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**Waiting for a Wife:**  
***Transnational Marriages and the Social  
Dimensions of Refugee 'Integration'***

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# **Metropolis British Columbia**

## ***Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Diversity***

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# METROPOLIS BRITISH COLUMBIA

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## Working Paper Series

### **WAITING FOR A WIFE: TRANSNATIONAL MARRIAGES AND THE SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF REFUGEE 'INTEGRATION'**

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## ABSTRACT

While much research addresses the economic dimensions of refugee integration, few researchers explore the social. This paper addresses the gap, examining the social dimensions of refugee belonging and integration through the case of Acehese refugees resettled in Vancouver between 2004 and 2006. We report findings based on research conducted a few years after resettlement. Findings suggest that more consideration should be given to policies designed to enhance social integration among refugees.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper probes and enhances understandings of the social dimensions of refugee 'integration' by focusing on the resettlement of a small group of predominantly young male government-assisted refugees (GARs) originally from Aceh, Indonesia in Vancouver, Canada. Their experiences with forced migration, extended detention, and Canada's resettlement and family reunification policies dramatically shaped the circumstances of their settlement, creating a tension between state 'integration' goals and personal aspirations to start families through marriages with Acehese women abroad. We demonstrate that working towards, saving, and waiting for such relationships to materialize may impede 'integration' aims in Canada. Although Canadian immigration and refugee policy aims to facilitate 'integration' with Canadian society, it may also unintentionally stall this process at a cost to the refugees, many who are now Canadian citizens. This paper argues that the social dimensions of 'integration' are a two-way process, and shows that Canadian policies to enhance settlement and social integration of refugees from Aceh, Indonesia can work at cross-purposes with policies of family reunification.

## CONTEXT: WANTING WIVES ON THE ROAD TO INTEGRATION

Of the estimated 15.2 million refugees in the world, the Canadian government resettles up to 8,000 individuals annually through its government-assisted refugee (GAR) program (UNHCR, 2010). Since the passage of the 2002 Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA), Canada selects these individuals based on their need for protection as determined by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Between 1999 and 2005, over 300,000 Acehnese were displaced within and beyond the region's borders to escape danger in the province (Drexler, 2008; Waizenegger and Hyndman, 2010). 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 Acehnese – and, in particular, young men – fled to Malaysia, where a similar language and culture provided a second home (Nah and Bunnell, 2005). In 2003, the UNHCR office in Malaysia estimated the presence of between 8,000 – 9,000 Acehnese 'of concern' living undocumented in Malaysia (UNHCR Malaysia, 2003). Due to the urgent need of Acehnese refugees languishing in Malaysian detention centres, Canada agreed to resettle a particular group of 154 Acehnese individuals – predominantly single men but also some women and children – entirely in Metro Vancouver, British Columbia between 2004 and 2006 (ISSofBC 2007).

Research probing initial settlement of Acehnese refugees in 2005 – a year after most had arrived – found a significant gender imbalance skewed towards primarily single, young men in their late 20s and early 30s to be a “particularly salient issue” in the final stages of the study (Hyndman and McLean, 2006, p. 356).<sup>1</sup> Of the 70 surveys completed in 2005, 66 respondents were male; the

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<sup>1</sup>We use the term gender imbalance (the ratio of women to men) and sex ratio (the number of females compared to males in a population) somewhat interchangeably here, despite the differences between sex and gender. We take gender to be socially constructed as a reference to men's and women's identities and relations to one another, and sex to be a biological reference to females and males.

average age was 29 and only 18 of the 66 men were married (Hyndman and McLean, 2006). Research participants expressed an explicit desire “to establish families in Canada” yet “noted that they did not speak sufficient English to meet other women [in Canada], nor have strong ties to people beyond the Acehnese community because of English language skills” (McLean, Friesen and Hyndman, 2006, p. 17). In a community feedback event, participants asked the Canadian government representative present to increase refugee resettlement numbers of women from Aceh. However, the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, or GAM) rebels and the Indonesian government in 2005 brought relative peace to Aceh, an abrupt end to Acehnese resettlement in Canada, and lingering uncertainty regarding their concerns.

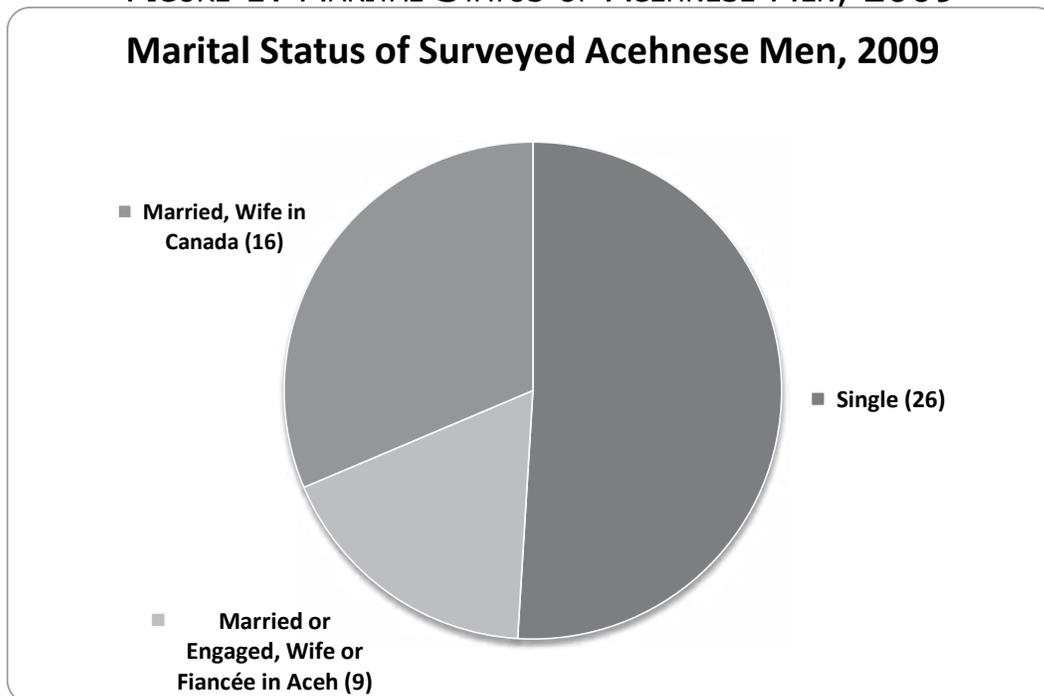
In 2009 – five years after the arrival of most Acehnese GARs in Canada –approximately 73 adult men and 25 adult women lived in Metro Vancouver. The authors of this paper conducted 75 surveys (with 51 men and 24 women) and 50 semi-structured interviews (with 28 men and 22 women) as a follow-up to the 2005 study. In an earlier paper, we outlined our methods and ascertained overall settlement outcomes in the areas of housing, official language acquisition, employment, and participation in Canadian society among both men and women (Brunner, Hyndman and Friesen, 2010).

In this paper, we focus on single men and processes of social ‘integration.’ We define and discuss ‘integration’ in some depth below, but use scare quotes around the term to qualify its meaning as a state-directed policy goal of refugee resettlement. This is not to negate its importance, but to qualify its antecedents and authors. To us, integration is a proxy for refugee belonging in Canada and participation in all facets of Canadian society. For the refugees with whom we worked, many who are now citizens, coming to Canada was less about integration (the need to ‘fit in’) than protection (the need to be

safe). Hence, we also aim to balance the motivations of both the state and the refugees in our analysis.

Among the 51 men surveyed in 2009, the average age was 35 years, and 16 had a spouse in Canada. Of these 16, only one was married in Canada (to a non-Acehnese Indonesian woman who immigrated to Canada through the Live-in Caregiver Program). The rest married before coming to Canada and sponsored their wives through the GAR program. Eight men married Acehnese women, and one got engaged since arriving in Canada; but all of these men remain separated geographically from partners, still waiting to come to Canada. At the time of the survey, none had yet been successful in bringing an Acehnese spouse to Canada, although many were in the midst of trying.<sup>2</sup> Two men were married when they initially arrived in Canada but became widowers when their wives died in the 2004 tsunami while waiting to come to Canada. The remaining (24) men have never married. As our last paper suggested, several said they could not afford to do so (Brunner et al., 2010).

FIGURE 1: MARITAL STATUS OF ACEHNESE MEN, 2009



<sup>2</sup> At the time of the dissemination event in July 2010, the first sponsored Acehnese spouse had just arrived in Canada.

Source: Participant Surveys.

The 33 men surveyed who arrived in Canada unattached fled Aceh to Malaysia as young, unmarried men. They had few opportunities to get engaged or marry, especially once they were detained by the Malaysian authorities. As the 2009 surveys reveal, the men spent an average of four years in detention before their resettlement to Canada, with the minimum time in Malaysia being one year and the maximum 12 years. Many travelled back and forth between Aceh and Malaysia several times, given the proximity of regions on either side of the Strait of Malacca. Although we do not assume that every Acehnese man in Canada aspires to marry women, among those interviewed, the desire to marry and start families proved significant.<sup>3</sup> Five years after their arrival, the initial excitement of life in Canada had been replaced with a sense of waiting and angst among most of the single men we interviewed.

The first problem [for us] is the lack of women. Acehnese women.  
(Man, interview #18 p. 8, 07/28/09).

[The gender imbalance] is still difficult because now I still feel like I really want to have a wife from Aceh. If I can. I don't know.  
(Man, interview #47 p. 5, 09/27/09).

For these men, finding a spouse in Canada remains difficult, and most see the sponsorship of a wife from Aceh through a transnational marriage as their only option. Marrying and sponsoring an Acehnese spouse, however, requires several things: Canadian citizenship and money to make the trip home and pay for the wedding; flexible commitments to language training, work, and housing; and additional remittances to support the fiancée during the process.

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<sup>3</sup> We recognize the potential pitfalls of heteronormativity by focusing on marriage. Although gender-neutral terms such as 'spouse' were used by the interviewer, they were likely understood in heteronormative terms (e.g. 'wife'). At the time of writing, homosexuality is illegal in Aceh under a provincial bylaw (Amnesty International, 2009), although this of course does not mean homosexuality does not exist there. Throughout the research, all male respondents who were married or discussed their desire to get married referred to women.

In what follows, we discuss the complexities of refugee 'integration' and how it applies to the experiences of single male Acehnese seeking spouses in Canada. We then turn to the ways in which the alternative – marrying and sponsoring spouses in Aceh through transnational marriages – affects other social and legal 'integration' goals. Finally, we highlight the costliness of the resulting waiting period for the GARs and offer conclusions.

## 'INTEGRATION' AMONG ACEHNESE SINGLE MEN

### *The complexity of 'integration'*

Despite its frequent usage in government, media, settlement NGOs, and academia, the term 'integration' is rarely defined and there is "no single, generally accepted definition, theory or model of immigrant and refugee integration" (Castles, Korac, Vasta and Vertovec, 2002, p.114; van Tubergen, 2006). The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) describes the inconsistency in reference to "equal opportunities and rights for all human beings":

Social integration is a complex idea, which means different things to different people. To some, it is a positive goal, implying equal opportunities and rights for all human beings. In this case, becoming more integrated implies improving life chances. To others, however, increasing integration may conjure up the image of an unwanted imposition of conformity. And, to still others, the term in itself does not necessarily imply a desirable or undesirable state at all. It is simply a way of describing the established patterns of human relations in any given society (UNRISD 1994, p. 4).

The inconsistency of this definition contributes to the "great deal of disagreement about what constitutes integration, how one determines whether strategies for promoting integration are successful, or what the features of an inte-

grated society are" in relation to migration (Atfield, Brahmhatt, and O'Toole, 2007, p. 12).

Castles et al. explain that the broadness of the concept makes a precise definition difficult, contributing to its controversy and "hot debate" (2002, p. 114). The authors also question whether integration functions as a 'two way' process conceptually or in practice. They note that "popular attitudes and policies often seem to be based on the assumption that integration *is a one-way process*" in which "migrants are expected to integrate into the existing culture or society without any reciprocal accommodation" with the "connotation of assimilation in which immigrants are expected to discard their culture, traditions and language" (Castles et al., 2002, p. 113, emphasis in original). They add that, at least in the UK, the NGO/community sector considers 'integration' particularly "top-down" and problematic (p. 114).

Still, others suggest that 'integration' be used to stress a genuine "two way interchange of culture and understanding," implying adaptation on the part of both the 'host' community and its institutions and newcomers. These scholars suggest that integration "that begins with arrival and ends when refugees are in an equal position to the majority" (Phillimore and Goodson, 2008, p. 309).

In a Canadian context where the Multicultural Act and the Federal Charter of Rights and Freedoms "institutionalize not only respect for difference but also the rights of being different" (Ley, 2005, p. 7), the term 'integration' often references a desirable policy goal in explicit contrast with more assimilationist modes of incorporation. As Yu, Ouellet, and Warmington put it, "most [Canadian academics and policy makers] generally accept that 'integration,' as opposed to one-way assimilation, outright marginalization, or segregation, is desired" (2007, p. 17). However, it is not always clear if policy makers em-

ploy 'integration' *in contrast to* (as Yu et al. suggests) or simply *in place of* assimilation.

Critics of the term argue that 'integration' is, in practice, just another word for 'assimilation' and imposes an unfair expectation that newcomers adapt to the norms of a receiving society. Some distinguish multiculturalism from 'integration,' describing multiculturalism itself as "an approach to inclusion that either constitutes an alternative to assimilation, a complement to it, or a new version of assimilation" (Kivisto and Faist, 2010, p. 163) that is not captured by the term 'integration.' Ley makes this distinction in his description of the recent "erosion" of multiculturalism in Canada (2005, p. 7):

The federal and provincial governments have downsized, and in some cases closed multicultural offices, settlement benefits for immigrants have been cut back, and government rhetoric has moved from multiculturalism towards a normative language of social cohesion and integration, positions that could easily blend into a disguised assimilationism...Even in the nation where [multiculturalism] was first enunciated and most fully institutionalized, multicultural policy is on the defensive" (2005, p. 7-8).

In Ley's view, 'integration' is not a multicultural value but rather 'disguised assimilationism.'

Since 'integration' is so vaguely used, 'refugee integration' is nebulous at best, and many users fail to make the distinction between 'integration' among economic or family class immigrants and those who come as refugees. Although the difference between 'refugee integration' and the 'integration' of immigrants is not always made clear, Yu et al. point out that the distinction is significant for at least three reasons and thus "warrant[s] more studies focusing on refugees" and the meaning of 'integration' (2007, p. 18). Firstly, unlike other forms of immigration, refugee resettlement programs are explicitly *humanitarian* rather than *economic* endeavours. While Canada selects

most immigrants based on their ability to establish (either based on their own economic potential or the presence of economic support in the form of family members), refugees are selected principally based on their need for protection (Yu et al., 2007). Secondly, refugee migration is inherently rooted in a fear of persecution and likely involves more trauma than that of immigrants. Yu et al. stress these differences to show that refugees have unique and expected 'integration' challenges. A third difference related specifically to resettled refugees is that, as opposed to asylum seekers or privately sponsored refugees, the selection and settlement of refugees from overseas is done at the discretion of the state. Federal governments are thus responsible for the 'integration' of government-assisted refugees as mandated by the UNHCR.

Canadian legislation and policy does not explicitly define successful refugee 'integration' (Pressé and Thomson, 2007). However, Canada implicitly commits to provide "the appropriate reception and integration of resettled refugees" under the UNHCR's Multilateral Framework of Understandings on Resettlement (Pressé and Thomson, 2007, p. 96). Yu et al. contend "most scholars and policy makers in Canada and elsewhere agree" with the UK Home Office's 2003 description of refugee 'integration' as a "dynamic, multi-faceted two-way process which requires adaptation on the part of the newcomers, but also the society of destination" (2007, p. 17). Indeed, in *Refugee Resettlement: An International Handbook to Guide Reception and Integration*, the UNHCR defines 'integration' similarly as,

...a mutual, dynamic, multifaceted and on-going process. From a refugee perspective, integration requires a preparedness to adapt to the lifestyle of the host society without having to lose one's own cultural identity. From the point of view of the host society, it requires a willingness for communities to be welcoming and responsive to refugees and for public institutions to meet the needs of a diverse population (2002, p. 12).

These two oft-quoted definitions still leave vague notions as to how to enact policies of 'integration.' Despite its lack of a precise definition, Canada identifies 'integration' as an important policy aim of the Canadian state in relation to refugee settlement. Thus, the need to interrogate the meaning of refugee 'integration' and the government's role in its success is particularly timely for Canada. Refugees resettled in Canada receive an income supplement provided by the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) for up to a year, after which the Canadian government expects them to utilize services for immigrants more generally (Hiebert and Sherrell, 2009). There are many challenges during a resettled refugee's first year in Canada, however – particularly with sometimes competing goals of language acquisition, self-sufficiency through employment, and cultural adjustment – and it is not clear which the Canadian state considers most important (Brunner et al., 2010).

Since IRPA, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) "recognizes that current resettlement programming may not adequately meet the unique and changing needs of refugees" (Pressé and Thomson, 2007, 96). The barriers refugees face in securing and maintaining adequate employment, housing, education, and language are well-documented (for example, see Yu et al., 2007; Sherrell and ISSofBC, 2009; Hiebert and Sherrell, 2009). The economic measures of refugee 'integration' show lower incomes than the Canadian average (Hiebert, 2009), poorer housing conditions (Sherrell and ISSofBC, 2009), and less competence in English or French as our study found.

Far less is known about the *social* life of refugees because such relations are difficult to quantify. And yet research shows that social ties function as mechanisms for support during refugees' initial settlement in Canada (Simich, 2003). Compared with other classes of immigrants arriving in Canada with existing human and/or financial capital, "one of the few resources available to

most refugees is social capital in the form of social support networks" (Lamba and Krahn, 2003, p. 336). Yet for refugees such as the Acehnese who are 'new and few' – that is, arriving in Canada in small numbers without an already existing group of 'like-ethnic' individuals – the lack of social support networks may present an additional hurdle to their participation in Canadian society (Hyndman and McLean, 2006). Indeed, Canada piloted post-IRPA group resettlement in 2003 with 780 Sudanese and Somali refugees from Kenyan refugee camps not only to reduce processing time, but also to "create ready-made support systems for arriving refugees" (Labman, 2007, p. 42). The same program brought approximately 1,000 Afghans from Central Asia in 2004 and 810 Burmese refugees from Thailand in late 2006 and early 2007 (Labman, 2007). Neither researchers nor policy makers can predict the long-term implications of Canada's state-planned refugee resettlement programs for refugees from protracted situations. We return now to the case of the Acehnese men in order to discuss how the social dynamics of their resettlement affected their 'integration.'

### *Bonds and belonging as qualitative measures of integration*

During the research with single Acehnese Canadian men, we heard repeatedly that they were waiting for the moment when they could afford to travel to Aceh and marry an Acehnese woman using a Canadian passport. This was clearly an important goal and issue. Our purpose in studying marriage choices among Acehnese in Canada, however, is not to imply that marrying an Acehnese spouse indicates either a path or an impediment to 'integration'. Rather, our objective is to note the effects of the absence of partners, as articulated by our participants. The desire to form bonds with – and, in this case, marry – someone from the same ethnic group who speaks the same

language and shares the same interpretation of faith is not uncommon. Ager and Strang's (2008) distinction between social *bonds* (connections linking members of a group) and social *bridges* (connections between groups) is useful in measuring 'integration.' Their research shows the maintenance of ethnic identity through connections with 'like-ethnic groups' (social bonds) "in no way logically limit[s] wider integration into society" (p. 186) and is instead associated with "various benefits contributing towards effective integration" (p. 178). Although social bridges are also usually positive, in Ager and Strang's words, "involvement with one's own ethnic group (bonding capital) influence[s] 'quality of life' independently of involvement with the local community (bridging capital)" (p. 178).

In their discussion of social bridges, Ager and Strang make another important distinction between those reflecting 'friendliness' (or a "lack of conflict and sense of acceptance") and "more intense involvement with the local people," or connections (p. 180). Although 'friendliness' bridges are linked with safety, security, and positive self-judged 'quality of life,' it is the latter form of bridge which is "crucial in bringing longer-term social and economic benefits to a community" such as employment opportunities (p. 180). In our study, both men and women were quick to describe 'friendliness' as one respondent does here:

I feel happy in my life because the people [in Canada] are very friendly, even at work...It's not only your employer or a sub-contractor. At the jobsite, we are team players. I feel very happy. Wow. If you need help from other workers [and ask] 'Hey, can you give me a hand please?' They just help right away...In Hong Kong [and Malaysia where I worked,] when I asked 'Excuse me sir, can I ask [a question]?' they didn't even look at me. Here [in Canada when I say] 'Excuse me sir?' [they say] 'Yes? How can I help you?' That's the happiest thing for me.

(Man, interview #45 p. 6, 09/13/09).

Although Malaysia offers more similarities to Acehnese culture and language, cultural views of class and cultural differences prevented the formation of social bridges in the workplace. On this level, 'integration' may proceed at different rates based on the stratification of the society rather than the cultural similarities. However, a dearth of the latter 'more intense' social bridges was less common in the interviews, and descriptions of significant social bridges were nonexistent among single men:

It's really hard to find a friend [in Canada] because I don't know how to speak [English] very well. Maybe if my English was very good I [could] make a lot of friends...I need to make a friend from a country [other than Aceh]...[One of my Acehnese] friends has a lot of friends in Canada...[but] my English is not really good so I feel a little bit – < sigh >  
(Man, interview #39 p. 10, 08/18/09).

This statement stands in stark contrast to respondents who talked about having Malaysian friends in Canada and who hung photographs of Malaysia on their walls. When asked what advice he would give to future refugees, another man responded:

[Future refugees should] socialize and make friends with [people outside their ethnic community]...I don't do it but I think it's good... people basically need friends to talk to, so it should be [like that]  
(Man, interview #46 p. 4-5, 09/27/09).

This respondent *wants* to form social bridges but is not able to, which is a different situation than *choosing* to not interact significantly with a majority culture. The surveys reflect this on a larger level. Of the 75 Acehnese men and women surveyed, 70 reported regular attendance at the ACCS Community Centre (at least once a week) and the remaining five attended at least monthly, one indicator of well-developed social bonds.<sup>4</sup> Social bridges in general were

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<sup>4</sup> The organization of the Acehnese Canadian Community Society (ACCS) and the initial rental of a community space took place before the late-2000s recession when the majority of Acehnese men were able to find

much weaker, with 11 men out of 51 reporting they do 'no' activities with non-Acehnese people. Those who do activities with non-Acehnese people listed playing in soccer tournaments with other Muslim communities, discussing job opportunities, and eating and talking with co-workers at work. A minority (less than 5 each) mentioned talking to neighbours, fellow public transportation passengers, and people at Muslim celebrations or in coffee shops, while community leaders mentioned meeting with people from other immigrant groups to discuss community-building. Among women, 8 out of 24 surveyed reported doing 'no' activities with non-Acehnese people. Yet women who did participate in activities with non-Acehnese people cited positive and potentially 'more intense' social bridges through drop-in parenting programs at community centres and neighbourhood houses, shopping, food banks, and volunteering at their children's schools.

What does this mean for family and the community's gender imbalance? Based on Ager and Strang's framework (2008), men in particular have strong social bonds with each other, but weak social bridges beyond the community, leaving few opportunities to meet and develop relationships with unmarried women in Canada. Indeed, male respondents noted the lack of opportunities to meet women as a major hindrance to their aspirations to start a family. This is especially significant in the context of the gender-segregated nature of Acehnese events. Although two men mentioned meeting and dating non-Acehnese women in English Language Services for Adults (ELSA) classes, none of the respondents was enrolled in ELSA at the time of the study. Additional indicators of language, 'cultural competency,' and conflicting values, however, complicate the picture.

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relatively high-paying jobs in the construction industry. Since a significant number of Acehnese men have lost jobs, the successful continuation of a community space is up in the air. At the time of writing, the community is only able to afford a basement space, which is half of what they were previously renting. To read the ACCS Constitution, see appendix G.

*Gender Imbalance, Marriage, and the social integration of resettled refugees*

Very little research examines marriage, gender imbalance, and social integration in the context of refugee resettlement. Social geographies of family relations in general and gender issues specifically remain understudied in refugee studies (Indra, 1989; Shami, 1996; Sherrell and Hyndman, 2006; Hyndman, 2010). Sex ratios in Canadian refugee resettlement policy are known to historically favour men even when spouses and dependents are considered, as shown in two studies (Gordon and Boyd, 1994; Dauvergne, Angeles, and Huang, 2006). Although this gap has closed in recent years, especially with the increased protection mandate of IRPA passed in 2002 which reduced the importance of admissibility criteria for acceptance, sex ratios vary widely based on country of origin.

In the case of Acehnese resettled in Vancouver, men outnumber women acutely, and all of the Acehnese women we spoke to [and reportedly all who live in Greater Vancouver] were already married. The extreme gender imbalance among the Acehnese remains unusual but reflects the conditions of flight and detention in Malaysia from which they came. Predictably, detention inhibited their contact with family and friends.

One exception to the lack of research on the impact of sex ratios is the resettlement of Sudanese refugees in the US, Australia, Canada, and elsewhere. In a sample of 2,660 Sudanese refugees in the US from 1990-1997, for example, three men were resettled for every woman (Shandy, 2007). The resettlement of the so-called 'Lost Boys of Sudan' continued well into the 2000s, with very few 'Lost Girls' being resettled during the same period (Grabska, 2010). In this case, pressures to sustain a connection to 'home' and retain an ethnic identity led to a preference among resettled Sudanese men to marry

women from within their clan (Grabska, 2010; Shandy, 2007). Although the initial gender imbalance limited the number of suitable candidates for Sudanese men to marry in the West from the start, there was an additional perception among Sudanese men settled abroad that Sudanese girls who had migrated to the West were "too free and too open" and thus not compatible with the men's "very traditional" values and desires to both "control" their wives and "serve" and "understand" their parents (Grabska, 2010, p. 487). A significant number of Sudanese men who had resettled abroad returned to Kakuma Refugee Camp in Northern Kenya to marry and sponsor Sudanese women who had not yet gone abroad.

As in Sudan, gender norms and expectations of marriage in Aceh differ widely from those in Canada. Since the creation of the modern Indonesian nation-state, gender relations have been reconstructed so that "on the one hand Aceh is represented by Acehnese Muslim nationalists as having a long tradition of 'strong, fighting women' and on the other hand...by the Indonesian state and military since the New Order under Suharto as the cradle of 'Islamic fundamentalism'" (Siapno, 2002, p. 1). Partially due to its geographic location, Aceh is the probable location of Islam's initial establishment in Southeast Asia and remains religiously conservative relative to the rest of Indonesia. After the Dutch transferred control over Aceh to the Indonesian state in 1949, the Acehnese waged an Islamic rebellion under the name of Darul Islam (Islamic State) (Drexler, 2008); ultimately, this conflict resulted in Aceh's designation as a special territory of Indonesia with some degree of autonomy.

Since implementing partial Sharia (Islamic) law in the early 2000's, the province has increasingly enforced punishment for acts such as drinking alcohol, contact between unmarried adults, and sex outside marriage ("Indonesia's Aceh passes stoning law," 2009). Polygamy is also legal not only in Aceh,

but throughout Indonesia. Enforcement of Sharia law – implemented often in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami – remains controversial within Aceh (Waizenegger and Hyndman, 2009). As Siapno writes, “within Islamic communities, there is a conflict between the apologists who say that Islam is a liberatory force for women and on the other [activists] who argue that Islamic fundamentalism is misogynist” (2002, p. 1-2). Still, the law and cultural norms it embodies reflect an incompatibility with the Canadian definitions of family. Despite expressed interest in marrying ‘Canadian women’, explanations similar to those among Sudanese men are found in the Acehnese men’s explanations of why they are unable to find a spouse in Canada:

I like white girls but when I talk to white girls the conversation doesn’t go smoothly...That’s why I’m not happy in [Canada.] If you want to have a white girl, you have to go to a club and drink alcohol...it’s unacceptable in my culture. I tried but it didn’t work...I’m thinking to get a girl from my culture, because [in Aceh] when men come home from work the food is already on the table so the husband just eats, and if the husband gets mad, his wife never talks back or complains. This is my culture...If I can find a white girl I will not go back to Aceh, but it’s so difficult to find a local girl  
(Man, interview #18 p. 4-5, p. 8, 07/28/09).<sup>5</sup>

The absence of family ties in Canada may also be contributing to the difficulty single men face in finding a wife, reflecting Ager and Strang’s (2008, p. 178) findings that proximity to family, or lack thereof, “played a large part” among refugees in feeling settled. In their study, single men “pointed out that traditionally it would be their family’s responsibility to find them a wife [and] without family, they were anxious about how they could ever get married” (2008, p. 178). The following respondent captures this sentiment as well:

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<sup>5</sup> Since we employed a *Bahasa* Indonesia interpreter for the interviews and the first language of the respondents is Acehnese, here it is necessary to problematize research based on interpretation and note the dangers of (mis)translations. In addition, the association between ‘being Canadian’ and ‘whiteness’ points to a larger discussion of race and the understanding of Canadian identity; see Brunner, 2010, p. 15-16.

In Aceh it's easier [than in Canada to find a wife]. Here you have to have a personal relationship with a girl, then after living together for a while you decide if you want to get married. In Aceh the parents or family members just introduce you and...it's not based on a relationship. If the man likes the girl, they get married. Easy. There's no need for a slow process...here you can test the water. You can test if you fit together...because here [Canadians] have a perception that you marry only one time, so when they get married they really get together. In my culture it's different. I can have another wife  
(Man, interview #33, p. 6, 08/12/09).

One important observation here is that the 'social division of labour' – i.e. the role of matching young men and women for marriage – is done by parents, not by the brides or grooms themselves. The loss of such supports in Canada and the shift in responsibility must be considered in the Canadian context. A second important observation is the distinct cultural differences in terms of understandings of marriage.

In the interviews, respondents often interpreted the phrase 'finding a spouse in Canada' as 'finding a white girl.' In probing this assumption, we asked some interviewees if they would consider marrying Muslim women and/or Southeast Asian women in Canada. Respondents said that mother tongue and language ability were additional barriers:

First I want to marry someone who has the same religion as me [but also] the same culture and the same language. Right? Because it's easier to communicate between wife and husband. That's why I want to get married to an Acehnese person  
(Man, interview #25 p. 8, 08/07/09).

We want to marry [non-Acehnese women] and some of us try, but communication [is] a problem. Because of the different culture, it's not easy to understand each other. In our culture, women can work or to earn money and help family, but usually the woman is second in the family. The husband is number one. This helps to manage the house. The wife takes care of the kids. The husband just tries to find money to live and to make the family better. That's why if we try to marry [non-Acehnese] people there's a problem. But for sure it's good,

because if we marry between different nations, in the future [the children will be] different and that would be nice. We try to do that but the first problem is [a] misunderstanding [we encounter when] speaking. Our English problem  
(Man, interview #1 p. 9, 06/26/09).

Here, the latter respondent subsumes a particular gender division of labour to declared cultural norms in Aceh. He described his 'wife' as someone who stays at home and attends to domestic duties, yet the first respondent is more nuanced: for him the choice of an Acehnese partner is about shared customs and better communication.

Only one man revealed a sustained relationship with a non-Acehnese woman in Canada. This particular man spoke relatively good English and was the only individual to live by himself in a neighbourhood with no other Acehnese. Nonetheless, he appeared conflicted about his future:

I have a girlfriend in Aceh and I have a girlfriend [from China] in Canada also... I don't know [what to do] because everything is different. I need to really, really think about which way is better...I need to respect [the Acehnese community.] I need to do [what is good.] If I do something not good, if they know – my religion is different. So if I have a girlfriend from a different country, if that girl wants to come to my religion, maybe I will get married. But if not, most people [won't accept it.] [With] different religions it's very hard  
(Man, interview #39, p. 6, 08/19/09).

Men's expectations generally contrasted with the perspectives of married Acehnese women who lived in Canada for three or four years. One woman recounts her story:

I want work and [to get] an education. I need both, but for right now until my daughter grows up maybe it is better to stay home...but [work or school is] better than being bored at home, right? For me it's very boring staying at home...The first time [I went to work] my husband said 'No, just stay home, look after my kid.' I said, 'If I stay at home I'm just cooking and cleaning every day, and then shopping, spending money'...

I think I can just help a little bit [by working] and then my English also can also improve outside [the home] and I can make friends, so it's fine  
(Woman, interview #29 p. 4, 08/09/09).

In general, women spoke positively of working outside the home in Canada. Acehnese women also described changes in their sense of independence in relation to their husbands based on examples of other women witnessed while in Canada:

The first time I arrived here I felt it was so hard. I did not know how to communicate, did not know where to go, I did not have the courage to go by myself. Everywhere my husband went I had to follow. I always needed my husband's guidance...but now I feel that I have more courage. I can go everywhere by myself. [It changed because] in my mind, it's impossible to always follow the husband. Why can other people make it? Why can't I? I have to try also. If other people can do it, I will try. I can do it also  
(Woman, interview #3 p. 4, 07/12/09).

For both men and women respondents, shifts in cultural norms are selective. Some Acehnese norms, such as patriarchal views of marriage, are praised and retained by several of the Acehnese-Canadian men, while others, such as hierarchical power structures in employment settings, are criticized when compared to Canadian norms. If integration requires refugees to "adapt to the lifestyle of the host society without having to lose one's own cultural identity" (UNHCR, 2002), then this balance must be understood. What needs preserving and what needs adapting are not always clear.

While the provincial government of British Columbia has not specified a gender equity dimension to its settlement policies, the government of Québec has. For example, one government document explicitly states that "to integrate into Québec society is to be prepared to know and respect its common values" clearly outlined in a document entitled "Values and foundations of

Québec society" (Immigration-Québec, 2009). These values include the statements that "women and men are equal...They have the same rights and the same obligations" and "parental responsibilities towards their children are the same" (para. 1, 3). The federal department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada is not as straightforward. A 2010 report contained the following description of integration:

Canada's approach to integration is one that encourages a process of mutual accommodation and adjustment by both newcomers and the larger society. Newcomers' understanding of and respect for basic Canadian values, coupled with Canadians' understanding of and respect for the cultural diversity that newcomers bring to Canada, is fundamental to this approach. As well, the cooperation of governments, stakeholders and other players, such as employers and volunteers, in providing newcomers with the support they need for successful economic and social integration helps Canada realize the full benefits of immigration (CIC, 2010c, p. 29).

In this case, Canada recognizes the "mutual accommodation and adjustment by both newcomers and the larger society," setting it apart from 'assimilation' as favoured elsewhere. Yet it also expects newcomers to respect "basic Canadian values" without stating what those values are (as opposed to listing a specific document such as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms). So while there are no stated *universal* Canadian values, there are shared norms and values that newcomers are expected to adopt. Canadians, meanwhile, are expected to respect the "cultural *diversity*" newcomers bring to Canada but not necessarily newcomers' *values*. While Canada does not explicitly define Canadian values, other countries do. Countries such as Australia and the Netherlands require all immigrants – humanitarian entrants such as refugees included – to sign agreements that they will adhere to the values of the respective countries; these included the equality between men and women.

We do not deny the sexism and different marriage norms evident in the excerpts from respondents and their contrast with the normative framework and values of Canadian society and law. Sexism is not accepted in Canada as a 'different culture.' However, we aim here to highlight the difficulty of the integration process for refugees who have spent considerable time detained in limbo, like the Acehnese, and for whom the cultural limbo of adjustment continues. In a study of Southeast Asian refugees in California, the previously "illiterate, hill-tribal Hmong who came from a geographic setting that was most divergent from urban America were the most likely to suffer the greatest cultural dissonance upon arrival in the United States" (Ying and Akutsu, 1997, p. 135) when compared to other resettled refugee groups. Aceh too is a largely rural province of Sumatra, despite a pattern of coastal settlement for the majority; this is dramatically different from Canada where 80% of the population lives in urban areas. Respondents revealed significant struggles with the unfamiliarity of English Language Services for Adults (ELSA) classroom settings in a secular, non-Muslim society.

Gender imbalance affects other aspects of 'integration' in Canada. As we have shown, the small sample of Acehnese refugee men shows strong social bonds within the group, but weak social bridges beyond it. Whether this suggests a lack of 'integration' in Canada remains open for debate, but the evidence collected suggests participation in Canadian social circles is low. Yet despite the difficulty in finding a wife in Canada, the alternative – facilitating a transnational marriage – presents its own set of challenges:

If I can find a girl here [in Canada], I want to be married here because  
if you sponsor a wife you have to wait

(Man, interview #41 p. 7, 08/20/09).

As this quote suggests, a transnational marriage with an Acehnese spouse requires Canadian citizenship and considerable funds to travel home and pay for the wedding. Additional money is required to pay remittances to support fiancées during the process of family reunification. On top of these sizeable demands, one also needs to maintain flexible commitments to language training, employment, and housing to facilitate marriage, and above all, to find patience to endure the wait.

The competing demands of sending remittances, saving for marriage, and paying for ESL classes intersected in important ways for our participants. The rewards of being self-sufficient, sending home remittances and saving for marriage costs are a serious distraction from taking language courses through ELSA. 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. The context of gender imbalance among Acehnese resettled to Canada exacerbates this salient, well-known set of challenges.

Because a major goal of the single men we interviewed was to marry Acehnese women, they faced even more pressure to save money to cover the costs. The initial transportation loan from the federal government set up a hurdle from the start; even though GARs have one to three years before they are expected to pay back the loan (depending on the size of their debt), the subsequent interest which accrues is not permitted in the Acehnese interpretation of Islam. Additionally, any debt to the government may hamper their financial ability to sponsor a spouse. Other expenses relate to communication, such as calling cards to contact potential wives, fiancées, and wives back in Aceh. Still more resources are required to support an additional family in Aceh:

Single [men] who married [someone] in Aceh have to send money every month [and] support three families now because they have to support themselves, they havetosupporttheirwife, andtheyhavetosupporttheirownparents. Sotheyhave to send three [times the money]. So that's why they have to look for another job  
(Man, interview #31 p. 13, 08/11/09).

Although remittances are a source of pride for some, a study of Southern Sudanese men in a western Canadian city found the financial strain as 'global breadwinners' sending remittances to multiple families back in Sudan resulted in social adjustment difficulties (Stoll and Johnson, 2007; Quinn, 2006). For the Acehnese, remittances have been critical for many families after the 2004 tsunami devastated the coast, yet about half of all respondents in our study said they wanted to send more. For example, one single man who was left a widower after his wife and children died in the tsunami is continually asked for money by other Acehnese in Canada:

I don't have family [to send money home to] so all my [Acehnese] friends [in Canada] call me [and say], 'Hey, give me money, let me borrow your money, I want to send money [to Aceh].' The ones who got married there [have an extra fee to pay]

(Man, interview #31 p. 14, 08/11/09).

Still other expenses include the cost of sponsorship itself:

There is a certain doctor [approved] to do the medical tests [for the sponsorship application], and unfortunately the doctor [is] only in Medan, about one day from Banda Aceh. I have money difficulties right now because [of my] economic situation. I have to send money back home in order for [my wife] to travel to go to Medan and to pay for the doctor too, right?

(Man, interview #22 p. 8, 08/04/09).

The largest financial outlays for prospective grooms are threefold: the airfare back to Aceh, the 'bride wealth' or 'bride price' (called *mahr* in Arabic), and the cost of the wedding. At the time of writing, a return economy airfare to Banda

Aceh is \$2000 CAD. According to a past ACCS president, *mahr* ranges from \$2000 to \$5000 CAD (personal communication, October 20, 2010). These amounts are high for individuals in the secondary labour market or on social assistance.

In short, the cost of marrying someone from Aceh is high, and it takes time in Canada to save the funds to pay for a passport, travel, the ceremony, and other financial obligations. Such efforts, however, are also at odds with the 'integration' in some sense. While participation in the labour force is avid (when work is found), jobs are low skilled and often temporary. Official language skills are poor, on average, and not improved by setting aside English learning in order to engage in paid work in order to save and plan for marriage. An unwitting situation of either/or emerges where employment and official language learning are at odds with one another (Brunner et al., 2010). The demographic imbalance in sex ratio of those who came to Canada (far more men than women) explains some of this conundrum. Regardless of the source of the problem, however, these findings prove significant in understanding barriers to social integration for this and other groups of resettled refugees with family members overseas whom they wish to sponsor or who wish to marry someone from abroad.

### *Lives On Hold and the Quest for Citizenship*

In addition to financial resources, transnational marriage also involves transitions in legal status, and in the case of the Acehnese men we interviewed, acquisition of Canadian citizenship as a prerequisite. The first step towards sponsoring an Acehnese spouse is either a travel document or a passport in order to travel back to Aceh and get married. Because almost all Acehnese men are hesitant to deal with the Indonesian embassy in Canada, the acquisi-

tion of Canadian citizenship has a specific purpose and sense of urgency for these single men as a step towards marriage.

GARs arrive in Canada and gain permanent residency very quickly, but obtaining citizenship is another matter. Basic English or French is required and yet not possessed by several men interviewed. According to the Citizenship Act, to become a Canadian citizen one needs “adequate knowledge” of English or French, or enough “to understand other people and for them to understand you” with an exemption for applicants under the age of 18 or over the age of 55 (CIC, 2010a, para. 5). Obstacles to language and employment can create a catch-22, and official language proficiency among Acehnese living in Canada is relatively low.

During the interviews, at least a dozen men asked questions about obtaining citizenship and/or a passport to travel back to Aceh. As one man explained, marriage was simply not an option for him in the near future because he lacked a combination of money, work, citizenship, and a passport:

I have no plan [to get married] because I am too young. I have no passport and no job, so I can't. Not in the short term  
(Man, interview #34 p. 13, 08/14/09).

For the men with particular official language and employment struggles, the promise of marriage and starting a family in Canada remains far off. The resulting waiting period puts their lives on hold, and does little to improve prospects of social ‘integration.’

For refugees – both those from protracted refugee situations (PRS) in camps and asylum seekers – waiting “has become the rule, not the exception” (Hyndman and Giles, 2011). In an unfortunate twist on that argument, waiting can also persist *after* refugee resettlement. For the few who are able to pass

the Canadian citizenship test, acquire a passport, and accrue enough money, the years of waiting to return to Aceh ends with the start of a second phase of waiting. After getting married in Aceh, the men (who are now Canadian and lack Indonesian passports) return to Canada where they begin processing their wives' sponsorship applications if they have sufficient funds. The reunification process is long; according to CIC, 80% of applications for spousal sponsorship at the Canadian visa office in Kuala Lumpur are finalized after 10 months and in Singapore after 17 months (CIC 2010b). After experiencing a protracted refugee situation, the waiting continues.

One man, for example, was engaged in 2002 but fled to Malaysia in 2003 and was later put into detention there before coming to Canada. Because he did not list his fiancée on his initial resettlement application to Canada out of fear of rejection, he came to Canada alone. Despite constant contact with his fiancée, he has not seen her for eight years, and he told me that she is growing impatient.

For others, the long periods of separation are simply too difficult to weather, as one man explains:

Before [coming to Canada] I had a girlfriend but she married [someone else] because she was worried I could not go back [to Aceh]...When she told me I cried. And right now I'm just single  
(Man, interview #43 p. 5, 09/06/09).

Another man met his fiancée while working in Malaysia before being detained and was separated from her for five years until recently returning to Aceh to marry her. However, they are again enduring a second separation period while waiting for Canada to approve her sponsorship.

Even after approval, difficulties related to separation can ensue, particularly in a context of 'new and few' refugee resettlements lacking the established narratives of migration. As one man describes it:

[I was told] after the approval it takes only 6 - 8 months. [My wife] was approved [almost a year ago] but she doesn't have a visa [or an interview] yet. So right now the problem is... my wife feels like oh, maybe I am playing around, not telling the truth...In Indonesia when you get married to somebody far away, neighbours and family [get suspicious] and ask if he will fulfill his promise. [Especially] my wife's parents. So right now there's some bad gossip. [They say I'm] like a sailor. So whenever I talk about coming to Canada, my wife is a little bit stressed because she doesn't want to talk about it  
(Man, interview #30 p. 7, 08/11/09).

All this is to ignore the sheer difficulty of being separated from one's partner. Participants reported forms of emotional and physical distress.

I can't sleep because I miss her...if the government delays too long I will become crazy

(Man, interview #8 p. 7, 07/19/09).

Being separated is very hard. We were together not even 2 months [in Aceh] and then I had to come back [to Canada.] I don't know how to express it. I know she feels [the same.] She cries every night. We both want to be together [all the time], everywhere. Not just here [in Canada] - everywhere. [We both want to be] together. Just like that  
(Man, interview #45 p. 4, 09/13/09).

For the majority of Acehnese men, however, the waiting is not for a particular person but for the nebulous hope of returning to Aceh in the future to get married. For these men, waiting to get married was commonly accepted as inevitable, and its perpetual presence served as a backdrop for all decisions:

For [us single men waiting to] sponsor, to get wives to come here [to Canada,] single men understand. [Other men] have a family, and [we are] single.

That's okay. [We are] just waiting [for the day] when we can [go] back  
(Man, interview #1 p. 5, 06/26/09).

This waiting has inhibited enrolment in ELSA classes, prevented men from making long-term commitments to housing and employment, and added stress to the wider community.

Respondents expressed their frustration with the drawn out sponsorship process especially in more informal conversations outside of the interview setting. Some commented during the interviews as well:

Why [is] the process still long for the single [men to sponsor spouses]?  
Finally they [will] come anyway, right? Why not speed up the process?  
(Man, interview #31 p.13, 08/11/09).

According to CIC's Canadian Overseas Selection and Processing manual, "family unity is an express objective of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act...family separation is an impediment to the successful establishment of the family unit and leads to psychological and emotional distress such as loneliness, guilt for leaving family members, separation anxiety, loss of support network, inability to focus and get on with new life, breakdown in relationships, depression and mental health problems" (CIC 2012, p. 62). However, separations were commonplace for the Acehnese men interviewed, with painful results. Integration, ironically, was not impeded by the trauma of prior detention but by the policies and procedures of immigration that made them wait for a spouse.

In a 2006 research project with 152 GARs in BC from 12 different countries of origin, Cubie (2006) found that:

...being separated from family members can cause distress and increased anxiety to refugees already here. This was particularly marked where immediate family members (such as spouses, children or fiancées) had not yet arrived. For

example, several respondents mentioned that separation from family members was the worst thing about living in Canada, when asked how they pictured their life in 3 years time a number of respondents stated that they hoped that their husband, children or fiancée would be with them, and family reunification came out strongly as the one change respondents would like to see to their lives (p.43)

Loss – both material and emotional – is part of the commonalities of ‘the refugee experience,’ however diverse these experiences may be (Sales 2007). Refugees may lose friends and family members, status, trust, and control over elements of their lives. But the long-lasting disruptions of forced migration need not continue on after resettlement if possible.

Given these conditions, many of the Acehnese men are single today as an outcome of the *combination* of forced migration to Malaysia, detention there, and Canadian family reunification policies. No single factor created this isolation, in which single men work when possible, wait, and save to obtain Canadian citizenship and enough resources to marry a partner from Aceh. Yet these hopes may well get in the way of ‘integration’ as construed by the Canadian state.

It has now taken many men upwards of 5 years to gain Canadian citizenship, return to Aceh to meet prospective spouses, and pay for the sponsorship application, associated travel, and wedding costs. Based on our research, findings show that this process competes with other aspects of settlement such as obtaining English language skills (Brunner et al., 2010). And still, not all of the men have been able to obtain Canadian citizenship and afford to marry the women that they would like. These men remain in limbo in Canada, ‘waiting for a wife.’

Today, respondents are encountering a new problem: among those who have returned to Aceh to get married, some now have pregnant wives still in

Aceh or even born children who are waiting for legal entry into Canada. In at least one instance, the birth of the child has complicated and prolonged the sponsorship processing time of the wife, worrying other community members that the same will happen to them. Thus, in new ways the protracted separations continue.

## CONCLUSION

As governments, NGOs, and researchers continue to test, monitor, and evaluate group settlement strategies; we should conduct further research on settlement outcomes, including social inclusion and integration. To focus solely on the more measurable aspects of settlement and integration (e.g., housing, official language acquisition, and employment) without attending to the social dimensions that shape inclusion and participation in Canadian society (e.g., sex ratios, community cohesiveness, and geographical concentrations) proves short-sighted. As Simich writes, “[GARs] from all backgrounds [maximize] their opportunities for social support in ways meaningful to them, irrespective of the logistics problems that result for the resettlement system” and that “government support is an important part of the help refugees receive, but it seldom meets all support needs” (2003, p. 582). In the case of the Acehnese, the combination of factors leads to unique struggles, and their attempts to solve these struggles may in fact impede ‘integration.’

At the same time, ‘integration’ is a poorly defined term and should be used with caution. In an effort to make policy more effective, the Canadian government could more clearly define the term, given its expectation that newcomers respect “basic Canadian values” and Canadians respect the “cultural diversity” newcomers bring to Canada (CIC, 2010c). This would also facilitate qualitative measures of integration for researchers.

Considering the changing makeup of post-IRPA GARs and the decision to enact group processing of refugees from protracted situations, the Canadian government, settlement agencies, and researchers should more carefully define and address *refugee* 'integration' in particular. Interviews with Acehese men reveal significant differences between some men's understandings of gender and marriage expectations and Canadian norms. As strictly observant Muslims who cannot pay interest on loans, accessing credit proved to be difficult for many Acehese entrepreneurs who were committed to opening new businesses, as did repaying transportation loans before interest began to accrue. Negotiating their faith with market values here in Canada created an unexpected obstacle to succeeding financially for some.<sup>6</sup>

Quite invisible in this discussion is the 'two-way street' aspect of 'integration,' and the question remains whether 'integration' truly is a mutual process of engagement and accommodation, or largely unidirectional. As Hiebert and Sherrell suggest, "the government can only do so much to help immigrants integrate and the process is limited by the degree of accommodation offered by society at large" (2009, p. 20). They point to BC's Welcoming and Inclusive Communities and Workplaces Program as an "innovative" example of a program to encourage just that among immigrants in general (p. 7). Yet despite "changes in the provision of services for BC GARs" since the implementation of IRPA, "the configuration of *refugee resettlement* programs has yet to be perfected" (Hiebert and Sherrell, 2009, p. 36, emphasis added). Refugee resettlement is a *humanitarian* form of "premeditated, state-planned, government-managed migration and settlement" (Hyndman and McLean, 2006, p. 345) and thus involves a role for the state that is somewhat distinct from its role in

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<sup>6</sup> Another consideration is the provision of aid in finding financial assistance in order to comply with Sharia law (see Ijara Canada, 2009).

other forms of immigration. At least in the Acehese case, the two-way definition of integration seems limited, and we echo Hiebert and Sherrell (2009) in their urge for wider society to understand their role in facilitating 'integration.'

Achieving a two-way form of 'integration' does not require changing Canadian law (e.g. by legalizing polygamy), but it does require changes in practice. More nuanced attention should be paid to the social relationships that shape refugee settlement. Because 'integration' is poorly defined in policy, it is almost impossible to measure in a meaningful way. Yet, we know from this study that the social is often connected to the economic realities of wanting to make marriage happen (Brunner et al., 2010). Affording a family is the first hurdle. In this context, the Canadian government could contemplate facilitating an expedited spousal sponsorship process for all GARs who were detained by a third country government for a period of years before their arrival.

An expedited spousal sponsorship process could also be warranted in light of the skewed sex ratio among the refugees who were selected to come to Canada. To paraphrase the Acehese participants addressing the CIC representative who attended the project's dissemination event on July 3, 2010, "Could you bring some Acehese women to Canada?" Here, we reiterate our policy recommendation from that event: "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" (Brunner et al., 2010: 44). This is critical because no extant co-ethnic Acehese community met this group; they were 'new and few'.

While this research could not trace the direct effects of detention in Malaysia on refugee settlement in Canada, it is clear that the secure and closed conditions of detention shaped the selection of who came to Canada

and detainees' access to family and friends during their institutionalization. The detention dimension of their forced migration can only exacerbate their feelings of isolation. This is significant because group processing of refugees to Canada continues, bringing new Canadians from protracted refugee situations created by source countries like Burma (Karen refugees via Thailand) and Bhutan (Lhotshampas via Nepal). These groups are also relatively 'new and few' with specific settlement challenges of their own (Sherrell, Friesen, Hyndman, and Shrestha, 2011).

Most importantly, such change would allow the Acehnese to shift their gaze from Aceh to Greater Vancouver; from working multiple jobs to afford travel to Aceh to accessing English/official language learning that promises better jobs in Canada and more meaningful contact with other Canadians; and from negotiating Canadian immigration regulations to negotiating Canadian society. Belonging to Canada could continue apace.

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