



CANADA'S PERIODICAL ON REFUGEES

REFUGEE

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REFUGEE AND IMMIGRANT WOMEN: AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE, PART II

Introduction: Refugee and Immigrant Women as Workers

Guida Man

Women all over the world have always worked. From sunrise to sunset, women are always busy working. They are often engaged in the formal labour market, working in factories, hospitals, schools, businesses; and in the informal labour market, doing home sewing, baby-sitting, or bartering; as well as being occupied in household work, cooking for others, feeding their babies, washing clothes, fetching water, cleaning house, caring for the aged and the infirmed, listening to other people's problems. The work that women do are important and indispensable as part of the household strategy for survival, and yet they are often invisible and taken for granted because women are not being recognized as legitimate workers.

This issue of *Refuge* assembles a collection of studies which represent the voices of refugee and immigrant women. In particular, these studies document and analyze the day-to-day, traditional and non-traditional work of these women. From Kenya to Canada, from the isolated remote refugee camps to the

hustle and bustle of cosmopolitan cities, from hauling water for daily subsistence, to providing health care to strangers for pay, these studies explore how refugee and immigrant women do

their work and how they manage their daily lives.

As Jennifer Hyndman's article on the daily work of Somali refugee women in the Kenyan camps of Ifo, Hagadera,

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Refuge is dedicated to the encouragement of assistance to refugees by providing a forum for sharing information and opinion on Canadian and international issues pertaining to refugees. *Refuge* was founded in 1981.

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and Dagahaley illustrates, refugee women are not merely "vulnerable," helpless victims of circumstance, passively accepting their fate. Hydman deconstructs this stereotypical notion by demonstrating that these women are active participants who employ various survival strategies and indigenous skills in their daily struggles, and who engage in informal cash economy to make ends meet.

For those refugee women who have higher education and professional qualifications, they have always been able to combine work and family in their home country due to the support of the extended family. This is confirmed by Rosemary Sales and Jeanne Gregory's study on the Somali refugee women in London. However, these highly educated Somali women professionals were unable to find permanent employment in Britain despite an urgent need for Somali speakers in teaching, medicine and social work. This is so because Somali qualifications are not recognized in Britain, and few refugee women have the resources to undertake the necessary training to allow them to work in Britain. Refugee women therefore face multiple barriers to employment due to their uncertain legal status, and the racialized and gendered structures of the labour market.

The employment barriers encountered by the Somali refugee women are also experienced by the Chinese immigrant women in Canada as revealed in Guida Man's study. Man demonstrates that institutionalized discriminatory processes in the requirement of "Canadian experience," and the inadequacy of an accreditation system to calibrate immigrant's qualifications make it difficult for the Chinese immigrant women to obtain employment which commensurate with their qualifications and experience. Consequently, these women experienced underemployment and unemployment. The differences in the social organization of Canadian society vis-a-vis their home country also makes life increasingly difficult for these women, intensifying their daily workload.

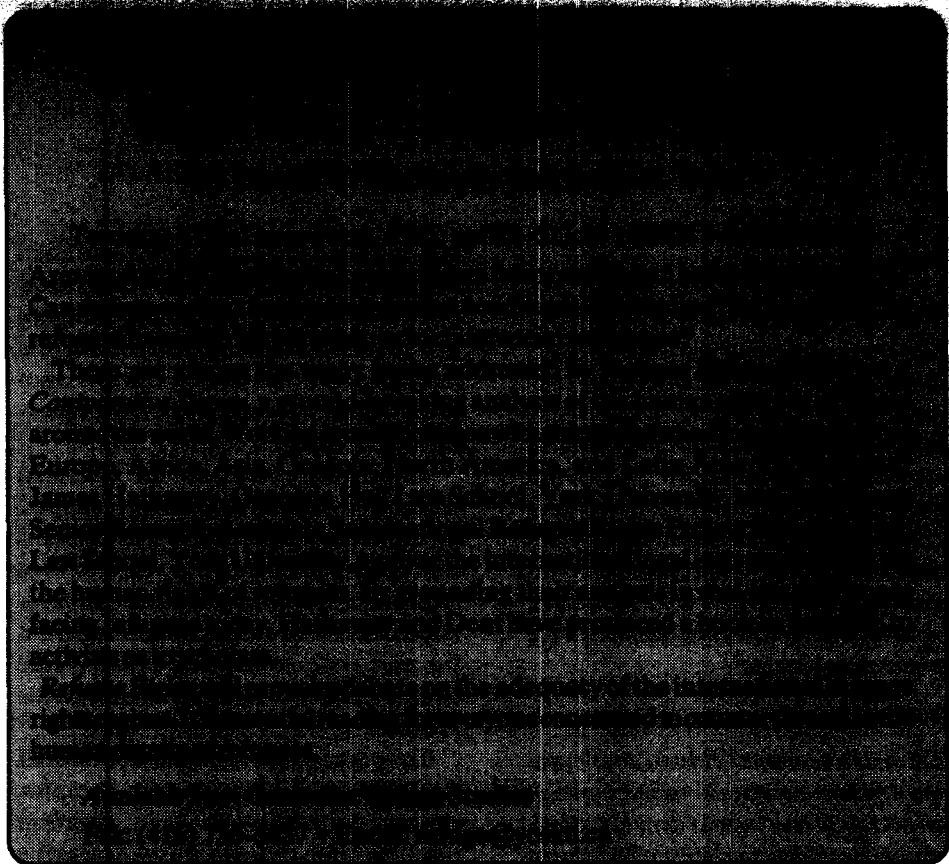
Despite racism, class discrimination, and gender oppression, McCabe's investigation of migrant women health care aides in Canada found their care giving practice to be an aspect of an ethics of care that allows for moments of empowerment and resistance to an oppressive social context. McCabe argues that the Canadian market for care has been shaped largely by discourses that devalue women's work and commodify migrant women caregivers.

Departing from the theme on refugee and immigrant women as workers, this issue of *Refuge* also includes two provocative papers by Maryanna Schmuki. Her first paper opens the issue by interrogating the fundamental concern of how refugee women is constructed. In particular, she poses the questions: How do the knowledges created by the West about refugee women affect the process by which a woman becomes a refugee? How does this knowledge affect the process and likelihood that the refugee will shed the label "refugee"? How do women refugees become "normal" again and how do the groups intending to aid refugees mitigate this process? Are the voices of women refugees incorporated into the knowledge production process? In answering these questions, Schmuki explores how the development and humanitarian assistance establishment as a construction site produces a distinct discourse on refugee women. She contends that the knowledge produced creates an image of the women refugee that may be intended to benefit not only the refugee herself, but also the regimes and individuals that make up the international system of emergency relief and assistance. She suggests that for refugee women to be able to shed their refugee skin, a delicate balance must be struck between the power inherent in the international aid community and the liberatory effects of the new found category of refugee women.

This issue of *Refuge* concludes with Schmuki's second paper which explores the development of women refugees as a category within human rights discourse. In her final paper, Schmuki reiterates her concern that given the

western cultural values, western epistemology, and western institutional form predominant in the contemporary aid arena, how do human rights instruments and images help or hinder the process of women refugees returning to normalcy, i.e., does the construction of refugee women reflect the voices of women refugees? And how would refugee women be able to shed their refugee skin? These are significant considerations that we need to keep addressing and renegotiating. In order to adequately respond to these questions, I suggest we continue our dialogue with academics, practitioners, NGOs, grassroot organizers etc. working on issues concerning refugee and immigrant women in future issues of *Refuge*. ■

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Asylum: A Moral Dilemma

By Guida Man

Translated by [illegible]

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Every year the refugee landscape changes, but it is constantly more urgent. Faced by the explosion of problems of our age, refugees receiving nations have to respond to masses of humanity flooding everywhere, but to carry on with the daily clash between these two alien representatives of life. It, he provides a far-ranging inquiry into the book. The book presents political, ethical, philosophical, and historical issues in a clear and accessible way. Contents: The Refugee Question: Within America; The Refugee Question: Through the Lens of Sociology; The Practice: Refugees in Africa; Four Asian Refugee Settlements: A Final Note; Challenge; Asylum: A Moral Dilemma is an important work. York Press, Inc.

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