

# Building resilience and resistance against racism and discrimination among Salvadorian female youth in Canada

Mirna E. Carranza

Lecturer, School of Social Work, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

## Correspondence:

Mirna E. Carranza,  
School of Social Work,  
McMaster University,  
1280 Main Street West,  
Hamilton,  
Ontario L8S 4M4,  
Canada  
E-mail: carranz@mcmaster.ca

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## ABSTRACT

**This paper reports on the findings of a qualitative study (32 in-depth interviews) with Salvadorian mothers and their daughters. In particular this paper focuses on the strategies that mothers and daughters utilized to resist prejudice and racism in their settlement country, Canada. Findings contribute to the literature specifically by drawing attention to the importance of ethnic pride in helping mothers and their daughters bridge significant strains that arise in their acculturation process.**

## INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on the processes of Salvadorian born mothers and their adolescent daughters during their cultural transition in Canada. In particular this paper focuses on the effectiveness of the strategies that mothers utilized in order to build their daughters' resistance and resilience when they encounter discrimination and prejudice in their settlement country. In addition, the way in which their adolescent daughters responded to their mothers' guidance and strategies is explored. This paper seeks to contribute to the larger body of literature on immigrant parent–youth relationships, particularly moving away from the deficit theory regarding the erosion of immigrant parents' authority with their children. The focus of the study is on the manner in which mothers and daughters, jointly, positioned themselves to settle in what they perceived to be a hostile environment because of anti-immigrant sentiment.

This paper raises critical issues for social work practice with refugee and immigrant communities. Findings are especially relevant to social workers involved in designing therapeutic interventions and/or community programmes aiming to support immigrant parents and their children.

## SALVADORIANS: CONTEXT OF MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT

To fully understand the experiences of Salvadorian immigrants and refugees, it is essential to understand the circumstances that gave rise to their flight. Millions of Salvadorian fled to North American countries in search of a safe haven during the civil war of 1980–1992 (Martin-Baro 1996). Of those who fled El Salvador seeking refuge, 28 295 came to Canada by 1991 (Canada Statistics 1991). The first wave of Salvadorians to arrive in Canada sought refuge directly from El Salvador shortly after the outbreak of civil war there. The second wave included refugees and immigrants who were settled in the USA illegally. They came to Canada in the mid 1980s during the changes in the immigration policy in the USA which led to a massive deportation of Salvadorians. Also among the second wave were those who had lived for some time in a transit country such as Mexico, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Cuba, etc. The third wave arrived to Canada slowly as a result of Canada's immigration programme of family re-unification. Thus Salvadorians entered Canada under diverse circumstances.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The attainment of positive and coherent identity is an essential task of adolescents (Erikson 1968). Adolescents' critical task is the selection and integration of childhood experiences. It is believed that this integration will lead to a construction of self in both present and future. An understanding of this process requires an appreciation of the psycho-social-cultural web in which the individual develops (Phinney & Rosenthal 1990).

The attainment of a positive ethnic identity may be more challenging for immigrant youth of colour because of the multiple negotiations that are taking place simultaneously; that is, parent-child relationships in a new context, acculturation and adolescence itself (Carranza 2007). However, research findings indicate there are many immigrant families who have developed successful strategies in order to maintain viable parent-youth relationships regardless of the challenges they encounter during and post migration (Strier 1996; Strier *et al.* 2005; Carranza 2007). Furthermore, Phinney & Nakayama (1991) in their studies with Asian-American, African-American, Mexican-American adolescents concluded that parents who involve children in cultural activities influence the development of positive ethnic identity. This in turn may lead to high self-esteem and sources of strength (Phinney & Alipuria 1996; Herman 2004). Others (Phinney & Rosenthal 1990; Phinney *et al.* 1990; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco 2001; Gamst *et al.* 2002) state that positive feelings of a person's ethnic identity is a fundamental component of ethnic identity formation and when dealing with prejudice and discrimination, especially for youth of colour.

This paper presents the research findings for the following research questions: (i) how do Salvadorian mothers and their daughters position themselves, as members of a minority group settling into Canadian society, (ii) what strategies do mothers develop in order to support their daughters, and (iii) how do Salvadorian daughters respond to their mothers' support.

## METHODS

Grounded theory was used in this study. The goal of grounded theory is the development of inductively derived grounded substantive and formal theory about a phenomenon. Its methods emphasize the development of theory that is rooted in the data which is systematically gathered and analysed (Glaser &

Strauss 1967; Glaser 1978; Charmaz 1983, 2005; Strauss 1987; Strauss & Corbin 1990). The researcher focused on the study of patterns of behaviour and meaning which account for variation in interaction around a substantive problem in order to arrive at conceptually based explanations for the processes operating within the substantive problem area (Murphy 1992; Locke 2001). Thus grounded theory methodologies allowed the researcher to fulfil the goals of this study through a 'grounded' theme analysis.

A critical stance was maintained throughout the project (Reason 1994). This entailed having awareness about the politics of difference and knowledge production (Freire 2004) and working closely with three Salvadorian research consultants throughout the research (two mothers and an adult daughter). Both mothers worked within the Salvadorian community. One mother worked as a health promotion officer, the second as a community development worker. The daughter involved in the study was attending university. Their involvement was critical in the development of interview questions, recruitment and in the data analysis, especially regarding emergent themes and overall in the process of knowledge production.

As a member of the Salvadorian community the researcher undertook the 'insider' perspective. As an insider the researcher had an enhanced understanding with the participants' struggles. Hence the researcher was able to explain the structural context in which their life unfolded. At the same time, this meant that the researcher brought inherent bias to the research. This raised boundary and interpretive challenges of which the researcher needed to be mindful through the study (Lomba de Andrade 2000; Moffat *et al.* 2005). The support of colleagues was sought in order to deal with these challenges.

## Sample

The challenges of immigration are, more often than not, negotiated in the context of the family (Carranza 2001). Therefore, research in family studies needs to encompass the family as a unit of analysis as well as the patterns of resistance that family members develop in order to bounce back in an unwelcoming environment. A purposive sample was chosen in order to provide some diversity to the range of the accounts regarding mother-daughter negotiation. The purposive sample provided richness along many dimensions such as socio-economic-political religious affiliations, migration paths, etc. The sample design was fairly

complex involving two sets of participants. Each of the two sets included mothers and their daughters. Participants in these sets were interviewed individually. These two sets were: (i) The Mother–Adolescent Daughter Set which included Salvadorian immigrant mothers and at least one of their adolescent daughters between the ages of 15 and 17 years who were born in Canada or abroad; and (ii) The Mother–Adult Daughter Set which included Salvadorian immigrant mothers and at least one of their adult daughters between the ages of 19 and 30 years who grew up in Canada or arrived before becoming an adolescent. Mothers and daughters in these two groups were interviewed individually because ‘in-depth interviews provided the possibility to learn to see the world from the eyes of the person being interviewed’ (Ely 1991, p. 58). These in-depth conversations allowed obtaining information about the participants’ individual perceptions regarding their positioning as they settled into Canadian context.

All the mothers and adult daughters, and some adolescent daughters, who participated in this study, left El Salvador fleeing for their lives. The paths of their flights were diverse, including sometimes periods of time in another country of first asylum. Out of the total sample only 12 mothers and their families had come directly to Canada with the assistance of the Red Cross, a sponsoring church, or Amnesty International. Prior to them settling in Canada, six mothers had lived in the USA, one had lived in Costa Rica, one in Nicaragua, two had lived in Guatemala and one had lived in Mexico. The participants’ immigration status at the point of entry varied. For example, 11 entered Canada as Landed Immigrants. Three came to Canada as Conventional Refugees. Eight entered Canada as Refugee Claimants. The participants who entered as refugee claimants waited an average of 5 years for their refugee hearing and to obtain Landed Immigrant status. The mothers and their daughters who participated in this study had been living in Canada between 8 and 20 years.

### Sample rationale

Participants were selected through English as a Second Language classrooms, immigration and settlement organizations, and by other contacts in the community. There were a total of 32 individual in-depth interviews; 16 with mothers and 16 with daughters. Interviews with mothers and their adult daughters were chosen because they had more experience in the subject. They provided a reflective retrospective view

regarding their struggles and successes during the acculturation process as members of a minority group. Interviews with adolescents were chosen because they and their mothers were able to provide information concerning current struggles dealing with racist behaviours from the native born.

### Data collection

Two-hour interviews were conducted in Spanish. They were audio-taped with the participants’ permission. In addition to the initial interviews in Sets One and Two individual follow-up interviews with eight of these participants (two mothers and daughters from Set One and Two) were conducted. Follow-up interviews were carried in order to integrate the data in two ways: (i) to add to the theme categories of the first set by providing more in-depth information and (ii) to clarify and ‘double check’ information about which I was uncertain regarding the participants’ meaning (Ely 1991).

### Data analysis

The method of analysis was ‘bottom up’ analytical strategy of grounded theory using theme analysis (Strauss & Corbin 1990). Ely (1991) defines a theme as a significant account that contains important meanings and that appears through all or most of the collected data or that carries heavy emotional and factual impact. The theme analysis provided the range of experiences for the mothers and the daughters as a set regarding how they positioned themselves as members of a minority group in order to successfully settle in Canadian society.

## RESULTS

The mothers’ perceptions regarding their experiences of discrimination is presented first. The analysis of the mothers’ teachings follows. The daughters’ views regarding ethnic pride are presented at the end. False names were used in order to protect the participants’ anonymity. Non-identifying biographical information has been added to each of the selected quotes in order to provide some context to the women’s experiences.

### Experiences of discrimination

The mothers interviewed expressed an acute awareness of the various challenges that they and their

daughters faced in Canadian society because of anti-immigrant sentiment. This section of the interviews was very emotional for the participants. One mother of an adult daughter and a former teacher commented:

'There is racism here. They tell you that there isn't, but there is. I have experienced it at work, in my volunteer job at school . . . I used to be a teacher in El Salvador, but I am not able to work in my profession so I volunteer at school because I miss teaching . . . You need to be aware of it [racism] so it does not take you by surprise . . .'

A mother of an adolescent daughter and a general labourer stated:

'I experienced racism at work every day. I have more seniority but my supervisor continues to give me the toughest jobs in comparison to my other teammates. Like I am short and they are all tall and look stronger than me. I have to do it or I'll get fired . . . One day I complained and he told me, 'If you don't like it here go back to your country.' My children have experienced it too. My daughter used to get teased at school due to her accent. Even the school principal did it too. She did not want to go to school anymore . . . She used to cry a lot. It hurt so much to see her like that . . .'

A mother of an adult daughter and a former pharmacist said:

'I experienced a lot of discrimination here because of my race, my colour and my accent. I have learned to fight back . . . I see it as ignorance . . . I mean people that discriminate are more ignorant than I am. I do not feel less than them. I sometimes confront them. Other times I walk away. It will depend in what mood I am. I mean when I am tired I just let it go or if it is not a big deal. But when it is of great importance I use it as an opportunity to educate people . . .'

The participants' experiences of discrimination were various. Most of their comments were related to racist acts within their current place of employment and personal encounters. They all talked about having an acute awareness of the anti-immigrant sentiment that surrounded them in which immigrant of colour and with an accent were not easily accepted.

Noteworthy is the fact that the participants who held professional training were not able to work in their profession. Yet they did not comment on this as systemic discrimination. They took their downward mobility as part of their 'price to pay' in order to live in a safe environment.

Most of their worries and concerns, however, focused on their daughters. They talked about the need to prepare their daughters to live in a racist

society hence they would not be taken by surprise. The strategies that they talked about developing were various.

### Mothers' teachings

In this study the mothers' major goal was to enhance their daughters' sense of heritage in order to prepare them to deal with racist acts. All the mothers commented that if their daughters felt proud of their heritage they would be able to stand strong in spite of the negative stereotypes and anti-immigrant sentiment that persisted among some Canadian people.

### Consciousness-raising: colonial oppression, indigenous roots and resistance

Almost all the mothers talked about wanting their daughters to stay connected to their roots, culture and ancestry. They discussed their pride in their daughters knowing their racial ancestry as 'mestizos' (Indigenous and Spanish mix). Some mother-daughter pairs had a direct lineage to indigenous tribes in El Salvador. Pride in their race was discussed at length by most of the mothers interviewed.

Some mothers specifically spoke about teaching their daughters about El Salvador's legacy of oppression which began in the times of the 'conquista' [conquest] by the Spaniards, which they considered to be another aspect of being Salvadorian. For them it was important that their daughters understood not only the culture and their family roots, but also the history of suffering, the poverty, subjugation and resistance of Salvadorian people. A mother of an adolescent daughter commented:

'Because I feel that if they know [about their roots] they will be able to feel that they come from a family [extended family]. They belong to a special place. I think that [her teachings about her ethnic roots] has helped her to feel proud of our ethnic roots. An example is that of her grandfather. He was murdered during the civil war of our country. I have told her about that so she knows that he fought and died for social justice; for peace in El Salvador. She values that a lot. She feels very proud of her ancestors.'

Another mother commented about her daughter's direct lineage to the indigenous people and to those that died in the indigenous up-rising in 1930.

'She [daughter] is learning Nahuat [Indigenous dialect]. Her grandmother lives with us. She [grandmother] is from the tribe of the Pocomanes and she is teaching her. She is now telling her [daughter] about the indigenous up-rising of the 30's when many of her family members were killed. My

daughter doesn't like to hear about that. But I tell her that because it is part of our history and she needs to understand that too. The last time we went to El Salvador I bought history books for her to read about it too. It is hard for her because my mother-in-law still cries when she thinks about it [The killing of her relatives during the indigenous up-rising]. . . . She is interested in learning about our people, the Mayans . . .'

A mother commented on the need to be a role model in order to instill ethnic pride in her daughter:

'I tell her that she needs to feel proud of being Salvadorian . . . I know I am and I will be until I die . . . For me it is very important that she keeps her Salvadorian roots. I have tried to model my beliefs with my behaviour. I tell her that she must be proud of her ancestry. Yes, some of us make mistakes. We make them due to our ignorance because we have been oppressed most of our existence. We must not feel ashamed of that. It is part of our legacy.'

The above quotes highlight the mothers' pride and consciousness about their ethnic roots, their awareness of their legacy of colonization and the resistance of the indigenous people to oppressive circumstances. It is evident that the participants' reactions are a reflection of their political awareness and critical consciousness about their needs to strengthen their daughters' ethnic pride as a way to resist discrimination. They believe that this knowledge is essential for their daughters' survival in Canada. All the mothers were vocal about their rationale for teaching their daughters about their legacy of oppression. Their suppressed or marginalized voices were ready to come forcefully into dialogue with those who were willing to listen in order to educate those within mainstream society about who they were and what they stood for.

### Speaking Spanish

Most of the mothers in this study commented on their great pride in keeping alive the Spanish language in spite of the challenges of living in an English-speaking country. They were very proud of their language and believed it was important for their daughters to learn their mothers' tongue. Their reasons for this, however, varied. For some it was about having more employment opportunities. For others it was so their daughters felt that they had an advantage over their native peers thus feel less intimidated because of racist behaviours toward them. Language retention was extremely important for a mother of three whose children were born in the USA. She noted:

'We speak Spanish at home. I ask my family that lives in Mexico to send me books so I can use them to teach her . . . I think she will be better equipped when she is older. I mean

knowing two or three languages will give her better job opportunities . . . She will have many advantages.'

For others it was about the importance of communicating with the elderly and with family members left behind.

'She speaks Spanish very fluently. We taught her since she was little . . . It is very important to me that she speaks our language. It is important that she communicates with my parents and other relatives that do not speak English.'

As the women noted, speaking Spanish at home was very important for most of the mothers. Speaking their mother tongue was for the participants in this study an important feature of their heritage that set them apart from members of the dominant culture.

The support of family members was very important in the majority of the mothers' endeavours regarding their daughters' development in Canadian society. They drew upon family loyalties and strong connections (familism) in order to pull family members together for the sake of strengthening ethnic pride and teaching Spanish to the next generation. They made learning Spanish 'a family affair' as illustrated here.

'Our tradition is that we try to spend a lot of time together on weekends, special holidays. This way the children practice Spanish and get to know other family members. They hear stories about *la vida salvadoreña* [Salvadorian life].'

Another respondent used stories about her deceased mother and described how modelling family unit was part of teaching her daughter about her ethnic roots. She noted:

'I tell her stories about the way my mother was; the way we were as a family, our unity. It didn't matter what happened, we were there for each other. Now that we are older we always try to be there and to provide a shoulder to each other. But that circle of support, that bond, is always there no matter what. There is nothing that could break us apart. We are four and it is like we are four pillars of support, like four pillars is better than one, right. I always try to instill that in my children since they were babies, but it's not easy, not when they're already in adolescence. One has to be always mindful of them. The way you're modelling this [familism] step by . . . It is part of who we are. It is part of our roots . . .'

As family members get together in the new country they are able to draw upon their values and moral strengths in order to re-build their lives in the new country while simultaneously preparing their children to live and navigate the nuances of their cultural transition. As they re-create their home country's traditions they are able to strengthen their daughters' ethnic pride and develop a sense of community that

may enhance their daughters' sense of belonging within Salvadorian culture.

### **Outcome of mothers' teachings: daughters' views on ethnic pride**

#### *Sense of belonging: feeling Salvadorian*

Several daughters talked about the importance of maintaining their ethnic roots. For some it was about eating Salvadorian traditional foods, learning to dance to the Latina music and being familiar with Salvadorian literature. A 16-year-old daughter commented:

'Ahh, the food that my mom makes is very Salvadorian. The music that we listened is very Latina. Ahh, I read Salvadorian authors like Alfredo Espino and other poets. My mom has made me read many books written by Salvadorian authors. I think that is a way of keeping my roots. I always read like a book a day . . .'

Other daughters not only drew their sense of belonging from speaking Spanish but also from their family relations with family members living abroad. An adult daughter stated:

'Spanish is my first language and I wouldn't change that for this country's language. Like I need Spanish to talk to my relatives in the US and in El Salvador, what kind of granddaughter would I be if when I go there [El Salvador] to see my grandparents I'd be speaking English to them. That would be rude, or when I go see my aunts and uncles in the US I mean they don't speak English . . .'

Other daughters talked about feeling a sense of belonging and solidarity with other Salvadorians. The comments of a 15-year-old highlighted this theme:

'I am Spanish [in a gentle and playful tone of voice]. I am very proud of being Spanish. I like being "Salvadorena" [Salvadorian]. It's fun because there are a lot of Salvadorians in this community and I like that, wow! We rule [laughter]. I am happy and proud of being "Salvadorena". I feel wanted by my friends. They want me around them . . .'

An adult daughter noted:

'I came here when I was little but I still feel Salvadorian. At the same time I think and feel Salvadorian. It is true that I live here, but El Salvador is the country of my birth . . . Yes, this country is really pretty and all and I'm living here and I even said that I wouldn't want to go back to El Salvador either, maybe to visit because I still have family there. I continue being Salvadorian . . . I think this is due to my mother's teachings . . .'

It seemed that for the young women in this study their self-esteem was rooted in feeling good about

themselves in relation to their Salvadorian social cultural roots. Their need to develop a sense of pride came from their commitment to stay loyal and connected to those living abroad and who did not speak English. Regardless of their reasons having a strong sense of ethnic pride appeared to support the daughters' development in Canadian society. Thus it seemed that the mothers in this study were successful and effective in teaching their daughters what they set out to do. These daughters have developed a sense of agency regarding their own lives and the aspects of their heritage they would like to retain. The results of the interview analysis suggested that 'tomar conciencia' [becoming aware] of their race was an important aspect for both mothers and daughters as they struggle to integrate into Canadian society.

#### *Troubled youth because of experiences of racism and discrimination*

One adult daughter reflected on how her mother tried to nourish her sense of ethnic identity when she was an adolescent. In her view, she was 'supposed' to learn about her race and ancestry as a way to protect herself from the effects of prejudice and discrimination. This in turn would have kept her away from high-risk behaviours. Leonora stated that although her mother taught her about her ethnic roots, she rejected this part of herself because belonging to her 'white' peer group was very important to her during her adolescence. She believed that experiencing racism and ethnic prejudice prevented her from feeling a sense of belonging to Canadian society. She talked about how her feelings of disconnection from her family and then marginalization from her 'white' peers led her on a path of self-destruction; e.g. drinking, misusing drugs and dropping out of school. She commented:

'When I was 19 or 20 [years-old] I think, my parents took me back [to El Salvador]. I wasn't doing anything here. I mean I was doing drugs and living on the streets . . . I didn't understand it at the time. I mean I did everything that they [peers] were doing and asked me to do and still they wouldn't accept me . . . It crushed me. I didn't want to go. I was afraid . . . But I liked it when I arrived there [El Salvador]. I liked the people, seeing my friends again, to see my whole family. I liked everything, everything, like the environment, ahh Christmas, something very different from here. I had not seen all that for about eight years, like I came here when I was 12 years old. After that I went back every year and every year I wanted to stay, but I was nearly 17 and I had not finished my high school and I was not yet a Canadian citizen. My mom told me, "You have to finish high school and obtain your Canadian citizenship." So when I came back from El Salvador I started to work and save

money so I could go back every year. In 2000 I didn't come back. I stayed there and I got married there . . . I am now here with my son and waiting for my husband to come . . . It's different now. I know who I am now. I am proud of who I am . . . I am prepared to deal with that stuff [discrimination] . . .'

It is worth noting that this daughter felt she had worked hard to fit into Canadian society, yet the prejudice that she experienced led her to take refuge in drugs and alcohol. Her parents out of desperation and as a last resource sent her to El Salvador. From her point of view the warmth and welcoming embrace of her family members in El Salvador nourished her back to the happy and confident person that she had been prior to migrating to Canada. She was able to re-claim her ethnic roots and sense of belonging that gave her back her sense of self. Leonora was able to come back to Canada no longer carrying the illusion of seeking to assimilate into Canadian society. She knew that her race and ethnicity accompanied her everywhere she went; this set her apart as being 'different'. Therefore, in her adult years she was always both aware of and prepared for facing discriminatory practices everywhere. Experiences like Leonora's are not uncommon in the lives of these mothers and daughters who are engaged in negotiating their acculturation process into Canadian society. Mothers are actively occupied in supporting their daughters' functioning in a racist society. The mothers' commitment and the length that they are willing to go are endless. The mothers in this study stood on guard nourishing their daughters' sense of pride as a way to provide them with a strong platform that would ensure their survival in their country of settlement.

## DISCUSSION

This paper discussed how the mothers positioned themselves to support their daughters to enter a world where race and ethnicity were paramount of their existence. It also presented the strategies that mothers talked about creating in relation to supporting their daughters' during their cultural transition. The findings also indicated that mothers saw themselves as active agents in their daughters' lives. The general congruency of this issue between the mothers and daughters was significant. Mothers and daughters drew from their cultural background in order to become aware of their race and ethnicity. This awareness provided them with the necessary resources and inner strengths to face the outside world; that is, a racist world. Their ethnic pride served as the bridge

that allowed mothers and daughters to stay connected as each faced their individual struggles of acculturation while living between two worlds (Garcia-Preto 1996; Mock 1998) thus adding to the body of knowledge of immigrant parent-youth relationships.

The findings indicate that the immigrant mothers in this study had a pivotal presence in their daughters' lives. They can be seen as the gate keepers and as standing on guard looking out for the well-being of their daughters' connections with their roots and for the survival of the next generation of Salvadorian women in Canada. The mothers' strategies were embedded in the socio-political and historical context of their culture-of-origin and encompassed the socio-political and historical context of the country of settlement. The findings presented not only denote the challenges that immigrant women faced during their migration and settlement but also the effectiveness of their strategies of resistance and resilience to oppressive circumstances. It seemed that mothers were actively instilling an awareness of race and ethnicity in their daughters through their everyday activities. Perhaps this strategy not only supported their daughters' sense of belonging but also reduced the cultural and generational gaps between them as a result of their daughters growing up in Canada. This enhanced awareness seemed to be the bond that kept their daughters rooted in their families. This in turn may have prevented daughters from becoming assimilated into more individualistic values that might take them away from their families. It appeared that as daughters gained awareness of their culture and roots they also gained a sense of belonging and security that allowed them to face the challenges of racism during their cultural transition. Thus the findings are congruent with other authors that have challenged the deficit theory regarding the 'ineffectiveness' of immigrant parents in guiding their children in the settlement country (Strier 1996; Strier *et al.* 2005).

There appeared to be a tension in the mothers' desires for their daughters. This tension seems to be related to the inherent contradiction of maintaining their cultural identity while simultaneously becoming integrated in a society that might not fully support their home country's traditions. This strain may lead to intense parent-child conflict (Sluzki 1979; Martinez 1993; Falicov 1996, 1998; Sanchez-Ayende 1998; Sluzki 1998). Research seeking to examine how immigrant parents and their children overcome the parent-child conflict because of this tension would expand our knowledge in this area.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

There are several implications for social work practice. This paper suggests that despite the Canadian policy of multiculturalism, prejudice and racism prevail. These exist in our schools and our hiring practices (i.e. asking for Canadian experience without acknowledging the realities of new-Canadians, not hiring someone because of his or her accent). More programming hence more funding is necessary. It is imperative that Canadian people become aware of how the systemic and behavioural racist acts are impacting the lives of immigrant families and their children and by in large eroding the core image of Canada as a 'multicultural mosaic'. It is important that social work interventions are developed that include organizational development in order to foster inclusive and cultural services (Lee 1999). It is essential that social service agencies provide culturally sensitive support for immigrant parents and their children. Social work education/training curriculums need to encompass taking an inventory of social workers' biases and assumptions toward those who are perceived as 'different'. This will open the space to engage in a process of self-reflection; that is, to discover how the political, historical and socio-economic location of social workers impacts the development and implementation of intervention and programming aimed at working with new-Canadians.

Social workers committed to social justice issues need to initiate and maintain collaborative partnerships with members from diverse communities; that is, it is crucial that we recognize the role that immigrants of colour have in social justice initiatives. It is urgent that we recruit and support students of colour who want to become social workers.

Social workers working in 'mainstream' agencies need to work in solidarity, rather than from a paternalistic standpoint, with community stakeholders as equals rather than from a position of power. We must work toward reducing the distances that occur in a context where issues of age, class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc., serve to create silos and to separating us rather than uniting us thus benefiting only those in power.

Social Workers must contextualize the 'problems' that immigrants and refugees of colour bring to the forefront. Most immigrants live within two contexts. The lives of the people we serve are not only intrinsically connected to their surrounding context and the systemic barriers they face because of prejudice and discrimination but also to their collective socio-

political histories of oppression and resistance from their culture-of-origin. The latter can carry sources of strength and resilience and is what informs their practices in the settlement country. For the most part, immigrants and refugees do not divorce themselves from their cultural heritage and traditions (Carranza 2007). These continue to be an essential component in their every day lives. To assume or to expect the contrary, denotes an assumption that immigrant and refugees are to become assimilated into the dominant society. The contexts in which immigrant lives are rooted need to be understood in the process of working with individuals, couples, families and groups who come from minority groups.

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