro and macro as constituting the social situation, his conceptualization more closely resembles Massey’s (1994) notion of stretched out social relations, which intentionally collapses the distinction. This is how I have reconciled what seemed to be an anomaly in Burawoy’s theorizing.

practices. As result conventional ethnographies created caricatures of cultures.

The first stage of the ECM involves the development of what Burawoy (1991) calls a *prospectus*, outlining what the researcher *expects* to see. As indicated above, investigation of a *case* begins with the theory – formal academic theory or less formally articulated theories generated from the lifeworld – that the researcher intends to pick apart and then reconstruct (Burawoy, 1991b). Early dialogue exposes whether the researcher is even in the right “theoretical” arena. The ECM’s main concern is with what is *actually* happening in the site, rather than what is apparent. It looks for what is shaping what is observable. It looks for signs of contest, some of which are made apparent *through* the disruption that is stimulated by the researcher’s entry into the research setting.

I sought to read cultural competence through the lens of the race/culture divide. Two theories comprised my prospectus in this sense. First, I anticipated that the middle women were “stuck” on the margins of main stream. It seemed to me that the middle women's work was wholly shaped through a dynamic of dominant-subordinate power relations – reflecting a structural analysis. Like Ng (1988), I expected that “members of the organization [participate] in courses of action which [lead] to their own oppression” (p. 99). Second, I thought that race and racism were implicated in the middle women’s work, and I anticipated that the participants in my research would name it.

The *analytic* process of the ECM involves *extending out* from the experiential realities that are apparent in the setting, and which are (therefore) describable. One extension delineates the social *process* that is working in the particular setting. This involves “the aggregation of situational knowledge into social process” (Burawoy, 1998, p. 15) – patterned, yet contradictory and unpredictable in its form. It reduces all the discursive practices in the setting into an explication of the particular social relations. A second extension delineates the broader yet specific

historically contingent social forces within which the particular is situated, such as global, national and regional economic relations, and racialization. This extension answers the social problem, “What must be true about the social context or historical past for our case to have assumed the character we have observed?” (Burawoy, 1991b, p. 281) To reiterate, the ECM is interested not only in learning *about* a specific social situation, which is the immediate concern of the research participant, but also in learning *from* that social situation.

As an empirical pursuit, “it is the task of *methodology* to explicate methods of turning observations into explanations, data into theory” (Burawoy, 1991, p. 5). This idea suggests that the locations of both researcher and researched are “real,” and that, as Smith (1987) has also suggested, both are necessary to *explicating* social relations. Moreover, I suggest that the second extension requires not only participant-observation in the site (or of the case), but also *theoretical* extensions – reading the experiential realities *through* theory. A theory-method, then, is not confined by rules at the level of *technique*. As Burawoy (1991a) argues, theory is important in every stage of the ECM.

Some social science scholars (e.g., Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994) treat observation as the *sine qua non* that differentiates social science from natural science. They argue, “in a sense, *all* social research is a form of participant observation, because we cannot study the social world without being part of it” (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994, p. 249). The extended case method “extends” the role of researcher from observer to *also* being *participant* in the social relations (Burawoy, 1998). In the extended case method, the engagement of the researcher in the social relations of a particular setting serves a theoretical purpose. The “*intersubjectivity* between participant and observer” (Burawoy, 1998, p. 14) disrupts the day-to-day practices that constitute the site, allowing what is taken-for-granted to become visible, open to questioning, and amenable to revealing anomalies. Participant observation is therefore a necessary intervention in

the social relations of the research setting *in order for* theory to be reconstructed. It is, then, a mode of dialogue that takes place both in the research setting and with academic theory (Burawoy, 1991a, 1998).

According to Patti Lather (1991),

Theoretical guided empirical work ... serves an energizing, catalytic role. It does this by increasing specificity at the contextual level in order to see how larger issues are embedded in the particulars of everyday life. The result is that theory becomes an expression and elaboration of progressive popular feelings rather than abstract frameworks imposed by intellectuals on the messy complexities of lived experience. (pp. 61-62)

One extension required me to be alert to the departures, exceptions and resistances to conformity (to main stream demands) that characterize social life as dynamic and dialectical, highlighting the "anomalous" (Burawoy, 1991a). But taking seriously the notion that social relations of power are not fully "graspable" within their sites of articulation required that I be mindful of how broader forces are implicated in them. I needed to situate the case within broader forces in a concrete way. Yet, critical constructivism with a post sensibility suggests the malleability of margin and main stream. I needed theories of power and discourse to help me generate analytic questions about the social relations of margin and main stream. What shapes the ways in which the middle women articulate, explain and navigate the race/culture divide, and in what ways? What is silenced or shielded from view? How is it that the existence of "the gap," and that it comes to be filled in, seem to be taken-for-granted? Do the middle women open up the taken-for-granted? Or participate in its silencing? Or both? Moreover, unsettling static notions of social phenomena (Burawoy, 1998) required accounting for contradictions. What shapes the seeming contradiction in the middle women's explicit recognition of racism and their simultaneous emphasis on cultural competence? If the race/culture divide is theorized as a mode of power that operates to sustain racialized relations, how is it that advocates for minoritized populations, themselves members of minoritized groups, also

seem to subscribe to the divide? If the middle women occupy a site of cultural struggle, how do they conceptualize “taking culture into account” in their efforts to achieve equitable health and well-being of (im)migrants? Does the middle women's use of cultural competence echo that of main stream discourse? Or does it work to transform it? Or, perhaps, it does both under different conditions? How do middle women work against the persistent challenges to institutional change? Are the middle women able to transform cultural competence so that it is not anti-racism's "Other," but instead works against fixed notions of culture? How might the middle women's use of the language of cultural responsiveness and cultural competence be understood? “What social and discursive processes are available to [her]?” (Schick, 2000, p. 85)

As I proceeded through my research, I engaged in a layered analysis, which involved a *series* of extensions from the *case* to its contexts of determination, bringing the participants' experiential realities and explications, my analyses, and theories of power and discourse into dialogue with one another. The findings generated through these *extensions* are the foci of Chapters 4 to 8 of the thesis.

### *Logistics of the research process*

#### *Gaining access to the research site*

I embarked on my in-field research following Research Ethics Board approval in January 2008. Although I had a letter of support from the senior level in the GMCNO, I still needed to negotiate the terms and conditions of access to the organization and the middle women. As soon as I received clearance, I contacted the two women who had signed off on the letter of support (Siobhan and Lenore). Lenore was away at that time, but Siobhan and I met in January 2008. We discussed how to present my request for organizational support to the GMCNO Board and then to the rest of the middle women. The organization operates according to democratic and egalitarian principles, and had generally supported participatory action research. I was proposing to access the GMCNO in a

more problematic research relationship – where I, as researcher, would have control over the topic, the research process, and the findings. Siobhan alerted me that Board members differ in their receptivity to research, especially from outside, and that they would be concerned about what was in it for them. As such, it was unclear how the Board and the middle women who comprise the GMCNO would respond to my proposal. I prepared for some tough questions from Board members about the topic of my research on the race/culture divide in human services, details of my proposed approach, and the nature and scope of their participation.

I attended the meeting of the Board in late February 2008. Siobhan introduced me, although I already knew a number of the members from evaluation work during the previous 10 years. I gave a brief overview of my request for the GMCNO to be my research site (Appendix 1), and distributed my project information sheet (Appendix 2) and consent (Appendices 3A and 3B). The Board welcomed me with open arms. After a short presentation, three members commented: "I could invite you to my groups," "What are you doing back at school?!" and "We will see more of you now – that's good" (Fieldnotes, February 29, 2008). I asked the Board if I should leave the room while members decided whether or not to support my research. The members responded that the GMCNO makes its decisions through open discussion, and that this would be no exception. There was little further discussion, and the Board approved my research. With the Board's consent, this meeting served as my first opportunity to recruit research participants and to observe the Board.

The third step in obtaining research support took place in late March 2008, at a bi-monthly GMCNO meeting. The Board chair introduced me to the middle women, and talked briefly about my research. She indicated that the Board had supported my proposal, and asked the middle women if they were supportive. As before, there was open discussion. I made it clear that participation in my research was



voluntary, and that confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained. I distributed my project information sheet and invited individuals to be involved in interviews and/or in having me observe their work where appropriate, including in these meetings. I indicated that I would not include observations of individuals who did not provide written consent in my analyses. There was a lot of interest in my research, and many of the middle women expressed interest in inviting me to observe their work. The middle women gave me the okay to recruit among this group, a process that subsequently took several different forms.

### *Data generating*

Pending approval of the GMCNO Board and the middle women, in January 2008 Siobhan provided me with a written and verbal overview of the GMCNO's work, and oriented me to new developments in the organization, as well as her upcoming work. We also charted a course for my involvement in Siobhan's work and her involvement in my research. We agreed to meet on a weekly basis, at least for the first few weeks, to reflect on Siobhan's organization-level work and debrief her experiences of interactions with human service organizations and systems. In all, I met with Siobhan on 11 occasions between January and September 2008. I interviewed Lenore for the first time in February 2008. We agreed to follow up several times over the duration of my research, as she had taken a part-time paid position elsewhere, and was no longer as intimately involved in the day-to-day operations of the GMCNO. I interviewed Lenore on two occasions.

Following the approvals discussed above, an additional 25 middle women at different levels of the GMCNO ultimately consented to participate in my research. Fourteen front-line middle women who provide direct support to (im)migrants participated in individual or two-

person interviews. I also interviewed four mentors,<sup>24</sup> whom the GMCNO employs on a part-time basis to provide professional expertise and support in the areas of nursing, mental health, and social work. In all, 20 middle women participated in 31 interviews, of which three involved two participants. Twenty-seven middle women consented to allow me to observe them in work-related meetings of various kinds between January and October 2008. Although I interviewed most of these middle women, seven were involved only in participant observation opportunities.

*Interviews.* I conducted all interviews in person and recorded them. They lasted between 50 minutes and three hours. Individual and two-person interviews were conversational in style, which meant that I requested elaboration or clarification to verify that I understood what the participant said. More important, I was attentive to equivocal and contradictory comments, bringing them to the attention of the participant and inquiring about them. Where appropriate I offered my perspective on the question or the issue, or brought in others' perspectives – both other participants' and theorists' perspectives – as reference points for further discussion. Although I developed a set of guiding questions (Appendix 4), the actual interview questions varied across data collection opportunities, as I built them upon one another to obtain deeper understanding of particular ideas, insights and struggles that I noted or that others identified. In subsequent chapters that focus on findings, I give examples of these processes in interview excerpts.

As I interviewed, I often made hand-written notes as reminders to pick up on something a middle woman had said. We also used small rough drawings as a medium for dialogue in some of the interviews, and I kept these diagrams in my notes. I wrote detailed fieldnotes following many, but not all, of the interviews. As will be clear in later chapters, my interviews shifted direction depending on the roles of the middle women

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<sup>24</sup> I refer to these four women as mentor-middle women throughout.

and the stage of the research process. As a result, interviews with the middle women who work at the organizational level (Siobhan and Lenore) tended to focus on the GMCNO's organization-to-organization, system-level, work. On the other hand, interviews with front-line middle women who work more directly with (im)migrants tended to focus on their interactions with human service organizations and service providers. Interviews with the four mentor-middle women tended to focus on their role in supporting the middle women at both organizational and individual/family levels. Four of the interviews I carried out served the immediate purposes of the GMCNO in helping to document their work for reporting purposes. Although these interviews focused on the circumstances of particular groups of (im)migrants, such as Karen refugees and temporary foreign workers from Central America, and the nature and scope of middle women's practice, these interviews also provided material relevant to explicating the need for middle women.

Furthermore, my earlier interviews sought to gain an understanding of how the middle women frame the issues that give rise to a need for their existence. As I generated data from these interviews, I observed that the middle women rarely named racism as an issue, even though I had framed my research in terms of the race/culture divide in human services. As a result, in later interviews with 11 of the middle women, including the four mentor-middle women, I explicitly began to open up questions, first about whether and how race and racism are implicated in their work and second, about how it is that they did not explicitly raise racism initially. Chapters 4 through 7 follow this pattern in a way that illuminates the social relations of power implicated in the middle women's life and work.

*Participant observation.* As Siobhan and I met weekly, she invited me to sit in and observe at numerous meetings and events involving GMCNO staff and human service organizations, with their permission. We explored relevant opportunities. It was not always easy to determine in

advance whether a particular opportunity for observation would yield good data. At the beginning, I went along to almost every opportunity that was available. Over time, I tried to be more strategic in taking up opportunities that would give me a glimpse into the GMCNO's work in the four main sectors through which it works – education, social services, health and employment.

Siobhan and I also discussed approaches to consent for participant observation of opportunities involving non-GMCNO participants (such as service system staff). It would have been unwieldy to obtain consent from every individual service provider. Following discussion with two of my supervisory committee members, I approached this by obtaining verbal consent to observe, with the condition that I document the GMCNO participants' involvement, but not that of the service providers. In some cases, a middle woman obtained approval prior to my involvement. In other cases, she introduced the request at the beginning of a meeting, and sought permission for my attendance and observation. We framed this as "shadowing" GMCNO members. "Shadowing" implied the close unobtrusive following of middle women to document their work.<sup>25</sup> I was clear with the service providers that the meeting context was important to interpreting the data I generated, but assured participants that I would not refer to specific individuals or name the settings. A small number of agency staff involved in participant observation opportunities asked to review my project information sheet and consent form, and four non-GMCNO individuals voluntarily provided written consent to participate in my research.

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<sup>25</sup> *Shadowing*: "To follow, especially in secret; trail." Retrieved from <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/> Although "shadow" here means to trail *secretly*, I have interpreted it to also imply unobtrusive rather than surreptitious trailing. Another definition is "somebody who learns a job by following and observing somebody else who knows or regularly does the job." Encarta® World English Dictionary © 1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. Developed for Microsoft by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

In all, I logged 85 participant observation opportunities (Appendix 5), from which I selected a set of 24 that were directly pertinent to the central focus of my research – namely, the race/culture divide, cultural competence and anti-racism.

### *Data handling*

I transcribed the recorded interviews as soon as possible following the interview. Transcribing my own interviews in a timely way was useful in four ways. First, it was a check on the quality of my interviewing, and especially whether I generated dialogues that elicited good data. I was able to adjust my interviewing accordingly. Second, as I transcribed my interviews, I sometimes typed reflective comments into them. In some cases I pondered how I had shaped a particular response, as exemplified in this comment:

[As I transcribe this interview, I am uncomfortable. (How) have I shaped this into a conversation about "cultural" or "religious" norms in exactly the way I have criticized? How did we get into a conversation about THIS? I'd like to think I was just following N's lead here, but why did she feel a need to explain her community in this way?] (Transcription Excerpt, Ruth's comment in Natalie)

The third way in which transcribing my interviews was useful was that it provided a vehicle for monitoring my impressions of the substance of the interviews – was I over-emphasizing some ideas I thought I was hearing? Or were my impressions accurate? Fourth, transcribing was analytic – by the time I had heard the interview twice (once in person, once on record), and seen it once (on my screen), I was extremely familiar with the content of each interview. I began to generate findings almost from the beginning of this process.

Fieldnotes were a much more ambitious undertaking. I was not always as up-to-date or complete as I would have liked. Nevertheless, overall, my documentation was detailed and it lent itself to transcribing. In consultation with two of my supervisory committee members, I decided not to transcribe all my fieldnotes, but rather to transcribe them selectively, along the lines suggested above with regard to observation

data – that is, to transcribe the data that were directly pertinent to the central foci of my research.

### *Analysis and interpretation*

As alluded to above in discussing my interview process, I carried out analyses as I went along – following a principle central to qualitative research (Morse & Richards, 2002), and used this ongoing analysis to guide continued generation of data. Once I was engaged in the research site, it was difficult to "stop the process" long enough for in-depth analyses, for several reasons. First, as suggested above, it was difficult to know in advance whether I would be able to generate useful and meaningful data in any particular opportunity. Second, the GMCNO's work is broad and deep, and I was determined not to render it into small bits for study, violating the very principles that gird the work. Third, at times I struggled with the focus of analysis, which presented three different types of tension. There was a tension between the GMCNO and the *middle women* levels of analyses – that is, between organizational and individual level practices. I opted to keep this tension open, letting it percolate. Being as fully engaged as possible in the process shaped by research participants, and in the site, served the strategic purposes of keeping me close to the action in the GMCNO, visible and relatively transparent. The middle women saw me frequently.

In addition, there was a tension in conceptualizing the *site* itself – that is, the GMCNO/middle women, and the site as a *case* of the phenomenon I wanted to examine – namely, what a particular articulation of the race/culture divide in human services can tell us about *society as a whole* (Burawoy, 1991a). Furthermore, I experienced a related theoretical tension in the analytics between, on the one hand interpreting and privileging the middle women's narratives as their ways of making sense of experiential realities of inequity and, on the other hand conceptualizing these narratives (solely or primarily) as discursive rehearsals.

Working through these latter tensions required two intertwined layers of analysis and interpretation. One level consisted of a critical thematic analysis of the middle women's narratives. Here, I treated the narratives as an expression of experiential realities, which I argue must be taken seriously as the concrete instantiation of the "everyday world as problematic" (Smith, 1987). This layer of analysis – what might be seen as a foundation – was critical in all the senses described earlier – dialectical, dialogic and reflexive. This layer involved analytic coding for themes, but more importantly it involved taking the narratives apart and reassembling them. Reassembling what were once the middle women's narratives produced a new narrative – it became *my* narrative. *My* narrative attended to what I saw in the middle women's narratives, and what I did not see – what I saw as being *absent*. *My* narrative comprised explicating the ways in which *I* made sense of the middle women's making sense. For example, because the analytic process *is* iterative, I could see that initially race and racism were absent in middle women's explications of inequity. This critical observation shaped the next interviews, and so on. As a result, the layout (or flow) of the thesis follows *my* narrative.

Awkwardly stated, the second layer of analysis and interpretation comprised an examination of how to make sense of both the middle women's making sense and of *my* making sense of the middle women's making sense. Here, I drew on the aforementioned notions of discourse as active context(s). This second layer of analysis was important because, as Fairclough (1992, as cited in Mills, 2004) has argued, "Utterances do not simply mean one thing and ... they cannot therefore be interpreted from the standpoint of the speaker or hearer alone; utterances are in essence ambivalent and are interpreted by participants according to hypotheses and working models that they develop in the course of the conversation. ... the analyst has therefore to be careful not to elide his/her position of analysis with that of one of the participants" (p. 126). Wetherell and Potter (1992) argue that it is important to pay attention to the discourse(s)

instantiated in everyday talk and text in the particulars of their contexts. This is to take seriously Fairclough's concept of discourse as social practice (1992). Although Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) and Wetherell and Potter (1992) exemplify their use of specific *techniques* of critical discourse analysis in their close textual analyses, I have not used these techniques directly. Rather I have used their concepts to shape a second layer of analysis or understanding on top of my critical thematic analyses of the middle women's experiential realities. This second layer allowed for, or made possible, a partial resolution of the tension between the "reality" of experiential realities and narratives as discursive productions. The practice of bringing the everyday into dialogue with the taken-for-granted and seemingly commonsense discourses in which it is implicated makes visible the meaning and value of the *extended case* method. It is how the *case* says something about *society as a whole*.

Ultimately, I treated the interview transcripts as the primary data, and supplemented them with fieldnotes. I was most interested in fieldnotes from observations of cultural competency-oriented training sessions and dialogue with service providers about challenges experienced by the (im)migrants whom the GMCNO support. Additional documentation included cultural profiles, which the GMCNO has produced to introduce service providers to the populations with whom they work. I also reviewed the GMCNO's promotional material and selected funding proposals to consider how they frame the need for their work.

In a spirit of reciprocity, and what for Burawoy (1998) comprises the *extension* from observer to participant, the GMCNO asked me to help out in some concrete ways. I carried out six interviews with middle people to document their work for use in GMCNO reports to funding agencies. Four of the interviews I conducted formed part of the data set I analyzed for my research (with consent, of course). Assisting with turning these interviews into useful information for the GMCNO's reports gave me



insights into the reporting requirements of the funding agencies and therefore served as an opportunity to observe how the GMCNO navigates its relationships with those who pay. I also assisted with writing a section of one report and with developing frameworks for two other projects. But I declined to participate in several other ways. For example, a middle woman asked me to participate in presenting some information about Jewish dietary customs to a group of health providers. This type of presentation was an example of what, for me, is problematic about cultural competency – or, perhaps better, "culture knowledge" – training. I discussed this tension with the middle woman involved.

During the summer of 2008, I imported my transcripts, selected fieldnotes, and the cultural profiles into NVivo8 qualitative analysis software to assist with managing the volume of data. Although I had not planned to use analysis software, I found it made retrieval much more efficient. But I began with a hard copy of each transcript – which I had prepared with line numbers and a wide right margin specifically for notes and codes, read the interview through, then re-read and coded main ideas, using coloured pens. I then re-read the interview, as I worked these codes in NVivo. Working in NVivo had its pros and cons. I found that it imposed a certain amount of rigour – making me sure not to leave out any key ideas. Or, perhaps, I should say that I used it to impose on myself a certain kind of rigour, keeping me honest about what was in and not in my data. On the other hand, I found that the line-by-line and paragraph-by-paragraph approach to coding resulted in losing sight of the big picture, at times obscuring the focus of my research. At times, I "forgot" to read the material through the lens of the race/ culture divide.

I began in-depth analysis with the first three transcripts of interviews with Siobhan, using the process described above. I thought it would be obvious how to proceed, but discovered that it was not. After coding these first three interviews, I realized that I had 50 codes already,

and became nervous that I would drown in codes but have no way to pull together a thesis! I wrote:

I recall telling [a supervisory committee member] that I have lots of good material and that there is "so much." I remember being really excited about the fact that the material was kind of "fitting" into some of my preconceived ideas of what the sectors might be at least. Also new directions. She said, "So you'll have to decide what to focus on." Decide what to focus on? I have my Research Focus/Problem, and a set of preconceived questions. I am finding that my interviews "cover" all or some of these in some way. What's to "choose?"

Ah ... After coding the first 3 interviews (all with Siobhan), I sit back. There are 50 open codes already, using open coding, line-by-line review and coding for key phrases, ideas, and themes. Sometimes the code is attached to a particular phrase (in vivo), sometimes to a larger chunk (like a paragraph). Already I feel overwhelmed with how many codes I am dealing with – both remembering what they are (fortunately you can print them and their descriptions (like a code book) in NVivo), and where to put what (which seems to indicate some overlap at this point). (Memo Excerpt, "Early thoughts on coding," July 21, 2008)

I decided I needed to code other participants' interviews to see whether my coding scheme held up. I analyzed four additional interviews, choosing them according to how strong I thought they were (based on my impressions) in providing insights into nuances around the concepts I was examining. I needed many new codes to fit the data appropriately. These four were front-line middle women, whereas Siobhan works at the level of the organization, more system-to-system and organization-to-organization. My coding reflected or represented that difference. I continued with coding in this way – shifting from free or open coding to theoretical coding in order to connect the ideas (Glaser, 1978). By the end of these interviews, I had about 125 codes. Although these codes seemed robust, I was concerned about the level at which I had coded the interviews. This level of coding provided for a rich description of the GMCNO site, the middle women, and their practices.

As I moved into the next set of interview transcripts, I decided to use only free codes, staying away from clumping codes for the time being, and to intentionally code at a level one step removed from the site and the specific middle women – at a more theory-driven level. At this level, I was

more conscious of really trying to view the data through the lens of the race/culture divide and from the vantage point of those who navigate the divide. At some point, I realized that I now had a coding process that was working for me. By layering a more theoretical level of coding onto the particulars of the site and the middle women's experiences, I was able to use these two levels productively. At this point, I moved back and forth between the two layers, between the literature and my coding. The layering of open codes, at a somewhat more abstract level, on top of the hierarchical coding scheme, allowed me to graft the race/culture divide lens onto the particular experiences generated in the interviews. The potential for intersectional analysis became visible in this layer of coding (allusions to class, race, and gender), as did distinctions between groups of (im)migrants (established and newer), and nuances in racialization practices (language, food, white knowledge, main stream, racialized systems). I could also see how public and private relations, and psychological and systemic factors, were implicated in the middle women's talk.

### *Notes on rigour*

Methodological congruence has been described as one of the most important contributors to rigour in qualitative inquiry (Mayan, 2009; Morse & Richards, 2002). It “refers to the fact that projects entail congruent ways of thinking” manifested in the “fit between the research problem and the question, ... the research question and the method, and ... fit among the method, the data, and the way of handling data” (Morse & Richards, 2002, p. 33). My research was shaped by theory, and the theory-method I chose was an excellent fit for my theoretical orientation – a critical constructivist paradigm with post sensibility. Indeed, as I have outlined, I worked carefully and methodically through a series of strategic methodological and theoretical extensions. Ultimately, the findings are a construction comprised of participants’ narratives, layered theoretical insights, and my reconstruction of both for a (new) theoretical purpose. In

this way, the research moved from the *case* to say something about the social world.

Additional criteria of rigour pertain to sampling and data analysis. I used purposeful sampling – the participants were able to speak extensively and deeply to the phenomenon I was examining. The sample resulted in saturation of the data. Although I do *not* believe that nothing new could have emerged from additional interviews, participant-observation, or analyses, my coding and categorizing of the data was iterative, careful and layered. It resulted in clear themes that speak to the issues I set out to examine. I met with one of my committee members to review and examine my emerging codes and categories to ensure I was on the right track. Moreover, *because* I worked through a series of extensions that were based on emergent findings, I followed up on contradictions and anomalies. Indeed, seeking to understand anomalies gave rise to the most important findings of the study. Finally, although no story is ever complete, the findings had “grab” – that is, they were interesting and important and revealed novel insights into the ways in which the race/culture divide operates in a particular site and with what effects.

Verification of findings with participants and with additional middle women who did not participate directly in the research demonstrated credibility of the analyses and conclusions. The dialogic, dialectic, and reflexive process supported an iterative verification process of checking, confirming, and being certain of my interpretations. As I shared my insights and asked questions to deepen understanding, frequently there was unequivocal resonance and consensus among the participants. Following completion of most of the research in mid-2009, I invited everyone in the GMCNO to attend and participate in one of two discussions of my research findings. The 15 middle women who participated affirmed my insights and findings, and supported the analyses.

A final criterion of rigour in qualitative inquiry consists of an audit trail (Mayan, 2009). I documented participation and observations in detailed fieldnotes, kept a separate researcher's journal where I documented emerging insights, questions, and theories. I also wrote memos and annotations as I coded and categorized my data. As will be clear, I have drawn on all these sources in writing the thesis.

### **Fore-telling**

#### *Discerning multiple vantage points*

As I discuss in Chapter 8, it was through the layering discussed above that I began to see that there was not *a* vantage point, but *multiple* vantage points, in the middle women's experiences. Indeed, it was in this process that I first glimpsed the significance of Burawoy and Massey's theories of the relationship between space and place. I interviewed 20 middle women, each with a different personal biography of (im)migration. I had not anticipated the extent to which the women tie their engagement as middle women to "back home." This finding was remarkable because in the interviews, I never asked the middle women to tell me their histories of (im)migration. Yet, in almost every case, they responded to my beginning question – "Tell me a little bit about how you became a middle woman" – by telling me about how (im)migration is implicated in their lives. As a result, I had to ask myself more than once, "Why have they started there?" In my previous work with this GMCNO, I had often pondered the middle women's practice and goal of trying to "make visible" the realities of (im)migrants. One middle woman summarized the significance of (im)migration histories for human services, commenting, "Everybody will bring something in their luggage that is more than clothing" (Sary).

In addition, during the interviews, a number of the middle women asked me if I was familiar with the history of their countries of origin and, in some cases, the shifting impetus for migration. I received short history lessons – descriptions of the changing circumstances of migration from

those countries. I came to understand my research as a vehicle for the middle women to "make visible" something they considered important. During more than one observation opportunity, I heard a middle woman tell her audience that it is important for service providers to study the map, to be familiar with the areas from which the (im)migrants they serve come. One common misconception or ignorance that middle women sought to dispel or educate about was the conflation of countries with continents (for example, Africa and Asia).

Early on Lenore had told me that one of the unique qualities of these middle women was that their work is grounded in a systemic analysis. Indeed, I came to see how true this was. As I discuss in Chapter 4, the middle women articulated systemic analyses of inequities "in Canada" through reference to pre-migration conditions and circumstances. For most of the middle women, talking through their understandings and explanations of a need for middle women to address the issues that (im)migrants experience, could not be separated from their histories of migration, their hopes for Canada, and the struggle of, as another middle woman put it, "living in the confused" (Thuy). I began to see how geopolitics was layered onto mundane conversations about the challenges of mixing and matching cultures.

These insights shaped my decision about how to describe the research participants. Although I had originally intended (by rote) to collect demographic information about the middle women, I did not do so. Gender was clearly important, as the position of middle women is elaborated through (im)migrant women's lenses on the challenges that (im)migrants face in Canada. It seemed to me to be important to follow the middle women's leads as to what was important, rather than to impose an artificial set of descriptors on them. Following their leads into the intersection of the pre- and post-migration conditions and circumstances that shape their personal biographies and their work, and their explicit reference to histories and maps, I opted to invite the middle women to

"map" their (im)migration path(s), with timelines and ascribed status upon arrival in Canada. It was beyond the scope of what was possible in this study to undertake a detailed examination of the histories of the individuals who participated in my research, but it was possible to ask them to map their pathways. I provided a large world map, coloured thread and labels, and invited the middle women to plot their paths. However, because I could not be at the site to continue this process, I invited the research participants to complete a short participant data sheet (Appendix 6). Ultimately, 20 middle women<sup>26</sup> returned the information sheets or an email message explaining their circumstances. Although initially I did not think it was important to collect information about age, I later realized that age and time of (im)migration were significant in relation to the impetus for coming to Canada.

Interestingly, "placing" the women's pathways on a world map was highly problematic. It was not possible to depict either actual movement or the directionality of movement in a meaningful way. A map in itself is acontextual and ahistorical. Indeed, what part of the world should be "centred" on a map? Moreover, since a map is a static representation, it fixed the women into place. As a result, I decided to abandon "mapping" the women's pathways.

However, I did aggregate the information the middle women provided, as shown in Table 1 below. The aggregated data illuminate and underscore the unique vantage point of the GMCNO, as well as its pluralism. This insight helped me to see how the GMCNO and the women who comprise it should not be separated in analysis. A multi-unit analysis was unavoidable. Furthermore, from a methods perspective, it was

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<sup>26</sup> Although 18 of the middle women who provided these information sheets were direct participants in my research, two were not. These two attended a discussion of my research findings in May 2009.

Table 1. Description of research participants<sup>27</sup>

Age	27 to 64 (4 unknown)
Country of birth	17 countries: Bosnia, Burma, Canada (3) <sup>28</sup> , Chile*, China, Ethiopia, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Iraq/Kurdistan Region, Mexico*, Pakistan (2)*, Philippines (2), Somalia, South Korea, Thailand, Vietnam (3)
Pathway to Canada	Born in Canada: 3 Direct to Canada: 9 Other locations en route: 9 - Bosnia to Croatia - Burma to Hong Kong - China to Macao - Ethiopia to Italy - Germany to India, then US - Iraq/Kurdistan to refugee in Iran, then Turkey - Somalia to Kenya - Thailand to refugee camp in Thailand - Vietnam to concentration camp in Hong Kong (2 unknown)
Self-reported ascribed (im)migration status	Economic, family member under the point/skills system, dependent wife, assisted relative class, family sponsored, privately sponsored refugee, government-sponsored refugee, refugee claimant, student, live-in caregiver (3 unknown)
Length of time in Canada	5 to 36 years (3 unknown)
Returned to country of birth	N/A: 3 (1 born in Canada lived in parents' country of birth for 3 years) Yes: 14 No: 4 (2 unknown)
Arrived with other family members	N/A: 3 Yes: 10 No: 7 (3 unknown)
Left family behind	N/A: 3 Yes: 13 No: 4 (3 unknown)

\* Incomplete information for three middle women who were interviewed.

<sup>27</sup> Information was available for: 18 interviewees, two participants who I observed but did not interview, and two who participated in discussion of findings but who were not otherwise research participants.

<sup>28</sup> Includes two (of four) mentor-middle women and one front-line middle woman.



interesting to see that one site – or case – can contain its own extensions. The middle women brought into visibility their different relationships to elsewhere(s) in ways that negated the possibility of decontextualizing how (im)migration is (or is not) implicated in their own lives and also (therefore) in the lives of the (im)migrants to whom they provide support. As one research participant suggested, "We treat people as if they had no life before. So just get on with it" (Hannah). It was also notable that two of the white mentor-middle women who were born in Canada sent emails indicating that they didn't have "very interesting" migration paths. For example, one commented,

*It is funny for me to get a request like this because it points out how polar opposite I am to the people I have worked with closely. I have hardly moved, mostly lived in the same two houses (birth house and married house) all my life, let alone moved across the world. ... Anyway, the most I could fill out on the form is my name and that I was born in Canada. (Email from Aileen, June 26, 2009)*

### **Discerning racisms**

Considering further the middle women's approaches to my question about what gives rise to the need for middle women, participants articulated multiple barriers and gaps that constitute the inequities that many minoritized (im)migrants experience "in Canada." But it was striking that the middle women did not explicitly name racism or discrimination in their articulations of inequities. This omission was particularly remarkable because I had framed my research in terms of the "race/culture divide," both verbally and in my project information sheet.

As I examined their accounts through a critical race theory lens, I saw the marks of race-thinking entwined in the middle women's examples of their day-to-day work. But after repeatedly hearing the middle women deracialize (Rattansi, 2007) inequities – not naming racism directly or obscuring it by use of other words – I raised it directly with 11 of the middle women. Bringing it to the foreground elicited immediate and numerous detailed and visceral examples of racist experiences – their own and those of the people they support.

Goldberg's (1994) theory of racist exclusions suggests an explanatory framework for the persistence of racialized inequities in access to, and experiences of, human services. The middle women involved in my research revealed how human services providers are practiced in overt disrespect, domination, and deficit-building, but also in disinterest and detachment, which are less tangible. They articulated how these practices diminish the (im)migrants they support. From their accounts, I named six types of barriers and gaps that constitute system(at)ic exclusions. The middle women's narratives exposed how these exclusions render many (im)migrants *reliant on* services, as in the case of income support, or *subject to* services, as in the case of child welfare intervention, and dependent on "their" communities for support not available anywhere else.

Moreover, when I suggested the possibility of system(at)ic racism or racialization, there was unequivocal resonance and consensus among the middle women that the system is "absolutely one-way" – designed for Canadian-born, white, English-speaking people, and "not fit to everyone." As I proceeded with my analysis, one of the things that became clear was the middle women's concrete description of "Canadian culture." I noted:

As I coded Thuy's interview, I noted "So there is a Canadian culture"! This is significant because often this is what is not visible to those in the Canadian culture as it's represented by services and systems. (Memo Excerpt, "So there is a Canadian culture!" October 20, 2008)

I was excited about this for two reasons. First, I observed that what service organizations and providers often requested of the middle women was help with overcoming linguistic barriers, and information about (their) different cultures (see Chapter 6). Through relationships prompted by service providers, the middle women steady the gaze on themselves, reproducing what is reproducible – the collectivized practices – and therefore "partial truths" (Clifford, 1986) – of the *groups* of people they support. Rarely, it seemed, did the service organizations or providers invite middle women into an assessment of organizational barriers and practices from "out there." It was therefore significant to see that the

middle women's explanations "returned the gaze" (Bannerji, 1993). Often referring to "in Canada" or "in this country," the middle women spelled out specific practices that constitute "Canadian culture." (Yes,) often in stereotypical ways.

Second, these juxtapositions between "Canadian culture" and "my culture," or "in Canada" and "back home," made clear how culture(s) are constituted or produced in relation to each other. Thuy, for example, talked about how, in the absence of familiarity with "Canadian culture," people in "her community" piece together the bits they have into an assembled understanding of how Canadian society operates. This simple assertion shed light on how a dominant group – in this case, represented in service organizations and providers, construct imagined minority groups' cultures out of such bits and pieces.

From a methodological perspective, the extended case method encourages "seeing" the juxtapositions of situated experiences. The extension was necessary in theorizing what is going on *in situ*. It was the middle women's descriptions of how the system works, illuminated by detailed examples that provided glimpses into how racialization operates *beyond* individual interfaces in different settings to society as a whole. The middle women characterized the human service system *as a whole* as "absolutely one-way." Their analyses also made reference to how (im)migration serves the purposes of the state. The middle women's characterizations resonated with Richard Day's (2000) notion of the perpetually "pre-designed nation," not responsive to, or amenable to, change, and also Goldberg's (1994) theory of racist exclusions. I discuss these findings in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

### ***Situated racisms?***

Towards the end of my in-field research, in August 2008, the GMCNO invited me to attend and participate in their annual retreat. I presented some of the themes I was generating, based on my early coding. One of the working codes I discussed was "Oppressed and abused." One

of the middle women asked me if I "had" to use the word "oppression": "It sounds so harsh. We have worked hard to establish good relationships with the organizations" (Sharadi). Furthermore, Sharadi alerted me to how "oppression" takes on different meanings depending on where people have "come from." Many of the middle women came from, and because of, (real) oppressive and brutal regimes. This conversation gave me pause. I really had to think about whether in seeking to find the commonalities among the participants I had already obscured important differences. As I pondered this, I realized that there were indeed anomalies. What I heard as overwhelming resonance that racism is a profound experience underlying inequities was itself a partial truth. I turned my attention to understanding how the anomalies could be accommodated in retheorizing the race/culture divide. A middle woman's comment – "You are sitting in a very different corner" (Shinin) – contributed the nuance I was in search of. It was a key moment in my analysis. First, her insight reinforced the reality that I was working with multiple vantage points. Second, it underscored the lived connection between "back home" and "in Canada." And third, it made me mindful of our respective positionalities with respect to theorizing the race/culture divide. I discuss this at length in Chapter 8.

### *Navigating the race/culture divide*

Returning to the implications of using the word "oppression" for the middle women's relationships with service providers, in that moment I responded that I would like to use that word because it seemed to be how people talked. I suggested that we could/would make a decision later about whether or not the setting (that is, the GMCNO) would be identified in my thesis or anything I wrote from it, so as not to jeopardize the GMCNO's relationships with its partners. As I pondered this subsequently, I realized that I could attend to the multiple vantage points through which oppressions are read, but there was no doubt that the theme was there. It seemed to me that the middle women's worry about

jeopardizing relationships with service organizations and providers was itself an example of oppressive relations.

With this idea in mind, I explored this tension with one of the middle women who had not been present at the retreat where the issue of oppression surfaced. Her response was, "Yes, yes, it is oppression" (Lisa2). Taking this in allowed me to see that the middle women had frequently made reference to caution about "saying it as it is." As Lisa said, "There are many dances that you do." Chapter 9 examines these dances.

### *Now I am a middle woman*

When I explored the issue of "oppression" with Lisa (see above), I told her that it was difficult to figure out how to deal with this tension of saying it as it is at the same time as not jeopardizing relationships – for them with their partners, and for me with the GMCNO and the middle women who participated in my research. She responded, astutely: "Now you are a middle woman too." I have thought about this a great deal as I generated, analyzed and interpreted the data, picked them apart and created a new set of stories out of our dialogues. I am mindful that what I have produced is another partial truth.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I have discussed how critical theoretical perspectives informed my research. I have argued that theory is for thinking and working. One important implication of a critical theoretical stance with a post sensibility is the need to move away from definition and definitive answers or solutions to social problems, toward examination of the conditions and social relations through which particular conceptualizations become operative, with what effects, and with what resistances. Concepts employ simplifying assumptions for particular purposes. A critical perspective with a post sensibility questions taken-for-granted understandings, and guides inquiry towards explicating how concepts are put to work and by whom, and what work concepts do.

I have also argued for a theory of context that activates the relationships between local social forces and the extended relations through which they are articulated. I have suggested that local studies are important because they “give life to” the particular sites through which power is enacted and negotiated. Studies of particular articulations of social relations of power and resistance can make visible unequal struggles between dominant and subordinate forces. However, this visibility also has the potential to render these social relations alterable. I have argued that discourse is an important vehicle through which social relations of power are reproduced but also negotiated and transformed.

In introducing my research method, strategies, and participants, I have sought to illustrate how I operationalized a critical theoretical and post perspectives in my research processes. In fore-telling how my theoretical insights shaped the process through which I generated findings and conclusions, and their timing, I have suggested the importance of explicating a position (or a vantage point) from which to look.

### **Chapter 3. Premises of the race/culture divide**

The bodies of literature about the concepts of cultural competence and anti-racism are extensive. Until recently, few scholars have brought the literature together across the divide. Yet understanding the problem of focusing on *cultural* responses to *racialized* inequities calls for examination of the premises underlying cultural competence and how they have been deployed in the human services, juxtaposed to the premises underlying racism and anti-racism that gird critical race theorists' concerns with culture-based strategies for addressing racialized inequities. As Razack (1998) has argued, "Culture considerations are important for contextualizing oppressed groups' claims for justice, for improving their access to services, and for requiring dominant groups to examine the invisible cultural advantages they enjoy" (p. 58). In this chapter, I therefore examine the underlying premises of the two bodies of literature. In particular, I outline the main lines of criticism of cultural remedies to racialized inequities, drawing attention to the underlying premises of both cultural competence and anti-racist interventions. Finally, with a post sensibility, I consider some of the broader forces implicated in Canadian critical race scholars' criticisms of culture talk.

Although my research focused on the race/culture divide in human services as it relates to those ascribed the category "(im)migrant," I also drew upon some writers whose work focused primarily on indigenous populations in Canada and New Zealand because their analyses highlighted asymmetrical relations of power in human services (e.g., Ramsden, 2002; Razack, 1998; Schick, 2000; Schick & St. Denis, 2005).

#### **Cultural competence as a response to the challenge of diversity**

As hinted at in Chapter 1, the need to respond to "culture" in Western societies has most often been viewed as a response to the challenge that increasing cultural diversity presents, rather than as a response to the everyday realities that many minoritized (im)migrants

experience around their social interfaces.<sup>29</sup> In other words, cultural diversity is a discourse that often presents (im)migrants as a problem to be managed (e.g., Baxter, 2001; Day, 2000). In the human services, the most prevalent responses to this increasing diversity have been strategies for increasing professionals' abilities to manage their interactions with those to whom they provide service. Variouslly described as culturally congruent, transcultural, cross-cultural, and culturologic<sup>30</sup> care, since the mid-1990s the terms *transcultural* care and *cultural competence* have become commonplace and somewhat interchangeable in nursing, medicine, and related health fields (Campinha-Bacote, 1995; Chin, 2000; Dreher & McNaughton, 2002; Goode, Dunne, & Bronheim, 2006; Kagawa-Singer & Chi-Ying Chung, 1994; Leininger, 2001; Leonard & Plotnikoff, 2000; Purnell & Paulanka, 1998; Rogerson, 2006; Salimbene, 1999).

By the early 2000s, there was an abundance of commentaries on culture and practice, conceptual frameworks and theories for culturally responsive care, manuals outlining steps to effective organizational management of diversity, and guides on "how to be" culturally competent (e.g., American Medical Association, 1999; Campinha-Bacote, 1995, 2000; Chin, 2000; Dreher & McNaughton, 2002; Kagawa-Singer & Chi-Ying Chung, 1994; Leininger, 2001; Leonard & Plotnikoff, 2000; Purnell, 2002; Purnell & Paulanka, 1998; Reed, Newman, Suarez, & Lewis, 1997; Spector, 2000; Wells, 2000). Particular attention has been paid to "cultural and linguistic competence" (e.g., Goode et al., 2006; National Center for Cultural Competence (NCCC), 2004). A number of different conceptual models of cultural competence have been developed (Campinha-Bacote, 1995; Goode et al., 2006; Leininger, 2001; Purnell, 2002; Wells, 2000). The main concepts comprising the nursing models have been extended to many other professional fields, including medicine, occupational and

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<sup>29</sup> I use the word "interface" intentionally, to refer to the border, boundary, edge or crossing point.

<sup>30</sup> These descriptors are contained in the titles of American nurse anthropologist Madeleine Leininger's seminal works from 1970 to 2006 and have made their way into the professional practice literature beyond nursing.



physiotherapy, kinesiology, social work, psychology, education, and theology.

Although there is some play in the notions that underlie cultural competence models, with some writers placing more emphasis on cultural competence as a process and others on its achievement, most notions are based on definitions of culture drawn from conventional anthropology (Jezewski & Sotnik, 2001). For example:

*Culture is broadly defined as a system of learned and shared standards for perceiving, interpreting, and behaving in interactions with others and with the environment... human beings learn culture from those with whom they interact from the moment of their birth. ... Family, and those who cared for us as young children, are the formidable teachers of cultural values, beliefs and behaviors. Values are ideas about what is normal and abnormal, proper and improper, desirable and undesirable, right and wrong. Values form the basis for our beliefs and behaviors. ... Culture should be viewed as a system. That is, culture is made up of discrete but interconnected components, [including] normative codes ... communication codes ... a body of knowledge ... problem solving strategies ... a set of relationships ... and methods of transmitting culture. (Jezewski & Sotnik, 2001, pp. 3-4)*

Cultural competence involves a generalized application of cultural stereotypes, which is problematic because it contradicts the professional's goal of individualized service (Suhonen, Valimki, & Leino-Kilpi, 2002). When discussing, or when writing for an audience working at the individual practitioner level, writers often add a caveat to remind the reader that culture is dynamic. Specifically, this approach maintains that "all human groups have a set of values and beliefs that guide their behaviors" (Jezewski & Sotnik, 2001, p. 7), but that "specific values, beliefs and behaviors are not universal across groups" (p. 7). Further, this caveat approach reminds readers that "when we are learning about specific ethnic or cultural groups, it is important to keep in mind that there is as much diversity within groups as there is between ethnic or cultural groups" (p. 8). The significance of the caveat is perhaps best underscored by the fact that Leininger's (2001) theory of culture care diversity and universality includes, as an appendix, a guide that delineates the practices and beliefs of, and culturally relevant nursing responses to, 23 cultural groups. If such delineations are meant as a guide, how then to handle the

idea of dynamic culture? Although each cultural competence model handles this challenge slightly differently, a common response is exemplified in the following:

*One way to avoid stereotyping is to look at new knowledge about an ethnic group as a generalization, which is a beginning point, knowledge that indicates common trends for beliefs and behaviors that are shared by a group. Stereotyping is viewed as an end point, that is, no attempt is made to learn whether the individual in question fits what is known about the group. (Jezewski & Sotnik, 2001, p. 8)*

Cultural competence models, then, generally focus on professional development, with three emergent foci: cultural *awareness* – knowledge of the cultural implications of health behavior; cultural *sensitivity* – non-judgmental attitudes on the part of service professionals; and cultural *proficiency* – skills for applying awareness and sensitivity to professional practice. Underlying assumptions of the focus on professional development are that practitioners can learn a body of knowledge needed for responding appropriately to diversity, and that this body of knowledge can be applied in such a way that the professional can serve everyone<sup>31</sup> (Leininger, 1984, p. 42). This professionalizing contribution of cultural competence models has several implications. First, it makes sense of an extensive focus on self-awareness and reflection as processes through which cultural competence can be acquired. Second, it invests considerable power and responsibility in individual practitioners for appropriate judgment and relevant practice. Third, it encourages a prominent focus on individualized care as the best strategy for addressing diversity, or actualizing culturally competent care. The "humanistic approach" that underpins much of the cultural competence literature embraces Leininger's (1984) concept of "universality and diversity." Thus, cultural competence models are entirely congruent with, and

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<sup>31</sup> The early work in the nursing field, which contributed to the development of later cultural competence models, was a challenge to the nursing discipline to create a relevant niche for itself (juxtaposed to medicine) (Dreher & McNaughton, 2002; Leininger, 1984; Reimer Kirkham & Anderson, 2002). This same issue of establishing a niche has also applied to the field of social work (see, for example, Darnell, 2007).

complementary to, patient-centred or client-centred care and individual care planning (Beach et al., 2006), working the tension between universality and diversity:

*To deliver individualized care, a provider must take into account the diversity of patients' perspectives, and so – to the extent that patient-centred care is delivered universally – care should become more equitable. Likewise, to the extent cultural competence enhances the ability of health care systems and providers to address individual patients' preferences and goals, care should also become more patient-centred. ... At the core of both patient-centredness and cultural competence is the emphasis on seeing the patient as a unique person. (pp. vii-viii)*

Although professional cultural competence hinges on individualized care, individualized care itself is not a straightforward concept, and has been studied to a limited extent (Suhonen et al., 2002). Preliminary evidence indicates that service providers and receivers differ in their perspectives on the extent to which individualized service has been provided (Suhonen et al., 2002). Nursing staff have reported that they depend on assessment of individual needs as a basis for individualized care (Mayan, Wolfe, & Tanesescu, in preparation; Suhonen et al., 2002). Service receivers, on the other hand, have reported not being treated as individuals, and not receiving individualized care (Hart, Hall, & Henwood, 2003; Suhonen et al., 2002). Lack of individualized care might be explained by findings that nurses have limited power to influence quality of care, which constrains nurses' abilities to individualize care (Suhonen et al., 2002). Service providers often attribute an inability to provide individualized care to funding cuts in health and social services (Anderson, Tang, & Blue, 2007; Hyde, 2004; Mayan et al., in preparation). Such findings raise questions about the extent to which professional service providers are actually providing care in keeping with their professional ethical responsibilities to protect human rights and dignity (Hart et al., 2003; Suhonen et al., 2002). Proponents of cultural competence are assessing "How are we doing 20 years later?" (Campinha-Bacote, 2006; Kardong-Edgren, 2007), while at the same time continuing to tweak the concept and what is required to actualize it (Campinha-Bacote, 2008).

Beginning in the 1990s, the focus on culturally competent *individual practitioners* (that is, professionals) was gradually extended to the organizational level across human services. Here, achieving cultural proficiency requires “the integration of cultural competence into the culture of the organizations and into professional practice; mastery of the cognitive and affective phases of cultural development” (Wells, 2000, p. 192). This expansion of cultural competence discourse has been attributed to racial inequities in both health outcomes (that is, health status) of non-white people and quality of health care provided to non-white people (Beach et al., 2006). As a result, there has been an increasing emphasis on black and minority health, disadvantaged and underserved populations, and specific goals for reducing racial and ethnic disparities (Beach et al., 2006; Darnell, 2007; Dohan & Schrag, 2005; Sue & Dhinnsa, 2006).

If professional cultural competence involves self-awareness and reflection, organizational cultural competence has its parallel in the awareness of organizational barriers to care. Key issues identified at the organizational level include lack of diversity in the leadership and workforce, systems of care poorly designed for diverse populations, and poor cross-cultural communication between providers and patients (Betancourt et al., 2002; Nybell & Gray, 2004). Recommended strategies for achieving organizational cultural competence include parallels to the strategies for professional cultural competence, but at the community rather than the individual level. For example, it

*requires an understanding of the communities being served as well as the sociocultural influences on individual patients' health beliefs and behaviors. ... how these factors interact with the ...system in ways that may prevent diverse populations from obtaining quality ... care. ... and devising strategies to reduce and monitor potential barriers through interventions.*  
(Betancourt et al., 2002, p. 14)

Increasing the diversity of the leadership in the workforce, along with ensuring integration of culturally and linguistically supportive resources and material have been suggested as key interventions at the organizational and systemic levels, in addition to training at the professional level (Betancourt et al., 2002).

An array of service delivery models and strategies have been developed during the past 20 years to address some of the barriers that prevent many members of minoritized populations from accessing services and supports they require. In Canada, human service organizations' responses to cultural diversity have been summarized according to four main models (Tator, 1996; see also Baines, 2002). Although the lines between these approaches are somewhat problematic, since boundaries around categories are rarely very clear, the approaches point to differing conceptualizations of the underlying problem of racialized disparities.

First, the monocultural/assimilationist approach "views racial and cultural diversity as an irrelevant factor in determining agency policies" (Tator, 1996, p. 155). Rather, it assumes that everyone is equal and should be treated the same – racism is considered an aberration. This colour-blind<sup>32</sup> approach is congruent with the underlying tenets of liberalism, which shape Canadian multiculturalism – namely, assumptions of universal rights make it possible to ignore or obscure the realities of racialized inequities (Bannerji, 2000; Li, 2007; Phillips, 2007; Razack, 1998).

Second, the add-on/multicultural approach involves a willingness "to address the issue of diversity and to develop programs designed to increase the access and participation of minorities" (Tator, 1996, p. 155). This approach treats racialized barriers as race relations problems manifested in cultural value conflicts and communication misunderstandings, which can be addressed at the front-line level. The "add-on" approach has often meant integrating immigrant workers into existing services and community resources to improve availability and responsiveness. Such workers include a range of specialized personnel such as interpreters, cross- and inter-cultural workers, cultural mediators,

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<sup>32</sup> "Colour-blind" is also an obscuring way to talk. It is a kind of double obscurity. First, it suggests that only non-white is a colour – and therefore does not recognize difference and, second, it hides the dominance of the colour white which is structurally privileged.

cultural consultants, culture brokers, advocates, and patient navigators (Budman, Lipson, & Meleis, 1992; Darnell, 2007; Dohan & Schrag, 2005; Elder, 2003; Eng, Parker, & Harlan, 1997; Forbat & Atkinson, 2005; Giblin, 1989; Jezewski, 1990, 1995; Jezewski & Sotnik, 2001; Kaufert & Koolage, 1984; Love, Gardner, & Legion, 1997; McNicoll & Christensen, 1996; NCCC, 2004; Morris et al., 1999; Musser-Granski & Carillo, 1997; O'Neill, Kaufert, & Koolage, 1986; Researcher, 2003; Tripp-Reimer & Brink, 1985; Westermeyer, 1990).

Third, the integrated multicultural/anti-racism approach “involves a wide range of racial and cultural groups in all areas of organizational life” (Tator, 1996, p. 156). It assumes that social change requires a systemic commitment, based on a structural understanding of racism.

Finally, in the ethno-cultural community-based model, “ethnocultural, community-based organizations ...[fill] the huge gap created by the failure of mainstream institutions” (Tator, 1996, p. 157). The establishment of such organizations suggests the emergence of a parallel system, and often operates with little recognition and inadequate funding.

At the organizational level, shaped by a cultural competence frame, culture has also been conceived as a coherent system.

*Culture, in the business sense and at its simplest and most familiar definition, is about ‘the way we do things round here’ (Bower, 1966). This view sees the organisation acting as its own mini-world with a set of intrinsic values and an emotional and reward currency that is perhaps unique to that sector or even that organization. (Baxter, 2001, p. 190)*

This is interesting in light of the fact that the very impetus for cultural competence is the need to address the challenge of diversity – so “sameness” is used to manage “difference” (Mayan et al., in preparation). The “sameness” that is proposed at the organizational level is that everyone will be treated individually and their unique, but dynamic, cultures will then be taken into account (Beach et al., 2006; Leininger, 2001). Seen through a critical race lens, then, cultural competence might be seen as a racial project (Omi & Winant, 1994), one that perpetuates essentialized cultures. Insofar as racial projects are articulated in particular

ways, cultural competence has the potential to be racist or anti-racist. An analysis of tools used to assess cultural competence revealed problematic assumptions underlying the measures, and signaled ways in which racist ideas shape the foundations of the cultural competence concept (Kumastan et al., 2007).

Limited research has focused on cultural competence in human services at either individual practitioner or organizational levels. Despite the huge emphasis on cultural competence, and experimentation with model development and implementation, systematic integration of cultural competency models into the organization and delivery of human services has been elusive (Hyde, 2004). A recent review of nursing "literature revealed that despite 50 years of transcultural nursing knowledge development through theory, research, and practice; *[sic]* there remains a lack of formal, integrated cultural education in nursing" (Omeri, 2008, p. ix).

Research findings show that integration of cultural competence strategies into professional practice can be difficult because staff rely on organizational policies of respect and therefore do not see the need for "special treatment" of minoritized groups (Mayan et al., in preparation; Reimer-Kirkham, 1998). Some nurse administrators suggest that having members of minoritized groups on staff ensures that their organizations can be culturally responsive when necessary (e.g., Mayan et al., in preparation). However, research also shows that racially minoritized students face barriers to and in education programs (Amaro, Abriam-Yago, & Yoder, 2006). Moreover, there is evidence that when minoritized staff are integrated into organizations as a specific cultural competence strategy, their work can be constrained by the mandate of the organization, the job descriptions into which they are hired, and tensions about professional status and associated judgments about competence (Hyde, 2004; Kaufert & Koolage, 1984; Morris et al., 1999; Musser-Granski & Carillo, 1997; Nybell & Gray, 2004; Pina & Canty-Swapp, 1999; Report, 2003b; Researcher, 2003; Westermeyer, 1990). Their abilities to act as

advocates for minoritized clientele can also be compromised (Kaufert & Koolage, 1984; Personal communications, middle women 2000;<sup>33</sup> Pina & Canty-Swapp, 1999). Further, research shows that minoritized staff members experience racism, feel silenced, and are penalized for their efforts to contest racism (e.g., Calliste, 2000; Nybell & Gray, 2004).

Evaluation results suggest that cultural competence training may contribute to health care professionals' knowledge, attitudes, and skills (Beach et al., 2005), and culturally competent care has been associated with improved provider-client communications, patient compliance, patient satisfaction with care, and improved health outcomes (Beach et al., 2005; Schim, Doorenbos, & Borse, 2005). However, systematic reviews of cultural competence strategies have concluded there is not adequate evidence of how these outcomes translate into equity or health status (Anderson, L. M. et al., 2003; Beach et al., 2005; Brach & Fraserirector, 2000).

Some findings indicate that cultural competence training may do harm. For example, cultural competence training has been associated with students' stereotyping of members of a particular racialized cultural group as "all alike" (Beach et al., 2005). Indeed, there is evidence that "providers exhibit bias and stereotyping" in their involvements with minoritized individuals (Beach et al., 2005, p. 366), and that service providers engage in biased and stereotyped assessment, diagnosis, treatment and referral behaviors, as discussed earlier (Geiger, 2001; Mirchandani & Chan, 2005; van Ryn & Fu, 2003). It is therefore significant that few cultural competence training curricula appear to have included concepts of racism, bias or discrimination (Beach et al., 2005), and how to address them. The simultaneous focus on culture and absence of racism in the curriculum is symptomatic of the race/culture divide.

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<sup>33</sup> This observation was based on experience of integrating former middle women into nursing positions in a main stream health organization that was the focus of the study discussed in Morris et al. (1999).



Insofar as the goal of cultural competence is to increase cultural sensitivity, enhance individualized care and reduce racialized disparities in care, increasingly transparent evidence of inequities in the *treatment* of racialized minorities is consistent with a conclusion that cultural competence has not demonstrated its efficacy. Indeed, there has been increasingly transparent evidence of racialized disparities across a range of indicators that suggest racialized minorities in Canada and the U.S. are disadvantaged in education, social, and health outcomes (Dunn & Dyck, 2000; Geiger, 2001<sup>34</sup>; Newbold & Danforth, 2003; Perez, 2002; Reitz & Banerjee, 2007; Williams, 1999). Proponents of cultural competence point to a need for further research into the nature and scope of interventions and strategies designed to improve cultural competence, the extent to which cultural competence has been realized at individual and organizational levels, and its effectiveness (Anderson, L. M. et al., 2003; Beach et al., 2005; Brach & Fraserirector, 2000). Other scholars have suggested that focusing on cultural competence, with its emphasis on individual practitioners and organizations, obscures the extent to which health disparities need to be addressed at a *societal* level. They call for redirecting interventions to the determinants of health (Drevdahl et al., 2008). Understanding race and racism as relations of power has resulted in recent scholars' conceptualizing race and racism *as* determinants of health (Etowa, 2009; Hyman, 2009; McGibbon & Etowa, 2009).

### **Contesting cultural remedies**

Although there has been dramatic growth in the body of cultural competence literature during the past 10 years, there has been a simultaneous growth in criticism of the conceptual tenets that underlie cultural competence. Overall, criticism of cultural competence is evidence of resistance among scholars to the main streams within their disciplines,

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<sup>34</sup> Geiger suggests that such racialized disparities are now recognized as a global phenomenon.

which has three main emphases: lack of recognition of power dynamics in human services, essentialism, and denial of racism.

The first emphasis works within an acceptance of cultural competence as a goal, but many scholars argue that promoting cultural competence for professionals is not enough. It is necessary for professionals to reflect on their personal and cultural histories and the values they bring into their interactions, to develop critical consciousness about how they are positioned in relation to both those they serve and the system of service delivery in which they practice (Anderson et al., 2003; Canales, 2000; Dorazio-Migliore, Migliore, & Anderson, 2005; Johnson et al., 2004; Salimbene, 1999). This criticism is important insofar as it has the potential to shift the problem of diversity from the “different” service user to the service provider's capacity to attenuate the unequal power relations that characterize most interfaces with human services.

Although critical consciousness is driven by a commitment to social justice, this commitment can be undone when it unduly emphasizes empathy, but does not address the underlying practices that shape racialized inequities. The notion of an “inequalities imagination” perhaps best exemplifies this problem, encouraging professionals to put themselves in the shoes of the “other” (Canales, 2000; Hart et al., 2003).

Recognition of asymmetrical power relations has also resulted in a problematic emphasis on the dialectical nature of service provider-user relationships, suggesting that they are negotiable (Anderson et al., 2003; Dorazio-Migliore et al., 2005; Johnson et al., 2004). But however dialectical these relationships may be, some scholars have seriously questioned the potential for negotiation within them (Jones, 1999), especially in the context of relations involving members of minoritized and dominant groups. Thus, although the first line of criticism of cultural competence explicitly recognizes the asymmetrical relationships involved in human services delivery, at the same time it does not explicitly recognize the dialectical processes through which such power is constituted.

A second, more strident, line of criticism contends that cultural competence concepts have limited potential for addressing systemic racism. Attacking both the focus and the premises of "culturalist" responses, anti-racist scholars are not surprised that cultural remedies have not resolved racialized inequities, since focusing on others' cultures cannot address racism, which is a structural problem. They argue that the focus on "other" cultures is essentialist (e.g., Carter, 2003; Dreher & McNaughton, 2002; Fleras & Elliott, 2002, 2003; James, 2005; Moodley, 2000; Park, 2005; Reimer Kirkham & Anderson, 2002; Zine, 2005). As Park (2005) has argued, in cultural competence the concept of culture, "constructed from within an orthodox, hegemonic discursive paradigm ... is deployed as a marker of deficit" (p. 11; see also Dossa, 2004; Jeffery, 2005; Razack, 1998; Schick & St. Denis, 2005; Willinsky, 2001). This essentialist approach not only treats culture as static, but also attributes minoritized peoples' problems to their static, and often (or therefore) backward and inferior, cultures (e.g., Bannerji, 2000; Jiwani, 2006; Razack, 1998).

A related thread of criticism of cultural competence comes from a post-colonial stance. Emanating from New Zealand, Maori nurses have vehemently worked against cultural competence both because it focuses on the "other" culture and because it does not recognize that the asymmetrical relations of power involved in professional-service user relationships are anchored within the broader forces of historical and contemporary colonization (Polaschek, 1998; Ramsden, 2002; Wepa, 2003). In its place, they posit cultural safety, shifting the power to define what is culturally safe to those minoritized by the persistence of institutionalized dominant practices. Nevertheless, nursing scholars in both New Zealand and Canada have struggled with the efficacy of integrating the premises of cultural safety into clinical nursing, teaching, and research practices (Anderson et al., 2003; Gibbs, 2005; Jones & Richardson, 2004; Wepa, 2003). Furthermore, some professionals have translated cultural safety into

practice in ways that blur it into conventional cultural competence (for an example, see Fulcher, 2002).

Overall, efforts to reorient professional disciplines and organizational practices to anti-oppressive, anti-discriminatory, and anti-racist practices based on analyses of institutionalized power have met with a great deal of resistance by the very professionals, organizations and educational institutions that claim to be “challenged” by diversity. This should not be surprising in light of the significant challenges to implementing anti-racist pedagogies in the academy (Dhamoon, 2009), notably by non-white faculty in mainly white universities (Ahmed, 2008; Hassouneh, 2006). It seems there is not readiness to address the issue of what it will take to overcome these challenges.

A third line of criticism of cultural competence examines how a lack of readiness on the part of members of the dominant population might be understood. Barriers to addressing racial inequality have been attributed to lack of anti-racist objectives and high-level policies at the organizational level, resulting in front-line discretion, unclear communication and allocation of minimal resources to implement change (Estable et al., 1997, as cited in Mock & Laufer, 2001). Cultural competence development (Nybell & Gray, 2004) that does not directly address the need for redistribution of power in organizations cannot address racialized inequality (Chesler, 1994, as cited in Nybell & Gray, 2004). Redistributing power is inherently conflictual; yet cultural mediation is most often described as a strategy for achieving negotiated outcomes through consensus building (Nybell & Gray, 2004). Openness and respect for cultural difference and awareness of and sensitivity to diversity are often discussed without any recognition that “the term ‘ethno-specific’ can be appropriately applied to most mainstream agencies that meet the needs of English-speaking members of the dominant culture” (Beyene et al., 1996, p. 178).

Critical race theorists’ concerns go far beyond the need for self-awareness and critical consciousness with respect to asymmetrical power

relations within the professional-service-user relationship. They argue that cultural initiatives fail to engage with the institutionalization of white supremacy throughout society (Fleras & Elliott, 2002; James, 1996; Razack, 1998; Schick, 2002; Schick & St. Denis, 2005). Anti-racism<sup>35</sup> works against the ways in which white dominance is reproduced and perpetuated in and through human services professionals and organizations. Insofar as interventions are framed solely in terms of respect, dignity, equality and inclusion, they do not address the social relations of power through which racialization produces both minoritized non-white people and white dominance as taken-for-granted realities.

Research exposes widespread denial of racisms and resistance to examining racialized hierarchies of power at both individual staff and organizational levels in human services. Denial of racism is a common response among service providers when asked directly about racism in their organizations (Baines, 2002; Bell, 2003; Jiwani, 2006; Srivastava, 2005). Research also shows important differences in how predominately white service providers and non-white service users talk about their "encounters" with one another. For example, Johnson et al. (2004) found that whereas service users spoke about race, racism, and discrimination, service providers' "accounts were couched in a discourse of equal treatment and cultural "appropriateness"" (p. 258). Despite what service providers claim,

*what remains central in [professional service providers'] talk is that "the problem" of social inequality is located within the difference that some people are made to contain. If there is no difference, there is no problem. (Comeau, 2006, p. 5)*

Although some scholars suggest that transculturally competent care can eliminate the inequities that marginalized people experience if it is grounded in multiple ways of knowing (Papadopoulos & Omeri, 2008), these claims often lack a systemic analysis, and rely on the qualities of

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<sup>35</sup> Among these scholars, anti-racism and whiteness studies blur into each other. Although they are sometimes seen as separate, I have chosen not to distinguish between them for my purposes here.

individual providers, such as tolerance, humility, and an authentic desire to be culturally competent (Bucher, Klemm, & Adepoju, 1996; Campinha-Bacote, 2008; Papadopoulos & Omeri, 2008). To the contrary, many researchers have attributed barriers to (im)migrants' use of, and negative experiences with services to geographic, socio-cultural and economic factors, cultural insensitivity, acceptability and availability of services, cultural similarity or dissonance, and the biomedical model of care (Asasin & Wilson, 2008; Elliott & Gillie, 1998; Gadalla, 2008; Ng et al., 2005). In the absence of a critical theoretical approach, these authors did not examine the power relations through which such reported barriers and experiences arose. Importantly, even when research participants have named racism and discrimination in their interviews, researchers have failed to name racism in their findings, and have recommended *cultural* responsiveness strategies with no mention of the need for anti-racist interventions (see, for example, Simich, Beiser, Stewart, & Mwakarimba, 2005; Stewart et al., 2006; Zanchetta & Pouresalmi, 2006).

Critical race scholars argue that culturalization has become naturalized as a mechanism that enables the denial of oppression (Bannerji, 2000; Bell, 2002; Jiwani, 2006; Razack, 1998; Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005; Wagner, 2005). Such denial is possible because

*The power of whiteness lies in a set of discursive techniques, including exnomination, that is the power not to be named; naturalization, through which whiteness establishes itself as the norm by defining 'others' and not itself; and universalization, where whiteness alone can make sense of a problem and its understanding becomes the understanding. (Gabriel, 1998, as cited in Jiwani, 2006, p. 5)*

As a result, academics that teach pre-service professionals also meet with strong resistance to anti-racist pedagogies among students who are members of the dominant population (Bedard, 2000; Bell, 2002; Jeffery, 2005; Razack, 1998; Schick, 2000; 2002). Such resistance “suggests that [these pedagogies] pose some kind of threat in the spaces where they are introduced” (Schick, 2002, p. 105). Anti-racist pedagogies disrupt the very bases upon which professional discourses and identities rest – certain knowledge, mastery of content and processes, and the capacity for

reflexivity (Bedard, 2000; Blades, Johnston, & Simmt, 2001; Jeffery, 2005; Jones, 1999; Razack, 1998; Schick, 2000; Schick & St. Denis, 2005). These are the premises of cultural competence. "What good is anti-racist social work if you can't master it?" (Jeffery, 2005) As Novogrodsky (1996) puts it,

*An anti-racist cast of mind learns about the Anglo-conformist assumptions buried deep in everyday life. ...It takes responsibility for reworking language and the taken-for-granted verbal formulas and exchanges so that history and experience of the 'other' is treated respectfully. (p. 190)*

Some of these scholars research the pedagogical challenges of resistance, exposing how students who are members of dominant groups receive, struggle with, and reject the difficult knowledge of how we<sup>36</sup> are implicated in the perpetuation of racist structures and relationships (Jeffery, 2005; Schick, 2000). Their focus on social relations of power exposes how racialization works to produce the respective positionalities of non-white people as subordinate and professionals as white (and therefore) dominant.

Insofar as "white privilege and 'difference' are normalized" (Schick & St. Denis, 2005, p. 299) through taken-for-granted dominant discourses that shape academic curricula in nursing, social work and education (Jeffery, 2005; Schick & St. Denis, 2005), such findings call into question the possibility of "negotiation" between members of dominant and subordinate groups (Jones, 1999). A number of scholars expose how the race/culture divide is constituted and reinforced in the social relations of power implicated in professional discourses of respectability and goodness, shaped by national discourses of multiculturalism, ethnic and cultural difference, and assimilation and integration, which obscure or deny racism (Baines, 2002; Giddings, 2005; Jeffery, 2005; Jiwani, 2006; Schick, 2000; Srivastava, 2005).

Race relations thinking (Dei, 1998; Satzewich, 1999) also shapes dominant discourses, making way for a focus on the attitudes of the dominant population. Conceiving of problems at the interface between

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<sup>36</sup> I use "we" intentionally to include myself as a member of the dominant group in this context.

service providers and immigrants as cultural clashes or communicative misunderstandings gives rise to a focus on awareness, sensitivity and skill, which comprises cultural competence. While discrimination is clearly an inter-group phenomenon, it is important to unpack what underlies it (Taylor, Wright, & Ruggiero, 2000). Yet, to the extent that remedies focus on the holders of prejudice and perpetrators of discrimination, implying that they are either ignorant or irrational, they fail to engage with how racisms are embedded in society as a whole.

Like cultural competence, the premise of anti-racism interventions is that racisms are relational. However, for critical race scholars, racisms are relational in the sense of cultural struggle – cultural struggle as in institutionalized social relations of power. Unlike cultural conflict shaped by race relations thinking, which is amenable to mediation to achieve harmonious relations, anti-racism challenges the tenets of dominant society. This is why there are “risks of talking culture” (Razack, 1998, p. 59). The premise that racisms are the foundations of contemporary society, rather than aberrations (Ladson-Billings, 2003, p. 408, citing Delgado, 1995b, p. xiv), calls into question defining racism in terms of individuals’ discriminatory acts and the need to gather evidence. It is “discourses of denial” (Jiwani, 2006) that produce the need for evidence.

Anti-racism scholars have implicitly or explicitly suggested that the only culturally responsive practice *is* anti-racist practice (Blades et al., 2001; Carter, 2003; Dei, 1998; Fleras & Elliott, 2002, 2003; James, 1996; Kujawa-Holbrook, 2002; Moodley, 2000; Park, 2005; Razack, 1998; Zine, 2005). I take this to mean that unless interventions explicitly recognize and contest the *racialized* relations of power that are implicated in human services, they are not going to be *culturally* responsive. Shifting from (multi)culturalism to anti-racism requires a radical shift in the premises that shape racist practices. James (1996) offers a nuanced way in which to think about how culture is constituted *through* racialized social relations of power.



*While the multicultural approach focuses primarily on cultural differences, in some cases constructing difference as 'foreign' – that which is brought from another country and is 'tolerated' – the anti-racism approach recognizes that racial-minority groups' cultures are constructed within our stratified society. Hence, the culture of minority groups results from their position in society relative to the dominant ethno-racial group. The lived experiences of minority-group members are understood within the context of the dominant culture. (p. 8)*

Interestingly, though, whereas race is nearly always conceptualized in relational terms – as a shifting social construction of categorization for social, economic and political purposes (e.g., Dei, 1998; Satzewich, 1998), culture is still frequently defined in static terms – albeit with caveats. How to take culture into account in human services is thus an epistemological struggle – that is, a struggle about ways of knowing, a struggle over the cultural norms and standards of professional practice and of human services organization and delivery (Anderson et al., 2003; James, 1996; Jeffery, 2005; Ramsden, 2002; Schick, 2000; Schick & St. Denis, 2005; Williams, 2006). Critical race scholars who are concerned with human services contend that professional practices and human services organization and delivery are but one site of cultural struggle. In main stream Canadian organizations,

*dominant practices are always 'on,' always the standard or fallback position for the 'way things are done.' This gives enormous privilege to those whose histories, ethnic backgrounds, social class, family assumptions, and personal knowledge are in line with these dominant practices. ... the fact that these practices are not the norm for everyone and that one's achievements [in the education context, for example] may be at the expense of others is often an invisible reality for privileged groups. (Schick & St. Denis, 2005, p. 300)*

This invisibility is possible because, as the historical "standard," "one's whiteness typically does not have to be thought about" (Pina & Canty-Swapp, 1999, p. 91). The invisibility of privilege enables a "fiction of equality," and means "we need not accept responsibility for racism" (Razack, 1998, p. 60). The practices through which a focus on culture

elides<sup>37</sup> racism and sexism (Razack, 1998), and enables the attribution of both personal and social problems to people's own cultures, has been called "culturalized racism" or "culturalization" (Bannerji, 2000; Castagna & Dei, 2000; Rattansi, 2007; Razack, 1998). Culturalization disconnects culture from the political realm, allocating it to the private sphere as a matter of choice or preference, rather than to a terrain of struggle (Bannerji, 2000). However, culture cannot be meaningfully relegated to the private sphere since the dichotomy between private and public is problematic in the first place (Bannerji, 2000). Cultural competence has been conceived as a strategy that can rectify race injustice by focusing on the other's culture, something "outside" white workers, rather than their whiteness, white privilege, or white racism (Pina & Canty-Swapp, 1999).

Such theorizations help to explicate research evidence that minoritized workers in community-based organizations experience a tension between assimilative and resistive pressures when the organizations receive funding to provide support and services to minoritized populations on behalf of dominant interests (Das Gupta, 1999; Ng, 1988; Pina & Canty-Swapp, 1999). When services become implicated in the "goal of duplicating the lifestyle of the privileged [it] tramples the dignity of the non-privileged group" (Pina & Canty-Swapp, 1999, p. 91). Seen through a critical theoretical lens, then, racism works effectively as a mode of power because individual, organizational and institutional practices are interlocked (Bannerji, 2000; James, 1996; Satzewich, 1998; Simmons, 1998). Racism

*cannot be grasped in its real character solely as a cultural/attitudinal problem or an issue of prejudice. It needs to be understood in systemic terms of political economy and the Gramscian concepts of hegemony and common sense that encompass all aspects of life – from the everyday and cultural ones to those of national institutions. ...The situation is one where racism in all its cultural and institutional variants has become so naturalized, so*

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<sup>37</sup> I like the following connotations of *elide*: to strike out, to suppress or alter; to leave out of consideration or omit. Retrieved from <http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?book=Dictionary&va=elide>

*pervasive that it has become invisible or transparent to those who are not adversely impacted by them. (Bannerji, 2000, p. 114)*

But the notion of organizational<sup>38</sup> racism has also been contested, for seemingly contradictory reasons. First, the intangibility of organizational responsibility can enable individual actors to elude accountability for their complicity in dominance (Rattansi, 2007; see also Razack, 1998). Second, it is clear that members of organizations, like the people who access them for support, are not homogeneous (Rattansi, 2007). Third, individuals have multiple, shifting, and sometimes contradictory positionalities (Anthias & Lloyd, 2002; Dhamoon, 2009; Essed, 2007). Some of the studies discussed above, for example, examined the relationships between individuals and organizations, dominant and minoritized staff, and relative positions of dominant and minoritized service providers and users (Baines, 2002; Bell, 2003; Canales, 2000; Hyde, 2004; Johnson et al., 2004; Nybell & Gray, 2004; Pina & Canty-Swapp, 1999; Russell & White, 2002; Wepa, 2003).

### **Dominant discourses implicated in human services**

I sought to read cultural competence through a critical race theory lens. This reading is particularly important because, as critical race scholars have amply documented, Canada has historically upheld explicitly racist migration policies (Bolaria & Li, 1988; Calliste & Dei, 2000; Elabor-Idemudia, 2005; Henry, Tator, Mattis, & Rees, 2000; Jakubowski, 1997; Khenti, 1996; Li, 1999a). It was as a result of its economic needs that Canada adopted a *non*-racist migration policy in the 1960s (Jakubowski, 1997), shaping a shift in the *type* of (im)migrant that the Canadian government deemed necessary and desirable, and (by extension) the *places* from which (im)migrants were recruited. Some critical race scholars argue that these changes to immigration policy, along with Canadian human rights legislation, are indicators of "considerable social progress" during

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<sup>38</sup> Here, Rattansi (2007) actually uses the term "institutional" rather than "organizational." I have interpreted his writing to use "institutional" in the way that I have used "organizational."

the past fifty years, to which the "dramatically altered" "ancestral composition of the population" can be attributed (Hier & Lett, 2009, p. 14). At the same time, other critical race scholars point out that immigration policy continues to be racialized. First, *non-racist* is not the same as *anti-racist* (Simmons, 1998). Second, current policy ideologically and discursively constructs some (im)migrants as "future citizens, to be integrated into the nation as Canadians," while those who are incompatible on the basis of their characteristics are "constructed as immigrants, outsiders to the nation" (Thobani, 1999, P8). Indeed, the Canadian government categorically defines (or classifies) "*non-immigrants*" as people who are Canadian citizens by birth (whether born in Canada or not) (Statistics Canada, 2007c). In a convoluted way, then, everyone who is *not non-immigrant* is cast as perpetually immigrant.

Furthermore, although multiculturalism policy was ostensibly designed to support immigrants to settle, by encouraging retention of their "ethnic cultures," it both recognizes and limits diversity since the dominant group holds the power to continuously redefine the limits to tolerance of differences in keeping with national economic and political goals (Bannerji, 2000; Li, 2003; Mackey, 2002; Simmons, 1999). Thus, the "cultural permissiveness" of multiculturalism shapes a focus on cultural competence insofar as it aligns with the "behavioural imperatives" of "cultural sensitivity" and "tolerance of others" that underlie liberal notions of plurality and diversity (Bannerji, 2000, pp. 9,40). Concern about race talk in the aftermath of World War II created space for culture talk.

As the critical race scholars cited above suggest, dominant discourses – "commonplace narratives" (Schick & St. Denis, 2005) of ethnic and cultural difference, integration, and multiculturalism – reinforce denials of racism. Such "narratives do not account for [the fact] that access to privilege – such as white skin privilege – greatly improves one's chances of avoiding systemic discrimination and overcoming disadvantage" (Schick & St. Denis, 2005, p. 296). Reliance on multiculturalist discourses that assume a level playing field through

which anyone can be successful through their own hard work and assimilation to “Canadian” norms “obscures the fact that differential access to power is produced through racial formations and not through the lack of familiarity with the cultural practices of other peoples” (Schick & St. Denis, 2005, p. 307). The assumption of equality shaped by a rights framework (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002) means that immigration and multiculturalism policies depend on a particular version of citizenship that emphasizes “immigrants’ obligations toward the host society while taking their economic and social rights for granted” (Neuwirth, 1999). As a result, (im)migrants have, by virtue of citizenship, a right to access that does not ensure they can successfully compete with the Canadian-born for resources. In taking for granted social rights, it assumes voluntary incorporation into Canadian society.

Indeed, historically, Canadian policy has fostered assimilation, then acculturation, then integration of immigrants. But more recently the government has placed emphasis on civic participation. Although this emphasis has stimulated some collective action projects among (im)migrants, it should also be seen as a component of the broader shift of responsibility to the community for addressing what are considered to be private troubles. As such, liberal multiculturalist discourses rely on conveying “a power neutral notion of diversity” (Bannerji, 2000, p. 45), “an abstracted, non-social ground zero” (p. 54). This is possible because official multiculturalism has also become the politics of civil society, as “political culture,” “in its reflexive dependence on everyday social culture cannot be kept insulated from the ongoing life of the civil society” (Bannerji, 2000, p. 34). This hegemonic connection between the state and civil society constrains the possibilities for resistance if civil society is “already saturated by the dominant political culture ... that politics of resistance itself can become a part of the state’s ideological apparatus” (p. 34).

The race/culture *divide* in human services points to how culture talk obscures racism by “unduly [emphasizing] transplanted culture” and

"[overlooking the] structural conditions of the receiving society" "in shaping ethnic inequality" (Li, 1999b, p. 166). But it should be clear that what the race/culture *divide* actually highlights is the race – culture *continuum*, since the obfuscation is accomplished through essentialization of cultures. Indeed, a number of scholars have theorized how the concept of culture, arguably at one time intended to work *against* racism, now operates as a "dividing practice" (Bauman, 1999; Day, 2000; Willinsky, 2001; Winant, 2000). Richard Day (2000) suggests that Canada has been constructed through two "Great Chains" of hierarchy – race and culture – which have been used as justificatory mechanisms for the construction and management of "diversity as problem." This is manifested in Canada's historically shifting construction of immigrants, immigrant women, ethnicities and ethnic groups on the basis of cultural *and* racial categorizations (Li, 1999a; Rattansi, 2007; Thobani, 1999, 2000). The links between race, culture and ethnicity are continuous in that they come down to a matter of origins as they bleed into each other (Dei, 1998; Li, 1999a; Ng, 1981, 1986).

Still, with a post sensibility, immigration and multiculturalism are and must be seen as shifting discourses. I wonder whether the field of critical race studies has relied on an overdetermined notion of multiculturalism in attributing discourses of denial to the premises of national multiculturalist narratives. Some scholars argue that the potential for seeing culture as the grounds for transformation of social structures is severely constrained insofar as culture is already relegated to the margins of dominant-subordinate social relations (Anthias, 2001; Hays, 1994). Openings for resistance may be constrained by multiculturalism's successful fragmentation of the base for collective action (Bannerji, 2000). Multiculturalism's focus on culture rather than cultural *struggle* (Bannerji, 2000) encourages "forgetting" the potential for "structurally transformative agency" (Hays, 1994).

On the other hand, it is easy to obscure human agency in stressing the ways in which everyday lives are shaped through forces beyond their

sight (Burawoy, 1991a). Bannerji (2000) reminds us that multiculturalism is also a site of struggle, since “the meaning of Canada really depends on who is doing the imagining” (p. 110).

### **Contributions of my research**

The literature I have reviewed highlights how concepts are sites of struggle. Even when scholars do conceive of how to take culture into account in human services as an epistemological struggle, most often they frame this struggle as a professional or an academic disciplinary one – a struggle to know “what to do” with, including “how to teach,” cultural knowledge in particular situations (e.g., Anderson et al., 2003; Hart et al., 2003; Williams, 2006). Where critical race scholars explicitly examine how this epistemological struggle works (e.g., Jeffery, 2005; Razack, 1998; Schick, 2000), still these scholars situate the struggle within their own particular professions/ disciplines in ways that obscure other types of struggles, for example over ways of knowing between professionals and non-professionals.

My review of the literature reveals that how to take culture into account in human services has been a dialogue within professional and academic disciplines and, rarely, across professions or disciplines. In this sense, it is a literature that tells a story about how professions and professionals are produced, and how these very discipline-making processes reproduce positivist and dominant strategies of categorization and hierarchization. It also highlights the role of academics in this process. Insofar as the existing literature focuses on professional service providers’ perceptions and practices of culture in human services, it is important to investigate taking culture into account in human services from a vantage point outside these disciplines, the professional stances in which they are embedded, and outside academia. My research investigated racism and the relevance of cultural competence and anti-racist practice from the vantage point of those minoritized by these very discourses. It privileged

the subjugated knowledges of those who do not have to “imagine” inequities.

I suggest that the GMCNO blurs the lines around Tator’s (1996) models. First, it *is* “multi”-cultural. Second, it does not officially provide settlement services or health, education, or social services. It therefore cannot be seen as operating completely outside main stream or immigrant serving organizations since it is dependent on its relationships with main stream organizations. Third, although grassroots organizations are at risk of being transformed by dominant interests (Ng, 1988), the existence of dilemmas and concerns about the tensions and contradictions of such transformations demonstrates the “maneuverability of community work” (p. 91). Here, I am positing that the GMCNO and the middle women have multiple positionalities shaped in their particular relationships with other settings. Fourth, as Rattansi (2007) suggests, even when organizations appear to be intangibly monolithic, middle women do forge relationships with individual players within health, education and social service organizations who work against the grain. It is important to understand how barriers are understood by those buffering the racialized experiences that many minoritized (im)migrants have with human services providers and organizations, what this buffering looks like, what shapes it, and what happens to those doing the buffering, such as middle women. My research contributes to an understanding of what it is like to work (in) the race/culture divide, from a vantage point in working the margins.

My review of relevant literature points to how resistance can work both to contest and to maintain the status quo. I have suggested that the intra-disciplinary criticisms of cultural competence are an important form of resistance to the main lines within these disciplines. Yet, it is clear that denial and resistance within these disciplines, and among the emerging professionals, also maintain the race/culture divide in human services. My research contributes to understanding how the race/culture divide operates in the site comprised of middle women.



The role of multicultural middle women is embedded in and shaped by the social relations of power implicated in immigration and multiculturalism. As one middle woman said, "Multiculturalism isn't just a theory or a policy. The families we work with are struggling each day with what it means to live multiculturally." My research, then, contributes to making visible how broader forces and local conditions work together in the day-to-day (Massey, 1994).

Finally, as Baines (2002) argues, racialized storylines need to be identified, disrupted and reconstructed ... or transplanted by "new, liberatory storylines reflecting the resistances and resilience of subordinated groups and their allies" (p. 198). Importantly, whereas cultural competence is a response to the challenge of cultural diversity to human service providers and organizations, middle women emerged to address the challenge of human services providers and organizations to minoritized (im)migrants. Redefining the challenge from the vantage point of those who need to access services and resources, rather than from the vantage point of service providers acting on behalf of their organizations, resituates the issue in a way that is similar to cultural safety. I therefore hope that my research contributes to the body of literature that disrupts, by making visible the resistive efforts of a catalyst for systemic change, albeit within the tensions of navigating the race/culture divide.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I have argued that the literature on how to take culture into account in human services comprises largely a professional, professionalized, and academic discourse that exposes the power in helping professions and human services more broadly. Because this literature comprises predominantly intra-disciplinary discourses, it reveals problematic struggles over professional ownership and mastery of knowledge, making it difficult for those not in the main stream to participate. I hold out hope that it is possible, with a post sensibility, to

imagine something different, illustrating how contemporary writers are disrupting the idea of a perpetually pre-designed nation that in turn shapes the design of helping professions and human services. I especially like the notion of “responsible disillusionment” (Schick, 2000, citing Mercer, 1997) with regard to resistance to anti-racist pedagogy.

*Cynicism presumes an all or nothing approach and eventually ends in withdrawal from a situation that seems intractable. ‘Responsible disillusionment’ is a possibility for coping with the ‘messy contingency’ of knowing that people in dominant social positions doing oppositional pedagogy are not going to save the world, but neither should we stop trying to do what is necessary to try, including no longer telling victory narratives without (dominant) selves at the centre. (p. 100)*

Schick (2000) simultaneously encourages the need to continue to work for change and recognizes that unlearning white privilege is an ongoing process that likely cannot be completed.

Overall, in this chapter, I have made the case that it is important to investigate “taking culture into account” from vantage points outside the academic, professional and main stream. First, such vantage points are largely missing in the existing literature. And second, how social relations of power are articulated is shaped by local conditions at particular moments.

## PART II

### Chapter 4. The emergence of middle women

*We don't get the services or the communication or the information that we really need to be a successful people in this country.*  
- Sary

*There is a very great need for [the middle women]. ... One woman said to me, "Thank god to [GMCNO] that kind of lit up my life. If I was told, 'You are here in Canada,' and left me alone, it could have been very difficult for me." - Shirko*

This chapter, with the two subsequent chapters, follows a layered analysis. The first layer of analysis comprises an *extension* of the *case* or the site through which power relations work (Burawoy, 1991, 1998), clearly linking pre- to post-migration inequities. This extension also provides an instance of Massey's (1994) theory of space as "stretched out social relations," which implicates global relations in the inequitable conditions that give rise to migration, and effects minoritized migrants' differential positionings elsewhere. Making these links visible is important because it makes us witnesses to, and therefore somehow complicit in the inequities both here and elsewhere.

The second layer of analysis, which is the focus of Chapter 5, extends the case in a second way (Burawoy, 1991, 1998), connecting the middle women's explications of barriers and gaps to the social relations of power implicated in their production in Canada. This extension points to how state policies and practices intertwined with institutional thinking in human services shape the issues and barriers that minoritized (im)migrants experience, which in turn give rise to the emergence of middle women.

It is important to say that I treat the middle women's experiential realities seriously. That is why, as stated above, I think it is necessary to provide a glimpse into the everyday realities that the middle women emerge to address. But the third layer of analysis, which comprises Chapter 6, extends the case again, examining how to make sense of the middle women's making sense of the issues and barriers they address.

This third extension brings the middle women's narratives of experiential realities into dialogue with underlying ideological tenets that produce Government policies that sustain inequitable issues and barriers. Drawing on Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) and Foucault's (2003b) theories of discourse and power, I argue that both the *niche* and the *Middle Woman* (now Capitalized) are discursive effects of dominant discourses. This layer makes visible how power circulates and is productive.

This chapter opens with a short introduction to how the middle women emerged, and then presents the middle women's explications of the issues and challenges that give rise to the continuing need for middle women. It provides a glimpse into the "realities of the people," as participants in my research put it – what Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) and Burawoy (1991) refer to as the "lifeworld," Smith (1987) the "every day as problematic," and Massey (1994) as "place." This critical thematic analysis examined the middle women's accounts of the issues that give rise to their day-to-day work of supporting (im)migrants. Here, the middle women's narratives suggest how they "make sense" of the concrete and material experiential realities of the minoritized (im)migrants they support. The analysis surfaces the overlapping and cumulative vulnerabilities of pre- and post-migration inequities, and the ways in which pre- and post-migration conditions and circumstances work together to reproduce and exacerbate vulnerabilities.

In one sense, this chapter is descriptive. I think it is important to present the middle women's experiences of the vulnerabilities they see and address on a daily basis *because*, I argue, Canadian society has come to take-for-granted the challenges that many minoritized (im)migrants experience. For example, it is expected that although (im)migrants will have difficulties "adapting" to the "host" society, these difficulties are "normal," and they will be overcome in the relatively short term of two to three years (Beyene et al., 1996). In this sense, the middle women's descriptions constitute a narrative of their own and, by extension,

minoritized (im)migrants' experiential realities of the persistence of both the difficulties and their effects.

### **How the middle women got their start**

According to participants in my research, the middle women's role originated with a needs assessment conducted by local health unit staff in the early 1990s. This assessment revealed a lack of pre- and post-natal care, and negative experiences of care, among minoritized (im)migrant and Aboriginal women. Some of the minoritized women who participated in the needs assessment subsequently worked with local health unit staff and a local community college to co-design an innovative community-based childbirth educator training program to reach minoritized women in Aboriginal and selected (im)migrant communities. In addition to Aboriginal and (im)migrant<sup>39</sup> women, a small number of white main stream health service nurse providers and administrators participated in this training program.<sup>40</sup> The reasons for including main stream service providers in this training were twofold: to engender positive collaborative relationships and to foster mutual learning between public community health services and "the community." Each participant received a childbirth educator certificate upon completion of the program. The initiative subsequently received funding from the federal government over a three-year period to demonstrate the value of a community-based childbirth educator.<sup>41</sup>

Understanding that women's health and well-being, and that of their babies and families, are compromised when they cannot or do not

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<sup>39</sup> Some of the middle women consistently used the term "indigenous" to characterize the middle women's position. For them, it implies that the women are *of* the communities they support, and it distinguishes them from the main stream worker who serves the system. However, this terminology can be problematic in the relationship between (im)migrants and Aboriginal peoples. I have opted not to use this terminology for this reason.

<sup>40</sup> My knowledge of this initiative is based on evaluation work I carried out in the 1990s (Report, 1998).

<sup>41</sup> It is important to note here that the Aboriginal women eventually separated from the group. Although worthy of study in its own right, analysis of this set of social/power relations is beyond the scope of my study. I henceforth focus on the (im)migrant women.

avail themselves of good health care, the middle women concluded that it was essential to achieve equitable access to perinatal services and support for minoritized (im)migrant women. The women who participated in the training program expected the credential to increase receptivity among minoritized community members to accessing and using pre- and post-natal health care and support. They also anticipated that the childbirth educator certificate credential would lend legitimacy to their role among health providers, and therefore would result in referrals from professionals, namely public health nurses and physicians. The first expectation was exceeded, as the women gradually established trusting relationships within the communities. The second expectation, however, was not met, as the anticipated referrals from main stream health service providers did not materialize.

The childbirth educators fully understood that the health and well-being of women, and their children and families, are shaped by multiple factors beyond perinatal health care. As a result, since their beginnings in the early 1990s, the middle women have focused first on minoritized (im)migrant women and then on their families, especially their children and youth. Their work quickly expanded beyond perinatal health. As they connected with women and their families, the educators immediately recognized many other issues, including unemployment, poverty, isolation, parenting across two or more cultures, and relationship struggles. Listening to the people and following their issues extended the educators' roles into other health issues and components of the health care system, and also ultimately brought them into contact with the full range of main stream human services.

Since the mid-1990s, the middle women have been involved in a myriad of initiatives addressing the determinants of health across the life span, from pre-natal to seniors. These efforts have engaged the GMCNO in the health, social services, children's services, education, and

employment sectors. Since 1995, the group has grown from eight to 40<sup>42</sup> middle women, who identify themselves with 25 (im)migrant communities and speak in the first or second languages of the people they support. At the time of study, the GMCNO was working in and with the Afghani, Bosnian, Central and South American, Chinese (both Cantonese and Mandarin speaking), Congolese, Croatian, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Filipino, Indian, Iranian, Iraqi, Karen, Korean, Kurdish, Middle Eastern, Pakistani, Rwandan, Serbian, Sierra Leonean, Somali, Sudanese, and Vietnamese communities<sup>43</sup> (GMCNO document, 2009a).

To better reflect the broadening scope of their work, the educators renamed themselves several times in the ensuing years. To maintain anonymity of the research setting and the participants, I have renamed them "middle women." This renaming is apt because, as Lisa hinted, it is the dual ability to know the people's issues at a visceral level and to understand how the system works – the ability to be able to access the people and the system – that defines middle women's unique role.

*Well, the system, being able to access the system, even when you have women who are pregnant. They didn't know what do to, where to go to get the support they needed. Then, so, it was natural to kind of find, you know, an organization that's multicultural to look at ways of really finding a better way to connect them with the system, and being the middle person, you could be able to access much more. And understand the system very well. And so, then transfer that to the, to our communities, because that has been really difficult experience for most of them. Is that really how do you access the services. (Lisa1)*

### **Pre-migration realities**

In this sub-section of the chapter, I first draw attention to some of the conditions and circumstances that give rise to migration. I then highlight two types of vulnerabilities produced through pre-migration

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<sup>42</sup> Twenty-five middle women comprise the members of the GMCNO. Another fifteen close colleagues who are not officially members of the GMCNO extend the GMCNO's capacity to respond to what they often refer to "new emerging communities," such as newly arriving refugees, and to particular emerging issues in the community.

<sup>43</sup> These communities are self-described within the GMCNO. Individual members are quick to point out that such categorizations obscure salient differences within groups (Personal communications, 2001-2003).

inequities that have implications for minoritized (im)migrants' lives in Canada – compromised physical and mental health, and lack of education and literacy.

### *Conditions and circumstances of migration*

Overall, the middle women attributed the migration of the people they support to inequitable conditions in home countries. They characterized these conditions in terms of class divisions, lack of employment opportunities, poverty, persecution, torture, trauma, starvation, lack of security, solitary confinement, and forced separation from families. It was beyond the scope of my research to delve into the societal conditions underlying the migration of each (im)migrant group that the middle women supports. However, there was something urgent in the ways in which the middle women explicated multiple complex and intertwined histories of successive colonization, political unrest and ethnic and religious conflicts, and disparate inequitable economic and social conditions that affect the lives of the people with whom they work.

The middle women emphasized how changing conditions in countries of origin, or the regions in which these countries are situated, shape the impetus for migration, its timing, where (im)migrants migrate from, their pathways to Canada, and what resources they have available to them prior to and after migrating. Among the significant points that the middle women made was the profound implications of whether (im)migrants lived in rural or urban environments prior to migration or, sometimes, prior to relocating to refugee camps. For example, as Sary and Carolina explained, many (im)migrants from Central American countries in the 1980s were educated professionals from urban cosmopolitan centres, whereas (im)migrants in recent years have come from isolated rural areas. Shinin explained that most Kurds are from isolated rural mountainous areas and had never been exposed to cities, let alone Western societies, before arrival in Canada. Lisa indicated that refugees who first came from Eritrea were educated professionals with money and



were familiar with urban centres. They had been exposed to Western societies because Italy is implicated in Ethiopia's history, and some refugees came from Ethiopia by way of Italy. In contrast, more recent refugees originating in Sudan have come from what she described as "the worst camps" in the world, in which people were stripped of their dignity and humanity and lost all connection to their cultures. On the other hand, Shirko explained that Somali refugees who immigrated to Canada from camps in Kenya were primarily city people, for whom the move from cities in Somalia to refugee camps that did not have the familiar amenities of city life was traumatic.

A second condition that the middle women's accounts made visible was the differing circumstances of earlier groups of refugees (in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s) compared to more recent refugees (in the 2000s). The earlier groups spent relatively short periods of time in refugee camps, unlike those who have arrived in more recent years. A large proportion of these more recent groups of refugees have survived 15 to 20 years in refugee camps before coming to Canada, among them many who were born in refugee camps and who have never known any other life.

As the middle women drew attention to these different and changing conditions and circumstances "back home," they provided glimpses into the implications of these realities for differential access to opportunities such as employment, income and social status, and formal education and health care, prior to migration. For example, unequal access to formal education means that, where education is not equally available to everyone, most often it is women and those who live in rural areas who do not have access (Shinin). Similarly, access to health care differs dramatically from place to place. Health care in some countries, such as India, is unavailable for anyone but the wealthiest, except for emergencies requiring hospitalization (Sharadi). (Im)migrants who came to Canada from refugee camps have often had only sporadic opportunities for formal education, and have had inadequate or no health care, inconsistent from camp to camp (Than, Lisa).

At times, the middle women hinted at how Canada is or can be implicated in the inequitable conditions and circumstances that give rise to migration. For example, Carolina highlighted how global politics and economics, and specifically trade relations between other countries and North America, including Canada – such as NAFTA – have resulted in multinational companies that move workers in both directions across borders. In the three years prior to my research, the middle women had experienced first-hand the dramatic increase in the number of Temporary Foreign Workers from Mexico and the Philippines as a result of a particular set of global and local political and economic relations, namely the oil boom in Alberta. The dramatic increase in temporary workers, in the absence of organized support elsewhere, had a direct impact on the GMCNO's workload. At the organizational level, for example, the middle women repeatedly noted that the GMCNO had never been so overloaded, in terms of the number of people in the office, the number of emails and telephone calls, and the pace of the work. Several middle women observed that although their workload had tripled in the previous three to five years, they had not received any significant increase in operational funding.<sup>44</sup> The dramatically increased workload that the GMCNO experienced can be understood as an effect of pre-migration conditions and circumstances, which gave rise to inequitable spatial movements of people across the globe (Massey, 1994), triggering the emergence of middle women in new minoritized (im)migrant communities in Canada and in the locale.

### *Compromised physical and mental health*

Health status was paramount in the middle women's talk, likely at least in part because of their history of emergence through perinatal and

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<sup>44</sup> I use "operational" funding to distinguish it from "project" funding, which is the GMCNO's major source of funding. This type of funding is usually neither long-term nor sustainable. And it uses up an inordinate amount of energy annually for the GMCNO and all non-profit service organizations.

family health. The literature on (im)migrants' health most often underscores the healthy immigrant effect – the process whereby immigrants' health status is generally better than that of the Canadian-born upon arrival in Canada and deteriorates to approach the level of the Canadian-born within two and 10 years (depending on the population) (Hyman, 2007). Recent evidence cautions against generalizing about the health of all (im)migrants, upon arrival in Canada and over time (Ng, Wilkins, Gendron, & Berthelot, 2005). In contrast to other groups of (im)migrants, the healthy immigrant effect is likely not an accurate way to describe the health of refugees who often arrive in very poor health, attributable in part to lack of availability and provision of health care prior to migration, in home countries and in refugee camps.

Compromised pre-migration health status was most apparent among refugees. For example, according to GMCNO documents,<sup>45</sup> common health issues among refugees include physical ailments, dental decay, and infectious diseases such as Tuberculosis, Giardia, Hepatitis B, Entamoeba histolytica (intestinal parasite), Malaria, HIV, and Syphilis. Indeed, there were many examples of the severe health issues of refugees in the data I generated. I found one among the toughest to hear because it brought home the severity of the effects of a lack of regular health care prior to migration, and illustrated the vulnerability of many newly-arrived refugees, and their urgent need for health care once in Canada.

*Some of the Sudanese people in refugee camps had never seen a physician. Never once. So, if they go to a physician, and the physician sees people who have yearly check-ups, so they've had none of the screens, none of the routine screens, you know, never had a physical examination. The children don't have immunization. Um, and, and they have lots and lots of chronic problems, so to address all those chronic problems takes, like I have a young, little boy, five years old. He had severe tooth decay. Like severe. To the point where you could smell his mouth from where we're sitting between us. ... Complete. It was horrible. He had such severe ear infections that the pus dripped onto his t-shirt, and they would stuff Kleenex in his ears so he wouldn't dirty the t-shirt. He had such severe anemia that he was wobbling*

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<sup>45</sup> Includes a series of "cultural profiles" of the immigrants and refugees with whom they work, along with other reports made available during my research.

*when he walked. And we thought he had a developmental delay, but it was, the doctor said it was a miracle that he didn't have a cardiac arrest. It was so severe, the anemia. But when we fixed his anemia, he was running all over the place, you know, but he'd never seen a physician. He'd never had any care. He'd never been anywhere. And he had global developmental delays, he had heart problems, he had hearing problems, um, like he had probably about eight quite serious chronic illnesses. (Aileen)*

The literature suggests that recent migration of non-white peoples has been accompanied by increasing evidence of racialized inequities in health status in Canada (Ng et al., 2005). Refugees are more likely to transition to poor health status than other classes of immigrants, and to report new physical or mental health problems in the short term (Newbold, 2009). These findings suggest that "immigrant class is significantly correlated with health status" (Newbold, 2009, p. 330). These realities corroborate information from other sources (Alberta Health Services, 2008; GMCNO report, 2008). In the three years before my research, the GMCNO acted as a catalyst for establishing a refugee health clinic in the locale to better address refugees' immanent health issues upon arrival in Canada.

In addition to physical health problems, the middle women identified mental health as a major concern among recent refugees. They described post-traumatic stress disorder as very prevalent among refugees, many of whom had survived genocide in home countries and fled first to refugee camps and later to countries of resettlement. According to the GMCNO, for many refugees, surviving meant experiencing or "witnessing horrific events and in some cases torture and rape" (GMCNO document, n.d.d). Aileen pointed to the severe effects of (such) horror when she described the circumstances of a woman who had migrated to Canada as a refugee from Sudan. As Aileen explained, post-traumatic stress disorder manifested itself in frequent and debilitating seizures.

*You can't generalize, ever. Um, you know, for families from Afghanistan, and the Sudanese, there's high numbers of women and families that are suffering with mental illness. I mean, I can't give a percentage, but ... there's a large amount of families. ... Some of their stories are horrible. Just horrible. .... One of the, one of the cases that the most challenging for me*

*was a young woman who has, who was pregnant and had a child, and she's got post-traumatic stress, and um, she's, she doesn't speak a word of English and has never been to school at all. And, uh, she has quite severe mental illness. She's got post-traumatic stress. She has about 15 seizures a day. So she falls down and has a seizure right on the street. So, she was having, when I first got involved, about 15 seizures a day. And we went through all the steps of following her completely through about those seizures, and there's absolutely completely nothing wrong with her physically.*

As Sary suggested, isolation, exacerbated by lack of mental health support, interferes with life in Canada.

*And besides nobody to debrief, to talk. ... mental health support. ... Like issues, we're bringing issues like um, torture, tortura, torture, also issues of uh, a lot of physically, mentally, and emotional abuse, that in a way, or in many ways, will interfere with our life as we move to this country. (Sary)*

Some of the women suggested that, like physical health, mental health issues do not always arise immediately. People struggling to survive the early challenges of their newcomer status may put these issues on the back burner. As Carolina suggested, only with time do they have the space for memories.

*And sometimes there are other issues they come up, after the fact. ... I think some of those things are starting to come up, again, you know, remembering why they left, and the things that they left behind. You know, the losses. I think it is the time to mourn some of those losses, and um, things that they never dealt with, I think that there are still people that are in need of some mental health help, and um, so, that is one part. (Carolina)*

There is a tendency for (im)migrants to keep hidden the effects of experiencing or witnessing horror. People may also have survivor guilt and worry about those left behind in their homelands (GMCNO document, n.d.d). The middle women's experiences underscored how pre-migration conditions and circumstances can produce physical and mental health vulnerabilities that shape (im)migrants' and refugees' resettlement in Canada. As a result, mental health is an issue even among minoritized (im)migrants who have been in Canada for many years, and it exacerbates social isolation.

### ***Lack of formal education and literacy for life in Canada***

The second major pre-migration reality that the middle women surfaced, which also predisposes (im)migrants to significant challenges in

Canada, was lack of formal education and life experiences they could put to use here. They highlighted unequal access to education in originating countries and in refugee camps, and how these conditions are implicated in the lives of the people they support in Canada. For many, living in refugee camps for extended periods, sometimes for their whole lives is "not good for them," as Than put it in talking about the Karen people who arrived between 2006 and 2008. "Because they don't have any abilities. Most of them, they can get free food, free like everything [in the camps]. Like they live there longer, they have no ability." Here Than was referring to skills that are useful for living in Canada, such as cooking, using electricity, running water, appliances, bathrooms, and applying for and holding jobs, earning and handling money, and banking, which are taken-for-granted in Canada. In Canada, "they are unskilled" (Than).

Echoing Than, Shinin spoke about how Kurdish refugees also came with "no formal education, and with not any training." As a result, she said, "They all ended up on income support. It is not easy for the people who have no formal education." The circumstances of refugees from Somalia were quite different from those of the Karen and the Kurds. Shirko explained that, unlike the urban centres from which most Somalis fled, they "ended up in a small camp. Where there is no doctors, or no like, normal city living. No bank, no all that." Some of families Shirko works with here "were children at the time when the civil war broke," and never had access to amenities of city living, "never had access to what grocery shopping is, a bank is."

An inability to speak English, exacerbated perhaps by illiteracy in a first language, impedes the process of getting bearings in a new place both figuratively and literally. With respect to the Karen people, for example, Siobhan and Than said that the people are developing "deep worries" "about the language, or lack of literacy, to not just English as a language, but just general survival literacy" (Siobhan4), "about getting lost on the bus ... [because] they don't speak English very well and they have no skills in their life," and finding jobs even though "lots are hiring, but the

problem is they don't know" (Than). It makes them very dependent (Siobhan2). The middle women sometimes struggle to figure out how best to put life experiences and skills that were needed elsewhere to use in Canada.

*Like back home if you're in a jungle<sup>46</sup>, how do you read for direction? And how do you apply that skill into an urban context? Right? And maybe everybody needed just more cues around, you know, streets are north-south. That kind of thing. (Siobhan4)*

As the middle women expressed it, pre-migration conditions can "trap people in their anxieties" (Siobhan), render them "not part of the society" (Lisa2), and produce "a paralyzed people" (Shinin). Next I surface *post*-migration conditions and circumstances that minoritized (im)migrants experience – the made-in-Canada challenges that are layered onto pre-migration realities discussed in this sub-section.

### **Post-migration realities**

Migrants come to Canada with high expectations and hopes. As one middle woman expressed it, some anticipate something like paradise.

*One mom told me, "I thought when I was coming to Canada, I was coming to a paradise." Like she came from a refugee camp. She was struggling, her daily life, how it was. Now the children and her, everybody found themselves lost in here. (Shirko)*

But if a paradise is "a place, situation, or condition in which somebody finds perfect happiness" or even (only) "a place where there is everything that a particular person needs for his or her interest,"<sup>47</sup> by all the middle women's accounts, Canada is not paradise. In this sub-section, I focus on minoritized (im)migrants' *post*-migration realities. The people who find their way to the middle women routinely experience profound dislocation and extreme isolation, financial struggles and extreme poverty,

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<sup>46</sup> The Karen people who came to Canada were refugees in camps in the jungles of Thailand.

<sup>47</sup> *Paradise*: "a place, situation, or condition in which somebody finds perfect happiness" or "a place where there is everything that a particular person needs for his or her interest." Encarta® World English Dictionary © 1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. Developed for Microsoft by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

all of which result in a spiral of crisis. The ensuing family tensions often culminate in family violence.

***Profound dislocation and extreme isolation***

The middle women often began their explications of the challenges facing minoritized (im)migrants by talking about the profound dislocation that people experience following arrival in Canada. As Shirko expressed it, it is about "differences everywhere" – in all areas of minoritized (im)migrants' lives.

*Different backgrounds. Different cultures. Different languages. Different ways of living, and all of a sudden coming to a different big world. But then there are also other things like knowing the culture, having children, raising children in here. So... there are differences everywhere. (Shirko)*

For some (im)migrants, the changing conditions and circumstances of their pre-migration lives resulted in *continuous* disruption – an accumulation of disruptions – what Lisa described as "a lot of Diaspora." These circumstances cannot be generalized, and the nuances are important.

Drawing attention to the effect of a mismatch between pre-and post-migration environments, Shinin described how farmers back home "were just like a paralyzed people" in Canada. Shirko explained that Somali refugees experienced a "very big disruption" in fleeing to refugee camps, leaving behind extended families. Among the Somalis who found their way to refugee camps were many highly educated people – "who had worked, so you can find doctors, some lawyers, it could be any kind, you know. ... Yeah. Some business men." Shirko poignantly drew attention to the fact that these people "lost all their status and all their ... whatever they were. ... They felt like they didn't belong anywhere. ... the cultural shock side of it. ... [The camp] is just a small town for them, that's how it looks." On the other hand, in the camps they could speak their language and help each other with taking care of the children, still practicing, Shirko said, how "it takes a village to raise a child. They were connected." Not so here.



Some of the middle women simply referred to “culture shock” to name the effect of the differences between pre- and post-migration conditions and circumstances of many (im)migrants. They sometimes referred to differences in social values and practices, comparing “Canadian culture” to the cultures of the societies from which (im)migrants originated. But overall, they did not frame (im)migrants’ challenges primarily in cultural terms. They tended to use the terms “context,” “culture,” and “social circumstances” more or less interchangeably, and they talked about “differences” primarily through comparisons between pre- and post-migration conditions and circumstances as they wove together political, economic and social differences that constitute pre- and post-migration “atmospheres.”

The middle women pointed to the absence of a social support network as a contributor to sustained isolation and invisibility among the minoritized (im)migrants with whom they work. Although (im)migrants are more likely than non-immigrants to be married and living in extended families, they generally have fewer social supports (Dunn & Dyck, 2000). At the same time, a Canadian study highlighted the importance of social support to helping (im)migrant women to rebuild their identities (Meadows, Thurston, & Melton, 2001). In light of these research findings, it should not be surprising that 60 percent of new immigrants<sup>48</sup> who were surveyed in the LSIC cited proximity to family or friends as their main consideration, over employment opportunities, in their choice of resettlement location in Canada (CIC, 2004). This appears to have been an important consideration, given that many recent immigrants reported receiving no assistance with overcoming significant barriers in accessing housing, health services, employment and educational opportunities during the first six months following arrival. Among those who did have assistance, family and friends were their main sources of support (CIC,

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<sup>48</sup> This survey includes only individuals with an ascribed status of “immigrant.” These figures do not pertain to refugees, foreign workers, or students.

2004). But often the circumstances of minoritized (im)migrants mean they have left families behind, families that comprised a significant component of their pre-migration social support network. The circumstances of refugees often mean having had family and friends killed in conflicts and wars, or losing families as they were scattered in fleeing to refugee camps. Referring to her own experience, Sary commented, "I needed help. Nobody was there. ... I lived in here without much help and support." She had no one with whom to "debrief" her experience.

*Cause in here we also don't have our mothers, our own families, to teach, to help us out. Nobody was around to say, "This is what you might face. This is what may happen." Nobody. ... I need somebody that I could debrief about my personal situation at this moment. (Sary)*

(Im)migrants who do not have family in Canada when they arrive, then, often lack such resources to help them navigate through their new experiences. As Natalie suggested, middle women often fill the gap.

*Brand-new to Canada and with very little family here, to make it worse. Because when you have some family here, they can guide you to where to go. So if I have a cousin that came from Lebanon, for example, um, they would have no problem sailing through our health care system here. I'll tell them exactly where to go, what's a good doctor, what's not a good doctor, dentists, everything, eyes. Everything would be laid out for them. These people have nobody here. (Natalie)*

In the absence of family and friends, lacking proficiency in English encourages minoritized (im)migrants to seek others who speak their own languages, to try to recreate a social support network. As resettlement agencies disperse people from short-term reception housing, they also disrupt a social network. The Karen refugees who arrived in 2006, for example, were initially settled in the same neighbourhood, where they were able to help each other. But, with successive groups of refugees, Than said, "they are spread everywhere now," and they can't help each other.

During the subsequent "transition period" – beyond "resettlement" – everyday challenges of survival take over, furthering insularity. Isolation in varying degrees was described as a reality for all age groups, from children to seniors, for different reasons. The middle women illustrated

many examples of painful experiences where children and youth were not able to fit in because, as Sary put it, "they are different."

*Because um, children also face difficulties in the school when they are from so and so community, they are different. And in their little minds, they are also different, and they can't fit into a society that has no interest in knowing more about him or her. (Sary)*

At the other end of life, Siobhan suggested, "Immigrant seniors have been completely invisible. .... Often we end up working with them when we're with a family" (Siobhan1). Older (im)migrants most often arrive in Canada as family-sponsored (and therefore dependent) (im)migrants, following family members who are economic migrants. Others arrive with their families, as refugees. Sharadi, Than and Nu highlighted implications of these different circumstances. In some cases, the older generation of (im)migrants is expected to stay at home to take care of the house and children while the other adults work. They can be very isolated with little contact outside the household.

*She had a very social life back home, because people dropped in, neighbours came, and you had a different lifestyle. [Here] she is all by herself in the house, with the children. She doesn't understand what the TV is, and what is happening on the TV. So very, you know, isolated.*

*Here, the mother-in-law waits when the daughter, the daughter-in-law comes from work, then she is going to, you know, chit-chat, and we're going to do stuff that we used to do back home. But it doesn't happen because she is, the daughter-in-law's come back from work, tired, and she has some things on her mind, you know, "I have to do this for the children," this, that. You know, the other stuff that goes on at home. So, again, the expectations are not meeting. (Sharadi)*

Than and Nu suggested that, for some older Karen refugees, their lives were better in the refugee camps, especially for those who are still independent and don't need much help. In the refugee camp, they had a social network beyond their immediate family. Now they are dependent on their family for everything. Here, they "stay close to their own family." Without the language and know-how about the city, "it will be very difficult for them."

*Because now they are in a new country here, they cannot, they have to stay home every day. [Laughs] They don't get to go out very much, unless their*

*kids or their grandkids take them out. There is nowhere to go. I heard that they wanted to go back to the refugee camp and live their everyday life. (Nu)*

The middle women often highlighted extreme isolation as a particular issue for minoritized (im)migrant women. Absence of a social safety net poses particular challenges for women, and especially women with children, to access educational opportunities, including English language classes, and employment.

*They don't have any family here, that they don't speak the language. So that is one of the ways that we might get involved. ... There are some that they are very capable. They are moms that they speak English, ... but they are by themselves. They don't have anybody here. (Carolina)*

*They just had a baby. Of course, we know that their money is limited – their financial, like you know, whichever [program] will pay for them. Sometimes they might not even have someone who can pick them up from the hospital [after having the baby] back to their home. We do that. Part of the whole position is that. (Lisa2)*

As Lisa illustrated, even when they speak English and can find employment that pays well, women often lack day care or after-school care.

*If you don't work 8 to 8, that company wouldn't hire her. So, it's so sad to see how they are struggling, and yet they want to work. They don't want to take money from the government. (Lisa2)*

These "realities of people's lives" (Siobhan3) isolate them from others who are struggling with the same issues, and from meaningful participation – interaction and engagement with main stream Canada. Struggling with the layers of intertwined issues in the absence of support often enhances vulnerabilities, builds deficits, and can produce depression and social disengagement. Siobhan exemplified this with the story of a young woman suffering from extreme loneliness.

*She went through the pain of isolation and being misunderstood by the system. How she came to us was the hospital said, "There's a young woman here." They didn't even know the nationality; they thought she was [name of country]. "Has a severe mental health problem and we just need someone to come and interpret." Turns out she was just deeply lonely and depressed, particularly after having a baby, and she wasn't crazy. Like even in the hospital, people were making assumptions that maybe she was on drugs. You know, that kind of judgment. And she's just desperately lonely. (Siobhan4)*

Shinin linked lack of social support to isolation and to a sense of not belonging in Canada. She suggested, "People who are very isolated, who are not very visible ... they are not into the system, and into the life we have in, in, in Canada." Lisa hinted at the connection between isolation and oppression, which can result in disengagement and even a backlash against "Canadians." She explained that when minoritized (im)migrants have not been able to participate meaningfully, and therefore do not feel they are part of the (Canadian) society, they become resentful and distrustful of "Canadians."

*There are different ways of responding to their oppression. None of them are working. They are not part of the society. So they have their way of telling you how they know this is not a country for them to settle and feel like they are wanted. And that continues to their kids, and their kids, and their kids, and so they have that different way of showing you how, how disrespected they feel. ... What they end up doing is they actually disengage, even in this big community. You live in this big community, but you basically take whatever you need, which is go to Safeway, buy food, go to this, and do whatever ... Do whatever, but other than that, you do not at all engage to get involved bring that tension of those Canadians to my house. ... Not only that they are fearful of the system. ... They are also fearful of being, engaging their relationship with Canadian friends. (Lisa2)*

The middle women often take up occupancy in the space of isolation, initially providing direct support, and then working to establish a safety net and support system. In some cases, the middle women who participated in my research are the only people in the city who speak both English and the first languages of the people they support.

I wondered whether *all* minoritized (im)migrants to Canada require the support of a middle woman to navigate through intersecting vulnerabilities. I was therefore interested in the question of who does and who does not need the help of a middle woman. The responses varied, according to how each middle woman gauges the meaning of be(com)ing resettled. For Shirko, it depended on how able people are to "stand by themselves" – "Almost everybody needs [the help of a middle woman]. You will see families who have been here for 15 years. They cannot stand by themselves" (Shirko). According to Sharadi, "It takes forever for a

person to be really established. You know, I even, after so many years, I feel I'm still not completely established."

As a result, the middle women underscored both persistent unaddressed issues and continuously emergent issues as the impetus for ongoing involvement or re-involvement with families. For example, the persistence of a language barrier, especially among minoritized (im)migrant women, is a key indicator of a need for a middle woman beyond the period of transition between resettlement and becoming more established in Canada. This is because lack of proficiency in English often means not being able to navigate human services effectively, to have a voice, and to advocate for themselves. The middle women attributed (im)migrants' lack of proficiency in English over the long term to lack of opportunities, isolation, and the resulting reliance on one other.

*Like I did see a family, like the mother has been more than 15 years here. Knows nothing about the Canadian culture. Cannot speak with the children's school teachers. Cannot speak with the doctors. She needs support, that's what we see. (Shirko)*

*There are still people who have been here, right, more than 10 years like, you know, 30 years, I would say, but they still need somebody to go with them to the doctor's and all that. Because what happened, because of the language limitation, they sort of circulate within their community. And they work within their community businesses. So they don't have an opportunity or the pressure to speak English. So they are still very much in need of a [middle woman]. Because they can't really voice themselves, their voice is not heard. (Neda)*

New challenges that give rise to interactions with human services for the first time frequently trigger the need for a middle woman. As Sharadi suggested, lack of experience with how systems work in Canada can retrigger feelings of dislocation even among minoritized (im)migrants who thought they were somewhat established in Canada.

*But we are sometimes going into school systems, because you know, these people we think are established, they are going to work. They are, you know, everything is fine. They have houses, and they are able to manage that. But once their own children go to school, they have no idea what the school system here is.*

From experience, Ma-mo spoke about needing social support in her first language to reduce the isolation of being at home with a new baby,

develop a support network, and gain knowledge about parenting and parenting resources.

*I was living in the [area], and the collective kitchen was also in the [the area], so it was convenient for me to go there. And so much fun with the drop-in and also the collective kitchen. I met so many friends, and other babies, so there is more of a network formed between my child and myself to the other women. And we're still good friends now. So, it's really amazing. ... And that was a time for me to get out of the house, cause when I'm stuck with a baby at home, not having rest, and not having anybody to talk to, and then a group with other women. If I have questions, if I have concerns about parenting, or how to, you know special health problems, or sleeping problems, or different kinds of little things when you raise a baby. And I ask people, basically that's what I do. I have problems, I ask, and I get answers. Right, or at least some suggestions that I can try. ... I wanted to get out of the house with my with my child. I wanted to learn cooking. I wanted to meet people. I wanted to make friends. (Ma-mo)*

It may seem "natural" that many (im)migrants experience dislocation. However, experiencing dislocation is not related solely to the fact of relocating. As the middle women articulated it, experiencing dislocation is shaped in part by what has been left behind – now absent in the lives of those who have migrated, and in part by what one finds upon arrival – now present in their lives. Thus, as Sary put it, "Everybody will bring something in their luggage that is more than clothing." What Sary referred to as her "allegorical form" of description aptly summed up salient aspects of the realities of many newly arrived (im)migrants.

*The cultural shock in there is something else, you know. It's a huge thing. And then you will want those second generations to be successful and grow and provide something back to this country. We have to look at those issues. They are very important. The system was not aware of what was happening to the refugee and immigrant women who were coming not only with the pregnancy and the baby with her, but there was also the baggage of things that she needs to work on. (Sary)*

First, Sary's allegory gestures towards the entry point of middle women in perinatal and family health through pregnancies, babies, and children. Second, it provides a poignant reminder that the people who come to Canada, by whatever means, had lives before they came here. Third, it should alert us to the fact that they bring "things" – like clothing that fits in a suitcase. Fourth, what is not visible is what people left behind – what they could not fit into a suitcase or carrying bundle, were not allowed to

take, or fled without, family, friends, landscape, and familiarity. But fifth, some of what is not visible has not been left behind and must be carried in other ways – like the memories of better and worse times, and the physical and emotional scars of torture and trauma, including rape in the case of many refugee women.

The effects of continuously changing conditions and circumstances – profound dislocation, compromised physical and mental health, lack of formal education and life skills relevant to/in Canada – actively shape vulnerabilities, and therefore the extent to which opportunities for the "better futures" that (im)migrants imagine in coming to Canada can be opened up or closed off.

### **Financial struggles and extreme poverty**

The middle women spoke *most* emphatically about the interrelated issues of employment and income, which create precarious circumstances for many minoritized (im)migrants. Poverty – what Aileen described as “extreme poverty” – is the issue that underpins the most significant challenges that many minoritized (im)migrants experience in Canada. Although nearly all the (im)migrants the middle women support experience financial struggles after they come to Canada, these financial struggles are neither all the same nor all equal in their effects. It is common knowledge that (im)migrants' employment and income prospects are uneven (Grant & Yang, 2009b; Teelucksingh & Galabuzi, 2007). Recent analyses for Canada as a whole indicate that, despite higher education levels among working age immigrants, the unemployment rate was more than twice as high among recent immigrants in 2006, and significant proportions of immigrants continue to be underemployed (21 percent of males and 29 percent of females) (Grant & Yang, 2009b).

Based on the accounts of participants in my research, these prospects exist along a continuum. At one end, highly educated and experienced professional and skilled people arrive to conditions under which their education, experience, professional credentials, status, and



skills are not recognized according to a range of Canadian standards. These (im)migrants are often unemployed or underemployed in precarious work – that is, forced to take low-paying jobs that do not require their credentials, provide no or few benefits and have a deskilling effect. As Sharadi put it, people who “were the cream of the society there, when they came here, their degrees were not recognized. So, they have to start all over again.” (Sharadi did not remind me that she was one of those people.)

Under quite different circumstances, according to Shirko, many Somalis who came to Canada as refugees were, like economic (im)migrants, highly educated and experienced professionals such as doctors, lawyers, and businessmen, before they fled Somalia for refugee camps in Kenya. It was there that they (first) “lost whoever they were” (Shirko), only to arrive in Canada to find they could not recover what they had before their lives in refugee camps because “whoever they were” was not recognized in Canada. This might be yet another way to read Sary’s allegory – namely, some of what has come in the luggage has been rendered invisible in Canada – the many capacities, including multiple languages, formal and informal education, credentials and experience, and resiliency. Sharadi noted that the realities sometimes result in (im)migrants rethinking their decisions, and some ultimately returning to home countries.

Along the continuum sit skilled trades people who were sought after during economic boom times in Canada, many of whom came under the government of Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker Program. The middle women talked about temporary foreign workers a great deal, because of the dramatic impact of Alberta’s economic boom on their workload. This was especially the case because temporary foreign workers’ families – primarily women and children – arrived with little or no pre-migration preparation, and little or no entitlement to support.

The juxtaposition of pre- and post-migration conditions means that, under some circumstances, migration to Canada has what Sharadi

referred to as an "equalizing" effect on people from the same country. As she described it, while the high paid "cream of the society" from India took a hit in employment, income and social status in Canada, some formerly low-paid trades people gained income and social status here as their skills and experience were recognized as relevant.

At the other end of the continuum are refugees such as the Karen people from the former Burma who arrived from camps in Thailand between 2006 and 2008. Most of the adult Karen refugees had lived in camps for 15 to 20 years; many were born in those camps. As Siobhan, Than and Nu observed, these families came without the benefit of formal education, credentials, work experience and life skills applicable to life in Canada. According to Siobhan, for them poverty is "on the top-10 list of worries."

Again, the GMCNO's experience bears out the statistics. Despite higher levels of education compared to immigrants arriving in 1995, there was a significant misfit between both education levels and occupations prior to and following arrival in Alberta (Alberta Human Resources and Employment (AHRE), 2006). Many minoritized (im)migrants are vulnerable to living in poverty. In 2001 in Alberta, almost half (47 percent) of immigrants had annual incomes of less than \$10,000, and an additional 19 percent had annual incomes of between \$10,000 and \$20,000. Only 10 percent had annual incomes over \$50,000 (AHRE, 2006). In addition, immigrants, especially those the government euphemistically refers to as "recent" immigrants, appear to be faring worse than people born in Canada in relation to effects of the recent recession on employment (Grant & Yang, 2009b). "Employment among Canadian-born workers fell 1.6 per cent over the past year, and 5.7 per cent among immigrants who have been in the country for five years or less" (Grant & Yang, 2009a, P7). Analyses also suggest that because immigrants have a harder time finding employment in their fields, they have less seniority and are at more risk of losing their jobs during a recession. Once out of their fields, working in "survival jobs" (Grant & Yang, 2009b), (im)migrants find it harder to

return to positions in their fields. Although the *unemployment* rate among immigrants who have lived in Canada for at least 10 years dropped in 2008-2009, it was still nearly double the rate for people born in Canada (Grant & Yang, 2009b).

Further, these realities are compounded by what is not immediately visible here – namely, (im)migrants' enduring connections and commitments to family and friends "back home" whom they actively support through regular remittances. It should not go without saying that remittances are the main sources of income that support the economies in some countries of origin. For example, the Philippines' Labour Export Policy and the Canadian government's demand for workers ensure the Philippines' economic survival (see, for example, Langevin & Belleau, 2000; Pratt, 2003).

As a result of employment and income struggles, it is very challenging for many (im)migrants to find suitable housing. This was especially true during the economic boom. Housing issues surfaced on numerous occasions during my research. Suitability encompassed affordability, quality, appropriate size, and location in relation to transit, schools, work, and training opportunities. The middle women's comments suggested that it is especially difficult to find housing for large families because, as Shirko put it, "With a family of seven, who will be willing to rent?" While I conducted my research, some of the Karen people who had been "resettled" with the help of government-funded immigrant serving organizations were looking to relocate closer to the centre of the city so that they could regain social networks and support, spend less time and money on transportation and be closer to the services they need, including English classes and other employment preparation opportunities. Relocating is equally challenging because people cannot afford to rent a house of their own.

These intersecting pre- and post-migration conditions set off a chain reaction of financial struggles or poverty, excess employment in low paying jobs with little security, and challenges with finding suitable

affordable housing and accessing nutritional food. In addition to the prevalence of mental health issues, the absence of English *in addition to* not reading or writing in their own spoken languages, makes some groups of refugees, such as those from Sudan, especially vulnerable as they become extremely isolated and unable to access the necessities of life without support. As Siobhan expressed it, "Because of the deep socioeconomic exclusion of our communities, families are almost always in crisis." This is not paradise.

### *Intra-family tensions and family violence*

Employment and working conditions, poverty, physical and mental health issues, lack of English and illiteracy, and compromised social support networks, frequently result in seemingly insurmountable tensions. These tensions manifest themselves in inter-generational issues, ranging from concerns about childrearing and disciplining of children to parent-youth conflict to elder care to family violence and woman abuse. Navigating profound dislocation calls upon all the resources (im)migrants can muster, at the same time as pre- and post-migration vulnerabilities work together to challenge their capacities.

The middle women shared many examples that illustrate how children and youth learn English quickly, fit into school, develop peer networks and learn "Canadian ways" so that they can navigate "hybrid" lives (Lisa, Siobhan). Youth have opportunities to fit themselves into Canadian society in ways that their parents, especially their mothers, often cannot. But many of the participants in my research expressed concern for the future of the youth who are migrating to Canada, especially those arriving as refugees. As Shinin explained it, opportunities will only be better for the youth *if* they don't lose their way. It can take so long for youth to "find the right and good direction" that sometimes they become discouraged. Some do not have the patience for it.

*I think for the young people, it will be easier [than it has been for the older people] because they are more able to learn the language, to be trained, to go to work. If they don't lose their way. If they go uh, following a good and right direction. And, following this right and good direction sometimes, it*

*takes 2, 3, 4 years, for the young person to be, come to the direction, and sometimes, some young people, they end up in gangs, I think it's true. It is a long period, and some people, they don't have the patience to handle it. And for older people, it is just, it's just quite hard. ...*

Shinin described inter-generational conflict as the most serious problem in some of the communities the middle women support.

*The gap between the two generations is very big. ... It is the biggest issue in our community. So, we try, you know, to, to, give some kind of parenting in two cultures, and to, to have some youth organization to, to somehow reduce the gap between those two generations. ... The generation who grow up in, in, in a different dictatorship country and who have a different vision and view to their lives, and the generation who have a very good stand and grow up in Canada, but uh, they don't know how to, to communicate. So, having not communication between two generations brings so many uh, uh, so many problems to the stage, to the life of the family and to the life of the youth.*

The many kinds of stresses that families endure, sometimes exacerbated by youths' problems at school, have resulted in high school drop-out rates in some minoritized (im)migrant groups (Shinin, Lisa). Child welfare intervention has become familiar to many (im)migrant families. According to the middle women, child welfare intervention is particularly poignant for (im)migrant and refugee families because they live in fear that the government can or will take away their children. It is not a hollow fear. One regional office estimated that Somali, Sudanese, Kurdish, and Afghani children and youth now comprise an alarming 75 percent of some of the social workers' caseloads, although they comprise a tiny proportion of the population. Just as I began my research, the GMCNO finalized a pilot project with the children's services region through which the middle women were to help the region improve their work with (im)migrant families.

Research participants described child welfare intervention in (im)migrant families as almost entirely related to parents' disciplining practices. One of the mentor-middle women observed that in her experience, compared to the families in which child welfare usually intervenes – namely, Aboriginal and poor white families – (im)migrant families take good care of their children in terms of feeding and clothing

them, and do not abandon their children. Some middle women attributed physical disciplining of children to social practices "back home," where "it's not [only] about the parents using corporal punishment. In school, teachers are used to beating the students. It was an accepted way" (Siobhan). The middle women suggested that use of corporal punishment tends to be episodic, set off by stresses that families face here, rather than frequent or ongoing among (im)migrant parents. But they also highlighted both a need and a desire on the part of some families for support with addressing the challenges of "raising children in here. ... raising children in two, in this Canadian culture. Discipline and all that" (Shirko). Evelyn described the frustration of a father struggling to parent across two cultures – trying to balance his children's expectations of what it means to be "Canadian" youth with his desire to maintain particular values and practices from "back home." Evelyn indicated that parents "lack some parenting skills here."

*They really don't know how to appropriately set the boundaries and how to discipline their kids. ... Parenting in two cultures. ... And [the father] was even puzzled. He wasn't sure why the girl would turn this way. Because he was telling us how he is working 24/7 to buy for them whatever they need. He told us how he bought her a cell phone, not only her, but the three kids. And he said, "I was hoping she would limit herself to \$50 bucks." But he ended up paying over \$300 each month. And then he was trying to discipline her. He took away the cell phone, and then he is so lenient towards the kids, the next day, he came from work, he said, "I'm going to buy another one. I know that you need it." And he believes that he spoiled them this way. But at the same time, he didn't understand, "How come I provide everything for them? I work 24/7 and why would she do this to me?"*

Thuy, too, talked about the resentments that build up in families when parents feel they have made huge sacrifices to make a better life for their children in Canada – "They came here and they cleaned, right? Back home, they had a business, but here they cleaned toilets and stuff." Then they wonder, "Why do you think I'm coming to Canada? Why? I sacrificed my life for you."

Neda and Sharadi's insights illuminated the differential impacts of shifting power dynamics within families. For example, some of the independent women are willing to take any kind of job to get started after

they come to Canada – “It doesn’t hurt their ego. They are happy. They are independent.” But, this can catalyze problems within families.

*That causes a lot of family problems, within the families. But the thing is, back home, these sons and daughters, if they were making money over there, there still the parents would have power, on them. And it just changes the dynamics. The dynamics totally changes, and all those you know, relationships, understanding and all that, they all gets mixed up. (Neda)*

On the other hand, for many (im)migrant men, changes in generational and gender roles, along with a loss of employment, income, and social status, are especially difficult. These changes have a spiraling effect on the individual and the whole family. Many (im)migrant men experience depressive illness, and may use alcohol to compensate for feelings of inadequacy (GMCNO document, n.d.d).

Shifting power dynamics in families creates added stress at a time when dislocation is already very challenging. The middle women are often called upon to help when “the family dynamics are very complex. ... where things have fallen apart after family sponsorship. It makes an effect on the psyche of the person. So other issues come out” (Sharadi). Many of the middle women identified family violence as an important focus in their work. Some attributed family violence – particularly woman abuse<sup>49</sup> – to the prevalence of male domination in families. Several middle women, however, pointed out that patriarchal domination in families is the norm in some countries in which woman abuse is nevertheless *not* the norm. Some of these middle women attributed woman abuse in Canada to the interaction of unabated stresses that include shifting family power dynamics shaped by patriarchal relations. Others articulated family violence as a product of made-in-Canada struggles laid over personal biographies of being born and raised into the violence of war.

*Of course, with some of them, it’s related to the fact of violence and all that, so we’re very, absolutely um, um, very um, I’m really kind of patient with that. I understand that. Like I would take, I know when women are, some of our women, gone through such a, such a kind of life. (Lisa2)*

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<sup>49</sup> Sary also pointed out that there are also instances of man abuse, but no one else mentioned man abuse.

Violence towards women is common in some of the couples that arrived as refugees from these conditions. Lisa's explanation reinforced how inequitable gender relations in refugee camps and in Canada exacerbate refugees' struggles for survival here, and result in family violence and ultimately family breakdown.

*Some of them have gone through hell. And when, sometimes when you know too much of what had happened, with one another, they choose, it's better to split from here on, and start a new life, and not have with that person, because that person can bring back that memory, that they've ... and we've had so many mediations with some of the families. And one of the things we find is, for example, in some countries, it was only the women who cook, clean houses and earn money. And when they earn money, the women are so sensitive to make sure that the kids have eaten, and if there's no schools or something like that in the refugee camp, they would pay someone to teach their kids, or something. Whereas the man would want to do something else, and he would... she would not give him money. But he holds that grudge when he comes here. Her kids are still young, and she would have to stay home and he has to work. And he would deprive her of that money, saying, "You see, when you were there, you did not give me any money. So you're not going to get money here." It's a grudge he's been holding because he felt she had power there, and now he has power here because she is staying home, and even if she asks him to buy milk, he would have a different response to it. And so, you see what I mean? (Lisa2)*

In Canada some of these women are kept isolated in male-dominated relationships that prevent them from connecting with other resources in the community or developing a social network.

*She didn't know anything. She lived here eight, nine months, and never left the house without her husband. And so, what she knew was very few things, and she doesn't know anything else. Even a dollar, she doesn't know whether it's \$20, \$25, all that. (Lisa2)*

When things get to that point, women make it to "the system," especially the women's shelter, because "they have no other way of leaving. They have to really exhaust a lot of the small things they have, and then go to the system" (Lisa1).

According to Lisa, in the best scenario, when a woman receives relevant and timely support to leave an abusive relationship, she can develop the resources she needs to do well: "Now she is working, she drives a car, she is independent, she's very assertive, knows what she wants" (Lisa1). But, further, as many of the women pointed out, it is



necessary to expect and support the men to change. Without that, there can be no long-term resolution of family violence and woman abuse.

### **Summary**

This chapter focused on the everyday experiential realities that give rise to emergence of middle women in minoritized (im)migrant communities. Drawing on the middle women's narratives, I highlighted particular pre- and post-migration conditions and circumstances that work together to exacerbate the inequities that minoritized (im)migrants experience in Canada. Inequitable pre-migration conditions mean that many minoritized (im)migrants, and especially refugees, arrive with severely compromised physical and mental health, and lack formal education and literacy necessary for life in Canada. But far from addressing these vulnerabilities, post-migration conditions are often characterized by profound dislocation and extreme isolation, financial struggles and extreme poverty, resulting in spirals of crisis that often manifest themselves in intra-family tensions and family violence.

## Chapter 5. Explaining inequities

*Because of the deep socioeconomic exclusion of our communities, families are almost always in crisis.  
- Siobhan*

### Introduction

In the last chapter, I used the middle women's narratives to provide a glimpse into the day-to-day post-migration experiential realities of many minoritized (im)migrants. I drew out one way in which the middle women initially made sense of these experiential realities. I argued that the middle women's narratives make visible how pre- and post-migration conditions and circumstances work together. In this chapter, first, I draw on their accounts to name six types of barriers and gaps that sit between the issues minoritized (im)migrants experience and their abilities to access, or effectively use, the services, supports and resources necessary for addressing these issues or overcoming their challenges. Second, I extend the case by connecting the middle women's explications of the barriers and gaps to the social relations of power implicated in the production of these inequities. This extension points to how state policies and practices, which seep into institutional thinking in human services, shape the issues and barriers that minoritized (im)migrants experience and that middle women emerge to address.

### Naming barriers and gaps

As the middle women discussed the issues and challenges of "resettling," they surfaced implications for minoritized (im)migrants' access to and use of human services and supports. And they provided glimpses into how these issues and challenges shape the work they do.

The middle women help minoritized (im)migrants navigate through the experience of profound dislocation. They assist with accessing services and supports, and community resources. From the middle women's narratives, first I drew out five types of barriers to minoritized (im)migrants' access to, and use of, existing supports and services. These were lack of knowledge or know-how, cultural differences, inability to use

existing services, fear, distrust, and lack of confidence, and negative experiences. Second, I drew out the non-existence of services and supports to address real and intractable problems – what middle women referred to as "no man's land" – the space where nothing exists.

### *Lack of knowledge and know-how*

First, the middle women identified minoritized (im)migrants' lack of knowledge about what services and supports are available and how services and systems work in Canada. They suggested that many of the people they support don't know anything about what "is offered to them," "don't know how to find it," and "don't know for sure how it works." The middle women assist by explaining what resources are available, and how education, health care, and employment practices work. And they actively bridge access to needed resources.

*You know, they have the language, but you know, you still need to be able to find you know, well the services that are there. ... Because they don't know what the expectation of the school system is because the education system is of the parents. You take them there. ... I'm talking about the majority of the people? You know, they don't understand the system as it is here. ... There is no understanding of the system, because that's how it is. ... So, it becomes really overwhelming for them. (Neda)*

*I tried to explain to the families, and they don't understand since like uh, the way they took care of the kids in the camp, here, and the way the doctor treats people, or the parents took care of their kids, is a little bit different for me. And another thing is that they didn't know where to buy the, um, simple medicine. I told them it is good to have those things in hand. Like when your kid is sick, have a fever, you don't need to take them to the doctor right away. You can try to give them Tylenol, wait a few days, if the fever doesn't go away, then you can go to the doctor. Some families don't understand that. They just want to call us right away, and ask us for the help to take the kids to the hospital right away. But when they went to the hospital, we waited for about 2 hours with them, the doctor said, "try Tylenol." So, I tried to explain to them that it's good to have a thermometer. (Nu)*

Than explained that the Karen refugees' inexperience with employment resulted in complaints from employers, who fired the workers. The employers told Than they did not want to hire any more Karen workers.

*[The employer] complained to me about our Karen people, like trouble and like ... Trouble in the [work]. Because some of them, they don't know about*

*the way of the Canadian people working in Canada. They have no respect [for the workplace], like when they don't go, maybe they are at home, they didn't phone in. The owner called me, and explained to me, like about all the people, like who is trouble ... And then he explained to me about their factory situation, because we don't want to hire any, all your people right now, because they, your people, are trouble.*

This experience corroborates other sources. It has been suggested, for example, that "unintentional discrimination" may be a factor in unemployment disparities between immigrants and people born in Canada (Kelly Pollack, executive director of the Immigrant Employment Council of BC, as cited in Grand & Yang, 2009b, P22).

*Some employers may lay off an immigrant because of the perception he or she just doesn't fit in with the culture. ... It's unintentional discrimination: you may have been hired, but then there are difficulties integrating. That's why cross-cultural training is something we need to be doing better – this issue is definitely something we hear about very repeatedly.*

Because minoritized (im)migrants are vulnerable to firing, they may be less likely to "demand workplace entitlements, such as severance pay" (Lior Samfiru, Employment lawyer, as cited in Grant & Yang, 2009a, P18).

### ***Cultural differences***

Second, the middle women identified cultural differences in conceptualizing problems, beliefs and practices between minoritized (im)migrants and Canadian human service professionals and systems as a barrier to (im)migrant's access to and use of existing services and supports. In some cases, this means that (im)migrants in their communities do not know the importance of particular practices common in Canada such as pre- and post-natal medical care. They may follow practices that differ from those in Canada, such as in childrearing and involvement in schooling. These differences varied depending on the country of origin and what the middle women saw as familiarity with Western practices. These differences sometimes mean that people can't "comprehend what [is] happening" to them (Evelyn). Without the middle woman, a lot of people would fall through the cracks.

*And [I] explain to them what happens if they don't get immunized. Why do they immunize? Right? So, if they don't have that, a lot of kids fall through the cracks. ... They're going to get [to the doctor], and look at the doctor, the doctor's going to look at them. And then what? So sometimes I say to myself, not so much about me but without [a] person representing their community and being a [middle woman] working for this organization, these families will miss out on the most crucial, honestly, most crucial, type of resource available to them. (Natalie)*

Services that are common in Canada might not (even) exist in the countries from which (im)migrants came. And differences in conceptualization of problems may render a particular kind of service irrelevant. For example, all the middle women identified significant differences in how health is conceptualized in Canada compared to "back home." Participants cited examples such as the concept of "owning a disease," which shapes the idea that people have control over their own health to get better, and mental illness.

*They have no concept of ownership of the disease. You know, like it's in my hands how much I am going to get better. It's, you know, those kinds of things? There is no such thing as management of the disease. There's no concept of that. (Neda)*

*Some of the people in our community don't understand mental illness. They associate it with religion. (Lisa2)*

Many middle women also noted that "in Canada" service providers often espouse the principle and expectation of "partnership," in education and health care for example.

*There, the doctor tells you what to do, here a patient's health is a partnership. ... the patient has a much stronger role to play in how they want to be treated and how they want to perceive their own health. (Sharadi)*

Such expectations may not fit with what (im)migrants were accustomed to elsewhere. Shirko's comment hints at the fact that for some (im)migrants, the expectation of partnership is not only "different" from what they are used to, but is experienced as somewhat onerous. They are trying to get their lives on track in a new country and yet are expected, as Shirko suggested, to also pick up a major responsibility for the education of their children.

*Back home, the children's schooling was the business of the school. Like mom makes sure the child is full; he eats well; he is well dressed. And he goes to*

*school and the school deals with him. Here it is totally different. Like could I say 50:50 has to come from the parent? (Shirko)*

### ***Inability to use available services***

Third, the middle women attributed lack of access to services and resources to (im)migrants' inability to use available services that they know about or inability to use them effectively because of barriers such as lack of English, difficulty finding the way to services, and unavailability of gender-appropriate services, especially for women. Finding the way referred both to the literal physical process of traveling to services, and to navigating the service components and sites within the service systems. The middle women reiterated the significance of proficiency in comprehending, speaking, reading and writing English as a pre-requisite for accessing and using main stream services.

*We're afraid to go out seeking because we don't speak English, Muslim or not. Language being a barrier is the organization's biggest problem, because if language wasn't the problem, they have no problem understanding each other. (Natalie)*

*Someone who doesn't have the proper language skills to understand the whole concept of what you guys are talking about, it's what we understand, diminished. Cause again, we, naturally, since we don't know the main language that is speaking, it's picking up on what we are on at the moment, we make a lot of assumptions. And basing it on those assumptions that nobody clarified for us. (Sary)*

### ***Fear, distrust and lack of confidence***

Fourth, the middle women frequently asserted that (im)migrants do not want to use services and resources that are available even when they do know about them and have the capacity to access them. Fear, distrust, and lack of confidence often prevent people from accessing main stream services. According to the middle women, many minoritized (im)migrants are fearful they will not be able to express themselves properly, and will not be treated with respect for who they are, what they know and what they have experienced. They frequently distrust government-provided services and systems that might violate privacy and confidentiality, impose unfamiliar practices, and control interactions.

Additionally, the women whom the middle women support are often ashamed about needing services such as financial assistance and women's shelters. They fear that service providers will judge them negatively. Building trust is an important part of the role of middle women. As Natalie illustrated, because many minoritized (im)migrants are fearful and distrustful of any kind of help, and especially of help from the system, it is necessary to build trust. But the middle women also recognized that trust must be continually renewed.

*But because language is such a big problem, then the same problems are faced under the whole Middle East umbrella. And that's the fact that they're afraid to seek out for help. They don't know what's offered to them. They don't know where to go. Are they going to understand what they need? Are they going to be treated with respect, cause they're snack-packing their English sentences, when they're going in there. So they're afraid of that, so they just would rather not go in. ... You don't actually see their problem until the second, maybe the third time you meet them before you build up your trust, cause the first meeting is just pretty much, they gotta evaluate you whether they trust you or not. Where are you coming from? How much are you going to talk about other people? They gotta make sure that anything they tell you is 100 percent confidential. And that's a key to being a good [middle woman] or not. (Natalie)*

Fear, distrust, lack of confidence and shame speak to a lack of safety. Lisa pointed to the importance of understanding the conditions and circumstances of the people they support. She drew attention to what this understanding means for the physical and mental safety of some of the (im)migrant women she supports. For example, what does it mean when a women's shelter suggests that a woman who has sought refuge from an abusive relationship is asked to take herself to the hospital in a taxi that is likely going to be driven by someone she knows? – "Right? But on the other hand, you and I know, I don't remember the last time a white person drove me in a taxi. I don't" (Lisa2). Not only does the woman involved fear how the service will treat her, but to make things worse she also fears that others in her own community network will find out. As Lisa put it, "You have to be in that environment to understand what's changing in this particular community."

*So when I talk about safety, you know, for some of these women, let's say, one of the issue is, "Where is the safe place for these women to be?" ... We*

*have issues where, in the shelter, where women will be sick or their children will be sick, and then it's probably 8, 9 o'clock. They will say to them, "Can you go to emergency?" On their own. ... And no one wants to accompany them because they cannot leave their premises. But it's interesting how, without them thinking what they are asking them to do. And it's like, "Whoa. You are putting her in much more risk by doing that." ... It is cultural in some ways. In another way, it's an environment. Like you have to be in that environment to understand what's changing in this particular community. (Lisa2)*

Despite the espoused ideal of partnership, clearly many minoritized (im)migrants do not expect their experiences with human services to be "partner-like." To the contrary, Lisa suggested that main stream services' practices often demonstrate taking "ownership of the story" rather than entering into a partnership.

*For me, my always thinking is, "If I want to solve this problem, and I tell Ruth, how much is Ruth willing to help me?" Therefore, how much do I need to tell Ruth so she can help me? That is how I think. And it comes from the cultural aspect of it. If you are not going to help me, why am I spilling all my issues, for what? For you to have the story? No. (Lisa1)*

### ***Negative experiences***

Fifth, the middle women suggested that at times the minoritized (im)migrants they support *will not use* existing main stream services and supports without a buffer such as a middle woman because they have had negative experiences with human services in the past. Such negative experiences included lack of responsiveness on the part of service providers and lack of preparedness on the part of service systems. Expecting "first world" services in a First World country, some of the middle women described being retraumatized in their interactions with human services in Canada.

*[The child welfare worker] was really traumatizing, and [the woman] was so scared of her. ... They are afraid of her so they didn't want to ask. They can say nothing because they are fearful. ... [And] most of our clients don't want to go to [the financial assistance office] by themselves. Because half of them will cry leaving the meeting, because they make them so. ... So you know why many of our people do not want to go to the system. If they can help it, they can starve. Some of them would say to us, "No, no, I don't want to go." ... Because they did not want to talk to this person, in case this person is going to give them hell. (Lisa2)*



This refusal to use human services because of negative experiences – their own or those of others – is ambiguous. It suggests the stance of victim on one hand. But on the other hand, this refusal to experience negative treatment might be seen as a form of active resistance. In Chapter 7, I further examine the social relations through which (im)migrants' fear, distrust, lack of confidence, shame, and negative experiences with human services are produced and sustained.

### *No man's land*

Any one of the reasons for not utilizing services and supports would be challenging for minoritized (im)migrants. Layered upon one another, they present a daunting set of barriers for people already minoritized in multiple and intersecting ways. Yet, this is not the full extent of the challenge. What about the absences<sup>50</sup> only hinted at in the delineation of namable barriers – the spaces between "in Canada" and "back home," "now" and "before," components within and across services and systems, and, finally, between what is available and what is really needed?

The middle women's narratives made visible the "empty" spaces – where issues clearly exist but fall in no one's mandate, no one's job description, where organized and legitimized resources and responses do not exist. This space is where many minoritized (im)migrants find "themselves lost in here" (Shirko), "living in the confused" (Thuy), and "a paralyzed people" (Shinin).

*They really don't have any settlement opportunities for [the women who come with temporary foreign workers]. (Carolina)*

*Parents still are very isolated, they are not into the system, and into the life we have in, in, in Canada. And their mind and view of the culture, their identity, it belongs to something that is not uh, belong where the kids are. And the kids are growing up in a different culture, different vision, different*

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<sup>50</sup> I use *absence* to mean "the lack or nonexistence of a particular quality or feature," or a "lack" of something: "something that is needed but is in short supply or missing." Encarta® World English Dictionary © 1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. Developed for Microsoft by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

*identity, so they are confused. ... Some kind of confusion between two very big identities, because they are not very much belong to what we have in Canada and they are not very much into what their parents have to go to Canada. So they are very lost. ... They were just like a paralyzed people. (Shinin)*

Siobhan aptly referred to the space that middle women occupy as "no man's land." "No man's land" refers to "an unoccupied area between the front lines of opposing armies " or land that is "unowned and uninhabited (and usually undesirable)."<sup>51</sup> These definitions suggest at once ambiguity and tension, the absence of possibility or potential for sustaining life. No man's land as a space in which "betweens" intersect.

As it turns out, this seemingly "empty" space *is* occupied. Beyond assisting people to access and use existing resources, the middle women also take up occupancy where no services and supports exist – in the space of isolation. They provide direct emotional and instrumental support, and help to establish a safety net and support system. They are called upon to help when families fall apart, and when youth struggle to find direction. They intervene in intergenerational conflicts, and support abused women.

Of course, it takes time to resettle. As some of the middle women suggested, "it takes forever." But clearly, main stream human services are not equally available to all. And the *persistence* of barriers and gaps over the long-term cannot be understood solely in terms of dislocation. The *persistence* of barriers and gaps evoked frustration and anger on the part of middle women. Lenore was the most direct in linking (im)migrants' conditions and circumstances to inequities. In the next sub-sections, I begin to examine the conditions that shape these post-migration experiential realities, implicating both problematic government policies and institutionalized practices in human services in sustaining these inequities.

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<sup>51</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/no+man%27s+land>

### **Problematic Government policies and practices**

The middle women's narratives point to how problematic government policies and practices constitute inequities. First, categorizing (im)migrants into groups affects entitlements to services, supports, resources and income for individuals and families, *and* for organizations that support them. Second, social and economic policies keep minoritized (im)migrants poor, contributing to a racialized underclass. And third, they exacerbate existing gender inequalities.

### ***Divvying them up***

The middle women were cognizant of the ways in which Government policies and practices shape the experiential realities of the minoritized (im)migrants they support as well as their own. The criteria for migrants' admission to Canada result in a persistent ascribed (im)migrant status and the conditions attached to it. Even though the GMCNO actively resists categorizing people for the purposes of its work, it is only partially successful in doing so. This is in part because in some ways ascribed status does shape differential conditions and circumstances, but also because in seeking funding to fill the gaps, the GMCNO must shape its requests in terms that align with government-defined priorities and concerns, which align with ascribed immigrant status.

During the time that I conducted my research, the implications of such dividing practices (Bannerji, 2000; Day, 2000; Foucault, 2003b) were most visible in the middle women's frequent references to "established" and "new emerging" groups of (im)migrants. This differentiation was triggered primarily by the lack of adequate resources to carry out their work. Since the mid-1990s, most (but not all) of the minoritized (im)migrants the middle women have supported came into Canada as refugees. Main stream organizations operate on the assumption that those who arrived in the mid-1990s are or should be established by now. As a result, according to the middle women, in recent years, human service

systems that fund portions of their work have encouraged the GMCNO to reallocate these resources from more "established" to "new" (im)migrant communities instead of requesting additional funding. But as explicated in the last chapter, it takes forever to become "established." Although, as the middle women pointed out, there is a pattern to the struggles, resolved issues reemerge and new issues emerge at particular life junctures. The issues and barriers that minoritized (im)migrants experience do not follow a predictable, chronological, or certain trajectory. Reallocating funding would mean taking support away from people who require it.

Categorizations can actually *create* inequities between main stream and minoritized populations, between (im)migrant groups, and ultimately even among the middle women who work with different (im)migrant populations as they vie for scarce resources. Siobhan pointed out that support for all minoritized (im)migrants is inequitable. There will never be enough resources, she commented, until (im)migrants are as important as hearts and hips.

*Unless something drastically shifted. And I don't know what that would be. Where all of a sudden, immigrant health becomes a high priority, you know, as important as, as, you know, heart surgery, as important, I don't see us having a lot of resources. Or even hip replacement, whenever, there's not gonna be real resources channeled to it. (Siobhan9).*

Sary attributed the talk of distinguishing between "established" and "new" (im)migrant communities to "a perception that service providers" have in looking at it. And it can shape the middle women's own perspectives, she said, when they take the position of service provider. Although the middle women resist categorizing the people they support, arguing the funding available to support minoritized (im)migrants has never been enough, such demarcations foster tensions among (im)migrant groups, and fragment the base for collective work. The issue is at times a source of tension within the GMCNO.

The middle women specifically highlighted the problematic terms and conditions of sponsorship status. Sponsorship means<sup>52</sup> undertaking a formal agreement with the Government of Canada “promising to provide for the essential needs of the Sponsored person(s) for a period of time following the arrival of the Sponsored person(s) in Canada,” in the event that “Sponsored person(s) are unable to provide for these needs on their own.” “Essential needs” means

*the Sponsor must undertake to provide the Sponsored family members with: food, clothing, shelter and other basic requirements of everyday living; and dental and eye care and other health needs not covered by public health services available to all Canadian citizens and permanent residents.*

The policy explicitly states, “The purpose of this agreement is to ensure that the Sponsored family members do not become dependent on Canadian public welfare assistance.”

Sharadi and Neda explained that problems often arise when there is a mismatch between migrants' expectations of post-migration conditions and circumstances and the expectations of their family sponsors. For example, Sharadi explained that economic (im)migrants often arrive in a state of excitement about their hopes – “They have a lot of high expectations when they come here.” She described this as “the honeymoon phase” – “Wow, I'm going to a new country. It's going to be fun. I'm going to work and I'm going to get a lot of money,’ and things like that.” Afterwards, they realize, “Oh gee. I really need to work hard. I really need to do all this stuff all over again,’ you know, to be able to get those jobs, the ones that they want.” As a result, Sharadi explained, family members in Canada may have taken 10 or 15 years to earn enough to sponsor others. Sharadi suggested that the sponsors then expect some form of payment in return. The mismatch in expectations contributes to

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<sup>52</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.canadavisa.com/canadian-immigration-faq--family-sponsorship.html>

family tensions. As Neda put it, often the sponsors' expectations are that the "people who have come here stay under their thumb."

*They spent a whole lot of money to bring the family here, thinking they would help, they would help with babysitting, they would help at least you know participating in the expenses of, you know, the running of the house. Like they also have expectations.*

*In many cases, when these family members go start to work and all that, [the sponsors] want to have part of their money, and they want to sort of run their lives and tell them, "You can't do this, you should do this."*

The bottom line, Neda explained, is "money is power" – "Who has the money, like you know, it's a son and a daughter-in-law, they are earning, they are bringing money in, so they have the power." Added to the tensions of changing generational and gender dynamics in the family, Sharadi said, these tensions can result in financial abuse.

*When their expectations are far apart, there is sometimes the financial abuse, in the sense that, that their money is taken. Sure, it's very hard these days to live, you know, it's very expensive, so maybe the young couples need that money that the parents have. Um, and so, like those are issues too. Where the senior is, is at a loss, you know, to know where to go. Where should they turn?*

### ***Keeping them poor***

Clearly ascribed (im)migrant status shapes differential conditions and circumstances. But ultimately, many minoritized (im)migrants in all categories are rendered economically precarious because of barriers to gainful employment. As described in the last chapter, such barriers include language and education and literacy for life in Canada, as well as lack of knowledge about how things work in Canada. But this description of the barriers deflects the problem onto the minoritized (im)migrants themselves. The fact that the issues and barriers *persist* can only be explained in structural terms. And the persistent focus on minoritized (im)migrants' *deficiencies* (which is the focus of Chapter 7) can divert attention from how inequity is reproduced and sustained through Government policies and practices. And although, as I have stated, minoritized (im)migrants ultimately share economic precariousness, this

works in different ways depending on the particular ways in which pre- and post-migration conditions and circumstances come together.

Lack of recognition of minoritized (im)migrants' education, credentials, and experience is both a familiar experience among the people the middle women support and well-documented experience more broadly. In 2005, the federal government established the Foreign Credentials Recognition (FCR) Program, to work with "provincial and territorial governments, licensing and regulatory bodies, sector councils, employers and many other groups who have jurisdiction over certain aspects of FCR" (HRSDC, 2009a). In 2007, it established the Foreign Credentials Referral Office to "provide information, path-finding and referral services to help foreign-trained workers succeed and put their skills to work in Canada more quickly" (FCRO, 2009). In 2009, the federal government invested additional resources to "speed up the process of assessing and recognizing foreign qualifications" (HRSDC, 2009b, P2). Government leaders were charged with developing "a national framework for faster recognition of foreign credentials" by September 2009 (P3). It remains to be seen what difference these actions make to employability prospects for minoritized (im)migrants, especially in relation to consideration of qualifications, credentials, and work experience across countries of origin. Thus, even highly educated minoritized (im)migrants – those without the "deficiencies" of language, education, literacy and knowledge of how systems work, who were admitted to Canada in part because their credentials got them points on admission criteria, struggle to find gainful employment in Canada.

According to the middle women who assist refugee families beyond the initial resettlement period, government-sponsored refugee families receive only a subsistence allowance from the government following arrival here. Drawing on experience working with the Karen refugees, Nu explained that a family of five would receive \$1750 a month. By the time they pay their expenses, they are often left with only \$300 a month for food. According to Than's account,

*They pay \$1250 for rent, right? Maybe \$50 for utilities and gas, the telephone maybe \$30, and then, how much they spend already? They have \$400 bucks left. Like they have to buy [bus] tickets, maybe for both, \$110. ... How can they survive on this? You see maybe they have \$300 bucks left. That's why no food.*

As Than put it, "You cannot eat with 300 bucks with a family of five. No way to eat. That's why they have to work." Nu explained that most of the Karen people – men and women – are working for a cleaning company because it allows "flexible hours." It means, as Nu put it, "They can choose which day they want to work, which evening they want to as well. Some of them after school, they just got on the bus and went straight to work." Yet, Than and Nu told me that the government penalizes government-sponsored refugees if they work. They are allowed to earn only half the amount of their government assistance per month. "If they work a little bit, like over, they get in trouble too. The government is holding their cheque" (Than). As a result, Nu said,

*It's difficult for them. So, it doesn't help them very much. That's why some of them, as soon as they finish with the government sponsor, they quit school, and they started to find a full-time job.*

Nu further explained how this policy has differential impact on individuals and families, suggesting that it is worse for single people than for the families. Whereas families receive assistance based on the number of people, and a Child Benefit if there are children, a single person receives only \$731 a month.

*Their financial situation is very tight. ... Their rent is very high, and the, so they are concerned about their budget, their rent, they're concerned about the food as well. Some of them, they didn't buy, they didn't eat enough nutritional food, they worried that if they eat, they spend their money on the food, they wouldn't have enough to pay their rent, and also the immigration loan, that they have to pay back to the government after the 6 months. ... and after 3 or 4 months, then the government starts to send them letter and ask for the loan back. And also the health care, they had to pay the health care,<sup>53</sup> every three months, I guess. It is very tight for the single people. And they are left with like \$50 extra per month. So it's very tight for them.*

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<sup>53</sup> As of January 1, 2009, the Government of Alberta abolished health care premiums, although it will continue to try to collect unpaid premiums.



In the absence of a living wage, many of these (im)migrants need to work rather than go to school. Yet postponing or delaying English classes and other educational opportunities means that many are not able to take full advantage of the resettlement supports for which they are eligible during their first one to three years in Canada. By the time they feel they can return to school, they are no longer eligible for government-funded supports and services and have to pay for them.

The middle women also drew attention to a Government of Canada policy (which Nu hints at in the above quote) that requires Government-sponsored refugees to repay the loan it provides for refugees to travel from camps to Canada. This repayment policy means that many refugees begin their lives in Canada with substantial debt. Again exemplifying this issue with reference to the Karen people, Than pointed out that although people know before they come that they will have to repay the loan, they sign the papers because the amount does not mean much outside Canada and people are desperate to get out of camps and to somewhere more promising. According to Than, Siobhan and Nu, between three and six months after the Karen people arrive here, the Government begins to notify them of the need to start repaying the loan at the end of one year. These experiences corroborate those revealed in other studies across Canada, which shaped the Canadian Council for Refugees' 2009 campaign calling for an "end to the burden of transportation loans" (Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR), 2009a).

Siobhan told me that when the government tells the people, "It's almost finished. Your one year of help, then people will get really depressed and desperate." Immigrant serving organizations that strive to support newly arrived refugees have also corroborated this experience. As one immigrant serving organization staff member reportedly commented, "We bring people to Canada for safety, but emotionally there's no safety for them. We see people coming here and crying" (Zabjek, 2009). According to the same newspaper coverage (Zabjek, 2009), the Canadian Department of Citizenship and Immigration reportedly indicated that the

Government "has no plans" to end the transportation loan repayment policy. The Government's rationale touts the Immigration Loans Program as a strategic component of Canada's humanitarian policy toward refugees. First, it is "part of a \$110-million revolving fund where repayments on existing loans are used to finance new loans for those coming to Canada." Second, "the Program provides [refugees] with access to funding that would otherwise not be available [to them]." And, besides, the Government argues, "interest rates on the loans are low – this year it's 1.75 per cent – and [the] loans may be deferred for up to three years. Those in particularly tight financial circumstances can sometimes renegotiate the terms." The argument implies that the repayment policy is what allows Canada to sustain its "humanitarian" policy of admitting new refugees.

The message the Government seems to want to convey is that it is aware of refugees' circumstances, and that it bends over backwards to take these into account while balancing them with the needs of those remaining in refugee camps awaiting resettlement opportunities. It is therefore worth noting that although the Government of Canada proclaims its humanitarian gestures toward refugees (CIC, 2009d), the number of refugees resettled to Canada annually has actually decreased in recent years. Since the year 2000, fewer than 11,000 refugees, on average, have been resettled to Canada each year, compared to 18,000 on average in the 1980s and 1990s (CCR, 2009b). Moreover, Canada's Immigration and Refugee Protection Act does not contain an appeal mechanism for denial of refugee claims, although refugees resettled or recognized in Canada may be stateless (CCR, 2009c). At the same time, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of temporary migrant workers<sup>54</sup> required to meet Canada's economic needs (Elgersma, 2007). Temporary workers by definition have precarious status.

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<sup>54</sup> Includes those admitted under the Temporary Foreign Worker and Live-in Caregiver Programs.

The middle women frequently spoke of excess employment in families – jobs with long hours, more than one job at a time or two adults and sometimes also youth in a family working in low paying jobs with little security and few benefits. Precarious work conditions are symptomatic of the racialization of poverty in Canada – "Canada's economic apartheid" (Galabuzi, 2001, 2004). These sustained economic policies guarantee the production of a racialized underclass. Government documents do not name racism, but they do hint at it. They highlight the increasing gap in employment and income rates between Canadian-born and (im)migrant workers, and a notable increase in the time it takes more "recent" (im)migrants to catch up compared to earlier groups. They explicitly indicate that this emergent pattern has coincided with the shift in migration patterns – that is, with increasing numbers of (im)migrants from (non-white) non-European countries (Statistics Canada, 2009a).

As a result of precarious employment conditions, not only are many (im)migrant families struggling, as Evelyn put it, "between two different cultures, between two different worlds," they are, "in my opinion, working too much." In the absence of stable income, excess employment can pose risks to the family. For example, in one situation where child intervention services were called in, Evelyn said,

*The father told me that for three weeks, he didn't have even one day off. So basically working ... you know, trying to provide for the family. ... So, maybe they have enough material goods for the kids, but they are missing the most important part, you know, to be with the kids, to talk to them. (Evelyn)*

Lisa echoed this observation, reiterating the need for middle women. She told me that even when it appears that there is support in the form of other adults in a family, they are often working so much that they are actually not available.

*The reality of it right now, even if [the women] have husbands, I can tell you, we have one lady, who is pregnant, who is almost ready to have a child in the coming months, her husband works 16 hours a day. ... So, we know also the reality of what is happening in terms of to, to really survive, for some of them. So we have to be practical in that aspect and do what you can to support that. If not, um, it is not going to wait for you? Right? (Lisa2)*

According to the middle women, the circumstances can be dire. Families struggle against the odds to use government assistance only as a last resort. But when the barriers are too high, they ultimately have no choice but to resort to government financial assistance.

*No (wo)man's land: Gendered inequities*

It was striking the extent to which the middle women highlighted gendered inequities. Of course, it was "natural" for the middle women to focus on women, since they emerged to address women's health issues. But, as could be seen in the last chapter, minoritized women's (im)migration conditions and circumstances make them particularly vulnerable to poverty and exploitation in Canada. Indeed, the middle women clearly placed women's well being at the centre of their mission. As Shinin put it, "For me, the mission. We cannot have a world of well-being families, especially with the ethnic groups, if the women are behind." Shinin sees that women often have sacrificed themselves, or have been sacrificed, to others' needs. As a self-described feminist, for her, it is paramount to advance (im)migrant women's opportunities and positions in their families and in society.

*We need to focus on the well-being of the women, to have a well-being family. Because those women have been isolated for a long time. They have not counted. They were not part of anything, you know. And especially in ethnic groups, the last thing women look at is their health and their well-being, because they always victimize and sacrifice themselves for the well-being of the children and the family, the culture of the community, they never look at themselves. That is why, for me, I focus on her health, because through her health, through the well-being of the women's health, I will go through my mission for the well-being of the family, even the husband. Because we cannot have a happy husband if we don't have a happy woman, a happy wife. We cannot have a healthy children, if we don't have a healthy mom. But they always ignore their health, because they want to sacrifice. That is why. It's my mission. (Shinin)*

Occupational segregation has historically channeled women into work that was an extension of what they did at home (Ghorayshi, 2002). Moreover, because these types of work are not valued in economic terms, they tend to be paid at a lower rate than "men's work." But additionally, wage gaps occur because women are paid less than their male

counterparts in the same work (Ghorayshi, 2002). These inequities are exacerbated for minoritized (im)migrant women. Although the details and terms of immigration are always shifting, gendered inequities among (im)migrant women have been a constant historically (Castagna & Dei, 2000; Ghorayshi, 2002; Satzewich, 1993). Ample research documents gendered disparities in both ascribed immigrant category and ensuing social and economic conditions and circumstances. As discussed in the last chapter, overall minoritized (im)migrants experience many issues and barriers and for many their lives are economically precarious, ranging from persistent financial struggles to extreme poverty. But minoritized (im)migrant women face even higher hurdles than their male counterparts because of gender discrimination. In addition to occupational segregation in "women's job ghettos," low wages, part-time employment, lack of job security, sexist discrimination, sexual harassment, and high unemployment, even minoritized (im)migrant women ascribed to the independent (economic) category confront racism, class exploitation and structural discrimination in other sectors (Elabor-Idemudia, 2000).

If they come to Canada under ascribed non-independent (im)migrant categories, their circumstances are often even worse. Those coming into Canada in the ascribed family (dependent) class, are "assumed to have financial guarantees and therefore are not expected to work outside their homes" (Elabor-Idemudia, 2000, p. 91). Thus, they do not have access even to the extension of home. Moreover, as cited above, sponsors are required to support dependents. Although it can be advantageous for (im)migrants to have family or other support networks in Canada, according to the middle women, (im)migrant women's circumstances often result in a lack of social support and extreme isolation, often precluding them from taking advantage of what limited resettlement supports and services are available to them. Isolation sometimes locks women into male-dominated relationships from which it is difficult to extricate themselves.

Taken together, these arrangements both reproduce traditional gender inequalities in Canada, and sustain exploitative gender relationships through culturalized assumptions of (im)migrant families, an issue to which I return in the next chapter.

### **One-size-fits-all: Institutional thinking**

In addition to the effects of government policies and programs, a second way in which barriers and gaps are systematized is through institutional thinking in human services, which the middle women characterized as a "one-size-fits-all" approach. As Lenore put it, "It's inevitable for organizations to have some kind of system, to run smoothly, ... that's why it's called an organization" (Lenore1). Yet, as the middle women saw it, the very practices that constitute the system-ness of services – their "smoothness" – create the barriers that minoritized (im)migrants, and those who support them, experience.

A one-size-fits-all approach results in, and even requires, silos and rigidities. The middle women cited numerous ways in which systematization (one-size-fits-all) delimits services and resources according to definitions such as eligible populations, geographical areas, allowable costs, time allocations, and provider qualifications.

*[The system's program] only works with the families who live north of the river. If it is south of the river, then they don't have this [laughs], so this is another problem. (Olivia)*

*And then it comes to funding, and looking at the communities and all that, that's one of the communities – Fiji, Guyana, West Indies – they are placed in the South Asian community [by the Census]. [When we started working], [we were] were only paid for Chinese, Vietnamese, Southeast Asia, Arabs, and Central America. (Neda & Sharadi)*

It is a conundrum, then, that the service systems divvy people up in so many ways, yet they do not keep statistics about the characteristics of those they serve. As Neda pointed out, there is no effort made on the part of service systems to document who uses services (and who does not). But service organizations and systems ask advocates for improved

responsiveness to minoritized (im)migrants for statistics to prove a need for their demands.

*Any government services don't ask [people] what is your religion. Don't ask them where they're from. But why not? What you are you are. I'm a brown person. I'm a South Asian woman. What's wrong with that? I want to put it down there. Yes, I am a Muslim. Put it down there. Because you know what happens? You are asked when you want to write a proposal or anything. And you want some stats. You can't get them. (Neda)*

Moreover, although service systems seem to pay a lot of attention to systematizing ways of doing things, there is seemingly little interest in ensuring that the gaps between services, systems, and sectors are systematically filled.

*The tendency of the system is to deal with it in a very rigid, very limiting way. ... The tendency is "Let's cut off here. ... Let's do this directly. So. Everything straightforward, box." (Siobhan3)*

For example, participants cited rigid requirements and lack of flexibility, which service providers blame on the computerized system used to determine eligibility for financial assistance and the amount of benefits.

[One participant] is very angry and slaps his hands together, and then the table hard with his hand as he talks. "There is no reasoning – no leeway. They say that  $2 + 2 = 4$ , but they will say "no" to  $1 + 3 = 4$ . There is only one way... . [Agency] contacts say they can't provide a hard copy of the rules, because it's on the computer. The on-the-computer program is "set" with no flexibility. If it has a space for only up to 6 children, and you have 10, then you cannot have 10. You are encouraged to lie about your family members. For example, sometimes they are not really my children. The "types" of names people have vary in different traditions. Sponsorship is a huge problem for women – if the sponsor/spouse abandons a woman. It took 20 days to get help for her." (Fieldnotes Excerpt, April 15, 2008)

As Carolina put it, the people in the system "still have to learn a little bit ... that one way is not the only way." She called for more flexibility and responsiveness on the part of service providers, and also on the part of systems that establish policies that have "no leeway."

*There are so many gaps, so many many many gaps in the system, uh, and there are so many people, that they are still have to learn a little bit about that one way is not the only way. That there are many ways to do something. And, that um, you need to be a little bit more flexible, and more um, responsive, you know, to needs of people. I, I think that we would have a better system, and perhaps, at that time, they won't need to have [middle women]. ... Especially the front-line workers that they don't understand not*

*only that their work needs to be more open and receptive, you know, to the needs of people. It's not only the system, but it's structured in such a way that it has to be that way, and no other way. ... There is no leeway.*

The middle women highlighted how the system's semblance of methodic organization may have internal coherence, but this internal coherence is exactly what constitutes exclusion of minoritized (im)migrants.

Some middle women layered "corporate culture" onto tendencies toward systematization.

*But the system has their culture of their own too. We cannot say that they do not have a culture. They do have a culture ... of, they have a corporate culture, which comes with its own way, rigid limitations and policies and things like that. Right? (Neda & Sharadi)*

An effect of corporatization is what Janice Gross Stein (2001) has called "the cult of efficiency." In my research, Lisa summed it up in the phrase "time is of the essence." As she put it, a "one-size-fits-all" approach means "there is no time wasted to try to find out what is really happening" (Lisa1).

*Well I find that as a whole, in this country, time is of the essence. Which means, you know, time can be an essence when you are going to the hospital and you need surgery. You have some heart problems. But for everything, time cannot be used in that way. And I found that to be problematic. I, I, I continue to find that to be problematic. One of the things, I preach, is to, from my own experience, slow the system. ... Slow it down. Uh, because what ended up happening it, when you are going fast, and trying to sort things fast, what happens is it takes actually the longest. Because when you are fast, you are going to leave many important things behind. And so, of course, when you get somewhere you are going to hit the wall somewhere and then come back again. And this is what I am finding. (Lisa1)*

Leaving "many important things behind" means the issues bounce back, which is inefficient. Middle women therefore work to "slow the system down." Carolina and Lenore remarked on the changes they have experienced with human services in recent years, coinciding with the increasing dominance of neo-liberalism. Carolina noticed that service providers used to be more friendly, accommodating, and helpful in the 1970s and 1980s, whereas today's service delivery has the characteristics of an assembly-line.



*I think in general, uh, what I remember from years ago and now, people were friendlier. People were more accommodating. ... In the 70s and 80s. People they were much more, um, helpful in a way. That they, they were not so rushed. I mean, the population was smaller, obviously, you know. The population was different. And, um, I, I think that now, everything is, you now, rush rush rush. You have to do this, and do it fast, and that's it. Done. And next ...*

As they saw it, a "one-size-fits-all" approach does not require attention to particular circumstances, populations or needs, let alone recognition or accommodation. Not surprisingly, then, some middle women expressed a high degree of frustration with human services that are "not interested in knowing more about the circumstances of this family or this person" (Carolina), or are only interested in the immediate issues as the system defines them (Evelyn). For example, the hours of availability of most main stream organizations (and even immigrant serving organizations) are highly problematic. Many minoritized (im)migrants need 24/7 access to support – someone who not only speaks their language but can also provide practical help, guidance and accompaniment. Than pointed out that main stream organizations (and immigrant serving organizations) have office hours and that staff tend not to be available outside those hours. They commonly have policies that explicitly disallow giving out phone numbers for after-hours contact. In fact, "most of them turn off their phone all the time. .... That is the organization's policy" (Than). The unavailability of support means that the middle women are available 24/7, usually giving their phone numbers to the people they support, in trust that they will call only when they really require help.

According to Siobhan, "In the systems, everything is neatly packaged." Pre-designed services are also officially difference-blind. As Lisa put it, "You treat everybody the same. It seems" (Lisa2). Siobhan illustrated the problem with reference to standards for child development milestones.

*[There is evidence that] when a child learns English, it's not always 3 months... every child is not 3 months, every one is a little different. To have one single policy to say if a child didn't learn by 6 months, then there's a*

*delay or a developmental issue. That we have to look at broader ranges of factors. So that the system would, and the community, would support children appropriately. (Siobhan2)*

Once human services have "done the urgent part," they see "no major concerns." Siobhan illustrated the problem with reference to the limitations of support provided to families experiencing child welfare intervention.

*After those 60 hours [that we are contracted to provide] if there is nothing ... from the child welfare point of view, "We're done. The family is stable." Really the real work begins, to continue supporting the family. ... So for child welfare they're done when they're done the urgent part. And there's nothing out there to cover the stabilizing the ongoing support. And it's not part of our early intervention funding – it's only focused on age 6 and under. So families with older children, it's not their responsibility. ... So [the middle woman] will be in there for sure with children's services for maybe 60 hours. Then children's services will say, "Good. There's no major concerns. The [middle woman's] been in there." They leave. The 60 hours is done. But I'm sure that the [middle woman] will be in there because this is just the first time. Then it will spiral off to another crisis. So I could see [her] going in and out of the family and helping prevent the second crisis, but from child welfare's point of view this incident is done because we're there. And that part no one funds – working with children and youth over six years old. (Siobhan2)*

Other institutionalized practices the middle women identified as problematic were confidentiality protocols and site- and professional-defined boundaries. The formal processes that main stream systems ostensibly use to protect the confidentiality of the people who use their services can get in the way of providing integrated and timely support to minoritized (im)migrants. As Siobhan suggested, in some of the smaller communities of minoritized (im)migrants, everyone knows each other and they already know all the "confidential" information.

*The system way of looking at confidentiality and boundaries is really hard. There are only so many people in the community. And what the system thinks is hush hush, you cannot let others know, the community, it's already known. And, uh, it's not a big deal, honestly. Particularly, if it's in the family. Um. So, I still don't know what [the service provider's] concerns are. (Siobhan in Than1)*

The middle women recognized these protocols and practices as systemic. For example, they suggested that there is a need to revamp organizational policies because, as Carolina said, "Of course, [the staff]

say, 'Well, I'm just doing what I'm told. This is my job, and I'm sorry'." In one meeting I observed, middle women facilitated planning of a cultural competency workshop. During this planning session, workshop presenters expressed anger about minoritized (im)migrants' interfaces with main stream human service providers. They asserted that "people are coming there at their most vulnerable and then are treated poorly" and that, as a support person, you have to "bite your tongue" because you can jeopardize the person's access to resources (Fieldnotes Excerpt, April 15, 2008). They commented on the intimidating tone and substance of these interfaces, pointing to several specific and repeated problems. They suggested, "Staff seem to be taught to interrogate" (Fieldnotes Excerpt, April 15, 2008).

One participant said, "It is like watching programs of military training – taught to be rude with the highest capability of insulting. It is as if the staff are selected according to their rudeness." (Fieldnotes Excerpt, April 15, 2008)

Further, the workshop presenters said that service providers do not give information about what people are actually entitled to unless they are specifically asked – "rights and entitlements are not shared easily." They said, "It's almost like they're taking money out of their own pockets," "They act like immigration officers," and "They seem to be taught to withhold information rather than be forthcoming."

Clearly, organizational policies shape the practices and protocols that front-line service providers use.

*You have to look at the policies, and sometimes the policies is what makes people at the individual level act the way they do, right? And, definitely, that is what is what needs a lot of revamping. (Carolina)*

Service delivery often therefore comprises interactions in which what is discussed and how it is discussed are driven by service providers, in an effort to meet their mandated needs and fit within pre-conceived available responses, solutions or offerings – Siobhan's "neat packages." Middle women described these types of interactions as "controlling." I was especially struck by the way in which Lisa framed her criticism of service delivery as "answering before asking the question." She described

how service organizations often impose their pre-conceived ideas and timelines on the people using services. In two different interviews, Lisa illustrated this problem through her experiences with women's shelters and labour and delivery support.

*The system will go, "Okay, you are here [in the shelter]. You have 20 days to leave this place. You have this. You have to do this. You have to eat with us. You have to eat this. This is what we do." Well, it's all good and well, but not all women can go through that. [Right away] the system has already said to a woman in a shelter, "Find a house, we'll put you in social services. We'll put you this." (Lisa1) ...*

*[Whereas] I ask them questions. I know, which is what we don't really do a whole lot in this country. ... I have to ask them what exactly do they do when they have a childbirth. What exactly do they do when they are having this? What is their arrangement in this and this and that? All I do is ask questions. I don't answer them. (Lisa2)*

When services and programs insufficiently engage in examination of the effects of not taking into account the circumstances of the people, they render even well-motivated interventions irrelevant and contribute to minoritized (im)migrants' distrust of systems.

*Circumstances like children's services jumping in because they saw something, and of course the next thing they do is like give the husband a restraining order, and you know, take him to the jail. Blah, blah. Well, yeah, you could do that, but after he gets out of jail, he's going to come, because the wife has five kids. Who is going to buy milk for her? She doesn't know how to go to the store. She doesn't speak a word of English. So, who are you helping here? And he doesn't understand why you are giving him a restraining order. (Lisa2)*

*But you [as a shelter worker] giving her a house within 20 days, getting them out and fast, fast, fast. It's not going to make that situation. In fact, what you're actually setting it up, is to fail. And [for people] to lie to you too. You see? (Lisa1)*

The middle women often attributed the persistence of the barriers to differences in worldviews and perspectives. They observed the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the institutional thinking that characterizes main stream human service systems in Canada. Here, the middle women connected the dots between the "one-size-fits-all" policy framework that shapes the silos and rigidities of the system and their rational-positivist underpinnings or dogma. For example, Trina attributed (im)migrants' negative experiences (see Chapter 4) to the

inherently exclusive nature of systems that are built on "a staunch belief in the system, and the rightness that the system is the truth" (Trina). Lenore similarly observed that there are "different ways of knowing" (Lenore1) between the system and the people the middle women support. When systematization is shaped by dogmatic beliefs in particular truths, and lack of openness to more than one way of doing things, there is a "clash."

*Because well we know how, how to say, how dogmatic the health system is. And there is still, even at this point, there is really no openness to other, other perspectives or other worldviews. And that's what influences the ways of doing things. ... You can even, uh, further analyze that it's a tension between two different ways of knowing. Systems recognize the rational, the written, uh. If we were to think from a community perspective, what's good is what we see, what we experience. So, uh, so uh, there is, there is almost a fundamental tension of differences in ways of knowing and building knowledge. (Lenore1)*

How might this "clash" be understood?

### **Underlying assumptions of government policies and institutional thinking**

What sense is there in admitting migrants to Canada – for either economic or humanitarian reasons – if they cannot become participating members of society? How is it that the issues that constitute minoritized (im)migrants' experiential realities fall under *no one's* mandate or *no one's* job description? How is it that so many issues persist despite the attention drawn to them even in Government documents? How is it that there is so little support for (im)migrants despite clear evidence that services, supports, and opportunities for participation are needed?

These power relations play out in part because of the problematic assumptions that *underlie* immigration policies. Critical theorists suggest that inequities exist and persist because the dominant ideology underlying Canadian immigration policy is that all (im)migrants are *not* equal. Indeed, they argue that immigration policy has always been designed to reproduce racial, gender, and class inequities that already exist in Canada. It fits (im)migrants into an existing hierarchy (Abu-Laban, 1998; Bannerji, 2000; Thobani, 1999, 2000, 2007). This is Richard Day's (2000) "pre-designed nation."

Supporting this argument, the middle women pointed to the parameters of resettlement support as among the most intractable contributors to social exclusion. These parameters are clearly based on an assumption of rapid resettlement (or absorption), which works for white English-speaking people with Canadian-worthy credentials or the ability to assimilate (Beyene et al., 1996). But this assumption belies the realities of minoritized (im)migrants under the conditions and circumstances discussed in this thesis. An assumption of rapid resettlement without much in the way of support is consistent with neo-liberal principles of individual responsibility – if you work hard enough, you can make it. There is no room in this ideology for structural inequities. But it is important to note the assumptions underlying immigration policy pre-date the neo-liberal era; they have been a shifting constant. Assumptions grounded in an ideological belief in Canada's liberal democracy allow the state to purvey a myth of universal equality that masks inequities in Canada.

Moreover, extending these assumptions through Canada's official multicultural discourse allows the state to purvey a myth of equality in diversity that obscures racialized-culturalized inequity in Canada. It also fosters a perception of Canada as a saviour nation that will rescue vulnerable migrants through its humanitarian policies (as suggested earlier). As an extension of this development thinking (Kothari, 2006), official multiculturalism's emphasis on cultures and their cultural practices produces essentialist caricatures of "foreign" cultures' backward patriarchal practices that fit well with maintaining the status quo in Canada while simultaneously allowing the government to claim that it is advancing the rights, lives, and opportunities of (im)migrant women. For example, the Canadian Government has worked these ideological assumptions together to place women migrants seeking asylum from gender-based persecution in the position of having to make claims based on the ""barbaric" customs of their non-Western cultures" (Razack, 1998, p. 47).

The middle women drew attention to how these implicit assumptions on the part of Government seep into contracted immigrant serving organizations that deliver orientation and support to newcomers. Such assumptions guide the substance of the information conveyed to newcomers, especially those arriving as refugees, during the early days following arrival in Canada. First, these sessions assume rapid settlement. They are designed to "transmit" a lot of information in a very short timeframe, during a time immediately following arrival – when it is likely that many displaced persons cannot "absorb" it. As Than explained, the orientation that is provided is not enough.

*They did a full orientation session. Part I, how to take a bus. The first one, the orientation session, you have to know the city. Like they show them a little bit. After two hours, how can you know ... The second day is the education system, the family law a little bit, the civil law, the Canadian law. ... child welfare ... It's not enough time. I tell the truth, for my people. Not enough.*

According to the middle women, policies and practices shaped by an assumption of rapid resettlement not only create undue hardship, but also actually *interfere* with (im)migrants' abilities to establish themselves in Canada. An absence of support to gain English language literacy, along with gendered and raced barriers to gainful employment, create insurmountable challenges, deep poverty, and isolation.

Second, the ideology of Canada as a liberal democracy that ensures the rights of its people is explicitly conveyed in orienting newcomers to children's and women's rights in Canada. This is when families are informed that women should not put up with abuse and should call the police, and avail themselves of women's shelters. They are told that child welfare services can intervene if their children are not treated appropriately according to Canadian standards. These explicit "Canadian" standards contain implicit judgments or at least uncertainties about others' (cultural) standards. Indeed, this process is often where refugees' entry into multicultural Canada begins – with fear that they may be deported if they don't stay in line, that the state might take their children away, and that women have access to resources here if they need to flee abusive

relationships. This is why Lisa tells the families she works with that child welfare was not invented because of (im)migrants.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I drew attention to five key types of barriers that minoritized (im)migrants face in trying to overcome their issues and challenges. I also underscored the existence of gaps – the *non-existent* services and supports that minoritized (im)migrants require. I then extended this layer of analysis to make visible the asymmetrical power relations that are at work before (im)migrants arrive, in the processes for admitting them (in)to Canada, in the decisions to admit (or not), in ascribing people to particular categories and (therefore) to differential (inequitable) access to entitlements once "in Canada." I then suggested that dividing practices implicated in government policies work to produce an underclass of minoritized (im)migrants, with exacerbated effects for minoritized (im)migrant women.

I chose not to focus on a particular group of immigrants in my research – that is, according to ascribed status as immigrant, refugee or temporary foreign worker, established or new emerging, country of origin or conditions and circumstances of migration, sex or age, or according to their interactions with a particular human service organization or sector. Instead, I followed the participants across silos and sectors. Perhaps as a result, what is particularly striking is the extent to which these categories, ascriptions, and affiliations matter.



## Chapter 6. Carving out a *niche*

*Between the multicultural paradigm and the actuality of a migrant citizen's life in Canada, the gap is immense.*  
- Himani Bannerji, 2000, p. 49

*Beyond the cultural explanation of inability to access [] care is a deeper issue of racism and discrimination that immigrants and refugees are vulnerable, as members of visible minorities.*  
- GMCNO document, n.d.b, p. 1

### Introduction

In Chapter 4, I suggested that in articulating inequalities the middle women's accounts emphasized conditions and circumstances more than any narrow conceptualization of culture. They tended to use context, circumstances and culture more or less interchangeably. On the other hand, some middle women said that their work is oriented to "preserving the languages and cultures of our communities" (Fieldnotes Coding Summary Excerpt, January 2009). And they frequently made references to "cultural breakdown" as a consequence of culturally dissonant intervention practices on the part of human services, including women's shelters, child welfare intervention, education, and health care. It was clear that the GMCNO strives to shape main stream organizations' and service providers' capacities to be more culturally responsive. If culture is not so salient in the middle women's conceptualizations of the issues minoritized (im)migrants' experience, how is it that the GMCNO has made itself into a *cultural* resource?

This chapter takes up where the last one left off. Here, I examine the relationship between the gap and the *niche* through which the middle women carve out a "unique" role for themselves. I argue that both *niche* and the *Middle Woman* are discursively produced in/by/through the power relations shaped by state ideologies and discourses. The middle women's articulations of experiential reality therefore provide an instance of Bannerji's (2000) argument that the hegemonic connection between the state and civil society means that when civil society is "already saturated by the dominant political culture ... then that politics of resistance itself

can become a part of the state's ideological apparatus" (p. 34). Racialized experiences do not make minoritized peoples immune to ideology.<sup>55</sup> In this chapter, then, I inquire into how it is that barriers and gaps have become a *niche* through which the once *ad hoc* middle woman has become the *Middle Woman*. This chapter instantiates the complexities of Sherene Razack's (1998) concern with who controls "taking culture into account."

As will be clear, this third layer of analysis is particularly important because, I argue, the formal establishment of the GMCNO in 1998 can be seen as the articulation of what Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) refer to as "discourse moments," inasmuch as it was a vehicle for addressing the intertwined inequities of minoritized (im)migrants and the emergent issues and needs identified by minoritized (im)migrant communities. The GMCNO saw itself as an advocate – a voice – for timely and responsive services and supports, for meaningful participation of minoritized (im)migrants excluded from main stream society, and for system change in human services. But it was also, and as importantly, a vehicle for gainful employment of minoritized (im)migrant women.

### **Production of the *niche***

Overall, the middle women indicated that most of what they do is fill the gaps left behind by Government policies and systemically institutionalized policies and practices in human services. Indeed, it might be said that what the middle women "uniquely" offer is seeing beyond the bounds of externally-imposed mandates. The persistence of issues and barriers evokes the middle women's frustration and anger.

The middle women estimated that 80 percent of their primary work continues to be generated in the community, not through service providers' requests. On the other hand, since the mid-1990s, several governmental and community organizations in the health, education and

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<sup>55</sup> I am grateful to Jennifer Kelly for this concrete (and therefore helpful) way of expressing how hegemonic relations work.

social service sectors, such as the health region, regional department of child and family services, and an early childhood intervention program, have contracted with the GMCNO for defined services within their mandates (Personal communications, middle women, 1998-2006). For example, in 2008-2009, the middle women provided direct individual and family support to over 2000 families – involving one-to-one and group pre- and post-natal education, and labour and delivery support (1560 families); early parenting and early childhood development support (545 families) and intense home visitation for children from birth to six years old (50 families); support to families with children with disabilities (110 families); and collaborative child welfare intervention (74 families) (GMCNO report, 2009a). If this is the case, what *does* give rise to human service providers' and systems' calls for involvement of middle women, which sometimes result in contracts? How does the impetus for these calls compare to the middle women's articulations of the conditions, barriers and gaps, and inequities that minoritized (im)migrants experience with human services?

Despite these contracts, the fact that a relatively small proportion of the GMCNO's work arises from service providers' referrals, even in circumstances where the work is funded by a service system, suggests that human service systems have not systematically integrated the middle women into the way they deliver services. Despite numerous projects, evaluations, research projects, and partnerships in which the GMCNO has been involved, more than 15 years after the emergence of the first middle women, only recently did a main stream human service organization<sup>56</sup> pilot systematically integrating middle women into the way it delivers services. As a result, the GMCNO constantly works in a context where main stream organizations neither recognize nor prioritize the nature and

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<sup>56</sup> Since GMCNO got its start in the health sector with pre-natal support, it is worth noting that the main stream organization that has begun to systematically integrate middle women into its work is *not* in the health sector.

extent of barriers that many minoritized (im)migrants experience. How might this lack of systematic integration – or better systematic lack of integration – be understood in the face of the persistence of barriers and gaps and continuing emergence of middle women? I examine these two questions in separate sub-sections below.

### *Calls for the middle women*

A clue to how service providers and systems see the need for middle women is the middle women's perception that service providers and systems see minoritized (im)migrants as a challenge. Human services need the middle women to help them "get their jobs done" (Lenore<sup>1</sup>, Lisa, Siobhan). They most often frame requests for involvement of middle women in terms of linguistic and cultural barriers – for help with overcoming communication barriers, bridging cultural differences, reaching (im)migrants whom they are supposed to serve or whom they want to mobilize for their own purposes.

First, available resources for interpreting are very limited in the region, and few people speak both English and some first languages. Since the middle women require fluency in English and first languages, perhaps it is not surprising that some of the middle women *also* work as interpreters for a local interpreter service. The role of interpreter, however, is usually conceptualized as word-for-word translation back and forth between a service provider and the individual, a "neutral" almost invisible "resource" to both parties to the communication (Hsieh, 2008) – a very specific role, much narrower than that of the middle women.

Still, the middle women observed that service providers most often request their involvement when an individual has no other family members here and does not speak "the [English] language" (Carolina). While availability of family members who speak English may lessen the need for service providers to recruit external interpreters, Carolina implied that service providers may rely on family members as a first

resort.<sup>57</sup> Carolina's comment suggests that human service providers, in some circumstances or systems at least, lack a systematic route for availing themselves of qualified and appropriate interpreter services. Although they distinguish themselves from interpreters, nevertheless the middle women often respond to requests for interpreting because helping with language and communication barriers opens up opportunities for more in-depth assessment of underlying conditions and circumstances. From their perspectives, responding to a request for language interpreting provides an entry point into the "real" work. A seemingly simple request for language interpreting on the part of a service provider may be the tip of an iceberg in what is happening for a family. The considerable paperwork involved in accessing and using human services, some of which is used for communicating basic information and obtaining consent for intervention and commitment to regulations and procedures, is a way for a middle woman to develop a relationship and earn trust.

Furthermore, as the middle women observed, service providers sometimes utilize them as interpreters primarily to affirm that (im)migrants whose first languages are other than English understand what has been communicated to them. Indeed, a service provider might request a middle woman even when an interpreter from another source has already been involved. For example, Olivia said, sometimes the service system will ask her "to go over there to see if [the family] really understands what [the service provider] said" (Olivia).

A second reason for requesting involvement of a middle woman is for help with "bridging cultures." Here, service providers appear to come up against what they perceive to be barriers to effective delivery of services, barriers that they attribute to cultural differences.

*You know, for people that they want to know more about, you know, culturally what is appropriate, you know. Or um, they are requesting that we do a workshop, or they want to know more about a particular*

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<sup>57</sup> There is a large literature on the appropriateness of using family members as interpreters, which I do not delve into here.

*community, because they are working with people in that community.  
(Carolina)*

Service providers' misunderstandings of circumstances, which they attribute to culture, shape a referral. It might be out of a "good" motivation – for example, to provide good service, to ensure compliance with medications, to be respectful – to be inoffensive (that is, to be "culturally" sensitive). The middle women reported an increasing number of requests because service providers "don't know what to do." Nu described what is involved in bridging the contexts of a refugee health centre physician and a Karen woman, and for a Karen family and the health system.

*In my experience, the Karen people, because they were in the refugee camps, they came here, everything was new for them. Sometimes, the doctor asked them a simple question, but they answered in a very complicated way. And especially, the ladies, when they got here, they were required to do the Pap smear test, and it's very hard for them to do that. So, I had to tell them that it's okay, no pressure, you have to be calm. There is nothing wrong, every lady who lives in Canada here has to do that. Every year, once a year. ... Or, back home, the doctor would treat kids, no matter what, they would give them medication. And here, in my experience, I see that the doctor would try one step at a time to, to, to treat the kids. And, especially right now, let's say the kid is sick, and the parents want to give the kid medication to cure everything go away. Sometimes, it's an overdose for the kids. That medication is too, too, yeah, too much for the kids. ... They are used to the routine, or the things that they did in the refugee camp. (Nu)*

Nu's example suggests a mutually beneficial exchange. But mutuality may not be the norm. As the middle women made clear, sometimes service providers treat the middle woman as a messenger through whom to relay expectations of acceptable "Canadian" practices such as compliance with common infant feeding and childrearing practices, and health treatments. In such cases, the middle woman may actually contest the neutrality of such messages as she navigates contexts in support of a family. In an example of what Natalie saw as disrespectful treatment towards a family (I discuss disrespect in-depth in the next chapter), she illustrated how "I find that you're advocating a lot for the community, and their ways of life, and at the same time for the Canadian way. And I understand both."

*For example, the doctor is, "You know, you're not supposed to feed your baby this kind of food, da-da-da, da-da-da." I will automatically explain that this is something traditionally that we do. It's caused no harm to children. They like us to start rice cereal at a very young age. "It has really caused no harm. This family is going to do this at home. Is there a way we can help them do it properly? There's just no way for you to change this." So, even though they're treated very negatively, I'll right away, I won't let them feel like I've picked up on that. But I'll right away turn it where, "Well, this is the reason why this family is doing this. Everything has a reason. They're not trying to kill their children. They do love their children. They want to wish them the best." And I'll explain to them that here in Canada, they would rather you not feed your children food until they turn, let's say, 6 months, or 4 months, or whatever the age is now. Um, and these are the reasons why. So they're both explained why they both don't get each other.*

Aileen, a mentor-middle woman with many years of experience in the main stream public health system, commented that it is really hard for main stream practitioners in Canada to understand or connect with the scope and depth of the issues many newly arriving (im)migrants, especially refugees, experience. Further, she suggested, the inability to connect applies to refugee women who have lived in refugee camps for extended periods of time in particular. Service providers don't know how to address these "complex cases," many of which involve minoritized (im)migrant women who have multiple physical, mental, and social problems, and may also be illiterate in their first language(s). She pointed out that even resettlement agencies have difficulty responding to the nature and scope of the issues. They too request the support of a middle woman.

*[A child] was referred to us by [name of resettlement agency] because they were doing settlement for him, and there's no way [name of agency] would go through all the steps this child needed to get the care he needed. ... I mean his needs were so severe, the physician didn't know what to do with him. The dentists didn't know what to do with him. I mean, I was upset with the dentist, but, but ... I think he just felt, "I don't even know where to start." ... 'Til I actually did that real hands-on work, I had no idea. Even though I'd been with the [GMCNO] from the very beginning. Unless you've really done it, you have no idea how complicated each little step is.*

A third reason the middle women cited for service providers or systems calling upon their expertise was recognition on the part of a main stream organization that particular populations are missing in its work or

not being reached for treatment or service. An impetus for such requests is a need to "find" (im)migrants who require follow-up treatment, in the case of sexually transmitted infections (Aileen), or women who underutilize services such as the birth control centre and cancer screening (Neda, Siobhan1). Service providers, and especially service organizations, also request consultation, education, and training, endorsements for project and partnering, and help with mobilizing (im)migrants for screening programs and other treatments, and recruiting and mobilizing immigrants for engagement in research.

Finally, agencies and government offices involved in long-term care, social services, employment, and income security request help with "working across cultures" (Siobhan2). Such requests are triggered by staff questions and concerns about how to respond to the "diversity" of the people who use their services, and also by service managers' awareness of tensions among "diverse" staff in the workplace. For example, the middle women knew of circumstances in which social exclusion of minoritized (im)migrant staff had triggered requests for assistance to work across differences. Such conditions were of concern to managers because they affect staff morale and retention.

### *Negotiating a niche*

Clearly, the middle women framed a need for their involvement in terms of the "people's realities." They work within a holistic concept of health grounded in the social determinants of health (Labonte, 1993; Raphael, 2004). Their work is driven by community- rather than system-defined needs. As previously indicated, the middle women frequently take up occupancy in a gendered space of isolation, initially providing direct support, and then working to establish a safety net and support system. They follow the path of the people across service silos and sectors.

The space comprised of barriers, gaps and no (wo)man's land is composed of absences that middle women navigate, as they support individuals and families to move from one service to another within a



system, and from one system to another system. They walk with people from a refugee health clinic to specialists, public health services, and dentists. And from health services to housing, schools, income support, employment opportunities, job applications and interviews. They address (im)migrant women's isolation, and the vulnerabilities that arise at the nexus of their particular pre-migration conditions and circumstances and post-migration issues that sustain these conditions in Canada. They develop safety nets so that minoritized (im)migrants ultimately "have control over their [own] lives" (Lisa2).

The middle women described service providers' and systems' requests for a middle woman as much narrower in scope, and driven by organizational mandates and institutional thinking. I suggest, then, that this *niche* is the place (as in Massey's (1994) conceptualization) where the middle women and human service systems find enough overlap in their explications of the issues and barriers that they (can) exist in a symbiotic relationship – that is, one in which they *need* each other. As I have already hinted, the *niche* is produced through the articulation of discourses – the way in which discourses work together – their "intertextuality" (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). Furthermore, the hegemonic relationship implicated in the *niche* instantiates both a discursive "failure of communication" (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999) and how power circulates (Foucault, 2003b).

The failure of communication is not a "technical glitch" (Razack, 1998); it is a "discursive glitch" (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). That is, it is not a *language* problem; it is a *discourse* problem – a failure "to achieve real dialogue between the participants" (p. 60). Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) illustrate this notion through an analysis of person-to-person interactions. I extend it to organization-to-organization, or organization-to-system interactions. In either case, the failure of communication takes place when, despite persistent efforts to frame, reframe, and inject the issue of concern in dialogue, the dominant discourse prevails. Here, I suggest that the *disjunction* the middle women

experience between their subjugated knowledge of minoritized (im)migrants' experiential realities of inequities and what service providers need (and therefore request) is a failure of discourse. Despite their efforts to frame these realities in terms of structural and systemic inequities manifested in everyday issues and barriers, the system only *recognizes* linguistic and cultural barriers. To be sure, the middle women also identify linguistic and cultural barriers. I am arguing that it is only this narrowly-defined area of overlap – or agreement – that comprises the *niche*.<sup>58</sup>

The middle women are dependent on service providers and the system to get a foot in the door, and to mediate an effective response to the people they support – this defines the *niche*. I suggest that the overlap is what makes it possible for the middle women to persist. The *gap-niche* nexus is a place of exploitation in two inter-related ways. First, the *unrecognized* condition of inequity sustains barriers and gaps. The middle women continue to address them, often without remuneration or, as I show in Chapter 9, by navigating them in other ways. It is not surprising, then, that the middle women could not envision a time when they will be out of a job. As long as there is immigration, Sharadi suggested, the challenges that minoritized (im)migrants experience will continue.

A second and related way in which human service systems exploit the middle women is in controlling the parameters of contract work. This control limits contractable work to that which fits within service mandates, which are shaped by the system's silos and rigidities. This means that each system provides funding on a piecework basis. Even within these parameters, these systems usually do not provide funding for coordination and core administration (Siobhan2), the infrastructure

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<sup>58</sup> niche 1. a position or activity that particularly suits somebody's talents and personality or that somebody can make his or her own; 2. an area of the market specializing in a particular type of product; 3. the role of an organism within its natural environment that determines its relations with other organisms and ensures its survival. (Encarta® World English Dictionary © 1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. Developed for Microsoft by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.)

necessary to sustain the middle women's work. Yet, the number of middle women has more than quadrupled in the past 11 years. This means the GMCNO has "to be very creative looking for programming resources from the community" (Lenore2). In funding the work on a piecework basis, the system exploits the middle women.

Further, piecework is precarious, and vulnerable to cuts in funding. Indeed, in 2002, a middle woman disclosed that her position, which was dedicated to perinatal support in a hospital-based women's program, had been cut<sup>59</sup> (Personal communication, middle woman, 2002). In 2003, a second site cut a contract for middle women by half (Personal communication, GMCNO, 2003). Also in 2003, a three-year mental health demonstration project (Report, 2003b) was completed and, with no additional funding forthcoming, eight new positions had to be terminated (Personal communication, middle woman, 2003). As I write, the pilot project that fostered systematic integration of middle women into children's services is at risk as the provincial government reorganizes, contracts out, and systematizes a one-size-fits-all approach to achieve outcomes framed in terms of cost-saving efficiencies (GMCNO document, 2009).

Since the middle women require the *niche*, they also contribute to its reproduction. In the next sub-section I extend this analysis, drawing attention to how the power relations implicated in the *niche* are productive in two other ways.

### **Cultural uniqueness**

As I have already argued, the *niche* is produced through a symbiotic relationship that serves a narrowly-defined overlapping need of middle women *and* human service systems. The *niche*, as I have suggested is a particular place – an articulation of social relations. It is by definition a *unique* place – a place that demands and produces specialization in the

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<sup>59</sup> The hospital foundation subsequently found resources to maintain this position.

same moment. It produces an argument for differentiation. What constitutes this *niche's* "uniqueness?" I argue that the *niche* requires defining *minoritized (im)migrants'* uniqueness. How is that?

The *niche* is defined by the terms of agreement (or overlap), which, as I have suggested, are discursively produced. This means the middle women must define the issues of minoritized (im)migrants in terms that human services *recognize*. Their clearest option is the opening provided by their agreement on linguistic and cultural differences, which is effected through dominant discourse. But, as shown above, human services call upon middle women for help with "getting their jobs done." The boundaries of the *niche* are set by main stream human service systems. This is possible because of the ways in which culture and equality discourses work together. First, culture is discursively produced as what *individuals do* and (accordingly) relegated to the private sphere (Bannerji, 2000). As a result, linguistic and cultural differences are attached to, or ascribed to, *individuals*. By extension, the barrier is "located within the difference that some people are made to contain. If there is no difference, there is no problem" (Comeau, 2006, p. 5). Thus the *niche* requires defining minoritized (im)migrants' *uniqueness* in terms of their *linguistic* and *cultural* differences *from the main stream*. Minoritized (im)migrants are produced as *different* – outside the norm. *Uniqueness*, then, comes to be attached to individual bodies.

Moreover, since some people are made to contain their own barriers – linguistic and cultural barriers are ascribed to those who experience them – human services can conceptualize barriers as beyond the scope of what they need to address (except insofar as they prevent them from getting their jobs done). In this particular *niche*, barriers are addressed – or dealt with – on an individual basis. A one-size-fits-all approach can be seen as a discursive effect of culture discourse. Although diversity is the hallmark of Canadian multiculturalism, clearly the one-size-fits-all approach works on the assumption that whatever culture is, it is something that does not concern public institutions except insofar as

they have to get their jobs done. It means treating everyone the same – officially difference-blind.

The one-size-fits-all approach is also consistent with and made possible by a dominant discourse of equality of *individual* rights. The middle women are able to extend the "culture" opening beyond the individual – by taking up advocacy on behalf of minoritized (im)migrants' *cultures* – thereby reproducing these cultures. But the middle women are not able to stretch the boundaries of the *niche* to a *public* concern with inequity through *culture* discourse. They must find another area of overlap with human services in order to stretch the *niche*. This requires finding another way of defining minoritized (im)migrants' *uniqueness*. A second opening the middle women can use in leveraging the definition of the *niche* is the *complexity* of minoritized (im)migrants. This opening is possible because a discourse of "complex cases" already exists in the system. As Trina pointed out, "I think that 99 percent of the cases we work with [in the GMCNO], in a mainstream context would be considered complex."

*[Who we see is] mostly the people that we know in general all over the world are the most vulnerable. Mostly it's non- or not-so-highly educated, women, from low-income backgrounds who come here. ... "Complex" is relative within the GMCNO, because I think that 99 percent of the cases we work with, in a mainstream context, would be considered complex. Yeah? But within the GMCNO, where what are now immigrant communities, the conglomeration of complex cases is, is lower than in the [new] refugee communities.*

Part of what makes working with refugees difficult, as Aileen put it, "is the fact that many families are illiterate in their own country, which makes it hugely complicated." The complexities of individual circumstances are then extended to the *groups* to which they are ascribed.

*I mean, the communities are complex, eh? The communities are not straightforward, right. So, one thing that might work here, sometimes, and with some other people in the same community, it does not work that way, you know. (Carolina)*

"We always operate in a complex context, and we have to juggle"  
(Siobhan2).

Lenore said that the middle women strive to level the playing field, which requires both correcting unequal opportunities and ensuring fair treatment in the interest of achieving equitable outcomes. This means that the middle women must constantly navigate a paradox – demanding both the "same treatment" as the main stream, and "special treatment" to accommodate cultural difference, as they navigate and buffer resources with and for the minoritized (im)migrants they support. It is difficult to level the playing field. Although Lenore assigned responsibility for ensuring a "fair chance" to government, she also suggested that this is unlikely to happen without the demand for it. It is necessary therefore for the middle women, (im)migrants, and the "communities" they comprise, to engage in mobilization and political advocacy.

*The circumstances of how you access equal opportunities aren't the same. And therefore, uh, it is society's responsibility, through government of course, to make sure that those who have barriers in accessing get more support than everyone else.*

This section of the chapter made visible the power relations implicated in the challenges of leveling the playing field. Although middle women strive to reinforce and strengthen the capacities of the people with whom they work, the *niche* requires continually rehearsing minoritized (im)migrants' vulnerabilities and deficits. As such, the middle women observed and experienced how systems encourage and even require that service providers fix a critical gaze on the people they are set up to support. As Lenore put it, "It is a persistent challenge for advocates of minority health to transform the content of the health and social services sector."

### **Production of the *Middle Woman***

Reproducing minoritized (im)migrants *as* their differences from the norm, which is the main stream, produces the *niche*. (I return to this in Chapter 7.) What is it that the middle women can claim to contribute or offer to the human service system? What do human service systems *call for* in requesting the involvement of middle women?

The symbiotic relationship between middle women's and human services' needs defines a mutually beneficial *niche*, as discussed above. But, I suggest, the *niche* requires a *particular* middle woman – it is *self-fulfilling*. It requires that the middle women define what constitutes *them as unique* (that is, *different*). First, the middle women defined their uniqueness in terms of being able "to see what others cannot see" (Carolina). They attributed their abilities to recognize the issues that minoritized (im)migrants experience in terms of a *sensitivity to inequities*. This is possible because most middle women, as minoritized (im)migrant women themselves, have experienced the same range of pre- and post-migration conditions and circumstances as the people they support. As a result, they consistently envisioned (im)migrants' experiences of juxtaposing "back home" to "in Canada." For example, what would it be like to come to a city in Canada from a refugee camp in the jungle in Thailand? How could the Karen refugees use the literacy gained in living in the jungle to navigate city streets and public transit? How could people who have never seen a city before apply their life experiences to such a different and unfamiliar environment?

*[The Karen] came from a very different environment. They were in the jungles of Thailand, to you know, to gradually relate to this environment is gonna take time. There's a lot of anxiety. [It's] completely new ... like you don't have the literacy to figure out the environment, so when you get more anxious it's harder to learn. (Siobhan3)*

*[The Kurds] came to Canada with no education. With not any life experience. And with not any training. Mostly those people come from a very isolated remote area from in between the border between Iraq and Iran, between Iraq and Turkey. ... The environment, you know, it is totally different. It would be different for them to go to the [cities] in Iraq and Iran. What do you think the life, the life, looks like for them in Canada? (Shinin)*

Siobhan suggested that having "witnessed so many people's lives [over 15 years], we can predict the future." The middle women are familiar with and attentive to the patterns in post-migration struggles. In one sense, it is their frustration with the repeating cycle they see that makes them persist.

Because the middle women emerged to address barriers and fill gaps, they have honed a sensitivity to inequities out of necessity. But, as Carolina explained, gesturing with her hands, it is necessary to see through a wide-angled lens – "We have, because we have lived sometimes in many other places, more world views" (Fieldnote excerpt, Feb 26, 2008). She reiterated this in a slightly different way during our interview.

*Because for me, too, I'm I think that part is experience, and part is I have worked in different parts of the world, and I have other sense of how things should be, not this way, but this [uses her hands to show narrow and wide]. ... I have had that experience. I know what it means. ... Because we are part of um, yes, part of the community, but we have had, each one of us, had the same experience, around here. I think that is the value, and that is the strength of what we do. ... If everything was fine, it was just a matter of saying, "You know, I'm going to interpret for you. We're going to this office. It's done. That's it, I'm finished." [Brushes her hands.] I don't have anything to do. But it's much more than that. It's not only that we are facilitating the language, but um, that you see what others cannot see. (Carolina)*

As shown above, however, defining the *niche* in terms of inequity only works when inequity is attached to the individuals who experience the barrier. It was necessary for the middle women to define the people they support through a discourse that explains minoritized (im)migrants' struggles through their *cultural* (and linguistic) *differences*. In a parallel way, the middle women are called upon to define their own *unique* contribution in terms of *cultural* insight. The *niche* requires the middle woman's *cultural* uniqueness – her *cultural identity* is value-able to the human service system. As Siobhan put it, organizations seem to "know that we have lots of insight." This has resulted in "courtship" from some government organizations and research projects. Indeed, as shown in the previous section, it is this courtship that allows for carving out a *niche*. In carving out a *niche* through which particular barriers *are* recognized, the middle women have evolved from an *ad hoc* resource that noticed something amiss in the early 1990s to the *Middle Woman* – constituted as a particular subject. She is "an extension of the system" (Siobhan).

Further, the discursive production of the *Middle Woman* also reinforces and reproduces the middle women's perpetual immigrant



status (see Bannerji, 2000; Ng, 1981, 1986; Thobani, 1999, 2000). And by exploiting their relationships to "their [cultural] communities," it both sustains the notion of the cultural community as *natural*, and uses these relationships for the system's purposes.

Perhaps the establishment of the GMCNO in 1998 can be seen as a milestone in registering the discursive production of the *niche* and the *Middle Woman*. Certainly it was a point of transition from the *ad hoc* emergence and performance of middle women to a more organized and [legitimately] *recognize-able* entity. Indeed, middle women's decision to establish an organization in 1998 rather than to either remain an *ad hoc* group of emergent support people or become part of any main stream organization (such as a health region) was a pivotal moment for them. They reasoned that remaining outside the main stream would allow them to preserve their autonomy to respond to the wide range of issues that minoritized (im)migrants experience, and to (continue to) advocate across sectors on behalf of the individuals, families and communities they support (Personal communications, middle woman, 1995 to 1998).

And it is true that the GMCNO has been able to maintain a high degree of autonomy with regard to the range of issues it addresses and the principles that guide its work. The middle women's decision to establish themselves as a GMCNO was shaped in part by a desire to model a way of working that itself addresses inequity. Many of the middle women themselves experienced first-hand lack of recognition of their education, experience and foreign credentials (for example, in library science, computer programming, graphic design, nursing, medicine, law, education). This contributed to their becoming middle women in the first place (Researcher, 2003).

Having multifaceted goals means that the GMCNO navigates a delicate balance among providing support, generating enough income to provide the middle women with a living wage, and advocating for system change (Personal communication, middle woman, December 2005; Researcher, 2003). One implication of these asymmetrical relations of

power is that because of a perpetual absence of secure funding, the GMCNO carries out a considerable amount of its work with no remuneration (GMCNO document, n.d.c). This practice sometimes compromises its ability to provide a living wage.<sup>60</sup> Second, then, the *Middle Woman* has become one component of the underemployed, excess employment, and "volunteer" labour pool, in part because it is difficult to "say no" in "their" communities. In these ways, both the *niche* and the *Middle Woman* have been discursively produced as part of the Governments' and human service systems' apparatus.

As such, although the emergence of middle women coincided with the increasing dominance of neo-liberalism in the early 1990s, as discussed earlier, their emergence represents both a particular contemporary moment and a continuity with past articulations of exploitative gendered power relations (see Ghorayshi, 2002, for example). Organizing among minoritized (im)migrant women to resist inequitable conditions and circumstances in Canada is not new, and these efforts are always constrained (Das Gupta, 2007, 2009; Dua, 2007; Lee, 1987; Ng, 1988). This suggests that constraint does not put an end to renewed efforts. Continuity of inequities, sometimes reformulated, gives rise to new forms and avenues of resistance, such as the emergence of ad hoc advocates for minoritized (im)migrants' health and well-being.

Although the *niche* and the *Middle Woman* are discursively produced in ways that constrain the possibilities for catalyzing social change to redress inequities, the middle women also reframe the *niche* as a window of opportunity. This provides an instance of arguments for a notion of agency that is not defined as entirely voluntary (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). Further, it instantiates the tension between structural determinism and constrained efforts to transform structures through

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<sup>60</sup> In 2004-2005, for example, middle women provided support to 55 families with disabled children, 94 seniors, 400 individuals with mental health issues, and 230 school-aged children and youth on a voluntary (unpaid) basis (GMCNO document, 2005). More recent data were not available.

appropriations of dominant discourses – that is, to transform the discourse itself. It takes up Foucault's notion of power as entirely relational – that is, as enacted – "action upon action" (Foucault, 2003b, p. 137). It is at the same time an exemplar of the disciplining effects of discourse – that is, the way in which people come to discipline themselves (Foucault, 2003b).

It was by virtue of carving out the *niche* that the middle women found a window of opportunity through which to draw attention to the need for a refugee health centre.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, the *niche invites* cultural competence training. Defining the problem that is to be addressed through the *niche* in terms of *cultural* difference and the *Middle Woman* in terms of her *cultural* insight – her unique knowledge of cultures, she is well-placed to offer *cultural* training to the system. Besides, as Siobhan pointed out, it helps the GMCNO's profile, and "systems love training."

*It sure helps us raise our profile. Because systems love training. Um, and our colleagues who are practitioners love to think that they could put this on their, not resumes, but they love it if it gives them more credits, and so there are practical reasons. (Siobhan5)*

The middle women see how the system's definitions and parameters *create* barriers to their own abilities to effectively support the people with whom they work and especially to create innovative solutions.

*Formal systems have their way of doing things. Being community-based [rather than system-based] could have opened up possibilities. (Siobhan1)*

*And if the strategy we try works, it's actually a strategy that is universally valid. Wouldn't be great if we can extend it to [everyone]? (Siobhan6)*

They nevertheless take heart in what they perceive to be incremental improvements in human services' responsiveness to minoritized (im)migrants during the past 15 years. They noted some increased interest on the part of human service organizations and service providers in what the *Middle Woman* can offer. They saw this interest as a sign of recognition of their role. Further, at times they see the *niche* as a

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<sup>61</sup> The refugee health centre now exists. Its form and usefulness are also constrained, through the articulation of these and other discourses.

vehicle for the *Middle Woman* to work towards becoming credentialed (recall their start as women with childbirth educator certificates). This suggests yet another articulation of discourse moments – disciplinarity and professionalism, which, although important, I do not examine further.

If there has been incremental change, to what can it be attributed? The middle women's accounts point to two main influences. First, the middle women attributed human service systems' current interest in improving responsiveness to (im)migrants to the reality of "increasing diversity." The increase in "diversity" in the locale was shaped in part by secondary migration of (im)migrants from other parts of the country, attracted by or recruited into the economic boom during the mid-2000s. Given the region's need to attract and retain "diverse" immigrants to feed its economy, the middle women suggested that organizations (now) have no choice but to respond.

*[The agencies] have to [respond]. They have been in a way, forced to change, because the diversity of the population, you know, the community is changing. The face of, you know, this community in Canada is changing, and they are starting to realize that if they don't really pay attention to that, they are out of the race because, you know, they are not going to be responsive to whatever is going there. ... My perception is that, all of us and everybody started talking about diversity, you know, everywhere you go. It doesn't matter what kind of a service they provide. Before, yeah well, people talked about diversity, you know. Diversity in the workplace, and this and that. But, it was more of a lip service, right? ... They are more aware, you know, that they need to provide better service, because I don't know if they had a lot of complaints, or because they somehow know that what they are doing, for some reason, is not working. (Carolina)*

*But now that the many of them [immigrants] are coming, and it's in their [service providers'] face, they don't have a choice but to change. (Lisa2)*

A second factor to which the middle woman attributed the current interest in responsiveness was government concern about the "health of the public" because of (im)migrants bringing in communicable diseases.

*[If] I remember correctly, the local health department was the one who got the refugee health centre off and running, because they were informed by [provincial health services] that the Karen community, the families are arriving, and there were concerns around TB and, in fact, that's where everybody got together within [the provincial department], to say, "What can we do to protect the population?" So, without this situation, I don't think the health centre would have gotten off so quickly. ... It was because*

*[the province] called public health together in different regions about the TB, potential TB, right, and therefore the health team were oriented to all the potential illnesses that might be coming, TB, Hep B, right? (Siobhan in Than1)*

It is significant that, as the middle women perceived it, human services have framed their need for action in terms of threats to "the public" – transmission of TB, HIV and other infectious diseases coming from "elsewhere" – and concerns about the economy. They have not articulated a need to change in terms of concern for the circumstances and conditions of (im)migrants or recognition of inequities.

As Carolina and I talked at a cultural competence workshop in which she participated, she hinted at something else at work. As she pointed out, "diversity" is not new. It is a certain *kind* of diversity that has caught the eye – human services systems' interest in diversity has arrived with increasing numbers of non-white (im)migrants.

Despite the skepticism born of their insights, the middle women nonetheless pointed to evidence of the GMCNO's increasing workload as recognition on the part of service providers and organizations that perhaps they have been remiss in the past, perhaps they are not able to do a good job alone. And the middle women put feathers in their own caps, as they attributed some of this recognition to the success of their own efforts.

*I think it's more education right now. Um, more information about immigrant and refugee communities to the system, that we didn't have before, and I think [we] play a big role in that. (Sary)*

### **Cultural competence training**

As suggested above, the *niche* invites *cultural* resources. In the past several years, the GMCNO has delivered dedicated cultural competency workshops in response to requests from agency managers, including those in government. Through participant-observation in preparatory meetings and at cultural competency workshops, I had the opportunity to glean what human service agencies and systems wanted from the workshops, and how they navigate the *niche*. In general, I observed that what they

wanted was consistent with their reasons for calling a middle woman (as discussed in the earlier section), although what they wanted also depended on the leadership in the agency, and the level and positions of agency staff involved. Staff wanted cultural information, including overviews of cultures and typical practices, help with assessment processes and tips on how to be culturally sensitive (for example, questions to ask and not to ask (im)migrants), and they wanted to know when to call a middle woman. But they also wanted feedback on what people in the communities think of the workers in their agencies (Cultural Competence Fieldnotes Summary). As Lenore put it in a planning session, "They want to change, but they don't know how" (Fieldnotes Excerpt, April 15, 2008). Clearly these ways of framing the need for workshops fit the boundaries of the *niche* perfectly.

I explicitly discussed cultural competency training, including its possible pitfalls, with eight of the middle women. I suggested the risks of stereotyping, asked them to reflect on what cultural competency training can and cannot accomplish in addressing the issues they had articulated, and puzzled about the relationship between cultural competency and racialized services and systems. (I take up the issues of racism and racialization in Part III of the thesis.) Examples of how I framed my introductions to two of these explorations are shown below.

I'm interested in that whole idea of cultural competence. What that does. What it doesn't do. ... And um, as I told you before, one of the reasons I was particularly interested in speaking with you was because what I heard you saying in response to the questions of the small groups you were in, in that workshop, was representing, Muslims and Arabs, I think, as very diverse. And so you really, I thought, shied away from making any kind of stereotypical generalizations. And I was really interested in that. ... I guess one of the things that I kinda picked up on in that workshop ... was the desire on the part, or almost the need on the part of the service providers, to pinpoint people. And to kinda be told, you know, what they should do, and what they shouldn't do, and this need to really home in on the practices, you know? And, that was kind of one of the things that I thought you almost contested a little in your discussion with them. Was to say, "Well, it's not all one thing, you know. We're a lot of different kinds of people in this group." So, what do you think can, and can't maybe, be achieved by such workshops? (Ruth in interview with Natalie)

And you say that there's, you think there's less racism now than before, and that some of that is because there's an increased awareness. There's been education and so on. I guess I'm wondering, you know, you've been involved in some cultural competency work. ... So, I guess the question arises for me as I come as an outsider to it, looking in, how is it that we frame the issues that people are facing as cultural issues? ... As opposed to racist issues? So, we don't talk very much with service systems about racism. I don't observe that happening very much, if at all. Um, in cultural competency workshops that I've observed, that's really hardly, really never talked about. ... But culture is talked about, and one of the sort of criticisms in the literature of cultural competency is that it teaches, or has the potential to teach, service providers the stereotypes of cultures, that then can be reproduced and be problematic. ... So, what I'm curious about, from your point of view, is what do you think cultural competency training can and cannot do? (Ruth in interview with Sary)

Siobhan conceptualized the GMCNO's involvement in cultural competency training as virtually entirely *strategic* – to keep the door open, or to open the door by raising the GMCNO's profile and building its credibility.

*You know, honestly, ... we've been using, I'm gonna underline the word using, cultural competency training for certain purposes. The training itself is not going to change practice. It's just a way to open the door for us to work with other colleagues. And the only time we see change in practice is actually we had the opportunity to work side by side, that we had the opportunity to see how at least at a micro level, things can change, because we were working together. Um, one single training session is not going to change practice. It might get people interested. It might you know, so, so, this whole notion of conventional training has limited limited impact. It does open doors for us. To be viewed as credible. (Siobhan5)*

But most of the middle women I interviewed also suggested that there is value in sharing information about different cultures with service providers and organizations. For example, they said, cultural profiles provide an overview or introduction to the "traits" or what is "typical" in people's cultures, contexts or atmospheres, which can serve as a background in understanding where people are coming from. As I suggested in Chapter 4, the middle women tended to use culture, context and society interchangeably.

*Cultural profiles, for me, give that little bit of a snippet, or a grounding of what that culture is supposed to, does look like. Just this morning, I was trying to figure out [which middle woman] to [refer] a Sierra Leonean family to, and I thought, you know, I don't even know what language they speak in*

*Sierra Leone. I don't know whether it's French, or what they speak there. So I think I'll look it up. And for me, what it did was make me be aware of the different languages that they may speak in Sierra Leone. Made me kind of understand that it was predominantly rural, right. So some of the understanding of, sort of, what is the country like. ... So it helps to give me some context. (Hannah)*

*In my personal view, there are underlying traits, which are more possible in some cultures than in others. I know for myself that, because I'm also in a marriage between two countries, um, I know that there are traits and I think things you grow up with, which are more likely in one nation than the other. And I do see a value in knowing about that. ... But so you need to first acknowledge what it is. And it is a different conditioning, like a Chinese, a Taiwanese, a German, you know, and that doesn't mean that each family has that, but there's an atmosphere there. (Trina)*

*What it means to me, cultural competence is understanding where this person is coming from. Knowing what is right or wrong for them, knowing what these people's values are, and accommodating. That's what cultural competence means for me. ... Culturally competent [means] they understand the reason why we [middle women] are there [as support], um, you know. And they also appreciate our services, and acknowledge that. (Shirko)*

I found Hannah's use of the term "snippet" interesting, and it perhaps aptly describes what some of the other middle women also expressed. While they highlighted the idea of "commonalities" that characterize cultures, societies and religions, they emphasized that such characterizations are useful only if they *open up* questions.

Characterizations are places to work *from*, not *to*.

*The cultural competence I always say is not an end. It's a process. You cannot learn it in one session. What we are doing here, is what we already know. Putting it in some kind of framework you can work from. ... Keep that in mind when you are talking to a person. And you, when you approach a person, you can say, "That's what I have read. That's what somebody told me about, in this culture, do you follow that? Is it true for you too?" Like you know, to, not to place that person in that box. (Neda)*

*We try and also tell them to, to, you know, when we are talking about some of the cultures and their differences, is um, is that to have an open mind. You know, to be able to ask questions, to be able to have something, a little bit of a background, but then still be able to ask questions, because everybody is different. The same way as in Canada. (Sharadi)*

The tendency to pinpoint, Trina suggested, is precisely the problem with the system – it operates within a worldview that is reductionist. To her, what is important is what people *do* with the snippets.



*To know this as my background so that I can ask questions. But not as a knowledge that "this is what it is." ... So, I, I wouldn't have a problem with having even the [middle women] stereotype, because in some ways some of this information needs to be known. Um, the problem is that the system takes it as a knowledge instead of as an atmosphere. (Trina)*

Through the lenses of these middle women, commonalities are problematic when they become "knowledge." If service providers want knowledge – knowledge for *doing*, they close off the exploration that comes through opening up questions. If, on the other hand, typicalities are seen as *contingent*, they can be useful. Being familiar with the typicalities can increase appreciation for the challenges of transition to new places, awareness and openness to differences and, ultimately, open up new ways of working.

*And then, for me, it helps me appreciate the challenges, for lack of a better word, ... of how difficult this transition is, and yet we all seem to think that people should embrace it, and embrace Canada. (Hannah)*

*Teaching cultural sensitivity is going to basically help people be more aware of behaviour or um, ways of being, of people from other cultures. ... As a way of also creating, by getting the knowledge, will help people who don't have that cultural competence to have opportunities to open themselves a little more to our communities that they were never really exposed to, trying to help people to understand um, how other cultures behave, what are the needs for those people to, help Canadians to understand that we are different, and if we are, if you guys don't understand how we are, or what we are, or what we need, or how we expecting things from you, it's very difficult for us to um, communicate with you. (Sary)*

The middle women also saw cultural competency training as an opportunity to give messages and to model intercultural dialogue as a process for *mutual* learning. First, the GMCNO always profiles individuals from a range of minoritized (im)migrant communities<sup>62</sup> who are well positioned to speak to and address challenges and issues facing people in their communities. Second, they model inter-cultural dialogue as a process for mutual learning.

Siobhan highlighted the importance of inserting community members [including middle women] into the workshop process, as a beginning opportunity for community leaders to be heard directly.

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<sup>62</sup> They sometimes also include Aboriginal presenters in these workshops.

She commented, "When you sit with a person from another culture and community, it tests the comfort level of the individual (staff), at all levels." (Fieldnotes Excerpt, March 11, 2008)

In planning workshops, I observed the middle women working to balance meeting main stream organizations' requests with the GMCNO's goals.

Lenore suggests that the purpose of the workshop with [agency] is to be "responsive to their needs but it is also strategic to achieve the goals of the GMCNO." Specifically, "They cannot reach the communities without us, can they? She invited input on how the workshop should unfold. (Fieldnotes Excerpt, April 15, 2008).

Lenore invited the presenters to share examples of what needed to be changed in the organization, and to consider these in light of what could be done in the workshop.

Lenore said, "It's good to give information, but also [agency] staff want to know "how to" ask some kinds of questions – for example: 'How did you come to Canada?' can be asked in many different ways. How it will be received could vary depending on the tone, intonation, facial expression. These all make a difference." (Fieldnotes Excerpt, April 15, 2008)

Perhaps the most prevalent message was that *all* groups are dynamic. As Natalie put it, "I just find that people are different, religion or not. Canadian or not. Lebanese or not. Muslim or not. People, every household, has a different way of operating and running the show." The middle women explained their own approaches to getting this message across, frequently alluding to qualifying commonalities by reference to diversity.

*Every time I have ever done a cultural workshop, I always say that whatever is said, it does not apply to everybody who is South Asian. Because there will be some people who are very highly educated, they've got jobs in their own fields. There are some who are getting it like that. There are some, on the other side, there are really happy families. So everybody's not at discord, you know. So every stuff that we are talking about, it doesn't mean that everybody is having all these problems. And that's not the case. So um, there's always a continuum. ... But definitely it doesn't apply to everybody. And like, you know, we already saying that there are so many different countries that fall into that South Asian, you know, the name, the nomenclature that we have given, you know, the religions, the cultures, the histories, the languages, they're all different. You know, there are more different, you know, than uh even in the same country uh than we would have between Canada and America which are two different countries. But*

*there are certain things that are, you know, that have common threads, that run. But it doesn't mean that it applies to everybody there. (Sharadi)*

*We always use the disclaimer of saying that this is just to build the foundation for better understanding of the culture, when we talk about, you know, we do use some norms. And those norms are based on commonalities of the identified group, right? Because they are placed in that group, because they share the language, the food, and things like that. So those things are solid there. And within cultures, there are subcultures, and within subcultures there are individuals. We make a point of saying, you know, and to envision that that these groups are made historically, based on commonalities. And normally, the strong commonalities are always taken from the language and the culture and ethnicity of, you know, that's how it has evolved. ... It depends where the person is living. You know, me living in Canada will be different than my sister living in Pakistan, right? That has an impact. And also each individual is different. (Neda)*

Other messages that the women felt were important to get across were that (im)migrants had a life before they came to Canada, that they have value as people and that they want to be treated as if they know something.

*Because we think they don't have a life before. I mean I do think some people think that. ... I think, that what it does in the context of the cultural competency workshop is to say, "People have value, and they've got lots of worth to offer." (Hannah)*

*I just think that by inviting us to these workshops, the main thing that they should understand is, a lot of these immigrants who come to Canada, I just wish I could say right off the bat, explain that all these immigrants that are labeled as not knowing anything, and labeled as not speaking any English, and spoken to, and a lot of these people say, you know, the way they speak to us, "it's kind of like they don't know anything." (Natalie)*

These efforts suggest that the middle women try to stretch the boundaries of the *niche* beyond a sole focus on *cultural* characteristics. (I return to other ways in which the middle women navigate the space they occupy in Chapter 9.) But in the workshops, I observed an inescapable tension and contradiction, as the middle women worked at the gap-*niche* nexus. First, I observed that there was a determined effort to present an overview of minoritized (im)migrants' conditions and circumstances along the lines of how they are elaborated in Chapters 4 and 5. For example, Lenore, the workshop leader, focused primarily on pre- and post-migration conditions and circumstances, and resulting vulnerabilities. She presented a short historical overview of migration to Canada, especially

contemporary patterns and the impetus behind them. She listed problems that minoritized (im)migrants experience, including racism and discrimination, and elaborated barriers and gaps. She also introduced the *Middle Woman* as a vehicle for addressing "inequitable access to services." (I did not hear any subsequent mention or discussion of racism and discrimination or inequity in the workshops I observed, and I return to this in Chapter 9).

In these workshops, the middle women participated both in reproducing minoritized (im)migrants' cultures and in contesting their reproduction. The workshop format normally used short round-table dialogues between agency staff and middle women (and in some cases, other community leaders), which the middle women called "cultural encounters" (Fieldnotes Excerpt, February 26, 2008). In addition, the guidelines that the presenters used for sharing during their cultural encounters with agency staff focused on conventional anthropological dimensions of culture (Ortner, 2006) – namely, family structure, roles and relationships, child rearing practices, help-seeking behaviours, and communication styles (Fieldnotes Coding Summary, Cultural competence observations, January 2009).

In one workshop,<sup>63</sup> I noticed that the different middle women handled the use of guidelines in very different ways. For example, the following excerpt highlights the different ways in which two Muslim middle women, who work with (im)migrants from different regions of the world, handled their cultural encounters.

[One middle woman], for example, I noticed, really introduced her culture/religion on a continuum. She made it very clear that there is considerable diversity within people in her culture/religion. Indeed she also made it clear that there is more than one culture and more than one religion in this group that is clumped together.

On the other hand, I noticed that [another middle woman] represented her culture/religion in somewhat more dogmatic terms.

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<sup>63</sup> This workshop was early in my research and preceded the preparatory meeting I discussed earlier.

While she did indicate that there were different religions within this group, she indicated that across their religions, and indeed across the countries in which these religions are practiced, that cultural practices are the same. I noticed that she represented a culture as hierarchical, patriarchal and even abusive – indicating that the abuse was an accepted cultural practice designed to keep a family together and functioning. (Fieldnotes Excerpt, February 26, 2008)

In another workshop, I observed that the presenters brought forward many of the same points as during the preparatory meeting described earlier. But they "lost" their anger, for the most part, in the re-telling (Fieldnotes, April 16, 2008). Some also countered agency staff's inclinations to seek "cultural" content, emphasizing that there are many different ways of practicing in their cultures – "just as in Canada."

In one workshop, there was little focus on cultural practices on the part of either managers or presenters. I observed that the managers seemed intentional about connecting the learning from the workshop directly to their work.<sup>64</sup> I was struck by the managers' lack of knowledge of the pre- and post-migration conditions and circumstances of (im)migrants they serve. Most did not know that government-sponsored refugees must repay the travel loan that got them to Canada. Across all the workshops, I observed that the staff found "refugee stories" compelling. In some instances, these stories fit with staff experiences of their caseloads, as in the case of child welfare and youth workers. Agency staff began to make connections between what they had heard and how they work. At times, they also identified problems with their practices. In another workshop, however, it seemed that consciously or unconsciously agency staff were interested in the "cultural" content and the middle women responded to this interest (Fieldnotes Coding Summary Excerpt, Cultural competence observations, January 2009).

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<sup>64</sup> I did not document details of service providers "side" of the cultural encounters as I was documenting the involvement of the middle women and the GMCNO rather than the agency staff. My research proposal did not include service providers. It was unwieldy to try to get informed consent from all participants in workshops or group gatherings. I therefore documented the GMCNO and middle people in detail, and only contextual descriptions of the setting.

Often service providers gravitated to wanting to know what is “common” – what are considered to be “dominant” practices of the group. “Exceptions” were considered to be just that – exceptions. They weren't picked out as being “not sameness” (Fieldnotes Excerpt, February 26, 2008). They wanted specific information about particular groups, to help them decide what to *do*. In Natalie's case, the information service providers wanted was about religion – “Because those are the tough ones.” But I heard service providers ask similar pinpointing questions of middle women who work with Spanish-speakers, Africans and Filipinos. Natalie confirmed my observation during our interview, explaining that sometimes it's just easier to tell people the commonalities than to try to talk about the differences.

*They're interested from the religious point of view, I think. Because those are the tough ones. Like, you guys believe this, do this, do that. Do we shake hands? Do we not? When they come in to do, you know when they do immunization?... We're very diverse. And they wanted to pinpoint. So I'll say they're very different. "Okay, well, how? Because technically you're all the same." So, to try to explain to them, it becomes very messy. It feels like I need to give you religion 101 first. Right? In order for you to kind of understand everything, I'll be much longer than a 20 minute round table discussion. So I just would rather just say, "We're all very different. And our religion has about ten different kinds of divisions, or beliefs, I should say. Ten different ones." And to explain how each one is different, and each one believes in a different thing, I probably wouldn't even know myself. I just know that we're very different. And to go into people's homes, and I do think that Canadians are the same way too. (Natalie)*

As can be seen in this section, it is a constant struggle to transform the discourse that is central to producing the *niche*. Cultural competency training, which is of course a discursively produced strategy, works within the “behavioural imperatives” of multiculturalism (Bannerji, 2000). It is a technical response to a structural problem (Razack, 1998). It reproduces the discourse that discursively produces the *niche*, the *Middle Women*, and minoritized (im)migrants through their *cultural* uniqueness.

A “one-size-fits-all” approach, with its silos and rigidities, produces the gaps between services, systems and sectors, which gives rise to the persistent emergence of middle women. Despite recognition in some sectors as “culturally relevant” resources to specific programs, much of the

Middle Woman's work remains largely beyond the scope of what the system sees (and funds).

*The [middle women] are paraprofessionals, they're not they're not treated in the same way. ... And, then, uh, "Is she a professional? And why would uh why would I give her all this information?" We have to make a case for them, you know. ... (Lenore1)*

For this reason, some middle women described the GMCNO's interfaces with other organizations as "oppressive." From the beginning, Siobhan and Lenore commented that the GMCNO "feels oppressed" by particular organizations and as a partner in some initiatives. For them, oppression means doing good work that remains unrecognized, lack of infrastructure and technical support to meet accountability requirements of contractors, and imposition of main stream normative standards on work that differs from the main stream. They perceived that better resourced organizations have more *visibility* and a greater voice at the table. They noted power imbalances between legitimized organizations that provide funding and receive government funding for resettlement work and the smaller organizations that are filling the gaps left behind.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I made visible the complex way in which power circulates through ongoing mobilization of now taken-for-granted discourses. First, I argued that the *niche* is a discursive effect of a dominant discourse of cultural difference, and that although its boundaries are elastic, the extent to which they can be stretched is constrained. Second, I argued, because a *niche* is a particular place, it requires defining what makes it unique. Minoritized (im)migrants' are produced as essentially cultural and too complex. Third, I argued, the *Middle Woman* is similarly produced as perpetually immigrant. I described the production-reproduction relations as a symbiotic one. In some ways, this is what makes it difficult to see.

Moreover, this symbiotic relationship also masks what falls outside the *niche* – the outstanding barriers and gaps that do not fit. Or the ways in

which this symbiotic relationship is made possible by exploitation. Or how the middle women contribute to the volunteer labour pool in the province. Like food banks and other community resources that were initially meant as stop-gap measures, the number of middle women has grown, as the issues, barriers and gaps persist.

But I set out to examine the race/culture divide in human services. So, how is it that in all the discussion and framing of barriers and gaps, of exclusions and inequities, of discursive production and reproduction, there has been virtually no mention of race, racism and racialization even as the participants comprise a group of racially minoritized (im)migrant women? An examination of the absence of race is the focus of Part III.



## PART III

### Chapter 7. An absence of race?

Part III explicitly focuses on the social relations through which race and racism are rendered absent. If, as I argued through Part II, a cultural (and linguistic) *niche* and the *Middle Woman* are discursively produced effects of the articulation of dominant discourses, Part III focuses on the silencing of race and racism.

In Chapter 7 I scrutinize the middle women's narratives, revealing many traces of race-thinking embedded in their elaborations of the need for the Middle Woman. Furthermore, explicitly asking whether and how race/racism is implicated in their work elicited an outpouring of examples from the middle women, as they detailed routine racist interfaces with human service providers, and affirmed how racialization is systematized.

But in Chapter 8, I reexamine the emergent pervasiveness of race and racism in minoritized (im)migrants' experiences of Chapter 7, in light of my realization that the middle women have complex relationships to "back home" and "in Canada," and therefore also to the ways in which they interpret and experience race and racism in Canada. Here, I extend my argument from Chapter 4 that post-migration inequities are layered over pre-migration inequities to sustain and exacerbate, rather than alleviate, their vulnerabilities. Here, I suggest that how the middle women experience and express whether and how race and racism are implicated in their work is also a function of the layering of post-migration conditions over pre-migration conditions. The ways in which the middle women are differentially situated in relation to their birth and diasporic countries are palpable in their explications of race and racism here. This analysis makes clear how what I initially conceived as *a* vantage point – that of the middle women – is multiple vantage points. But it also makes clear how minoritized (im)migrant women's possibilities of speaking about race and racism are constrained by dominant discourses of democracy, tolerance and equality.

As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, participants tended to talk in terms of the urgent and immediate challenges facing (im)migrants as they are shaped in part by ascribed (im)migration status. The middle women's system(ic) analyses attributed these challenges to a range of structural factors. In this chapter, I focus on the ways in which race/racism surfaced in my talks with middle women, examining my conversations with the middle women further for whether race/ism is implicated in their work and, if so, how. My analyses reveal that at times the middle women participated in rendering racism invisible. Yet at the same time and even in the same breath, they often inadvertently exposed deeply embedded taken-for-granted racial relations. With few exceptions, it was only when I explicitly raised the question of racism that it became a direct focus of conversation during the interviews. The absence of race talk was nevertheless remarkable because the explicit focus of my research was racism in human services. I had framed my research in terms of the tension between *race* and *culture* – the race/culture divide, an invitation to talk about it.

Once the conversation did open up, two layers of explicit talk about racism were evident. First, the middle women referenced many examples of difference-making practices on the part of individual service providers, articulated in particular moments. Second, their general descriptions of institutional policies and practices as siloed and rigid (in Chapter 5) shifted to "absolutely one-way." Here, the middle women said human services are designed for people who are Canadian-born, white, and speak English.

### **Three Ds revisited: Free to do what you want?**

In Chapter 4, I identified minoritized (im)migrants' fear, distrust, and lack of confidence, along with negative experiences with human services, as barriers that can result in their reluctance and even refusal to use existing services. In this section, I extend that discussion.

Variations on the notion of "the three Ds" of multiculturalism are now familiar (e.g., Bannerji, 2000; Srivastava, 2007). They refer to how diversity is often recognized and celebrated through displays of diet, dress, and dialect<sup>65</sup> (see, for example, Frank & MacLeod, 2005; Frank & Taylor, 2006; Jiwani, 1997). Often the mainstays of recognized "diversity" in schools, workplaces, city festivals and the like, the three Ds re-present others' cultural practices and symbols in pleasing and fun ways. Such "learning(s)" about others' cultures are non-threatening (to the learners) and therefore seemingly benign. However, according to these representations, first, only certain (non-dominant) groups have cultures, and second, "these 'cultures' are framed as being traditional, backward, and oppressive, but yet colourful and exotic" (Jiwani, 1997, P7). As such, cultures are ascribed "positive and negative traits," where "what is deemed "positive" is based on what is regarded as being acceptable because they are non-threatening to the dominant culture" – "food, clothing, music, dance, and literature" (Jiwani, 1997, P7). "In *small doses*, they can be appreciated and controlled" (P8, emphasis in original). However, in *large doses*, otherwise interesting cultural traits "are taken as signs of the lack of assimilation and integration into the dominant mainstream" (P8) – maintenance of traditional ways (e.g., arranged marriages) are deemed negative as they suggest tendencies to violate social norms (P7). This emphasis on others' cultural traits, spawned by official multiculturalism's emphasis on celebrated diversity, serves to "reduce the problem of social justice into questions of curry and turban" (Bannerji, 2000, p. 38).

Here, based on the participants' accounts, I draw attention to "the three Ds," but in quite other ways. The middle women described how, for their own families and those with whom they work, "keeping" cultural practices often means practicing privately rather than publicly, or keeping to themselves.

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<sup>65</sup> Sometimes "four Ds" when dance is included, and "five Ds" when drumming is included. I have chosen to draw on "three Ds" because they suit my purposes here.

*So they came here to Canada. Nobody really cares what you do. You can do whatever you want in the privacy of your own home. Nobody knows. You're not in a village. You're in a city. Let alone a Muslim city, at that. So you're free to do anything you want, so the Muslim religion was put on the back burner. "We'll get to you later. We're kinda busy trying to make money," and sending money back home to support the family, so they didn't really care if they didn't follow. ...*

*When my family first came to Canada, before I was born, there was probably about 15 families, Muslim families, Arab families, that they mingled with. Everybody knew each other, there was a very small number, and way back we're talking 30, 40 years ago, before my family came here. So, the number of Arabs were very small. But anybody who at that time wore a scarf to practice her religion was really strange, because they didn't do that 40 years ago. Good enough, you know, you always did your hair, and the population in Edmonton was very small, so everybody pretty much looked the same. And my mom never practiced, nobody did. They just did whatever Canadians did. They didn't practice their religion visibly, they didn't practice it at home, because you just don't do that in Canada. Religion doesn't have to exist here. (Natalie)*

*I'm sure that is the older [generation]. They have no idea about Canadian culture. Nobody know about Canadian culture, cause they don't learn about it. They don't even read about it. Nobody shared with them. So all we do is learning Vietnamese, and how to keep it the same way. And then some of the group has challenged it later on. Like I would say, five or 10 years later, where the parents are so strictly maintain their values and culture, and not expose to the Western Canadian. (Thuy)*

Natalie and Thuy implied that (im)migrants might try to stay relatively invisible, or hide practices that would draw attention to them. But there is ambiguity in the excerpt from Natalie's interview. Being in Canada can shape a particular relationship to religious and cultural practices – the freedom to practice or not because "religion doesn't have to exist here," the need to not practice "visibly," or the need to focus on what's necessary for survival. Later in the interview, Natalie's meaning became less ambiguous as she gave details about her perceptions of the change over the time in acceptance of girls and women wearing *hijab* in public. As she put it, 15 years ago, "it was almost more of like a dream for you to practice religion and have a life. It was too hard." So women didn't wear *hijab* if they wanted to "have a life." "Fast-forward 15 years. ... Now, any store you go to, there is definitely one girl wearing *hijab* that's employed by them."

Natalie's and Thuy's comments suggest that minoritized (im)migrants try to just "do what Canadians do" *and also* work to keep their cultures "the same way." The middle women often described how (im)migrants seek places "where they can find themselves comfortable" when they aren't having to live "like Canadians."

*I think, everybody is going to the temple. Temple is the main, they consider temple is where they can find uh, some Vietnamese in their daily life. Like after work. Sunday, at the end of the week. They come to temple. That's where they can find themselves comfortable. Like with my own people. That's how. And I think that's how I felt too, because on Sunday, I just had to go to temple. (Thuy)*

"Celebrations" of diversity, then, allow for rare public displays of, and therefore glimpses into, what (im)migrants of "unfamiliar cultures" may try to hide in order to fit into Canada. Bannerji (2000) suggests that this was precisely the principle underlying official multiculturalism – namely, allowing (im)migrants to "keep" their cultural practices in private while adopting the core (public) principles and values of Canada. The notion of model minority (Yu, 2006), (if it can be applied to any minoritized group, and I suggest that it has evolved in this way), takes on a new meaning under these conditions. Natalie and Thuy's comments suggest that minoritized (im)migrants astutely navigate the social relations that expect them to conform – "to accept prevailing values and beliefs and to acquire living standards and behavioural patterns similar to majority Canadians" (Li, 2003, p. 14). They illustrated that minoritized (im)migrants can give the *appearance* of conformity, at the same time as they contest the conformity through adhering to practices they consider important to them, and that work against assimilation. In Natalie's example, Muslims put religion on the backburner until there were enough people to provide the conditions of acceptance. In Thuy's example, Vietnamese (im)migrants stuck to themselves and tried not to be too visible. There is evidence (im)migrants actively interpret normative expectations to both support assimilative practices and also defend maintenance of traditional (cultural) practices (Pyke, 2000).

The literature points to contradictory implications of (im)migrants seeking comfort in ready-made and welcoming communities for integration into host societies. Ethnocultural communities have been described as a critically important source of social support for newly arrived migrants, one that often results in a strong sense of ethnic cohesion and a sense of belonging (Alba and Nee, 1997; Baker, 1993). On one hand, the literature suggests that the existence of an ethnocultural community assuages the disruptions associated with migration, providing instrumental support, a social support network through which individuals and families can learn the ropes in the new society, and create social capital (Yosso, 2005).

On the other hand, some scholars point to findings that indicate that such welcoming communities can contribute to ghetto formation, and temper the amount and rate of adaptational change. (Im)migrant settlement in the absence of an ethnocultural community often involves significant distress, and hospitalization rates for mental illness among (im)migrants have been found to increase as the size of the ethnic community decreased (Baker, 1993). Moreover, in the absence of an ethnocultural community, the “assimilation forces of the host society have a strong impact” (Baker, 1993, p. 272), and immigrants tend to integrate into mainstream culture rapidly (Alba & Nee, 1997; Rumbaut, 1997). Yet, there is evidence that the more rapid adoption of the dominant language, values and norms may result in delayed adaptational stress. This stress has been attributed to differential rates of acculturation among family members (Baker, 1993), resulting in increased isolation, marital stress, family violence, intergenerational conflict, child welfare involvement, trouble with the law, and high school dropout rates, all issues that surfaced in Chapter 4. Recent literature suggests that racialized residential segregation exists in Canada, but that it is uneven (Hou, 2004; Walks & Bourne, 2006). Although it has sometimes been attributed to a desire on the part of minoritized (im)migrants to keep to themselves (see Li, 2003 for a critique), my research corroborates other research findings that suggest

that exclusion along with poverty and gender inequities are at play (Galabuzi, 2001; Novac, 1999).

### **Sense-ing difference**

The literature discussed above focuses on adaptation *to* the host society. In my research, Aileen echoed some of these findings, reporting that (im)migrants recently arriving as refugees from some countries in Africa, with no predecessors in Canada, are becoming segregated among themselves. She argued that segregation can contribute to extreme isolation and impede some minoritized (im)migrants' use of main stream services, supports and community resources to which they are entitled. On the other hand, my research also suggests that segregation, while it may be in part a choice to connect with others who share a familiar life context and language, is certainly shaped by non-celebratory responses to difference(s). If racially minoritized (im)migrants need to seek spaces in which to feel comfortable, experiences of judgment, labeling and overt racism contribute to it. Lisa spoke to how exclusion can in turn produce a backlash against "Canadians."

*I did a very mini workshop with our community, and I asked, "Which one of you have Canadian friends that has come to your home?" Say, "You know what? I don't trust. Because you might come to see how I eat. You might go and report it to Children's Services." That is so. ... that any Canadian cannot be trusted in your home because we are labeled as weird because we eat, how we parent ... yeah. As how we parent, how we eat, how we do things. Therefore they really take it upon them to really disengage any Canadian from coming to their home. I was, and some of them are nurses, some of them actually work for [the government]. You, you know what I mean? (Lisa2)*

Seen through the middle women's talk, what is seemingly benign or even attractive when displayed in celebrations of diversity, or when chosen (as in the case of eating in ethnic restaurants), blends into judgments and labeling when it comprises everyday realities and practices. The middle women talked, for the most part inadvertently, about how diet, dress and dialect frequently trigger non-celebratory responses – what I came to think of as "sensed" difference(s). In passing comments, not intended to draw attention to problems or to criticize main

stream practices, middle women matter-of-factly implied how "Canadians'" reactions to their foods, appearances and languages mark them as not belonging and not welcome.

### *Ethnic foods, strang(er) appearances, and English sounds*

As they talked about issues that family members raise in small group gatherings nominally organized for perinatal support, middle women cited examples of "Canadians'" responses to the smells of their foods, from lunches brought to workplaces to food brought to patients in hospital.

*Somebody [a family member] will bring up, "what about food? Um, you know, we, we have, we have half an hour [lunch break], and when we heat up the stuff, and, and Canadian people say it stinks. So how do you address that?" (Thuy)*

*We can share with the other moms, eh, instead of oh, you go to the hospital, and you bring some salted fish, or, or really smelly, and things like this. (Olivia)*

Thuy and Olivia's comments suggest that such responses are common. This is why Olivia routinely advises the families with whom she works not to bring their "smelly" foods to the hospital.

Middle women also spoke about their own and others' experiences of non-celebratory responses to their (different) appearances. Responses may be spoken, as in Sharadi's example.

*Only the other day, you know, our son who was born and brought up here. And he wears a turban, he has a beard. And says that he goes into boardrooms, and they ask, "Oh, so where did you come from?" And he says, "I was born here." And then they said, "Oh, you speak English very well." He says, "Yeah. I was born here." Like you know, it doesn't go into their heads, just because he looks more different than another person who would have no beard and no turban, or maybe even that question would be asked of them. But any of those guys. This is his home. He doesn't consider India as his home. (Sharadi)*

Or they may be discerned in the unspoken, as illustrated in Sary's internalization of her awful child birth experience. Her perception was that service providers' negative responses to her were a result of her (physical) appearance.

*Trying to get services from someone who looks at me, cause I'm talking about my personal experiences, as somebody different. Somebody, because*



*the language barrier was one thing. But also because they didn't really pay much attention to the suffering, to the pain that I have at that moment, and then I thought nobody really cares. ... I think it was also um, physical appearance. That could be my assumption. Because I never see myself as somebody negative. Or that ugly. That people won't talk to me or anything like that. (Sary)*

Among the examples of the effects of appearance, Natalie's experience stood out. Natalie described herself as "100 percent Canadian," "Canadian Muslim," and born to parents who migrated from Lebanon over 30 years ago. She described how, when she was growing up, she strongly resisted anything that would draw attention to her and her family, objecting when her mother started to "practice visibly" by wearing "a scarf" when Natalie was in high school. As Natalie put it,

*I didn't care for my mom when she wore a scarf when she went out with me. No, because it was still too different for my skin. I didn't like it, um, I figured, like, "Why do you gotta be different? Why?" ... All of a sudden, mom went religious, and we're like, "Oh, what are you doing? No, no no no." You know, we're like, "What are you doing to us?"*

Natalie herself started wearing "a scarf" just six or seven years ago. No one was more surprised than her own mother. Natalie's story is almost like a "natural" experiment – a "different" appearance literally overnight evoked a "different" response.

*Before I wore a scarf, there was no difference at all. I am who I am, and keep in mind that when I had younger kids, people were very, "Oh, these children are so cute. Are they yours? They're so cute." You'll get a lot of that attention, "Oh, my goodness." And people were over the top nice. I would go to the mall just because I wasn't in a good mood, to hear all those nice comments that people had to say. ... So, when I did practice, when I did wear a scarf, my girls were older. And I can tell you the day before wearing a scarf, I still got, "Oh, my god. They're adorable." And then I wore a scarf the next day. So people who would be like [N whispers here], "Oh, my god," they would tell each other [whispers again], "Her children are adorable." But they wouldn't say it to me, because maybe I don't understand English. Because, "You're different," so you're not going to really probably understand if I tell you, "They're cute." Save their breaths. ... So if I look and smile, it's like, "Oh, she heard, so perhaps she understands English. Are those your kids? They're so cute." I'm like, "Ooh," [laughs] you know, so the difference is there. Right?*

*If I were to go into a very expensive store, same as I would have before I wore a scarf, now they don't approach you, "Hi there. Can we help you find anything?" Now it would be a situation where they'll observe first. "What are you here for? Are you going to pick something up? Are you going to go*

*the change room? Do you have any money on you?" Like, "Why really are you here?"*

In an earlier excerpt, Natalie suggested that it was only in the comfort or confidence of numbers – lots of Muslims – that Muslim women began to "practice visibly." And although Natalie observed that this difference is now accepted, one of the mentor-middle woman noted, "with the appearance [in the city] actually of more Muslim families, I start to even see some um, some talk about what's this going to do to our society" (Hannah).

Language as a marker of non-celebratory difference came up in nearly every interview. The knowledge that (im)migrants experience "linguistic" barriers in Canada is commonplace (CIC, 2004; Report, 1993). Language has become naturalized as a taken-for-granted barrier for (im)migrants who speak first languages other than English or French. In human services, translation and interpretation resources have been developed to address this barrier.

Having been involved in evaluating the implementation of an interpreter service during the early 1990s, I was not surprised to hear the middle women name language as a continuing barrier, despite the availability of interpreter services. At the time of the evaluation, language tended to be the most obvious issue to service providers, and a pragmatic one for them. They cannot carry out some parts of their jobs without communication. Moreover, there are legal risks associated with informed consent, compliance, medication use, and other programmatic expectations. Most health service providers involved as evaluation participants tended to see interpretation as a "pure" activity – direct translation from one language to another and back again. Some expressed nervousness about it, and at times were distrustful about what they perceived to be conversations that must be about more than pure translation (Report, 1993).

In this research, the middle women's first languages are the first or second, or sometimes even third language(s) of the populations they

support. They also speak English of course. As mentioned previously, while some middle women also work as interpreters for a local interpreter service, wearing a different hat, in their community work, interpretation occurs as part of their engagement as "middle people," mediating the relations between human service providers and organizations and the people they support. The middle women frequently echoed the significance of linguistic barriers to accessing human services and, more broadly, to participating meaningfully. In this sense, "linguistic barrier" was code for not speaking English, or not speaking and comprehending English with enough proficiency to ensure complete understanding.

The middle women highlighted a need for systematic integration of interpreters into service delivery. They also reported that when organizational policies mandate availability of interpretation services, some organizations have a ceiling on the budget for contracting interpreters. They were critical of a recent practice of some organizations to contract a U.S.-based interpreter service to provide immediate service by telephone, with no face-to-face contact, which does not even allow for the potentially multi-faceted roles of a good interpreter (Hsieh, 2008). According to the middle women, even when (im)migrants do have functional English ability, some service settings, such as medicine, law, education, and children's services, require specialized interpreters because of discipline-specific terminology. Here the middle women hinted that it makes more sense in these types of contexts to involve middle women since they are already involved in the families' lives and can provide continuity of care and follow through on recommendations, a role that interpreters do not play. The middle women experience how language barriers can be implicated in exacerbating problems. For example, language barriers can result in health risks when a family has no way to comprehend medical concerns. Without help with language and contextual understanding, a doctor can tell the family how urgent the situation is, but "they have no way of taking any of that information in. It's just blank" (Natalie).

*So I think the community needs somebody because, first of all, when they go to clinics, and they both [parents] have no English, and this baby needs help immediately, and the doctor's just trying to tell them, "Listen. Your baby has to eat 5 times a day. And you have to give Vitamin D, cause it's winter time and there is no sun. They need this. And you know what? Your baby's not gaining weight. It's way below the chart." They have no way of, taking any of that information. It's just blank. They're just looking at the doctor, saying, "When do we see you again? Two months? We'll weigh the baby? He's living. Bye." That's it. That's all they were gathering. (Natalie)*

Language barriers can also preclude receiving appropriate support when dealing with legal matters and in some circumstances increase women's vulnerabilities.

*One day the guy just slapped the woman in her face. So then she went to the telephone, because somebody told her that in Canada, if the man hits the woman, you have to call the police right away. So, she did. She did call the police. Police came. And then she got uh, a mark on her face. It was red. So they, without even language skills to appropriately communicate with the cops about what happened ... The guy was two weeks in remand centre. Without help. Without a lawyer, without anybody around. And the guy was getting really, really upset. And didn't know what happened, so mentally he was getting really really confused. ... And there is the woman without anything in the house, guilty feelings for what she did with calling the police, and there was not a counselor in between. (Sary)*

Frances, a mentor-middle woman, emphasized that when people are already anxious, upset or frustrated, it is more difficult to communicate in a second or third language.

*As good as her English was, which, I mean it wasn't great, but under stress, she could not ... like she needed to communicate in Farsi. Like she really needed interpreter services, cause she just couldn't think. She was all in a muddle.*

Sary spoke to how the absence of full understanding often results in actions and reactions based on partial truths – the service provider and the person s/he is supporting each pick up a little and draw conclusions based on what they can make sense of.

Olivia pointed to how (im)migrant families' abilities to be meaningfully engaged in their children's education shape their decisions about schooling. Choosing a Chinese-English bilingual school means parents can participate fully, whereas the English-only school reduces their sense of inclusion in the school. As Olivia said, some parents want their children to learn Chinese, but others want to be able to communicate

with the teachers. And they are able to read and understand school newsletters and other communications, which they would otherwise, as she put it, "just throw them in the garbage."

Lisa is often called to women's shelters because she is one of very few community workers in the locale who speaks Eritrean and Ethiopian languages. She is also on the local interpreter service's list of interpreters in these languages. But Lisa argued that translation would never be enough in a women's shelter. She knows there is translation and paperwork to do, but those are tasks to complete in the process of building trust with the woman for the longer-term work that is really needed.

*I go there, first and most, to tell the woman that she can call me if she needs me at any given time. Give her even my phone number because I know how it feels to be alone and to be in that situation. So that's basically, when I go there, that's how my mind is set.*

*So, what I do is, then I basically say to these women, I want to establish a relationship with her. In the sense, "I am not only here to translate, I'm here to help you, IF you are comfortable." ... So, I explain my role and what I do in that community. And kind of leave her with saying, "If there are some certain things you need, in terms of food, and around that, do let me know." So I talk about that, and leave her with that, and leave her with my phone number, and then that's when we start. And so she might phone and say, "The shelter is asking me this. What do you think?" Then we are starting to establish a relationship. If she sees some things that I advocate for her, then she knows I am there for the best interests of her. So, then this is how we establish myself. I go there, knowing that I am not going just to translate. I am going beyond that.*

The significance of language in these excerpts cannot be underestimated. Yet, what I found really striking went beyond the importance of linguistic interpretation in context. The middle women's nuanced explications, conscious and unconscious, offered much deeper insights into the senses in which language is a barrier for many (im)migrants. I highlight four of these senses below.

First, at one end of an imagined continuum, according to the middle women, service providers often judge the inability to speak English as a deficit. This is true even when people are fully literate<sup>66</sup> in

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<sup>66</sup> Able to read and write.

several other languages. Such judgments can have material effects, as when service providers use them as indicators of generalized (in)capacities. As Natalie put it,

*All these immigrants that are labeled as not knowing anything, and labeled as not speaking any English, and spoken to, and a lot of these people say, you know, "the way they speak to us." It's kind of like they don't know anything. Right? Like dumb dumb.*

The frequency of middle women's examples suggests that such generalizations are relatively commonplace. Commenting further on the implications of labeling, Shirko suggested, "the education system is made ready for the people who are born here or know the language." Not only do many (im)migrant youth who came to Canada as refugees not speak English, but in addition many have never been in school before. Schools have these youth "assessed and they go into a special needs program."

*Let's say in schools, when it's a 12 year old that comes to the country, doesn't know the language. Well, they put him in. He goes to the regular classroom, and he would get fed up. Because he doesn't understand what's going on. So what happens for them is this child has been assessed and they go to a special needs program. ... They are labeled, whereby that is not the case. This child does not understand the language. He's never been in a school before.*

When the youth "get fed up," the middle women told me, they drop out of school. Some middle women observed that a sense of hopelessness among the youth has been exacerbated by seeing that despite high levels of university education, their parents have been unable to find related employment or to succeed in Canada. Families who had hoped to provide better futures for their children – whether immigrants or refugees – conclude that there is no future for their children here. Some parents of black African youth have become so concerned about the fall-out, including involvement in drug dealing and violence, they are advocating for government-sponsored initiatives to promote vocational education as a good alternative for their youth. Among Somali families, for example, vocational education has not been valued in the past. Streaming of students into different kinds of programs has been common in Canada

historically,<sup>67</sup> recently along lines such as "academic" versus "trades" programs, and differing levels of academic programming. For me, the context of the Somalis' concern raised the question of why vocational training should be the only alternative available if their youth would otherwise have had the opportunity to have a university education "back home."

When parents don't speak English, they are effectively excluded from meaningful engagement in their children's education, as expressed by Olivia above. But at a second spot along the continuum, judgments of parents' inability to speak English can also mark them as incapable parents. According to Sary, when she tried to mediate the school-related challenges a young girl was facing, she and the girl's teacher disagreed on the nature of the problem. Sary explained that the teacher dismissed the parents (I discuss this further in the next section of this chapter) with the comment: "I have no time for those things. Her parents should talk to her. I'm sorry, maybe when the parents speak English, they can come over and talk to me." Ultimately the young girl found the situation unbearable, refused to attend school, and returned to her home country to live with other family members.

At a third spot on my continuum of English-language barriers, I've placed the experiences of those for whom (even) speaking English is not enough to overcome barriers. In the following excerpt, Neda and Sharadi explained why linguistic barriers are prevalent even among English speakers. They pointed to self-consciousness and embarrassment. Sharadi attributed these feelings to accent. Neda emphasized the point that often "the new immigrants are intelligent, they are educated," but "it takes a while before you can freely feel comfortable speaking [English]," as if to

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<sup>67</sup> I base this on my own experiences with public school systems in Saskatchewan and Alberta, as a student and as a parent. Vocational school was seen as the place to go if you weren't too smart when I was in school, when a more "applied" program was the place to gain skills for getting a job. In my sons' schools, there were advanced placement, academic achievement, baccalaureate, academic enrichment, and focal programs such as music and sports. With rare exceptions, students in the "academic" programs did not take courses in upholstery or cosmetology.

reinforce the implications of Natalie's observation that (im)migrants are often treated "like dumb dumb." Finally, Sharadi added the significance of language being *contextual*.

*Sharadi: [They don't feel] comfortable to speak, cause maybe their accent and then there are people, you know, they have learned English, just as we learn French here, right? ... So, they don't have that proficiency.*

*Neda: Yeah. It just takes them a while to get over the shyness of speaking. Like I know that 20 years ago, when I went to England, I had applied to the university, and I was accepted. And my brother went to all the places with me, and he would answer the questions, not me. And I was fully, like I had studied in English. But it takes a while before you can, you know, freely feel comfortable speaking. So the new immigrants who come here, they are very intelligent, they are educated, some of them, but it is hard, it takes them a while to speak, start speaking. They can read and understand written English, and write English, but speaking is a problem.*

*Sharadi: And also it's a different culture here. Right. So to be able to, it's not just the language, you know, um, you know, so that's where the hesitation is also, "Am I saying the right thing?" You know, "Am I asking the right questions?" ... Because, you know, ... also as adults, if you're not 100 percent sure about if you're speaking in correct English, these people, we, as adults, do not want to make a fool of ourselves. You know, and so the hesitation is there.*

Neda and Sharadi expressed how difficult it is to feel confident in English as a second language. But more than that, they also hinted that accented English can be a significant barrier. In fact, judgment of accented English was a commonly-identified barrier among the middle women. It was true not only for the (im)migrants whom the middle women support, but also for themselves. Thuy's almost matter-of-fact evaluation of English in her life was particularly striking. On one hand, she expressed with pride that one of her strengths – indeed a strength that made it possible for her to be a middle woman – is that "I could speak both Vietnamese and English very well." But later, as Thuy described her path to becoming a middle woman, she told me that she had undertaken university studies in Canada, starting out in nursing and later completing an education degree. But she attended university only to gain knowledge that she could share in her community; she never intended to actually practice as either a nurse or a teacher. In a seeming reevaluation of her English proficiency, she commented,



*When I transferred to education, to become a teacher, [my family] all disagreed. They went, "Well, are you nuts. You gotta be crazy." Because first of all we can't talk English very nice, right? ... When I go to education, my intention is not to graduate and teach school.*

In fact, Thuy told me that most Vietnamese (im)migrants study in fields in which they can work without a lot of interaction with the English-speaking public, becoming doctors, dentists, pharmacists, where they can work in their first languages. As if using her own experience to highlight the effects of accented English, Thuy observed that now many Vietnamese parents persuade their children not to learn Vietnamese because it will limit their opportunities.

*[They] absolutely want their kids to learn English, the best they can. So, they would say, "Forget about our uh cultures. Forget about learning Vietnamese. You don't need it here."*

As can be seen in these excerpts, the middle women are reflexive and analytic about language as a linguistic barrier. It was, however, particularly striking to hear that the middle women perceived judgments about the *middle women's* language abilities to be routine. Aileen described how the middle women frequently call upon the professional mentors, all of whom are white North American-educated women, to act as buffers with main stream service providers. She worried that the middle women often receive negative reactions and lack of response from service providers because of their accents. The following exchange during my interview with Aileen stood out for me because of the forcefulness with which she voiced this worry as she stressed her experience that as a white worker "some of the advocacy role is easier for us." She kept returning to accented English as the barrier for the middle women.

*Aileen: It's interesting. A [middle woman], you can see why [there are white workers as mentors in the GMCNO], because the, the some of the advocacy role is easier for us. Like for example, someone can phone up a doctor's office, and ask for an appointment, with an accent – everybody here has an accent – and get nowhere. And they'll pass me the phone, and I will make exactly the same phone call, and I will get the appointment.*

Ruth: And you actually have done this.

*Aileen: Many times. Exactly, many times. That has happened many times to me. So, and, it makes me feel bad every time it happens. But it does happen.*

*That happens. I can, can, um, mind you that's a skill I have. I know how to get things out of people. [Laughs] That's probably why I'm here. You know, I know how to do that.*

Ruth: You've worked in the system, too, so I wondered is it because

*Aileen: Yeah. Because I know the words to say, and I know how to say it to, to get something. Versus the [middle women] may not. And the other side may not be patient enough to hear the whole story, whereas I will say, you know, "this is urgent. These are the symptoms," you know. "We can't wait three weeks," you know. So I know how to do that. And I've done that. We try to teach [the middle women]. Like I tell [them], "this is what you say first. Don't say this first. And express worry," you know, say "I'm worried that this baby is going to be really seriously ill." I mean, you you*

Ruth: So you know how to work the system. You are a nurse. And you have a professional background. You're white. You don't have an accent. There's a whole lot of things there.

*Aileen: I worry that it's the accent sometimes does it.*

Ruth: Yeah. That's what you started with.

*Aileen: Um. I don't know. I know the words you say are really important. Especially dealing with health professionals. And, you know, I was on the receiving end of those phone calls. You know, but sometimes I worry it's the accent. It would be interesting to know. You could do a study or something to see how much that makes a difference.*

Ruth: But you've experienced it many times, you said.

*Aileen: Where someone will make a phone call for a family, need something. I will make the phone call, I will get it. And they didn't. I've experienced that many times.*

I pursued the issue of negative responses to the middle women's accented English with the other white professional mentors. Frances concurred that she too buffered the middle women's interfaces with service providers. She, however, implied that to at least some extent she understands the position of the main stream service providers with respect to both accented English and professional terminology.

*To be fair, there's some people with heavy accents, and um, with medical stuff, yeah, sometimes people are not sure. And it's easier to get the story from me, and for me to relay it, in their minds, that's easier on them. ... From the medical point of view. Like they feel they're getting the, they understand what I'm talking about. I don't have accented English. Um, so they are feeling more comfortable. (Frances)*

Trina suggested that people "respond differently" to somebody with an African or Asian accent than they do to somebody with a "Canadian" accent. She also suggested that she too might experience more difficulty than her peers who have "no accent at all," because she has a German accent. But, as she pointed out, responsiveness is shaped in part by working relationships, and therefore dependent on particular sites and individuals. She too highlighted how language works at more than one level – the un-accented English and the professional vocabulary work together.

*Well, you know, I mean Aileen and me were working together, I think it became the most obvious to me, um that, okay, the thing with the accent is, comes up again and again. That people don't uh respond um, respond differently if there is somebody speaking with an African or Asian accent um than with somebody with a Canadian accent. I do think that, depending on what it was. If it was a agency who didn't know us, then at times Aileen was more successful than me, because she has no accent at all. Obviously, if it was within a system where I was known, then that was kind of equalized. Um, still, I think because, you know, um, I mean through going to university in America, my vocabulary can get quite sophisticated, if that's what's needed. And so that always gives me an advantage, which the [middle women] might not have. They might not be, might not have the ability to switch to a more sophisticated vocabulary which can intimidate your counterpart. [Laughs] (Trina)*

In turn, several of the middle women gave examples of buffering the experiences of the people with whom they work in similar ways. For example, Thuy commented that, when a person whom she accompanies to an appointment speaks English, she advocates for them by encouraging service providers to speak directly to the person rather than through her as a middle woman.

*If I don't understand for my clients, I just advocate for them. I say, "Excuse me, I'm so sorry that my client, um, speaks very quiet to you, and you couldn't hear her, but when you clarify, just ask her, so that you can hear her, can you speak up? Or you know, just talk to her directly. And just slow down."*

Finally with respect to language barriers, I draw upon my interview with Shinin, who expressed the deeply-felt impact of not being able to express all of who she is and is capable of being in a language that is foreign to her. It seemed to me that here Shinin brought together the

nuanced implications of language, underscoring how the linguistic barrier goes far beyond the need for translation.

*You know, I have English to a degree, but I actually, because I wasn't born in Canada, I didn't grow up in Canada, I came to Canada when I was around 40, so, my language, still I have a very heavy and difficult language compared what knowledge I have inside, you know. Uh, the knowledge I have inside, and the qualities I have with me, the experience I have with me, it cannot be put in the language, you know, the level of the language I have. But I still have this knowledge. It can be, you know, useful for Canada. It can be useful for my family. It can be useful for the system, but the system has to help me. How to get this knowledge, this experience, this training out of me, because it is too late for me to be uh, a very proper English speaking person, you know. It will not, it will never happen. ... Because of my age. Because of so many things my brain is busy about.*

Reflecting on the marginalizing experiences of the (im)migrants in my research, I could see Frantz Fanon's notion of "epidermalization" (Gilroy, 2000) at work. He exposed how sense-ing difference through the body – in smell, sound and sight – colonizes the Other, fixing her in place in perpetuity.

*Every colonized people...finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. (Fanon, 1967, p. 18)*

I found Fanon's discussion of the significance of language in particular salient because in the past, I have downplayed the significance of language *per se* in considering the importance of the work of the GMCNO and the role of middle woman. When service providers are "faced" with a person who does not speak English, they may recognize that they need help with "translation." It is easy for them to see how language is a barrier to access, even without admitting that the system has any flaws – the problem lies with the "Others" deficiencies. It is in these experiences that I could glimpse the edges of the "racist exclusions" posited by Goldberg (1994). The power of the colonizer lies in being able to choose when to dismiss the promise of the "power of language" by ignoring "it," "inferior-izing" "it," silencing "it" (Fanon, 1967, pp. 31-32; Goldberg, 1994, p. 4). The "Other" is acutely aware that "every dialect is a way of thinking" (Fanon, 1967, p. 25).

### **Another four Ds**

In the previous section, I examined the middle women's reporting of main stream Canadians', including service providers', routine judgments of foods, appearances and, especially, languages, in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. At another level, the middle women left little doubt about some intertwined practices that are common in their day-to-day interactions with human services providers and systems. This section focuses on how practices of judgment and labeling manifest themselves in the day-to-day delivery of human services and how the middle women and the people they support experience these practices. Drawing on the middle women's framings, I refer to these practices as disrespect, disinterest, domination and a deficit focus.

#### ***Disrespect, disinterest, domination, and deficits***

The middle women made frequent references to "disrespect" in describing experiences with human services. They applied the term "disrespect" to such practices as "putting you down," "belittling you" and treating you "like dumb dumb." It is accomplished in overt behaviours such as laughing, and in subtle(r) snide remarks and innuendo. These practices, whether by design or not, have the effect of making the middle woman or the person being supported feel inferior.

Service organizations often hinge their rationales for not needing to have specific policies for ensuring cultural responsiveness on overarching respect-in-the-workplace policies (Mayan et al., in preparation; Reimer-Kirkham, 1998). For this reason, the frequency with which the middle women named and described practices of disrespect was particularly salient. Some of what the middle women talked about was what might be considered simple disrespect or, as Lisa said, "rude in any culture." Here the research participants described these practices as "rude," "ethically wrong," "diminishing," "(re)traumatizing" and "culturally insensitive." [I return to culturally insensitive later.]

*Was actually one worker at social services. She actually said something to my client, which was not ethically correct. She says to her, "I heard you are*

*pregnant again, eh? Who do you think, who is going to raise this child? And you go out and get pregnant, and blah blah." And a lot of things she said.*  
(Lisa1)

In Sary's example involving the disagreement between herself and a teacher over the problem of a young girl (cited above), Sary attributed the problem to continuous bullying. The teacher told Sary that the girl suffered from self-esteem problems and needed to build up her confidence. Sary felt that the teacher had dismissed her along with the girl and her parents when she said, "I have no time for those things." In another example, a child welfare worker referred to a Muslim family's "own way of living" – "In my opinion, [child welfare] even thinks, 'Well, this is done. The girl lives with the boyfriend. The family have their own way of living'" (Evelyn). With respect to Sary's own experience with the hospital when she gave birth, Sary said, "I feel unrespected, like everything on me was quite, like I said, not respected. Maybe I find another word later on." As I discuss later in this chapter, Sary did find another word.

The middle women also talked about a range of practices indicative of a lack of responsiveness and detachment on the part of service providers. Some of the excerpts in the earlier section hint at non-responsiveness, which the middle women attributed to language barriers. At one end of a continuum of treatment towards (im)migrants was simple disinterest or inaction – what might be common experiences among those trying to access services in stretched service systems. Here the middle women referred to practices such as ignoring repeated telephone calls, and not responding to specific requests for a call-back. For example, "And I kept calling and calling and calling. And the husband is trying to talk, and they [the landlord] wouldn't return my calls" (Natalie). A key concern for the middle women was that if *they*, as *go-betweens*, were made to feel this way, how would the people they support feel?

*And you can imagine if they can treat us like that, on behalf of our families, how the family, and you know why many of our people do not want to go to the system. If they can help it, they can starve. Some of them would say to us, "No. No. I don't want to go." (Lisa2)*

One answer to how people feel, is "they just feel shafted."

*They just feel shafted, a little bit. So they're treated like, this one, and how I got this, this one man said, "You know, I'm an engineer. I've been an engineer for 10 years back home. You know, I come to Canada, and they make me feel like I don't even know how to write my name." (Natalie)*

But further, the middle women observed that service is provided in a vacuum. To them, it seemed that service delivery often meets the needs of the system, but doesn't really care about the people.

*Like [the hospital] provided the services that they saw it would be good, and then that's it. ... They didn't really pay much attention to the suffering, to the pain that I have at that moment, and then I thought nobody really cares. (Sary)*

Evelyn suggested that she and the people she supports experience inattention and unresponsiveness on the part of the system as disinterested detachment. She described its effects on a family with child welfare involvement. Echoing Siobhan's concern in the previous chapter about the limited parameters of main stream services, Evelyn noted that the system doesn't even know that she is still supporting the family after the file is closed.

*What I'm frustrated in particular about is that even child welfare doesn't know that I still continue working with [the family], and how needed it is that we reach out to them right now. Why did [child welfare] close the file? What about the family as a whole? You cannot really, you know, observe one child and not see the effects on the whole family. And I even told the investigator how the mom is not capable of cooking, that she fainted several times, that the father was returned from his work. That will have also some financial effects on them. I told them everything. (Evelyn)*

Several of the middle women noted that their work begins when the main stream service provider or organization thinks the case is finished and closes the file. With exasperation, one middle woman commented that funding agencies can see what main stream services do – they understand it, while the middle women are "running around in the background" filling in the gaps.

One middle woman described her experience with the system as "very cold" and "detached." Some middle women interpreted this apparent detachment as a lack of interest in serving minoritized (im)migrants equitably – as they would English-speaking people who are

born in Canada. Evidence of this was that service providers frequently failed to provide interpreters even when they were clearly needed to ensure high quality service. Tears welled up as Sary shared her own example. Following the birth of her baby many years ago, she was "just left alone in a room, for six days, without getting information that it was desperately necessary." She assumed her newborn baby was dead because "nobody bothered to find an interpreter or anything." It was by coincidence that a visiting physician who spoke her first language stopped in to visit and provided her with the information she needed and the opportunity to hold her baby for the first time.

It would be great if her story could be put down to some kind of ignorance in the past. But other middle women told the same story in different scenarios of the present. Lisa recounted the experience of one woman who approached a financial assistance office for help, only to be told that *she* would have to arrange to have the rules translated before she could have assistance, so that she could sign for the money.

*You think about it, you know, Ruth. You have a client who goes to, who has little English, goes to [the financial assistance office], wanting to get some money. On her part, she wanted to go to talk about her problem to this person. And that person says, "In order for me to give you this money, there are 16 rules that you have to know, and I want them translated into your own language, you can sign for it." This is how they say it to them. So, we need to bring someone, right? So this particular client would actually ask you to come with them, because otherwise, they won't get the money. That's oppression. To me, that's, you are holding someone on them. (Lisa2)*

In Lisa's experience, it is not unusual to find service providers "giving [the people] hell."

*Because they know they have the power to either give them money to feed themselves, or not. So, when they are giving them hell, and some of it is ethically the wrong things to say, to clients. You and I know, for anyone. Well, "What makes you, who, who the hell you think will pay for this baby that you got pregnant again?" And someone says that to you, it's ethically a wrong thing to say. (Lisa1)*

In another example, Lisa talked about a situation in which a child welfare worker bypassed the woman/mother, who did not speak English, in her own home, by speaking only to the children.



*You know, [the woman] stand there and say, "Hello" to [child welfare worker], and [the worker] just walks in and talks to the kids and walks out without talking to the mom, and writes a report. Come on. Come on.*

How is it that organizations have such an apparently haphazard approach to ensuring that people who do not speak English have a qualified interpreter? The middle women reported a gap between management and front-line levels of organizations in their knowledge and understanding of the needs of service users. They are often asked to "fill in" as interpreters in circumstances where they will not get paid for it, despite taking hours of their time (Lisa, Sharadi). One middle woman told me that in her position within a main stream organization, a senior manager suggested that perhaps "the [immigrant] communities" could raise funds to pay for interpreters (Neda).

At the other end of the continuum of treatment towards (im)migrants, finally, disrespect and disinterest blended seamlessly into domination where, as Lisa put it, service providers use "that power thing" (Lisa2). This too took different forms, from intimidation or shaming, as hinted at in some of the examples above, to using the threat of authority.

Sometimes service providers imposed authority on the *middle women*, using expert knowledge and professional status to silence the middle women's voices. For example, Thuy "didn't dare" speak up.

*[The nurse and I] were kind of having a bit of a disagreement. But I didn't dare to tell her yet. I didn't dare to tell her that I disagreed. I will slowly. I don't want to address her at the beginning. (Thuy)*

At times, service providers demanded the middle women's involvement, and even "moralized" them when they "dared" to disagree.

*Even, some health workers, they would actually, it's very interesting, would refer a client. To them that client is in need. To us, that client is not in need. So, we go out, see the client, do the assessment. Okay. This client needs something, but not, I have other clients that are much more dire need position than that. So, you don't make that decision. To them, though, they refer it, so they expect you to do things. So they will call you and give you, their way of. And then you just say to them, "Actually, no, I have actually went there, been able to see this person. She is okay. Yes, she is invited to come to the group, but really, there is no need for her to, to be in that situation." And so they will moralize you. Like they will put you down, and that. (Lisa1)*

Middle women suggested that service providers wield the power of their positions routinely, applying rules in the interest of the system and threatening use of authority that affect people's well-being – such as taking their children, denying them money, withholding financial support, refusing them help at school or declaring they have "special" needs. "Being labeled" as a "special needs" student in the public school system ostensibly helps schools attract additional funding to support students. Extra support could be positive but, according to the middle women, the problem for (im)migrant students often is that needs are misidentified as learning disabilities or developmental delays when language comprehension and proficiency, dislocation, and the aftermath of trauma may be at the root of language barriers. Schools often lack adequate resources to address these problems.

According to the middle women, (im)migrants often experience situations where service providers "go over my limits," as Lisa put it. They can take advantage of such made-in-Canada vulnerabilities as not knowing how the system works – what services exist, how to access them, and their rights. Limited English or precarious status (as in the case of sponsored immigrants, government-supported immigrants and temporary foreign workers) can render feelings of anxiety, fear, distrust and powerlessness.

Lisa described circumstances in which a child welfare worker had agreed to provide financial support to a family member to be a safety net for a woman with mental illness, so that she could continue to care for her children. Too afraid to ask the worker about it, the family member received no income support for eight months. At that point the family member – the safety net for the woman with mental illness – returned to work to make enough money to support the family. Upon learning of this, the worker threatened to remove the children.

*Eight months. You and I cannot live without that money. Now I am off. Now I am angry. Because you know what? On her part, she only needed one more visit. She was going to snatch the kids and take them. ... She is using her power, right? So authority. She is showing them authority, and telling*

*[the family], "I own these children." Which is the most scariest thing to do to any immigrant family. (Lisa2)*

Working with many women seeking safe refuge from spousal violence, Lisa identified women's shelters as sites where interrogation-like questioning can take place – demanding the details of stories beyond what is necessary to establish how to provide help.

*For me, personally. If I have a problem with my husband, and I go and access the services, I can speak for myself. Which is way different than asking someone who's from my own community to tell them everything, my gut. Who I don't know this person, and then expect that person to explain to the other or third person. That, that, that takes a whole lot out of you as a person. ... If you are not going to help me, why am I spilling all my issues, for what? For you to have the story? No. ... It is to say, "I need help. But I'm not ready to tell you." And you have to respect that, and say, "Okay." I cannot just grill her more and more. I don't need it. What I need is those signs, and those signs, of course, will come when they come. And if they come, that is good and well, and if not, that is enough for us to do what we need to do. To interview her, to support her to do whatever. So you do not have to go down the deep ground to find out what else went on. ... Not grill her on what did he beat you? Did he starve you? You know, and the questions are too personal. Too personal to the point where is it taking you? I mean some of these questions are so insensitive. Why are we asking them these questions! (Lisa1)*

Here, not only does the retelling of such details evoke memories of trauma and torture enacted as rape in prior circumstances, but the shelter itself reminds the women of refugee camps in their regimentation, lack of privacy and imposed expectations, all of which contribute to feeling less rather than more in control.

Adding to disrespect, disinterest and domination, the middle women also spoke about how interactions with human services often have the effect of piling up people's deficits rather than fostering a sense of control during times of disruption. Many of the them shared examples of service providers telling their clients what "you're not supposed to do," often in ways that hinted that Western ways are superior – as in the case of child development practices, parenting, and gender relations within families.

Because of these experiences, it is not surprising that most of the middle women identified lack of confidence, fear and distrust as common

barriers that get in the way of minoritized (im)migrants knowing what is available and what they are entitled to, and availing themselves of needed resources and services. The practices of judgment and labeling, disrespect, disinterest and domination build deficits. Mounting deficits are a toll<sup>68</sup> that (im)migrant families pay, so that they often simply feel they have nothing (left) to give each other, or to the society in which they live. Referring to Kurds who came to Canada under refugee status, Shinin said, "[They] were just like a paralyzed people."

*You know, they all ended up on income support, so they haven't been a good productive role model for their kids too. It's another issue. For the parents not having a financial power, not having um, education power, not having something to be uh, it is mostly not having some power, you know, to, to live their lives, to give something to their children. It is an issue too. Because when you have a parent who is sitting at home all the time, who have nothing to give, who doesn't understand about the educational system, doesn't understand anything from the employment, to ... they don't have anything to give their children. (Shinin)*

It is true that, as discussed in the previous chapter, often the (im)migrants whom the middle women support have come from dire situations. Yet, as Shinin pointed out, "In a way, you know, they do have [something]. How they lived all their lives?"

I found a paradox in the middle women's articulation of the conditions of (im)migrants. On one hand, they acknowledged that for most (im)migrants Canada represents a future for their children and themselves in a democratic society in which people can be free to be who they want to be. Yet, on the other hand, almost without exception, the middle women spoke about the people they support feeling intimidated, afraid of staff in schools, health care, employment, and children's services who represent authority, monitored, and controlled. Founded in experience and spread by word of mouth, according to the middle women, many minoritized (im)migrants fear that service providers will

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<sup>68</sup> An apt definition for "toll" is a fee charged for a privilege, usually crossing a bridge or using a road. Encarta® World English Dictionary © 1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. Developed for Microsoft by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

judge and label, intimidate and humiliate them. They experience such practices as systemic. Among their most common worries, many (im)migrant parents fear that "Canadians" will evaluate their parenting as abusive, and that their children will be taken away. In this and other projects in which I have been involved over the years, (im)migrants were frequently fearful that they could be deported because they had not disclosed pre-migration circumstances or post-migration conditions such as mental health problems or inadequate income.

Demonstrating success in these terms is challenging, especially for those arriving in Canada under refugee status, already owing money, and often requiring intensive effort to gain access to language courses. If deportation is not a concern, then reunification most certainly is, and (im)migrants often feel that their futures lie in the hands of government authorities. Hannah's comments underscored the paradox for (im)migrants when she said, "We [Canadian-born service providers] think that they didn't have a life before [they came here]." On one hand, it seems no previous life translates into having nothing or being nobody (yet). On the other hand, (therefore) "they should just get on with it."

### **Finding other words**

As discussed in the previous section of this chapter, the middle women talked in passing, almost accidentally, about how "the three Ds" are implicated in main stream Canadians' and service providers' judgments and labeling of minoritized (im)migrants. They were direct and forthcoming in naming and describing routine practices of disrespect, disinterest and domination in their own and (other) (im)migrants' interfaces with human service providers. Recall Sary's comment, "Maybe I find another word later on," even as she attributed her awful experience to disrespect at that moment. Later in the interview, Sary did indeed find another word, commenting, "But to me this was racism, because I was different, and because of the language barriers I faced."

Many of the middle women's examples, across experiences in different sectors, involved snide remarks and caustic innuendos, with what they (and I) heard as racial overtones. There were times, then, when participants reframed and renamed practices of judgment and labeling, disrespect, disinterest and domination as "racism" or "oppression." In most cases, though, it was not until I raised the question of racism that participants talked about it explicitly.<sup>69</sup> In a sense, I led the middle women into considering race/ism by raising it directly. But most often it was their experiences and insights that led me there. As I illustrate in this section using interview excerpts, coming at or to the conversation about race/racism was at times awkward for me. I sometimes struggled to get to what I wanted to explore, fumbling with a tension between *defining* and *contesting* notions of culture/cultural and race/racial.

My entry points for opening up the conversation varied, depending on the conversation and the participant, resulting in two main scenarios. First, I picked up on middle women's own references to race/racism during the research interview or during prior informal conversations. My interviews with Sary and Lisa exemplify this approach. Both women had already hinted at race/racism being implicated in their explication of the need for the Middle Woman, so I pursued what they had raised. But the specific ways in which I probed it differed. In the interview with Sary, I asked her to elaborate on the meaning of racism to her in naming her experiences that way.

When you talked about racism before, uh, can you say a little more about what that means to you? ... And that, of course, um, how that was or was not framed as a racial experience. Or in racial terms.  
(Ruth in interview with Sary)

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<sup>69</sup> I rely on interviews with 11 of 20 middle women in the discussion that focused directly on talk about race/racism, since I did not explicitly explore racism with all participants. As discussed in Chapter 2, several interviews were carried out for the GMCNO as part of documenting their work, a reciprocal contribution for the time they gave to my research. I did not raise racism in those interviews since that was not the primary purpose of those interviews. Furthermore, I was interested in whether participants would name racism themselves. It was after I observed that they did not mention racism themselves that I began to raise it.

In the interview with Lisa, on the other hand, I felt comfortable with talking directly about the theorized race/culture divide – that is, using concepts from the theory to frame the conversation, building on her previous reference to racialization. My comfort was based on my prior knowledge of Lisa's engagements in feminist and human rights work shaped by theoretical perspectives.

Tell me a little bit more ... you're talking very much in, sort of cultural terms, and using that kind of term, to talk about what you're talking about, and I guess I'd like to kind of push that a little bit further. Um, because kind of, the way I've kind of framed my research, um, is you know, talking about a race/culture divide. ... And um, one of the concerns I had when I was sort of doing my literature review, and kind of looking at the whole cultural competence literature, um, cultural work, is that one of the risks of that approach is that there is a tendency to kind of essentialize, do you know what I mean when I say that? ... Essentialize cultures? So that, what gets represented is everybody in a culture gets, sort of, just described in the same way. So then we can teach people about other people's cultures, and now we know them and now we know what to do. And there's a kind of resistance against that, and some of the people who argue against that approach really say that what that hides, obscures, is it's still a focus on the Other, and it doesn't really address any of the racial issues, racialization that's going on. So, I'm kind of curious how you work that. ... The cultural idea, and I know, I've heard you talk yourself, about, in an informal conversation a few weeks ago, about um, racialization, as kind of a given in most organizations, so I'm kind of curious about how you see that tension between, you know, you haven't described the issues in racial terms, or racialization terms. (Ruth in Lisa1)

The above excerpt only hints at the second entry point I used to surface talk about race/racism – namely reflecting on the fact that it had not been discussed at all, or that the middle women tended to use other terms to describe their experiences. In my interview with Aileen (a white professional mentor-middle woman), for example, I simply observed and wondered about the fact that racism and discrimination had not been mentioned in any of my interviews to that point.

I'm interested that not many people here, although I've seen some things in writing and occasionally it kinda gets mentioned in passing, is um issues around racism and discrimination. And ... you haven't talked about it either, so I'm interested in the fact that it doesn't get talked about very much. (Ruth in interview with Aileen)

In my interview with Lenore, I asked about the "terminology" used in advocacy work catalyzed by the GMCNO. Specifically, Lenore described the advocacy work as representing "multicultural communities." I was interested in both components of the term – multicultural and community, and asked about the use of this terminology. Lenore explained that the advocacy group "had a long discussion around that. In terms of representation." They "even struggled about the terms" (Lenore1). The following excerpt from my interview with Lenore hints at how the terms are shaped in the power relations implicated in (im)migrants' lives in Canada. Note her references to multicultural, ethnic, and racialized communities and minorities as possible descriptors. And the advocacy group's decision to use "multicultural communities" because it is a "safer" starting point. Ultimately, as Lenore suggests, despite being anchored in a goal of advocacy, the "safer place" was more "neutral" – not too "activist." It would not "antagonize people," and would even cultivate acceptance. As Lenore said, "there is a political context" to the choice of terminology.

*Lenore: In fact we even struggled with about the terms. Should we use multicultural communities? Ethnic minorities? The [advocacy group] decided to use multicultural communities because there are certain members in the [group] at this time that if we use ethnic minorities, well, uh, "ethnic" is, how to say, "too anthropological." Of course I would certainly challenge that. Because there is a political context of why we want to use ethnic minorities or even racialized minorities, but they [the group members] say for an organization that is beginning to work on advocacy, we don't want to antagonize people with labels that may be misunderstood or misinterpreted. So they wanted to start from a safer ... so that's multicultural communities is what we're using.*

Ruth: Now how do you understand this question, then, of the multicultural community being a safer base?

*Lenore: Well, there were people who felt that ethnic minority is a negative label.*

Ruth: And does "racialized minority" even get discussed at all?

*Lenore: No. That doesn't even come in.*

Ruth: But "ethnic minority" is considered negative language?



*Lenore: And um and initially, while everyone agreed that the role of the [advocacy group] – advocacy is a principal role of the [group], there was um um there was a hesitation to, uh, to identify it with organizations where are labeled as "activist." So, and my analysis of this. At the time, there was a, feelings of, of you are a minority. At the time, the [group] was not very confident, uh, about their capacity. ... And so, uh, they want to start from a safer place. Um, and there is, um, a desire to be accepted.*

Ruth: Mmhm. ... And so [the group] works for that, because it implies something more neutral?

*Lenore: More neutral, yes.*

In the rest of this chapter, I examine the middle women's responses to being invited (or probed) to talk about whether and how race/racism are implicated in their work. Clearly, I initially read the fact that for the most part the middle women did not raise race/racism themselves as reticence to discuss it. Its absence prompted me to intentionally probe the issue of racism. Further, this reading shaped my further examination of what Lenore referred to as the "political context" – the social relations implicated in the work of the Middle Woman, which I examine in depth in Chapter 9.

### **Discerning racism**

Overall the middle women were discerning in their naming of racism. I use the term "discern" quite intentionally. To discern is to see or understand something that is not very clear or immediately obvious, and to be able to tell the difference between two or more things.<sup>70</sup> The middle women were cognizant of the multiple possible interpretations of service providers' practices. As they talked, they paid attention to detail, and carefully analyzed the contexts in which these practices took place. And they asked themselves reflective questions about their interpretations.

I was particularly struck by the middle women's reluctance or unwillingness to generalize from individual "incidents" of racist practices to all providers and all human services. They treated their experiences as

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<sup>70</sup> Encarta® World English Dictionary © 1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. Developed for Microsoft by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. Accessed October 12, 2009.

routine and at the same time almost as exceptions – "It depends on the person. Like who you are and who you are dealing with" (Shirko). Yet, as I discuss in the later chapters, these experiences were clearly significant in the middle women's personal lives and in their roles as middle women, shaping both the ways in which they voiced the need for the Middle Woman and her practice.

Here, I highlight ways in which the middle women were discerning in their assessments of service providers' practices – giving the benefit of the doubt, and assessing whether they "just treat everybody like that" or "would say it to a white person." Discernment speaks to how the Middle Woman always has to weigh the possibility of disrespect being a manifestation of racism against other explanations. This is necessary if, as Taylor et al. (2000) argue, "prejudice and discrimination have merely gone underground" (186).

First, I observed a strong tendency on the part of most of the middle women to give the benefit of the doubt to the service providers involved. Giving service providers the benefit of the doubt usually meant attributing practices of disrespect to other explanations. Recall the many examples the middle women gave to illustrate their negative experiences with human services. The middle women usually stopped short of describing these "incidents" as racist or of attributing them to racism. As Natalie put it, "You can't help but label." Besides, she said, assumptions can be motivated by good intentions.

*I do look different, right? Maybe I'm brand new to Canada and I don't understand English. ... And there's so many Arab/Muslims that look like me, that actually don't speak English, so how are they gonna know? It's hit and miss with them, who does and who doesn't. Right? So that change is there, but it's not something I call racism. It's more something I call being negative or treated differently. But I know it's there. Right? (Natalie)*

Some middle women attributed prejudicial comments and incorrect assumptions to ignorance. Natalie, for example, observed that some of these practices are found "among people that are very uneducated," while Siobhan attributed such practices to service providers' lack of knowledge about the conditions and circumstances of the minoritized (im)migrants to

whom the middle women provide support. These assessments of prejudice help to explain the GMCNO's goal of making these conditions and circumstances visible to service providers through an array of educational strategies from storytelling to transformative learning to cultural competency training.

Some middle women were reluctant to attribute rudeness to racism. Limited experience with a particular individual made it "a hollow experience" (Shirko), impossible to judge. Shirko's comment struck me as salient, because many relationships with human services involve single encounters. She too wanted to give the benefit of the doubt to the service provider. As she said, "maybe she has had some problems herself."

*It might be that, let's say, is it fair to call a worker ... maybe she had some problems herself, and she did not treat that client as was supposed to be treated, a respectful way. Someone else could call it racism, but myself, would maybe call it differently. Maybe that person has something else wrong with her. (Shirko)*

A second mode of discernment involves always balancing a judgment of racism against the possibility that the service provider just treats everybody like that, as Lisa suggested.

*When others [middle women] approach me and say, "How is it that so and so treat me like that?" I always tell them, "You can nicely talk to this person without having to take it personally. Because this person does it to everybody, not only to you." So you have to always have that balance as well. Is this person doing this to me because I am black, I am from Africa, she is from India, from this from that, or is this person just the way treats everybody? (Lisa1)*

I interpreted Lisa's point here as different from "everyone has that experience" or "disrespectful treatment is not unique to minoritized (im)migrants." In a subtle way, she drew attention to the fact that experiences that *appear* to be the same can in fact be very different.

Many of the middle women shared examples of practices that were undoubtedly judgmental, disrespectful and oppressive. Recall Sary's reference to a teacher's dismissive comment towards Spanish-speaking parents and Lisa and Shirko's concerns that many black children from African countries are labeled as dumb in school, and are bullied and oppressed. Hannah suggested that these practices are often "rooted in

racism." They stem from assessing our practices as "much more advanced" than those of others. I read "our" as white, middle-class, Canadian because of the way Hannah juxtaposed this experience to the "Aboriginal experience." Hannah pointed to how a position of privilege allows "us" to take up the superior position of knowing and telling others what to do, not because we are (or were) innately superior, but because of our "progress."

*I would say that our judgment of how people raise their children, and using the kind of discipline that they do, is rooted in racism. It's a superiority that we know what's best, and that we've come through that to this point where we're much more advanced, and therefore, you know, you just need to do what we tell you, which is similar to the Aboriginal experience, right. So to that degree, I think there's racism at play.*

As previously indicated, during the course of my research, one children's services neighbourhood office estimated that during the previous three to four years minoritized (im)migrant youth had become three quarters of some child welfare workers' caseloads, over-representing by far the small proportion of the population they make up.<sup>71</sup> These youth, who originated in Somalia, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Congo and Afghanistan, arrived in Canada with refugee status. Hannah wondered aloud whether the circumstances that lead service providers (such as teachers) to bring such minoritized (im)migrant families to the attention of child welfare workers would have evoked the same response had the families been white.

The middle women described numerous recent incidents of what they perceived to be racially motivated ridicule on school grounds, where a child was called a "fat Mexican" (Sary) and a Somali child's boot was taken and thrown on top of the school on a cold winter day (Aileen). Rather than schools being alert to and addressing such experiences, they "don't know anything about it. Or they don't do anything about it" (Sary). Without even having to pause for recall, Aileen rhymed off an array of

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<sup>71</sup> I was not able to locate the proportion.

common experiences in which she observed what she perceived to be discriminatory practices towards minoritized (im)migrants in health care settings. Her examples ranged from what she described as "little things" to "more blatant things." "Little things" included differential treatment in waiting rooms, where service providers frequently overlooked or ignored the minoritized (im)migrants she was there to support.

*Oh, examples. You know, people will will be waiting to be seen, and you know, because I try to get people to, you know my job is to get people to learn how to use the systems, so I don't try to do everything for them. So, I'll say, "Well, go check in," you know. And they'll stand there and stand there. And then other people are seen and they're still standing there and standing there, you know. So, you know, little things like that. (Aileen)*

The "more blatant things" involved "horrible experiences" of embarrassment and humiliation.

*But I mean the more blatant things, it's hard. A middle woman yesterday had taken a woman to apply for subsidized housing. ... this lady has mental illness, and she's from Africa, and um, what happened is the [middle woman] got the work done and then left her. She had other things that she needed to do in this building. ... The middle woman was paged. And she just died. Because she thought there was some accident. "Why would I be paged in this building, eh?" Then what had happened was this woman had lost her purse and she was ... pounding, you know you see people in movies, they hit themselves when they're stressed out. And, and, and the middle woman came back here [to the office]. She said it was so awful the way the two of them were treated by everybody around them. Because she said, "It was so embarrassing. It was so awful. Everybody ... no one came and said, 'Can I help you?' ... Everybody was just horrified by the whole thing," and she came here and said it was just the most horrible experience. (Aileen)*

As exemplified earlier, the middle women often wanted to give the benefit of the doubt to service providers, even as they suspected that race was implicated in their practices. The middle women were also ambivalent about generalizing from (individual) incidents. In one breath, Sary could say, "It depends. I don't think that the system was completely racist, but I see that for me [it was]." In another breath, Sary could say, referring to her exchange with the young girl's teacher, "I'm pulling my hair out. It was, just awful. And I have those things all the time. And then to me, Ruth, sincerely, I see racism in there." When Natalie was in high school (15 years ago), Muslim girls who wore *hijab* were labeled and

teased routinely. "It was very tough." As a result, Natalie resisted any sign of "being different" and kept her mom "in the back scenes a little bit."

*It was tough, for me, it was very tough [in school]. I didn't care for any of this whole religion, being different, and it was really teased at school, very teased, and we didn't see my mom so much, we kept her in the back scenes a little bit, so my friends never said anything, but throughout that girls in school were labeled. Oh, you know, "diaper head," and "this, that head." And all these names that these little girls were being called in junior high. ... I would remember hearing those comments, and thinking, "Oh, man, that's just... that's tough." (Natalie)*

Natalie believed that this type of behaviour is not that common in schools now. (Although importantly, she will not allow her own daughters to wear *hijab* until they are older.) Discernment was apparent as both Hannah and Aileen suspected that many of the prejudicial practices they have observed towards minoritized (im)migrants characterize services for everyone and all poor people in particular.

*But having said that, I think that the same kind of prejudice happens at time with people that are poor. Right, so, um, you know, if you live in low-income housing, then um, I think you might be more likely to be reported [to child welfare] than if you don't. That's just my guess, but I think that's true based on what I know from when I used to work with ... Aboriginal and poor white. (Hannah)*

But there were many examples in which there was *no* doubt – when a particular phrase tipped the interaction over the edge of suspicion about racism into certainty. Thus, a third way in which the middle women were discerning about racism was asking themselves whether what is being said would be said to a white person. Here, the middle women illustrated common practices such as racial profiling, name-calling on school grounds, and derogatory references in classrooms. Racial profiling occurred when a service provider made a negative assessment of an entire population based on an experience with one person. It involved first ascribing individuals to a group and, second, ascribing characteristic behaviours to the whole group based on an experience. Illustrating this, Lisa told me that one organization with which she frequently works suspected all the black women (from an African country she did not want

to name) of fabricating abuse in order to access housing through women's shelters. As she put it, "We know it's the race" (Lisa1).

*To think all of them would use that to, to stake out and find the housing, is the wrong assumption. So where does that play? We know it's the race. And if there is an easy target, when something happens, you have the targets of groups of people, you can easily do that. And we know, whatever you do, in this country, the, the race is an issue. (Lisa1)*

The organization then also extended the ascribed group and behaviour to all black African women – "So they're bunched." The shelter would ask every black African woman, "Is it because you are abused? Or do you want the housing?" – to the point where Lisa raised it with her colleagues involved with women's shelters. For her, discernment required asking, "Would any white-coloured woman be asked this question?" (Lisa1)

*This is becoming a phenomenon. This is racializing. This is discrimination. ... this would not be asked of an Aboriginal woman, and about Canadian women. Any white-coloured woman would not be asked this question. And why is this? (Lisa1)*

Similarly, reflecting on her experiences helping (im)migrants to access health care, Aileen observed that service providers frequently single out a particular group, asking "Is this a Sudanese family?"

*Some physicians' offices have stated that they do not accept Sudanese families. One other said, "We will give them one chance – if they miss the appointment then they are cancelled." I was with one woman when she was told by the receptionist that the doctor would not see her, including the appointment we had come for. We had come for test results. The physician had seen her several times previously. The [site] made an appointment for me but when they found out that the appointment I was making was for a Sudanese man they said they weren't taking new patients. I made an appointment with another Sudanese family, and the receptionist said, "Is this a Sudanese family?" And I said, "Yes." And she said, "Cause they only get one chance, for a no-show. ... And if they have a second no-show, then we drop them as patients." ... I mean she said it right on the phone. I didn't even see her. I was just making an appointment.*

Some of these findings concur with previous research about the experiences of people living on a low income (Williamson et al., 2006). This concurrence might suggest that such experiences are not unique to racially minoritized (im)migrants. A tendency on the part of service providers and (even) some of the mentor-middle women to see the issues

that minoritized (im)migrants experience as “the same” as for everyone else can be a frustration for the middle women, and for the relationship between the GMCNO and other organizations. While attributing such comments to a lack of knowledge or understanding of the conditions and circumstances of many of the minoritized (im)migrants the GMCNO supports, at the same time Siobhan experienced these comments as both neutralizing and dismissive.

*We get angry inside each time somebody said, “Oh, well, that’s the same as main stream ... It’s the same issues.” It’s to take the time to say, “Yes, it’s true. It’s unfortunate that all [groups] are struggling with these key issues.” Then we say, “Now, the difference, though, is in the context of how these issues are situated among immigrants. When they cannot communicate, when there is a severe language barrier and they might even be poorer ... We all have similar issues, but the depth and complexity is a little different. The context is a little different. ... It’s an issue of equity. They’re deeper in poverty. They’re deeper in vulnerability.” (Siobhan6)*

The point here is not that other individuals do not experience negative judgment and disrespectful treatment. Rather, the point is that racially minoritized people (have to) engage in a continuous process of *discerning* whether their experiences *are* racist – “you always have to balance that as well” (Lisa1). Human service systems’ unwillingness or inability to acknowledge and respond to the intersecting conditions and circumstances that exacerbate minoritized (im)migrants’ vulnerabilities reinforces the need to be vigilant. Furthermore, the difference between Natalie’s example in which she could choose to go unnoticed (pass for white) in the absence of *hijab*, and Lisa’s example in which as a black African woman could not choose to go unnoticed is important. Judgment is on the skin even before the experience – as Lisa expressed it. Moreover, it should not go without saying that a significant proportion of people living on a low income in poverty are also racially minoritized populations – among them many Aboriginals and (im)migrants.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> In the Williamson et al. (2006) study, the proportions of Caucasian and minoritized populations (defined as Aboriginal and other racialized minorities) in the study sample were the same (48 percent). However, the authors do not report whether there were differences in the experiences between the groups (Caucasian, Aboriginal & other racialized minorities).



One "incident" that occurred while I was conducting my research shed light on the circumstances that evoke uncertainty, suspicion, discernment, and certainty about racist practices. This "incident," which I present at length, took place at a local social service agency. The event was a cultural competency training session for senior managers and front-line staff, facilitated by the GMCNO at the agency's request. It involved six middle women. Natalie recalled the incident during my interview. Words in quotation marks are Natalie's words.

When Natalie arrived at the agency, she felt prepared and looked "presentable." She thought she'd "look great, all dressed up nice, going to give a professional presentation." As such, she fully expected to be "at least treated with respect," since that is "normally" how people who present well are treated. But that is not what happened. As Natalie's abridged account shows, the staff person who greeted her at the agency was rude, and referred to her "demand to speak" at the agency as a "joke."

*I walked into the organization, and I explained to the lady um, you know, "I'm here for the 11:30 workshop. And I'm invited by so-and-so to be a guest speaker." And she says, "What gives you the right to walk into my organization demanding to be a speaker?" And I says, "Oh, my goodness, I beg your pardon?" And I took out the piece of paper, and I says, "Is this so-and-so organization?" She says, "Yes." "Well, is this so-and-so person that works here?" She says, "Yes." I go, "Well, this is my name, and this is the time I've been invited to speak here." And I was still very friendly, still thinking that maybe I'm at the wrong office first. By her first being rude, I honestly thought it was a mistake of mine, that I came to the wrong door. And I thought, "Oh my goodness, I'm so sorry. Is this this this this so-and-so?" She says, "Yes." And I says, "Well, this is the time, and this is my name, and I've been invited by so-and-so to join you guys today." And she's like, "I beg your pardon?" She picks up the piece of paper. She tosses it on her desk, and says, "This is a joke. What gives you the right to walk into my organization with your own agenda demanding to be a speaker in my organization?" And I thought, "Ooh. What the heck is just happening here?"*

Although her impulse was to walk away, Natalie felt she had to assess the situation first. She explained that she "didn't get angry;" she "got very offended."

*I mean, "Tell me what gives you the right to walk into my organization." Fine, I probably would have turned away, and walked away. But to call me a joke? Like, what gives you the right to call me a joke? Why am I a joke, and you're not a joke? Like, what exactly is the difference between us? (Natalie)*

Wanting to give the benefit of the doubt, but "honestly, very unclear what [the lady's] intentions were," Natalie tried to find an explanation for such a reception. She outlined her thinking process, weighing whether the woman was "just rude" or whether the disrespect was "because of me, because of who I am."

*Are you just rude? Cause if you're rude, I refuse to speak here. If you're treating me with disrespect because of me, because of who I am, okay now, I got a big problem with that. I resent those comments 100 percent. But I still thought that maybe she's just a rude person. I refused to believe that this was because I practice my religion visibly. It crossed my mind briefly, but honestly it was like, "Nah. She's just rude." But I thought I better make sure that she's just rude, not that this is because I'm Muslim because if it is, she's going to make me walk out that door. And then she goes, "This is a joke." And she tosses my paper, and I said, "I beg your pardon. What part of this is a joke to you?" She goes, "This is all a joke."*

At that point, Natalie asked to speak to the person who had arranged the workshop in the organization, and was told that the person was not available to speak to her that day. It was then that Natalie's suspicion turned to certainty.

*[The lady] said something under her breath like, "It was just a joke. It was just a joke. Ma'am. It was a joke. I'm British. I ... this is a joke. I'm just trying to be funny. ... I'm British. I have a sense of humour."*

Although she still did not want to believe it, one of Natalie's colleagues later confirmed the experience was racism, telling Natalie, "You have just experienced a severe case of racism." "That," said Natalie, "was how that all unfolded. That was probably my worst one ever in my life, that I was faced with." Full stop.

Interestingly, another example illustrated a different form of profiling. Carolina told me that people sometimes ask her where she is from – presumably triggered by her accented English. Responding that she is from Mexico, at times people have told her that she is not Mexican, because "I don't have dark skin."

I said, "Yes I am Mexican." They were surprised that I am Mexican because I don't have dark skin. I pointed out to them that in Mexico there are many places where Mexicans have very light skin, depending on their backgrounds and colonization by white Europeans. (Cultural Competence Workshop, Fieldnote, Feb 26, 2008)

Indeed, the middle women's examples illustrated that they and the minoritized (im)migrants they support experience racist innuendo regularly in the course of their day-to-day interactions. Always based on racist assumptions and negative judgment, innuendo was evident in Sharadi's "you speak English very well," Natalie's "I'm British. I have a sense of humour," Carolina's "you cannot be Mexican," Lisa's "I heard you are pregnant again," and Shirko's "who will want to rent to a family with seven kids?" Here, Lisa obliquely referred to her frequent experiences of the common assumption that people of African descent and their cultures are backward (Kothari, 2006).

*They will even comment to you, "You are very smart." What does that mean to me? I, I, that is not a compliment, Ruth. That is not a compliment. I don't think you would say that to someone else who's not, who's maybe European. ... They're surprised your culture is quite decent in some ways. They will comment on.*

Comments such as those cited above seem simultaneously innocuous and barbed. This ambiguity keeps minoritized (im)migrants on alert, asking themselves, as Lisa put it, "Would [s/he] have said that to a white person?" I suggest, though, that the middle women's examples also implicate service providers in processes of discernment in their choices of when, where and how to make these comments. It seemed to me that service providers (must) make judgments about "how far to go" in their comments – judgments that push a comment from being possibly innocuous because of its perceived ambiguity to going over the line into certainty. This was evident in Natalie's reconstruction of her experience, at the point where the agency staff member commented, "It was a joke. ... I'm British, I have a sense of humour." Or as Sary said, "Okay. You can say "ugly." But why is the "Mexican" part in there?"

### ***Absolutely one-way – systemic racism***

The middle women's levels of discernment, the ease with which they recalled the details and nuances of their experiences, and the frequency of their comments suggests that their examples cannot be seen as isolated "incidents" of prejudice and racism. Moreover, the middle

women's examples reached across sites and sectors – including schools, child welfare, financial assistance offices, women's shelters and health care settings, as well as the everydayness of public places. So, although the middle women did not generalize racist practices to all service providers, often suggesting that it depends on the individual, they did clearly articulate that both individual human service organizations and the larger systems they comprise are organized so as to create barriers to minoritized (im)migrants. I therefore pursued exploration of the system(at)ic nature of the "incidents" with some of the middle women, inquiring into the extent to which they perceived Canadian society and human services to be racially organized so that racism is systemic.

The concept of racialization clearly resonated with the middle women. Of course, it is possible that the idea of systemically embedded racism resonated with the middle women simply out of deference to my position as researcher. However, their responses were so immediate, their comments so unequivocal and extensive that I regard that explanation as highly unlikely. In this section, I discuss the middle women's explications of what that means and how they experience it.

I use the notion of "system(at)ic realities" to refer both to the sense in which discrete components of human services act together (even if still haphazard)<sup>73</sup> and also to the sense in which the qualities and practices of these components are suffused throughout them. Indeed, I recall a worker involved in an earlier project that addressed responsiveness to minoritized (im)migrants describing the system (in which he was located for the duration of the project) as having an intangible inhuman quality. It was something, he said, that could not be easily attributed to particular

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<sup>73</sup> The sites do not constitute a "system" in any meaningful sense. Each site has a different organizational culture with its own protocols, practices, standards, relationships and power dynamics. For example, in a mental health pilot project designed to illustrate the practice of a site-based middle woman, establishing positions in different sites required four different sets of administrative and human resources personnel in the region. This makes it very difficult for "outsiders" – such as patients and middle women – to learn how the "system" works. What works at one site may not work at another site.

individuals, but rather to the routine practices, protocols and policies that characterize institutions (Report, 2003b, p. 17; see also Chambliss, 1996).

In explicating the systemic extent of their racist experiences, the middle women exposed how "one-size-fits-all" blurs easily into "absolutely one-way" through *both* dividing practices and difference-blindness operating simultaneously. This means that the middle women must constantly navigate a paradox – demanding both "same treatment" and "special treatment" as they navigate and buffer resources with and for the minoritized (im)migrants they support. I return to this issue in Chapter 9.

As already suggested, the middle women revealed that system-driven practices of delimitation in the organization and delivery of human services – including how they are funded – comprise dividing practices. For example, some of the systemic barriers that the middle women identified are not unique to minoritized (im)migrants. But recall also Siobhan's response that minoritized (im)migrants' conditions and circumstances mean that seemingly similar barriers are not really the same. When I pursued the question of systemic racialization, the middle women reinforced another way in which the experiences of minoritized (im)migrants are not the same as others' experiences with human services. It was here that the middle women asserted that the system is "absolutely one-way." For them, "absolutely one-way" meant designed for the "Canadian-born, English-speaking," "not fit to everyone," and "white dominated." Ultimately they attributed this to the dividing practices implicated in immigration policy.

First, it was here that the middle women articulated how human services are racialized to exclude (im)migrants who cannot easily assimilate as Canadian English-speakers. According to the middle women, the system has been (pre-)designed to work for people who can assimilate.

*This is where I saw the system being absolutely one-way. One-way in the sense that it was built for those women who are Canadian-born, who speak the language, who can access the services, who did not have many families*

*around them, so all of those kinds of things we are building in that way. (Lisa1)*

*The system of employment, the system of education, the system of employment requirements, the system of you know, the ways we look at the language, the system is set up for the people who are born and grow up in Canada. The system is not set up for the people who came from a different country who have not a very strong language quality. (Shinin)*

*What will happen is the education system is made ready for the people who are born here or know the language. (Shirko)*

Second, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, the middle women explained persistent systematic exclusions in terms of inequities in how ascribed classes of (im)migrants are treated and perceived in Canada, in both short- and long-terms. Reflecting on their own experiences as (im)migrants to Canada, the middle women pointed out that "labels stick with you." This "sticking" renders visible minority (im)migrants, *and* their children, forever immigrant and *invisible*, second or third class citizens.

*If you are labeled by certain characteristics that was going to stick with you. ... They stick with you. We are called immigrants. Our children will be called children of immigrants, not Canadians, you know. But they feel they are Canadian. (Neda)*

*People in general in this country, don't see the need for them to try to understand us. Or what they really mean to say when they use certain words to refer to who we are. Like visible minority. To us, this is a horrible way, it is really horrible terminology. Visible minority, well you see the minority, but it's in another end, we are invisible. Because we don't get the services or the communication or the information that we really need to be a successful people in this country. (Sary)*

*Lisa1: We all know we are second or third class citizens. That's life. And, and, as unfortunate as it sounds, we come with that assumption. When it gets crazy and sad is when you see it happen to your children, where they feel that they are fully Canadian, but on the basis of their face, and without knowing who they are, and where they come from, teachers, university deans, all those other people, start saying, and making assumptions on that. Yes, of course, it hurts. But, for us, as an immigrant, it's a given.*

Ruth: You're pretty much forever an immigrant? ... Is that fair?

Lisa1: Yeah. It is fair, and I, for one, believe that I have to work twice as much, as a white worker here, to even ... This, I tell you without no questions, this is how I teach my children, the same way.

Based on her experience of migrating to Canada ten years ago, Lenore reported that staff in regional government offices had been "so

rude." But what she observed as she sat in those offices was that different groups of people "were put down in different ways" (Fieldnotes Excerpt, March 11, 2008). The hierarchy was Aboriginals at the bottom to blacks to people with accents to people who speak English at the top. According to Lenore, a "visible" appearance garnered "skeptical" attitudes. Reflecting on her experience, Natalie noted, "You're kinda labeled already, by the complainer, the one that doesn't have a lot of money, that perhaps needs to take advantage of Canada's niceness."

### *Compl-ex-otic-ity*

Because of the middle women's observations, I was struck by the frequency with which they attributed barriers to accessing human services to the "complexity" of (im)migrants', and especially refugees', lives. This was particularly true in my interactions with the middle women who work at the organizational level in the GMCNO – the executive directors and the mentor-middle women. At times, it seemed to me that they had adopted the main stream service providers' practice of seeing people who do not fit as having problems, deficits and cultures and circumstances that are "too complex" to resolve. In other words, across service settings and sectors in which the middle women are involved, adherence to standard ways of doing things – systematization – renders those who don't fit (too) "complex." So, it seems, the system is too simplified to accommodate complexity? I pursued this tension in my conversations with some of the participants.

On one level, "complexity" seemed to be an almost taken-for-granted descriptor of the "new emerging" refugee community members whom the GMCNO supports. Two of the mentor-middle women, for example, expressed both what complexity means to them under these circumstances, and what it means for human services.

*Well, what I find with complexity is ... when you deal with people who, culturally are so different. Like you know, if you have a woman from a rural place somewhere in Africa, who, who is coming from such a different place than Canada, and uh, doesn't speak English of course, but sometimes doesn't even read or write. And sometimes comes as a single parent. And comes*

*with a whole bunch of children. I don't know. To me, that's complicated right there, cause you're going to have housing issues, you're going to have poverty issues quite likely. ... probably some complex health stuff, so already, you know, there's a mountain to climb to help somebody like that. And lots of mental health stuff. That always adds ... just puts another layer of complexity on top of everything else. (Frances)*

*The refugee patients take time, are complicated health wise and they are frequently late and/or miss appointments and they may come to a 15 minute appointment with five children and expect them all be seen. (Email, Aileen, Feb 8, 2009)*

Other middle women contextualized the talk about complexity for me. For some, "complexity" was an apt description for the circumstances and conditions implicated in minoritized (im)migrants' vulnerabilities. Here, they saw complexity as a given in the work the Middle Woman does. They pointed to how this requires flexibility and leeway – one-size-does-not-fit-all. Complexity is why "inreach" is needed.

It was through the middle women's explanations that I came to see how complexity is shaped in the dividing practices discussed earlier. Furthermore, during participant-observation opportunities I noticed that the plight of "the new emerging" refugees makes a compelling story for main stream service providers who "want to know" about them. As with "the three Ds" in the earlier section of the chapter, what is seemingly benign or even attractive and fascinating when chosen is too "complex" *because* it is exotic, or "compl-exot-ic."

When funding is divvied up according to such intriguing and compelling stories, "complexity" thinking can be seductive for the GMCNO.

*I had a good view of what cases would come to [another organization where I worked]. And it is simply clear that you have, the levels stacked higher with the cases at [the GMCNO], because you basically always have a language barrier, and somewhat of an invisibility within the system because the system and the people don't have a language to communicate with and not knowing how to access the system and the system being at odds with the thinking and the context in which people live. I think some of that also applies for Aboriginal cultures, but still there is more of a buy-in of the system with Aboriginal cultures. They have more of a weight of advocacy than with the immigrant and refugee population. ... There are simply several layers that, you know, start out from the very beginning which add to the complexity. (Trina)*



On the other hand, Hannah struggled with the tension.

*If we start to speak always about families having so many complexities, it feels like you can't really move ahead because it's way too complex. ... You know what? Everybody's complex. And yes, they have some additional complexities. ... It's kinda like a self-fulfilling prophecy, because they're refugee, we now see them as refugee class? And so, we go into [the work] thinking, "Oh, my god. It's going to take twice as long."*

Self-fulfilling prophecy or downloading "complex" cases to the community without adequate resources? On the surface, it seems logical that main stream organizations' self-acknowledged inability to address such "complexities" would result in new and innovative approaches. To the contrary, instead they frequently resulted in what Trina described as exclusions – "You either conform to the system, or you don't. And if you don't, there is no need for me to deal with you, because I'm in the truth."

Categorization shaped through a particular worldview or dogma also affects who works in the system and who can access it. Several of the middle women made pointed comments about "who runs the system" and "not seeing myself" in the system. They implied that it is members of the dominant (white) group who run the system and deliver the services.

*But the majority of the system, who runs this, we know are, you know, we know who is the Canadian system. We know that. But, but, so, of course, you know, when you are me, as a black person, me as a woman, when I go somewhere, I may have much more confidence in me, but I don't have confidence in that person that he will treat me well. You know what I mean? (Lisa2)*

In passing comments, they indicated that most people in the human services systems who look like them work in the low-paid jobs. But, even when the professionals do "resemble" them – as Lisa put it, "could be a black person like me" – it may make no difference to service delivery. This is because, on the one hand the power of the system is invested in the people who work (in) it.

*The system. That oppressor could be a black person like me, but has the power in that system. If he treats me like that, it is because he has the power, cause the power gives him so. (Lisa2)*

*The interesting observation is the majority of the time, even our colleagues [in the system] who are themselves visible minority, they end up looking at the world through the lens of the main stream and work accordingly. And*

*that, that is disappointing. It's as if they have forgotten about the complex realities of the families and that that kind of complex reality needs to be known. (Siobhan5)*

*They are sort of absorbed by the system, that they have to comply with their rules. (Neda & Sharadi)*

On the other hand, working in the system as a minoritized worker is very hard.

*To actually not being valued for who you are. That is also a feeling of oppression. Um, I know, actually minority workers in larger institutions have, outside of work, come to us and talked about how they're feeling really demoralized. And often it's about them being criticized for not being like the others. Um, not being valued, perhaps for the way they work, very relationally oriented, um, they might not be very technically sound, uh, they might work odd hours, rather than staying between 8 and 5, um, uh, being told the way they behave socially doesn't fit in. Uh, you know, why can't they be more like the others, uh, and uh, bending so much of the institutional process to fit the families' needs. Those are the things we hear a lot. You know, and they kinda really cry on our shoulder about. (Siobhan5)*

Recall that Lisa echoed this experience as she asserted that she has "to work twice as hard as a white person."

The middle women's comments surfaced how challenging it is to change systems. As Lisa put it, "You can take the spice to make it look different, but not to change the taste" (Fieldnotes, August 27, 2008). She is not interested in optics. I return to the challenge of influencing system change in Chapter 9.

## **Summary**

I opened the chapter with a closer examination of the middle women's ways of talking about their experiences with human service organizations. Beginning with the middle women's passing references to "the three Ds" – diet, dress, and dialect, which I reframed, I highlighted another "four Ds" – disrespect, disinterest, domination, and deficits, which were prevalent in the middle women's experiences with human services. Despite this discourse, the middle women rarely attributed their experiences or service providers' practices to racism. However, directly raising the question of whether and how race and racism might be implicated in these experiences evoked immediate, strong, and

unequivocal responses, along with many specific examples that middle women ultimately named racism. Still, the middle women sought to give the benefit of the doubt to ambiguous interactions with service providers. Engaging in a continuous process of discernment, they highlighted the need to always consider whether what is happening to them (and those they support) is racist, or whether it can be attributed to ignorance, individual personality or personal problems, or whether a service provider just "treated everyone like that."

Following a similar line of questioning, I subjected the middle women's characterizations of individual service providers' practices as "institutional," "rigid," and "siloes" to closer scrutiny, and explicitly raised the question of whether and how race and racism might be implicated in this "institutional thinking." This too evoked immediate, strong and unequivocal responses, as the middle women's discourse shifted from the more generalizable "institutional" to the more edgy "absolutely one-way" – Canadian-born, English-speaking, white (and at times male). They sometimes referred to minoritized (im)migrants as being second and third class citizens and perpetual (im)migrants. Thus, the judgment and labeling of minoritized (im)migrants across human services can be seen as an extension of the assessment of who and who is not admissible to Canada, and the extent to which (im)migrants' credentials are (and are not) recognized. It connects how different types of workers are valued in the system to assessment of deficits across settings and generations. Professionalization and credentials reflect who "measures up to Canadian standards." Illegitimacy means being under-valued, under-paid and under the thumb of recognized professionals with credentials to practice in Canada, as shown in Chapter 6.

## Chapter 8. Sitting in very different corners

### Partial truths

In Chapters 4 and 5, I exposed how pre- and post-migration conditions and circumstances intersect in ways that can alleviate, reproduce, sustain or exacerbate vulnerabilities among minoritized (im)migrants in Canada during and beyond initial resettlement. I suggested that these inequities shape (im)migrants' vulnerabilities to further inequities in Canada. From the middle women's accounts, I generated five types of barriers and gaps that constitute post-migration vulnerabilities: 1) gaps in (im)migrants' knowledge about what services and supports are available and/or how they work; 2) gaps in conceptualization of problems, beliefs and practices between (im)migrants and Canadian systems; 3) inability to use existing services because of language barriers or lack of gender appropriateness; 4) not wanting to use existing services because of fear, distrust and lack of confidence; and 5) refusing to use existing services because of negative experiences. When barriers and gaps persist, the middle women suggested, they constitute inequities. I have therefore suggested that for minoritized (im)migrants, post-migration inequities are layered onto pre-migration inequities.

In Chapter 7, I said I found it interesting and remarkable that the middle women did not explicitly identify discrimination or racism as a source of, or an underlying basis for, inequities. It was surprising to me because, first, racism and discrimination were explicitly identified in some of the GMCNO's documents, and second, I had framed my research in terms of the race/culture divide and an interest in experiences of racism, thereby inviting discussion about racism. In Chapter 7, I first drew attention to the traces of race-thinking in my conversations with the middle women, examining their allusions to racisms.

But second, it was directly raising the question of whether and how race/ism is implicated in the middle women's work that surfaced many and varied examples of how racisms operate in subtle and not-so-subtle ways in and through everyday interactions. I was struck by the

immediacy and strength of the middle women's willingness to enter into dialogue about the race question, and the ease with which examples came to their minds and their tongues. I drew attention to how the middle women's accounts especially underscored the extent to which (Canadian) social institutions operate through taken-for-granted systemically embedded assumptions and practices. Specifically, these accounts exposed how human services and systems, shaped through "Canadian ways," operate to produce barriers and gaps that have the effect of excluding minoritized (im)migrants. In other words, they brought attention to how the system is "pre-designed" for a particular population (Day, 2000), which they described as white, English-speaking, Canadian-born and/or main stream, descriptors that denote racialization.

But now I admit that the findings discussed to this point tell "partial truths" (Clifford, 1986). The first partial truth is that several middle women suggested that some of the same barriers and gaps exist for non-(im)migrants in Canada. My findings adequately address this partial truth, as argued in Chapters 4 and 5, by demonstrating that it is the layering of particular types of inequities that distinguishes minoritized (im)migrants' challenges with human services from those of non-(im)migrants in Canada. It is this layering of inequities that shaped the emergence of middle women in the mid-1990s, and their persistence that shapes the continuing need for middle woman in "new emerging" minoritized (im)migrant communities.

The second partial truth is that not *all* the middle women concurred that racism is a *pervasive* underlying reality for minoritized (im)migrants in Canada. There were "negative cases" (Mayan, 2009) – middle women who did not fit the prevalent pattern. Indeed, there was a split among the middle women with respect to whether or not they recognized or acknowledged racism in their everyday experiences as Canadians and as middle women or in the extent to which they felt that racism was a prominent issue. This partial truth called for more nuanced consideration.

First, the split among the middle women was not along colour lines. I was struck by the very different responses of two black participants, born in different countries in Africa, who had migrated as refugees. Lisa, who works with Eritrean and Ethiopian (im)migrants, implied that racism is everywhere – "We know, whatever you do, in this country, the race is an issue. ... It is a given" (Lisa1). By contrast, Shirko, who works with Somali (im)migrants, suggested that she has not "seen that."

*You know, like somebody else who is with me and seeing the same thing might call something racism. But I don't know. I haven't seen that. ... It's hard for me to know maybe. I haven't seen it.*

Similarly, three light(er)-skinned (white?) participants had very different accounts. Sary, who works with Spanish-speaking (im)migrants, pointed to difference evoking pejorative responses.

*Sary: To me that was racism, because I was different, and because [of] the language barriers that I faced.*

Ruth: You're saying disrespectful, but would you say that's racism?

*Sary: Yes, that is the racism, if you don't care about the bad feeling of that little [child] who looks different. Not only because he's fat or chubby, but also because of the word Mexican. It's viewed in a pejorative way. I see racism in there.*

On the other hand, Shinin, who works with Kurdish people and (im)migrants from Iraq, responded that racism has not been a "serious big problem," and did not have a "very serious outcome."

*[There have been] some few problems, but not any serious big problems in regard to racism in our community. From my own experience, there were a few, but yeah, we see, but it is not a very serious one, a very serious outcome.*

Natalie, who works with Arabic-speaking (im)migrants from the Middle East, identified herself as 100 percent Canadian-born Muslim. Recall that she experienced differentiation only after she started to "practice visibly" – wearing a scarf. According to her account, prior to that time, she was not identifiably a member of a visible minority.

These five middle women, then, perceived and shared quite different perspectives, or points of view, about racism in Canada and in

human services. Their perspectives defied reduction to one neat overall experience, and they also defied my expectations, especially after some of the interviews in which I first explicitly focused on racism.

In thinking it through, I initially identified several possible ways of understanding the incongruities. My findings in Chapter 6 suggest that articulation of race and racism is diverted by a dominant discourse of culture and linguistic barriers and gaps. However, the fact that I explicitly framed my research to create an opening for talking about race and racism calls for additional explanations. First, perhaps some of the middle women did not want to open up views or experiences of racism with me as a white researcher. Second, I wondered whether the middle women define and/or interpret racism in different ways. As Jo-Anne Lee and John Lutz (2005) (among others) suggest, "Ideas of 'race,' [*sic*] racisms, and anti-racisms are in constant motion, and our understanding evolves as they take new forms" (p. 3). Liberalism shaped an enduring conception of racism as aberrant, the mark of "individual pathology" (p. 8). Although the academic literature is replete with materialist and post-modern conceptualizations of racism that render the liberal focus on irrationality obsolete, discourses of liberal democracy and official multiculturalism perpetuate the idea of racism as aberrant individual behaviour (Li, 2003, 2007). Third, was racism an uncomfortable topic – does acknowledging racism work against the middle women's hopes for a better future? Fourth, did the middle women have different interpretive repertoires (Wetherell & Potter, 1992) that shape what is sayable within the social relations of power in Canada? Interpretive repertoires refer to the resources that people draw upon under particular conditions and circumstances to make sense of what is happening. Wetherell and Potter (1992) observe that transitions in ways of thinking are disseminated unevenly and not directly into "lay talk" (p. 20).

As I struggled with understanding the seeming anomalies, I examined the ways in which the middle women responded to three lines of questioning or dialogue in my interviews: the need for a middle

woman, becoming a middle woman, and how racism is implicated in their work. It was striking that when I asked participants why there is a need for a middle woman, some of them asked me how much I knew about "the history of our community here." In many cases, I admitted I had little or no knowledge of that history. Some of the middle women provided a short history lesson, in which they highlighted the changing impetuses for emigration from "home" countries and the accompanying differences across groups of (im)migrants depending on these circumstances. Concise "cultural profiles" prepared by the GMCNO also highlight key aspects of these historical circumstances of migration for the main (im)migrant populations the middle women support.

In response to variations on my question – "How did you get involved as a middle woman?" – most participants set up their explorations of my framed question by way of talking about how (im)migration is implicated in their personal and family biographies and experiences. They wanted to talk in detailed ways about both their own pasts and how their pasts brought them to where they are now, and about how their own lives are intricately connected to those of the families they support.

The middle women's ways of responding to my questions suggested that they *use themselves* in interpreting and relaying the experiences of (im)migrants generally and the experiences of the people they support. An emergent question for me, then, was, "Why is it that the middle women started *there*?" How could I understand that (most of) the middle women referenced their own histories (circumstances and timing) – their personal biographies (Knowles, 2003) of migration – when asked to talk about how they became middle women?

As I tried to make sense of the middle women's starting points, I came to see how these connections were central to their nuanced insights, which made visible how their situated realities have shaped both their experiences and their explications of their own and others' experiences. I interpreted this as a systemic analysis – a rendering of their connections to



the issues *and* of their suitability as middle women. But more than that, I interpreted it as a *need* to articulate the issues in personal, visceral and often corporeal ways – "substantiated with *flesh*" (Knowles, 2003, p. 27, italics in original). I am a researcher and have taken time to listen, indeed to record, the stories they wished to tell (within limits). Had they entrusted me with the power and position to "make visible" what they struggle to make visible, or to voice what they struggle to speak?

I came to see that the middle women gauged their current conditions and circumstances, including racism, *through* their pre-migration conditions and circumstances. Their views of racism and other oppressions have been shaped by their particular pasts and current experiences. In other words, the very different vulnerabilities they articulated with respect to the need for a middle woman also apply to them, positioning them in very different relations to being "in Canada." These different relations of possibility played out in their perceptions, interpretations and even experiences of racism in Canada. It was through these personal biographies of connection to the issues that I, a white researcher, began to see that there were *multiple* vantage points. The middle women named some of the same issues across the (im)migrant populations they support, but they also named dissimilar issues and differences in the ways in which they situated these in relation to the conditions and circumstances of migration and the conditions of arrival, adjustment and life in Canada.

Three pivotal moments in my research contributed, first, to my questioning what was going on, and second, to a need for a more nuanced analysis. Drawing on my research memos, I discuss each of these in this chapter, in the order in which they arose during my analysis.

### *Discerning racism*

Recall from Chapter 7 Natalie's experience of being treated "rudely" by the receptionist in a human services office. I initially heard about this incident from some of Natalie's colleagues. But there is another

piece to Natalie's story. When I arrived at the same agency office for the same workshop, I too was treated rudely. The receptionist implied that either I must be in the wrong place or I must be in the right place at the wrong time. The workshop had started some time ago. After hearing about the incident from Natalie's colleagues, I noted the following in my fieldnotes.

At the meeting at [agency name], Carolina brought up an "incident" that occurred at the service agency where the cultural competency workshop took place on Tuesday. One of the [middle women] was treated rudely. The story was that she came in, was treated rudely by the receptionist, left to her car to cry and then came back in.

I also found the receptionist rude, but I filter my experience through what the [middle woman] (who wears a *hijab*) might have experienced. (Excerpt from Researcher's Journal, February 28, 2009)

My subsequent interview with Natalie followed three informal conversations during which she gauged the pros and cons of being a participant in my research. During the first conversation, she wanted to know how much time it would take now and in the future. I told her that I had heard about the incident at the social service agency and would like to explore it with her. She told me that she wanted to "refuse" to accept that what had been done was racist. But, on the other hand, she also told me that she was devastated by the experience (Researcher's Journal, May 5, 2008). In a later conversation, Natalie filled me in on how she became a middle woman. She also expressed concern – distrust is a better word – about whether participating in my research might/would "undo" all the hard work she and others in the Muslim community have done to (re)present themselves in positive terms. She asked me what I would do with the information and whether there was a risk that my research might shape or report negative perceptions of Arabs/Muslims. Natalie also talked a little about her experience of the cultural competency workshop, and how she had dealt with the situation. It was then that she told me that it was Lenore's observation – "I think you have experienced racism there" – that verified her experience. Afterwards, I wrote,

She thought of it how? Rude – [she addressed it] – said she would never go there again and talked to the supervisor. Had to recoup to do the job there – participate in small groups. She shared the difference in how she had been treated before she started wearing a *hijab* (7 years ago) and now – how she sometimes has to stop to think about the fact that she looks different because of her "scarf." (Excerpt from Researcher's Journal, May 20, 2008)

After agreeing to participate in my research, during the interview Natalie further explained her initial tentativeness about participating, especially her concern that I not represent her community negatively.

*Just from that angle, I wanted to make sure that this study, which I'm very proud and honoured that you did ask me to be part of, was more on the positive note. Yes, there's challenges. For sure, with every community, there are challenges. And I have no problem speaking about them. (Natalie)*

We also examined "the racist incident" in depth.

After interviewing Natalie, I wrote a memo, in which I tried to make sense of the difference between her experience of rudeness and mine.

This was a particularly poignant example [of discerning racism] because I had my own experience to juxtapose against Natalie's. After this interview, and after the experience itself even, I found the same woman to be very rude. So, I struggled with the "facts" of it, at first thinking there has to be a "right" and "wrong" way to understand it. As Lisa says in her interview, "Sometimes it is just a rude person," pointing to the need to discern what is really happening. It sounds like, "She treats everyone like that. Don't be so sensitive," or "You see racism everywhere." I came, in my own thinking about it, to realize that positionality is what is at the core of it. It's not about "right" and "wrong." It is about the fact that some people have to engage in a process of discernment in a way that I do not. So, Lisa, as a black woman who "expects" racism and experiences it everyday, is on alert in a way that I am not. She is impacted on a corporeal level that I am not, or at least not to the core. I may feel irritated or annoyed, but I don't question myself or my own judgment about it (not usually). (Memo Excerpt, "Positionally different," June 3, 2008)

This insight contributed greatly to my growing understanding of what it means to embody whiteness and difference. I had been confronted with embodying (my) whiteness on a previous occasion in another context unrelated to this research. This moment in my research was a good reminder of how easy it is to assume, or take for granted, how position constitutes privilege – in this case, the privilege *not* to internalize the rudeness, to be able to let it go. I discuss this issue in Chapter 9. What I am

mindful of here is that this process of unlearning privilege (Spivak, 1990) seems to (need to) occur through continuously renewable learning, too easily "forgotten."

### *Sitting in a very different corner*

My interview with Shinin was a second pivotal moment in my realization of how position constitutes privilege. In this excerpt from my interview with Shinin (after which I have titled this chapter), she directly and clearly named our different vantage points, in a sense refusing my imposing conceptualization or pre-conceived analysis.

Ruth: Um, I mean one way that people talk about it is that because this whole idea of the Canadian standard is a kind of racial idea, right? [Shinin has referred to this standard earlier.] Like, it's based on white British stock, background, and so that's kind of what you are working against. Do you understand it that way, or does that make sense to you when people say that?

*Shinin: Yeah. Yeah. I heard people say that, and I see it, that is how it is, but it is much, much, much better than before. That is why I am optimistic about the change. You know, here the system is founded to respond to the white British, French born people, but it is not the same way any more.*

Ruth: You're seeing a change.

*Shinin: Yeah. I see a change, yeah. I think it has changed, but*

Ruth: And you've experienced racism in your former country too.

*Shinin: Yeah. Because compared to what I experienced to my home, we are living in heaven.*

Ruth: Mmhm. Mmhm.

*Shinin: Yeah, that is how I do. Because I am different than you. We are sitting in a very different corner. You know, I see things in that way, because you never experienced what I experienced. So, based on what I experienced, you know, what we have in Canada is just heaven.*

Indeed, I am sitting in a very different corner. This dialogue reminded me (again) of non-white feminist theorists' cautions against generalization that comes from the taken-for-granted, universal, position (e.g., Razack, 1998; Dhamoon, 2009). I continued to struggle, though, with Shinin's *need to compare* "in Canada" to "at home" conditions and circumstances and the seeming *contradiction* of the "real" lived experience

of how hard it is here. Recall Shinin's articulation, from Chapter 7, of the difficulties of measuring up to Canadian standards. I return to these points later in this chapter. Shinin was one of (only) two participants in my research who spoke directly to me *through* my position in the dominant group. She put me in (my) place. As Sary also put it,

*Of course, there are a lot of uh, um, good people, like yourself and many others who are, who have an interest, in learning from us, something that we have this country to give back. ... But we're not, you guys are not so many.*

### ***Tracking what I see and hear***

A third pivotal moment occurred when I interviewed Shirko, because her perceptions differed so dramatically from those of Lisa, whom I have frequently cited. Recall that, for Lisa, "We know, whatever you do, in this country, the race is an issue. It is a given. ... We all know we are 2nd or 3rd class citizens. That's life" (Lisa1). It was therefore particularly striking when Shirko asserted that she does not "see that."

*Usually, like with the people that we deal with, like the Canadians or people who grew up here, they are good at that. I don't know what's in the bottom of their heart, but I track what I see and what I hear, right?*

As Shirko described how students are labeled "special needs" in school, she asked me, "It is what people call racism?"

*Shirko: They are labeled, whereby that is not the case. This child does not understand the language. He's never been in a school before.*

Ruth: So for you, that would be a lack of accommodation.

*Shirko: Lack of accommodation. Lack of understanding. Yep. So, is that what people call racism? [laughs]*

Following my interview with Shirko, I wrote a series of memos, which I titled *Striking pieces*. The following excerpt highlighted my realization that the "vantage point" of the middle woman was not one vantage point.

I am now aware, even more so with the last interview I did, that there is no one "vantage point" among the [middle women]. This is a multiple-vantage-points project. Why Shirko's interview? Well, here she does not claim to, or claims not to (?), experience racism or discrimination, and is not aware of such experiences among those she supports. (Memo Excerpt, "Striking pieces," September 27, 2008)

## **Multiple vantage points**

In "reality," the middle women's vantage points appear to intersect the possible understandings I outlined earlier, to shape their particular articulations of race and racism. The middle women interpreted their experiences through comparison, drawing on multiple reference points, including definitional and interpretive repertoires, comparisons between "real" lived experiences of "back home" and "in Canada," and the salience of different issues in the lives of the minoritized (im)migrants they support.

### *Conceptualizing racism*

I noticed that the middle women drew upon differing notions of racism as they pondered whether and how race and racism are implicated in their work, in response to my questions. I did not ask them to "define" race or racism. In fact, I intentionally wanted to stay away from definition because I see race and racism as relational. Nevertheless, in analyzing the interviews, I discerned traces of at least three modes of race-thinking in our dialogues.

First, in my interview with Neda and Sharadi, Neda implied that in itself race is a neutral term, commenting, "Race is, is a viable social term." Rather, she suggested, it is the way race is put to use that makes it problematic – "But the way it is, has become, is like a bad word. Like sort of putting you down. 'You are from this race or that'" (Neda). Sharadi responded that race contains power connotations – "It's [race is] a divider." As we pushed these two ideas further, Neda and Sharadi continued to talk through neutral and power-infused uses of race, noting the pros and cons of talking about it (as they conceptualized it), as illustrated in the following dialogue taken from our interview.

Ruth: Because there's judgment attached to it?

*Neda: Yeah. Because there is judgment attached to it, so and that's what we, you know, understand. We know what race means, but the thing is that is a sociology term to define you, define you where you come from, and your ancestry and all that. But it has been exploited, yes, and people are afraid to talk about it and I say to all people, or the [middle women], the immigrants,*

*the people who are working in main stream, that "Don't be afraid of talking about that. Open it up. Talk to them. How long are we going to walk on eggshells? And say what it is, like what you see. And talk about it."*

Ruth: Okay. [To Sharadi] Um, want to add to that?

*Sharadi: No, it's, Neda's right. It just doesn't seem to be politically correct to you know ask of somebody, "Are you from this place?" Or that sort of a thing. It is okay to ask, as long as we you know, give a framework of why we are asking. You know. Um, in some ways, it is good to ask, even when they do the census. Um, because then certain needs can be identified and certain resources can be put towards that you know. But in another way, it can also be a divider. Like you know, they can be used in a negative way.*

*Neda: Well, the thing is that the uniqueness of Canadian society is the diversity and diversity only can be seen when the different parts are identified as you know, of the population. "Yes, these are East Indian, these are this, these are that."*

I seized upon the moment to explore the idea of culturalization of race, explaining that some theorists argue that culture has come to be the "talkable" subject at the same time as "race" is now taboo.

Ruth: The next sort of layer of question would be, or is for me, some people, and this is kind of another sort of thesis that I've been working on in my research, um, kind of one of the theories that I came in with, um, is people who have really argued that the whole notion of culture has really been racialized. So, now even though we don't like to talk about race, we do talk about culture, but we talk about culture as if we are not doing the same thing. So we don't acknowledge that racism exists, but we're quite happy to talk about cultures, but culture is now being used in some ways in the same way. So judgments are made about cultures. Negative stereotypes are attributed to particular cultural groups, in the same way as racisms have worked in the past. Do you have experience of that? Would you see them as being different? Can you understand that argument? Does it make sense? Do you agree with that argument?

This question opened up further examination, as shown in the next excerpt from our interview, during which Sharadi hinted at the hard edges of race that make it unspeakable, compared to its "softer" replacement – culture. At the same time, Neda differentiated race from culture drawing on a static-dynamic dichotomy.

*Sharadi: Well, you know, you are right. Because it's being interchanged because you know, you still need to talk about it. So instead of race, they just put another word which is softer. You know, which doesn't seem like it's going to offend anybody. ... They are two different things, though, but they are using it now ...*

*Neda: Race is sort of more rigid. Culture is not as rigid when you're using it, in terms of ... there is always room for you know, "culture is dynamic." Race is not dynamic. If you're a black race, you're a black race. Right.*

Finally, Neda referred to the "catch-22" of differentiation as a difference-making practice that draws on racialized and/or culturalized difference. Here, she alluded to the underlying question of *who* gets to *use* the concept of difference and for what? As she put it, "You can't have your cake and eat it too."

*But the thing is, we are saying, "Okay. We are different. But don't call us we're different from you." You know, "Asking me." Like having your cake and eat it too. (Neda)*

A second mode of race-thinking among the middle women drew on a notion of racism as the practice of *conscious* inferiorization on the basis of another's traits. Trina thought about racism in this way.

*When I think about it, I realize that um, to me, I label racism um [pause] the part where people consciously say um, "You're worth less because of your colour or, or whatever, things you have."*

For her, the notion of consciousness or intentionality was central. As she thought through whether and how race and racism are implicated in the Middle Woman's work, she simultaneously pointed to the strategic usefulness of a malleable deployment of racism. Here, she allocated *conscious* racism to extremists like the Klu Klux Klan. She asserted that she had "very rarely encountered that in all these years." Accordingly, she juxtaposed *consciousness* to *unawareness*, suggesting that the appeal of defining racism as conscious is that it makes space for the possibility of change. Whereas *conscious* racism is probably a hopeless case," practices that occur out of an "*unawareness* of your own culture and race, and somebody else's" are amenable to change.

*What I have encountered is what I call um, um, unawareness of your own culture and race. And somebody else's. Um, and most of the time, it is not, it is not directed, like what I would call racism. It is simply a lack [pause], yeah, it's what I call unawareness.*

*In some ways, it is, for me, also a more um, a perspective that gives me more room to maneuver, and to see whether things can change. Because if it's unawareness, it means that in order to change um, it means to, for people to become more aware. Yeah. That's what it takes, and then a change can occur.*



*If, like you know, with people from the Klu Klux Klan, I don't know what you would do with them. I honestly, I think it's pretty much a hopeless case. What do you do with people who think that just because you are black, you are ... so, I guess that's my distinction of racism, and also how I can work within the system. (Trina)*

Trina's thinking comprised an interesting reversal of the theorized rationale attributed to culturalization in a supposedly post-race era. As Kothari (2006) has asserted, culturalization is not new. It was central to colonization as a civilizing force. If race was static – or, as Neda put it, "rigid" – the advantage of culture was (and is) that it can be changed. As biological concepts of race have all but disappeared (Bolaria & Li, 1988; Miles & Torres, 1996) (although clearly their traces persist), and culture has become the vehicle for change, Trina's comments hint that cultural awareness is a vehicle for changing the dominant group's (un)awareness – but not its conscious-ness. She has already suggested that conscious-ness is difficult if not impossible to change.

A third mode of race-thinking I noticed among the middle women's accounts also drew on inferiorization, but this time with reference to its effects. Here, Sary, for example, defined racism as the effect of pejorative judgments of difference – a "feeling of being less. Of being ugly, of being different."

*So he [my son] was growing up with that feeling of being less. Of being ugly, of being different. To me, that's racism. ... Because I didn't speak very good English at that time, and I wasn't sure how to handle it [what happened to her son in school]. Same thing happened to these newcomers today. They don't know how to handle situations like this, because like I said, I never heard the word racism in my life 'til I came here. They never heard many things happened to their children in their life, because they've never been here before. But to me that was racism, because I was different, and because the language barriers that I faced. ...*

*Like if a child, for example, in the school, is being called "fat" or "you're a fat Mexican." And then the child gets resentful then. Because I could be chubby, not fat. But why the "Mexican" word came up? You know, so then to me that's very unrespectful for a child.*

The middle women clearly held varying and shifting positions in relation to what was *seeable* and *sayable*. As a result, they drew upon different and sometimes ambiguous and contradictory repertoires to make

sense of and interpret their definitions of racism and their experiences. Both pre- and post-migration conditions and circumstances and personal biographies shaped the women's repertoires. I return to the implications of say-ability in the next chapter.

Although Natalie, in the end, realized her experience of racism, she wanted to refuse to believe it. During our conversation, she commented, first, "I refused to believe that was racism," and later, "I refused to believe that this was because I practice my religion visibly." And Shirko wondered, first, "Is this [labeling] what people call racism?" and later, whether racism is something people see if they are already conscious of racism, preoccupied with it, and are therefore *looking* for it.

*I don't know. I don't recall that. Like, for myself, it's, I don't look at things very ... Like maybe there are people who have consciousness of racism – "This person did that. That person is racist." They are already preoccupied with this kind of thinking?*

Lisa, as already shown, *sees* racism as an underlying reality. She hinted at how an assumption of privilege allows service providers to "forget who they are."

*And so, as I grew up to be a privileged person, I've always had to remember I've lived, my parents had to go through that scrutiny, and being watched, and we will always have to be ... So, I know that experience, and I transfer it unconsciously to my children, and that's exactly how my kids look at themselves. ... But I have no qualms to say when I see something that is not right. And I, I, I go home, sleep at night without having to, I give 150 percent of everything I do because they pay for my bread, I have to give it. That's what I learned. But, at the end of the night, I don't forget who I am. .... But [the service worker] assumes that she doesn't have to talk to this mom, because she doesn't speak English much, and therefore she walks in, and goes to talk to the children, and walks out. (Lisa1)*

By contrast, Sary wasn't familiar with the language of refugee, visible minority *or* racism, before she came to Canada. She learned this "vocabulary" in Canada.

*The word racism, I never heard in my vocabulary when I was in school, ever. Either in my childhood when I was growing up or in my teenage years. But it's very important. (Sary)*

Natalie suggested that an underlying discourse of "Canada's niceness" also works to shape how (some) people are treated, and how

they interpret their treatment. Her comments resonated with Folson's (2004) concept of "calculated kindness." Here, Natalie hints that (im)migrants are made to feel that Canada has been so good to them that they ought not (have no right to ?) be critical.

*Because I resemble my Muslim religion, so we're labeled. Going into a store to return something, for example, you are, "Okay, well, are the tags on, do you have a receipt?" You're pretty much, well, right away, they're pretty skeptical. "Have you worn this item before?" "Are you returning it worn already?" So, you're kinda labeled already, by the complainer, the one that doesn't have a lot of money, that perhaps needs to take advantage of Canada's niceness, and the return policies. Because back home there is no such thing.*

At the same time, though, Natalie is positioned (and at times positions herself) as 100 percent Canadian-born, English-speaking. In the absence of the "visible difference" of her scarf, she "passes" for white. Here, Natalie pointed to how "chosen difference" is likely to draw attention. Her allusion to choice revealed simultaneously the privilege some (ever visible) people do not have and a lack of awareness of this ambiguous privilege.

*You can't change people's thinking a hundred percent. Right? But as long as I'm not treated with disrespect, then all that I just think this is the way life is. You want to be different, you're going to be treated a little differently. Nothing's wrong with it, though.*

### **"Real" differences**

The middle women's definitions and interpretive repertoires were not the only shapers of their readiness to examine racism, or their recognition of racism. I suggest that the middle women filter their experiences and perceptions of racism through multiple and overlapping comparisons of circumstances and conditions between "back home" and "in Canada."

For Shinin, conditions really are "better" "in Canada" than (any)where else from which the women she supports have come. There is "no comparison" that can render "back home" a better place for Kurdish women.

*[Working for women's equality] in the north of Iraq ... was a very tough job, because the whole society and the culture was not ready for any change.*

*And, for women, it's just supposed to be, to have a typical role, you know. Even when the role [of women] changed, and the woman got more education, and she went to a work field. People would think she has a little freedom, more than the previous generation, there was not a big change. She was still, you know, playing the same role and has not any freedom to express herself, and uh, to practice her life. So, we were a group of women who tried to bring change, and for women to ask for more freedom, and to have more freedom to practice their lives as human beings. It's when ... something came our way – it was honour killing.*

*And the honour of the family in their understanding, in their view, can be abused even by talking to a neighbour male, or even, you know, or their own husband, even for asking for more rights and sometimes not being virgin. Even sometimes not being virgin was for a medical reason. Even for a woman who had not a sex relationship, but it happened the blood was not red. So, we tried to organize some kind of group to bring more attention and awareness around honour killing, that it is a wrong. Not to have it in our culture. We brought some awareness, and we found a group, but we were not very effective to reduce that number of the honour killings, because it's very much related to the religion, uh, ideas, the cultural background. The society was not ready for, for any change, and the women still get killed because of the honour reason.*

*You know the dream of bringing change, and the dream of bringing more rights, more well-being to women's life brought me to the field of [being a middle woman].*

Shinin's mission is women's equality "back home" and "in Canada." Her mission represents continuity in that she saw that the women who were "behind" "back home" are also "behind" "in Canada." These are the women whose pre-migration conditions and circumstances shaped their vulnerability to continuing inequities in Canada. As I coded this interview, I struggled with Shinin's labeling of women "back home" as "behind," seeing how it works against feminist race theorists' criticisms of Western judgments of (im)migrant women as "backward." I made sense of it this way.

I think this is a very important insight, the way that Shinin expresses it. I have struggled with the idea of re-labeling the women, especially the ethnic women, as "behind." But here, the thread is from her work back home, where she TOO worked for change, as a feminist, and she has carried this work here. She sees that women's lives are narrowed by both circumstance and by narrowly defined parameters of religions and societies. Capacity building of women is her mission. (Annotation#3 in Shinin)

I thus came to see how our different relations to women's conditions there and here allowed Shinin, but not me, to judge what is occurring "over there." Shinin made clear that her work is continuous *and* discontinuous, as she commented, "It is not the same, but it is close" (Shinin). For Shinin, the *possibilities* of Canada really *are* different from the possibilities back home. Here, as she says, "I was able to be a Kurd in Canada. ... I cannot be the person I am if I am not in Canada."

*I think being Canadian, it means you are a multicultural person, you know. Being Canadian is not like being American, or being English or something. Being a Canadian is, I feel I'm a Canadian Kurd. That's what I feel. I'm not a Kurd Canadian. I'm a Canadian Kurd. Because mostly for me, I was able to be a Kurd in Canada. It is very, very strong this way. I cannot be the person I am if I am not in Canada. So I am a Canadian Kurd. That is how I just define myself. It is my identity. I cannot be a Kurd without being a Canadian.*

*I'm not a Canadian without being a Kurd. So it is very much together, you know. Being a Canadian is much, much different than being, you know, from any other country. You are yourself. In Canada, it is free to be yourself. Being a Canadian does not stop you from being yourself. So it is very much, you know, part of me [here she points to each side of her body] is Canadian, and part of me is Kurd, and being the part of being Kurd cannot be alive without being Canadian.*

"Back home" Kurds risked cultural genocide – "Right now, we have in Iraq, Kurdish language is allowed and the kids can learn the language in Iraq. But in Iran and Turkey and Syria, the language even is not allowed to be spoken with" (Shinin). As a result, Shinin's recent involvement in implementing an inter-cultural pre-school pilot project through which Somali, Sudanese and Kurdish children learned together reinforced her sense of *possibilities*. It was a site through which the children could be "who they are" – where their languages and cultures comprised the classroom. On several occasions during participant observation opportunities, I heard Shinin describe the experience as a "dream come true." I explored this with her during our interview.

Ruth: It was kind of like the dream come true. And you talked a lot, in some of the conversations, about the importance of cultural identity.

*Shinin: Because it was mostly very important for the Kurdish community, because they never had uh, uh, before. For the Kurdish people, and it was*

*something that brought them some kind of pride. ... even having the language, or uh, you know, uh, it was telling us, even as we learn that, it was okay for us to be different. But we can live together. We are different, but at the end, we are all one unit when we meet and we work all, we all work together to have a brighter future and a very important next step. So, for the kids, it was very okay for them to have a Somali kids who speak Somali, and a Sudanese kids who speak Arabic and Nuer. So, they were uh just like a very harmonic class. Very harmonic class. They were so happy.*

A democratic system makes *daring* to dream possible in ways that Shinin could not imagine "back home." The fact that the system is changeable makes her optimistic – "our system is not a concrete system."

*I am very optimistic, because our system is not a concrete system. You know, maybe we have some kind of racism, or, you know, we have some problems, but it can be solved with communication. ... It is not because, you know, the system is not good. The system is, we have a democratic system, and the system is able to change. What I like about, you know, our system in Canada is a changeable system. It is not a concrete system. Like, you know, a Koran or a bible cannot be changed.*

As I coded my interview with Shinin, I reflected on the salience of her point.

This is such a salient point. It was a key moment in my thinking about the different significances of what "cultural" demands mean, and offers a way to understand or make sense of Shinin's way of seeing what Canada offers quite positively, because it is always within the realm of hope made possible by being in a democratic country, where you can be yourself, or at least strive to be. (Annotation#2 in Shinin)

Yet, Shinin was clear that (a) democracy does not inevitably turn possibilities into realities – "[Change] will come, but it will not come on its own. We have to make it. We all have to get together and make it."

In contrast to Shinin's position, for Sary, life was better "back home" until a coup changed "the whole picture," making her a refugee. Before that, she "had a good life." As a result, she feels "immigrated. I didn't immigrate myself." She was an involuntary (im)migrant.

*I felt a refugee person, becoming a refugee without wanting, without looking for it. Like I didn't have any need to get out of there. I had a good life. I went to university. I have a good family. I live in a great house. I have everything that I need to be happy. But then suddenly the whole picture changed, and that doesn't make me different, or worse, or less, than anybody else.*

*To me, I was just coming because I didn't decide to come to this country, but it is because of the political situation. And then we have the opportunity by the Prime Minister that we have at that moment in Canada, to open the*

*opportunity for Chileans, and then we came. But to me, I feel immigrated. I didn't immigrate myself.*

Coming from this vantage point, Sary's negative experiences in Canada shaped her analysis of the poor performance of a "first world country" compared to the "good life" back home.

*I was one of those immigrant refugee women who did have a baby in this country just as a newcomer, and I felt that I did not really get what I thought I would. I mean having a baby in a country that is first world country, like Canada, so the expectations I had at the time were quite huge. ... And I didn't feel, after delivering my baby, that those expectations were real. ... When you listen, and when you live in another country, you listen to this all the time, again and again. Canada, United States, and all the first countries of the world and where people get very well respected. I mean, this is not a completion, it's basically expectations I would say, from what I knew, that may happen, or my assumptions of what may happen, in a health care system that um, didn't show what I was expecting.*

Shinin and Sary tended to make *overall* types of comparisons – generalizing about "back home" and "in Canada" through their particular conditions and circumstances of emigration and immigration. Some middle women, though, did not generalize in these ways. For them, comparisons were specific to particular circumstances. Their articulations suggested, first, that Canada is a better place than back home in some respects but not in others, and second, that not everything in Canada is worthy of striving for.

For Lisa, availability of familial social support systems and established ways of addressing emergent issues back home are conditions that shaped better possibilities for successfully resolving issues. In exploring family violence and woman abuse, for example, Lisa articulated how back home a collective interest fosters successful resolution of familial conflicts – where *both* men and women receive support. In diaspora, on the other hand, the families don't know each other, there is no one to help solve problems or they are "not the right people." In this sense, "you are in a worse situation."

*Now, meeting some of these men in diaspora, you don't even know his family. His family does not know your family. So you are coming here, you are trying to solve problems, in a culture that you don't know, there is nobody to solve it. So in this same area, you are in a worse situation because*

*even people who are in your own community are not the right people, because these people don't know you. (Lisa1)*

Further, Lisa noted that many (im)migrants left their countries of origin to get away from the kinds of oppressive relations that the middle women and the minoritized (im)migrants they support experience with service providers in Canada. This is especially true when they feel they cannot talk back to disrespect for fear of jeopardizing access to the very services they are trying to navigate, which as she says, is "the saddest feeling."

*Lisa: It is that kind of relationship, but in a way, we are um, we are doomed. Like we are in the middle. So as long as you are in the middle, there are times that you could just say, "I don't care, but you cannot talk to me like that," right? But there are, there are many times that you have to take that in order for the client to get what they want. Which is the saddest feeling.*

Ruth: And that is, really the meaning of oppression.

*Lisa: Yes, it is. It is. And honestly, many of us, many of us, have left that [kind of oppression behind]. (Lisa2)*

Thuy and Lisa both referenced the "freedom to do whatever you want" as a "Canadian" norm. But they critiqued this notion of "freedom" – one that seems to treat relationships as disposable, like commodities. Thuy articulated her ambivalence about this kind of "Canadian" freedom.

*I need to advocate to our people that not all white people are leaving home when they are 18. And I also share with them when they are 18, the reason, there is a reason why they leave home, and there a reason why the parents want them to be independent. ... They say, "That is so Canadian. That's so low." They ask me about divorce, and I said, "If you're not happy, you just divorce." That's just a practice. That's freedom. The right to do whatever they want to do. You respect it. Their right to do it. I'm sharing that with them. At the same time, they talk back to me.*

*Nowadays, new women who arrive to Canada, they thought if they come to the Canadian way, they not happy with my husband, I divorce him. So that is the trend that is going right now. The young women from Vietnam coming here, and that's what they do. And now, I'm going back again, to advocate them again. "That's not Canadian. You are wrong. Canadians are not like that. Everybody has the same values." So, I'm going back a bit. So right now, I see my role is helping families to, to see the picture. Because it has become so easy to divorce here, but not back home, right. Divorce here is easy, and then you can marry again. ... And then they arrive here, and the women are saying, "Oh, it's the Canadian way. And freedom country. We can do whatever we like." Misperception.*



Lisa emphasized how the circumstances of comparison are very different for Ethiopian and Eritrean women in Canada. In the extended excerpt below, Lisa illustrated that "for some women, of course, not for all women, for some women, this might be a better place to be" (Lisa1). And like Thuy, she problematized what seems to constitute women's equality "in Canada."

*When [name] was in Ethiopia, she was a hard-working woman. She was out, you know, she can maneuver the system like you wouldn't believe. Here, because of language, because of age, because of situations, she doesn't. [Her husband] actually is the one who she goes with, or [her family]. That wasn't the reality for [her]. [She] was very strong. She and her sister ran a business. They go to the bank, everybody knows them. They just deal like a man would deal in the business. Here the reality is different.*

*For some of the women, things are changing back there too. Back there, you see, in Ethiopia, they're educated. They have been active in certain things. We are respecting them that way, whether they are a woman or a man. But the majority, the chances are not there for women. So, then having said that, women are better off here in that aspect, for education, for work. Cause there's no, there's 80 percent of people who are not working in the country where we come from, so in that aspect, in, women being the mother, and the one who is going to raise the children, automatically, that is not the chance they would even have. So that is the reality.*

*However, now in Eritrea, both men and women work, and the reality is different. Really different. Women are much, even the old, old women, are much more educated of their rights, than the women who are here who thinks, by working, by driving a car, they are better off. No. That is the problem we are having here. Even Canadian women, when I look at Canadian [women], what they seem to think is that because they drive a car, because now they can work, and become a manager, and all that, they still don't think that the reality is that men are getting paid more than we do, in this country.*

*And so, to me, so you cannot say, "Well, as a woman, I'm this and that." No, you're not. In fact, we are way behind, as a Western, or first world. And so, I, I, this is where I have a problem, because women now feel like they can live on their own, they can purchase a house, and a car. Well, that's the same mentality they are transferring to our women. And, you have to kind of remind them, so that's not even the reality. The reality is that women have a long way to go in this world, period.*

*To me, in a culture where I come from, women can be, you know, and in India, women, of course they are politicians, but in India, in the Philippines, women are Presidents. Why are we so behind? And nobody thinks that way. In fact, the women who are in Africa are way ahead of the game because they know the reality every day, they live it, so they have to be on their toes. Whereas here, women have taken it easy because they are working, they are*

*earning money, and they can do things on their own. And if they don't like the husband, they can kick him out.*

*That's not the only thing. As a whole, though, a single woman, doesn't matter if she's Canadian or immigrant, suffers in this country, suffers and their children suffers, because of the reality. In our country, a single women might not suffer that way, because there will be relatives, there will be grandmothers, there will be someone to look after the children. That's not the reality here. She is, and so you need to start looking at, so what are we talking about?*

*And so, not enough in some ways better off here. They are very alone. They are really in, but of course, they can work and earn money, if that's what we say is equality. ... You see. So, I have a different thoughts on that, depending on who. (Lisa1)*

Sary, Neda and Sharadi, Thuy and Lisa talked back to the ways in which "Canadian" comparisons take for granted that (im)migrants are/ must be better off here – comparisons that, although sometimes unreferenced, are implicated in service providers' difference-making practices.

Yet another way of conceptualizing racism was as "a given." Aileen and Lisa saw it that way. Seeing racism as a given is consistent with critical race theorists' assertions that racism is not an aberration; it is the norm. But if that is the case, why did some middle women recognize it while others did not? The middle women surfaced three possible responses to this question. First, Aileen suggested that if racism is "a given in their life," "you couldn't get upset about it every time it happened."

*I've learned that people just ... that's a given in their life. That's just the way it is. ... I think they're just used to it. ... I mean you couldn't get upset about it every time it happened. I mean, the person I was walking with, I mean, they weren't near as upset as I was. Because I don't think they ... I think that happens to them, eh? And they wouldn't let it spoil their day, because if you're gonna get all upset about it, you would just spoil your day whenever it happened, eh? (Aileen)*

Second, for many of the middle women, racism in Canada is a continuation of racial, ethnic or religious conflicts "back home" – conflicts that gave rise to their migration to Canada in the first place. Neda, for example, explained that "back home" even people who moved from Pakistan to the villages were "refugees" who no one wanted to deal with.

Lisa also spoke about how ethnic conflicts between Eritreans and Ethiopians were implicated in her family's migrations.

Finally, although racism may be an issue, the middle women often subordinated racism to other (more) immediate issues. When I asked about racism, Shinin emphasized the gap between the two generations and Thuy commented, "I think, you know, that nowadays, nowadays, a lot of, a lot of our people, a lot of people in our community, experience parenting issues is the problem right now." Carolina reflected on how talk of diversity has coincided with the (im)migration of non-white people, especially from African countries. But her immediate concern was "so many gaps." For Lisa, who is also involved in an organization that engages with race and gender analyses more explicitly, while racism is a *given*, it isn't the top-named priority in her work as a middle woman, where family violence takes most of her attention.

### **Relative racism?**

The middle women's starting places were often the geopolitics involved in the countries from which (im)migrants came to Canada in the first place – including political and economic conditions. They highlighted the effects of Canadian immigration policies and practices, intersecting with education and employment standards, and income security programs, laid over pre-migration experiences. For economic immigrants and their dependents that had opted to migrate to Canada to leave behind a lack of opportunities for employment commensurate with their education and secure a better future for their children, the struggles may result in a feeling that they have "made a mistake" (Sharadi). They may ponder whether they should have migrated and, in some cases, they return to home countries or relocate elsewhere. For refugees who fled political persecution and civil-war-torn countries, sometimes leaving behind, first, birth countries and, later, refugee camps, compared to what they had experienced, they expected life in Canada to be "paradise" (Shirko). For some, "It is not paradise" (Shirko), while for others, it is "just

like heaven" (Shinin). The circumstances of migration shape these interpretations of experience. The middle women's nuanced examinations of their conditions and circumstances and those that shape the lives of the people they support made palpable the problematic way in which the ascribed category "immigrant" has come to represent so much while at the same time it says so little *because* it glosses over the myriad differences that require attention.

As I analyzed the middle women's considerations of how race and racism might be implicated in their work, I wrote the following memo.

In Shinin's interview, she clearly makes the experience of racism relative. Although some Kurds have experienced it, it has not had severe outcomes. She makes clear that compared to where Kurds came from (the multiple non-democratic countries), life in Canada is heaven. There are changes to be made, but these changes are imaginable here in a way that they were not elsewhere.

I think other middle women see racism in relative terms too. But not in the same ways. Lisa, for example, sees racism as expected, being black and having experienced it elsewhere. For her, there is ethnic rivalry "back home," and here, but here it is added on to racism attached to the skin. Difference is not chosen.

For Natalie, racism/or xenophobia/or religion as the basis for racism is tempered by a benefit of the doubt for negative and disrespectful behaviours. Like Thuy.

For most, it seems to be always in comparison.

For Shirko ... no experience of racism. It is interesting that Lisa, in her second interview, spoke about the Somalis being much more confident and assertive in going after what they are entitled to. So, perhaps Somalis ... because of ??? ... education ?? ... have that. Or maybe it is not true either, and it is just that Shirko does not/or refuses to see racism (as Natalie puts it). (Memo Excerpt, "Relative racism," November 20, 2008)

"Refract" means "to alter the appearance of something by viewing or showing it through a different medium."<sup>74</sup> In this research, I set out to try to see what is visible from a new or additional vantage point (or, more aptly here, through a different lens). What I have come to see, and have

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tried to make visible in this chapter, is how the middle women's astute and nuanced explanations of the challenges and possibilities for (im)migrants in Canada are refracted through the particular ways in which (im)migration is implicated in their own lives, so that they experience racism "relatively." In a subsequent memo, I noted my reflections on this insight.

An anomaly?

I was already aware that Shirko's perceptions are somewhat anomalous with respect to experiences of race and racism. Even when asked directly, she says that she has not seen racism through her work ... and "pushed" further, coming at it in different ways, I see that she attributes the seeing of racism to an expectation of it. I'm not clear at this point what that means, or how I can interpret that.

Or is her perspective so different? They also gave examples of what I might/would tend to see as racism, and in giving the example also did not see it as racism. Natalie has it in her mind, perhaps because she has experienced herself as invisible and as visible, and has a basis for comparison. She does not want to see racism, but sometimes she does think she sees and experiences it. For Lisa, there is no doubt; she expects it, experiences it as a day-to-day reality, but is discerning about when the experience is racism and when it is not.

At times, the workers check with me what do others think of as racism? e.g., Shirko, Sary. "Is this what is meant?" "I think this is racism."

One thing is clear: There are judgments being made about language, practices, abilities, which channel immigrants' and refugees' in particular directions. These directions may result in lost opportunities and forestall maximizing potential. These judgments are made in individual cases, and there are also systematic aspects to them. (Memo Excerpt, "What's solid and what's not," November 26, 2008)

Further, I wondered, "Does not experiencing it [racism] make it not racism? Does seeing it make it so?" (Memo Excerpt, "What's solid and what's not," November 26, 2008)

During and following my interview with Shinin, I realized the impossibility (in the sense of unbearable difficulty)<sup>75</sup> of comparison. I implied this during my interview with Shinin.

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<sup>75</sup> im·pos·si·ble: "unbearably difficult or not possible to endure." Encarta® World English Dictionary © 1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. Developed for Microsoft by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Ruth: It's not right to have to make that comparison, really.

*Shinin: Yeah. Yeah. So, but I don't want to compare Canada to Iraq, because Iraq is just something that we don't want to be a model for anywhere. Or Iran. Jordan, Syria. We don't want those countries to be, or Turkey, we don't want those countries to be the role model of anything in Canada. So, we want a more positive, a brighter future for Canada, and I am optimistic.*

I felt that the very *need* to compare was itself an inequity. For Western liberal discourses *also* shape the middle women's comparisons and, as a result, are implicated in how they experience racism relatively. In the next memo excerpt, I noted contradictions that are perhaps inherent to what Floya Anthias (2001) calls "translocational positionality."

There were (frequent) references to Canada as a democratic country or a civilized country or as a country that is tolerant, etc. and yet these characteristics are sometimes unexpectedly disrupted giving rise to implied comparisons between here and there. "How could such a thing happen in Canada, a civilized country?" a parent reportedly asks regarding the child's right not to go to school after the age of 15. [The middle woman wondered], What future will she have if she does not go? How could Canada condone this?

Authority – How is it that people who left authoritarian countries for freedom in a democratic and civilized country, are afraid of the government and the service systems here? Afraid that they can take your children away? Or deport you if you are sick or if you need help? (Memo Excerpt, "Civilized and democratic," October 22, 2008).

Siobhan described how (im)migrants navigate the tension of constant comparison, commenting, "The capacity to hope and to worry is always in the same breath" (Siobhan4). The capacity to hope manifests itself in *daring* to dream. The capacity to worry, or even despair, tempers the hope. Theirs is not *naïve* dreaming. Like Spivak's caution (1990), it is more like *daring* to dream but (remembering to) critique it at the same time, which, as Lisa suggested, keeps you "on your toes."

Recall Shinin's caution (earlier in this chapter) – that democracy does not inevitably realize the possibility of equity. As a result, for Shinin, being a middle woman is "not a *job*." It is about actualizing dreams, as she explained.

*Shinin: It's some kind of bringing change and linking the people to the whole system, and how to bring the both sides together, the system and the client, to work together for the well-being of the whole individual and the family and the society.*

Ruth: What are some of your ideas about what [becoming more responsive] needs to look like?

*Shinin: It is not just my ideas. People have to get together, and to share ideas. ... What is the use of you and me and some other people who have no power to say anything to get together and talk? But it is the system and the people, the individuals who came to Canada, have to get together and to share something, you know, and to find something to be more responsive and more positive for the people who come to Canada. For us to be more useful.*

Ruth: This is a really important moment, you're saying

*Shinin: A moment, yeah. A very important moment, because if we don't try to help the system now, we won't be ready, we'll be talking about this, you know, change in 15, 20 years. But from right now, we have to make and find the resources, a foundation for other people to come, they'll be more productive, more ready to go on the market. You know, because we cannot have uh, a very progressive, very strong country, we have 25 percent of all people are on income support.*

## **Summary**

In this chapter, I surfaced anomalies in my findings about the middle women's naming of racism in Canada. To understand these anomalies, I then re-examined the data for the ways in which the middle women had responded to questions about the need for a middle woman, becoming a middle woman and how racism is implicated in their work. This examination revealed that the women's personal and family connections to (im)migration were central to their nuanced insights, which made visible how their situated realities have shaped both their experiences and their explications of their own and others' experiences. The middle women gave meaning to "in Canada" experiences *through* particular pre-migration realities, in a process of continuous comparison between "here" and "there." *Sitting in very different corners* signals that the middle women are positioned in very different relations to being "in Canada," and therefore also differ in their perceptions, interpretations and experiences of racism in Canada. As the women filter their understanding of inequities, as well as the possibility of overcoming them, through these comparisons, their hopes for the future take on particular meanings.

This chapter revealed the implications of different conceptualizations of racism, and illuminated what it means to draw on

different interpretive repertoires. It highlighted the extent to which a discourse of racism as individual behaviour is dominant. At the same time, it contested the dominant discourse that racism is aberrant, by exposing racism as not universal but nevertheless routine and systematic. Finally, it was through *coming* to see that there were /are different "corners" that I understood that there were multiple vantage points in this project.

In the next chapter, I examine what is involved in navigating the social relations of power that shape the possibilities of speaking about and contesting racism in Canada.



## PART IV

### Chapter 9. The many dances that you do

*You have to maneuver the system. ...  
So, there are many dances you do. I call it a dance.  
- Lisa2*

#### **Saying it as it is?**

In this chapter, I revisit a fourth "D," drawing upon Lisa's description of the middle women's work. As I discussed in the previous chapters, some middle women spoke about racist and oppressive practices without prompting. But for the most part I needed to ask them directly whether and how race/ism is implicated in their work – for example, in the practices of judgment and labeling, disrespect, disinterest and domination they had reported. I initially read the need to inquire directly as reluctance or unwillingness on the part of the middle women to open up the issue of race/racism. However, as discussed in the last chapter, the extent and vehemence of the ensuing dialogues caused me to re-read these signs.

Actually, a clue to the power relations implicated in opening up talk about race came even before I began my research, when I met with Lenore to discuss my research proposal. At that time, Lenore mentioned that reading my proposal had been a "cathartic experience." In our first interview, I reminded Lenore of that comment and asked her to elaborate on it. She reiterated the experience – "To me it was a cathartic experience to have someone articulate what was going on inside the experiences of inequality and oppression." Lenore explained that it is often difficult in the day-to-day to "sit down and be reflective and be analytical too. And even be critical" (Lenore1). But as we talked, I wondered about this explanation. Lack of time or something else?

In my first conversation with Lenore, she quickly pointed to the GMCNO's need to be "really cautious" about "exposing inequality." On one hand, Lenore asserted, "I'm so tired of being cautious. And sometimes I just want to lay it out straight" (Lenore1). On the other hand, she

explained, the Middle Woman fails as mediator when “one entity that you're mediating doesn't trust you anymore.” Echoing these sentiments, on more than one occasion Siobhan too described the feeling of being in an oppressive relationship with other organizations.

*It's hard work and sometimes it does feel like we're in an abusive relationship sometimes with the system [Laugh], because in the methodic kind of relationship building, sometimes the benefit doesn't come right away. ... Being abused meaning we do the work, it's not being recognized and uh sometimes being criticized, but certainly not being recognized and supported. (Siobhan3)*

Recall Neda's reflection on how the term race has become a "bad word," so that people are "afraid to talk about it." She wondered aloud, "How long are we going to walk on eggshells?" Recall that she advises middle women, (im)migrants and service providers to "say what it is, like what you see." At one point in my research, the GMCNO invited me to share some key themes from my research at its annual retreat. I had framed one section of my findings "oppressive relations." And Sharadi objected, "Do you have to use that word?"

The middle women's comments suggest that the power relations in which they are embedded severely constrain "saying it as it is." But what is at stake for an organization of minoritized (im)migrant middle women in "saying it as it is?" Lenore suggested that "you have to be very cautious" not to "antagonize" other organizations, in the interests of "preserving the good relationships."

*You know something is wrong, you have to be very cautious. You know that someone is oppressing. An organization is oppressing another organization. But you can't bring it out openly. Uh, if you do, if you ever want to bring it out, you have to be really cautious about it. Make sure that it is from a perspective of collaboration and support. Sometimes I think that it is an instant where you need to set things straight. But then that would be that would be antagonistic. And there is sometimes a tendency to just say it as it is. To to to, I use the word, to expose the inequality. (Lenore1)*

Siobhan also suggested that the organization's survival needs silence the truth.

*It's like we are so ... it's a relationship where we are depending on them for our own survival. And therefore we cannot speak the truth as often as we can. And where we cannot lead the decision making, and we cannot speak*

*when we want to speak. I think that is what I'm describing. To be oppressed.*  
(Siobhan5)

And Sharadi alerted me to the GMCNO's reality – "Oppression sounds so harsh. We have worked hard to establish good relationships with the organizations."

As my research proceeded, I heard and observed how the middle women navigate the racialized power relations implicated in their work. In this chapter, I examine how working in oppressive relations shapes "the dances that they do" and, ultimately, the toll it takes.

### ***Keeping the door open***

Clearly, "saying it as it is" is more easily said than done. The Middle Woman assists minoritized (im)migrants to access services and resources and to bridge gaps, in part by buffering their relationships with main stream service providers and organizations. To accomplish this, she must navigate relationships with service providers and systems in such a way as to keep the door open. Indeed, one way of keeping the door open is to be cautious about antagonizing others.

Lenore was clear that the GMCNO's caution necessarily also characterizes the middle women's practice. The middle women frequently spoke about what they "wished they could say" (Natalie). Standing "our ground is certainly antagonistic to the system. And we know the consequences of that" (Lenore1). The ability to do advocacy work, especially at the systemic level, "will jeopardize their practice." As Lisa put it, "At the end of the day, you don't want to close the door for the clients" (Lisa1). Yet, both Lenore and Lisa concurred with my suggestion that worry about jeopardizing relationships is already a symptom of oppression – "Yes, yes, it is oppression" (Lisa2). As with discerning racism (in Chapter 7), Lisa noted that sometimes she even "accepts" disrespectful treatment "because I need something." Being "in the middle" requires this kind of compromise in the interests of gaining access and rightful resources – "I know, on the other hand, they are giving me this little money [for the client] to, to shut my mouth off" (Lisa2).

Another form that caution takes is the Middle Woman's discerning when and where she can and cannot speak. As she crosses work sites she takes on strategic roles and identities. At the level of individual practice, compromise means "trying to smooth the system, trying to smooth the communication, for both sides" (Lisa1). At the organizational level, it means navigating organizational power relations. At times the organization "deliberately keeps a very low profile" by "staying in the background" (Siobhan2). But for an organization that is trying to elevate its profile, credibility and legitimacy, keeping a low profile can compromise the GMCNO's goals.

A second way of keeping the door open was to help service providers and systems "get their jobs done." Recall Lisa's concern that organizations, especially (tax-supported) government services, need to be responsible for ensuring that their services are available to everyone. She hinted that often the Middle Woman is doing the job that main stream services are supposed to do. Indeed, the middle women frequently referred to helping "them" – main stream services – get their jobs done. For the GMCNO, drawing attention to helping "them" to "get their work done" is a material issue. As Siobhan noted, the tension is "needing to be responsive" to the service providers, but then being "driven by them. It's a slice of work to help them" (Siobhan1). As the GMCNO and the middle women see it, their work is "not the pieces we're funded for. So we're looking for stable reliable contracts. But services want our involvement case-by-case, as invited in" (Siobhan1). In explaining the middle women's resistance to imposed accountability requirements, Lenore attributed this resistance in part to the fact that "we're already doing other people's work, so how can you have time for reports?"

Despite the reality that "the work is constant," Siobhan said in a later interview, "the unfortunate part is they only see [the middle women] as interpreters" (Siobhan4). Lenore had explicated this challenge in her earlier research (Researcher, 2003), and it seems that there has been only

incremental change during the past decade. Lisa elaborated on how this works.

*How they [the women's shelter] see it, and they'll say, "Oh, you are here an hour." But then I'm taking [the woman] out. Right? So they will not count that part of it even though that's their job to be doing. But, it's always that they don't have anybody that has the language and the culture to do that, so my expectation is zero from them. But they are so busy on counting how many, what time I come in to do whatever they have to do, and then what time I leave. But sometimes [the woman] leaves with me, because there are a certain number of things that she needs, that I have to do. They won't count that part. And to me, it doesn't matter to me anyway. If that's my commitment. (Lisa1)*

Thus, as Lisa put it, "We've got to in order to please them, so we do some things. So, like we do."

These experiences point to one manifestation of the *niche* and reinforce the persistent *need* for the Middle Woman, as discussed in Chapter 6. As a result, Lisa said, "I can tell you, even when we work as partners. We say partners [but] we are not partners. We are services for them. We are the ones that we go out of our way to please them" (Lisa2).

In Chapter 7, I exposed the ways in which seemingly benign comments on the part of service providers sometimes blur seamlessly and easily into racism. Similarly I illuminated institutional practices that appear to be universal but that are simultaneously exclusive because of assumptions underlying universalism. In Chapter 8, I suggested that what initially appeared as an absence of talk about race/racism could be attributed in part to the middle women's different relationships to the issue both "back home" and "in Canada."

As I drew upon the middle women's narratives in those chapters to explicate these points, clearly I pulled the stories apart for my own purposes. As such, those stories were incomplete. I want to return to some of them now for yet another purpose. The previous chapters may have left the impression that not only are the minoritized (im)migrants the middle women support rendered vulnerable through pre- and post-migration conditions and circumstances, but that the Middle Woman is also rendered vulnerable through the power relations that shape her position.

This is true. But it is only partially true. In this chapter, I draw attention to the ways in which the Middle Woman resists racialized disrespect, but I also draw attention to the toll it takes. It is particularly important to illuminate both of these aspects of the social relations of power in which the Middle Woman *and* human service organizations and providers are implicated. Put another way, as I laid out in Chapter 2, drawing upon Burawoy, Foucault, and Fairclough's work, power relations are productive. And as these theorists argue, although resistance is one product of power relations, it does not inevitably result in substantive or lasting change. Under the conditions of my research, resistance may put human service organizations and providers on alert, or encourage modest if incremental changes. But my research revealed that resistance in oppressive relations takes multiple forms. At times, as will be clear, forms of resistance can also appear to contribute to the problems they are trying to address, reinforcing the idea that power circulates.

### *Holding you accountable, clearing the path*

Earlier in this chapter I cited Lenore's suggestion that advocacy work risks jeopardizing the middle women's practice. I interpreted the risk as *closing* the door, which as is already clear, the Middle Woman must endeavour to keep open. However, many of the middle women described advocacy as a routine part of their work. It is a matter of balancing the needs of the service provider (or organization) and the needs of the people to whom the middle women provide support. You do "whatever works" (Lisa1). Advocacy is "active verbal support for a cause or position."<sup>76</sup> In her earlier research into the middle women's practice, Lenore articulated their advocacy practice in terms of addressing unequal power relations (Researcher, 2003).

*Advocating in the [middle women's] practice is viewed as a strategy of equalizing the situation of people who are at the lower end of the socio-*

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*economic scale. Advocating means acting on people's behalf when their capacity to represent themselves is not fully developed. It could also involve people's knowledge about how things work in the new culture so that they can have the tools to ask questions. The [middle women] also call this "leveling the situation" for the disadvantaged and the less powerful. (p. 118).*

Advocacy clearly took both these forms – verbal support and leveling the situation for the less powerful. As Natalie and Lisa hinted, even as the Middle Woman works to keep the door open, smooth the system and help main stream services to do their job, at times caution goes by the wayside.

*You always have one or two people who really push you to the end. And show you that they are in power, that they are going to oppress you, whatever it is. And this and that. Then one has to take their own stance. ... I will, with love and with respect, I'll go so long. But you disrespect me, and I know my rights so much, that it is not going to be acceptable. And sometimes, I do it so that the clients know what this person is doing is wrong. ... There are some fights that are worth it, because then you have to establish, something has to happen. Obviously you know this client is not getting what she needs, so you have to do what you have to do. So you do it. (Lisa1)*

"So you do it" meant confronting what is not right, "holding you responsible" (Lisa2). Here, middle women described their active role in resisting service providers' disrespectful, unacceptable, and unethical practices (as they described them). This resistance took the forms of what I refer to as "speaking back" and "speaking up."

The middle women cited many examples of speaking back to disrespect and domination, which means confronting and challenging service providers in the moment. So, even as they "smooth [the service providers'] work in many aspects" (Lisa2), at times it is necessary to "change your approach" (Lisa1). Lisa came back to this point several times during two interviews.

*Like you have to change your approach depending on [service provider], you do. Sometimes, you have to be a ruder than them, because they cross the boundary, and they actually insult you. So, and yet, we are actually doing [your job]. You are actually making their life easier. And, so, you have to remind them that, and wait, put them in their place to start, then do what you have to do. To establish that they understand where you come from. (Lisa1)*

*But as I am respecting, and trying to do what I can, to smooth your work in many aspects, because you really don't have that person that speaks my language, and understand these people, so I am actually going out of my way to smooth that for you, and you disrespect me, well I will not let you get away with it. ... At some point, I will hold you responsible because it is not right for you to treat any one of us like that. ... (Lisa2)*

"Holding you responsible" means setting limits to what the middle women accept in the interests of preserving the relationship – that is, "You cannot have it all" (Lisa2). "Some of them cross you so bad, that you actually lose yourself, and that have happened."

Recall from Chapter 7 Lisa's example of the disrespectful child welfare worker. I left that story before its conclusion. Lisa reached her end.

*So I said, "This is the second call." She again gave me off. And then I say, the third time, I say, "Have we done anything?" Now I am getting pissed off. I said, "You are trying to take the child back, but I am finding, I am going to their home, I am doing, [we have done] an assessment, and they're just fine. They just of course need the aunt [as a safety net], but they cannot have the aunt because the aunt has to work. There is no money. Mom's only getting \$1000 and that is not enough for the whole family. The rent is almost \$800. And I just said, "No, no, no, no, no. I am going to go and see. I'll be dead before you can take those kids again. I know for sure this family is set up." (Lisa2)*

She organized a meeting with the child welfare worker to review the situation. As the workers perpetuated the disrespect and domination in that meeting, Lisa again intervened, to demonstrate that withholding money will not render her silent. She ultimately accused the service provider of trying to cover up her own discriminatory actions.

*I said [to the child welfare worker], "Have you started the meeting?" I said to her, because now I saw the mom and the aunt starting to bawl. Now I said, "What are you doing? First of all, there's so many of us who does not know each other [here]. You need to introduce us properly. I see someone sitting beside you. Who is that person? Have we asked [the family] if they are okay to have that person in here?" I said, "Why don't you do that first? And I do not accept for you to actually talk to the parents in that aspect. No."*

*The family to know that they have a right to speak in this country. This is not that because she gives them money, that they have to be quiet. So, I blasted her. Like I blasted her, and I told her, "It is disrespectful, what you are doing, going to their home, mom has told me that it is disrespectful that you walk in without even saying "hello" to her, and talk to the kids and get out. I understand you are there for the best interests of the children, but I can tell you this, I am there for the best interests of the family, and I will tell*



*you that is disrespectful. When we speak, we have to speak to her first, and the aunt is there second. That's the way it is. It is cultural. It is disrespectful you don't do that. And I want the family to know what you are doing is not right."*

*I'm like, whoa. So, then I said, you know, "Let me ask the family if they are okay. If they are not okay, I'm sorry," I said to the young girl [sitting in], "You might have to leave. This is not the way to do it. This is their life. This is hearing their own secrets. I don't think anyone can walk in and want to listen. You don't do that with any other person. Why would you do it with her?" (Lisa2)*

Recall Sary's interaction with the young girl's teacher, from Chapter 7. I left that story unfinished too. During that interface, Sary confronted the teacher about her inappropriate response, pointing out that the problem did not lie with the young girl, but rather with the conditions and circumstances in which she found herself – "We are not talking about self-esteem in here. We are talking about differences."

*Then I said, "What you are saying to me is not appropriate. Something we could do is to sit down with her parents, yourself, and the young woman, and see what her real feelings are, and what is really happening, and why she feels so hurt by the system in here, and she got to the point where she doesn't want to go to school any more. We are not talking about self-esteem in here. We are talking about differences."*

At times, the middle women deployed a rights discourse as a form of resistance. Lisa, for example, used this discourse to reprimand a service provider about her "unethical" treatment while in the same breath reminding her, "We pay tax the same way."

*And I just said, "You are not allowed to say that. That is ethically not right for you to say that. And she said, "I ... " And I said, "No, you don't. You and I, we pay tax the same way.... " And of course your defense kicks in too, right. Like I don't think anybody has the right to talk to her in that way. (Lisa1)*

Clearly, these examples illustrate that at times the middle women do speak back to disrespect, domination and racism at the front-line. At times, the middle women reported more threatening types of resistance such as speaking *up* to supervisors, managers, or legal advocates. For example, Lisa followed through with the child welfare worker's supervisor.

*"I need to get your boss here. I don't want to deal with you any longer. I've had it. Enough." I said, "You are rude. You're disrespectful. And you are trying to show them power, and you are scaring them. This is not right. You, you, did not send them money. And you are trying to find a fault, so what makes you think they don't think you are setting them up?" I said, "In fact, it's actually them who's thinking you're setting them up to fail, so you can take the kids." "No." Then I said, "If it is not. What makes you think they are setting you up? In what aspect? They are scared of you, as you see. And you have no right to scare them. You have no right to scare them. And don't you dare think for a day that we can allow. This is not right. You and I cannot live without that money. Why would you think they can live without money? And, therefore, I said to her, "I am doing your dirty job. And I am here for the interests of this family, and I want respect for them, most of all. You do not need to respect me if you do not respect them, because that's why we are all here talking to them." ... This girl [I took to the supervisor] was actually switched to another department, or I don't know where she is. (Lisa2)*

And Natalie made good on her promise to the office receptionist to talk "to the person who has you sitting on that chair representing the business."

*When we were done [presenting], I realized that the person sitting beside me was the supervisor, or coordinator, for that whole organization. She said, you know, "Thank-you so much for coming to the organization. Thank-you so much, Natalie. Oh, what a pleasure to have you coming in." Da-da-da, da-da-da. "You were great." And I just answered back by saying, "Well, thank-you so much for inviting me. It was an honour to come to your organization to speak. However, it will be the last time that I ever will come back to this organization. "Why, what, who, where?" And I explained to her how it all came apart." And she right away went and documented everything. She got a pen and paper, documented everything, called over all the supervisors, "da-da-da da-da."*

Beyond the immediate goal of leveling the situation and perhaps if only temporarily shifting the power balance, I was struck by the representational function the middle woman ascribed to advocacy. For them, these forms of advocacy against (or resistance to) disrespectful treatment also fulfilled a responsibility for "clearing the path." They became, or were produced as, ambassadors of their groups, cultures, ethnicities, and religions. They saw themselves as putting service providers on alert – at one point Natalie referred to a "red flag." They wanted service providers to know that they cannot get away with treating them or the people they support with disrespect. But *equally* important,

they wanted the minoritized (im)migrants they support to see that they too have the *right* to expect better treatment and to "fight for themselves."

*Because I'm going to set the grounds here for any other Muslim woman that walks in to be treated with respect. I'm not going to let her [service provider] be to me this way, and the next person to hear from her as well that looks like me. It's not going to happen. (Natalie)*

*So I had to actually be as rude to actually explain to her [service provider], but at the same time, the family to know that they have a right to speak in this country. .... If you don't do that, and the clients don't see that you are able to do that, then what makes them think that the next time, when they need help, and they want to come and do something, someone puts them down, and they can be able to fight for themselves? So they have to see that part of you as well. (Lisa1)*

### **Working around you**

Advocacy on a case-by-case basis, then, is one mode of resistance that the middle women employ in an attempt to alter unequal power dynamics. But it is not the only mode of resistance the middle women use. Recall Siobhan's frustration that main stream organizations usually invite the middle women in on a case-by-case or piecework basis to help *them* get their jobs done. Working against this dominant way of operating, the GMCNO and the middle women often stretch the boundaries of other organizations' mandates to meet the needs of the people they support. The middle women gave many examples of "borrowing" programs as entry points "to deliver more than it should be" (Thuy), or to reach people they might otherwise not reach (Olivia). At another level, they use project opportunities as entry points for addressing community-defined issues. This can mean challenging bureaucrats by "reminding" them whose interests are (supposed) to be served.

*And I said [to the project director], "And that's the learning you could share with [the government funder]. In fact in immigrant communities, it's more about relationships, not so much about geographical boundaries. If you want, as your outcome, to build families' capacity within the community context, it will be involving parents beyond [that geographical area]. And be proud about that. Not to be anxious about that." (Siobhan2)*

Indeed, sometimes the GMCNO gets involved in an initiative "just to be in a high profile project and see if we can create some profile about our issues" (Siobhan2).

In addition, the middle women talked about borrowing white peoples' bodies and words, both those of the mentor-middle women and allies outside the GMCNO. Recall from Chapter 7 that the mentor-middle women often buffered the responses and non-responses the (im)migrant middle women received from service providers. They helped both to stretch the middle women's credibility in the community and with main stream organizations. In the following excerpt from my interview with Thuy, she explained that she "just wanted to borrow Aileen's body, and Aileen's words." For Thuy, borrowing Aileen served two purposes. First, a white professional lent legitimacy to Thuy's work in the community. But second and as important, a white professional could protect Thuy from negative perceptions in her own community. She did not want to be seen as a "sex expert."

*Thuy: So, we invited Aileen to come and talk about that first. And, it's not that we don't know about that stuff, because we got trained by [name of organization]. But I just wanted to borrow Aileen's body, and Aileen's words, to speak and then we transfer [the knowledge]. It's easier for us, right.*

Ruth: She's legitimate.

*Thuy: Yeah. That's what Aileen said. That's what Aileen said. So we don't want to be, we don't want to be, what uh, um, labeled as a sex expert, right. Cause then when we talk about it, people think that we are sex experts. So, that's why we borrowed Aileen.*

Ruth: It's somebody else, a white person really. Right. Is that

*Thuy: A white person, yeah.*

Ruth: Is that right?

*Thuy: Yes. A white person is different than if it is talked from [a middle woman] or myself. ... Whatever works, we do it.*

A second way in which the middle women used these white professional bodies and their words was when they met barriers in negotiating with service providers, such as resistance to setting up appointments. These circumstances were visible in Chapter 7, for example, where Aileen drew attention to service providers' judgments and non-responsiveness to the middle women's accented English. In the following

quote from my interview with Lisa, she indicated that at times she just passes it over to the mentor-middle women, here even referring to the latter as "my boss." As she put it, "I've been in this business for so long, that I know I don't waste my time with people who don't understand what I do well."

*But some, you just have to say, it's not worth my time and energy to waste it with you, so I just end it here. You'll have to take it with my boss, period. ... At that point, I just say to the [person], I will not personally go with you. You need to talk to Aileen, or Trina, and this is the number. I'd like to stop this communication. We just hung up. I don't even go too far. Because the day is too short for me to get myself going with someone who actually has no understanding of what I do. ... I've been in this business for so long, that I know I don't waste my time with people who don't understand what I do well. (Lisa1)*

The middle women also stretch their work by using their multiple roles, identities and positions creatively. As discussed earlier, the GMCNO has not been able to provide full-time secure employment for the middle women. As a result, some middle women have pieced together full-time work out of part-time positions in more than one organization. Where necessary, these women blur the boundaries around their positions in the interests of serving the people best. As Lisa put it,

*You cannot count the amount of time and energy put in. Either side would not pay enough to do that kind of work we do. ... So, you have to use your different hats in different ways, at least for me. So I know where I go, where [name of agency] is big, then I know where I go where [GMCNO] is big. So depending on that, to actually maneuver the door to get into the door, you use whatever you can. (Lisa1)*

Sharadi described having to negotiate across departments in one work setting for use of her "body and words" to ensure she got paid for work she was asked to carry out. As she put it, "I am myself falling through the cracks."

Finally, the middle women worked around the system by failing (or refusing?) to meet a contract organization's requirements or timelines. Lenore suggested that the middle women have developed "almost a hostility to organized systems" – "anything that looks like rules is looked at critically, it's challenged" (Lenore1).

## **Building capacity, protecting the community**

As can be seen in the last section of the chapter, for the middle women, strengthening the capacities of the individuals they support was part and parcel of the ways in which they work. But it was interesting to hear how the middle women also carefully navigate a course between capacity building and protecting the community. An unstated tension of working in the gap, a consequence of having to navigate the power relations implicated in access to and use of human services, is that the middle women buffer "the Ds." (Refer to Chapter 7.) They articulated strategies to protect people in minoritized (im)migrant communities. Here, for example, the middle women tried to divert judgmental comments and demand service providers' understanding.

Recall also the middle women's desire to "fix it so it doesn't bounce back" (Lisa1), to model fighting for your rights, to provide knowledge and support so that people "can stand on their own" (Shirko). But also recall from Chapter 7 that one way in which racialization manifested itself was in negative judgments and feedback that contributed to building deficits. To counter the deficit building to which so many minoritized (im)migrants are subjected, building capacity is a key strategy. The middle women attempt to recognize, highlight, and help to make visible the strengths that people have individually and collectively.

Capacity building is somewhat of a buzzword in community development and health promotion (e.g., Labonte & Laverack, 2001a, 2001b). But seeing it through the middle women's lenses contextualized my understanding of it, as I came to see building capacity as a necessary antidote to the cumulative impact of deficit building. As Tara Yosso (2005) has argued, minoritized (im)migrants' strengths, capacities and potential are often discounted by main stream society. She thus raises the question, "Whose capital counts?" And she offers a reframing of capital that is quite compatible with the principles that guide the GMCNO.

During my research, middle women expressed consciousness about their theory and their practice of capacity building at both individual and

family levels. They frequently drew attention to a key message they want to get across to the people they support – "We are here to support you at the end of the day, not to break you" (Lisa2). The middle women saw their job as one of teaching in a way that helps the people they support understand and learn to do what they need to do on their own (Carolina, Lisa) – to transfer information, assistance and tools so that people have the know-how required for living in Canadian society and navigating Canadian systems. As Carolina said it, "I don't want to be the person that solves their problems. They need to know how to solve their own." From the middle women's vantage points, investing "the good time that they need and the relationships it takes" makes the job easier later on and prevents things from bouncing back (Lisa1).

Investing the time means not only providing positive and reinforcing feedback, but also locating and supporting opportunities so that people can succeed – countering familiar experiences of being set up to fail – "Why can't you make her think that she can be useful? In, in one little thing?" (Lisa2) It means not assuming that all women who take the difficult step of leaving home because of abuse have left for good, instead assuming that all parties implicated in domestic violence and child welfare intervention should have support. Understanding the life stories of the people with whom they work, the middle women look for positives to build on. Recognizing what the people face in Canada – knowing that an absence of alternate support networks and financial resources will send children and youth out of schools, women back to abusive husbands and children into child welfare, the middle women try to build up the family's resources to overcome violence. They do not condone violence while at the same time they work in ways that reflect understanding its roots. They try to mobilize safe(ty) nets for all members of the family.

*And I know about their life story. And aside from alcohol in his system, he, unlike any other man from that community, he actually helps his wife. He watches the kids. Like they have a good relationship, but when he drinks, he's off. That I have, you know, he admits, and he told me and so has the wife. So I said, "Well, then we have to deal with it. We have to work on your anger issues. We have to work on your alcohol consumption. Which is we're*

*going to have to start you in AADAC." He said, "No problem. I'll do anything you want me to. No problem. This was my mistake." (Lisa2)*

Middle women watch out for the safety of women living in abusive relationships, and those who have left those relationships. They work hard to intercept possible risks and to establish safe arrangements. In the absence of knowledge about the size of a community and the internal gender-power dynamics, women's shelters can perpetrate further trauma or place women in further danger. As Lisa put it, "You always have to think beyond that box" (Lisa2). So, when a woman needed to leave the city in order to be safe, the middle women made special arrangements to ensure she would be safe not only in the new city but also en route to the airport to get out of the city.

Beyond individual capacity building strategies, the middle women also use small group initiatives, often looking inside and into created communities for support.

*Look at mutual support or collective action, or sort of along the lines of community development. Collective learning so we don't get stuck with the worries individually. (Siobhan4)*

But there is a risk too in the GMCNO's and the middle women's community capacity building strategy – a risk of reifying community, as when they encourage looking inside the community to resolve issues and looking to one another for support. On the one hand, it buffers. As Siobhan suggests in the quote above, collective work can buffer the isolation of being alone with many worries.

On the other hand, collective work may also *buffer* the exposure of issues – actually obscure them – from public sight, simultaneously "protecting" the community and "protecting" the broader society from responsibility. This is a tension. So why does such a seemingly strategically savvy organization take such a risk? Because, as Siobhan stated, "What we're finding is that when the system fails, the communities try to do for themselves with no money" (Siobhan1). What other choice could they make but to try to strengthen the processes by which communities arrive at solutions that build strength?



Mutual support groups provide safe forums for family members to raise issues and challenges without fear of judgment. Such groups foster confidence and increase social skills for both children and adult family members. Families develop support networks that become their first line of contact for information.

*People were clearly saying, um, they want to know about their children more. And have more strategies to deal with discipline issues than just being told, "Don't use the stick." (Siobhan4)*

*But since we have the drop-in, we have it weekly, so if they have questions, usually they come and ask, or sometimes, because we have the health talk, we already gave out that information, so they don't need to ask us[facilitators] any more. Besides, they are starting to have a network with the other moms, so um, they would call the other moms first. Ask for help. If they can't, you know, find the information, then they call me. So actually, I can see my phone calls getting less and less. So, I can see the big changes. (Ma-mo & Olivia)*

Ma-mo started out as a participant in one of Olivia's groups, and gradually developed the confidence to be a middle woman herself – co-facilitating a parenting group. She described the group as a "necessity for me."

*It is important to me. That changed me, right. Taking that [opportunity], that changed me. And um, well, to be involved with the GMCNO, and to view myself as more valuable, right. And from there, many things happened. But I really treasured this opportunity. (Ma-mo)*

Shinin talked about proactively addressing the intergenerational conflicts that threaten to break Kurdish families – supporting family members to see that they are somebody and that they have something to give each other.

*So we try to through the communication and through the well-being to bring some kind of relationship between [parents and youth] for they need to have a foundation and for the parents to have a stage to practice their parenting with their kids. ... Mostly we try to form the youth inside themselves and bring them together with their parents. ... Through the homework club, we will target of organizing the parents in parent groups, and to empower the youth, what we will, what they have for the younger generation, who are younger than them, and they born or they grow up in Canada, so they will have something to give to their parents, and to the younger generation, and the parents will have something to give to both generations when they start to learn too. So we are dreaming for a lot ... Something healthy, you know, more stronger, we'll be, you know, will grow between the parents and the kids. They will have a communication and a*

*relationship. And we'll have something established that so the community to be ready to handle the others who are growing up, not to have the same problems. (Shinin)*

The middle women worry that service providers will not "tackle" difficult subjects gently enough.

*Work with the families about um raising children in Canada. I hope they'll be able to deal with the subtleties of the issues. I think they went for the issue now the children are coming home, and saying they have their rights in Canada, the school taught them. So it's a very um complex area. I hope they'll be able to tackle it gently and thoughtfully. (Siobhan3)*

As a result, they sense a need to protect the people they support from harmful interactions with human services. When possible the GMCNO aims to "steward" the relationships between main stream service providers and organizations and minoritized (im)migrants and communities. At the individual level, stewarding may mean intercepting the first visit of a child welfare worker to give a family time to explain its story without the child welfare worker involved, and to prepare for the visit with support of a middle woman. In the case of family conflict, it means addressing issues proactively before they require intervention, while simultaneously demanding appropriate and timely intervention when they see the need. It means actively altering the dynamics that build deficits. And it means pleading for understanding.

*So, even though they're treated very negatively, I'll right away, I won't let them feel like I've picked up on that. But I'll right away turn it where, "Well, this is the reason why this family is doing this. Everything has a reason. They're not trying to kill their children. They do love their children. They want to wish them the best."(Natalie).*

*And I said, "Can you please be understanding? And the first thing I would like you to do is ask them where they were born. Just ask them their stories, and then they can tell you. First they start with that." So, she came in, she has this attitude, and all that. And there is nothing you could do. She sat there. She asked them their story. The husband told her from A to Z. By the end, she was crying. That's the circumstances from which they come. (Lisa2)*

Moreover, I noticed that at the community level middle women often take pains to re-present their communities to the broader "Canadian" society in a good light. Part of Natalie's initial tentativeness about

participating in my research was her fear that I might "undo" the good image of her community because it has "come such a long way."

*I've worked very hard, myself and my community, that we've worked very hard to represent ourselves in the community as, you know, well educated, professional, calm, not so negative, and always complaining and always nagging, so for a paper to be written on a negative perspective goes against everything I believe my community and myself have worked so hard for. No, we're not complainers. ... I think the Arabic community, Arab slash Muslim community has come such a long way. And I wanted to make sure that we stay at the pinnacle we're at. Positive. Encouraging. All that stuff, right.*

As a presenter in cultural competence workshops, Natalie's message explicitly counters unspoken stereotypes of backward Muslim families in which fathers are not involved in their children's lives.

*[My message is] very positive, "Oh, I can't wait to tell you about my community because my community is fantastic. Where do I begin? This is where we were. This is where we came. This is where we are now. This is the improvements we've done. This is where dad was never involved with children. This is now where he takes them to soccer games, and this is what he does." To speak to them with respect, and under the understanding that these families do everything that we do. And they in return will look at you guys as not looking at them through the lens of the immigrant foreigners that aren't involved in their children's lives.*

Similarly, at the organizational level of the GMCNO, Siobhan referred to taking great care to ensure that community leaders will not bring harmful judgments to their own communities by exposing internal conflicts and lack of a "cohesive" understanding of their issues.

*Opportunities are coming, but we're not prepared. It can cause real problems. It's so harmful to have community members [leaders, elite members] say, "We're fine" because they're out of touch with the problems that people in their own communities are experiencing. ... We're not prepared for the conflicts among the community leaders. The purpose is to learn about what the real outcomes we're striving for? What can result in cohesion in the community? What are the gaps? (Siobhan9)*

Finally, the GMCNO strives to keep democratic principles visible. Specifically it tries to steward relationships with main stream organizations in order to ensure that the unheard voices of the community are heard. Siobhan and Lenore saw the GMCNO as "maybe the most persistent voice about the community directing our future" (Siobhan3).

*We will hopefully always be the constant voice about the people, about the principles, so it doesn't get lost in all the details. ... We always integrate input somehow. ... our ongoing services are directed by the people, the recipients of care. All the way through to the strategic and directional level, we have the leaders guiding us. It doesn't look very radical to some of us; it's really already quite radical for others [in the systems]. (Siobhan3)*

## **Reflections on influencing system change**

Michael Burawoy (1991a) has suggested that resistance to domination can take many forms. As he observes,

*The interplay ... between domination and response, is dynamic and varied ... – from capitulation to the creation of alternative organizations, from negotiation within limits to the negotiation of limits, from anarchic outbursts to self-conscious collective protest. (pp. 285,287)*

Indeed, perhaps the very establishment of the GMCNO can be seen as an act of resistance. Many of the middle women saw the GMCNO as a setting through which they can *strive* for their ideals. Some of the mentor-middle women compared the GMCNO to other settings in which they work or had worked in the past, where "nothing was possible." Likewise, a youth leader was drawn to the GMCNO as a base for youth work because here the response was, "Let us try." Ultimately the GMCNO's goal is equity, which requires system change.

Recall Siobhan's earlier comment that what the GMCNO experiences as compromise is already "too radical for some" (Siobhan3). Clearly, the Middle Woman uses many different strategies to influence system change. Among them, as revealed throughout this thesis, these strategies include actualizing democratic principles of engagement, individual and organizational resistance to oppressive and racist practices, modeling the right to resist, community capacity building to raise the voices of minoritized (im)migrants, co-creation of innovations, and cultural competency workshops to foster responsiveness and system change. As Siobhan commented, the GMCNO is always "skating to where the puck is" (Siobhan6).

The nature of the GMCNO's strategic initiatives for system change can be seen as falling along a continuum. At one end is the GMCNO's mantra "daring to dream." It can be seen as an expression of the middle

women's hope and optimism. Shinin, who understood that a democracy does not inevitably translate into equity, holds the belief that if people – the system(s) and the communities – work together, change will happen, since the system is not "a stone."

*I think if people get together and try out to work, for the health system, to be more responsive, it will happen. And I think that if people get together and try out to make an easier employment standard system, we will have it. I do believe, you know, if people get together and do some kind of positive communication in regard of change, it will happen. (Shinin)*

Lenore and Siobhan frequently referred to "working in the third space." For them, the "third space" denoted a space through which they can enact their dream of equity by working with main stream partners to co-create new ways of being and doing. As Siobhan suggested, co-creation is "a capacity building process. It's not about reproducing what we used to do. It might be adapting, it may be new approaches" (Siobhan3).

Illustrating the potential of co-creating new ways of being and doing, recall from Chapter 8 Shinin's reflections on fully integrating families' first languages into a pilot pre-school classroom. It was worthwhile because for the first time young minoritized (im)migrant children did not have to leave their cultural identities at the door when they entered school. For Shinin, the importance of pride in identity and confidence that children (and parents) gained through a public school-sanctioned project could not be overstated. She hoped that the project was the groundwork for eventual integration of first languages into all classrooms. That project had to overcome many hurdles, according to Siobhan, not the least of which was that it proved difficult for the main stream partners to let go of preconceived ways of doing things and enter into a creative space – they found it hard to dream.

Similarly, the GMCNO saw the potential in other initiatives that were unfolding during the time I carried out my research. In the employment sector, it saw projects as opportunities for increasing opportunities for unemployed and underemployed (im)migrants and for disengaged minoritized young people. As Siobhan put it, "The whole

concept is we really wanted gently but very intentionally to create opportunities in the institutions for our community members" (Siobhan2). But, again, it was difficult.

*The tendency of the system is to deal with it in a very rigid, very limiting way. And if we follow the principle of community capacity, or individual capacity building, we will have to come up with a [a new way to do things.] So it will be an interesting balance. The tendency is, "Let's cut off here. Let's do this directly. So. Everything straightforward box." ... And so it will be interesting to see the dynamics. Cause it will every step along the way, there will be a constant clash. (Siobhan3)*

Co-creation clearly threatens some partners – how else to understand a "constant clash" "every step along the way"? It is clearly too radical for some – a hint of Burawoy's (1991a) notion of "negotiating the limits." The GMCNO's work to strategically co-create innovative models has an anti-subordination/anti-racist edge. The GMCNO does not use the language of anti-racism, preferring to reference what it is "for" – democratizing the processes through which models are designed to achieve equity. Insofar as it "gently" and "intentionally" demands that pre-existing designs for delivering human services to minoritized (im)migrants be put aside in favour of an "open field," it contests the legitimacy of professionalized knowledge(s) that inform existing service delivery. (Thus?), while the GMCNO has successfully catalyzed some co-created pilot projects, the "third space" is not always a space in which creative things emerge. The grayness, or ambivalence, of the (third) space, which is always uncertain, is familiar to minoritized (im)migrants.

*It's so gray and so complicated. It cannot be resolved in a black and white, all or none, situation. It seeks new kinds of understanding. And that's below the physical work that we have difficulty describing. How do we deal with this invisible subterrain reality? (Siobhan3)*

If daring to dream is one of the GMCNO's strategic projects, then defining its "uniqueness" is another. The GMCNO hopes that ultimately the system(s) will recognize the role of the Middle Woman, which will result in her incorporation into the system. Lenore, for example, saw this type of recognition as a potential new opening for a sustainable role for the GMCNO – training middle women *for* the system. As Lenore

suggested, "I think no other organization can do that except the [GMCNO]" (Lenore2). Like Central American immigrant women in Salzinger's (1991) study of transforming maids' work into a market niche to achieve income security, there is little doubt that at the organizational level, the GMCNO's consistent strategic goal has been to carve out a "unique," as Lenore says, niche for itself. But, here, unlike the maids in Salzinger's study, the GMCNO and the middle women constantly have to *prove* themselves (that is, demonstrate their credibility) to (mostly white), professional-dominated, main stream service providers and organizations, to be legitimated. For them, credibility is derived in part from (creating) a demand for their "uniqueness." Lenore suggested that by having a foot in the door, in the long term "you might be able to initiate changes *within* the system" (my emphasis).

*Well, this is a vision, right. In the long term, you might be able to, uh, you know, to initiate changes within the system, too. Of how they begin to work ... with, with minorities, with ethnic minorities. And say that from a social and political context. ... Not just the cultural differences. But these are group of people who have experienced inequality. ... So, of course, it is strategic ... . I think there are two key sectors that makes the [middle women] unique and should actually work intensively on this. The health care sector and social services. I think this is what the kind of work that we do in this sector is still unique. There are no other organizations or workers who do [what we do]. (Lenore1)*

In keeping with this goal, educating service providers, organizations and systems is an important strategic objective both at the level of the individual middle woman and at the level of the organization. Practically, the GMCNO weaves education into all of its work, from subtly modeling culturally relevant support and (even) anti-racist practice to delivering cultural competency training.

*I still have to show them that they've got to understand that each and every one of us has got a different way of doing things. Just because I am black, just because I am from Ethiopia, doesn't mean that 10,000 Ethiopians have the same. (Lisa1)*

*Hopefully [our first contact people in the GMCNO] will come to know each of us [middle women] very very well and our communities very very well that when a request comes in, they will talk to the referral agent – children's services, nurse whoever – figure out what really what they are asking for – they will often say we need an interpreter. ... [Our] intake process starts*

*with asking the right question to help the referral agent think out loud what is really the issue. (Siobhan2)*

Encouraged by incremental change, the middle women expressed optimism. After 15 years in the field, they observed, "some nurses are familiar with some of our cultures" (Lisa2); "the health care system, and any other, system in this society that deals with people, is very much aware of what is going on in people's life" (Sary); and "from perinatal [health], we have evolved into many, many other areas. The most recent example is children's services. They want to seek our help on a permanent basis" (Sharadi). Appreciation for the Middle Woman's work in the form of appropriate funding was important symbolically and materially – "Sometimes in this country, they have to pay you to respect you. That's the deal" (Lisa1). In addition, the middle women interpreted the existence of dedicated staff to support minoritized (im)migrants in some settings as "a sign" that things are changing. The GMCNO clearly relies on main stream service providers and organizations for access to direct services and supports, *but also* for a hearing. As such, its potential for achieving change is constrained by the limits of the main stream's hearing – what Burawoy (1991a) refers to as "negotiating within limits."

But sometimes optimism is hard to sustain, even in the face of incremental change.

*One time we rolled on the floor laughing, because [name of organization] promised us originally [an amount of funding] for our involvement in the [name] project. Then we found out we had half ... always that is the case. ... We were so mad. So we came back and brought all our colleagues. And we said let's quantify how many cases and what time we put into it and we came up with 14 FTEs. We were laughing. Who is ever going to afford it? (Siobhan2)*

Siobhan commented several times that, under these conditions, the GMCNO has survived through "just sheer stubbornness." Recall her question, "How do we deal with this invisible sub-terrain reality?" How to deal with "this sub-terrain reality" gave rise to speculation on the part of the GMCNO and the middle women about the need to "go it alone." When translating a dream of equity seems too fraught, and when sustainability



of successful pilot initiatives remains elusive, "Sometimes the power thing makes us want to be rebellious and break out and go on our own. We want to buy a cow" (Siobhan1). The "cow" was a reference to the GMCNO's reliance on "borrowing" a program that provides milk vouchers, and the accompanying frustration with main stream accountability requirements that get in the way. At another point, Siobhan commented, "If we are ever rich enough, we will have our own team [of professionals]" (Siobhan2).

What does "going it alone" mean, and what are its implications? At the simplest level, what middle women described was a need for dedicated services and supports – a parallel system for minoritized (im)migrants – driven by their own voices, responsive to their own needs and issues, and based on their own strengths and capacities. There has been discussion about the need for an (im)migrant serving women's shelter (Lisa2), more professionals from different communities who speak the same languages as the people (Sary), foster homes designed for minoritized (im)migrant children and youth (Siobhan, Hannah, Lisa), and day care and pre-school programs designed and delivered by and for minoritized (im)migrant families (Hannah, Siobhan, Shinin). Some of these ideas are being developed. The middle women's concerns echoed those that gave rise to black-focused schools in Toronto in the past several years (Dei, 2005) – a need for places where minoritized (im)migrants would not have to leave who they are at the door (Shinin).

The GMCNO has also catalyzed the development of another organization that can develop into a voice for minoritized (im)migrant communities. According to Lenore,

*One of the most valuable [things] that we learned is that there are indeed community members, given the opportunity, and the right support, will want to engage in political discussions. And we've proven that in [a] project. ... That actually it is actually a vehicle for those who have felt that they have no voice. (Lenore1)*

This spin-off organization of the GMCNO will ultimately help to focus "our work around advocacy or level the playing field," "support

communities to become engaged in active citizenship, [so] that they know their rights and exercise them," and "mobilize community members from multicultural communities to be engaged in political advocacy. Let's say it as it is" (Lenore1). Once they are confident that they can say it, "They are not marginalized any more" (Lenore1).

### **Disrupting the gaze?**

As I was developing my research proposal, I played with a metaphor suggested to me by Erin Manning's (2003) work about a Canadian artist who inserts "Others" into iconic Canadian landscapes – disrupting the illusion of pristine purity. I had wondered whether inserting the Middle Woman into the relationship between minoritized (im)migrants and (mainly) white main stream-representing service providers would/could similarly disrupt the gaze. As I revealed in Chapter 7, accompaniment of a middle woman can gain access, but clearly it does not divert negative judgment, disrespect, domination or a focus on deficits. It does not deter service providers from using racist innuendos. Although the middle women buffer the gaze, they cannot actually disrupt it. Indeed, when the gaze is diverted, it may be deflected onto themselves. At times, they have to turn to those who can buffer the Ds, borrowing white bodies and words. At one point during my research, Siobhan actually suggested a need to "go in twos" into some of the more difficult interactions. She suggested that taking a colleague along for moral support, even if s/he does not say anything, would be important.

As mentioned previously, as I analyzed the interview data I had generated, I was struck by how (a) "Canadian culture" was rendered visible through the vantage point of minoritized (im)migrant middle women. I read what the middle women see as a counter-narrative to service providers' alleged practice of unselfconscious normative referencing. I say "alleged" because it is clear that service providers often use "in Canada" as an explicit reference point for what is deemed acceptable, under some conditions and circumstances. I return to this

point in the final chapter. What implications does the naming of (a) "Canadian culture" have for cultural competency carried out by those who can see it? In the final interview, I explored the extent to which cultural competency workshops are used as an opportunity for *mutual* exchange. Sary and I talked around the vantage point afforded by the Middle Woman's wide-angled lens.

Ruth: What service providers are doing is often invisible to them. So, I guess what I'm wondering about, or what I puzzle about in this whole scenario about cultural competence is, if the teaching all is one-way – that now the service providers are supposed to know something about somehow all of these different communities that speak Spanish, let's use that as an example, cause that's the communities you're working with. But do they also, or do you also, in these cultural competency workshops also ask service providers to look at what they are doing?

Sary: *In what sense?*

Ruth: In service provision. So, for example, um, you know, your experience of the language barrier, the no attention to suffering, um, the being to... having the gaze on you, as though, again this lens, right, as if you are the, you're different. ... And, what you're being asked to do by service providers is to tell them more about your difference. Um, but is there also an opportunity to talk about how they are doing things.

Sary: *Exactly. I think that would be very important.*

Ruth: Is that happening?

Sary: *I don't see it. I don't see it. No. What I normally get is the feedback back from service providers, or administrators of service providers, about what we do, and what we provide them. It's normally you know, "Thank you very much. If I don't know this, how can I serve people better?" Which is very good. Because they show huge appreciation, you know. But in reality I don't see more than that. I don't see that I get from the service providers things that we may be able to use in our own services to provide to the people. ... What I notice from some service providers, in general, from here, are most interested in what we can give to them, rather than what we can get from them to us. Like, okay, you go to school, and you learn certain procedures about Canada. Right? But not enough. It's something that the system put together, but it's not what so and so person can give it to me.*

Another pivotal moment. As I transcribed Sary's interview, I typed a note into it.

As I type this, I am really struck by her almost dismay at that. It is a real aha moment for her, perhaps, and then for me in return ... that the [middle women] actually see what is invisible to the system, but they don't realize

it. So, now I think part of how they could reframe what they are making visible is not only their difference ... [their culture], but what the system looks like through their lens. (Ruth in interview with Sary)

This finding supports critical race theorists' contention that a focus on culture can indeed result in perpetuating a focus on Others' cultures. But recall some middle women's allusions in Chapter 5 to the "corporate culture" of human services. As I discussed in Chapter 3, human services have adopted the notion of "culture" to conceptualize their way of being – "that's the way we do business around here" (Baxter, 2001). Perhaps human services' use of culture has actually *normalized* a focus on cultural characteristics. Or perhaps, on the other hand, human services' use of culture has demonstrated the maneuverability of concepts. What might be the implications of these possibilities for the GMCNO and the middle women?

*The truth of the matter is, we honestly are learning as we go along. And so, um, and even our thinking and orientation around something like cultural competency is constantly evolving. (Siobhan8)*

### **Paying the toll**

In the last section, I made visible the ways in which middle women resist service providers' oppressive and racist practices, and strategies they employ to counter subordination. In Chapter 7, I mentioned in passing that (im)migrants must pay a toll. One form of toll is the material effects of living and working in the race/culture divide – the many challenges (im)migrants face and, for the GMCNO and the middle women, the physical demands of 24/7 "on-call," a lack of appropriate remuneration commensurate with the work, and the elusive sustainability of work begun as pilot projects – "the many dances that you do."

But navigating the divide(s) also shapes other aspects of the middle women's lived realities. Earlier, I cited Siobhan's emphasis on the importance of collective work "so we don't get stuck with the worries individually" (Siobhan4). Here I consider the significance of these comments further. For, although collective work is a way to *share* the worries founded in the "sub-terrain reality," the middle women

nevertheless do get "stuck with the worries." They frequently mentioned visceral responses evoked in immediate day-to-day racialized interfaces with human service providers and organizations. And they talked about the cumulative effects of system(at)ic violations. They provided glimpses into what happens to them and what they do to protect themselves – what it means to internalize racism.

### *Embodying the sensed*

Internalized racism occurs when racially minoritized people consciously or unconsciously take into themselves the dominant society's racist attitudes, stereotypes and ascribed positions. A result of internalized racism is that minoritized people see themselves as inferior in dominant-subordinate relations of power (James, 1996, p. 6; McGibbon & Etowa, 2009, p. 116). As Carl James (1996) suggests, "The actions of the dominant group towards minority groups shape daily life as well as the perceptions of their positions and their potential in society" (p. 6). The middle women's visceral responses to racism signaled the inseparability of "the psychological and the physical," which suggests what Hook (2008) calls a "pre-discursive" notion of racialized embodiment (p. 13). They described their embodied responses to racism as "burning," "numbness," "tightness," "knotted" and "aching," "hurting," and "forgetting."

*I have to say, I was absolutely in, my whole body, like when I turned around and I saw [the family] crying, I saw [the social worker] talking, as I was talking to the nurse. The nurse was going like, "What's happening?" Right? So, I'm talking to you, and your eyes are going somewhere. So I followed that, right? Like naturally. And that's when this happened. Then my whole body was just burning. (Lisa2)*

*I was too numb to cry, to get emotional about it. ... Both of us didn't react emotionally to it together, but we were grieving. Individually. I said to Siobhan, "I'm too numb to cry." (Lenore1)*

*So, with this specific workshop, I had no desire to talk to them positively. I had no desire to even explain to them my community. So I don't honestly remember the questions. I don't even remember the day, except for how I was treated at the front door. (Natalie)*

Drawing from Franz Fanon's original work, Hook refers to the 'psychosomatics of race and racism' (p. 15), which are

*felt in both the racist and the target of their racism alike. I am alluding to the lived experience of racism, and indeed, of 'race' at that embodied, affective and experiential level that 'comes before words.'* (Hook, 2008, p. 15, punctuation in original)

In my research, Lisa gestured towards this notion of embodiment.

*With us sometimes, we don't even have time to think that way. We, we already are feeling that way. It didn't matter what you do, we expect it, and we accept it. ... But, but, so, of course, you know, when you are me, as a black person, me as a woman, when I go somewhere, I may have much more confidence in me, but I don't have confidence in that person that he will treat me well. You know what I mean? (Lisa2)*

Other participants conveyed what "both the racist and the target of their racism" might feel. Recall from Chapter 7, for example, how the middle women alluded to "sensed" differences on the part of society and service providers in response to their smells, sights, and sounds (diet, dress, and dialect). Their further comments underscored the implications of sense-ing difference, as it seemingly evoked disrespect, disinterest, domination, and a focus on deficits among main stream people. Particular humiliating interactions with main stream professionals lead middle women to conclude that they were stupid or ugly – "I was stupid. It's like I thought I was stupid. Who cares? I was stupid, right, cause you never exposed [to something before]" (Thuy); "Because I never see myself as somebody negative. Or that ugly. That people won't talk to me or anything like that" (Sary).

Furthermore, discrimination is literally taken into body, mind, & spirit, as it "eats away at you" (Wente, 2008). Recent research reveals its pathways to physical and mental illness (Krieger, 2000; Wente, 2008). A number of times, I was struck by middle women's talk about being nervous, uneasy, uncomfortable, or lacking in confidence, when they moved out from the GMCNO into other spaces involving service providers.

1) First, that these very articulate women should lose their confidence in the face of service providers and system people – an internalization of "lesser than" status, that might be attributed to their "difference" that includes non-professional designation, accented English, etc. and therefore speaks to intimidation, a practice of domination. 2) Second, that they feel that they are repeatedly testing themselves and being tested in these "going

out" circumstances. (Memo Excerpt, "Going into new places," November 19, 2008)

The middle women appeared so confident within the relative safety of their colleagues in the GMCNO and in responding within their communities. Yet a number of the middle women talked about how it had taken them many years to "build up" their confidence and how, even then, confidence remains elusive outside their comfort zones.

*Um, with the health system, I am now, after 13 years, confident and comfortable to advocate and to access my people, even myself, to the health system, or interact with the health care provider, the social services provider, with confidence, with assertiveness, right. ... because I built that up. ... With the health system, and the social services provider, I am comfortable. Now, with the school system, like education, other sectors, I'm not too sure. (Thuy)*

*First hand, keep in mind um, I'm nervous as it is already to go give a presentation to these people. Um, not having a lot of experience giving them. That was already, my nerves were a little bit sensitive going in to this organization, just because I'm a speaker there, and I'm not a good public speaker. I'm worried about that. (Natalie)*

Recall Sary's story of the disagreement she had with a young girl's teacher about naming the issue. The teacher laughed when Sary said, "We are not talking about self-esteem. We are talking about difference." During my interview with Sary, she told me that for a long time after she came to Canada 16 years ago, she talked about "my land, or my country," but "I don't really do that any more. That used to be my reference point" (Sary). I asked her when that had changed for her, and she talked about the processes through which she came to see herself "not necessarily as a Canadian, because my heart will always be in two, someone who is more neutral" (Sary). And then she circled back to explicitly make the point that she did not *lack* self-esteem when she arrived in Canada. Rather she "lost it" through the lack of help and support and the accumulation of deficits.

*Oh. It changed over the years of living in this society, and becoming little by little, more part of this society, like beginning to learn more about who my neighbours are, where I do my work to make my living, uh, where my children go to school, how much I can trust those teachers and talk to them directly, and then I don't necessarily need to express myself as someone from somewhere else, because in reality after living a few years in here, I feel very much part of this land. But I speak as my own embodiment. My own um, a way of integrating myself into this society, in many different ways, doing*

*volunteer work here and there, go back to school and learn this and that, reading more papers and magazines that are from this society, and then going back home and feel myself different. ...*

*Before I was 100 percent identified with my heritage. 100 percent. Cause I did feel myself different in here. But later on in life, since I'm going back there, like I said, and I don't see myself in that society. The most important issues happened in here. Delivering babies, getting married or getting separated, whatever the case was. Going back to school. Learning how to become a successful worker to provide services for people. ... All those things create a huge difference in me, that make me who I am today. So I don't see me different. And if people see me different, well, that's okay. It's how they see me. They notice my accent. I do have an accent, and that will never change. And I don't want to change, and I think it's cool.*

*You see, so maybe in that sense, you can say, "Oh, now Sary has more self-esteem." That probably is that I don't have more self-esteem. It's just that I recovered some of what I lost for the last few years, that I lived in here without much help and support. (Sary)*

The middle women's comments help to make sense of the capacity building focus of their work, and of the dances that they do to create opportunities through which to build confidence among the people they support.

### ***Draining our spirits***

So, it is possible to recover your self-esteem, as Sary said. But the middle women's "work is so hard" that "if you don't have proper support, you get so drowned and you lose sight of your own wisdom or the wisdom of the [people you're supporting]" (Siobhan2). Here, Siobhan was referring to the challenges of the substance of the Middle Woman's work – how to "manage the emotional turmoil." Experiencing the conditions of the people they support evokes the "saddest feeling. It's just tragic" (Lisa2). Sometimes the middle women "crack" (Natalie).

*I thought, "I can disconnect from this job completely. I'm going to go home. My kids are gonna make me forget anything when I see them all. That's not going to be hard." And I remember, a month later, I actually had to crack. Because some of stories were so emotional. Some of these families had no money, like I was willing to get them money to eat. Because I couldn't disconnect seeing people from my own community suffer. When I've been given so much. (Natalie)*

Race-making, as Knowles (2003) explains, must be understood as a "people-centred enterprise" (p. 34) through which personhoods (or



subjectivities) are "made in the interface between people and the social categories by which they are recognized and positioned in the world" (p. 35). Embodied performances are "inevitably spatial" (p. 99).

*[Embodiment] means to be both positioned within historical processes and it refers to the place of corporeality – of body – in generating the person in the practical dialogues composing the social landscapes on which we operate. (Knowles, 2003, p. 37, emphasis in original).*

For racialized minorities, embodiment means "you have to work twice as much" (Lisa1) to prove yourself.

*We know we have to be the best of the best, to show them how good we are, how well we work, and, and, we make jokes, even, it's not a joke, let me tell you. ... You are very visible, in an invisible community. You know, you are, whatever you have to do, it is expected of you. Right. So, you are invisible in that way. But you are visible. What we know is you have to be ahead of the game. (Lisa1)*

Navigating the social interfaces that evoke bodily sensations of burning, pain, numbness, tightness, knots, and amnesia is "nerve-wracking" (Lisa2) and frustrating (Evelyn). It makes you "pull your hair out" (Sary). But the middle women's comportment is not supposed to "reveal" their embodied humiliations – "You just have to let it sit off your shoulders" (Natalie).

*I went downstairs, and I was, my nerves were sky high. Um, now I'm gone crazy. Because I need to speak, but I still have to try to not get angry in front of my colleagues. So, maintain my nerves, try to be calm, collected, because normally I would have just started freaking out. But I have to make sure not to, because I reflect my religion now. People look at me as a Muslim. People don't look at me as Natalie any more. So, I thought, I have to be very careful when I react in public, that I react on behalf of my religion. I don't react on behalf of me any more. So, normally I would have been like, "This is a joke." Rip it up, toss it aside, and said, "See you later. Too-da-loo. Tell her that I did come in and you were very rude to me. Too-da-loo." But I didn't want to do that, because I wanted to make sure to do it very professionally, to reflect on my religion as well.*

*When I spoke to one of my colleagues about what [the receptionist did], she said, "Oh, my god. I would have just walked away. I wouldn't have said anything." And that's where the difference is. I do have to say something. I can't allow people to speak to me this way, and let them think that that actually got to me. It didn't get to me. It didn't bother me at all. "You're free to your opinion. But don't say it to my face. I resent that." (Natalie)*

When they can't manage to "contain" it, sometimes the middle women "lose it" or get "pissed off" (Lisa2), as discussed earlier. Dealing

with the "invisible sub-terrain reality" means "juggling" "not only the ethical and legal things that we are always straddling" (Siobhan3), but also the social relations of power that shape their judgments about what is ethical and legal.

*If other people knew that some of us take money out of our pocket to help families, or we take families home. We don't tell anybody. But we are part of the community, what can we do? These things are invisible right now. But as we work more closely with systems, we need to find a way to manage it. Not only the ethical and legal things that we are always straddling. There are many aspects of our reality that requires really really unique approaches to manage it, to learn the language to describe it, so we don't get judged immediately, that we help build understanding and that we don't get trapped in the black and whiteness of things. That we have to help people see, because we see the next generation. We have an incredible group of youth leaders, who almost give up their lives for the community. And they also work in that gray area. If we can't manage to describe our way of working, we will not be able to help them describe their way of working. And as they rise, they're really now the celebrities. People are coming to them for advice. They are keeping quiet about how they work. Because if people knew how they work, they would be shocked. And uh, we need to help ourselves, but also help the next generation, know how to describe this work in the third space. (Siobhan3)*

Navigating these tensions is "very draining spiritually" (Siobhan3).

*So, our colleagues often get trapped too in constantly crisis. We all suffer some degree of fatigue and compassion burnout. The only way we are going on is just the sheer stubbornness. We won't let ourselves get burned out. We are burned out, but we won't let it get to us. We just keep on going. Because it harms us physically, spiritually, and emotionally. (Siobhan3)*

Lenore observed, "One of the things that really burns you out is you're just tired of being cautious. ... Sometimes I just want to lay it out straight" (Lenore1).

## **Summary**

In this chapter, I delved into the practices the Middle Woman employs to navigate (in) the race/culture divide. I opened the chapter by revisiting what initially appeared as reluctance to talk about racism to expose how caution is shaped in social relations of power implicated in what the GMCNO experiences as fragile and tentative relationships with human service organizations. This chapter revealed the many dances the Middle Woman does in the interest of maximizing support to minoritized

(im)migrants who are more vulnerable than she is. I surfaced how the middle women work a constant tension between keeping the door open and challenging and resisting what they regard as disrespectful, unacceptable, unethical and racist interfaces with human service organizations. The Middle Woman also works to build communities' capacity to recognize their strengths, see beyond their vulnerabilities, and resist inequities.

*Discernment* was again visible here, as the Middle Woman attends to the circumstances and timing of her intervention, but also to her discursively produced position as representative of her organization, her community, her religion, her culture, her race. At the organizational level, the GMCNO navigates relationships with other organizations, sometimes undertaking cultural competence training to open the door and the dialogue about inequities. Discernment keeps the Middle Women on her toes. But it also takes a toll on her body, mind and spirit.

## Chapter 10. Revisiting the race/culture divide

### Introduction to the end

The aim of my research was to examine the race/culture divide in human services as a mode of social relations of power in contemporary Canada. In Chapter 1, I introduced the theorized race/culture divide in human services, coined by Canadian critical race studies scholars to problematize the premises that underlie the notion that *cultural* remedies can address *racial* disparities. Recall their assertion that “paying attention to culture alone and notions of ‘cultural difference’ carries the risk of avoiding issues of racism” (Conference, 2006; Race/Culture, 2006; see also Bannerji, 2000; Li, 1999a; & Razack, 1998). Furthermore, even as “culture considerations are important for contextualizing oppressed groups’ claims for justice, for improving their access to services, and for requiring dominant groups to examine the invisible cultural advantages they enjoy” (Razack, 1998, p. 58), there are particular “risks of talking culture ... when, as so often happens, it is the dominant group that controls the interpretation of what it means to take culture into account” (p. 59).

Drawing on Michael Burawoy (1991b) and Geraldine Pratt's (2004) work, my goal was to examine how the theory "holds up," *working* it through an examination of the social relations implicated in human services as they are articulated in a particular site – that of the middle women who are grassroots advocates for racially minoritized (im)migrants. In this final chapter, I revisit the theory through the vantage points gleaned in my research – those of the participants filtered through my own.

In light of my research, I first draw some tentative conclusions about how the race/culture divide operates in and through human services, from vantage points on the edges of main stream human services. Second, I briefly discuss the contributions of my research to theorizing about the relevance of the extended case method and to undertaking and interpreting research findings. Third, I query the premises of the theorized race/culture divide in a way that complicates drawing straightforward

conclusions and implications about how it operates. Fourth, based on revisiting the race/culture divide, I situate the contributions of my research in light of the findings as a whole, by pointing to how my research extends previous research in several areas. Fifth, I gesture toward additional avenues for examining the race/culture divide in human services and in particular anti-racism and cultural competence. Finally, I briefly revisit the site of the Middle Woman in light of the meanings and implications of my insights. In this chapter, then, I gesture toward implications of my research not only for theorizing the race/culture divide in human services, but also for theory, method, and practice.

### **Summary findings and tentative conclusions**

#### *Perpetuating the race/culture divide*

In Chapter 3, I reviewed relevant literature on cultural competence and anti-racism pertinent to human services. I concluded that the race/culture divide is reproduced in the literature such that calls for cultural competence and anti-racist intervention comprise virtually entirely separate bodies of literature. While the notion of cultural competence in relation to human services originated in the field of nursing, it is now prevalent across human service disciplines and sectors. Anti-racism literature in relation to human services emanated primarily from the disciplines of education and social work and has only very recently surfaced in the nursing and related health literature. This is especially true in Canada.

Inasmuch as cultural competence has been a project of main stream disciplines, through which it has often been deployed in cross-disciplinary (cultural) struggles about turf both in the academy and in the human services sector, its potential for being recast as an anti-racist strategy to effect system change is compromised. But, as a tool reshaped by the people whose vantage points are on the edges of main stream human services, and also anchored in what it means to live (in) the race/culture divide, it may have potential to surface the underlying issues that shape

inequity for minoritized (im)migrants and to open up a space for discussing how racism operates as a system of oppression.

### ***Racism as a system of oppression***

In explicating racism in everyday life, Philomena Essed (2007) asserts,

*Racism does not refer to personality characteristics but rather to cultural patterns, societal structures, recurring practices, behaviours, ideologically informed attitudes, and discourses, through which racial and ethnic minorities are excluded, problematized, and inferiorized. ... Racism is a process fluently integrated into the customs and experiences of everyday life. ... The problem is not just racism, but the fact that racism is an everyday problem. Everyday racism adapts to cultural arrangements, norms, and values while operating through the structures of power in society. (pp. 234-235)*

In these senses, my research comprised a case study of how racism operates as a *system* of oppression (Dei, 2007; Doane, 2006; Essed, 2007).

As I showed in Chapter 4, pre- and post-migration conditions, perceived through the vantage point of the Middle Woman, intersect to differentially reproduce, produce and sustain minoritized (im)migrants' vulnerabilities in Canada. The layering of pre- and post-migration conditions and circumstances on one another produces inequitable disadvantages, which the middle women framed as inequities. In Chapter 5, I identified six types of barriers and gaps that many minoritized (im)migrants experience in Canada: 1) lack of knowledge about what services and supports are available and how systems work; 2) differences between pre-migration and main stream concepts, practices and systems; 3) inability to use available services or to use them effectively because of proficiency in languages other than English, difficulty finding the way to services, and unavailability of gender-appropriate services for women; 4) fear, distrust and lack of confidence that result in avoidance of main stream interfaces; 5) negative experiences with human service interfaces that result in a refusal to access needed services and resources; and 6) absences in the service systems, including gaps between services and

sectors and non-existence of needed services and resources – which I ultimately referred to as "no man's land."

Chapter 5 also drew attention to problematic Government and human services' policies and practices that are implicated in the barriers and gaps the minoritized (im)migrants experience. Beyond the interfaces with individual practitioners, the middle women elaborated taken-for-granted system(at)ic practices that constitute exclusionist barriers at organizational and systemic levels across sectors. I also explored this issue in Chapter 5, drawing attention to another layer evident in the middle women's talk about inequities. Apparently shaped at least in part by liberal assumptions of "equal" access and colour-blind treatment, the women operationalized (and made visible) exclusionist barriers and gaps that (continue to) give rise to emergence of middle women in "new emerging" (im)migrant communities.

Chapter 6 illuminated how the cultural and linguistic *niche* that middle women can legitimately fill, and the *Middle Woman too*, are discursively produced. Still, it was notable that, despite comprising a group of racially minoritized (im)migrant women, participants in my study did not initially explicitly attribute inequities to racism, or explain inequities in terms of race/racism. In Chapter 7, I examined participants' framings of the need for middle women more closely, paying attention to the underlying discourses of race and racist thinking implicated in the ways in which the middle women talked about their day-to-day *experiences*. This was fruitful in exposing how seemingly unselfconscious talk-in-passing on the part of main stream (primarily white) Canadians, including service providers, can be rooted in racist ideas, and how such racist talk shapes the practices of service providers and of the Middle Woman. Indeed, the race-culture continuum was readily apparent, where the middle women revealed that they and the people they support dwell in daily culturalist-racist interfaces. My research illuminated the complex way in which contemporary racism can operate overtly and covertly *simultaneously*. For inasmuch as the middle women articulated and gave

meaning to difference-making practices on the part of service providers, organizations and systems, their talk concealed particular types of culturalist-racist practices. In their talk, albeit *also* in passing, the middle women alluded to how diet, dress, and dialect (three Ds) comprise the *cultural* terrain on which difference is constituted in everyday interfaces. Accordingly, I reframed multiculturalism's seemingly benign promotion of diet, dress and dialect by exposing the "Other" side, where the senses – smells, sights and sounds – trigger anything but celebratory responses in main stream Canadians. Further, the middle women exposed how "Canadians" translate their sensed responses – what I later referred to as pre-discursive (in Chapter 9) – into prevalent practices of disrespect, disinterest, domination, and a focus on deficits, which I called "another four Ds."

I then interrogated the absence of explicit race talk through examining conversations *about* race and racism with 11 middle women. These conversations elicited numerous, detailed and visceral examples of racist interfaces with individual service providers. While deferring explicit talk of racism, disrespect became a code word for culturalist-racist, suggesting that the middle women use deracialized (Rattansi, 2007) language in describing their experiences. But when explicitly invited to talk about race and racism, middle women's discernments sometimes ultimately "found another word."

But this avenue of inquiry – that is, explicitly examining the absence of race talk – also illuminated the complexities of race talk and its silence/ing, which I examined in Chapters 7, 8, and 9. First, as was evident in Chapter 7, opening up examination of and naming of racism can be tricky. Additionally, clearly racism's speak-ability is shaped through the very social relations of power that signal racism. At one level, racism is not the middle women's first-voiced issue in the immediacy of addressing the many other issues that take priority in the everyday lives of (im)migrants and, by extension, the middle women. Moreover, in the medley of differences that many (im)migrants experience in Canada, race



may not be the first one they name. One way of interpreting this finding is Philomena Essed's (2007) suggestion that "race and ethnicity are modes of identification, central to identities, but they are not the only ones" (p. 240). I return to the implications of Essed's suggestion in the final section of this chapter.

At another level, though, what I earlier referred to as a "reluctance" to generalize racist practices to all main stream (predominantly white) service providers – even to "give the benefit of doubt" – while at the same time unequivocally articulating the system(at)ic nature of racialized exclusions, highlights one way in which contemporary racism operates as a mode of power and oppression. It points to how racist practices can be *systemic* and at the same time *not universal*.<sup>77</sup> Racist practices are, however, also *systematic* – that is, routine. A reluctance to generalize ought not to be taken as an indication or an admission that racist practices are exceptional – the work of a few bad apples who are irrational or hold extremist views (Taylor et al., 2000). To the contrary, *not universal* also does *not* mean exceptional. As Maysie (2009) says in a blog response to a recent story in the Toronto Star, "Are you people KIDDING ME?!?!?!?" (P2, emphasis in original).

*Her son was not called a n----- [sic] three times! He told you about it three times, or three times is what you chose to tell the reporter. There's a great deal of damage caused when racist incidents are reduced to the general white population as occurring one or three or 6 times? As if that's all the racism that her son ever received? What about the curriculum? What about treatment by teachers? Lack of intervention in racist comments made by classmates that are overheard by teachers? (P8)*

This tension between not universal yet system(at)ic helps to make sense of how, despite the middle women's elaboration of the ways in which individual and system(at)ic practices work through each other, nevertheless the discernment of racisms can be elusive. Essed (2007) hints that when racism is conceptualized in *individual* terms, the practice of discernment rightly surfaces caution because "it can be difficult to be

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<sup>77</sup> I owe thanks to Sara Dorow for this nuance, which I have complicated here.

absolutely certain about the nature of mistreatment, hostility, underestimation, or prejudice" (p. 237). It is a reminder that racism *is* systemic. She cautions against hasty attributions of racism as much as "not racism."

My more nuanced analysis of the ways in which research participants explicated the issues (im)migrants experience, and their differing vantage points on the salience of race and racism raised the question, "Does not seeing or perceiving racism make it not so?" In a recent seminar focusing on my research, a black woman who indicated she came to Canada from Nigeria responded (like Sary in my research) that she did not know about racism until she came to Canada. It was not until the woman read about racism in Canada that she "knew" about it, and she isn't sure she wants to know. Before she knew about it, she liked her life in Canada better. Philomena Essed's insight that "people experience different modes of identification because some identifications *weigh* more than others owing to structural or situational factors" (p. 246, emphasis added) is helpful to understanding the differing and shifting vantage points elicited in my study and beyond. Can surfacing racist realities do harm?

In Chapter 9, I drew attention to how caution about "saying it as it is" silences race talk, signaling unspeakable oppression. I also revealed how oppressive relations shape the many other dances that middle women do to navigate the tension between keeping the door open and resisting subordination. This dance may be seen as the impetus for critical race theorists' concerns with who defines what it means to take culture into account (Razack, 1998). In this case, the dominant group comprises main stream (primarily) white service providers and the organizations that shape their focus on *cultural* competency in the face of *racialized* barriers and gaps. Even when the system does employ minoritized workers – whom the middle women hoped would share their vantage points – the middle women observed that main stream systems often

effectively "absorb" minoritized workers, into the dominant modes of operation including exclusion.

The main stream's tendency to focus on culture is at odds with the middle women's conceptualizations of the issues/inequities that minoritized (im)migrants experience. Yet, even as this tendency shapes the GMCNO's strategic redefinition or realignment of equity as cultural responsiveness, the system-defined need creates an opening for the GMCNO to address barriers and gaps. It reinforces the (cultural) *niche* that the GMCNO can (legitimately) fill. There is an inherent ambiguity (and therefore ambivalence), then, in the GMCNO's and the middle women's responsiveness to the system's calls for "cultural" help. Sandwiched between (the possibility of) naming inequities and (the silencing of) speaking racism, the middle women engage in cultural competency training and critique it at the same time.

It is, then, the complex ways in which hidden and overt – absent and present – discourses and other practices operate together that characterize contemporary racisms, and that constitute racism as a *system* of oppression. In this thesis, I traced these practices piece by piece. But it is (only) in fitting the pieces together that it is possible to glimpse the contemporary operation of racisms: Hidden in a discourse of barriers and gaps that comprise inequity (Chapters 4 and 5), but also in talk-in-passing in which culturalist-racist assumptions and judgments are embedded (Chapter 7). Weakly concealed in what appears as disinterest and detachment, which comprise non-reaction, inaction, or unresponsiveness (Chapter 7). Overt in practices of disrespect, domination and a focus on deficits that trigger familiarity (the pre-discursive) and uncertainty, keeping the Middle Woman on guard – discerning, sometimes finding other words (Chapter 7). Invisible in the way that barriers and gaps and culturalist-racist practices are institutionalized, rendering a system that is one-way (of being Canadian), exclusionist (Chapters 5 and 7). Surfaced and suppressed, discerned and perceived through multiple and shifting positionalities, which situate actors differentially in their relations to

“Canada” (Chapter 8). And finally, hidden in navigating the perilous tension between jeopardizing relationships with main stream organizations and working against the very practices that give rise to a need to navigate (Chapter 9).

### **Contributions of my research**

#### ***Theoretical insights on the extended case method***

My findings suggest that the extended case method can be fruitful in a somewhat unexpected way. It has been used in local studies to intentionally examine what shapes the life or existence of a local site through attention to the broader social forces in which it is nested, and in global ethnographies to study more than one (inter)connected place (or site) *in situ*. It has been used to revisit one place at different times (Burawoy, 1998; Burawoy et al., 1991; Burawoy et al., 2000).

My research findings illustrate how close analyses can generate a study of articulations of multiple sites in one place. I originally conceived my study in terms of contributing *a* previously unexamined vantage point. But perhaps one of the most important findings is that there was not *a* vantage point, but multiple vantage points. The particular positionalities and personal biographies of the participants shaped “real” differences in their vantage points. Moreover, taking seriously Philomena Essed's notion of multi-identifications calls for attending to the perpetual partiality of a vantage point. My avenues of exploration may have brought particular identifications to the surface to the exclusion of others – identifications such as woman, Canadian Kurd, Muslim, Middle Woman, community member.

#### ***Undertaking and interpreting research findings***

My findings have implications for undertaking research and interpreting research findings. First, the trickiness of talking about race and racism was evident in my research, both in my struggle to open up the question, and in the participants' initial reluctance to name race and racism and their cautiousness about saying it as it is, both of which signal

oppressive relations. This trickiness should alert other researchers to the challenges of exploring experiences of race, racism and discrimination in Canada. The Ethnic Diversity Survey, for example, ought to be interpreted with caution. This survey likely significantly underreports or misreports the extent to which (im)migrants name race, racism and discrimination because of their multi-identifications, vantage points and positionalities within the social relations of Canada, and the meanings they ascribe to these concepts. Moreover, the survey does not ask respondents about *racism*; questions are framed in terms of discriminatory behaviours (Statistics Canada, 2003a). This framing has the potential to reinforce the idea that racism is a matter of individual behaviours rather than the system(at)ic ways in which race-thinking is embedded throughout society.

Second, as I indicated in my review of the literature, many human services scholars who do not situate themselves within critical race or anti-racism theory omit consideration of the social relations of power through which racisms operate. This is not to suggest that all research should be re-oriented to centre race and racism, but rather that race and racism ought not to be treated as variables that may or may not be present. The relationship between race and health and social disparities is not straightforward, and calls for complex analysis strategies (Williams, 1999). Race and racism are (already) implicated in social and health indicators; they cannot be "controlled out" (Bonilla-Silva, 1996). To the extent that race is an experiential reality (Dei, 2007), it cannot be disconnected from the social relations in which it is articulated with other modes of oppression. As previously suggested, acknowledging experiential reality as a way of knowing is an epistemic issue at the heart of race debates. All researchers ought to be attentive to both the nuances of multiple vantage points inherent in pluralistic societies, and to how these vantage points are situated in relation to multiple modes of always-operating practices that produce and sustain disadvantage.

### *Querying the premises of the race/culture divide*

In this subsection, I query premises underlying the theorized race/culture divide in a way that complicates drawing straightforward conclusions about and implications of my study. First, I revisit the notion of culturalized racism, considering in what way(s) a focus on culture obscures racism. Second, I explore whether it is necessary to *name* racism, and the implications of rendering it unspeakable. In so doing, I reconsider the question I raised earlier: "Does not seeing or perceiving racism make it not so?" I raise the question of whether a focus on race and racism can obscure the significance of culture in a problematic way.

#### *Culturalized racism*

The concept of culturalized racism (Razack, 1998) challenges the race/culture binary by fully interlocking culture and race. Sherene Razack (1998) argues that the concept is important because, first, culturalized racism draws attention to racism's contemporary "covert operation" (p. 60). On one hand, my research provided an instance of this covert operation. On the other hand, my research also exposed how simultaneous covert and overt practices blur the edges and complicate easy discernment of racisms. Although this blurring itself may be seen as "covert," I suggest that there may be something even more insidious in the experienced reality in which covert and overt practices blur – that is, they shift too quickly to be grasped, or so unpredictably that they render vision and remembering fuzzy, indistinct, unclear, confused or uncertain.<sup>78</sup>

Sherene Razack (1998) also argues that culturalized racism explains the co-existence of routine racist practices and "their interpretations" and the "refusal to take responsibility for them" (p. 60). In other words, it

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<sup>78</sup> These are definitions of "blur." Encarta® World English Dictionary © 1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. Developed for Microsoft by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

allows for innocence and denial (Razack, 1998). This argument helps to make sense of the seeming contradiction in the middle women's simultaneous discernment of racisms and giving the benefit of the doubt. Denial of racism is made possible by the tricky ways in which it is both not universal and also routine, haphazard yet predictable – that is, not surprising. This ambiguity cautions the Middle Woman, making her vigilant in her discernments.

Second, culturalized racism points to how a focus on culture in particular obscures racism. Here, my research provided an instance of the significance of who determines what it means to take culture into account. This was evident in the middle women's revealing how main stream service providers' and systems' emphases on culture, language and cultural difference shape calls for *cultural* intervention. My research, however, also exposed how hegemonic *systems* of oppression might appear to operate with the consent or cooperation of the oppressed (Foucault, 1990). Specifically, a focus on inequities, framed in terms of barriers and gaps, shaped self-conscious discernment about racism in a way that worked to silence race/racism talk. In initially not *naming* racism as a barrier, it seems the middle women sometimes obscured racism even from themselves. It is important to observe, though, that they did not obscure racism primarily by a focus on culture, at least not within any narrow conceptualization of culture. Participants were more likely to engage with a broad and complex notion of culture as societal context, conditions and circumstances rather than simply as ways of *doing* manifested in values and personal practices. For them, the cultural *is* social, economic and political, and these dimensions of the cultural could not be meaningfully disengaged from one another. The difference between the main stream's and the middle women's deployments of culture underscore the extent to which the underlying cultural struggle comprises an epistemic struggle.

Moreover, the middle women's complicity in obscuring racism by deracialized naming or silencing is made possible in part by their reliance

on main stream human services to meet their goal of redressing minoritized (im)migrants' inequitable access and treatment. But I suggest that it is also because disrespect, *and* its resistance, occur in hidden (private) interactions with public representatives in public spaces such as human services. These layered interfaces are largely out-of-view of other service providers, supervisors, managers, the "public," and even from other middle women. As such, surfacing these system(at)ic but not universal practices at higher levels in the systems may be (indeed, are likely to be) met with resistance as such "intolerances" are renamed aberrations and are then (sometimes) "rooted out" (Dei, 2007, p. 58).

In keeping with my goal of examining the theorized race/culture divide in human services, I placed emphasis on how a focus on culture can obscure racism. But I suggest that there is also a risk that a focus on race can obscure the significance of culture *not only* as a basis for oppressed groups' claims but in its own right. I noted in Chapter 8, almost in passing, that cultural "demands" take on different meanings depending on people's personal biographies. Cultural struggles "back home" have shaped the import of culture to the middle women both "back there" and "here in Canada."

It is therefore important to attend to the nuance of how culture is, or can be, rendered particularly problematic in Canada, and with respect to minoritized (im)migrants in particular. For people who fled cultural/ethnic and/or religious persecution, the reason *for* migrating was not to have to hide *not only* who they are as expressed in their practices, *but also* not to have to hide (period). This is the sense in which the cultural *is* social, economic and political. In this way, as Shinin expressed it, it is only "here" that she can be a Kurd – and, therefore, she sees herself as a *Canadian* Kurd. This reality gives rise to a tension under Canadian conditions. It is important to *name* racism "in Canada," and to clearly connect it to culturalism – that is, challenge the race/culture divide. But at the same time, it is important not to obscure the significance of culture. My research bears out Himani Bannerji's (2000) assertion that immigrants'



demands are not first-voiced as *cultural* demands. "Their issues [are] about racism, legal discrimination involving immigration and family reunification, about job discrimination on the basis of Canadian experience, and various adjustment difficulties, mainly of child care and language" (p. 44). These are the issues that the middle women in my research framed as inequities.

But my research also suggests that cultural demands cannot be evacuated from demands for equity. Under some conditions, critiquing the displacement of demands for equity onto cultural terrain risks emptying equity demands of their substance. It has been suggested that focusing on inequities can "[reinforce] stereotypical attitudes and prejudices about marginalized groups" (Giddings, 2005, p. 237), resulting in re-presentations of familiar "one-dimensional views of refugees" "as bearers of symptoms" (Ryan, Dooley, & Benson, 2008, p. 16). To the extent that cultural struggle *is* an epistemic struggle, there is a need to always be mindful of taken-for-granted privileged notions that may underlie notions of disparity (Yosso, 2005). For example, critical race theory challenges deficit thinking – a focus on what non-white people *lack*, which is embedded in a normative assumption that what is *lacking* is what "one cannot not want" (Spivak, 1990, p. 93). Building on this insight, and taking seriously "the empowering potential of cultures of Communities of Color [*sic*]" (p. 76), Yosso (2005) creates a space in which to centre the capacities of racially minoritized people, which she conceptualizes as "cultural wealth." This concept explicitly recognizes forms of cultural capital that are rendered invisible in main stream models – aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant. The idea of cultural wealth fits well with, and helps to articulate, the GMCNO's way of thinking about capacity building that works against the accumulation of deficits generated through interfaces with main stream service providers and organizations. It may even be helpful in rethinking the idea of barriers and gaps, which can suggest that what the system has to offer is worth having. The GMCNO is not interested in simply bridging access to what already

exists. It recognizes what is lacking *in the system*; it seeks to equalize the value of community and main stream knowledge and practice. It invites the main stream to be less certain of what it knows.

Finally, Sherene Razack (1998) suggests that the notion of culturalized racism disrupts faith in a democratic pluralistic society as a "neutral" relation through which equality will be realized (p. 61). Critical race theorists critique the liberal notion of equality for its reliance on the assumption of universal (individual) rights (Bannerji, 2000; Razack, 1998). My research provided an instance of the system's reliance on an assumption of universal access, evident in the way that the middle women created a caricature of "Canadian" culture as "absolutely one-way."

However, my research also suggests that universal assumptions are not *always* at play in the race/culture divide. First, all people are clearly *not* considered equal. Some racialized (im)migrants are explicitly labeled as deficient – lacking in capacity, substandard, "in need of" parenting courses and child welfare intervention because of their practices and values. Second, service providers and systems do not appear to hold the assumption that everyone has equal access or avails themselves of needed services that are available to them. The middle women's accounts indicated that service providers explicitly acknowledge that they do not, do not know how to, and therefore cannot, "reach" particular populations who do not use their services or do not do well in their systems. They acknowledge that it is not possible for many minoritized (im)migrants to "fit in" to the way main stream services do business. This explicit knowing belies an assumption of universal access or equality. Moreover, if human services organizations rely on overarching policies of respect to ensure universal treatment – that is, as the mechanism for ensuring that people "have equality," then clearly many racialized (im)migrants are not considered equal on this indicator. From the vantage point of the Middle Woman, disrespect in human services was both familiar and frequent.

Critical race theorists suggest that assumptions of universality (or universal assumptions) are hidden in *unmarked* cultural-racial

(Euro/white /male/modern) standards, norms and reference points, which are always present in their absence (e.g., Bannerji, 2000; Razack, 1998; Schick, 2000). My research findings suggest that cultural-racial reference points are sometimes *not* unmarked. A common reference point was "Canadian." In fact, racial-cultural reference points couched in a nationalist discourse allowed for service providers' unselfconscious uses of explicitly delineated reference points. Other scholars have exposed how national/ism/ist discourses have historically interlocked with racism/culturalism (Mackey, 2002; Schick & St. Denis, 2005; Thobani, 2007). Canadian institutions embody the "Canadian" standards by which they assess others (and find them deficient). The middle women frequently alluded to such civilizing discourses employed in service providers' uses of covert racist innuendos. This was evident, for example, in how government-sponsored refugees are educated in "Canadian" values and practices upon their arrival (refer to Chapter 5), in case they are not familiar with the realities and laws "in Canada."

### *Naming racism*

So is it necessary that racism be *named*? With respect to silence,<sup>79</sup> Bannerji (2000) argues, "We cannot even begin to plumb the depths of this silence unless we recognize its complex character. ... Silence is highly telling – it can mean anything from complicity to resistance" (p. 153). Dei (2007) argues that Western science's influence in shaping contemporary enlivened debate (see Hier & Bolaria, 2007, for example) about the "reality" of race is complicit in silencing talk about racism: "The denial of race and racial difference is at the heart of the failure to acknowledge racism" (Dei, 2007, p. 56). Etowa (2009) suggests, "Racism is the factor that makes race salient" (Slide #24). Like Maysie, whose blog entry I referred to earlier in this chapter, Dei (2007) argues for race as a "lived reality" "informed by

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<sup>79</sup> I borrow Bannerji's reference to silence, which she used in reference to silence among non-white women about violence in non-white families.

embodied knowing" (p. 62) – as in Maysie's "Are you people KIDDING ME?!?!?!?" (Even) post-modern multiple identities cannot erase colour. Dei (2007) continues, "While identities are transient we must also recognize the permanence of skin colour as a salient marker of identity through human history. The salience of colour in the mind of the racist cannot be dismissed" (p. 62).

On the other hand, Philomena Essed (2007) suggests, under some circumstances and conditions, anti-racist struggle does not necessitate *centering* race – that is making it the explicit and /or sole focus of resistance to racisms. My research suggests that while colour remains a salient marker of identity, the dominant group ascribes other types of sights (such as *hijab*), as well as smells and (especially) sounds, to particular bodies, and groups of bodies, in racialized ways.

It seems to me that it is particularly important to *name* race and racism in the "Canadian circumstance" *because* naming racism in Canada is relatively recent, unlike in the U.S., where racism has been top-of-mind historically. Additionally, I think, it is important to *name* racism in Canada *because* Canada has worked to develop its own reputation as a non-racist nation, especially since the elimination of overtly racist immigration policies in the 1960s, and the subsequent advent of multiculturalism policy in the 1970s and 1980s.

Moreover, does the concept of culturalized racism improve the possibilities for *speaking* racism? As I discussed in Chapter 8, in my study, participants' perceptions of their lives in Canada and their interpretations of race and racism in Canada are inextricably connected to their perceptions and interpretations of their lives in other sites. They *experience* their experiences (!) and those of the people they support *through* constant comparison between their particular positionalities elsewhere and here. This finding cautions against generalization. Minoritized (im)migrants' experiences of racism can be no more universal than their multiple pre- and post-migration conditions and positionalities. In particular, the middle women involved in my research contested any notion of the

"essential [minoritized (im)migrant] woman" (Dhamoon, 2009; Razack, 1998).

When I presented a summary of my research findings to participants in the spring of 2009, I wondered whether, and almost expected that, participants would take exception to them, find them irrelevant, or would find them too harshly expressed for their comfort. Recall the expressed worry about naming oppression (from Chapter 9). To the contrary, the middle women listened with rapt attention, expressed great interest, and concurred with the experiences voiced and my analyses of them. Some of them repeated experiences they had told, as if to reinforce the findings. They commented that the reason they do not name racism in their work is because they *cannot* – it is not speakable. They continue to fear jeopardizing relationships. One middle woman commented several times that "the politicians" need to hear my findings, and one suggested that I should translate the findings with recommendations or implications into a user-accessible format for service providers and decision makers. Following these discussion sessions, several of the women who participated spoke to me individually, expressing real interest in the findings and indicating that they look forward to the final thesis in its entirety. One woman wanted to know my conclusions about the theorized race/culture divide based on this study in which they had invested themselves.

What have I read into these responses? *Naming* race and racism was important to the participants. This is not a topic about which they have engaged in discussion within the GMCNO. Perhaps the opening up of racism will (even) be helpful as the GMCNO works through the changing and challenging dynamics of its internal composition. For example, as discussed in Chapter 5, there were hints of the tension between middle women working with "established" and "new emerging" communities. Even while the middle women share a common goal of overcoming inequities, how they conceptualize and explain what shapes inequities may differ. At the same time my understanding that the participants are

situated in different ways to race and racism was also important to the middle women. These differences are clearly related in part to how the women are differently positioned in racialized relations of power "back home" and "in Canada." Furthermore, including racism and discrimination in the *list* of impediments to health and well-being of minoritized (im)migrants, while placing the *emphasis* on barriers and gaps, will be a continuing tension in the GMCNO's interfaces with human service organizations. As Siobhan put it, "It is a tension for us to act as an extension of main stream services [improving access and reaching (im)migrants] while always continuously calling on them to transform their practice." Thus, the discursively produced *niche* and *Middle Woman*.

For organizations and service providers, *not* naming race and racism should not be seen as a manifestation of "cultural sensitivity" – that is, a way to steer away from an uncomfortable topic. Although raising questions of racism – both configuring the question and engaging in the dialogue – are tricky, as my research demonstrates, it is a fruitful vehicle for illuminating just how fraught the concept some theorists want to stop using (e.g., Miles & Torres, 1996) is. Its very "fraughtness" points to its continuing relevance.

### ***What about cultural competence?***

When I presented my research findings in one GMCNO discussion group, one participant responded to my critique of cultural competence by wondering aloud, "But isn't cultural competence a place to start?" So what are the implications of my research for thinking about cultural competence?

Most cultural competence models focus on knowing cultural specificities with a caveat to not generalize them to all individuals within a group. They also promote self-reflection and self-awareness about how power is implicated in professional-service user relationships. Anti-racist theorists do not suggest that there are *not* specificities attached to cultures. For example, Sherene Razack (1998) has a caveat on her critique of

focusing on culture, because in reality, people "are diverse and do have culturally specific practices that must be taken into account" (p. 9). How does her caveat differ from those of proponents of cultural competence? Critical race theorists argue that difference, including cultural difference, is not, and does not explain, *oppression*. Reliance on cultural differences as an explanation for oppression suggests that, "if these differences could somehow be taken into account, oppression would disappear" (p. 61).

Of calls for cultural and linguistic remedies grounded in a cultural differences approach, Razack (1998) asserts that reducing cultural differences to communicative problems treats them as "mere technical glitches...that arise because the parties are culturally, racially, physically, mentally, or sexually *different*" (p. 8). Cultural know-how depends on essences (Bannerji, 2000; Razack, 1998) – what else is knowable? In the linguistic and cultural differences approach, if linguistic barriers can be addressed by the simple remedy of translation (which assumes either that knowledge is uncontested or that dominant knowledge is the only knowledge that counts), then cultural barriers can similarly be addressed by the simple remedy of "knowing" culture. When a "sensitivity to history" only produces "a refined catalogue of cultural differences, it does nothing to disrupt power relations" (Razack, 1998, p. 8). Without an understanding of how culture comprises a terrain of struggle, there can be no guarantee that organizations and the service providers who comprise them will be able to translate stories "heard" or circumstances "seen" in ways that will reorient practice to address power inequities. Through cultural competence, cultural and linguistic know-how provide the tools for the dominant group to "navigate their way through ... differences" (p. 8) – to *manage* diversity (Bannerji, 2000), without altering the power relations that make diversity a problem to manage (Day, 2000). Indeed, what diversity challenges *is* taken-for-granted sites and forms of knowledge production.

"The problem," says Bannerji (2000),

*is not that ideology invents particular socio-cultural features, found among many, but that it centres some and erases others which might contradict the centrality of the selected ones. ... It is the whole discursive organization that*

*is distortive or untrue, not particular features as such, and it is in their establishment as "essential" that the harm is most palpable. (p. 161, emphasis added)*

As Drevdahl et al. (2008) assert, "The trouble with cultural competence is that the concept always has a way of circling back to 'essential' identities of particular groups that supposedly have some shared characteristics" (p. 23). They pose the question how to take culture into account without reifying it. This is a particular challenge because, as discussed in my review of literature, racist ideas and attitudes comprise (hidden) assumptions that underlie cultural competence (Kumas-Tan et al., 2007). Yet, Josephine Etowa (2009) conceptualizes *lack* of cultural competence as a manifestation of racism. If this is the case, (how) *can* cultural competence serve an anti-racist agenda?

Some proponents of anti-racist practice suggest that cultural competence might be useful for *individualized* care, even though it is unlikely to be able to address inequities in care provision or outcomes (Drevdahl et al., 2008; McGibbon & Etowa, 2009). As Maysie (2009) put it, in her blog, to which I referred earlier, "Racism won't just go away once white folks just start behaving better. Although, you know, that would be a good place to start you doofuses!" (P7) This tension between addressing racism at the *individual* and *systemic* levels underscores Philomena Essed's (2007) suggestion that converting an understanding of what comprises racisms into anti-racist strategies is not straightforward. She cautions against "the trap of qualifying *individuals* as racists rather than ideas, attitudes, or manifest behaviours" (p. 236, emphasis in original). Approaching racism from "a moral and emotional perspective, which inevitably renders it a personal thing" reduces "complex social issues to a matter of subjective belief" (p. 236). Thus, for Josephine Etowa (2009), "Of central importance to anti-racism intervention is an *understanding* of how racism overlays all other health determinants for people of colour" (Slide #24, emphasis added). This emphasis is consistent with Philomena Essed's (2007) interesting and contentious redeployment of sensitivity, which gives meaning to *understanding* as the ability "to identify even the hidden



forms of racism" (p. 237). Therefore, the individual/institutional divide deployed in supporting the possibility that cultural competence might be useful for individualized care is itself problematic.

Elizabeth McGibbon and Josephine Etowa (2009) hypothesize that oppression is the institutionalized culmination of a cycle through which "biased information" is converted into stereotypes that form the basis of prejudice that shapes discrimination. Cultural competence conceived as sensitivity to the historical relations of power implicated in the present, with a goal of "seeing injustice" (McGibbon & Etowa, 2009) *and*, I would add, seeing how we (white and system people) are implicated in both the history of injustice in its many guises and its perpetuation, could or would comprise an anti-racist cultural competence. It would draw upon and bring together the *useful* foundations of anti-racism, cultural competence, and cultural safety. But would it evoke more receptivity than resistance on the part of main stream dominant (primarily white) service providers and organizations? In *this* cultural competence, "sensitivity" would comprise a focus on the practices through which particular ideas and attitudes – culturalist-racist ones – are institutionalized as oppression (Essed, 2007; Etowa, 2009). According to Sherene Razack (1998), what is necessary is an understanding that and how oppression is "socially organized to sustain power arrangements" (p. 8). This understanding includes how it is that the dominant group comes to define what it means to take culture into account, and how professional disciplines are one mechanism that the dominant group uses to perpetuate (dividing) practices that delimit what counts as knowledge in human services.

What happens when racism is coded as disrespect/disinterest/detachment/deficit focused? Do the system's disinterest and service providers' detachment imply "neutrality" or omission? Following Goldberg (1994), Josephine Etowa (2009) issues a reminder that racism "involves both action and inaction in the face of need" (Slide #24). "Action" constitutes the overt actions that signal racism, such as inequities in service delivery and discriminatory policies and

practices. On the other hand, what the system *lacks* comprises "inaction." In this light, I suggest that persistent barriers might be seen as overt, while gaps might be seen as inaction. Together they constitute inequitable exclusions. The middle women's cultural competency workshops navigate a tension between professionals' and service providers' more comfortable focus on "ethnic" differences and disparities.

### *Extending previous research*

My research extends previous research in a number of significant ways. First, it contributes an examination of the race/culture divide from an additional vantage point or set of vantage points. It documents the conditions and experiences of a grassroots organization established by middle women whose vantage points arise in the experiences of minoritized (im)migrants rather than in the main stream's need to fulfill its mandates. As mentioned in my review of literature in Chapter 3, some previous research has highlighted the challenges that racialized minorities experience as students, educators and professionals in predominately white institutions. Looking at the issue from outside any professional discipline and from the edges of the main stream was particularly fruitful in exposing the *depth* and *breadth* of marginalization that many racially minoritized (im)migrants experience. In an unexpected way, examining inequitable exclusions through the lenses of the middle women who emerge to address them made visible *layers* of exclusion. Across the range of different histories and experiences (refer to Chapter 2 for a description of the middle women's backgrounds), every middle woman reported marginalization of some kind. A poignant finding was that, regardless of the length of time they have lived in Canada, or the mode of (im)migration, many of the middle women experienced themselves as perpetually immigrant. Recall from Chapter 9, for example, the middle women who said it had taken 13 and 16 years to build up their confidence in relating to human services.

Second, my research did not single out a particular group of minoritized (im)migrants for study. Choosing a research setting that works across multiple minoritized (im)migrant populations turned out to be valuable in exposing how racialized relations of power operate *across* minoritized (im)migrant groups. But it also revealed some of the ways in which the mode of operation of racialized relations is dynamic and, hence, indeterminate. In particular, my research drew attention to how differences in (im)migrants' conditions and circumstances shape their ascribed (im)migration statuses, but also how systems *hear* their experiential realities differentially, in a way that renders refugees' stories more compelling than those of (im)migrants with comparative advantages. These differentiations also shape tensions within (im)migrant groups when (im)migrants are ascribed to "new emerging" and "established" categories in setting of priorities for funding.

Third, building on the extensions discussed above, understanding that pre- and post-migration experiences are layered upon one another contributes a nuanced explication of the significance of pre-migration experiences and post-migration adaptation in minoritized (im)migrants' lives. This understanding highlights the extent to which "settlement" and "adaptation" are both contested and also maneuverable concepts (see, for example, Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2003; Donkor, 2004; George & Tsang, 2000; Ryan et al., 2008). As I showed in Chapter 4, pre- and post-migration conditions, perceived through the vantage point of the middle women, intersect to differentially reproduce, produce and sustain minoritized (im)migrants' vulnerabilities in Canada. Most people migrate to improve the conditions of their lives and especially the lives of their children. While this is also true for refugees, their migration process is stimulated by more severe events that threaten their lives. Until recently, "the process of immigrant assimilation has typically and uncritically [been] conceived as one of linear progress" (Rumbaut, 1997, p. 923). However there is "a compelling body of evidence of the adaptation of immigrants ...[that] points to a deterioration of outcomes over time ...[in Canada as well as in

the U.S.]” (Rumbaut, 1997, p. 923). Moreover, one research study of immigrants from the former Yugoslavia suggested that the longer they stay in Canada, the more dissatisfied they become and the less likely they are to report that they have adjusted well to life in Canada. Although most participants still indicated that they planned to become citizens, some considered leaving because they faced barriers to achieving a better quality of life *and* because they perceived improved conditions in their countries of origin (George & Tsang, 2000).

Whereas much scholarly work on adaptation in resettlement has emphasized psychological factors and responses (for example, Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2003), there is also a body of work that conceptualizes resettlement in more nuanced and fully contextualized ways. For example, a study of Ghanaian women's adaptation in Canada (Donkor, 2004) highlighted the women's *agency* in the ways that they *use* their shifting ascribed statuses in adaptation while navigating the constraints of structural and institutional barriers. Donkor argued that by situating her research within a *critique* of adaptation studies that were based on the assumptions underlying Canadian immigration and settlement policies, she "puts immigrants squarely in the centre of the adaptation process by recognizing their actions and reactions in relation to conditions both in their original homeland and in their adopted country" (p. 38). Ryan et al. (2008) recently hypothesized a critical approach to examining "the interplay of pre- and post-migration factors" relevant to migrants seeking asylum (p. 16). This approach suggests the need to consider the pre- and post-migration social conditions that shape what personal, social and cultural resources refugees are able to mobilize in relation to their needs and goals and the demands placed on them, and gestures toward resource redistribution.

The middle women's consistent dual emphases on the dynamic interplay of forces that shape migration and post-migration experiences along with the predictability of the challenges that minoritized (im)migrants experience in Canada suggests a need for human service

organizations to be both more proactive and more dynamic in their practices. After all, the women said, the population that public main stream human services are mandated to serve and support is made up in part of minoritized (im)migrants. Put another way, they suggested, (im)migrants are entitled to equitable access and treatment in human services, as Canadians, as taxpayers, and as recipients of Canada's professed humanitarianism. *Understanding* how pre- and post-migration experiences work through each other thus provides not only a backdrop or passive context against which to read and interpret (im)migrants' experiences. Rather, it highlights the need to pay attention to the connections between "elsewhere(s)" and Canada not only in the lives of *individuals* who migrate but also in how *Canada* is implicated in those elsewheres. At the individual level, grasping the connection between life elsewhere(s) and life in Canada has implications for fully contextualized responsive services and resources. Thinking beyond the site, however, calls for analysis of Canada's complicity in the pre-migration conditions of (im)migrants and in the post-migration conditions that exacerbate vulnerabilities and produce unequal opportunities. It was in this vein that I read participants' demands that I /we examine the maps and the histories of the people who migrate.

More specifically, understanding both pre-migration and post-migration circumstances and conditions as *socio-cultural* denaturalizes the adaptation difficulties of (im)migrants, which have come to be accepted as commonplace – that is, taken for granted. This understanding reconceptualizes the vulnerabilities of racially minoritized (im)migrants by demonstrating that and how vulnerabilities are shaped through the institutionalized actions and inactions of governments and governmental institutions including (im)migration and resettlement practices, schools, family and children's services, child welfare intervention, employment standards, and health services. This understanding helps to explicate why the GMCNO aims to make visible the circumstances of (im)migrants through the telling of experiential narratives. This understanding is

important because in my study, the middle women also articulated an absence of acknowledgment or recognition of racism on the part of service providers, organizations and systems. Thus, the race/culture divide surfaced in the problematic ways that represent critical race theorists' concerns – namely, in the middle women's accounts of service providers' (pre)determination of what it means to take culture into account. The dominant system's ultimate control over defining what it means to take culture into account contributed to the middle women and the GMCNO's reluctance to name racism or explicitly adopt anti-racist practice, lest they jeopardize their hard-won relationships with other organizations (which, by the way, are the source of their income).

An immediate implication of this insight is that there is a need for human services providers to reconceptualize their interfaces with minoritized (im)migrants to consciously and intentionally see every encounter as anchored in "history and social context" (Razack, 2002, p. 8), with the potential to *extend* or *disrupt* the encounter(s) before (wherever and whenever they were). Otherwise, "each encounter between unequal groups becomes a fresh one, where the participants start from zero, as one human being to another, each innocent of the subordination of others" (Razack, 1998, p. 8). The idea that encounters are spatially connected actually extends Doreen Massey's (1994) conception of place in an unusual (or new) way. It calls for envisioning human services as a *place* of articulation of *multiple* "stretched out social relations" (p. 4). Consciousness of these extended social relations in which we are (all) implicated has the potential to connect us to sites beyond our sight, attune us to the luggage that is not or cannot be contained in the suitcase, and pushes toward what Manning (2003) calls an "ethics of responsibility." It means treating pre- and post-migration conditions and circumstances as active contexts intimately connected in embodied remembering. In conceiving of the particular site in relation to our (Canada's) global social, political and economic agendas, involvements and investments – such as international development projects, exploitation of workers elsewhere, justifications for

exploitation of workers here, and so on, it reconnects the sites through which power is articulated globally.

I believe that this set of insights is particularly significant for the discipline and field of human ecology because of its concern with the concepts of context and near environment. My findings caution against reading social life on the surface. I could have drawn my research to a close at any number of points along the path of extensions I took. I could have concluded that race/racism was not an issue because the middle women did not raise it, or that the real issue was disrespect. I might have seen the different vantage points on racisms' pervasiveness as relative racism. I might have failed to see how the *niche* is necessary to the way power circulates in a complex way to serve the interests of the parties implicated in it. But any of these points would have resulted in premature closure. It was only in starting with the middle women's concerns – their immediate and emergent issues and those of the minoritized (im)migrants they support – that is, placing them at the centre, and then intentionally extending out, that it became clear that there can be no centre independent of its extensions. The past is in the present. My research has effectively demonstrated the notion of "active context" that I posited. This is an idea that could be fruitfully incorporated into human ecology theory and research in other topics relevant to the experiences of (im)migrants and refugees – such as life course theory, and other substantive areas in family and cultural studies.

A fourth way that my research extends earlier work is by extending documentation of the practice of an unrecognized community resource – the Middle Woman. While earlier research (Researcher, 2003) articulated the practice of middle women, it did not examine how they navigate the power relations in which their work occurs. My research adds a nuanced understanding of what it means to work (in) the gap.

Further, like many other community workers, the Middle Woman is predominantly female and takes up occupation in gendered space. A national workforce study of non-professional volunteer and paid

community health workers (CHWs) in the U.S. (U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services (USDHHS, 2007) found that many CHWs supported underserved populations – almost half (49 percent) reported serving immigrants (excluding migrant workers) – playing roles similar to the Middle Woman:

*(1) Acting as a "bridge" or cultural mediator between communities and the health and social service systems; (2) providing culturally appropriate and accessible health education and information; (3) assuring that people get the services they need, including provision of referrals and follow-up; (4) providing informal counseling and social support; (5) advocating for individual and community needs; (6) providing direct services which do not require other professional licensure (such as nursing); and, (7) building individual and community capacity. (p. 119)*

A large majority (82 percent) of CHWs were women, of whom more than half (51 percent) had completed at least some university-level work, including 31 percent with four-year degrees. With few exceptions, CHWs were employed by mainstream (including community-based non-profit) health and social service organizations to help them fulfill their mandates, get their jobs done, and to help contain costs (p. iii). The exception was grassroots organizations, catalyzed by volunteer CHWs, which have not been well documented (USDHHS, 2007). Despite demonstrated effectiveness and cost-savings, lack of sustainable funding and reliance on multiple sources of funding were identified as barriers to the development of the CHW workforce (p. ix). However, a key finding was that "the occupation of CHW has not been viewed as a career, because CHWs have positions that are often short-term, low paid, and lack recognition by other professionals" (p. viii). The middle women involved in my study emerged under a particular set of neo-liberal conditions in Canada in the 1990s. Like the CHWs in the U.S. study, despite their demonstrated effectiveness over fifteen years, the Middle Woman's role remains under recognized, undervalued, and (therefore) under resourced – exploited.

Interestingly, the inequitable disadvantages of minoritized (im)migrants, to which the GMCNO wants to draw attention, may be



rendered almost invisible in the way that the system can simultaneously take for granted and depend on the existence of the Middle Woman herself – as she runs around in the background helping systems to "do their jobs" and filling the gaps. My research also hints at how immigration policies have worked to maintain the status quo in Canada through exploitation of culture-shaped gender roles (e.g., Bannerji, 2000; Thobani, 1999, 2000, 2007). But it only hints at this. This site and my data very much call for closer gender analysis.

A fifth way in which my research extends previous research was in choosing a setting that works both across human services sectors and outside (or beyond) existing human services sectors. My research contributed an examination of how inhuman practices are institutionalized across human services. My findings brought together experiences of (im)migrants' interfaces with service providers and organizations involved in publicly-funded social (income support, child & family services, child welfare), employment, and health services and education systems. My findings work against the argument that manifestations of racist ideas and practices in human services are either aberrations or unique to a particular discipline or sector. They underscore how racism operates as a *system* of oppression. But they also revealed the complex process of navigating the spaces between not only service sectors, but also professional disciplines that are complicit in the race/culture divide.

Sixth, my research examined a site through which race/culture and racism/culturalism interlock in a complex way. As others have argued in positing the need to "challenge the race/culture binary",<sup>80</sup> what the race/culture divide references is the race-culture continuum insofar as cultural remedies can perform essentialization of cultures – what constitutes culturalization of race or culturalized racism. But other

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<sup>80</sup> Refer to footnote on page 1.

problematic binaries are also deployed in debates about the awkward relationship between, or disconnection between, anti-racism and cultural competence. The binaries surfaced in and by my research include individual/organizational, main stream/margin, Canadian culture/Other cultures, immigrant/refugee, new/emerging, dominant/subordinate, public/private, settlement/integration, and equality/disrespect. My research setting was a site through which race and culture, but also anti-racism and cultural competence, work together across the race/culture binary in a complicated way that the theorized race/culture divide does not quite accurately or adequately imply. On one hand, it is true that the dominant group *shapes* control over what it means to take culture into account. But on the other hand, the Middle Woman disrupts a simple notion of cultural competence, creating space for a notion of *critical* cultural competence grounded in part by the premises underlying cultural safety. The middle women actively resist disrespectful practices at the individual level. But through the GMCNO, they also continually nudge the system to change. They invite and encourage participation in co-creation of new approaches that go beyond adaptation of main stream models. And they challenge what comprises legitimate knowledge. When all else fails, though, they also gesture towards "going it alone."

### **Towards extending the discussion**

In this thesis, I have examined the race/culture divide in human services through the problematic binaries of race/culture, racism/culturalism, and anti-racism/cultural competence. In light of the findings as a whole, I suggest two further avenues for examining the race/culture divide in human services, both of which situate anti-racism/cultural competence within extended social relations in which they are implicated. First, I suggest it is useful to read the race/culture divide in human services through "critical social analyses" (Essed, 2007),

picking up on recent efforts to cast incrementalism<sup>81</sup> in new light (Hier & Bolaria, 2007; Hier, Lett, & Bolaria, 2009). Second, but related, I gesture towards the fruitfulness of examining debate about the race/culture divide in human services in dialogue with claims for recognition and accommodation in Canada. Bringing critiques of universalisms together may point to new ways of reading cultural struggles such as that at the heart of the race/culture divide in human services.

### *Revisiting anti-racist critiques of multiculturalism*

Official multiculturalism in Canada is almost 30 years old. It has been the target of critical race theorists' critiques of liberal multiculturalism's anchor in an (individual) rights paradigm (Bannerji, 2000; Razack, 1998). It recasts claims for equality<sup>82</sup> in *cultural* demands, and cultural demands then *come to be made* as the only recognized basis for rectifying inequalities (Bannerji, 2000; Dei, 2007). Far from being impartial, the presumption of equality obscures the realities of unequal opportunities for social (economic and political) mobility (Dei, 2007, p. 58).

While it is true that Canada has never adopted an explicitly anti-racist *immigration* policy (Simmons, 1998), it has claimed to address discrimination and racially-shaped employment inequities through its Public Policy Framework comprising the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Canadian Human Rights Act (CHRA), Official Languages Act, Employment Equity Act (EEA), and the Multiculturalism Act (Meht, 2006).<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, in 2005, the Government of Canada announced Canada's Action Plan Against Racism (CAPAR) (Patel, 2007). CAPAR was promising in its orientation, as it stated,

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<sup>81</sup> Social or political gradualism: <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/incrementalism> July 16, 2009

<sup>82</sup> The condition of being equal, especially of having the same political, social, and economic rights <http://www.yourdictionary.com/equality> July 16, 2009.

<sup>83</sup> Ajit Meht was the Director General of Human Resources and Social Development Canada at the time.

*Racism is a complex issue which has social and economic consequences for both victims and beneficiaries. Moreover, racism takes many forms. It can be direct and overt, referring to attitudes, actions, policies and practices that openly embody the assumption that one ethno-racial group is superior to — or more deserving — than another. This form of racism includes hate-motivated crime and hate propaganda. Racism can also be indirect or covert, introduced consciously or unconsciously. It results in systemic racism, where policies and practices that adversely affect ethno-racial and ethno-cultural groups are embedded as the social norm.*

*Because racism is linked to socially constructed beliefs and perceptions of superiority or inferiority, different groups may experience racism in different forms, dimensions and intensities. (CAPAR, 2005, pp. 7-8)*

The 2005 Report to Parliament on Immigration (CIC, 2005) and the 2008 Annual Report on the Operation of the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (CIC, 2008) highlight the Government's focus on "an overarching horizontal approach [to anti-racism] across federal departments and agencies" (CIC, 2005, P30), along with new settlement initiatives and extensions to the "Welcoming Communities" strategy (CIC, 2005, 2008).

Declaring, "We must fight racism wherever we find it, inside or out of the workplace" (Minister Blackburn, 2007), CAPAR's emphasis was the Racism-Free Workplace Strategy. In 2007-2008, Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) reported that Racism Prevention Officers had been integrated into regional Government of Canada offices

*to promote workplace integration of visible minorities and Aboriginal peoples and educate managers and employees about the benefits of fair and inclusive workplaces, to build a network between community resources and employers to facilitate access to employment, to develop ways to use research in operational decision making, and to assist employers with recruitment, retention and more efficient dispute resolution measures. (CIC, 2008, Part III, HRSDC, Racism Prevention Officers, P1)*

At another level, the Multiculturalism Program provides funding to community applicants to foster civic participation in public decision-making, cross-cultural understanding *to combat racism*, and institutional change to *eliminate systemic barriers* (Multiculturalism Program, 2007, emphasis added). Previously under the Department of Canadian Heritage, in late 2008 the Multiculturalism Program was moved to the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (Google, 2009).

But despite these strategies, Canada's public policy efforts against racism have generally been weak (Patel, 2007), insofar as they emphasize "rooting out intolerance, discrimination, and a lack of goodwill" (Dei, 2007, p. 58). Frequently grounded in a race relations approach (Patel, 2007), such strategies for addressing racism have largely conceived of prejudice and discrimination as attitudes and actions of "misguided individuals" – ignorant or irrational and, therefore, transformable through education and reason (Patel, 2007). This emphasis on *individuals* treats racism as anomalous within a context in which Canada's official multiculturalism "celebrates cultures and their diversity without necessarily responding to power issues of difference" (Dei, 2007, p. 58).

Explicitly *naming* racism and anti-racism in CAPAR has not fundamentally altered the approach (Patel, 2007). Some research has found that multicultural discourse is so pervasive that it "often forms the framework, either unspoken or explicit, for addressing racism in many organizations, institutions, and communities, even where anti-racism is the explicit goal" (Srivastava, 2007, p. 291). Funding under official multiculturalism programs constrains *naming* racism and anti-racism, and submerges even explicitly anti-racist goals within a multicultural discourse. "Anti-racist multiculturalism" is therefore highly problematic (Srivastava, 2007). For example, it is worth noting some of the hidden assumptions embedded in the Multiculturalism Program's current priorities:

- *To support the economic, social, and cultural integration of new Canadians and cultural communities.*
- *To facilitate programs such as mentorship, volunteerism, leadership, and civic education among at-risk cultural youth.*
- *To promote inter-cultural understanding and Canadian values (democracy, freedom, human rights, and the rule of law) through community initiatives, with the objective of addressing issues of cultural social exclusion (parallel communities) and radicalization. (CIC, 2009c)*

Without fully unpacking the discourse underlying the framing of these priorities, it is easy to see how they are highly problematic. For

example, particular people (new Canadians) have "cultural communities" (while some do not – "old" Canadians?). Only these particular "cultural communities" have "cultural youth." "Inter-cultural" understanding involves these "cultural communities" – namely "new Canadians" – understanding "Canadian" values. And if/when they do ... it isn't clear what then. *They* will be included, *they* will not need to segregate *themselves* or engage in resistance? Or become "radicalized?" (Although they will become involved in civic participation in public decision-making.)

### *Disrupting universalisms*

Himani Bannerji (2000) has argued that challenging the problematic presumptions underlying official multiculturalism calls for a liberatory culture of resistance organized around the "common social conditions produced through oppressive relations" (p. 52). Indeed, despite the problems associated with official multiculturalism, it has not entirely closed off avenues of resistance. Recognizing multiculturalism(s) as sites of struggle, and official multiculturalism as only one possible deployment of multiculturalism, contemporary critical race and cultural studies scholars have opened up cracks in liberal multiculturalist discourses in Canada as elsewhere (Lowe, 1996; Manning, 2003; Pratt, 2004; Willett, 1998). In *Immigrant Acts*, Lisa Lowe (1996) argues,

*To the extent that [in the U.S.] multiculturalism – as a discourse designed to recuperate conflict and difference through inclusion – is itself the index of crisis in a specific dominant formation, the terrain of multiculturalism also provides for the activities of racial, class, and sexual minority groups who organize and contest that domination. (p. 42)*

These scholars have exposed liberatory struggles through which minoritized peoples have rejected laws, defied restrictions, fought legal challenges, strived to maintain cultural traditions in secret, run from enslavement, organized strikes, published their own newspapers, established self-help organizations, lead protests, organized themselves as workers, accommodated, assimilated, and engaged in violence as acts of anti-racism, anti-subordination, and reterritorialization (Allahaar, 1998;

Calliste, 2000; Khenti, 1996; Manning, 2003; Pratt, 2004; Razack, 2002). They have surfaced alternative renderings of dominant-subordinate power relations. They have cleared the path for resistant modes of multiculturalism – critical multiculturalisms or multiculturalisms from below, and envisioned new possibilities for pluralist societies (Lowe, 1996; Manning, 2003; Pratt, 2004). In this vein, Richard Day (2000) challenges us to (re)imagine the state's role as “[creating] a space of free play ... out of which almost *anything* might emerge” (p. 225, emphasis in original). This is to see the Canadian state not “wielded as a tool to build a pre-designed nation” but as a site of “ongoing revision. Not a static, solidified order, but a dynamic and fluid chaos” (p. 225; see also Bauman, 1999).

Many contemporary scholars work in an anti-essentialist mode, calling attention to the problematic ways in which anti-essentialisms can give rise to new essentialisms, while they simultaneously reveal the challenges of working in this way (Anthias, 2006; Dhamoon, 2009; Essed, 2007; Razack, 1998). They theorize alternative normative projects and visions of society. Philomena Essed (2007) suggests the need to “[reach] beyond antiracism” to develop a normative vision “not formulated merely as negation but ... in a non-reactive mode” (p. 233). Although fully supportive of intersectional analyses, she also hints at how the need for intersectional analysis and theorizing also inherently undermines anti-racist struggle. As a result, she argues that centering race to the exclusion of other modes of oppression may foreclose struggles against racism on other terrain. Since other modes of oppression may be the vehicles “through which ethnicity or race can be asserted,” it is necessary to “[reject] monodimensional determinism” (p. 240) in favour of “non-essentialist, non-exclusive” (Essed, 2007, p. 239) forms of anti-racism that potentially create space for extending anti-oppressive struggles.

Furthermore, Essed (2007) argues, “the negative connotations attached to 'anti' are problematic when you are trying to mobilize people towards progressive goals such as equity, mutual human respect, human rights, or accepting diversity” (p. 236). This may help to explain resistance

to situating systemic change efforts within an "anti-racist" discourse. Interestingly, here Essed cuts close to framing the goal in exactly the terms that anti-racist critiques contest. How should I read this? Essed suggests that resettlement is a *cultural* struggle that (also) involves unsettling the settler society. As such, she hints, social transformation is the experiential reality of "heterogeneous societies in which people engage in multilayered identities and shifting affiliations" (Essed, 2007, p. 244). Through this argument, she posits that transculturalism is a more useful concept than multiculturalism (Essed, 2007).

In this, Philomena Essed (2007) pushes at the boundaries of a deterministic liberal democratic multiculturalism, or at least calls for uncomplicated readings of it. First, in adopting an "anti-anti" stance, she disrupts the naturalization forms of particular anti-racist critiques of liberal multiculturalism. "Monoculturalism is not a naturalism. ... the illusion of monoculturalism has been at the root of past and current conflicts and wars" (Essed, 2007, p. 243). Although hyphenated identities can be seen as a strategic "response to the ways that white Canadians persistently insist upon [a] perpetually immigrant status" (Pratt, 2004, p. 140), the "adoption of hyphenated identities" also symbolize immigrants' creation of "new spaces in their adopted homelands" (Essed, 2007, p. 245). Rather than treating immigration as a threat to an illusory monoculturalism – the foundation of the pre-designed nation (Day, 2000), "a more constructive approach is to recognize that people with an experience of migration ... can encourage transcultural development" (Essed, 2007, p. 246). Transculturalism holds out hope for denaturalizing and renegotiating meanings of equity, mutual human respect, human rights, or accepting diversity. Second, Essed distinguishes between "universalist antiracism" and "differentialist antiracism" (p. 238). Where the former works within parameters of (main stream) liberal democratic principles – the heart of anti-racist critique, the latter "demands public



space for the politics of collective identity, for social, cultural, ethnic, and self-designated racial groups" (Essed, 2007, p. 239).<sup>84</sup>

### *Struggles for (cultural) recognition and accommodation*

Indeed, all concepts are contestable. Joseph Carens (2000) unpacks critiques of liberal democracy that depend upon a universal treatment of liberal democracies. In clearing a path through such critiques, he denaturalizes the concept of "justice as fairness," and examines what "justice as evenhandedness" might offer as an alternative or in tandem. Whereas justice as fairness constitutes abstract applications of general principles, justice as evenhandedness is

*derived from the assumption that to treat people fairly we must regard them concretely, with as much knowledge as we can obtain about who they are and what they care about. This approach to justice requires immersion rather than abstraction. It emphasizes contextually sensitive judgements [sic] more than general principles. It requires our institutions and policies to take an evenhanded (rather than a hands off) approach in responding to the claims that arise from different conceptions of the good, including matters of culture and identity. It opens up the door to the idea that we may sometimes come closer to equality by adopting practices of differentiated citizenship than by insisting on identical rights. (Carens, 2000, p. 8)*

This *contextual* notion of justice (Carens, 2000) is, like Essed's (2007) notion of transculturalism, simultaneously disruptive and proactive. Such approaches can be inserted into debates about recognition and accommodation.

My research points to how recognition is a particularly knobby problem in human services in Canada. Although the participants in my research framed inequities in slightly different ways, overall they suggested that the Middle Woman is necessary to redressing unequal opportunities and inequitable treatment in human services. In this way, the Middle Woman is attuned to addressing inequitable disparities that disadvantage racialized (im)migrants. Most of the middle women could not envision a time when the Middle Woman would not be needed. My

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<sup>84</sup> In light of the whole piece, I read this list as an illustration of possible collective identities, rather than as a complete list.

research shows how pragmatic issues of access to human services are intimately connected to conceptions of citizenship, democracy, and multiculturalism. As the middle women filtered their explanations of gaps and barriers (including racism), as well as the possibilities for overcoming them, through nuanced comparisons between "back home" and "in Canada," the GMCNO's mantra "daring to dream" took on particular meanings for different middle women and the (im)migrants they support. Sometimes drawing on discourses of rights and citizenship, the middle women look to government to ensure a fair chance. On the other hand, they do so within an understanding that government action will not happen without demand for it.

As a result, although most middle women did not explicitly name *accommodation* as a goal of their efforts to address inequities, I would argue that their claims can be read in that way. Extending from my argument that under some conditions, a focus on race/racism risks obscuring culture, *culture* is one terrain upon which struggles against racism can legitimately take place. For example, I suggest that being able to be (a) Kurd in Canada in a way that was (and is) not possible "elsewhere" argues for the *legitimacy* of culture-based demands for equity. Or perhaps I should say equity demands for or through culture. In other words, what it means to be able to be a Kurd in Canada is that one does not/should not have to leave one's being at the door(s) – at the doorways into Canada or at the doorways into its institutions. From the vantage points of the middle women, cultural demands in human services are demands for recognition, representation, *and* redistribution. In this way, I suggest that struggles for recognition and accommodation can be seen as a deployment of Essed's differentialist antiracism.

Still, Essed's idealism – or proactive approach – is countered by a popular sentiment that Canada's multiculturalism is having an "identity crisis" (Gregg, 2006) – "How can this situation change?" (p. 46). For Alan Gregg,

*For multiculturalism to work, the native-born must accept immigrants as equals and new arrivals must demonstrate a willingness to join mainstream society by adopting the fundamental mores and values of the prevailing culture. There must also be cross-fertilization between ethnic groups and civic nationalism has to be clearly defined. (p. 46)*

That multiculturalism is Canada's "twentieth-century conundrum" (Gregg, 2006, p. 38) opens up space for alternate readings and renderings of both what it means and what is possible. Accordingly, Cynthia Willett (1998) avers, "multiculturalism has not yet been fully theorized" and there is a "multiplicity of perspectives" that works against "unity, consistency, or coherence" (p. 1).

Under these circumstances, it is timely to read the race/culture divide in human services through debates about recognition and accommodation. The recent Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences in Quebec (Gouvernement du Quebec, 2008) surfaced contentious dialogue and placed Canadian multiculturalism "under the microscope" (Abraham, 2007). On one hand, Abraham suggests that the Commission "[changed] the terms of the debate" (P3) – "It's no longer about what Canadians can do for new immigrants; it's about what new immigrants should do to fit in. The new mantra may well be "reasonable accommodation"" (P2). On the other hand, anti-racist activists argued that the Commission was complicit in perpetuating *racist* thinking and accommodation (Mahrouse, 2008).

Indeed, the path the Commission took in its conclusions and recommendations relies on an assumption that accommodation is (only) a *response* to a demand, not a (pro)action to ensure change in the way business is done. The Commission distinguished between a "legal route" and a "citizen route" to "handling requests for accommodation of cultural practices" (Gouvernement du Quebec, 2008, p. 51). Whereas "reasonable accommodation" is the legal route for addressing perceived unjust/unequal treatment, "concerted adjustment" "is less formal and relies on negotiation and the search for compromise. Its objective is to find a solution that satisfies both parties" (p. 52). Weighing heavily in favour of

the "citizen route," the Commission argued that it is in the best interests of the parties to a cultural demand "to engage in negotiations that simultaneously emphasize a contextual, deliberative and reflexive approach" (p. 52).

*The contextual dimension takes into account the unique nature of individual situations. Through the deliberative dimension, the interveners engage in dialogue and the reflexive dimension allows them to engage in self-criticism and mend their ways when necessary.*

*The main strength of this approach is that it can be adapted to different situations and emphasizes the interlocutors' accountability in a spirit of mutual respect and dialogue. Moreover, it responds to the request from interveners and managers who want certain clarifications in respect of the general guidelines [for how business is done] but wish to preserve leeway that allows them to take into account the specific nature of cases, contexts and environments." (p. 52)*

Reading these conclusions (and hopes) through my research findings renders them highly problematic. Based on the Commission's examination of publicized examples of satisfactory (albeit "erroneously" criticized) "accommodations," its underlying assumption seemed to be that cultural accommodation "requests" can and will be negotiated between equal parties in dialogue. My research findings suggest that it is very difficult for minoritized (im)migrants to make *requests* for cultural accommodation in human services. Indeed, it often requires an advocate's (assertive) *demand* for accommodation. Furthermore, it is difficult for "invisible" minoritized (im)migrants to have requests or demands "recognized" in main stream services. This is what gave rise to middle women in the first place. My findings suggest that even middle women who have "built up their confidence" over 13 or 16 years often find it necessary to call upon their white professional colleagues to assert relatively more powerful presences into such demands. Moreover, the continual need to make such demands, in the absence of a system(at)ic response or change, takes an enormous toll on individual advocates and on organizational resources. It is important to read the race/culture divide in human services through debates about recognition and accommodation

in Canada. Experiential realities – counter-stories – very much need to be inserted into idealized visions of the future.

### **Revisiting the site of the middle women**

It is necessary to hold the vision. It will not be possible to reach it otherwise. But navigating the realities of now with the vision is a challenge that takes its toll. At the beginning of my research, the GMCNO and I agreed to defer a decision about the organization's anonymity in my thesis until the end. Recall that the issue of jeopardizing established relationships with some organizations and service providers was a concern for some of the middle women. At the end of my research, in light of the findings, I recommended to the GMCNO board that the organization and the middle women remain anonymous in my thesis. The basis of my recommendation was twofold. First, not all research participants had chosen to have their own names used in the research; from the beginning, some preferred to be anonymous. Second, I could not ensure the GMCNO or the individual participants that there would be no repercussions (that is jeopardy) from naming racism. The Board made the decision to follow my recommendation. Of course, there remains some risk, which it is not possible to prevent – namely, that someone in the human services might be able to identify the organization despite efforts to maintain anonymity. That is a risk the Board is willing to live with. But this potential for jeopardy is a signal of the continuing relevance of the race concept – that naming racism can evoke responses such as not knowing (or lack of recognition), disbelief, and denial on the part of human services organizations and service providers (as earlier referenced in my review of literature) and worry on the part of anti-inequity advocates such as the middle women. This helps to explain why it is that the GMCNO mentions racism and discrimination in its list of inequities, but does not frame its work in anti-racist terms. Addressing barriers and access is a palatable way to engage with human service organizations and

service providers. Even naming barriers as inequitable can evoke strong responses on the part of service providers.

In framing its work in terms of the determinants of health, the GMCNO is in good company. McGibbon and Etowa's (2009) recent reconceptualization of the determinants of health places race and health at the intersection of identity(ies), social, and geographical determinants. It also frames race as a distinct determinant of health. Earlier I alluded to a Canadian study that centred race in an intersectional analysis of determinants of women's health. It revealed that "the many faces of racism have a significant impact on women's health" (Etowa, Wiens, Bernard, & Clow, 2007, p. 69).

*They include the lack of information specific to health needs of Black people, the lack of culturally sensitive health-care providers in rural and remote communities in the region, and the lack of culturally relevant outreach programs. Inappropriate and insensitive care may also arise from subtler assumptions embedded in the health-care system, particularly the tendency to embrace the white, middle-class, male experience as normative. (p. 69)*

My findings identified many of the same barriers and gaps. This research may lend support to the GMCNO in *naming* racism. This possibility is opened up in part by a confluence of such *namings*, at a moment when racial "incidents" have caught the attention of the public through the news. But racist "incidents" are not new. What has been notable in recent months has been public *anti-racist* protests in response to such incidents (Clarkson, 2009; Cooper, 2009).

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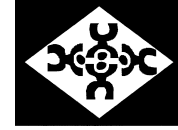
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**Appendix 1**  
**Invitation Letter**



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Edmonton, AB T6G 2N1  
Phone: (780) 492-3824  
Fax: (780) 492-4821



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January 2008

[GMCNO]

Attention: Co-Executive Directors

To the [GMCNO],

As a PhD student in the Department of Human Ecology at the University of Alberta, I am writing to formally request the GMCNO's participation in my PhD research. My proposed research is about the challenges of taking culture into account in human services. Specifically, I am interested in the relationship between cultural responsiveness and racism in human services. There has been a great deal of writing about culturally responsive human services. However, there are many different views about what it means to be culturally responsive, and there has been limited research. Existing research has focused on cultural responsiveness primarily from the perspectives of professional disciplines and service providers, most notably educators, nurses, doctors, social workers, and psychologists, and academic theorists.

My interest in this project came about as a result of my evaluation work with [middle women] between 1993 and 2003. Although several studies of cultural brokering have been carried out—including [Researcher's] study of [middle women's practice—I have not found any research that focuses on how [middle women] conceptualize taking culture into account in human services, and its relationship to racism.

My proposed study will be carried out between January 2008 and June 2009. I expect to complete data collection by September 2008, and involve participants in dialogue about findings through to December 2008. To ensure that my research is meaningful, it is important that participants be as knowledgeable as possible about [being a middle woman] with immigrant communities. I am inviting the GMCNO to participate in this research study because the GMCNO recognizes the

importance of both culture and racism and discrimination in human services. I will need your thoughtful input on the best ways to implement the project.

I believe that this research will make an important contribution to knowledge about culturally responsive human services from the vantage point of workers who are grounded in the communities they serve, and who work at the edges of mainstream services.

I would appreciate an opportunity to discuss my proposed research with GMCNO members, answer questions, get their input and explore any challenges that members foresee.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

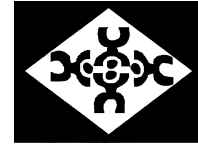
Ruth R. Wolfe  
PhD Candidate  
Dept of Human Ecology  
Faculty of Agriculture, Forestry, and Home Economics  
University of Alberta

**Appendix 2**  
**Project Information Sheets**





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### Project Information Sheet for Brokers and Support Staff

**Title of Project:** Working in the Gap: A Critical Examination of the Race / Culture Divide in Human Services from the Vantage Point of Multicultural Health Brokers

**Researcher:** Ruth R. Wolfe, PhD Candidate; **Supervisor:** Dr. Deanna Williamson

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research is to increase knowledge about the challenges of taking culture into account in human services from the vantage point of multicultural health brokers.

**Timing:** The study will take place between January 2008 and December 2009. Data collection will be completed by September 2008 and brokers and support staff will have a chance to discuss findings until December 2008.

**Methods:** Four data collection strategies will be used: 1) participant observation, including observation and informal conversations, 2) unstructured individual interviews, 3) small-group discussions, and 4) review of relevant documents. I may ask you to let me watch and chat with you as you do your work, let me interview you or talk about your work in a small- group.

1) Participant-observation: I plan to spend time in the Co-op office, watching the day-to-day work to get a sense of how things happen—how your work comes to you and how you respond to requests for your involvement. This will involve informal conversations as you do your work. If it seems necessary or possible, I might ask to go with you to observe your work with individuals or families, with their consent.

2) Unstructured individual interviews: I also plan to interview individual members of the Co-op, up to 2 times during the study. Each interview will take up to 1 1/2 hours. If you say it is okay, I would like to tape-record the interviews. The interviews will be more like conversations than a formal question-answer process.

3) Small group discussions: In addition, I might ask you to be in a small group with other brokers and staff to talk about stories from your work—either things you are working on right now, or stories you have written down in the past as a way to share your work with others.

4) Review of documents: I might ask to look at brochures, reports, proposals, and other written information about the Co-op.

**Consent:** I am asking for your written consent to participate in the study. Your decision about whether to participate is voluntary, and will not affect your involvement with the Co-op now or in the future. You may withdraw from the study at any time.

**Confidentiality:** To keep your information private, I will:

- not use your name in any notes, tapes, transcripts, or reports – I will use created names for the Co-op and for people in the study. You can make up a name for yourself or I can make one up.
- make sure that the only other people who can see the information you provide are my supervisor and other members of my supervisory committee.
- keep your consent and the information you give locked up in separate places.
- destroy your consent form and the information you give one year after the study is over, unless you say it is okay to contact you again in the future.
- ask people in small group discussions not to talk with others about who is in the group or what they talk about. However, I cannot guarantee that others will keep this information private.

I may want to use short pieces from the information you provide when I talk about or present this study. I will remove information that might make it possible for someone to figure out who you are. However, it is possible that someone might know the study took place at the Co-op, because the Co-op is known in the community and across the country.

**Benefits:** Potential benefits of participating in this research include the opportunity for you to:

- talk about the experiences that members of your community have with human services
- think about why multicultural health brokers are needed
- come up with new ways of thinking about multicultural health brokering and what it might look like in the future
- talk about the day-to-day practices and policies of human services organizations and governments that result in difficulties for immigrants
- help identify where the Co-op is successful and not so successful in its work
- contribute to new ways for human service organizations and service providers to think about cultural competence and racism in human services in Canada
- help to analyze the Co-op's central intake process.

**Risks:** I do not think that being in this study will harm you in any way. However, there is a chance that someone might figure out that the study involved the Co-op. There is a small chance that this could affect relationships with other community organizations. However, I believe that this is no more likely than your day-to-day advocacy work.

**Withdrawal from the study:** You can change your mind about being in this study at any time up until December 2008. After that, I will be writing or presenting reports about the study. You can stop being in the study by contacting me at 707-3983 / wolfe@ualberta.ca, or my supervisor at 429-5770 / deanna.williamson@ualberta.ca.

**Use of your information:** I will be analyzing all the information you provide and compiling it into a thesis. I will share the findings with Co-op members from time-to-time, and you will have an opportunity to be involved in discussion. I

will provide a copy of the completed thesis to the Co-op. I will also present findings of this research at conferences and in publications. The data may be used again in related studies in the future. This study might result in further research.

**Further Information:** For further information about this study, please contact me at 707-3983 / wolfe@ualberta.ca, or my supervisor at 429-5770 / deanna.williamson@ualberta.ca.

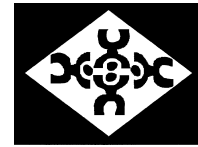
**Ethics Approval:** The Agriculture, Life & Environmental Sciences (ALES) Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta has approved the plan for this research. If you have concerns about this research, please contact the Research Ethics Board Administrator at 492-2131.

## **Appendix 3**

### **Consent Forms for Interviews and Small Group Discussions**



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**Consent Form for Interviews / Small Groups with Site Participants**

<b>Part 1: Researcher Information</b>		
Researcher: Ruth Wolfe, PhD Candidate      Supervisor: Dr. Deanna Williamson Affiliation: Dept of Human Ecology, University of Alberta      Telephone: 492-5770		
<b>Part 2: Consents</b>		
	Yes	No
Do you understand that I am asking you to participate in a research study about the difficulties that immigrants experience Canada?		
Have you received and read the Project Information Sheet?		
Do you agree to participate in individual tape-recorded interviews during this study?		
Do you agree to participate in a small group to talk about the issues that give rise to the need for a middle woman?		
Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study?		
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the research study with the researcher?		
Do you understand that you are free to refuse to be in the study or change your mind about being in the study at any time up until December 2008? You do not have to give a reason and it will not affect your involvement with the GMCNO or any other organization.		
Do you understand what I will do to keep the information you provide private?		
Do you understand who will be able to see the information from the small group?		
Do you understand that the information collected for this study may be used again in related studies in the future?		

• Ruth Wolfe explained this study to me on \_\_\_\_\_(Date).

• Please write the name you would like me to use for you in the data and reports:  
\_\_\_\_\_OR

Would you prefer that I give you a name? \_\_\_\_\_Yes

• If it is okay for me to contact you about interviews or small group discussions during this study, please provide information about the best way for me to contact you:

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

• Further, I agree that you may contact me about future research opportunities at the address, telephone number or email address given above: \_\_\_\_\_Yes \_\_\_\_\_No

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_Date: \_\_\_\_\_



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**Consent Form for Participant Observation of Participants**

<b>Part 1: Researcher Information</b>		
Researcher: Ruth Wolfe, PhD Candidate      Supervisor: Dr. Deanna Williamson Affiliation: Dept of Human Ecology, University of Alberta      Telephone: 492-5770		
<b>Part 2: Consents</b>		
	Yes	No
Do you understand that I am asking you to be in a research study about cultural responsiveness and racism in human services?		
Have you received and read the Project Information Sheet?		
Do you agree that it is okay for me to observe you from time-to-time during the study while you do your work at the GMCNO office or in the community?		
Do you agree that it is okay for me to write notes about what I see and hear while you work?		
Do you agree to that I can contact you about individual interviews and small-group discussions during this study?		
Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study?		
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the research study with the researcher?		
Do you understand that you are free to refuse to be in the study or change your mind about being in the study at any time up until December 2008? You do not have to give a reason and it will not affect your involvement with the GMCNO or any other organization.		
Do you understand what I will do to keep your name and the information you provide private?		
Do you understand who will be able to see the information you provide?		
Do you understand that the information collected for this study may be used again in future research related to similar issues?		

• Ruth Wolfe explained this study to me on \_\_\_\_\_(Date).

• Please write the name you would like me to use for you in the data and reports:  
\_\_\_\_\_OR

Would you prefer that I give you a name? \_\_\_\_\_Yes

• If it is okay for me to contact you about interviews or small group discussions during this study, please provide information about the best way for me to contact you:

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

• Further, I agree that you may contact me about future research opportunities at the address, telephone number or email address given above: \_\_\_\_\_Yes \_\_\_\_\_No

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## **Appendix 4**

### **Guiding Questions for Interviews and Small Group Discussions**

## Guiding Questions for Interviews & Small Group Discussions

Below is a preliminary set of guiding questions that may be used in interviews and small group discussions. However, the actual direction of the interviews / discussions will be responsive to issues documented during participant observation and analysis of documents.

At the beginning of individual interviews or small group discussions, I will remind participants of the purpose of the research project and the purpose of the interview / discussion. I will also review the consent form, remind them of confidentiality procedures, and explain the use of the tape-recorder.

Anticipated topic areas (below) are similar to those included in participant observation and document analysis guides, all oriented to critical ethnographic questioning in the extended case method. I do not envision that all these guiding questions would be explored in one interview or discussion, but that across all the data collection strategies and opportunities, they will be explored. Overall, the purpose of these guiding questions is to orient investigation of how the race / culture divide operates here in this site, how it is shaped by broader forces, and in what specific ways.

### Guiding questions:

- Can you tell me about how cultural brokering got started in Edmonton?
  - What were some of the problems that gave rise to a need for brokers at that time? Who identified these problems? (e.g., Was it brokers? Community members? Service providers? Etc.)
  - How did cultural brokers think these problems could be / should be addressed?
- Can you talk a bit about how has cultural brokering has evolved over time?
  - For example, in what ways have the problems that you address changed over time? How did new problems come to your attention? Why do you think these problems surfaced when they did?
  - What have changes in the problems meant for cultural brokering? That is, in what ways has your work had to change in order to responsive to emerging problems?
- What factors do you think have influenced the problems that immigrants experience in Canada? For example:
  - To what extent do you think that immigrants experience the same problems in Alberta or in Edmonton as elsewhere in Canada?

- Do you think that people who migrate to Canada from different parts of the world face the same challenges or different kinds of challenges? In what ways are they the same? In what ways different? What do you attribute any differences to?
- Do you think there are ways in which the practices or policies of government(s) have given rise to the problems you are seeing? If so, can you give some examples from your work?
- What about practices or policies of organizations? If so, can you share some examples from your work?
- Can you tell me what lead you to become a multicultural health broker and / or involved in the Co-op / this situation / work?
- Can you think of an example from your work that might help me understand the problems of the people you work with? Let's focus on that example and talk about what is going on there.
  - I am especially interested in how people or problems get to cultural brokers. For example, who defines a need for a broker? How do the people who contact you define the problem that needs to be addressed?
  - Do immigrants, family members, etc. talk about their problems in a different way than how service providers do? Can we talk through an example of each kind?
- You refer to your work as multicultural health brokering. Can you tell me about why you describe your work in this way?
  - In what way(s) is your work "multicultural?" In what way(s) is multicultural health brokering about "culture?" Can you give me some examples from your work?
  - And in what way(s) is it about other things? How else would you describe what your work is about? Can you give me some examples?
- If multicultural health brokering is about "culture," it seems to make sense that the Co-op talks about cultural responsiveness and culturally competent services. Can you talk about what cultural responsiveness or culturally competent services means to you?
  - What do you think makes it necessary to call for cultural responsiveness or culturally competent services in a country as diverse as Canada?
  - Have you seen changes in the cultural responsiveness or cultural competence of services since you've been a multicultural health broker? Can you give some examples of what you would consider to be "success" outcomes of multicultural health brokers' work towards increasing cultural responsiveness?
- If multicultural health brokering isn't about culture, or isn't always about culture, what other kinds of changes are needed or envisioned? (that is, besides cultural responsiveness)

- How would you describe the work required to make those kinds of changes? Have you seen those kinds of changes? Can you give some examples of what you think of as "success" in these areas?
- Sometimes a focus on culture can result in stereotypes of groups, or hide other kinds of barriers or issues like class, race, or gender. Have you experienced this in your work? How do you work with this tension?
  - Recently, there has been a lot of discussion in the media and in the professional literature about how focusing on culture can hide racism. I'm interested in how you think about that. When do you think a problem you're working with is "cultural" and when is it racism? Do you have any examples from your own experience or from your work that might show how you think about issues that are cultural and issues that are racial?
  - Some writers also argue that culture, racism, class & gender (and heterosexism and ableism, etc) work together, not alone. Can you give any examples of where it seems like all these things are working together?
- How have / do you address issues that you think are racial? What happens when / if you try to address them?
  - Is it something that you have discussed here in the Co-op? If so, can you talk a bit about those discussions? If not, why do you think the Co-op doesn't talk about it?
  - In what ways do you think the Co-op is able to, or not able to, address issues like racism?
- What do you think needs to happen in Canada / Edmonton / human services so that immigrants don't experience the kinds of barriers we've been talking about?

*At the conclusion of the interview, I will thank the participant for their time, and discuss potential times for future interviews.*

## **Appendix 5**

### **Recording Guide for Participant Observation at the GMCNO**

## Participant Observation Guide

Date:

Type of observation opportunity:

Participants:

Who do I speak with?

Foci of notes: What is going on? Who is involved (brokers, visitors to the GMCNO, etc)? Who calls (e.g., family members, community member, service provider, agency / organization? Who responds to "calls" to the GMCNO? What happens to a "call" after it comes in? How does it get to a broker? Which broker and why? How is a "call" "translated" into a request for support? By whom? How does a response take place? How does the person who responds think about the issues?

**Appendix 6**  
**Participant Data Sheet**

## Participant Information

First name: \_\_\_\_\_

In what country were you born: \_\_\_\_\_ Year of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Path to Canada: What other countries did you live in before coming to Canada?

Country	Year moved to country

Year of arrival in Canada: \_\_\_\_\_ Province you arrived to: \_\_\_\_\_

Immigration status upon arrival in Canada:

Economic \_\_\_

Dependent of economic (family member: child, wife) \_\_\_

Privately sponsored refugee \_\_\_ Government-sponsored refugee \_\_\_

Asylum seeker / refugee claimant \_\_\_

Temporary worker \_\_\_ Undocumented \_\_\_

None of the above \_\_\_ (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Did you arrive:

Alone \_\_\_ With other family members \_\_\_

To family here \_\_\_

If so, how long were you separated from family? \_\_\_\_\_

Did you:

Leave family behind \_\_\_ Have no family \_\_\_

Have you ever:

Returned to birth country? \_\_\_

Returned to country you came to Canada from? \_\_\_



**What other provinces did you live in before coming to Alberta?**


**Year arrived in Alberta:** \_\_\_\_\_