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Aceh-Malaysia-Vancouver: Settlement Among Acehnese Refugees Five Years On

**Lisa Ruth Brunner,
Jennifer Hyndman,
and Chris Friesen**

Series editor: Linda Sheldon, SFU;
Krishna Pendakur, SFU and Daniel Hiebert, UBC, Co-directors

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ACEH-MALAYSIA-VANCOUVER: SETTLEMENT AMONG ACEHNESE REFUGEES FIVE YEARS ON

Lisa Ruth Brunner

Department of Geography, Simon Fraser University

Jennifer Hyndman

Centre for Refugee Studies, York University

Chris Friesen

Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia

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ABSTRACT

Ideally, the Canadian government, researchers, and/or service providers would trace the settlement outcomes of government assisted refugees (GARs) from various countries over time, but such data is expensive to collect and challenging at the national scale. In a modest effort to fill this gap, research with GARs from Aceh, Indonesia was conducted in 2005 (one year after most arrived) and again in 2009 to ascertain settlement outcomes in the areas of housing, official language acquisition, employment, and participation in Canadian society. While the 2009 findings are but a snapshot of social and economic relations among the Acehnese at the time, they offer the fullest available picture of how these GARs are doing; what their concerns, priorities, and challenges are; and what Canadian policies do to facilitate or hinder their aims as new Canadians and permanent residents. More than five years after their arrival, a number of official language and employment issues persist. Spousal sponsorship has proven a salient goal for the majority of men who are still single. Working towards, saving for, and waiting for such relationships to materialize may well be impeding integration aims in Canada. Recommendations to address these situations are offered.

INTRODUCTION

Between 2004 and 2006, a group of 154 government assisted refugees (GARs) originally from Aceh, Indonesia were resettled entirely in Metro Vancouver, British Columbia (ISSofBC 2007). As an early example of the increasingly “new and few” Canadian-selected GAR group resettlements—that is, a relatively small number of individuals forming a “new” ethnic group previously unrepresented in Canada—their initial settlement was unique. Here, we follow up on research with Acehnese conducted in 2005, remembering that “despite full legal status and access to employment sanctioned by the host state, there is no guarantee that refugees will have an easier time creating livelihoods under dramatically new conditions” (Hyndman and McLean 2006, 345). In what follows, we show how, five years after arrival, low levels of employment and official language skills impact other aspects of settlement in the context of two additional unique facets of Acehnese resettlement: the initial concentration in one urban area and the possibility of repatriation. Although many are now Canadian citizens, struggles persist.

The First 365 Days

To escape danger in the province of Aceh resulting from decades of bitter conflict between the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh rebel movement known as *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* (GAM), between 1999 and 2005, over three hundred thousand Acehnese were displaced within and beyond the region’s borders (Drexler 2008; Hyndman and McLean 2006). Forced migration was particularly widespread following May 2003, when Indonesia began its largest military offensive since the 1975 invasion of East Timor (Human Rights Watch 2004). Thousands of young Acehnese men in particular fled to Malaysia, where a similar language and culture provided a second

home to many undocumented Acehnese (Nah and Bunnell 2005). However, as Malaysia is not a signatory to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol, Acehnese refugees in Malaysia were detained indefinitely and occasionally deported back to Aceh, where they faced death (UNHCR Malaysia 2010). In 2003, the UNHCR office in Malaysia estimated the presence of between eight thousand and nine thousand Acehnese of concern in Malaysia (UNHCR Malaysia 2003), although other estimates are higher.

In accordance with Canada's commitment to resettle refugees deemed by the UNHCR as "most in need of protection" since the 2002 implementation of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) (Pressé and Thomson 2007), 104 Acehnese individuals—mostly men—were selected by Canada as GARs and resettled to Canada between February and September of 2004.¹ Although this resettlement flow was expected to continue, the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the subsequent signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the GAM and the Indonesian government in August 2005 changed the Acehnese landscape dramatically, both physically and politically. With the arrival of relative peace to Aceh, GAR resettlement to Canada ended and the possibility of repatriation became a reality. In total, after all applicants' wives and children arrived, 154 Acehnese individuals were resettled to Metro Vancouver between 2004 and 2006, forming 5 percent of all GARs resettled to BC between 2003 and 2006 (ISSofBC 2007).

GARs arriving in Canada are typically "destined," a word employed in the settlement sector, to thirty-six different cities across Canada including the Province of Quebec. An equal number of immigrant and refugee serving agencies provide initial settlement to GARs through the Government of Canada's

¹ All but one principal Acehnese applicants interviewed were men.

Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP). As the Acehnese were the first group of GARs from Indonesia ever settled in Canada, a unique decision was made by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), in consultation with the BC-based immigrant and refugee serving agency Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia (ISSofBC), to resettle them all in Metro Vancouver in order to keep the community together.² The Acehnese who arrived had scant other “co-ethnic” Acehnese in Canada, and their trust of non-Acehnese Indonesians was low. Both the main settlement counsellor and most of the interpreters hired were Canadians of Chinese-Indonesian descent.

The post-IRPA policy shift away from resettling refugees with an “ability to establish” in Canada towards those most in need of protection significantly altered Canada’s resettled refugee population to include more “high needs” individuals with increased settlement requirements, and the GARs from Aceh fit this profile to the extent that they spent many years in hiding and in detention in Malaysia before coming to Canada. Post-IRPA GARs face barriers in securing and maintaining adequate employment, housing, education, and language (see, for example, Yu, Ouellet, and Warmington 2007; Sherrell and ISSofBC 2009; Hiebert and Sherrell 2009).

CIC “recognizes that current resettlement programming may not adequately meet the unique and changing needs of refugees” (Pressé and Thomson 2007). However, the long-term implications of these “higher needs” on settlement are not well understood. Do levels of greater need exist empirically? If so, will they continue in perpetuity or will these newcomers eventually catch up on health and educational deficits, for example? Longitudinal research on

² We use “community” to describe the cohort of Acehnese who came to Vancouver between 2004 and 2006 and include their immediate family members in Vancouver—some Canadian citizens and some not, some refugees and some not—but mark it as problematic in terms of whom it may include and exclude. For further thoughts on how “community” may be defined differently by members themselves and outsiders, see Cohen (1985).

post-IRPA refugee settlement may yet happen, but at present, it exceeds the shorter funding cycles of Metropolis BC and other national funding bodies. The Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC), with its national coverage and successive waves of data, is a rich data source, but one in which refugees—who comprise about 10 percent of the immigrant population—are not well represented.

In an effort to fill this gap in refugee-specific research, a study with Acehnese GARs was conducted in 2005—one year after the arrival of the first 104 adults—and planned again for 2009 to ascertain settlement outcomes in the areas of housing, official language acquisition, employment, and participation in Canadian society. Research in 2005 found that the decision to keep all Acehnese GARs geographically together was unanimously favoured by the Acehnese surveyed and laid the groundwork for the consolidation of an Acehnese community (McLean et al. 2006). Despite “challenges posed by official language deficits and poor employment prospects,” (McLean, Friesen, and Hyndman 2006, 20), the formation of the Acehnese Canadian Community Society (ACCS), competitive sports teams within local Muslim leagues, and participation in local mosques showed “small but important signs of settlement” (Hyndman and McLean 2006, 358).

Research Methodology

Our qualitative case study takes place four years after the 2005 research and analyzes many of the same issues covered in that study. We aim to ascertain changes in housing, employment, and official language ability. Our methods consist of seventy-five surveys (fifty-one men, twenty-four women) and fifty semi-structured interviews (twenty-eight men, twenty-two women) conducted between May 2009 and November 2009 (see Appendices 1 and 2),

followed by a dissemination and feedback event with participants and other community members on July 3, 2010.

Oliver Bakewell (2008) observes a bias in refugee research concerning the “danger of falling into the trap of assuming that a certain set of problems or experiences are the exclusive domain of refugees” (445). To avoid refugee-centrism and to include all social networks affected by GAR resettlement, our study broadly included any adult Metro Vancouver resident originally from Aceh who arrived to Canada after 2004; all came either directly through the GAR resettlement program or were sponsored as family members. Estimating the size of an ethnic, and particularly refugee, community often poses a problem when designing survey-based studies (Bloch 1999). However, at the time of study, the adult Acehnese community in Canada consisted of only ninety-eight adults, approximately, based on data from the Acehnese Canadian Community Society (ACCS) and ISSofBC, the primary service provider for this group upon arrival. Thus, we were able to survey approximately 75 percent and interview approximately 50 percent of the population.

The recruitment of participants initially relied on one of several leaders of the Acehnese Canadian Community Society (ACCS), introduced to us by ISSofBC. This relationship with the group’s community leader was vital to the trust-building process and required “constant negotiations” common to survey research with refugee populations (Bloch 1999, 378). Nonetheless, we also recruited more generally by hanging recruitment flyers at ISSofBC’s office and incorporating snowball sampling to make contacts with other potential participants. As Bloch (1999) points out, a snowball sampling approach can “isolate members of the communities who [are] not in touch with any social, cultural, religious or community group or contact point and excludes them from the research” (381). To counter this issue, we followed Bloch’s suggestions of

using multiple gatekeepers and a purposive sampling approach. We insisted upon a minimum of at least 30 percent women for both the surveys and the interviews despite the lower actual percentage of women in the community. In the end, 32 percent of surveyed participants and 44 percent of interviewees were women. Two interpreters who were known to the community from the settlement period served as additional gatekeepers; they actively recruited participants who were not as involved in the ACCS.

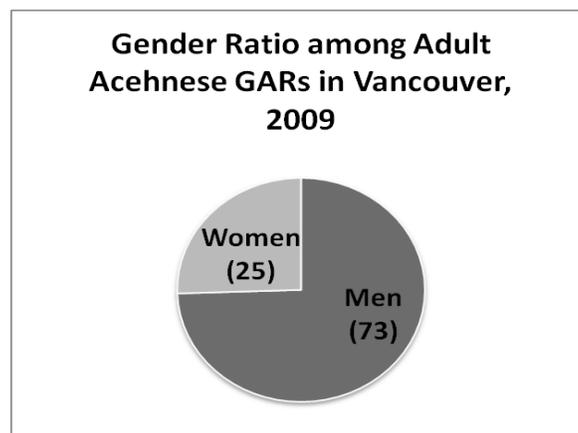
After surveys and interviews were piloted with community leaders, surveys were administered in the living room of a private home adjacent to the ACCS community centre frequented weekly by most members, women, men, and children. Interviewees chose where they preferred to be interviewed, and these were administered in either the private homes of participants or in the ACCS community centre. The dissemination event took place at Simon Fraser University's downtown campus. Interview participants were given grocery store gift cards in exchange for their participation, and the ACCS was given payment in the form of rent for using the community centre throughout the project. All three stages of the study (surveys, interviews, and dissemination event) were conducted in the presence of one of the two *Bahasa Indonesia* interpreters mentioned above. Although Acehnese is the first language of the participants, the majority are fluent in *Bahasa Indonesia* and have drawn on the services of both translators for previous interpretation.

Responses to surveys and the discussion at the dissemination event were recorded by hand while the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed with permission. Finally, the survey data was tabulated manually and the interviews were transcribed; the data was then coded by the following themes: detention, marriage, employment, language study, comparisons between Canada and Scandinavian countries (where many respondents' friends were

resettled), comparisons between Metro Vancouver and Alberta/Calgary, repatriation, the Acehnese community in Vancouver, transnational ties to Aceh, and gender issues.

The Next 1,460 Days

According to our main community informant, seventy-three male and twenty-five female Acehnese adults (not including children) are currently living in Metro Vancouver and appear to be a closely knit if not homogenous group of newcomers.³



Source: Community Informant, 2009

Among those interviewed, feelings towards life in Canada are mixed five years after arrival. All fifty respondents expressed their gratitude to the Canadian government, particularly for the safety that permanent residence in Canada provides. They praise access to high quality, low-cost public education, medical services, and transportation. One man expressed his appreciation:

I want to say thank you very much to the Canadian government because they supported us . . . I'm really happy. It's [allowed me to] make a new life here. Everything is changing.

³ Some Acehnese have moved to Alberta for better work opportunities, but the majority remain in Metro Vancouver.

(Interview #48, Man, November 1, 2009, p. 3)

However, echoing the initial research conducted in 2005 (Hyndman and McLean 2006; McLean, Friesen, and Hyndman 2006), unemployment remains high among respondents, official language skills remain quite low, and adequate housing in Metro Vancouver (and particularly Vancouver) remains prohibitively expensive. As another man explains, these challenges have increased over time, especially in light of the late-2000s recession:

The first two weeks I felt very happy and very proud because we are mostly from the lower class [in Aceh] and I never imagined that I could cross the ocean and live on another continent. So I was happy at that time. But . . . now it's getting more difficult because we don't know how to find a job. [In Canada] you have to speak English.

(Interview #30, Man, August 11, 2009)

Although the Acehnese community in Canada is small, the diversity among individuals is noteworthy. Our interviews revealed varying Acehnese and Indonesian language skills, as well as age, marital status, rural/urban, and educational differences, each affecting settlement differently. For example, the significant gender imbalance among Acehnese Canadians represents a major challenge for the young, single men who want to start families of their own. In the absence of single, Acehnese women in Canada, many experience long waiting times associated with marriages organized across international borders (hereafter, "transnational marriages"). They endure tensions between state (and sometimes personal) goals for their participation in Canadian society and their aspirations to keep Aceh culture alive, given its minority status in Indonesia and in Canada. A companion working paper to this one explores the specific settlement implications and transnational marriage practices that

result from a skewed gender ratio among the Acehnese upon arrival (Brunner, forthcoming).

In the following discussion, we focus broadly on three prominent issues common to all respondents: the work/language dilemma; secondary migration to Surrey, BC and Calgary, AB; and the relationship between repatriation and Canadian citizenship. In doing so, our aim is to avoid the “tendency to define refugees themselves as the problem, and the resettlement system as the solution,” instead recognizing how “this system operates within a problematic social context” (Simich 2003, 577). We agree with Simich that “too little analytic attention has been given to contextual factors such as the social conditions in which refugees are expected to adapt and policies designed to control refugee settlement patterns in receiving countries” (577). Although refugee settlement is often compared to the economic objectives of other immigrant classes (such as temporary foreign workers or skilled workers), we stress that the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) is first and foremost a refugee protection and humanitarian program.

THE WORK/LANGUAGE DILEMMA: “WE STILL FEEL LIKE STRANGERS TO THE COUNTRY”

For up to one year after their arrival or until economic self-sufficiency is achieved, GARs are eligible for federal assistance through RAP. In addition to initial orientation services such as temporary housing for fifteen nights and a one-time basic household goods and furniture package, monetary assistance is available based on family size and the age of household members. In 2006, for example, an individual living in British Columbia was eligible for up to \$635 CAD monthly, mirroring provincial income support rates (ISSofBC 2007). In principle, this initial year offers GARs an opportunity to concentrate fully on

settlement and especially on official language acquisition as provided in British Columbia by BC's English Language Service for Adults program (ELSA). In practice, several factors pose challenges to full-time language study during this initial period; a recent study among post-IRPA GARs in Toronto, for example, found high drop-out rates, low graduation rates, and increased overall difficulty in language classes compared to other classes of immigrants (Debeljacki 2007).

Although low official language ability hinders several aspects of GARs' lives—such as their ability to access services and more generally participate in Canadian society—it particularly affects their access to employment (McLean, Friesen, and Hyndman 2006). Researchers and Acehnese participants alike stressed a strong link between language and employment in the 2005 study (McLean, Friesen, and Hyndman 2006) as have studies elsewhere (Hyndman and Walton-Roberts 1999; Henin and Bennet 2002). Acehnese “participants repeatedly called for more ESL availability, as well as more innovative ESL/pre-employment job placement pilot programs,” leading McLean, Friesen, and Hyndman to conclude that “extant federal and provincial employment assistance models [were] not working well for non-English speaking refugees” (2006, 15). After more than a year in Canada, “all members of the Acehnese community were experiencing difficulty finding stable employment, and continued to cite lack of English skills and ‘Canadian’ work experience as the reason for their failure” (15). The 2005 study also revealed language assessment wait-lists and seat shortages, delaying access to ELSA during this crucial first-year period (McLean, Friesen, and Hyndman 2006). Although new money from federal sources largely eliminated these waits for GARs arriving after 2008, other barriers to ELSA during participation in RAP persist. Starting from the critical first-year RAP support period, we trace Acehnese experiences

with the “work/language dilemma” by highlighting additional challenges revealed five years later.

English classes in the first 365 days: “I was broken that year . . .”

Facing the highest housing prices in Canada, one initial challenge for Acehnese in Vancouver was that the assistance provided by RAP was simply not enough (Sherrell and ISSofBC 2009). As one man explains, rent was so high that RAP payments provided for little else:

When I first landed in Canada, I got 573 dollars every month [from RAP]. That is not really enough, because after you pay rent and buy a bus pass, you have no more money.

(Interview #48, Man, November 1, 2009, p. 8).

The already inadequate RAP allowance left little room for the additional cost of the transportation loan GARs are required to pay back, with interest, to the Canadian government. In 2006, for example, an individual GAR arrived to Canada with a \$1,534 CAD debt (ISSofBC 2007). Although repayment can be delayed for up to twelve months after arrival, all fifty of our respondents said they paid their transportation loans as quickly as possible; for some, this was partially to avoid paying *riba*, the term for interest forbidden in Islamic economic jurisprudence *fiqh*.

The pressures on Acehnese GARs to send home remittances created an additional financial burden early on. In the context of resettled Sudanese refugees, Akuei (2005) notes that remittances are a source of dignity and pride for those who send them, often contributing towards a dowry or allowing younger siblings to attend school. However, remittances vary by country of origin; in a study with Kosovar refugees living in BC in 2002–03, for example, only three families out of twenty-four sent semi-regular remittances (Sherrell and

Hyndman 2004). For the Acehnese, the widespread devastation of the 2004 tsunami created an unexpected pressure to send remittances months after arrival (or, depending on their arrival, immediately upon arriving) in Canada. Respondents described their support of those affected by the tsunami:

[I send remittances to Aceh because] my mom and my family need help. Before, my husband's brother lost his home because of the tsunami, and they needed help [too]. So we helped them.

(Interview #4, Woman, July 12, 2009, p. 5)

I have relatives in Aceh who, because of the tsunami, are orphans. So I still have to send some money to support them.

(Interview #6, Woman, July 18, 2009, p. 6)

Before [the peace agreement] we had to [send] donations for orphans, because in Aceh there are a lot.

(Interview #40, Man, August 20, 2009, p. 10)

Based on our interviews, all respondents—even those unemployed—are currently sending remittances back to Aceh to support their aging parents and/or the education of their younger relatives such as siblings and cousins, while unmarried men are also saving up for additional costs associated with future transnational marriages. Orphaned relatives continue to add pressure not only to send remittances but also to save towards the costly sponsorship process, as another woman describes:

My nephews' parents were killed in the tsunami, so I would like to bring them [to Canada] . . . [when I] call [my nephews], they ask whether they can come [live in Canada] with me. I would like to sponsor them. Even just one kid is okay...I treat them just like sons.

(Interview #28, Woman, August 8, 2009, p. 6)

A final challenge during the RAP period was the sheer difficulty in adjusting to life in Canada. Unfamiliarity with Canadian teaching styles and limited previous exposure to English created challenges adjusting to ELSA classes, as one woman remarked:

The first time I was put into an ELSA class at level 1, I learned up to level 2, but I was not interested at that time because I couldn't understand what the teacher was trying to explain. But now I feel I could learn more because I understand a little bit [more], so I want to go back.

(Interview #13, Woman, July 19, 2009, p. 2)

This woman needed time in Canada before feeling confident enough to progress further through Canadian language classes. Unfortunately, like all immigrants, GARs are only allowed limited ELSA instruction; thus, individuals entering at a lower level—as most Acehnese did—are not offered sufficient support to reach full fluency. In addition, once a permanent resident obtains citizenship, they are no longer eligible for government-subsidized classes. These barriers significantly limit the level of official language proficiency post-IRPA GARs are able to obtain even five years after arrival.

For others, years of conflict, separation, and detention presented challenges, particularly in light of the tsunami:

The first year I stayed in Canada, the government gave my people one year to go [to language] school [and everything] was free. But at that time I was crazy; something was wrong because I thought about my country, and then I didn't go [to] school. I was broken that year . . . but now [by working and sending money back to Aceh] I can help so many people in my family.

(Interview #43, Man, September 6, 2009, p. 1)

As the above quote exemplifies, initial adjustment difficulties combined with the pressures to afford life in Vancouver, pay back the transportation loan, send home remittances, and achieve self-sufficiency created a serious distraction from taking language courses during the first year after arrival. This resulted in quick part-time entry into the labour market, with many beginning work before the RAP period was up. Once in the workforce, however, respondents faced difficulty juggling employment and other household responsibilities with language classes. As the following two quotes show, the demands of both paid and unpaid labour compete with language classes:

Going to school after work was very difficult. It was just going through one ear and out through another ear. There was nothing left. Nothing stuck.

(Interview #23, Man, August 4, 2009, p. 1)

I stopped [ELSA] during the Ramadan preparations. I didn't have enough time for cooking [and] preparing [Iftar] dinner . . . so far I haven't [gone back] because I have [to] take care of other things first.

(Interview #27, Woman, August 8, 2009, p. 1)

Among women, childcare was the single greatest barrier to ELSA. This mirrors findings from previous studies (for example, Sherrell, Hyndman, and Preniqi 2004; Wasik 2006; Wayland 2006).

For men in particular, the "low-skilled" nature of employment found resulted in an additional factor hindering official language acquisition. Upon arrival, most of the younger Acehnese men quickly found jobs in construction, finishing carpentry, and painting, while older men tended to work lower-paying positions such as janitors, *halal* butchers or prep cooks in restaurants, or in a box factory. Although the latter were relatively high-paying (more than \$20 per hour), many jobs were outside the city (such as work on the Sea-to-Sky

Highway in advance of the 2010 winter Olympics) and required irregular, contract, or overtime hours.⁴ It quickly became impossible to meet the requirements for both work and English classes, as one man working in construction pointed out:

I have no time [for ELSA] right now because sometimes I'm working late but sometimes I'm not. I really want to study but [if I do] I would have to tell my boss I have to stop a job at 4 or 5 [pm]. But sometimes I have to work until 6 or 7 [pm].

(Interview #30, Man, August 11, 2009, p. 1)

However, after stopping ELSA classes, it was virtually impossible to reenroll. In addition to the previously listed barriers to ELSA based on allotted time in ELSA and citizenship status, the complex logistics of reenrollment are a further hurdle. In our study, two men mentioned attempts to reenroll in ELSA but faced long wait times; others mentioned the difficulty balancing the commitment to classes with the search for part-time work and the need to be available for work anytime.

If official language skills are not obtained during the RAP period, they can remain elusive indefinitely. In 2009, English-speaking abilities among Acehnese men and women were varied but low overall. Among those surveyed, the average ELSA level obtained is between 2 and 3 among men and 2 among women out of 6 possible levels (literacy level, beginner levels 1-3, and intermediate levels 4 and 5). Among the fifty men and women interviewed in the presence of an interpreter, thirty-two spoke entirely in Indonesian, ten spoke a mixture of English and Indonesian, and eight spoke primarily in English with clarifications from the interpreter. No one has successfully returned to

⁴ The average wage of men was reported to be \$18.30 per hour, although only roughly two-thirds of those employed were willing to give an exact number.

ELSA after stopping, and despite a desire to do so, no one is actively studying English.

(Un)employment among Men: "My future is very dark for me right now"

For Acehnese men, quick entry into the labour market despite low English proficiency levels proved disastrous when employment conditions changed during the recession. The construction industry, particularly in conjunction with the 2010 Olympics, was hit hard; as a result, many men were forced to accept short-term, sporadic contract work or lost their jobs entirely. With few significant ties beyond their community, the Acehnese were particularly affected. Out of twenty-six men interviewed, twenty-four found all their jobs through other Acehnese men.⁵ Because the entire Acehnese community worked in groups for a small number of employers, when one company laid off employees, multiple men from the community lost work options. Our research was conducted in the midst of these changes. The following quote is representative of the experiences of virtually all Acehnese men in our respondent pool:

My first job was in construction. I heard about it from an Acehnese person. I worked for one year and two months, but the salary did not match the work load. Another Acehnese friend [helped me get a job in] tile grinding, so I worked there for one year and two months . . . [but] I was always at the bottom . . . I quit and went to work for the Kiewit construction company [through another Acehnese friend] for nine months but I got laid off. I called the previous grinding company and got work but after two weeks I got laid off again because the economy was slowing down . . . [Finding a job in Canada] is very hard because I don't know anybody here . . . I still don't know what to do. My future is very dark for me right now. I have no experience and no stable job.

(Interview #47, Man, September 27, 2009, p. 2).

⁵ Two men said they found their jobs through acquaintances in ELSA classes.

Facing a shortage of “low-skill” job opportunities, those with limited English skills were having great difficulty finding work and making ends meet. One sentiment frequently expressed again echoed responses of the 2005 survey: Acehese men want to work but simply cannot find it. At the time of the 2009 survey, nineteen of the fifty-two men were unemployed, although anecdotally we learned that this proportion grew significantly as 2009 progressed; at the time of writing, community informants estimate that “most” are out of work. Two men—both with jobs and relatively high English skills—described what other respondents were hesitant to admit:

My friends [without a job] have nothing. No money. No job. Some of them have no money to pay the rent. Some of them have no money to buy food. I fill out their forms [like] employment insurance forms. I feel sympathy for [them].

(Interview #44, Man, September 13, 2009, p. 8).

Some Acehese have just enough to survive.

(Interview #18, Man, July 28, 2009, p. 8).

Attempts to better their situation have largely failed. Many of the skills that Acehese have were not aligned with local labour market needs, similar to the Kosovars settled in the BC interior in 1999 (Sherrell, Hyndman, and Preniqi 2004). Those who have participated in employment programs, however, still struggle to find work. At least four men described attempts to work as truck drivers or electricians but noted they faced certification challenges that hindered these efforts. New funding in 2008 provided more employment-related support programs such as ISSofBC’s Employment Outreach Services and the MOSAIC-led Step Ahead program; the settlement services sector has delivered targeted training programs that included an ESL and job placement/work

experience component. These have included home support work, painting and decorating, long-term care aide, and automotive mechanics.

One woman described the plight of her family after her husband, who had worked as a truck driver in Malaysia for twenty years, failed the BC driver's test for the thirtieth time:

I'm ashamed because when I go to the welfare office, it seems like I'm a beggar asking for money, and the person there just keeps rejecting, rejecting. With four kids you have to pay bills, have to pay the rent – the money is not enough. The money I had in savings is already used up. [My husband] has been unemployed since September last year, so it's [been] about a year already. The welfare people...say if [he] doesn't find a job by September then [our] welfare will be cut.

(Interview #20, Woman, July 29, 2009, p. 1)

After finishing with RAP and transferring to provincial welfare, these threats happen and at times refugees are pushed out of language classes in order to find employment and get off of welfare. Finding employment remains difficult, but an additional source of frustration among respondents is that after five years in Canada, the low-skilled work available to them does not match their expectations. One man recalls his expectations of employment in Canada before his arrival:

In Aceh we don't get paid by the hour. We get a monthly salary. So when we had to work eight hours [a day in Canada], we were really surprised because eight hours here is really eight hours. It's not like Aceh. If you work eight hours, maybe only four hours are [spent] directly working . . . That was a hard adjustment and I wish the Canadian officer had told me [more] about employment in Canada . . . [Some of us thought] working in Canada was just sitting and using a computer, like an office job.

(Interview #33, Man, August 12, 2009, p. 6)

Expectations and lived realities are two very separate things. Although some respondents remain hopeful, the difficulty they face in improving their English leaves bleak prospects for many respondents to achieve their goals:

I don't like my [construction] job right now. I don't want to be dirty. It's a [manual] labour job. My first target will be studying English. After that, I want to be a politician.

(Interview #18, Man, July 28, 2009, p. 2)

I want to find a job. I don't care about the salary...because I have no job now...but my dream job is to be a paramedic.

(Interview #48, Man, November 1, 2009, p. 1-2)

Previous research revealed frustration among refugees with generally high education obtainment who experience downward mobility in the Canadian labour market (for example Krahn et al. 2000). Despite lower educational levels overall, these post-IRPA GARs also face frustration.

Women's Perspectives on Work: "We have our own pride"

Women had different observations and analyses of the settlement process. In general, Acehnese society prescribes different gender roles than those in Canada, and older women in particular encountered tensions upon entering the Canadian labour force. One woman with four children described her difficult decision to quit her job even though her husband had been unemployed for almost a year:

In Canada, it's very normal for both the husband and the wife to work, but back in my hometown, it's common that the husband works outside and the wife takes care of the house, the kids, and the husband. [When] I had a job, I got off work at midnight. I went to sleep at 1 o'clock. In the mornings at 5:30, I was already awake to cook for my husband. Then at 7:30, I woke

up the kids to go to school and then at 9 o'clock, I took them to school and then picked them up again, and then, you know, [I had to] clean and everything, and then I went work. [After one year] I could not do it. It was too hard for me [especially] at my [older] age. From the perspective of a wife, the government of Canada [can help by] preparing a job for the husband so we [wives] can take care of children at home.

(Interview #20, Woman, July 29, 2009, p. 15)

Despite her struggle to balance employment and household obligations, her unemployed husband's assistance with household work was not a realistic option in her opinion:

If I am the one who has to go to work, it's better not to have a husband . . . I just don't feel it is right for a man to stay at home.

(Interview #20, Woman, July 29, 2009)

Some younger women, however, described positive experiences working in Canada (some as the sole breadwinner in their family) or expressed a strong desire to work. At the time of our survey, six out of twenty-four women were employed with an average hourly wage of \$10 per hour as part-time prep cooks, grocery cashiers, or labourers in a commercial bakery. More women want to work but face multiple barriers related to their household obligations and low English levels. As one young mother expressed:

The government has to do something for young moms, because after we get pregnant we would still like to find a job, but we know that our English is not sufficient enough to find one. But if we would like to improve our English, there is no daycare provided and we cannot go. The income of our husbands cannot cover all the expenses. That's the conflict we [face] but we do not know how to solve it. I feel embarrassed to [depend on] welfare assistance. I would like to find job, but what about my kids? Who will take care of them? That's the conflict in our hearts. We do not want to add to the burden of the government. We have our own pride.

(Interview #6, Woman, July 18, 2009, p. 7)

The unpaid but vital work of child care competes with the need for income and paid work. Although some ELSA classes offer free childcare, there are “not many spaces” and wait times are long (ELSA Net 2010).

Still, in addition to the competing demands of household work, the available paid work options are poor. Like their male counterparts, women expressed frustration regarding the type of work prospects. As one woman explained, some positions are under-the-table and render employees vulnerable:

If I work in a factory, I feel more secure because everything is arranged [formally]. But if I work [under the table] in a restaurant, there is no commitment, there is no certain schedule or shift . . . the [business] is small and they have to pay cash . . . I’m forced to take the job in the restaurant because my husband is unemployed now. If in the future my husband gets a job, I will no longer stay in the restaurant. I will find another job [which] provides benefits.

(Interview #13, Woman, July 19, 2009, p. 3)

Others recalled their previous experiences in Aceh:

[When I change my job in the future] I don’t want it to involve too much physical labour. What I was doing in a commercial bakery [here in Canada] was [a difficult job physically]. Before coming to Canada, I never even worked before. I’m still young. I was doing my university [in Aceh].

(Interview #36, Woman, August 16, 2009, p. 3)

It’s shameful. Back home [in Aceh] I had a comfortable position. I was working for a government institution, not [manual labour]. But here I have to work in a factory

(Interview #28, Woman, August 8, 2009, p. 2)

I dream to be a nurse again, like [I was] in my country. Of course I can do that here [someday] because the government will loan me money for an education. The government provides such kinds of opportunities, right?

(Interview #29, Woman, August 9, 2009, p. 9)

These women are experiencing downward social mobility on a local scale through their employment, while men experience a similar downward mobility through unemployment. As one woman remarked, things are different in Aceh:

[In Aceh] if you are jobless, your condition is still okay. But here [in Canada] you are forced to face that unemployment is not a good thing here . . . if you are unemployed [in Canada], it seems that it's not good for this country. But in Indonesia there is a lot of unemployment.

(Interview #28, Woman, August 8, 2009, p. 8)

While not unusual for immigrants of any class, their struggle with limited options and aspirations to find better jobs is real.

The Role of the State: "The government does not pay enough attention to us"

Frustrated, both men and women respondents see this as an unmet obligation on the part of the Canadian government in terms of basic survival and self-determination, as the following representative quotes reveal:

Incoming refugees should be given a skill to prepare themselves before coming [to Canada] or maybe during their resettlement so they have a [way] to survive in Canada rather than depending on employment assistance.

(Interview #24, Man, August 7, 2009, p. 6)

The government does not pay enough attention to us, to help us find jobs. We do not regret coming to Canada, oh no, no, no. We are happy to come to Canada. But the thing is, [having a] job is very important to survive.

(Interview #20, Woman, July 29, 2009, p. 4)

Thinking of the future, respondents also expressed fears that the availability of manual labour is not only affected by the economy but also by individual age and ability, as an older man says:

After ELSA, maybe the government can provide a training course for employment . . . to learn about the refugees' skill and what they did in their country before. For example, I had a convenience store business [in Aceh] so I want to know how to [manage] a convenience store here [in Canada] also . . . I don't like working in construction. If you work in construction and you are strong, you are young, okay. But around 55 or 60 you'll be too weak, right?

(Interview #40, Man, August 20, 2009)

Finally, as the following quote shows, the significance of employment exceeds its monetary value and affects notions of self and participation in Canadian society:

The Canadian government should pay more attention to employment, because for other things, we can do it by ourselves to improve. But for employment we still feel like strangers to the country.

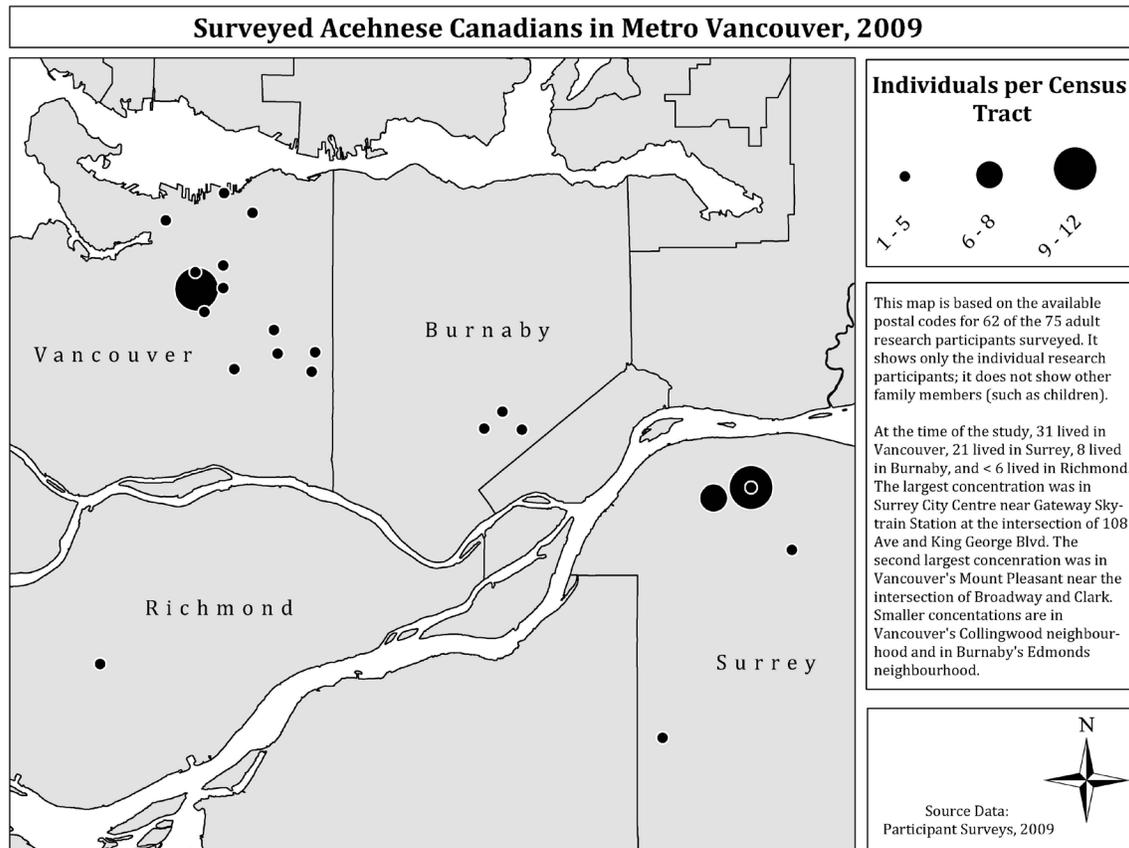
(Interview #7, Woman, July 19, 2009, p. 6)

For some participants, employment offers one of the few opportunities to interact with non-Acehnese people. As the remainder of the paper will show, long-term unemployment coupled with low English abilities leaves many families with difficult decisions to make.

SECONDARY MIGRATION TO SURREY AND CALGARY: "OUR FUTURE IS UNCERTAIN"

As noted, the Acehnese were the first group of GARs to be resettled entirely in one Canadian urban centre, and the Acehnese surveyed in 2005 unanimously favoured this decision. The community remains very tight; at the start of the 2009 study, the Acehnese Canadian Community Society converted a collectively rented storefront in Vancouver into a mosque and used it as a community centre. Although all seventy-five respondents said they attended at least once a month, the vast majority attended every Saturday. Respondents expressed the importance of this space as a place to pray, socialize, teach their children Acehnese and religious classes, exchange information about jobs, and support community members during celebratory or grieving periods following major events such as births and deaths. During the study, however, the community centre was moved to a storefront with cheaper rent; at the time of writing, the community is only able to afford a basement space and its future remains up in the air.

At the approximate time of the 2005 survey, eighty-five individuals (including adults and children) lived in Vancouver, forty-five lived in Burnaby, and twenty-three lived in Surrey (ISSofBC 2007). Our 2009 survey of seventy-five individuals surveyed the housing location of adults only, revealing forty-one adults living in Vancouver, twenty-three in Surrey, nine in Burnaby, and two in Richmond. The map below shows the settlement of sixty-two adults for which accurate postal codes were available. During our research, however, several additional families moved or planned to move to Surrey.



Because Vancouver's high rental costs were negotiated "through strategies of doubling and tripling up in order to spread rental costs among more people," in 2005, 81 percent of survey participants lived with four or more other people in their apartment, 26 percent lived with six or more, and 22 percent lived with three or more people per room (McLean, Friesen, and Hyndman 2006, 11). Our 2009 study reveals that single men with no spouse in Canada (69 percent of survey respondents in 2009) are more likely to double/triple up and thus afford housing in Vancouver, while married couples with children largely do not have this housing option and tend to live in Burnaby or Surrey.

However, a (third) migration to other parts of Canada has emerged as a survival strategy by the Acehnese. Single men and families alike undertook

searches to find employment specifically in Alberta, threatening the continuity of a geographically centralized community. Research participants spoke of the relationship between the Acehnese community in Metro Vancouver and two Acehnese men who immigrated to Canada several decades ago through their work in the oil industry. These men initially assisted Acehnese find employment in restaurants and factories throughout Alberta, including work in more rural areas such as the Columbia Icefields in the Rocky Mountains and Fort McMurray, Alberta.

Anecdotally, at the time of our study, respondents estimated that there were about thirty Acehnese living in the Calgary area. Their moves are, however, often temporary; many return, citing cold weather, poor public transportation, and a lack of Asian and/or Acehnese people and food as their reasons for returning to Metro Vancouver, as the following respondents explain:

I went to Calgary because some Acehnese live there and [my Acehnese friend] said come here, we have a good job here, [you can] work in a restaurant [near the Columbia Icefield], there are a lot of [Acehnese] people [in Calgary] . . . but when I got there, I saw that the weather is not really good for me. So I came back. Vancouver has the very best weather . . . [and] more [people from] different nations live here so I love it.

(Interview #44, Man, September 13, 2009, p. 2-3)

In Calgary, from one place to another place is quite far and of course the weather is cold. There are also not so many Acehnese people there. In Vancouver, there are a lot of places we can go, for example the beach, and we have many friends here. That is why I decided to move back to Vancouver.

(Interview #24, Man, August 7, 2009, p. 2)

These passages only scratch the surface of locational decision-making among the Acehnese we interviewed. Despite negative aspects of life in Alberta for

respondents, it remains an option for the future. Since the end of our research in 2009, at least two families we interviewed have moved to the Calgary area. Very few Acehnese men, however, and no women with whom we spoke were willing to move to an area with no other Acehnese nearby. One man tried working in Vernon, BC but stayed for only two weeks due to feelings of alienation and housing difficulties.

I went to buy something in a Canadian food store, but I [was the only] Asian guy. The other guys were too different. That's why I don't like it [in Vernon]...It was difficult to get housing there too.

(Interview #22, Man, August 4, 2009, p. 2-3)

Yet, as the poor economic climate continues, even less desirable locations for work may cease to be an option, as one man pointed out:

In Calgary it's also difficult to find a job. If there is a job in Calgary, I want to move [back] there. But even some Acehnese in Calgary are already coming back to Vancouver now because they lost their jobs there. Everybody's getting laid off.

(Interview #38, Man, August 18, 2009, p. 4)

Moving between apartments, cities, and metro areas was a persistent theme throughout the interviews. In five years, almost all respondents reported moving at least five times, adding to personal histories of displacement. Two families were successful in jointly purchasing a home in Surrey, BC. Since the recession, however, the looming possibility of unemployment is omnipresent, and respondents noted inadequate living conditions, unresponsive landlords, and long waiting lists for subsidized housing through BC Housing. These housing conditions closely resemble those recently described by Sherrell and ISSofBC (2009). The resulting instability caused by moving to seeking better opportunities is, as one woman describes, disruptive:

[I was told by Acehnese friends in Calgary] that it's easy to find employment [in Calgary] and the pay rate is much higher, so it's good to be there. My husband took the opportunity to go there and after three months I joined my husband, but I found it difficult to socialize and there is not much [Acehnese] community there . . . so [our family] decided to move [back to Vancouver] . . . For the time being, we can maintain our situation [in Vancouver] because my husband is still has a job. But if in the future it's hard for my husband to be employed, we will have to consider moving to another city or country. We are not sure yet because our future is uncertain.

(Interview #3, Woman, July 12, 2009, p. 2-3)

In the 2005 study, one respondent was quoted as saying "we would never go back to Aceh for good" (McLean, Friesen, and Hyndman 2006, 20). Yet as the preceding quote suggests, relocation possibilities are not limited to Canada. Still, Metro Vancouver is retaining many of the GARs from Aceh, even after they have tried other Canadian destinations and returned. In the final section, we explore the ways in which settlement difficulties are related to cross-border, or transnational, linkages and strategies employed by those we interviewed.

REPATRIATION AND CANADIAN CITIZENSHIP: "I AM A CANADIAN BUT I WAS BORN IN ACEH"

For those struggling to survive, an uncertain future might focus less on living in Metro Vancouver or Calgary and more on the benefits of Canada versus Malaysia or even Aceh. The last two questions we asked during each interview were, "what has been your biggest challenge in Canada so far?" and "which achievement in Canada are you most proud of?" This attempted to reveal the significance of living in Canada for the Acehnese in our study. Interestingly, the two most common answers to both questions were identical: English skills and economic self-sufficiency. Even very limited English skills or former employment experiences were viewed as sources of pride. The third

most common answer to the question concerning achievement, however, was physically being in Canada. As the following respondents explain, the upward social mobility on a global scale gained by simply “making it” to Canada is great:

People usually say that someone who can go abroad is wealthy. But we came here from nothing, from a poor situation. But we still can be here. That’s really a very good blessing. It’s lucky for us to be here. Before we just dreamed . . .

(Interview #29, Woman, August 9, 2009, p. 9)

People [in Aceh] think going abroad is difficult, especially to Canada, but I made it. So I’m proud of it. That is my biggest achievement. I made it.

(Interview #33, Man, August 12, 2009, p. 9)

The sense of being among the first Acehnese ever to arrive in Canada made this feat particularly rewarding, as one man describes:

I’m proud because I’m the first Acehnese to come to Canada. Before [me] there were no Acehnese. In Canada there are lots of people from around the world, like Chinese, Japanese; every country is here in Canada. But Acehnese never came here before.

(Interview #38, Man, August 18, 2009, p. 13)

For some, however, it was their *only* source of pride in Canada, as one woman says:

[Respondent]: I am proud that I can be here [in Canada]. I can be here at the other end of the world because of the [Canadian] government’s help. Even if people have a lot of money, they cannot stay in Canada.

[Interpreter]: What about your achievements for yourself? Perhaps studying English or working or having a driver’s license?

[Respondent]: No, not so much. [My achievement] is the existence of being here [in Canada]

(Interview #42, Woman, September 6, 2009, p. 7)

Only one man discussed the significance of Canadian citizenship above and beyond the social mobility gained by simply being in Canada. Although he was unemployed at the time of the interview, his Canadian citizenship carries a huge weight in Malaysia:

[Canadian citizenship gives me] more respect. The first time I landed in Malaysia [after becoming Canadian], I gave [the officer] my passport. He looked at my passport and then he looked at my face. He looked at my passport and then he looked at my face. I said, is something wrong? [He said,] no, no, no, are you Canadian? And then I spoke in Malaysian. Yes, I am a Canadian, but I was born in Aceh. [The officer said,] oh, that's great, how long have you been in Canada? [I said,] I've stayed there five years. [The officer said,] are you working there? [I said,] yes, I'm working. As a Canadian I must work. [The officer said,] oh! And then he gave me a visa for three months. I stayed there for two days. When I gave the passport again [to leave for Aceh, the officer said,] what? Just two days in Malaysia? [I said,] yes, because I need to travel to Aceh. I want to see my family. [The officer said,] well, you have a visa for eighteen days. You should stay here for like one or two more visits in Malaysia? I said I have no time. [Laughing.] If they didn't know I'm Canadian, they would ask for my passport and everything. But because I feel I'm Canadian, I don't have to worry when I go anywhere. I don't care about the police because we don't make any mistakes. We have a true document . . . It changes a lot [about how I think about myself]. Before when I didn't have a document in Malaysia, when I want to buy something I felt very nervous. Are the police outside or not? We have to look very carefully, make sure there are no police on the street, make sure there are no operations to [arrest undocumented migrants]. I was in Malaysia for three years. I stayed in the city for one year, but [the first two years] I stayed in the forest.

(Interview #48, Man, November 1, 2009, p. 7)

Canadian citizenship provides enhanced status, though ironically it belies a life of unemployment or underemployment. Its relative value also changes depending on one's location. Recent changes to the Citizenship Act that focus on English or French language requirements may well make it more difficult for post-IRPA refugees to obtain Canadian citizenship.

A major irony for the majority of respondents who spent years working undocumented in Malaysia is that formal Canadian documentation does not guarantee a job (McLean et al. 2006). Despite very negative experiences as undocumented migrants and subsequent detainees in Malaysia, three respondents expressed a preference for life in Malaysia over Canada. This may partially be true because Malaysian language and culture, including religion, are much more similar to those in Aceh than those in Canada. However, as the following passages show, negative employment experiences in the Canadian labour market influence these preferences:

The most difficult [thing about living in Canada is] the language and also [the fact that there are] too many regulations in Canada. In order to enter a trade [in Canada] you have to have a certain ticket. There are too many regulations that block the way to earn money. It's different in Malaysia. As long as you can work, you get a job.

(Interview #34, Man, August 14, 2009, p. 6)

The minimum wage [of \$8 per hour in British Columbia] is too low. It is still the same as the Malaysian rate, [but] here in Canada, everything is expensive [such as] rent and food. Compared to Malaysia, when we work, a single day's wage can be used for eating in a restaurant for one week. But going back to Malaysia really depends on the government policy because it's not easy for [undocumented migrants] there.

(Interview #27, Man, August 8, 2009, p. 8)

In Malaysia, respondents could work, communicate, pray, eat, and so forth, in a familiar context; they were just not allowed to stay legally. In Canada, the opposite is true. This paradox frustrated respondents, and the allusions to the difficult plight of undocumented workers in Malaysia in the preceding quote reveal the impracticality of living without status in Malaysia. A more plausible hope is to return to Aceh.

All respondents—single men, married men, and women—noted their desire to travel temporarily back to Aceh in the future, citing cost as the main obstacle. Technically, the Indonesian consulate has the authority to issue either a travel document or an Indonesian passport for those Acehnese who are not yet Canadian citizens. One woman respondent travelled back to Aceh on an Indonesian passport while one married couple returned on travel documents issued by the Indonesian consulate; all three did so in response to emergency medical situations concerning their relatives in Aceh. The remaining respondents expressed distrust of the Indonesian government and chose not to be involved with the consulate, opting instead for Canadian citizenship and passports, as one man explained:

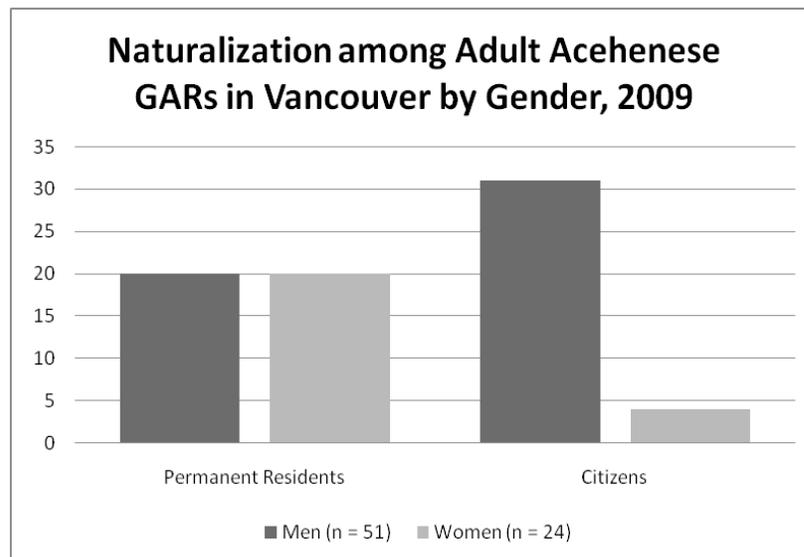
I can't trust Indonesia . . . Nobody can trust Indonesia, especially Acehnese.

(Interview #1, Man, June 26, 2009, p. 6)

The Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC) “shows that refugees (GARs and Privately Sponsored Refugees) show the highest percentage (97 to 99 percent) of having obtained, applied for, or intending to apply for naturalization” by the fourth year of arrival as compared to economic and family class immigrants (Yu, Ouellet, and Warmington 2007, 21). This is not a surprise, since refugees normally do not benefit from the protection of their

own government. For most Acehnese, however, Canadian citizenship has an additional purpose: to more safely facilitate a return visit to Aceh.

However, a gender disparity exists in the rates of citizenship between men and women: at the time of our survey, Acehnese men were 3.5 times more likely to have citizenship than Acehnese women, with thirty-one of fifty-one men holding Canadian citizenship compared to only four of twenty-four women.⁶ We initially hypothesized that this difference may be related to the increased desire of the overwhelmingly single men to return to Aceh to get married (see Brunner, forthcoming). A community informant, however, told us that many women and men alike have failed the citizenship test more than once because of poor English abilities.



Source: Survey data 2009

⁶ The earliest that GARs are permitted to apply for Canadian citizenship is approximately thirty-six months after arrival, and the total processing time for a routine application for Canadian citizenship is approximately thirteen to sixteen additional months (CIC 2009). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that citizenship could be obtained in fifty-two months. Based on our survey of seventy-five participants in 2009, the average length of time in Canada at the time of the survey differed only slightly for men (fifty-nine months) compared to women (fifty-six months) with forty-six out of fifty-one in Canada for fifty-two months as compared to twenty out of twenty-four women.

While citizenship is an important indicator of social inclusion, one is technically no longer eligible for settlement services once citizenship is obtained. Likewise, access to official language acquisition is restricted. More research on the implications of the new citizenship act on post-IRPA refugees is needed.

Another factor may be the feeling that Canadian citizenship comes at a cost. Since the nationality laws of neither Indonesian nor Malaysia—the countries where most Acehnese spent significant amounts of time—recognize dual citizenship, once an Acehnese becomes a Canadian citizen, a visa is required to return to Aceh. Although short-term visas (30 days or less) are available to Canadian citizens at the Indonesian border, respondents typically obtain a single-entry 60-day visitor visa in Malaysia or Singapore and may extend it a maximum of four times, or to 180 days total.⁷ One woman expressed regret over losing her Indonesian citizenship in order to become Canadian since it lessened the chance she would ever return to Aceh permanently:

If from the beginning we knew that we could travel [back to Aceh] with a travel document, perhaps my husband wouldn't have applied for [Canadian] citizenship. Perhaps we would just hold permanent residency. We tried for [Canadian] citizenship and my husband passed but I failed. Then due to the tragedy of my sister passing away, my mom asked me to come back [to Aceh] for a visit so we tried another way by visiting the [Indonesian] consulate. The consulate gave me a travel document so I could go back to visit Aceh. But now [since] my husband is already a [Canadian] citizen, I have to [try to pass the Canadian citizenship test] again to join [my husband].

(Interview #26, Woman, August 8, 2009, p. 8).

Of the UNHCR's three "durable solutions" (voluntary repatriation, local integration, or resettlement to a third country), resettlement is reserved for "situations where it is impossible for a person to go back home or remain in the

⁷ Indonesia makes an exception for children under eighteen; however, at the age of eighteen, they must choose citizenship to one country.

host country” (UNHCR 2010). Indeed, as Castles aptly reminds us, “the overwhelming majority of the world’s displaced people would prefer to return to their homes in safety and dignity. It is only those who have no hope of return who get resettled in the West” (2005, ix). Yet since the signing of the peace agreement, Acehnese do have the option of returning. One woman made the following remark:

There is an Indonesian proverb [which says] it’s still better to live in our own country than go abroad. If God permits and gives me a long life, I prefer to go back home for my retirement.

(Interview #28, Woman, August 8, 2009, p. 5)

Of fifty interviewees, nine say they plan to return to Aceh in the future and five say it is a possibility. Of the thirty-six respondents who plan to remain in Canada permanently, eight said Aceh is not yet safe enough to return; nine mentioned the lack of jobs in Aceh; and six said education for their children is prohibitively expensive in Aceh. The remaining thirteen mentioned only positive attributes of Canada and nothing about Aceh. Although two men mentioned the incompatibility between Canadian work schedules and Islamic prayer and five parents mentioned hopes to send their children to Islamic schools abroad, most cited the Canadian labour market as the primary reason behind their consideration of whether or not to leave Canada.

Notably, however, no respondent had a concrete plan to return permanently, although some implied that money was the only limiting factor: I want to move to another country. Maybe Malaysia or Saudi Arabia. Or maybe go back to Indonesia, I’m not sure yet. I am thinking about it but if I don’t have money, how can I open a business there? . . . If I have enough capital, maybe I will go back to Indonesia or Malaysia.

(Interview #50, Man, November 3, 2009, p. 2)

I have no intention to [return to] Aceh because I have no capital to start a business [but] if I have enough money, I might want to stay in Aceh . . . I'm planning to run a small business like a convenience store in Aceh.

(Interview #37, Man, August 18, 2009, p. 5–6).

This is an option for the significant number of Acehnese refugees living in Denmark, where immigrants are offered financial incentives in exchange for their right to Danish residency through the "Repatriation Act" (Danish Refugee Council 2002). Yet one man recounts his disapproval of a friends' acceptance of the offer:

After the tsunami, the Danish government offered [my Acehnese friends living in Denmark] about CAD\$25,000 [to move back to Aceh] and sign that they are not allowed to return to Denmark. Once you take that money, you can do business in Aceh, but you can't return to Denmark anymore. Only one [of my friends] did that, but [in my opinion] he made the wrong [decision] . . . it's very hard to go to another country! You need lots of money. If you [immigrate] by yourself you have to spend lots of money, like \$200,000. [If Canada offered the same option] I'd stay here [in Canada.]

(Interview #38, Man, August 18, 2009, p. 9)

These repatriation schemes are controversial and not a path we support for policy and practice in Canada. Instead, we should ask what Canadian citizenship means in the context of refugee resettlement. Citizenship is commonly defined by two component features: membership in a polity and a "reciprocal set of duties and rights" (Kivisto and Faist 2010, 227). As we have shown, a survival income (ironically equivalent to approximately half of the StatCan low income cut-off) may be a right in Canada through the provision of social assistance, but employment and acquisition of official language skills are not. Without these, active citizenship in Canadian society—the idea that new-

comers participate in this country's institutions, public life, and communities beyond simple membership in a polity—remains elusive.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Our research points to possible policy recommendations for both the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) and the Province of British Columbia. What follows are recommendations to enhance settlement outcomes, social inclusion, and economic survival based on the Acehese experience over the past five years.

1. CIC should develop, and where possible deliver, pre-departure English language training for refugees selected for resettlement.
2. CIC and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) should review the existing pre-departure orientation program (COA) to ensure that information provided is realistic and actually reflects the inevitable experiences faced by refugees during their first few years in Canada. For example, they should be briefed on the low level of income support they will receive and the likelihood of unemployment.
3. CIC and provincial bilateral agreements on immigration should extend the eligibility for language classes to include naturalized citizens to better respond to the need for greater social inclusion and labour market attachment.
4. The BC Government should review the current daycare inventory and expand spaces in various locations to improve access to language programs for refugee women.
5. CIC should fund research or undertake internal analysis to ascertain how the new citizenship act will impact refugees.

6. The BC Government should reinvest in tailored, project-based language training programs to support the retraining and greater labour market attachment opportunities for resettled refugees.
7. CIC should undertake a review of their destining policy to determine its effectiveness in meeting goals of integration. It should also obtain greater clarity for destining smaller ethno-specific refugee populations, considering in particular whether there is a minimal optimal number that should be considered as part of the destining policy.
8. Government assisted refugees, like the Acehnese, would greatly benefit from more early intervention support services during their first year in Canada. CIC should increase the funding to RAP so that it could be expanded to include additional services, particularly those required to address the changing needs and characteristics of refugees post-IRPA.
9. For several years CIC Refugee Affairs Branch has had a RAP National Working Group consisting of CIC National Headquarters (NHQ) and Regional representatives as well as four settlement sector reps. CIC NHQ should consider expanding the permanent membership to include a representative from the BC and Manitoba governments.
10. RAP service agencies, such as ISSofBC, would greatly benefit from an opportunity to share and learn from good practices happening across Canada. CIC, BC, and the Manitoba government should jointly fund a national conference on RAP with the goal of collectively enhancing the settlement outcomes identified through the Acehnese experience

Dissemination Event

On July 3, 2010, we took the policy implications noted above back to invited stakeholders from CIC, the Province of BC, and universities, as well as members of the Acehnese community at a dissemination event in Vancouver. The following additional policy implications came about as a result:

11. CIC should make every effort to amend sponsorship policy and reduce processing time once for the sponsorship of a spouse, even if the engagement/marriage occurs after arriving in Canada. This is particularly important for newcomers from Aceh for two reasons: 1) there was no refugee community from Aceh already in place upon their arrival in Vancouver; and 2) the initial group came from Malaysia, where most spent three to five years in detention before their resettlement to Canada. They had little to no opportunity to foster such relationships in these conditions.
12. The provision of space for community gatherings and network/support building would be very beneficial for GARs, particularly during the first year after arrival for those who are "new and few." This space could be used by multiple GAR groups during different times and would also serve as a contact point for ISSofBC and other service providers.
13. Access to credit proved to be difficult for many Acehnese entrepreneurs who were committed to opening new businesses. Collateral for loans was an obstacle, as was lack of schools to create a solid business plan. The greatest hurdle, however, was the interest expected by all lenders. As strictly observant Muslims, many are not permitted to pay interest and do not know how to negotiate their faith with market values here in Canada. Further research to probe possible partnerships or options would

be a prudent move toward better labour force attachment and business activity.

14. Linguistic/ethno-specific official language training should be considered for post-IRPA GARs, particularly those who are “new and few” and/or come from protracted refugee situations. Pre-departure delivery of such services in first countries of asylum would be efficient, both in terms of cost and in hastening labour force attachment once in Canada.

CONCLUSION

In 2003, Simich argued against the Canadian government’s decision to “destine,” or distribute, other groups of GARs out across multiple urban centres. Her main concern was that “while refugees are agents of their adaptation, the resettlement bureaucracy may operate at cross-purposes and constrain their resettlement” (2003, 588). In the case of the GARs who came to Metro Vancouver from Aceh via Malaysia, the decision to concentrate the community and settle its members together has proven popular with them and is perhaps a factor in retention. Further research should examine the successes of Canada’s destining policy. Overall, the Acehnese generally view their move to Canada as a positive one. Locating all Acehnese refugees in Metro Vancouver in 2004 has worked, and the community is close and active. While some have left for jobs in Calgary, others have returned for the weather and for Acehnese friends.

Yet, this is qualified by the barriers they face in acquiring English and getting good jobs, and, as we have shown, the two are intrinsically linked. Adequate jobs have been hard to find in light of the recession, and strong language skills have been neglected in order to pursue other goals. Unemployment and low English skills ultimately affect many aspects of settlement, including

the ability to come together in a community centre, the continued geographic concentration in Vancouver, and ultimately, a sense that everyone will stay in Canada. Family reunification policies are proving difficult to negotiate, as shown in an analysis of efforts to arrange marriages across borders despite very low incomes in Canada upon arrival and transportation loans to be repaid (see Brunner, forthcoming). Moreover, RAP rates of income assistance are low across the country, meaning that all GARs face a meagre start in Canada.

In outlining the struggles faced by the Acehnese, we aim to stress refugee resilience rather than pathology (Simich 2003). Our interviews included moments of joy and stories of success as well as those of struggle and hardship. Yet although these former refugees, now citizens and permanent residents, may be resilient, they still require some ongoing settlement support, access to employment, and English language classes, much of which is no longer available to many of them in Metro Vancouver due to their new citizenship status.

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APPENDIX 1: SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. What is your age? (Also record sex.)
2. Where do you live? What is the postal code and city?
3. When (month and year) did you first arrive in Canada?
4. What is your current status in Canada (Permanent Resident? Citizen? Other?)?
5. Did you come to Canada as a refugee?
 - a. If so, were you previously in Malaysia? If so, for how long? When was the last time you were in Aceh before landing in Canada?
 - b. If no, did you come to Canada through the family reunification process? (If so, what is your relation to the person who sponsored you?)
6. Do you hope to bring anyone here through family reunification? (If so, who?)
7. How do you get news about the world? (Newspapers, TV, internet, friends? Which one(s)? And in which languages?)
8. Do you attend mosque? If so, in Surrey or Vancouver?
9. Do you visit the Acehese Community Centre on a regular basis?
10. Do you participate in any community or social activities other than mosque or the Acehese Community Centre with others from Aceh (sports, shopping, cooking, etc.)?
11. Do you participate in any community or social activities other than mosque or the Acehese Community Centre with others not from Aceh? (If so, who? How did you meet them?)

12. Do you have any children? (If so, do you attend parent-teacher meetings at your children's school from time to time? Have you met any other parents with whom you talk at school? After school?)
11. Do you have a paid job? (If so, what position and who is your employer? How many hours per week and at what rate of pay?)
12. What language do you speak at home? (elaborate)
13. What level of ELSA training have you finished, if any?

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Preamble: In 2005 we conducted a study with ISS about the arrival of the Acehnese community in Canada, your housing situation at the time, and your education and language programs. These questions follow up from those; we want to know what has changed since 2005 and how you are faring.

1. Employment/training/language

- a. Did you participate in our focus group discussion in 2005? Either way, what were you were doing (for work or school) in 2005? How have things changed since you arrived in Canada?
- b. Describe your experiences with ELSA classes and learning English—for example, if you are no longer taking ELSA classes, why not?
- c. Describe your experiences finding employment. If you are employed, do you enjoy your job? Do you plan to look for a new job in the future? Have you been affected by the global recession?
- d. Are you still paying the transportation loan?

2. Prior to arrival in Canada

- a. Did you spend time in detention in Malaysia? Are you comfortable answering a few questions about that time? [if no, skip to last two questions in this section]
- b. If yes, where were you detained and for how long?
- c. What did you while you were in detention? (work?)
- d. How were you treated? (probe treatment by authorities, availability of food, living conditions)

- e. Did you have any communication with family members while in detention?
- f. Did any health issues arise? (What kind? In Aceh or Malaysia?)
- g. Did you have medical care?
- h. Did your time in Malaysia affect your health?
- i. When did you learn that you would travel to Canada? What, if any information did you learn about Canada before leaving? Do you have any advice for the Canadian government to change the pre-departure orientation program?
- j. How would you rate your current state of health: 1. Excellent; 2. Good; 3. Okay; 4. Poor; 5. Extremely Bad

3. Housing

- a. Can you describe your arrival in Canada? How did you feel upon arriving? What did you do during those first weeks after arriving? Compared to your feelings then, how do you feel now?
- b. How many times have you moved residency since you arrived in Canada?
- c. Where are you living now (city and postal code)?
- d. Why did you choose this place?
- e. Do you rent or own this home? If renting, what rent do you pay per month?
- f. Are there other Acehnese nearby?
- g. With whom are you living? (note number of family members and relation of each to respondent)

4. Family

- a. One of the issues raised in 2005 was the difference in the number of Acehnese men versus the much smaller number of women. What have Acehnese men done to solve this issue? (Has anyone been able to marry women from Aceh and sponsor them?)
- b. Are you married/divorced/single?
- c. Where and when did you get married? (Canada/Aceh/Malaysia)
- d. Have you been back to Aceh since you came to Canada? (If so, when, for how long)? If so, what did you do while you were there?
- e. Do you have family members in other countries, other than Aceh or Canada?
- f. Do you send money to family? To family in Aceh? How often do you send money?

5. The future

- a. Now that peace has come to Aceh, do you want to return? Will you? To visit? To live? Why or why not?
- b. What has been your biggest challenge in Canada so far?
- c. Which achievement in Canada are you most proud of?
- d. What would you change about the Canadian government assisted refugee resettlement process for future groups?