



THE CANADIAN SOUTHEAST ASIA REFUGEE HISTORICAL
RESEARCH PROJECT: HEARTS OF FREEDOM

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THE CANADIAN SOUTHEAST ASIA REFUGEE HISTORICAL
RESEARCH PROJECT: HEARTS OF FREEDOM (HOF)

The Evolution of Canadian Settlement Programming from the Mass Resettlement of Indochinese Refugees to Present

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Abstract

The 1976 Immigration Act was the first act to establish the fundamental objectives of Canadian immigration policy, define refugees as a distinct class of immigrants, and require the government to meet its obligations to refugees under international conventions and agreements. In 1979, the Mennonite Central Committee Canada (MCCC), an Anabaptist non-profit organization, signed the first umbrella agreement with the federal government to provide private sponsorship of refugees that led to the development of Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program. The Vietnam War, the Lao Secret War, and the Cambodian Genocide had created massive flows of refugees. The Southeast Asian (Indochinese) refugee movement from 1975 to early 1990s became a catalyst for the development of various settlement programs to help refugees integrate in Canada. This article examines the evolution of different settlement programming, including ethnic associations, along with their contributions and challenges in the settlement and integration of refugees in Canada.

**The Canadian South East Asia Refugee Historical Research Project:
Hearts of Freedom**

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Introduction

Between 1979 and 1980, 60,000 refugees from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia were resettled to Canada in the single largest mass movement of refugees in Canada's history. This event was unprecedented not only for its scale, but it also marked Canada's first experience with the newly-minted Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program and contributed to the expansion of Canada's immigrant Settlement Program. Indochinese refugees faced a number of significant barriers to settlement and adaptation in Canada, but were also assisted by the provision of settlement services and funding for ethnocultural organizations through the multiculturalism directorate. Drawing from the lessons learned from the Indochinese refugee movement, this paper explores the evolution of settlement programming as well as the role of ethnic organizations in the promotion of immigrant settlement and integration in Canada.

While Indochinese ethnic organizations are considered to have played a vital role in supporting and advocating for their communities, the funding for these organizations has dwindled in recent years due to competition with larger multi-ethnic service provider agencies and the prioritization of short-term settlement objectives over longer-term concerns about the social and political integration of immigrant communities. This paper argues the settlement and integration of newcomers should be approached holistically, with appreciation for need for culturally-appropriate programming available at various stages of the settlement process. Settlement and integration take place over the lifespan of newcomers and a continuum of support is necessary in order to overcome the various challenges that newcomers encounter in the months and years following their arrival. Furthermore, the Canadian government must attend to existing structural barriers to integration and work to create welcoming communities that support the full social, political, and economic integration of immigrants and refugees.

Settlement Service Delivery in Canada

When immigrants and refugees arrive in a new country, they go through a process of adaptation and settlement as they adjust to their new home. The stages of settlement include: (1) adjustment to the culture, language, people, and environment; (2) adaptation to their new community by learning how to navigate challenges as newcomers begin to establish their new lives and routines; and (3) the final stage of integration, where newcomers actively participate in and contribute to the host society without barriers (Shields, Drolet, & Valenzuela, 2016, p. 5). This process, aided by government-funded support and services, is intended to benefit both newcomers and the broader host society (George, 2002; IRCC, 2017; Shields et al., 2016). The obligation of the Government of Canada to actively support the integration of permanent residents in Canada is outlined in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA), which acknowledges that this process involves mutual obligations on the part of both newcomers and the broader Canadian society (IRCC, 2018). While the department of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) indicates that settlement “refers to a short period of mutual adaptation between newcomers and the host society” (IRCC, 2018, 1), scholars have argued that settlement is a non-linear process that takes place over the lifetime of newcomers and may extend into subsequent generations (George, 2002; Omidvar & Richmond, 2003).

The federal Government of Canada provides funding for an array of programs to assist newcomers with their initial needs following arrival as well as to attain longer-term objectives such as economic and social integration. Just as the Indochinese refugee crisis began to take shape in the 1970s, Canada began a process of expanding its immigration and settlement programs that had been cut back during the previous decade (Vineberg, 2012). In 1974, the program that later became known as the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP)

was created under the department of Manpower and Immigration in order to provide immigrants with “financial assistance for settling in, job counselling, placement, language and occupational training, information and referral services, social counselling, centers for community contact and general forums for immigrants’ concerns” (cabinet decision cited in Vineberg, 2012, p. 28).

Since its inception, the Settlement Program has been contingent upon the leadership of local voluntary organizations for the delivery of services to newcomer populations. The key role of the voluntary sector was reflected in Cabinet decisions that led to the creation of the program as well as the government’s interest in developing ethnic and community organizations to work for the “integration and involvement of the immigrant community in the Canadian society” (Vineberg, 2012, p. 28). As will be discussed later in this paper, ethnic organizations were considered to be crucial resources for settlement and adaptation of Vietnamese, Laotian (Lao), and Cambodian refugees in Canada.

Between 1974 and 1984—a period which included the resettlement of 60,000 Indochinese refugees between 1979-80 and the subsequent arrival of thousands more through refugee resettlement and family reunification programs—the government increased funding for settlement programming by over \$2.3 million and the number of agencies providing services increased from 51 to 136 (Vineberg, 2012).¹ In the early years of the program, most contracts were granted to agencies in Montréal, Vancouver, and Toronto, leaving significant gaps in services in other major centers. The mass resettlement of Indochinese refugees led to a significant increase in demand for services and a subsequent boom in new immigrant service provider organizations across Canada (Vineberg, 2012). Many existing settlement service providers trace their roots to this period.

¹ These numbers do not include expenditures on initial refugee resettlement assistance (then-known as the Adjustment Assistance Program (AAP)) (Vineberg, 2012).

In the 1980s, settlement programming expanded to support basic-language training that operated in addition to existing labor-market-oriented language training and the Host Program, which was intended to connect refugees with Canadian volunteers who would assist with the refugees' adaptation in Canada. In the 1990s, the eligibility for the language programs and the Host program was expanded to include permanent residents belonging to other immigrant categories besides refugees (Vineberg, 2012). Currently, settlement services are available in urban and rural centers across Canada for Convention refugees, permanent residents of other immigrant categories, protected persons, and some temporary residents. According to the IRCC (2018), resettled refugees and protected persons are more likely than any other immigrant category to access settlement services (72% of refugees and protected persons access federally-funded settlement services as opposed to an overall average of 39% among other immigrant categories). It is reasonable to assert that other immigrant groups have other resources and skills to help them in settlement.

Since 2014, the federal government has assumed responsibility for the funding of settlement services in all provinces and territories with the exception of Quebec through multi-year contribution agreements with local service provider organizations (SPOs) (IRCC, 2018). Under the 'modernized' federal Settlement Program, settlement services now focus on six key areas: (1) needs assessments and referrals; (2) information and orientation services; (3) language assessment; (4) language training; (5) employment-related services; and, (6) community connections. Additional services are also provided to facilitate newcomers' access to settlement programming, such as childcare, interpretation, and crisis counselling, though significant funding limitations are placed on these latter services as they are intended to only facilitate newcomers' access to the settlement programming offered through the six streams (IRCC, 2018). Currently,

the majority of federally-funded settlement services are provided by non-governmental organizations and educational institutions, while only 7% of IRCC-funded SPOs identify as community, ethnic, fraternal or other civil society organizations (IRCC, 2018).² According to the IRCC (2018), the “public-private partnership model” used by Canada allows the government to maintain consistency in programming across the country, while local non-profit service providers are seen as more adept at responding to the particular needs of their communities and may draw upon existing community resources to meet these needs (IRCC, 2018, p. 20).

Short- and Long-term Settlement Objectives

As indicated in the discussion above, there are divergent ideas as to the length of the process of ‘settlement’ experienced by immigrants and refugees. The federal immigration department defines settlement as a “short period” occurring within the first several years following arrival (IRCC, 2018, p. 1), whereas some scholars and immigration policy advocates argue that settlement is a long-term process that takes place over the course of a newcomer’s life and is possibly even inter-generational (George, 2002; Omidvar & Richmond, 2003; Shields et al., 2016). These differences can be attributed, in part, to funding priorities oriented to meeting the short-term needs of newcomers and the Canadian labour market, with less emphasis provided to the long-term goals of the social, economic, and political integration of newcomer populations. Various scholars have argued that newcomers are pressured to quickly gain employment, while at the same time being confronted by structural barriers to their full participation in the labour market (Aliweiwi & Laforest, 2009; Omidvar & Richmond, 2003; Shields et al., 2016). This discussion will explore how these pressures and barriers related to

² In addition to the IRCC, other federal departments and levels of government including provincial and municipal governments also provide services to newcomers that are integral to their settlement and integration in Canada including the provision of healthcare, social services, education and employment services (IRCC, 2018, p. 4).

employment may undermine the long-term settlement goals and prospects of newcomers (Aliweiwi & Laforest, 2009). A holistic approach oriented to long-term outcomes will address barriers to economic integration as well as the social and political integration of newcomers. As will be discussed in the subsequent section, ethnic organizations can play a key role in meeting both immediate and longer-term settlement objectives.

Canada's broader strategy of economic development involves utilizing immigration to respond to issues such as labor shortages and an aging population (Aliweiwi & Laforest, 2009). Despite Canada's interest in encouraging immigration for economic purposes, many newcomers face significant barriers to finding adequate employment or employment commensurate with their education and experience (Shields et al., 2016; IRCC, 2017). Foreign credential recognition is among the long-standing issues that have contributed to challenges faced by newcomers in terms of labor-market integration and settlement in Canada (Aliweiwi & Laforest, 2009; Omidvar & Richmond, 2003; Vineberg, 2012). Robert Vineberg (2012) attributes this problem to "multiple jurisdictions, outdated attitudes towards foreign credentials, and lack of information—both among Canadians about the strengths and weaknesses of foreign academic institutions and among prospective immigrants about their realistic chances of having credentials accepted in Canada" (p. 55). Problems related to the recognition of newcomers' credentials have been discussed by the federal government since at least the 1960s when the issue was raised in a Cabinet decision on immigration (Vineberg, 2012). These problems continue to present a significant barrier to integration, worsening newcomers' exposure to economic insecurity and contributing to stress, a sense of unrealized expectations, and loss of status (Aliweiwi & Laforest, 2009; Omidvar & Richmond, 2003; Vineberg, 2012).

While credential recognition presents a significant structural barrier to the economic integration of newcomers, other studies have indicated that the pressure placed on immigrants to quickly become self-sufficient and avoid dependency on the state during the early stages of settlement is likewise extremely problematic. The pressures to quickly gain employment can come at the expense of much-needed skills and job training, which “risks undermining broader social integration and may create and perpetuate vulnerability for new Canadians” (Aliweiwi & Laforest, 2009, p. 138). Scholars argue that the emphasis on newcomers’ rapid entry into the labour market combined with the existence of structural barriers to full economic participation, including racial and gender discrimination and lack of access to credential recognition and training opportunities, contributes to the concentration of poverty among newcomers and growing issues of social and economic exclusion (Aliweiwi & Laforest, 2009; Omidvar & Richmond, 2003). The pressures for newcomers to be “labour market/economy ready” are focused primarily on persons arriving through economic and family class immigration streams (Shields et al., 2016); however, refugees also face pressures to quickly enter the labour market and reduce their dependence on the state. The experiences of Indochinese refugees are particularly illustrative of these intertwined issues.

Indochinese refugees who arrived in Canada in the late 1970s and early 1980s faced numerous challenges to integration. Among these challenges were a lack of fluency in English or French and the economic recession in Canada that began in the 1980s that further limited the economic opportunities available for these newly arrived refugees (Dorais, 2000). While the Indochinese refugees of this period were frequently described as having very low levels of formal education and professional experience, there were also many refugees who had secondary or post-secondary education and had professional work experience (Employment and

Immigration Canada, 1982; Neuwirth, Grenier, Devries, & Watkins, 1985). Despite facing barriers to employment, reports later revealed that by the mid-1980s Vietnamese and Laotian refugees were participating in the labour market at a rate greater than the Canadian national average, with many finding employment within the first six months after arrival (Neuwirth et al., 1985; Dorais, 2000, p. 15). While this may be considered evidence of their rapid integration into Canadian society, reports also indicated that Indochinese refugees, like other newcomers, were largely concentrated in low-wage occupations involving manual labour, earning less than the national average despite their greater participation in the labor market (Chan, 1987; Copeland, 1988; Dorais, 2000; Stobbe, 2006).

Pressure for Indochinese refugees to quickly become independent (and therefore, not dependent on the government) led immigration officials to prioritize language training for male heads of household who were deemed to be most likely to enter the labour market, further deepening the precarity and social isolation faced by newcomer women (Indra, 1987). While men may have initially been encouraged to attend language classes, the pressure to become economically independent led many to leave classes once work became available despite the long-term benefits of gaining proficiency in one of the official languages (Indra, 1987; Neuwirth et al., 1985). Stobbe's (2006) research found that women were more likely to stick with language classes while they were in the workforce. Other needs, including counselling, mental health support, and cultural and social adaptation and inclusion, were likewise considered to be of lower priority than short-term economic concerns (Indra, 1987).

The unemployment and underemployment of newcomers during the economic downturn of the 1980s and 1990s led to a higher incidence of poverty among newcomers during this period in comparison to previous cohorts of immigrants, and contributed to a growing sense of social

exclusion (Omidvar & Richmond, 2003). In a study conducted approximately 25 years after their initial arrival in Canada, Laotian refugees indicated that training and preparation for the long-term success needs to be prioritized over rapid employment (Stobbe, 2006). Of those surveyed, 90% discussed the importance of allowing refugees to focus on English language acquisition prior to joining the workforce and the need for various governmental supports for refugees entering the labour market including credential recognition, re-training, and job matching (Stobbe, 2006).

Refugees should be provided with the support to become employable not only for short-term 'survival' jobs, but for their long-term success and integration (Beiser, 1999; Stobbe, 2006). These programs are required to not only support the employability of newcomers in their area of expertise, but also to mitigate the mental health effects of loss of status experienced by highly trained newcomers who experience disillusionment due to the lack of opportunities commensurate with their training and the additional strain of economic insecurity and unemployment (Beiser, 1999; Neuwirth et al., 1985, Vineberg, 2012). Studies found that Indochinese refugees with previous professional employment and higher education experienced a heightened sense of loss of status than those with less education and work experience, leading these highly trained newcomers to feel more discouraged about job prospects and more pessimistic about the future (Dorais, 1991; Neuwirth et al., 1985). These problems do not necessarily present themselves within the first several years following arrival, but may affect the long-term settlement and integration of newcomer populations.

While settlement is frequently described as a continuum, newcomers do not necessarily experience a linear progression from initial adjustment to integration as they encounter barriers and challenges such as racism, employment problems, mental health issues and unrealized

expectations in the years following arrival (Aliweiwi & Laforest, 2009; George, 2002; Omidvar & Richmond, 2003). Poverty, unmet expectations, and discrimination all present challenges to successful settlement and integration at the individual level and risk contributing to a sense of exclusion and the reproduction of serious social problems such as the concentration of poverty among newcomers (Aliweiwi & Laforest, 2009; Omidvar & Richmond, 2003). Due to this, a continuum of support is needed not only from the federal immigration department but from all departments and levels of government as well as civil society in order to respond to the initial settlement needs of newcomers as well as the longer-term objectives of economic, social and political integration (George, 2002; Shields et al., 2016; Vineberg, 2012). To attend to these longer-term objectives, settlement and integration need to be re-imagined from the current “‘one-way’ street” focus on immigrants’ successful integration that is often narrowly defined as whether they are employed and therefore not reliant on public support to the “‘two-way’ street” or mutual adaptation required by both immigrants and the host society (Shields et al., 2016, p. 13). This entails responding to the structural barriers to employment experienced by newcomers as well as efforts to create welcoming communities and develop a sense of belonging socially, politically and culturally among immigrant populations (Aliweiwi & Laforest, 2009; Omidvar & Richmond, 2003; Shields et al., 2016; Vineberg, 2012, p. 66). The following section will consider the role played by ethnic organizations in responding to the short- and long-term settlement needs and integration objectives of newcomer populations.

The Role of Ethnic Organizations in the Settlement Process

During the Indochinese refugee movement, ethnic organizations and networks were seen as a key resource for the successful integration of newcomers as they provided material assistance to newly arrived refugees, connection to employment opportunities, and social support

(Beiser & Hyman, 1997; Chan, 1987; Dorais, 1991). Private sponsors and government programs that encourage the establishment of cross-cultural networks, such as the Host program or what are now referred to as ‘community connections’ programs, can provide some of these same forms of support and social connection. Some studies suggest, however, that during the initial period of settlement, the relationships fostered through these programs may be somewhat superficial as newcomers may prefer to address sensitive personal problems within familial and cultural networks (Dorais, 1991; Lamba & Krahn, 2003). Ethnic organizations assist refugees in establishing themselves in their new community through culturally-appropriate support in their first language, while maintaining their cultural identity and providing a sense of continuity (Copeland, 1988; Dorais, 1991). These groups provide practical as well as social and emotional support for refugees as they begin to rebuild their lives following resettlement.

Initial funding for Indochinese ethnic associations was provided by the Canadian Secretary of State through their Multiculturalism Directorate in order to assist refugees with social, political and cultural integration and provide a bridge between refugees, the state and society (Indra, 1987; Vineberg, 2012). Given their disparate populations sizes, the Laotian and Cambodian communities faced significant challenges in competing with the large Vietnamese community for scarce governmental resources (Chan, 1987, 1988; Van Esterik & Van Esterik, 1988). A sizable community of Vietnamese students and professionals had immigrated to Canada prior to 1975 and had the resources, knowledge of English or French, and an awareness of Canadian institutions in order to create robust Vietnamese associations that advocated for their community’s needs (Dorais, 1991; Indra, 1987). The Cambodians and Laotians, on the other hand, lacked this pre-existing community of professionals in Canada and faced the additional barrier of a broad lack of awareness about the historical, cultural, and linguistic background of

Laos and Cambodia among private sponsors and government officials. Due to these factors, the particular needs of these communities were neglected, leading to conflict between the refugees and their sponsors, and compounding barriers to their integration in Canada (Dorais, 2000; Indra, 1987; Stobbe, 2006). These challenges limited the ability of emergent Laotian and Cambodian organizations to act as cultural brokers between their communities and the provincial and federal governments in order to access funds and connect newcomers with community resources (Chan, 1988; Indra, 1987). After the initial federal funding for these organizations began to dry up in the mid-1980s, competition between the smaller Laotian and Cambodian organizations and the larger Vietnamese groups became more acute and some organizations went through a period of decline, eventually limiting the services that they provided or closing altogether (Copeland, 1988; Indra, 1987; Woon, Wong, & Woo, 1988).

While these ethnic organizations were considered to have significantly contributed to Indochinese refugees' settlement in Canada, federal funding for settlement is now concentrated among larger multi-ethnic or non-ethnic nongovernmental organizations. Ratna Omidvar and Ted Richmond (2003) found that funding cutbacks, imposed restructuring, and competition with larger agencies, led to many small community-based settlement service providers, particularly those catering to a particular ethnic community, to close their doors or otherwise cut back on their programming. This finding was echoed by the report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on best practices in settlement service delivery (Tilson, 2010). Witnesses to the committee indicated that "ethno-specific services and ethno-specific agencies play a critical role in settlement," as it is important "to be able to access services from people who fundamentally understand your values, who look like you, in many instances, and who can speak the language of the service you're demanding" (Tilson, 2010, p. 5). Despite this, witnesses

testified to the committee that smaller organizations have difficulty accessing settlement funding due to competition with large agencies and their lack of institutional capacity to complete the rigorous evaluations required for receiving federal grants and contributions (Tilson, 2010).

Today, the majority of federally-funded settlement services across Canada are provided by non-governmental organizations, non-profits, and educational institutions, with only a small percentage (7%) of services provided by ethnic or other community organizations (IRCC, 2018).³

While the trend in federal funding for settlement services has been moving away from funding ethno-specific organizations, a variety of scholars have argued that these organizations provide specific benefits to newcomer communities. In her analysis of the community organizing of Indochinese refugees in Canada from 1977-82, Doreen Marie Indra (1987) argues that ethnic organizations “could provide an effective, culturally-appropriate vehicle for *short-term* programming aimed at immigrant settlement and adaptation, complementing the contribution of voluntary organizations” and that “the longer term processes of social, cultural and political integration of immigrants into Canadian life might be powerfully augmented by giving community organizations more financial support and greater public recognition” (pp. 167-68). Ethnic organizations can better define the needs and interests of their own community, potentially avoiding some of the challenges that Laotian and Cambodian refugees faced due to the lack of awareness among sponsors and government officials of their distinct cultures, languages, and histories in the initial period following their arrival (Indra, 1987). These organizations also provide translation services that enables communication between refugees and

³ This is not to say that these larger organizations cannot provide culturally-appropriate services for refugees in their own languages, indeed, many of these organizations employ immigrants and former refugees as settlement counsellors and interpreters.

sponsors, and in some situations even mediate conflicts in ways that create more satisfying resolutions (Stobbe, 2006). Ethno-specific service providers can also assist in connecting newcomers with employment opportunities within their community networks, providing culturally-appropriate responses to trauma and the stress of resettlement, and they may be better placed to reach out to vulnerable members of the community such as women, children, and the elderly (Indra, 1987; Pinto & Sawicki, 1997; Shields et al., 2016).

These organizations, along with religious institutions, may also assist newcomers in the process of settlement and adaptation by contributing to the strengthening, maintenance, and transmission of ethnic identity. Cultural and religious celebrations offer an opportunity to bring newcomers together, reduce alienation and isolation among refugee populations struggling with trauma, and provide a sense of continuity, community, and identity to newcomers as they establish themselves in the host society (Dorais, 1991; Indra, 1987; Van Esterik, 2003). These celebrations also provide opportunities for the broader Canadian public to learn about and interact with newcomer populations, contributing to the social integration of newcomers and reflecting the ‘two-way’ vision of settlement and integration, which implies changing the cultural fabric of Canada rather than pursuing an assimilationist approach.

In order to effectively support newcomers in both the short- and long-term, ethnic organizations require sufficient and reliable funding and institutional support. By strengthening their institutional capacity, these organizations may build sufficient political legitimacy and power to effectively advocate for their communities, thus contributing to their political and social integration (Indra, 1987, 168). Ethnic organizations can play an important role in advocating for migrants’ rights and the expansion of settlement and integration programming, particularly in a time of increased anti-immigrant discourse and ongoing funding cutbacks to settlement

programs. Government funders, however, are often reluctant to provide economic support for such activities (Indra, 1987; Shields et al., 2016). Shields *et al.* (2016) explain that strategies for overcoming these funding challenges may include fostering partnerships and alliances with other stakeholders, including national and international rights groups, like-minded public officials, academics and academic institutions, and other non-profit organizations (p. 24). Partnerships between ethnic organizations and larger service provider organizations may also be useful for overcoming the institutional limitations of many small ethnic organizations as well as issues related to accessing government funding, provided that these partnerships are equitable and ethnic organizations are not treated as a “junior partner” (George, 2002; Shields et al., 2016, p. 20).

To adequately support the full economic, social, and political integration of immigrant and refugee communities in Canada, settlement must be understood from a holistic perspective that accounts for both immediate and long-term needs. This perspective must also consider the changes that need to be made on the part of the Canadian government and Canadian society to reduce barriers to newcomers’ full participation in each of these areas. Ethnic organizations can play an important role in responding to the short-term needs of newcomers in the period following arrival, as well as longer-term goals, provided that they receive sufficient economic and institutional support. The following section will discuss the emergence and evolution of Indochinese ethnic organizations in three cities across Canada. This discussion provides insight into some of the challenges faced by Indochinese ethnic organizations in maintaining their presence over time, as well as the approaches that some organizations have made in order to continue providing services and support to their communities.

Ethnic Organizations and Settlement Case Studies

The following pages will discuss the emergence of ethnic organizations among the Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian communities in Toronto, Winnipeg, and Vancouver in the years following the mass resettlement of 60,000 Indochinese refugees to Canada between 1979 and 1980. During this period, a large proportion of Indochinese refugees were designated to settle in the major urban centers of Toronto and Vancouver. The Indochinese communities in these cities continued to grow throughout the 1980s as refugees designated to settle in other areas secondarily migrated in order to be near the larger ethnic communities in these cities and to take advantage of increased economic opportunities that were present there. Though Winnipeg is a comparatively smaller city, it shares a long history of involvement in refugee resettlement, particularly as it relates to the private sponsorship of refugees. Due to the active involvement of a number of churches and community groups in the Private Sponsorship of Refugees program, several thousand refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia were designated to settle in Manitoba during this time.

The following discussion focuses on ethnic organizations developed by the Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian communities; however, this discussion does not fully account for the experiences of ethnically-Chinese refugees from the region and their efforts to build their own community organizations or become incorporated in existing Chinese ethnic organizations in Canada. A significant percentage of the refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia were ethnically-Chinese, with their own distinct cultures, histories, and needs.⁴ Some attempts have been made to research the particular experiences of this ethnic group; however, the experiences

⁴ Dorais (2000) explains that up to 40% of Vietnamese refugees, 25% of Cambodians and 20% of Laotian refugees that arrived in Canada during this period were ethnically Chinese.

of ethnically-Chinese refugees from this period remains underexplored.⁵ In terms of participation in ethnic organizations, the literature appears to show a tendency among ethnic-Chinese communities to participate in both existing Chinese ethnic organizations as well as organizations corresponding to their national origin (such as Vietnamese community organizations) (Dorais, 1991; Indra, 1988; Woon et al., 1988), though Dorais (2000) notes that Chinese communities across Canada also created their own organizations (p. 22), however there is little information available about these organizations.

The information presented here about Indochinese ethnic organizations and settlement service providers is drawn mainly from the organizations' websites as well as published reports and academic studies. While the size, scale, and focus of these ethnic organizations vary, this discussion provides insight into the evolution of some ethnic organizations that arose during the 1980s in response to the Indochinese refugee movement into formalized settlement service provider organizations geared toward newcomers from diverse ethnic backgrounds. In these examples, the shift to providing services to a broader community of immigrants and refugees likely occurred in response to federal funding requirements and the changing demographics of immigrant and refugee arrivals in Canada. While some Vietnamese and multi-ethnic organizations continue to provide settlement services, other ethnocultural organizations, particularly among the Laotian and Cambodian communities, have since disappeared. Another theme that can be observed from a review of the activities of Indochinese ethnic organizations in these cities is their emphasis on the preservation and transmission of ethnic identity through cultural celebrations and community events. Ethnic organizations may provide a bridge between newcomers and mainstream services, assisting newcomers with settlement and adaptation in a

⁵ For studies on the settlement experiences of ethnically-Chinese refugees from Vietnam, please see: (Chan, 1988), (Indra, 1988), and (Woon, Wong, & Woo, 1988).

new country (George, 2002; Indra, 1987). At the same time, they may also provide an opportunity for newcomers to celebrate and strengthen their cultural traditions and practices as a resource for adaptation in the Canadian context.

Toronto

Prior to the arrival of the 60,000 Indochinese refugees in Canada between 1979-80, Toronto hosted a small population of Vietnamese professionals and students. Large numbers of Vietnamese refugees began arriving in the city in 1979, with the population continuing to increase through the 1980s due to family reunification initiatives and secondary migration from other parts of Canada (Van Esterik & Van Esterik, 1988). Between 1979 and 1980, approximately 6,385 Indochinese refugees arrived in the Toronto/Mississauga area, making Toronto the second largest destination for Indochinese refugees in Canada after Montréal (Employment and Immigration Canada, 1982). As the province with the most sponsoring groups (3,203), Ontario received 40% of all privately sponsored Indochinese refugees in Canada between 1979 and 1980, totalling 17,084 (Employment and Immigration Canada, 1982). The 2016 census found that 81,175 people in Toronto identified as having ethnic origins from the region with 5,945 identifying as Cambodian (Khmer), 50 as Hmong (an ethnic minority group from Laos), 3,805 as Laotian, and 71,425 as Vietnamese (Statistics Canada, 2017a).⁶ These numbers demonstrate the exponential growth of the Vietnamese community in Toronto over the past 40 years.

The Vietnamese Association in Toronto was established in 1972 by a group of Vietnamese students and became the largest and most professionalized of the Indochinese ethnic organizations in the city (Van Esterik & Van Esterik, 1988; VAT, 2015). Initially, the

⁶ These numbers derived from census data do not account for the population of ethnically-Chinese persons from these three countries.

Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian Associations had offices in a Government of Ontario office building in downtown Toronto until the Vietnamese Association purchased its own building in 1986 (Van Esterik & Van Esterik, 1988). In their early years, these organizations provided settlement, orientation, and information services for members of their community as well as programs for the celebration and preservation of their cultural heritage. The size of the Vietnamese community in Toronto is reflected in the large number of Vietnamese cultural associations, groups, and service providers that cater to this community.⁷

The Vietnamese Association, Toronto (VAT) and the Lao (Laotian) Association of Toronto maintain a significant presence in the city and continue to provide settlement services, support, and activities celebrating their cultural heritage. The VAT provides government-funded settlement services, including information and orientation, employment assistance, and citizenship test preparation. These services are provided in English, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Cantonese, Tagalog, Tibetan, and Hindi, indicating that the organization has expanded its services beyond the community of Vietnamese newcomers to immigrants and refugees from a variety of Asian countries (VAT, 2019). In the fiscal year, 2018-19, VAT staff served 8,361 client visits (VAT, 2019). In addition to their delivery of formal settlement services, the VAT also organizes community events and celebrations of culturally significant holidays for the “promotion and preservation of the Vietnamese heritage and culture, and for the enrichment of

⁷ To give a sense of the array of Vietnamese cultural organizations and groups that currently exist in Toronto, the 2018-19 annual report of the Vietnamese Association in Toronto lists the following groups that the association has collaborated with over the past year: the Vietnamese Toronto Marching Band, Former Thu Duc Cadet Officer Association, Vietnamese Cultural Society, Elderly Vietnamese Association of Mississauga, Elderly Vietnamese Association of Toronto, Vietnamese Association of Kitchener-Waterloo, GTA Photographers Association, VWAT Family Services, Quang Nam Da Nang Fraternity Association, Quang Ngai Fraternity Association, Vietnamese Culture and Science Association – Toronto Branch, Vietnamese Medical Association of Ontario, United Vietnamese Student Association of Ontario, Vietnamese Community Centre of Mississauga, Brampton Vietnamese Language School, Kitchener Vietnamese Language School, Mississauga Vietnamese Language School, Toronto Vietnamese Language School as well as several media organizations catering to the Vietnamese community in Canada (VAT, 2019).

multiculturalism in Canada” (VAT, 2019). These celebrations include the Viet Summer Festival, the annual Mid-Autumn Festival, Christmas celebrations, and the Lunar New Year (Tet) Festival, which the VAT Annual Report explains attracted large numbers from the community and hosted speeches from the Immigration Minister, Ahmed Hussein, and the Conservative Party Leader, Andrew Scheer (VAT, 2019). The presence of federal party leaders and cabinet ministers at the celebration provides a symbolic demonstration of the association’s—and by extension, the Vietnamese community’s—political legitimacy and strength. Connections with public servants and federal politicians provides an opportunity for the associations’ leaders to advocate for the needs of the Vietnamese community. Thanh Hai Ngo, who served as Chairperson of the Employment Insurance Board of Refugees, became the first Canadian Senator of Vietnamese descent in 2012 and continues to champion Vietnamese interests (Parliament of Canada, 2020).

Like the VAT, the Vietnamese Women’s Association of Toronto (VWAT) was founded in 1982 following the mass exodus of Indochinese refugees and provides settlement support to newcomers (VWAT Family Services, 2019). In addition to providing mainstream settlement programming, VWAT Family Services brings awareness to issues of domestic violence and healthy living, and in recent years began expanding their delivery of services beyond the Vietnamese community to newcomers from other ethnic backgrounds and nationalities (VWAT Family Services, 2019). This organization provides programming for youth and seniors, and participates in the organization of the Autumn Festival and other cultural activities. In their annual report, VWAT Family Services explains that these programs and events help their clients “connect to the community of their own culture and heritage, increase the sense of belonging and help reduce the loneliness in Canada” (VWAT Family Services, 2019, p. 7).

The online presence of Laotian and Cambodian ethnic organizations in Toronto is much lighter than that of Vietnamese organizations, owing to the fact that these communities share just a fraction of the total population of the Vietnamese community in the city. Unlike the Vietnamese, these groups also lacked a large existing community of students and professionals in Canada in the pre-1979 period who could establish community organizations and assist with the initial settlement needs of Cambodian and Laotian refugees during this early period (Indra, 1987).

The Lao Association of Ontario (LAO) was incorporated in 1980 and initially provided settlement services, language programs, youth programs, and organized cultural heritage events (Van Esterik & Van Esterik, 1988). The LAO website indicates that the organization continues to provide social and family counselling and other assistance as well as cultural programming, including a Lao dance and cultural program, an arts and crafts program, and a summer festival, though information on these activities has not been updated for several years (LAO, n.d.). Cultural celebrations, including the celebration of the Lao New Year, have also been organized by the Lao Buddhist Temple, providing an opportunity for the community to gather and strengthen their cultural and ethnic identities while sharing these practices with the broader Canadian public.

While there is a sizeable Cambodian community in Toronto, numbering just under 6,000 people in the last census (Statistics Canada, 2016), there is little up-to-date information about Cambodian community organizations in the city. The Canadian Cambodian Association provided similar services as the Vietnamese and Laotian associations during the 1980s; however, there is no information online indicating that the group is still active. Janet McLellan (1999) suggests that due to their traumatic experiences under the Khmer Rouge regime, Cambodian

refugees may share a sense of distrust and suspicion towards those in positions of authority, thus weakening the community networks and leadership required to establish and maintain community organizations. Despite these challenges, the Cambodian community in Toronto established a Khmer Buddhist Temple.

While Cambodian and Laotian Buddhists both practice Theravada Buddhism, the religious practices of these communities are closely tied to their ethnic and national identities and are therefore not equivalent nor interchangeable (Van Esterik & Van Esterik, 1988; McLellan, 1999). Religious practice can serve as a resource not only for the transmission of religious values, but as a mechanism to express ethnic identity and build communal networks of self-help and support (Stobbe, 2006). The maintenance and transmission of ethnic identity through worship and religious practice can be an invaluable resource for adaptation following the intense disruption and upheaval caused by resettlement to an unfamiliar country (Van Esterik, 2003). Religious practice has also been identified as an important resource for preventing mental health problems among refugees who have experienced trauma, loss, and violence, and who may be uncomfortable with speaking about sensitive personal problems with counsellors or therapists (McLellan, 1999; Stobbe, 2006; Van Esterik, 2003). Religious practice and the leadership of trusted religious leaders can help a community heal in a culturally-appropriate manner following violence and conflict.

Winnipeg

The first Indochinese refugees began to arrive in Manitoba in 1979 and between the period of 1979 to 1985, over 7,000 refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia were designated to settle in the province, with an initial 4,022 arriving between 1979 and 1980 (Copeland, 1988; Employment and Immigration Canada, 1982). Due to the participation of civil society groups in

the PSR program, refugees were not only concentrated in large urban centers, but were spread throughout the country according to the location of the sponsoring groups. In an early report, the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) estimated that they had sponsored approximately 4,000 Indochinese refugees between 1979-80, and of this number, 1,094 arrived in Manitoba, far outpacing MCC's sponsorship of refugees in other provinces (Kehler, 1980). The total population of persons identifying as having ethnic origins from these three countries has changed little over the decades. According to the 2016 census, 7,685 people in Winnipeg identified as having ethnic origins from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam (Statistics Canada, 2017b). The distribution of these ethnic groups in Winnipeg is approximately 500 Cambodian (Khmer), 1,605 Laotian, and 5,580 Vietnamese (Statistics Canada, 2017b).

Refugees from these three countries formed ethnic organizations in Winnipeg within the first several years of arriving in Canada for the purposes of preserving their cultural heritage and languages, and for providing community support for their members and settlement assistance for newcomers (Copeland, 1988). Online searches show that there is a Lao Association of Manitoba, but no information on the services they provide. There is also a Buddhist temple, Wat Lao Xayaram of Manitoba, but again, no details about the establishment. Currently, few Indochinese ethnic organizations remain active in Winnipeg.⁸ One notable exception is the Southeast Asian Refugee Community of Manitoba (SEARCOM) that was established in 1984 by two social workers of Southeast Asian descent (IRCOM, 2019). In its early years, SEARCOM was the only group in Manitoba that explicitly encouraged cooperation among the Southeast Asian ethnic groups in the province and provided recreation programs for youth and parenting courses as well as cross-cultural exchange programs between newcomer and Indigenous communities

⁸ While some of these organizations may continue to informally exist, they do not have a web-based presence indicating that they are not actively involved in formal settlement service provision for newcomers from this region.

(Copeland, 1988). SEARCOM expanded into formalized settlement service delivery and later built an apartment complex intended to respond to the lack of transitional housing for newly arrived refugees in Winnipeg (Bucklaschuk, 2016). The organization changed its name to the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba (IRCOM) in 1991 and now provides 3-year transitional housing to low-income immigrants, refugees and refugee claimants, regardless of their country of origin (Bucklaschuk, 2016; IRCOM, 2019). The majority of government-funded settlement services in Winnipeg are not provided by ethno-specific organizations, but like IRCOM, provide services to newcomers from a variety of backgrounds and frequently employ newcomers and former refugees as settlement counsellors.

Vancouver

Between 1979 and 1980, Vancouver received approximately 3,496 refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia (Employment and Immigration Canada, 1982), though other sources estimate the number of arrivals during this period to Vancouver and the surrounding area to be closer to 5,000 (Beiser, 1999). Prior to the refugees' arrival, Vancouver had a sizeable Chinese population of more than 150,000; however, there was no pre-existing community of Vietnamese, Laotians, or Cambodians, as was the case in Toronto (Beiser, 1999). In the 2016 census, 38,135 people identified as having ethnic origins from the region with 2,465 identifying as Cambodian (Khmer), 115 as Hmong, 1,710 as Laotian, and 33,845 as Vietnamese (Statistics Canada, 2017a). These numbers do not provide an indication of the size of the ethnically-Chinese community originating from these countries.

As there was no pre-existing immigrant community from these three countries in Vancouver, Indochinese refugees had to create their own community organizations in the years following their arrival or attempt to integrate into the existing Chinese community groups. As

described by Yuen-fong Woon et al. (1988), ethnically-Chinese populations face a particularly complex dynamic in terms of the maintenance and transmission of their cultural heritage and identity. On the one hand, this group benefitted from the presence of large Chinese communities in cities across Canada, including Vancouver, and therefore have access to various Chinese community organizations, media, and language schools. On the other hand, the authors found that ethnically-Chinese refugees in Victoria faced difficulties in feeling accepted in mainstream Chinese community organizations as well as in specific Indochinese associations, such as Vietnamese ethnic organizations (Woon et al., 1988). This group seemed to be caught between the two cultures that they are a part of due to their unique lived experiences and country of origin.

As the largest Indochinese community in Vancouver are the Vietnamese, there are a number of Vietnamese associations and community groups that continue to exist; however, it does not appear that these groups continue to provide formal settlement services for newcomers or refugees. Vietnamese ethnic organizations in Vancouver celebrate important holidays such as the Lunar New Year (Tet) and the Journey to Freedom Day, which commemorates the exodus of Vietnamese refugees after the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975.⁹ This day has been officially recognized in Canada through an Act of Parliament in 2015. There are also youth-led groups that have emerged in recent years who participate in organizing annual events including the Vietnamese-Canadian Community Heritage Day (VietFest).¹⁰

⁹ The following Vietnamese community groups gathered at the B.C. Legislature to commemorate the 2018 Journey to Freedom Day: the Vietnamese-Canadian Community in Greater Vancouver; Little Saigon Vancouver Foundation; the Free Vietnamese Association in B.C.; the Vietnamese Canadian Seniors Society of Greater Vancouver; UN Army Volunteer Reserve Brigade; the Mekong Delta Fellowship Society; the Vietnamese Cultural Heritage Association; the Vietnamese Women's Society in Greater Vancouver; the Vietnamese Veterans Association in B.C.; the Vietnamese Air Force Association; the Vietnamese Heritage Association; Lac Viet Radio; Thoi Bao; VietBC Radio; and the Yellow National Vietnam Flag Conservation Association (source: British Columbia Legislative Assembly Hansard <https://www.leg.bc.ca/content/Hansard/41st3rd/20180425pm-House-Blues.htm>).

¹⁰ For more information, please see the website of the Vietnamese-Canadian youth group, V3: <http://v3group.ca/>.

Despite having populations of over or close to 2,000 people in the Cambodian and Laotian communities in Vancouver, there is little information available online about the existence of Cambodian or Laotian ethnic organizations or temples. According to James Placzek and Ian Baird (2010), the Lao Benevolent Society of British Columbia was registered in 1980 to provide services and support to newcomers; however, the activities of the organization diminished over time with the decline in new arrivals from Laos. There is no current information available about this organization online. Placzek and Baird (2010) also describe the efforts by the Laotian community in British Columbia to establish a *Wat Lao* or Lao Buddhist temple. A former Lao community association president explained that his motivation to build the temple was “to show the next generation we are not alone,” while other temple congregants indicated that “being better Buddhists will make them better Canadians,” suggesting that the Laotian community in Vancouver likewise viewed religious practice as a resource for strengthening their ethnic community and adjusting to the Canadian context (Placzek & Baird, 2010, p. 111, 121). In 1987, the Lao community in Vancouver invited a Lao Buddhist monk from Montreal to live in the city and by 2000, the community bought a house in Surrey that was to become their temple, which moved again to another property in 2005. While Placzek and Baird (2010) expressed optimism for the future of the Wat Lao, there is not much information online about its programs, only that there is a Lao Canadian Buddhist Temple Society in Aldergrove, a community outside of Vancouver.

Conclusion

As illustrated by the preceding discussion, Indochinese ethnic communities in Canada quickly developed local organizations and associations to advocate on their behalf and assist newly-arrived refugees navigate the settlement process in cities across the country. Some of

these organizations have since ceased to exist, while others have transformed themselves into multi-ethnic settlement service providers for the broader immigrant and refugee community. Others have moved away from the provision of settlement services to focus specifically on the preservation, celebration, and transmission of their ethnic and religious identities and practices.

As indicated by Usha George (2002), settlement and integration are processes that may take years or even generations, particularly if you consider successful settlement to be measured by newcomers enjoying 'barrier-free' participation in the social, political, and cultural spheres in Canada (Shields et al., 2016). The tendency to envision settlement as measured by the rapid employment of newcomers and their lack of reliance on the state for support, ignores other important facets of integration, particularly in terms of the political and social integration of newcomer communities, as well as the structural barriers that exist for newcomers to fully participate in the labour market. A holistic and long-term vision of settlement is required to achieve the goals outlined by both scholars and the Canadian government for the full and barrier-free participation of newcomers in all facets of social life in Canada.

The settlement and integration needs of Indochinese refugees shifted and changed over time, and ethnic organizations provided, and in many cases, continue to provide settlement and integration support to their communities. These organizations also faced numerous challenges to their ongoing ability to provide services and advocate for their communities. The literature broadly supports the notion that ethnic organizations play a key role in the successful settlement of immigrants and refugees, yet these sources also indicate that ethnic organizations face difficulty in accessing funding for the provision of settlement services and integration-oriented programming (George, 2002; Indra, 1988; Pinto & Sawicki, 1997; Shields et al., 2016; Tilson, 2010). While ethnic organizations may be more responsive to the particular needs of their

individual communities, some groups lack the institutional capacity to provide a broad array of services or compete for government funding with larger agencies.

Scholars and policy advocates recommend that the government encourage partnerships between small community-based ethnic organizations and larger non-profit agencies in order to respond to these challenges, though care must be taken to ensure that these partnerships are equitable (George, 2002; Omidvar & Richmond, 2003; Shields et al., 2016; Vineberg, 2012).

Other potential solutions include the creation of partnerships with other levels of government and non-governmental stakeholders in order to access funding and increase the political legitimacy and power of ethnic communities (Shields et al., 2016). Ethnic organizations require financial and institutional support to advocate for their communities and support the goals of long-term social, political, and economic integration of newcomers in Canada.

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