

## FIELD REPORT

---

### Settling Like a State: Acehese Refugees in Vancouver

JENNIFER HYNDMAN  
JAMES McLEAN

*Department of Geography, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby,  
British Columbia, Canada V5A 1S6*  
hyndman@sfu.ca  
jamesm@sfu.ca

In Canada, the phenomenon of urban refugees is largely an expression of state-managed practices, not spontaneous migration and settlement. This study focuses on the distinctly North American, and specifically Canadian, experiences of pre-meditated, state-planned, government-managed migration and settlement for urban refugees from the Aceh region of Indonesia to Vancouver, British Columbia in 2004. It explores why and how these refugees came to Vancouver; the state policy decision that located all of them in one city; and how they have fared in acquiring official language proficiency and employment. Whereas many refugees move to urban centres to enhance educational and employment opportunities, this study illustrates the obstacles to accessing both in Vancouver. 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. The analysis is based on research conducted between January and August 2005 during which a survey of housing, employment, and income issues was conducted with 70 of the 104 Acehese refugees who had relocated to Vancouver since February 2004. In addition, a one-day, three-part series of focus groups was held during which 47 members of the Acehese community took part. Discussions centred on three key moments during their migration: (1) while in Malaysian detention camps; (2) upon arrival in Vancouver, British Columbia; and (3) during the first year of settlement in the city, to ascertain common settlement experiences, policy implications, and the short-term 'success' of the resettlement.

Keywords: refugees, displacement, resettlement, Canada, Aceh

#### Introduction

First Allah gave us life. Then Canada gives us another life (Focus Group Participant from Aceh, April 2005).<sup>1</sup>

Our title plays on the title of a book by James Scott, *Seeing Like a State* (1998) in which he outlines the ways in which governments render landscapes and populations legible through particular administrative practices. State selection

of refugees abroad for resettlement in Canada represents one such set of practices; refugees are selected offshore in an orderly fashion and sent to specific cities or regions for settlement. Scott not only demonstrates the link between landscapes and legibility, but also argues that state practices are enacted most effectively in the locales where they face the least resistance. Such is the case in the settlement of the handful of refugees selected to live in countries like Canada, the US, and Australia. The state orders and supports the migration and settlement of these refugees, in mostly urban centres, in very systematic ways.<sup>2</sup> The centrality of state intervention in the lives of urban refugees is apparent in this first quotation, an excerpt taken from transcripts of focus groups with refugees from Aceh, Indonesia now living in Vancouver, Canada.

In contrast to urban refugees based in countries of the Global South, the phenomenon of 'urban refugees' in Canada is largely an expression of state-managed practices circumscribed by a highly protected geography of isolation. Canada has only one land border and this with a prosperous country, the United States. This border is increasingly policed in relation to migrant traffic since 9/11, and restrictive immigration policies have been introduced that make it more difficult for asylum seekers to get into Canada. In contrast, refugees in, for example, Kenya are generally required by the state to remain in camps. Many of these refugees nonetheless find their own way to Nairobi, Johannesburg, Minneapolis and Toronto to join family, improve their livelihoods, and seek full legal status. While some asylum seekers do come to Canada of their own volition, making refugee claims upon arrival, resettlement of government-assisted refugees from abroad to Canada represents a highly selective and state-managed approach.

This article highlights the distinctly North American, and specifically Canadian, experiences of settlement for urban refugees. We briefly explore why and how refugees from the Aceh region of Indonesia came to Vancouver; the state policy decision that located all of them in one city; and provide an assessment—from their perspective—of how they have fared in acquiring official language proficiency and employment since their arrival. The study on which this analysis is based was conducted between January and August 2005, in cooperation with Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia, a not-for-profit immigrant and refugee-serving agency. Since the Acehnese community is still relatively small and very much being managed by state processes, access to it was straightforward and cooperation was good.

In March 2005, with the assistance of a counsellor from Immigrant Services Society of Canada, a brief survey of housing, employment, and income issues was conducted with 70 of the 104 Acehnese refugees who had relocated to Vancouver since February 2004. In April 2005, 47 members of the Acehnese community took part in a one-day, three-part series of focus groups facilitated by five researchers and five interpreters. Each of the three sessions held with the five groups was an hour to an hour and a half in length and focused on access to and understanding of information and services provided at three key moments during their migration: (1) while in Malaysian detention

camp; (2) upon arrival in Vancouver, British Columbia; and (3) during the subsequent first year of settlement in the city. Detailed notes were taken and the session were recorded, transcribed, and analysed to ascertain common settlement experiences, policy implications, and the short-term 'success' of the resettlement. In June 2005, a dissemination event with participants was held at which salient findings were presented. New issues and policy questions were also raised by the Acehnese in attendance, generating plans for future information workshops and consultations. Given the short term nature of our contact with research participants, we could not measure or ascertain how processes of integration and settlement were proceeding. Most of our findings here are based on testimony from the Acehnese refugees themselves over the first 365 days of living in Canada.

### **Geography, State Exclusion, and the Canadian Challenge to Asylum Seekers**

Canadian geography provides a monumental deterrent to asylum seekers. Unlike the US that shares a land border with Mexico, a country to which Central Americans can easily travel, Canada is relatively expensive to fly to and is surrounded by seas on three sides. The 599 Chinese migrants from Fuzhou province who came ashore on boats along the coast of British Columbia in 1999 did not even choose Canada as a final destination. Most were trying to reach New York City with the assistance of human smugglers known as snakeheads (Mountz 2003).

Until recently, however, one third of the refugee claims made in Canada were made by asylum seekers who first arrived in the United States and then travelled to Canada to make their claim. In 2003, 34 per cent of all refugee claims were made in Canada at the US–Canada border. These numbers peaked in 2001 (see Table 1).

But Canada invokes policies to protect its borders despite its geographical isolation. In response to the increasing numbers of asylum seekers coming

*Table 1*

<b>Refugee Claims in Canada 1996–2003</b>	
<b>Year</b>	<b>Refugee Claims</b>
2003	31,837
2002	33,400
2001	44,500
2000	36,534
1999	30,124
1998	24,937
1997	24,289
1996	28,315

Source: US Committee for Refugees 1997–2003.

to Canada from the US, Canada pushed for the Safe Third Country Agreement with the US which took effect on 29 December 2004. The Agreement effectively prevents asylum seekers from the US from going to Canada to make a claim, or from going to the US from Canada to make a claim (the latter scenario being far rarer). It is part of the 'Smart Border Accord', a 30-point action plan being negotiated with Canada that is designed to improve security after the September 11 terrorist attacks.

The Agreement acts as an invisible but restrictive wall to keep refugee claims and claimants out. During the first six months of implementation, refugee claims made to Canadian ports of entry along the land border declined by 50 per cent (Canadian Council for Refugees 2005). Stricter visa regulations on citizens of countries that produce large numbers of asylum seekers have also been implemented in both Canada and the United States. These extra-territorial measures exclude migrants before they land in Canada or the US. As border enforcement becomes more harmonized in North America, acceptance rates for asylum claims in both Canada and the United States have also fallen since 2001. The US registered a 49 per cent approval rate in 2002, down from 57 per cent in 2001. Likewise, Canada's approval rate fell to 44 per cent from 58 per cent in 2001. Acceptance rates in both countries dropped even further in 2004. In short, the Safe Third Country Agreement represents a state practice (instantiated in law and policy regulations) that further seals Canada off from asylum seekers who are not formally selected and 'invited' by the state to come to Canada, as the Acehnese were.

From a protection perspective, Acehnese refugees in Vancouver are in an enviable position. State policies ensure this by granting permanent status upon arrival, including full employment rights. Because their presence in Canada is fully sanctioned and they quickly obtain legal status as permanent residents, the Acehnese enjoy most of the rights and access to services (health, education, employment, and social) accorded to citizens, except the right to vote. Legal protection is simply not an issue for these refugees, unlike most others, who struggle to gain access to this enviable status of Convention refugee in Canada. To be selected as one of fewer than 12,000 refugees per year from all Canadian immigration posts overseas is a daunting challenge, one over which applicants have little control. Those asylum seekers who make it to the US, hoping to get into Canada at the border, will now be returned to the US, just as many asylum seekers who have attempted to land in Australia have been turned back as part of the 'Pacific Solution' in that country.

### **Refugee Resettlement in Canada, British Columbia, and Vancouver**

Canada hosts people from 210 different countries, with high proportions of foreign-born people in its largest cities. Toronto, for example, is considered the most 'multicultural' city in the world because it has the highest proportion (44 per cent) of foreign-born people compared with 37.5 per cent in Vancouver. Vancouver is home to a higher proportion of foreign-born than many

major cities throughout the world, for example, Sydney (31 per cent), Los Angeles (31 per cent), and New York (24 per cent). The metropolitan area of Vancouver had the highest proportion of visible minorities of all such urban areas in Canada, according to the 2001 Census (Statistics Canada 2003).

Almost 75 per cent of immigrants to Canada settle in Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal (CIC 2001); Vancouver receives 17.7 per cent of the total.<sup>3</sup> Of those who arrive in BC, 89 per cent live in the Vancouver metropolitan area, making immigration a quintessentially urban phenomenon. Canadian immigration policy divides immigrants into various classes: economic immigrants (including skilled workers, investors and entrepreneurs), family class immigrants, and humanitarian class immigrants, dominated by refugees. Montreal receives the largest proportion of refugees, while Toronto receives the largest absolute number of refugees annually (CIC 2005). Over the past decade the Canadian state has selected 7,300–7,500 government-assisted refugees annually to come to Canada. This group is selected overseas, normally through referrals from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, based on eligibility criteria outlined in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Vancouver receives a relatively modest number of these government-sponsored refugees annually, between 800 and 900 people. Across the country, another 3,000–4,000 refugees are sponsored privately, normally by community groups and faith-based organizations, and the remainder is made up of refugee claims made at a Canadian port of entry which are decided by the Immigration and Refugee Board, an appointed body that adjudicates all eligible cases.

Our study focuses on the state-planned, government-managed migration of refugees to cities. Through federally funded programmes that are contracted out by the province of BC through a federal–provincial agreement, programmes such as the Refugee Assistance Programme (RAP) and English Language Services for Adults (ELSA) provide critical support to newcomer refugees, both financially and in terms of services for official language acquisition. Most services targeted specifically for refugees may be federal or provincial in terms of their funding sources, but most are *located* in the Greater Vancouver area.

The federal government funds one immigrant and refugee-serving agency in particular to provide a full range of services to refugees upon landing. These services include (among other things) meeting refugees at the airport, providing temporary housing upon arrival, assisting with the search to find more permanent accommodation, and offering a comprehensive orientation to Canadian culture, health services, employment prospects, and the administrative imperatives of each. Bilingual settlement counsellors were hired to facilitate this initial transition process, and one counsellor continues to be funded to assist the Acehnese a year after their arrival.

This approach to settling refugees in cities is so different from such cases as Somali refugees in Johannesburg, Eritreans in Khartoum, or Guatemalans in Mexico City that strict comparisons are difficult to make. Even within the Canadian context of refugee resettlement, the Acehnese in Vancouver

are not a 'typical' refugee group. They are the first refugees from Indonesia to come to Canada (other classes of immigrants have come, but not refugees), so do not have the assistance that networks of earlier arrivals may provide. The state, specifically the federal government department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), decided to settle this entire group of Convention refugees in the same urban area. One aim in this article is to shed light on the successes and challenges of this particular scheme.

Most Convention refugees are sent to Canadian cities upon arrival. Toronto, Vancouver, and Montréal are seen as Canada's economic engines of growth. While job growth continues to occur disproportionately in these urban centres, the paring back of the welfare state through neoliberal policies at the provincial and federal levels has reduced social and physical infrastructure in Canadian cities (Walton-Roberts 2004). Critics of federal immigration policy have even argued that immigrant concentration in Canadian cities will lead to social tensions or public outbreaks of violence (Collacot 2002), though these predictions have yet to materialize.

Large urban areas also tend to host a greater concentration of services that refugees require: access to official language instruction, organizations that assist people traumatized by torture, interpretation services for health and housing, to name but a few (Hyndman *et al.* 2006). Economies of scale operate in urban environments where specialized services for immigrants and refugees can be offered at a lower cost per person when large numbers of users are present.

Nonetheless, in one government experiment related to refugee resettlement in BC, refugees from Kosovo were sent to several small communities outside Vancouver (Sherrell *et al.* 2005). The Canadian state has been trying to 'regionalize' immigration of all kinds for some time because of the concentration of immigrants in Canada's largest cities. Smaller cities and towns that have declining populations need immigration to bolster numbers and skills. The success of this policy decision for the Kosovo refugees has been mixed: those with job experience in factory work ended up in cities where services in tourism, health, and retail provided the majority of jobs, resulting in few employment prospects for most. Others located in cities close to Vancouver were able to find full-time work and lower cost housing, faring better in many ways than those in Greater Vancouver itself. In all locations, those who have come to Canada have little desire to return to Kosovo; many have gone back to have a look, only to find the economy in ruins and those who did return regretting their decision.

Comparing the Acehnese refugees' 'one city' settlement in Vancouver with the Kosovars' 'small city' experience in urban centres across British Columbia is problematic. Each group has a distinct demographic, education, and skills profile, and while both groups fled oppressive governments, they have little in common. One can compare the government policies, however, of dispersion and concentration. Dispersion remains the exception in terms of refugee resettlement in Canada. The Acehnese constitute an exception at the other

extreme: unlike any refugee group before them, all were settled in a single city, a policy that is successful in the experience of the refugees themselves.

Comparing the Acehnese to other refugee groups in Canada is also difficult, given that those from Aceh are so 'new and few' to the country. In contrast, the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, based mostly in Toronto, has been built upon refugees coming to Canada in considerable numbers since the mid-1980s. Well over 200,000 Sri Lankan Tamils live in the Greater Toronto area alone, making Canada host to the single largest Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in the world (McDowell 1996; Cheran 2000: 170). The built environment of the city expresses this urban refugee concentration. There are ten weekly Tamil language newspapers, four Tamil language radio stations, and three cinemas that show Tamil language films (most are produced in Tamil Nadu). Toronto is also home to the largest Tamil video and music store in the world (Cheran 2000). By contrast, the Acehnese group with whom we worked on this research project has left little mark on the Vancouver landscape at this early juncture.

### **Displacement from Aceh to Malaysia**

It's very ironic: we have a gas plant [in Aceh] but we were cooking with wood.

The Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* or GAM) has been fighting for Aceh's independence since 1976. This province enjoyed a long period of independence as a Sultanate before being incorporated into the Republic of Indonesia in 1949. Resentment against the Indonesian Government stems from perceived abuses by the Indonesian military, and a widely held view that it has not shared the proceeds from the province's rich natural resources with the Acehnese people (BBC 2003). The Aceh secessionist movement in Indonesia is based on these perceptions of unequal access to the revenues generated by offshore oil (Ross 2003). On behalf of the Acehnese, GAM has demanded access to those revenues from the Javanese-dominated Government in Jakarta.

In Aceh, conflict, violence, and a massive counter-insurgency have displaced more than 300,000 people since 1999:

There is no human rights in Aceh. We were treated not like human beings, we were treated like animals.

The fighters were called GAM and the Indonesian government is looking for them, so they will go into a place and they ask the locals, and if they cannot find them they will burn down the houses and maybe shoot some people.

In May 2003, the government declared a state of emergency in Aceh and brought in 40,000 troops to forcibly relocate insurgents (Hedman 2005). The recent tsunami and international responses to it appear to have catalysed a very recent peace accord in which the Aceh rebels have renounced violence and dropped their demand for independence in return for the withdrawal of government troops from the province, amnesty for all rebels, and the right of Acehnese to elect their own local officials (Voice of America 2005).

The 104 Acehnese who arrived in Vancouver during 2004 were selected overseas by Canadian immigration officials during their detention in one of three Malaysian camps in Sembilan, Malaka, and Selangor. Some Acehnese had been in the camps for as long as five years. They were notified of their acceptance to Canada within three to four months of being interviewed by Canadian officials.

### **Successes and Challenges of State-Managed Settlement among Acehnese**

I am thankful the Canadian government takes us over here; we cannot live in Aceh. The government over there makes us flee. But if the Canadian government wants to help us, they have to help us thoroughly and completely.

I have been here for one year; I have not seen any soldiers on the streets.

Speaking with the Acehnese refugees one year after their arrival offers an opportunity to hear their assessment of state-mediated settlement in a preliminary fashion. Two particular areas warrant attention. First, the Canadian government's decision to send all the Acehnese refugees to one location, Greater Vancouver, is unique. This decision bears on the settlement experience of individuals and the community and, therefore, must be evaluated for future implementation. Second, current policy to assist refugee settlement allows for one year of financial support and access to English language training up to a basic level, so as to prepare individuals for independent living, education, and employment once the federal assistance ends.

In light of these considerations, we pose several questions: (1) How has the assumption that relocating a potentially 'ready-made' community will ease processes of settlement and integration worked on the ground? (2) Does basic language training (to level 3 of ELSA) during year one provide sufficient levels of understanding to access adequate employment? (3) Do people actually have access to and receive language training during that first year? (4) Does the current employment market and support system work in terms of finding employment or do people fall into provincial financial support networks? The following section offers a preliminary analysis of the Acehnese responses to these and related aspects of state-managed resettlement.

In Vancouver, where real estate has been the most expensive in the country for several years, housing affordability can be an issue. Typically, over 90 per cent of skilled migrants and other economic immigrants enter Canada with savings. This is rarely the case with refugees; some 85 per cent enter Canada with no savings (Statistics Canada: LSIC 2005, 27). Although many of the Acehnese found that housing was more expensive than they expected, all the participants in this study stated that housing is not an immediate issue for them. Finding housing was difficult because of the language barrier, but with access to settlement counsellors and personal contacts (through the mosque, for example), they all have homes. Most of our survey respondents



Table 2

**Acehnese Perceptions of Current Housing, June 2005**

Maintenance Condition of Apartment/house			Safety of Apartment/house		Safety of Neighbourhood	
Good	Acceptable	Poor	Yes	No	Yes	No
29	34	7	70	0	68	2

indicate that their housing conditions are good or acceptable, 97 per cent consider their neighbourhood safe, and 100 per cent indicated their apartment building or house was safe (see Table 2).

Some, however, are 'doubling up' in order to make high rents more affordable:

It was not difficult to find [an apartment], but we need to find a place to fit our budget. It has to be under \$1000, and even if it is under \$1000, we have to share with four other people.

Thus, density and rooms per person may be a better indicator of housing conditions. Of the 70 survey responses, 64 per cent feel that their current house or apartment is large enough given the number of people living there. The 'doubling up' of people, however, may indicate that housing conditions are not optimal:

If we have a one bedroom apartment, two people share, but if it is a two bedroom we will share with four ... mostly if they live in the basement, there will be four.

Furthermore, 81 per cent of survey participants are living with 4 or more other people in their house or apartment and 26 per cent are living with 6 or more (see Table 3).

This alone may not necessarily indicate crowding. Comparing the number of people in a house or apartment to the number of rooms per household (rooms other than the kitchen and bathroom), 22 per cent are living 3 or more people per room (see Table 4).

The highest ratio of people per room is five to one, indicating that the high rents in Vancouver are negotiated by refugees through strategies of doubling and tripling up in order to spread rental costs among more people.

Refugees often move to cities from camp situations informally and without legal status in order to access better educational and employment opportunities (Hyndman 2000). What is ironic about the Canadian case presented here is that refugees are granted full legal status by the government to work and pursue education upon arriving in Vancouver, but cannot find full time employment, in part because they cannot speak English nor access readily

Table 3

**Acehnese Co-habitant Density, June 2005**

No. of others per household	No. of Acehnese reporting
1	3
2	3
3	7
4	33
5	6
6	9
7	3
8	3
9	3

Table 4

**Acehnese Living Arrangements, Rooms per Person, June 2005**

Rooms per person	Married respondents	Single respondents
2 or more	20	27
2.5 or more	8	12
3 or more	5	10

English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) instruction, which is fully paid for by the government up to a basic level. A number of reasons were cited for this gap in service provision, some of which are discussed below, including a lack of availability of English training courses, schools closing down, and intermittent employment taking priority. Legal status and government support to learn English do not guarantee paid work.

We discuss the issues of language and employment together in this section because they are linked both analytically and practically. Refugees are likely to experience and report language barriers as the most difficult challenge when accessing education and employment (Hyndman and Walton-Roberts 1999; Statistics Canada: LSIC 2005: 48). In comparison to other immigrant classes, refugees face greater challenges in finding employment and experience the highest levels of unemployment during the first six months of settlement (Statistics Canada: LSIC 2005: 59–60). Acquiring official language skills—English in the Vancouver context—is a significant concern in the Acehnese community, as it is in other recently arrived refugee communities in Canada (Sherrell *et al.* 2005). Lacking English language skills makes acquiring adequate housing, health, and settlement services difficult, even impossible at times without the aid of an interpreter or bilingual settlement counsellor. The absence of official language ability hinders both social and economic integration (DeVoretz *et al.* 2004; Statistics Canada: LSIC 2005). Moreover, lacking basic skills to

communicate may dissuade individuals from accessing other services offered, for example, at school, local libraries, community and recreation centres. The most challenging barrier that insufficient English language skills presents for many refugees is accessing employment (Hyndman and Walton Roberts 1999; Henin and Bennet 2002).

The Acehnese canvassed in the focus groups agreed that the most important challenges were finding employment, accessing language training, and building English skills. These were not viewed as separate issues that can be solved with distinct policies or programmes:

Jobs and English: I want them to go hand-in-hand instead of one at a time. (Focus Group participant)

Our mind is focused on two things: language and earning money. But we cannot get jobs without English, they go hand in hand. And we can't focus on our studies because we are worried about money. (Focus Group participant)

We are happy to come to school. We know we need to come to school everyday but when we come home we are just with our own and we cannot practice and so it is harder to practice and be better at English. (Focus Group participant)

Spending the majority of their time in language training schools and relying on federal financial assistance offended their sense of pride and desire to be self-sufficient:

We are ready to work. If you ask me if I am ready to look for a job, I'm not ready to look for a job because I don't know how. But I am ready to work.

We have the ability to work and we want to come over here to work. We have the intention of coming over here to work; we can do the work.

Attending work full-time rather than taking language training was rarely an option as most employment available to those with few or no English language skills was temporary, part-time, and low-paid, according to focus group participants. Moreover, taking full-time work often meant sacrificing language studies:

Immigrant Services Society has said that they will try to get us into jobs. But some of us could not accept the job because we still want to study. If we take the job we would have to abandon the study and both are very important.

Many Acehnese suggested an integrated approach with language and employment as the goals, rather than dealing with issues of employment and English as isolated factors in the settlement process that often means immigrants must make choices between the two:

I just wish that when we first came over here, (the government) just set us up with one job at the same place, same factory or whatever, and then we could go to school at the same time, it would be easier for us.

Rather than we just stay home and go to school and (the government) support us, it would be faster if we could just work and go to school at the same time.

A combination of state-sponsored work programmes and English training would release them from state dependency and provide more opportunities for learning and practising English language skills:

If I could work and go to school at the same time I could enhance my language skills. I could learn and practice the next day at my work place.

The problem of language acquisition may be seen by some Acehnese as an obstacle in the settlement process:

We are not yet part of (Canadian) community because we do not speak the language.

I have been living here for one year and they just put me in language school last month so how can I learn the language.

We have identified two processes of community formation amongst the Acehnese that coalesce around three central spaces: the mosque, the soccer field, and the newly formed Acehnese Society of Canada. The first process of community is locally oriented and focused on developing a strong local Acehnese community in Vancouver. In refugee migration more generally, social networks formed prior to arrival have been critical to facilitating local community during the initial phase of settlement (Statistics Canada: LSIC 2005, 84). The specific state-mediated conditions under which the Acehnese migrated has meant that social and familial networks existing in the Malaysian camps were relocated to Vancouver. A single, common settlement location has been important to the Acehnese. When asked about the decision to relocate everyone to Vancouver, participants were unanimous:

Well done, good idea, we are very happy. We have become united in one community. We can share, we can have our community. And we prefer it this way.

This was the best idea, best situation, because we are totally new.

While almost half of new immigrants to Canada plan to sponsor relatives or help others come to Canada, refugees are the most likely class to report efforts toward reunification (Statistics Canada: LSIC 2005: 88). During the first resettlement process a particularly salient issue for building the community was the desire to bring Acehnese women in future settlement schemes. The Acehnese community in Vancouver is overwhelming skewed toward males, as is common in refugee movements (Hyndman and Walton-Roberts 2000), largely because more men than women fled Aceh in order to establish a better life elsewhere in hopes of reuniting with family at some later point. Of the 70 surveys completed in our study, 66 respondents were male. The average age of this group is 29 and only 18 of the 66 men are married (see Table 5). Thus, there is a significant portion of this community who encourage continued resettlement of Acehnese, especially one that reflects a better gender balance.

Table 5

**Age and Marital Status, June 2005**

	Average Age	Single	Married
Men	29	48	18
Women	27.8	0	4
Total	28.9	48	22

New social networks, however, have also been established, particularly among and within other Asian diasporic communities from connections made at mosques or through sports:

We share religion as a basis for bonds.

We met people from Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia . . . we talk on the phone, and we are networking for a job if someone knows of a job, or ask for directions in the city.

Socializing around sports (soccer and volleyball) is an important aspect of community life in Aceh and continues to be an important site in which not only is the Acehnese community strengthened, but bridges across communities are also forged:

We play soccer every week. It is a very popular sport in Indonesia; even in the villages in Aceh.

Every Sunday we play soccer together at 29<sup>th</sup> avenue; to play soccer and to talk . . . We bring the kids and they can play in the park while we play soccer. After soccer, maybe go back to someone's house for dinner together. We have a very close relationship with one another; like brother and sisters.

We are close to one another here, but we welcome others to the group.

The second process of community formation focuses on those sites and connections between the local community and might be considered as a process of diaspora formation where the Acehnese are beginning to negotiate political space in the Canadian, global and transnational context. In these spaces of political mobilization, issues include generally advocating for the safe resettlement of those Acehnese still in detention camps and in Aceh, and specifically pushing for family reunification. This process of community formation is still rather tentative at this early juncture:

Because we are the first Acehnese here it is hard for us to build community.

We want to bring our parents here.

Is it possible to bring everyone over to Canada?

Concern for those still in Aceh and Malaysia is the impetus for forming the Acehnese Society of Canada:

We are happy over here, we want them to be happy over there too.

Sometimes . . . we have a meeting and we pray for family, relatives, and friends still in Aceh. We meet in Burnaby in one of our houses that is big enough to accommodate everyone.

The Acehnese Society of Canada's [focus is] cultural. About the Acehnese. To help people in Aceh, to bring them to Canada and make their life easier, and to send some money to the refugees in Aceh. To help the people in Aceh.

It seems clear then that the seeds of a transnational community have been sown as part of this particular resettlement plan, in that locating all the refugees in the Vancouver area has helped to maintain existing social ties and communications as well as provide the space for fostering new relationships within the broader South Asian diaspora that makes up one part of the Vancouver ethnoscape. Furthermore, the ongoing interaction this particular group has with state and service providing actors contributes to a sense of cohesiveness among the Acehnese.

### **Final Thoughts**

In practical, everyday terms, the Acehnese participating in this study continue to have settlement difficulties in terms of access to and acquiring employment and English language training within the first year of federally funded financial support. Small but important signs of settlement, or 'integration' in the lingo of the Canadian government, have coalesced around the mosque, sports fields, and the Acehnese Society of Canada in ways that build upon affinities within the Acehnese community and among other, mainly, immigrant communities. These early indicators of success encourage continuation of state-managed settlement, especially when those migrating are 'new and few'. Policies and programmes of support surrounding employment and language, however, need ongoing development in order to facilitate a smoother and speedier settlement process. Legal status and permission to work—highly sought after and often elusive goals for many urban refugees in other parts of the world—are not in themselves a sufficient basis for securing livelihoods in the Canadian context.

The phenomenon of 'urban refugees' in Canada is an expression of state-managed selection and settlement practices that affect a tiny, if privileged, proportion of the world's refugees. The Canadian government's decision to settle all Acehnese refugees to Canada together, in Vancouver, has been a good one from the refugees' perspective. Further research to probe their participation in Canadian society over time is needed, especially since this group is 'new and few'. Full legal status and access to the services of the welfare state that has accepted them have not yet met their own goals of economic self-sufficiency. During the period of the research, the livelihoods of Acehnese refugees, who are now permanent residents on their way to citizenship, remained precarious and state-supported.

## Acknowledgements

We thank Chris Friesen and the Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia, the primary settlement agency in BC that assists Convention refugees, for initiating this project and co-facilitating the research. We wish to acknowledge that this research was co-funded by the Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis, collaboration among federal government departments, universities, and a federal funding body, the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). Finally, our gratitude goes out to Kathy Sherrell, Karen Jacobsen, and anonymous reviewers for their comments on earlier drafts. Any errors remain ours alone.

1. Unless otherwise stated, excerpts are taken from our focus groups held in April 2005. These comments have been translated from Indonesian to English by interpreters and digitally and manually recorded.
2. The funding on which this research is based is provided, in part, by the government agency responsible for immigration and refugee settlement in Canada, namely Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). Hence, not only is refugee settlement provided for by CIC, but studies of refugee settlement in Canada are also sponsored by the state.
3. Immigration currently accounts for 70 per cent of labour force growth, yet the incomes of recent immigrants to Canada are declining despite increased requirements for educational standing (Reitz 2001; McIsaac 2003).

**BBC** (2003) 'Indonesia braces for Aceh Conflict', 14 May; available on 24 August 2005 at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3026225.stm>

**CANADIAN COUNCIL FOR REFUGEES** (2005) *Closing the Front Door on Refugees: Report on Safe Third Country Agreement 6 Months after Implementation*. Available at <http://www.web.net/~ccr/closingdoor.pdf>, 20 November 2005.

**CHERAN, R.** (2000) 'Changing Formations: Tamil Nationalism and National Liberation in Sri Lanka and the Diaspora', Ph.D. dissertation (Toronto: Department of Sociology, York University).

**CIC** (Canadian Immigration and Citizenship) (2001) 'Pursuing Canada's Commitment to Immigration: The Immigration Plan for 2002', Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada.

**CIC** (Canadian Immigration and Citizenship) (2005) *Facts and Figures 2004*. Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, Cat. no.: C11-8/2004E-HTML; available on 30 August 2005 at <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/pub/facts2004/>

**COLLACOT, M.** (2002) 'Canada's Immigration Policy: the Need for Major Reform', *Public Policy Sources* 64, The Fraser Institute.

**DeVORETZ, D., PIVNENKO, S. and BEISER, M.** (2004) 'The Economic Experiences of Refugees in Canada.' Working Paper Series 04-04. Vancouver Centre for Excellence: Research on immigration and integration in the metropolis.

**HEDMAN, E.-L.** (2005) 'Introduction', *Forced Migration Review* 24: 4-5.

**HENIN, B. and BENNET, M. R.** (2002) 'Immigration to Canada's Mid-Sized Cities: A Study of Latin Americans and Africans in Victoria, B.C.' Working Paper Series 02-22 Vancouver Centre for Excellence: Research on immigration and integration in the metropolis.

**HYNDMAN, J.** (2000). *Managing Displacement: Refugees and the Politics of Humanitarianism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- HYNDMAN, J., SCHURMAN, N. and FIEDLER, R.** (2006) 'Size Matters: Attracting Immigrants to Canadian Cities,' *Journal of International Migration and Integration*.
- HYNDMAN, J. and WALTON-ROBERTS, M.** (1999). 'Transnational Migration and Nation: Burmese Refugees in Vancouver.' Working Paper series 99-07. Vancouver Centre for Excellence: Research on immigration and integration in the metropolis.
- McDOWELL, C.** (1996) *A Tamil Diaspora: Sri Lankan Migration, Settlement and Politics in Switzerland*. Providence, RI: Berghahn Books.
- McISAAC, E.** (2003) 'Immigrants in Canadian Cities: Census 2001—What Do the Data Tell Us?' *Policy Options*, May: 58–63.
- MOUNTZ, A.** (2003) 'Embodied Geographies of the Nation-State: An Ethnography of Canada's Response to Human Smuggling', PhD thesis, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.
- REITZ, J.** (2001) 'Immigrant Success in the Knowledge Economy: Institutional Change and the Immigrant Experience in Canada 1970–1995', *Journal of Social Issues* 57(3): 579–613.
- ROSS, M. L.** (2003) 'Resources and Rebellion in Aceh, Indonesia', working paper for the Yale-World Bank Project on 'The Economics of Political Violence', available 24 August 2005 at <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/ross/ResourcesRebellion.pdf>
- SCOTT, J.** (1998) *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- SHERRELL, K., HYNDMAN, J. and PRENIQI, F.** (2005) 'Sharing the Wealth, Spreading the "Burden": The Non-metropolitan Settlement of Kosovar Refugees in British Columbia', *Canadian Journal of Ethnic Studies* 37(3): 75–95.
- STATISTICS CANADA** (2003) '2001 Census: Analysis Series—Canada's Ethnocultural Portrait: A Changing Mosaic', catalogue no. 96F0030XIE2001008, January 21; available on 30 August 2005 at <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/analytic/companion/etoimm/pdf/96F0030XIE2001008.pdf>
- STATISTICS CANADA: LISC** (2005) 'Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada: A Portrait of Early Settlement Experiences.' (LISC) Ministry of Industry September 1–106.
- US COMMITTEE FOR REFUGEES** (1997) *World Refugee Survey 1997*. Washington DC: Immigration and Refugee Service of America.
- US COMMITTEE FOR REFUGEES** (1998) *World Refugee Survey 1998*. Washington DC: Immigration and Refugee Service of America.
- US COMMITTEE FOR REFUGEES** (1999) *World Refugee Survey 1999*. Washington DC: Immigration and Refugee Service of America.
- US COMMITTEE FOR REFUGEES** (2000) *World Refugee Survey 2000*. Washington DC: Immigration and Refugee Service of America.
- US COMMITTEE FOR REFUGEES** (2001) *World Refugee Survey 2001*. Washington DC: Immigration and Refugee Service of America.
- US COMMITTEE FOR REFUGEES** (2002) *World Refugee Survey 2002*. Washington DC: Immigration and Refugee Service of America.
- US COMMITTEE FOR REFUGEES** (2003) *World Refugee Survey 2003*. Washington DC: Immigration and Refugee Service of America.
- VOICE OF AMERICA** (2005) 'Indonesia–Aceh Peace Accord' 24 August; available on 24 August 2005 at <http://www.voanews.com/uspolicy/2005-08-24-voa2.cfm>
- WALTON-ROBERTS, M.** (2004) 'Regional Immigration and Dispersal: Lessons of Small- and Medium-sized Urban Centres in British Columbia', Metropolis working paper 04-03, available 5 April 2006 at [http://riim.metropolis.net/frameset\\_e.html](http://riim.metropolis.net/frameset_e.html)