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**YOUNG REFUGEES SEEKING ASYLUM:
THE CASE OF SEPARATED YOUTH IN QUEBEC**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1.	Introduction. Youth Separated from their Families and Living in Exile	7
	Separated youth in the world today.	7
	History of a phenomenon.	11
	Renewing debate on the protection and care of separated youth in Canada.	12
	A case study of separated youth in Quebec.	14
Chapter 2.	Protection and Care of Separated Youth: International and Canadian Perspectives.	17
	Humanitarian traditions in the protection and care of separated youth.	17
	Protection of separated youth in the Canadian context: roles and actors.	20
	Becoming a refugee in Canada: from the port of entry to the refugee determination hearing.	22
	Welfare and well-being: the role of the provinces	27
Chapter 3.	Portrait of a Population. Profiles and Migration Trajectories of Separated Youth.	30
	Separated youth in Quebec: a statistical portrait.	30
	Towards a typology of migration trajectories.	32
	Voices of exile: trajectories of separated youth in the study.	34
	Getting settled in Quebec: the first few days.	40

Chapter 4.	Maintaining Continuity. Working with Separated youth in the Social Services.	46
	Working with separated youth: a practice developed in the field.	46
	Working within an intercultural framework..	48
	The limits of the professional relationship.	52
	Structural barriers in the intervention relationship.	55
Chapter 5.	The Barriers of Participation. Access to Resources for Separated Youth.	58
	Going to school.	58
	Going through the refugee determination system: liberating or limiting	68
	Staying healthy: access to medical care.	74
	Access to private sector domains: employment, housing and commercial institutions.	76
	Access to other domain of daily life: the community sector	77
Chapter 6.	Negotiating constraint. Bringing into play personal and other resources.	79
	Growing up fast: personal resources of separated youth.	79
	Family continuity as protection.	81
	Seeking aid. Formal and informal support networks.	84
	Social service network	84
	Placement network	86
	Peer networks	90
	Places of worship and community networks	92
	Futures	94
Chapter 7.	Summing Up	98
Bibliography		102

Chapter 1.

INTRODUCTION:

YOUTH SEPARATED FROM THEIR FAMILIES AND LIVING IN EXILE

I arrived in a country very unknown to me. I had just seen it on television and in films. I arrive there and the people that were supposed to take care of me weren't there. There was no one for me. I started feeling very sad because it affected me a lot. First, I missed my parents a lot. I couldn't go to school, I could never see my friends again. I was really lost in this country. Imagine yourself at my age, at the age that I was at that time. I was 14. Without money, without anything. I thought to myself that it was really going to be a catastrophe (Vange).¹

Vange remembers only too well that early morning in July when the military police stole into his family's home in Angola, taking his parents away by force. He and his younger sister had had just enough time to hide. They left their hiding place only after everything was quiet and made their way to a cousin's home. Fearing for their security and for his own, the cousin made preparations for their immediate flight from the country. That day marked the beginning of what would be a long journey of close to seven months which would take Vange first to South Africa, where he was involuntarily separated from his sister, then on to the United States where the people he had been told to contact were no where to be found and, finally, to the Canadian border because a New York City taxi driver told him that the United States was not a safe place for a youth alone like himself. At the Canadian border he blurted his story to the immigration officer who received him and only then learned what a refugee was and that he was one of them.

Separated youth in the world today.

In 1999, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported an approximate 22.3 million refugees in the world, including persons displaced internally within their own countries and

¹ The names of the separated youth in the study are all fictive. At the beginning of the research interviews, they were asked to choose a pseudonym that they would like to see used in the report. It is these names which accompany the quotations from the youth. As for the practitioners, no pseudonyms are used. This choice was made in order to protect the confidentiality of the respondents, given that the number of persons working with separated youth in Quebec is quite small.

those seeking asylum in other countries (UNHCR, 2000). Of the total refugee population, half are estimated to be children and youth under eighteen years of age. Although most children remain with their families during periods of flight and forced migrations, a certain number, like Vange, are separated from them, obliged to make their way in the world without the immediate support of their parents. In international and national spheres, these youth are known as separated children or unaccompanied minors. According to UNHCR estimates, these youth account for between two and five percent of the world refugee population, a figure representing 360 000 to 900 000 persons (UNHCR, 1994).

Armed conflicts, persecutions, genocide, forced migrations, natural disasters, sexual and labour exploitation, poverty and abuse are among the numerous circumstances which provoke the separation of youth from their families. Three principal profiles have been identified by the UNHCR: separations which have occurred against a parent's will, with parents' consent and separations provoked by situations of armed conflict. In the first, children may have been accidentally separated from other family members (particularly during mass migrations), abducted or orphaned. Older youth, wishing to live independently, may have run away without parental consent. The second profile corresponds to children or youth entrusted to the care of another adult or institution, sent abroad or left behind by their parents as a means of ensuring their protection: "a child may be entrusted or even abandoned when parents believe that his chances of survival will be improved by being with other people, or when facilities and services are established for unaccompanied children which are significantly better than those otherwise available" (UNHCR, 1994b: 7). Finally, the third profile refers to those who have been enlisted as 'child soldiers' in fighting units with or without their family's consent. According to a recent estimate, there were approximately 300 000 'child soldiers' in 36 contexts of armed conflict in 1998 (Ayotte, 2000).

Although most separated youth remain in or near their countries of origin, in recent years increasing numbers have made their way to countries in Europe, North America and Australia (Morton and Young, 2002; Ayotte, 2001; Ayotte, 2000; Forbes and Weiss Fagen, 1985; Adelman, 1984). In Western Europe, a recent study indicates that five percent of asylum seekers within the European community are separated youth, comprising in total an approximate 100 000 youth (Ayotte, 2000). In Canada, an estimated 1,088 separated youth entered the country in 2000, for the most part settling in Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia (Ayotte, 2001).

These figures, however, provide only an approximate indication of the real number of separated youth in countries of asylum. In both the European and North American contexts, data tends to be based on the number of separated youth who have gone through the official immigration channels and who applied for refugee status upon their arrival in the country. The majority of separated youth are refugee claimants. For instance, it is estimated that 95 % of the separated youth clientele of the *Service d'aide aux réfugiés et aux immigrants de Montréal Métropolitain* (SARIMM),² the principal agency responsible for these youth in Quebec, claim this status at the port of entry. There are youth, however, who are excluded from this portrait, such as those who may have migrated for economic reasons (and thus are not refugees according to the terms of the Convention on the Status of Refugees), who held a tourist or student visa upon arrival, or who may have entered the country illegally. The fact of not being counted does not decrease their vulnerability. On the contrary, those who are not represented in official statistics may well be those who experience the most difficult life situations, as victims of abuse, poverty, sexual exploitation or recruitment in trafficking networks (Ayotte, 2000).

Although there has been some improvement in information gathering on separated youth in recent years, Ayotte nonetheless questions the 'patchy' character of this data and wonders whether it "reflect[s] a belief on the part of some governments that the phenomenon of separated children is a transitory one, and therefore does not require documentation" (Ayotte, 2000: 17). Yet, the increasing number of separated youth worldwide indicates that the phenomenon is far from transitory. Several reasons for this increase have been proposed: the changing nature of war in which growing numbers of innocent civilians are becoming victims of persecution; the development of trafficking networks for exploitation purposes, such as prostitution, begging and drug smuggling; the increased vulnerability of children and youth resulting from structural changes introduced by processes of globalisation (Kumin and Chaikel, 2002).

Existing literature on the specific needs of separated youth is sparse. Generally speaking, it is acknowledged that they are subject to the same psychosocial anxieties as adult refugees, such as family separation and the absence of other significant relations, trauma, loss of country and difficulties of adaptation to a new society. For young refugees, however, these anxieties are often amplified because of their developmental stage and level of maturity. Not only have they lost their principal support

² SARIMM has a regional mandate for separated youth in Quebec and is a service of the CLSC Côte-des-Neiges.

networks and role models, but they have also been forced to take on adult responsibilities at a very young age (Ressler et al., 1988; UNHCR, 1994; OMS, 1997). The loss of identity referents resulting from what Eisenbruch (1988) has referred to as ‘cultural uprooting’ can also increase the fragility of these youth. Finally, in more extreme situations involving child trafficking and exploitation, it is clear that separated youth are placed in particularly precarious situations, although little is known of the extent and nature of such practices (Ayotte, 2000; Ayotte, 2001). It is precisely the acknowledgement of these diverse forms of vulnerability which justifies the need for their protection and care, both internationally and nationally.

The literature has also identified some factors which may facilitate the establishment of separated youth in asylum contexts. The family, for instance, may remain an important source of support to these youth even following separation. The fact of being able to maintain contact with family members abroad, or even knowing that means have been undertaken to retrace them, can be a source of comfort (Ressler et al., 1988; UNHCR, 1994; OMS, 1997). Contact with an extended family network in the country of asylum or with other members of the same community of origin may also become a factor of protection for these youth. On the one hand, such contacts provide essential moral and practical support for navigating through the various immigration and administrative procedures relating to migration. On the other, they may help separated youth construct symbolic links between their new homelands and their countries of origin (Ressler, et al., 1988; Eisenbruch, 1988). In their study of Somalian separated youth, Rousseau et al. (1998a, 1998b) examine the way in which myths and stories transmitted within the community of origin enable these youth to come to terms with major life transitions such as exile. According to these myths, the process of migration is perceived as being a collective experience in which youth develop strengths and strategies for survival. These strengths, and the incredible capacity of separated youth for adapting in the face of great adversity, are also considered to be facilitators in their own right. Fiorino (1993) illustrates well this capacity in his description of the tensions between several Somalian separated youth and the social practitioners working with them in a Montreal group home. The youth were described by the practitioners as being “arrogant, aggressive, macho and frankly impolite” and special measures had to be adopted in order to diminish the tension. As the author emphasises, however, their assertiveness was in fact a survival strategy that had been adopted in order to cope with the events which had radically changed their lives.

*History of a phenomenon*³

The phenomenon of youth separated from their parents because of situations marked by armed conflict or political unrest is by no means a new one, either in the European or North American contexts. Since there have been wars, there have most certainly been children living in exile, separated from their parents and their homelands. Ressler *et al.* (1988) trace some of the more important migration waves of separated youth which have occurred since the early twentieth century. From 1915 to 1923, approximately 132 000 Armenian children were resettled following the forced migration of Armenians under Ottoman rule. While some migrated to France with their families, close to 40 000 were sent to orphanages in Russian Armenia and Greece. The number of abandoned children was also significant during the Russian revolution of 1919, totalling an approximate 7 000 000 youth, 800 000 of whom were placed in institutions. It is especially during the World War II period, with the mass migrations of refugee populations, that separated youth became a particular preoccupation on the international scene. During this period, most European countries were home to an estimated 50 000 to 200 000 separated youth. Between the second world war and the 1980s, numerous other conflict situations have accounted for over 300 000 youth seeking refuge alone in countries of asylum: the Greek Civil War (1948), the Korean War (1950), displacement of Tibetan refugees (1954), Vietnam War (1954), Hungarian Revolt (1956), Cuban Revolution (1960-1983), Nigerian Civil War (1970), Bangladesh war of independence (1970), exodus of south-east Asian refugees (1975-1983) (Ressler *et al.*, 1988). Since the 1980s, child welfare authorities in Europe have noted an increase in the number of separated youth claiming asylum, although no precise estimates are available. The diversity of their countries of origin reflect the ‘hot spots’ of conflict in the past twenty years: Iran-Iraq, Sri Lanka, several African (Erithea/Ethiopia, Angola, Uganda, Somalia, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, etc.) and Latin American countries, former eastern and Soviet countries and former Yugoslavia (Ayotte, 2000).

Canada in particular has a long history of asylum for youth separated from their families. Although little documented, some examples can be traced even to the mid-nineteenth century. Between 1868 and 1925, for instance, Canada became home to close to 80 000 separated British youth. This group was not comprised of refugees *per se*. Indeed, the term ‘refugee’ itself had not yet been introduced into the international rights vocabulary. The forced emigration of these youth was seen less as a humanitarian project than as a means of relieving the burden of the poorhouses in Great Britain (Parr, 1980). These

³ This section was previously published in Catherine Montgomery, Cécile Rousseau, Marian Shermarke. (2001). “Alone in a Strange Land: Unaccompanied Minors and Issues of Protection”. *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, Vol. 13(1), pp. 102-119.

youth, however, were separated youth in the broader sense of the term; that is, youth living independently from their parents and alone in a strange land.

In Canada, special programmes were put into place in the early 1940s to prepare for the arrival of young refugees. A first programme made provisions for the protection of close to 6,000 'British Guest Children' (Adelman, 1984). While some were accompanied by their mothers or other family members, close to 1,500 were unaccompanied. The *National Advisory Committee for Children from Overseas*, working in collaboration with the federal and provincial governments and with the Children's Aid Societies, was established to ensure their placement and care. Unlike separated youth today, however, exile for the 'British Guest Children' was meant to be temporary and most returned home after the war. A second programme for young refugees was set up in 1943, its objective being to evacuate 1,000 Jewish youth from unoccupied territories in France (Adelman, 1984 ; Forbes and Weiss, 1985). The programme, however, was short-lived and came to an end with the German occupation of these territories. Slightly more than a decade later, in 1956, the Russian invasion of Hungary brought a new wave of separated youth to Canada who were placed under the responsibility of the Children's Aid Societies (Adelman, 1984). While their numbers are not available for Canada, the United States accepted close to 6 000 separated Hungarian youth during this period (Forbes and Weiss, 1985).

In more recent memory, it is most certainly the arrival of the Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian 'boat children', between 1978 and 1983, which is best known (Beiser, 1999). Close to 900 separated youth arrived in Canada during this period (Adelman, 1984). While this group is smaller in number than that which arrived in earlier decades, extensive media coverage during this period drew an overwhelming response from the general public. Designated care organisations were inundated with calls from families wanting to open up their homes, there was a significant mobilisation of public and community resources, policy makers debated on immigration and placement measures. Since this period, however, there has been relatively little attention given to separated youth despite the fact that their numbers have increased steadily since the 1980s. Unlike earlier decades, these youth do not arrive in waves from any one single region but rather from a great diversity of countries.

Renewing debate on the protection and care of separated youth in Canada.

In Canada, the arrival of 134 separated Chinese youth off the coast of British Columbia in 1999 has renewed debate on issues relating to political asylum, particularly for minors (Kumin and Chaikel,

2002). Since this period, several initiatives have been put into place in order to better evaluate the respective roles of institutional actors with respect to these youth. In 2001, UNHCR Canada published a much needed report on the asylum process in Canada for separated children (Ayotte, 2001). In 2002, the International Bureau for Children's Rights, in collaboration with other international and Canadian agencies⁴, inaugurated a project entitled the 'Focal Point on Separated Children' whose objective is to promote the rights of separated youth in various spheres of activity, including immigration, health and welfare services, education and to protect them against child exploitation and trafficking (International Bureau for Children's Rights, 2002). Several initiatives have also been introduced on a provincial level. In Quebec, the *Ministry of Relations with Citizens and of Immigration* (MRCI) has drawn up a preliminary discussion paper on policy issues relating to this population (MRCI, 2000). In Ontario a *Migrant Children's Task Force* was set up in 2000 for the same purpose and British Columbia created a *Migrant Services Team* in 1999 in order to better coordinate services for separated youth (cf. Ayotte, 2001).

Until recently, 'unaccompanied minor' was the term primarily used in Canada to designate these youth. The meaning of the term, however, has led to confusion on at least two levels. First, some youth may arrive in Canada 'accompanied' by members of the extended family network or by other persons designated for purposes of immigration, such as agents or traffickers. Although 'accompanied', the fact of separation from their parents nonetheless remains a factor of vulnerability in terms of psychosocial adaptation. Second, those 'accompanied' by a third party, particularly by agents or traffickers, are potentially more at risk of being exploited and thus require additional protection. In view of this confusion and the issues at stake, the principal Canadian child welfare agencies involved in the protection of these youth have recently adopted the use of the term 'separated' children and youth (Kumin and Chaikel, 2002). This term has been used in Europe for several years already. The following working definition of separated youth, proposed by the project 'Focal Point on Separated Children in the Americas', broadens the scope for their identification and protection and will be used for the present study:

Separated children and adolescents include all those under the age of 18 who are outside of their country of origin without a parent or previous legal/customary primary care giver. They include those who seek asylum as well as those who have been brought for the purpose of trafficking for exploitation and/or who may be living undocumented on the

⁴ Canadian Council for Refugees, Child Welfare League of Canada, International Social Service Canada, Save the Children Canada, UNHCR Canada.

margins of society. Regardless of their status, they are first and foremost children in need of protection (International Bureau for Children's Rights, 2002).

Meanwhile, information on the profile of separated youth in Canada remains limited. Little is known of their migratory histories, their process of establishment, the obstacles faced by them and the resources they bring into play to negotiate the difficulties they encounter.

A case study of separated youth in Quebec.

An understanding of the experiences of separated youth, both migratory and post-migratory, is not only of academic interest, but is also crucial to the development of social policy and practice which is better tailored to their needs. It is this facet of the integration of separated youth which is explored in the present study. The study itself is based on the Quebec experience and is structured around two principal objectives: to provide a detailed portrait of separated youth in Quebec and to identify issues of intervention relating to their care and protection.

The study was undertaken in two phases, each providing a distinct point of view on the experiences and needs of separated youth. The first phase consisted in a series of ten individual interviews with social practitioners and administrators working with separated youth, and one group interview which brought together an additional eight practitioners. The respondents are from four types of service agencies and organisations, including the *Service d'aide aux réfugiés et aux immigrants de Montréal Métropolitain* (SARIMM), the principal agency responsible for separated youth in Quebec, the YMCA,⁵ Youth Centres (*Centres jeunesse*) and the Ministry of Relations with Citizens and of Immigration⁶. All interviews were semi-directive in structure and explored the following themes: history of intervention with separated youth, profiles and trajectories of these youth, conditions and limits of social practice with this population. In addition to the formal interviews, the study also drew on a series of informal meetings with persons working in the field. As front-line actors, practitioners and administrators have in-depth knowledge of the issues facing separated youth and of the conditions which could facilitate

⁵ SARIMM has a branch office in the YMCA where short term placement is also provided for separated youth in the days following their arrival in Quebec.

⁶ The *Centres jeunesse*, which form part of the youth protection network in Quebec, are responsible for separated youth with regularised immigration statuses. As for the *Ministère des relations avec les citoyens et de l'Immigration*, it is the Ministry responsible for immigration procedures in Quebec.

their full participation in Quebec society. They also offer a privileged voice for reflecting on the possibilities and limits of their own intervention practices (Sévigny, 1993).

The second phase of the study was based on a series of thirteen interviews with separated youth.⁷ The youth are from the African and Indian continents, which accounted for 84 % of the separated youth clientele of SARIMM in 1999. More specifically, they are from India (Punjab region), Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe and Angola. The sample is comprised of seven young men and six young women, ranging in age from 13 to 26. Two of the respondents were over 18. One had arrived as a separated youth and now acts as a host family to other youth. Her account was considered worthwhile, because she could provide insight into her own personal experience and into that of the other separated youth in her care. The second person turned eighteen after her arrival in Quebec. The interviews with the separated youth reconstituted key moments and events experienced by the minors in the period immediately preceding their arrival in Quebec and in the process of establishment, placing emphasis on obstacles and facilitators to integration encountered at each stage. More specifically, the two inter-related notions of trajectory and network were used to structure the semi-directive interviews which touched on the following themes: migratory trajectory prior to arriving in Quebec, the initial period following arrival in Quebec, discussion of events relating to placement, school and immigration process, exploration of formal and informal help networks.

The report is divided into five sections. Chapter 2 examines international and national frameworks for working with separated youth, looking more specifically at the instruments and actors which intervene in their protection. Chapter 3 describes the profiles and trajectories of separated youth in Quebec and looks at some of the difficulties faced during the initial period of establishment. Chapter 4 looks at the social service perspective in working with these youth, including the possibilities and limitations of the professional role. Chapter 5 looks at the difficulties faced by separated minors in accessing diverse

⁷ Due to their status as minors and as refugee claimants, some particular ethical concerns were taken into consideration in these interviews. According to Article 21 of the Civil Code of Quebec, all research with minors necessitates written consent from their parents or guardians. In the case of separated youth, however, there is a juridical void on this question. Not only are their parents absent, but they do not have a designated legal guardian. Following consultation with several agencies working with separated youth, it was decided that the Director general responsible for SARIMM would act as interim guardian for the purposes of the study. Another ethical issue addressed concerned the types of questions to be asked relating to the pre-migratory experiences of the minors. Given the vulnerability of their situations, it was decided to minimise discussion of events which might cause them to relive difficult experiences with which they have not yet come to terms. The first theme, on pre-migratory experiences, was thus left open and the respondents were clearly told that they did not have to answer any questions relating to this theme (or any other questions with which they felt uncomfortable) if they did not want to.

societal resources, including the education, immigration, health and community sectors. Finally, Chapter 6 examines the ways in which the youth bring into play their own resources in order to facilitate their establishment in Quebec and negotiate the constraints with which they are faced

Chapter 2.

PROTECTION AND CARE OF SEPARATED YOUTH: INTERNATIONAL AND CANADIAN PERSPECTIVES

In refugee situations the families may be broken up by death, separation and trauma, leaving children alone, without care or protection. [...] Unaccompanied children or children without an adult to care for them, should be the 'first among the first' to be identified and provided for (UNHCR, 1994 : 1).

The protection of separated youth is first and foremost an international concern and is rooted in two humanitarian traditions which have acquired particular force since the second world war: the protection of refugee populations and, the second, the acknowledgement of the rights of the child. The *Convention on the Status of Refugees* and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* are not merely juridical instruments, but also reflect an ethical position based on humanitarian *ideals* and the protection of basic human rights. They are rooted in the history of minority rights and the acknowledgement of crimes against humanity. From this point of view, the double status of these youth as *refugees* and as *minors* dictates the necessity, even the responsibility, to intervene on their behalf in a logic of protection. While these international instruments provide a valuable framework for guiding action on a global level, social intervention practices in countries of asylum are necessarily coloured by the specific context of establishment of separated youth. This chapter examines the interface between international and national frameworks of protection.

Humanitarian traditions in the protection and care of separated youth.

The history of humanity is, unfortunately, a history of war, conquests and conflicts. For this reason, refugees have always existed even if the term has not. It is not until the First World War, through the responsibility of the Society of Nations, that the question of refugees was placed on the international agenda. Meanwhile, it is not until World War II that the first institutions and instruments were created for their protection. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was created in 1951 and, one year later, the *Convention on the Status of Refugees* was adopted. The Convention proposes a definition of refugee as being a person who has a well founded fear of persecution due to his race, religion, nationality, membership in a certain social group or due to his political opinions:

(the term ‘refugee’ shall apply to any person who) owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside of the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (*Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*, 1951).

The *Convention* also sets out the rights of refugees and the obligations of States towards them. It establishes the norms and principles for their protection and their well-being in different sectors of daily life, such as work, education, residence, freedom of movement, access to justice, naturalisation and a guarantee not to be returned to a country where they risk persecution. Although separated youth are not explicitly mentioned in the *Convention*, the same principles underlie the protection of adults and youth. The UNHCR guidelines on the protection and care of separated youth set out three basic standards in this respect: 1) a child who has a ‘well-founded fear of being persecuted’ for one of the stated reasons is a ‘refugee’, 2) a child who holds refugee status cannot be forced to return to his or her country of origin (the principle of non-refoulement) and 3) no distinction is made between children and adults in social welfare (UNHCR, 1994: 17-18).

It is generally agreed, however, that separated youth are particularly vulnerable in the refugee determination process, because of their age and level of maturity. Guidelines on refugee status procedures thus propose that special considerations be taken into account in cases involving separated youth. Such considerations may include the participation of experts on child and youth development in the assessment process, the use of professional interpreters when youth do not master the language(s) spoken in the host country and the appointment of a representative or guardian whose task is to ensure that the interests of the youth are respected and that he or she is accompanied throughout the proceedings (Petty, Tamplin, Uppard, 1999: 5-5).

The principles concerning the determination of refugee status for separated youth are complemented by those contained in the *Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)*. Adopted in 1989 and ratified by over 150 states, the CRC sets out the basic standards for welfare rights of all persons under the age of eighteen. These standards extend from more general social and political rights to more specific rights to health, education and well-being. More generally, three types of principles underlie these standards: the ‘best interests’ of the child, non-discrimination and participation (UNHCR, 1994).

According to the first principle, the child's welfare constitutes the primary consideration behind all policies and intervention practices: "in all actions concerning children the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration" (art. 3, CRC). In addition to the basic respect of human and legal rights, this principle affirms that individual needs and circumstances must be taken into account when dealing with child's rights. In the case of separated youth, for instance, this would mean considering the specific histories and trajectories of each youth in order to determine the 'best interest' of the child in relation to refugee status (i.e. asylum, establishment in a third country, reunification, repatriation) or to other decisions concerning their well-being (i.e. placement in a family setting versus a group setting; placement within community of origin or not) (Petty, Tamplin, Uppard, 1999).

The second principle, that of non-discrimination, acknowledges that children constitute a particularly vulnerable group with respect to discriminatory practices because of their status as minors. Accordingly, article 2 of the CRC provides a definition of non discrimination and sets out the framework for adopting measures for combatting discrimination:

States parties shall respect and ensure that rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic, or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members (art. 2, CRC)

Finally, the principle of participation acknowledges the explicit right of children to hold and express their point of view: "States parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (art. 12, CRC).

In addition to these three basic principles, the CRC also details numerous specific rights, some of which are of particular relevance for separated youth. Article 22, for instance, recognizes the equal rights of refugee children: "Every child seeking refugee status has a right to 'protection and humanitarian assistance' in the enjoyment of the rights that are contained in treaties and declarations pertaining to refugees" (art. 22, CRC). Numerous other articles also have specific importance for this population, including the right to a name and nationality (art. 7), the right to the preservation of identity

(art. 8), the right to non-separation from parents (art. 9), the right to family reunification (art. 10), the right to the freedom of religion (art. 14), the right to protection from all forms of violence (art. 19), the right to the best possible health (art. 24), the right to benefit from social security and to an adequate standard of living (art. 27, 27), the right to education (art. 28) and to an education promoting the fullest potential and respect for human rights (art. 29), the right to respect for culture, language and religion (art. 30), the right to play (art. 31), the right to protection from economic exploitation (art. 32), the right to protection from sexual exploitation (art. 34), the right to protection from abduction, sale or trafficking (art. 35), the right to protection from torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment (art. 37), the right to protection in situations of armed conflict (art. 38) and the right to due process (art. 40) (Save the Children, 2000b).

Parallel to the two conventions noted above numerous other pan-national instruments may also be applied to the protection of separated youth, such as the *European Convention on Human Rights* (1950), the *American Convention on Human Rights* (1969), the *African Convention on Human and Peoples' Rights* (1981) and the *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child* (1990) (Petty, Tamplin, Uppard, 1999). These documents represent important instruments on both symbolic and ideological levels. Their application in practice, however, is necessarily dependent on programmes and policies existing in the respective countries where these youth have sought asylum.

Protection of separated youth in the Canadian context: roles and actors

As noted earlier, 1 088 claims of separated youth were reported by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) in 2000. For the most part, these youth are concentrated in the three urban centres of Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. Ontario, which receives close to 45% of all refugee claimants, also has the greatest number of separated youth. According to statistics provided by the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB), 265 claims were reported in Ontario in 2000. Quebec receives the second largest number of refugee claimants, accounting for 35% of those who enter Canada. Although figures are not available for the precise number of such youth who arrive in Quebec each year, in early 2001 the *Service d'aide aux réfugiés et aux immigrants de Montréal Métropolitain* (SARIMM), the primary

agency responsible for their protection, had 298 minors on file.⁸ Finally, British Columbia, which receives approximately 12% of all refugee claimants, became home to 50 separated youth in 2000. This number represents a significant drop from 1999 in which 144 claims of separated youth were reported, many from Chinese youth who landed on the coasts of the province during this period (Ayotte, 2001).

As is the case in Europe, statistics are likely to underestimate the real number of separated youth arriving in Canada. In part, this is because the definitions used to designate this population vary from one agency to another, whether the CIC, IRB or local child welfare and other non government agencies. The lack of uniform data may also be the result of the very different ways in which these youth arrive in Canada. Not all separated youth are identified as such at the port of entry. Some, for instance, may enter with tourist visas and present themselves to immigration only after the visa expires. Others may arrive with adults who have claimed them to be their own children. Still others may enter the country through ‘underground’ channels or be caught up in international trafficking networks.

Although Canada has ratified a number of international agreements which provide protection for separated youth, such as the *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, there is otherwise no uniform legislative or policy framework for guiding those who work with this population. Instead, their protection and care falls into the shared jurisdiction between the federal and provincial governments. While immigration policy and procedures for refugee claimants are federal concerns,⁹ the responsibility for child welfare services belong to each of the provinces. There is some concern, however, that the bi-lateral division of powers has led to a fragmentation of policies and mechanisms for helping separated youth. A recent report of the UNHCR on the situation of separated youth in Canada calls for a better alignment of federal and provincial responsibilities and a more coherent plan of action:

⁸ This figure includes all separated youth in their care, independent of the year of arrival. However, since the responsibility for these youth is transferred to Quebec’s Youth Protection Services (*Centres jeunesse*) once they have acquired permanent resident status, it can be assumed that the majority have been with SARIMM for less than two years.

⁹ The situation of Quebec is different from that of the other provinces. Through a series of Quebec-federal agreements between 1971 and 1991, Quebec has acquired increased responsibility for the selection and integration of immigrants within its territory. The objective of these agreements was to encourage the selection of immigrants who would be more easily integrated into a society in which the majority language is French. By virtue of these agreements, Quebec retains the exclusive responsibility for selecting independent immigrants, refugees whose demands are processed outside of Quebec and for receiving demands for family sponsorship. Meanwhile, the responsibility for refugee claimants seeking asylum after having arrived in Quebec remains under federal jurisdiction (Legault, 2000; Roy and Montgomery, 2002).

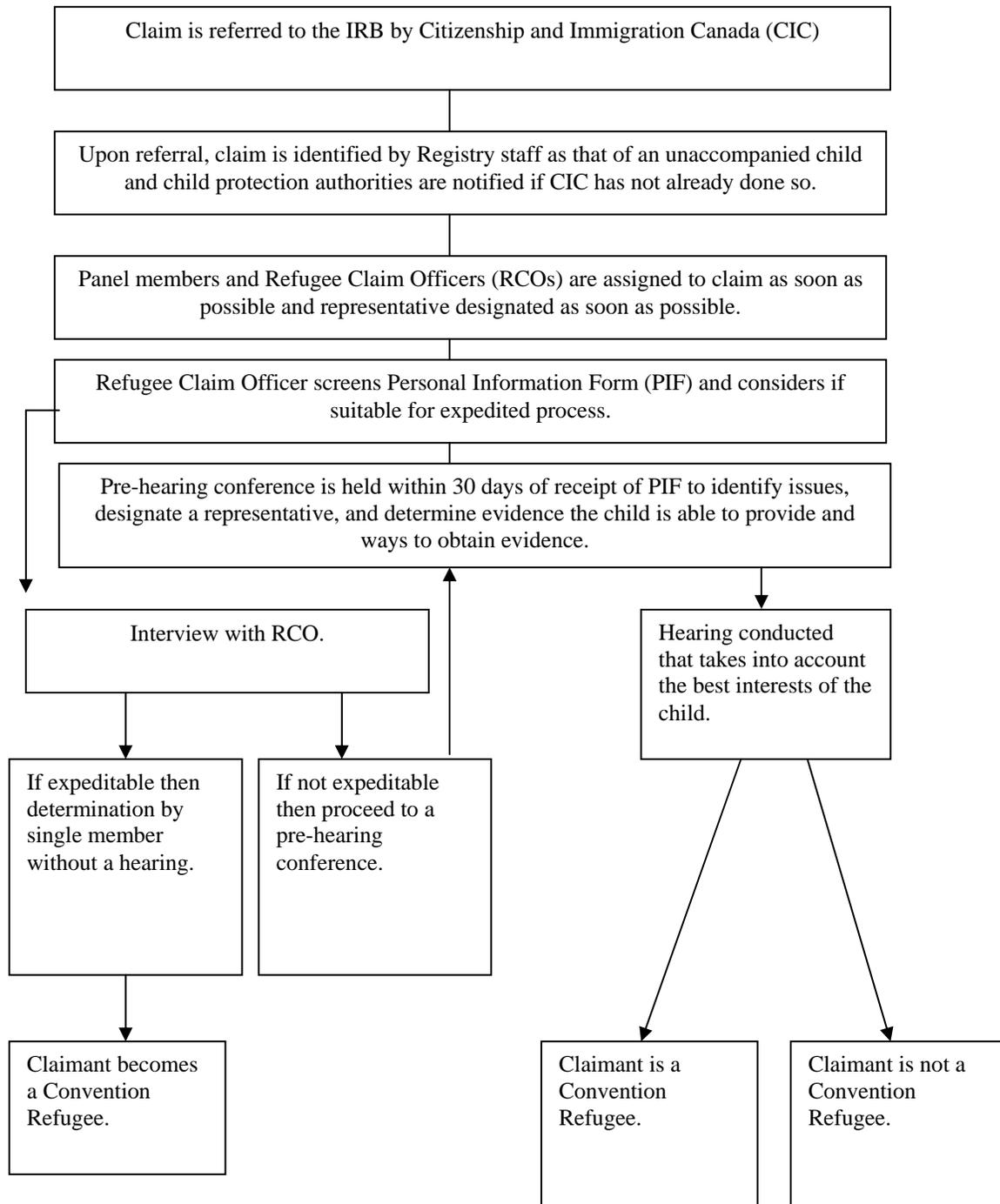
There is an inherent tension between immigration and child welfare concerns. Canadian federal and provincial authorities should work together to reduce this tension, in the interest of the welfare of separated asylum-seeking children. Clear national standards and guidelines for practice concerning these children are needed [...]. Child welfare in Canada is a mosaic of varying provisions, standards, definitions of risk and differing ages of entitlement to care and protection. The formulation of a truly coherent national policy with regard to separated asylum-seeking children will not be an easy task, in particular in the absence of a federal ministry responsible for child welfare. However, it is possible to conceive of national standards that can be implemented via different provincial mechanisms (Ayotte, 2001: 61).

At the time of writing, the International Bureau for Children's Rights was in the process of developing a watchdog mechanism, known as the 'Focal Point on Separated Children in the Americas'. The objectives of the Focal Point would be to gather data on the situation of separated children and youth in the Americas, monitor their movement and identify key issues and strategies for protection (International Bureau for Children's Rights, 2002). Such an initiative is an invaluable first step in constituting a more coherent policy and programme framework for the protection and care of separated children in Canada.

Becoming a refugee in Canada: from the port of entry to the refugee determination hearing.

The process of being officially accepted as a refugee is often a long and difficult one (see Table 2-1 for a detailed description of process). Some studies have drawn attention to the negative impact of the long waiting period for refugee determination and the obtention of permanent residence on other aspects of claimants' lives, such as the impossibility of planning for the future and the difficulty of access to employment and other services (medical care, employability programmes, day care, language courses) (Renaud et al., 1998; McAll et al., 1996). Other studies have established a relationship between the procedures surrounding the refugee determination process and the increase of stress and other psychiatric and somatic symptoms among refugee claimants (Silove et al., 1997; Silove et al., 2000). In 1999-2000, the average waiting period for separated youth in obtaining refugee status was 7.3 months by comparison to 9.6 months for adult claimants (Ayotte, 2001). The obtention of permanent resident status for claimants in general takes on average an additional year (Renaud et al., 1998).

Table 2-1 : Immigration Process from Port of Entry to Determination of Refugee Status (IRB, 1996)



For most separated youth, their administrative trajectory in Canada begins in the offices of *Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC)* whose mandate with respect to refugees is to develop policies and programs for the determination of status and for resettlement (CIC, 2001). For most, the first contact with CIC is at the port of entry, whether a Canadian land or water border crossing or, in the majority of

cases, at the airport, although a minority may claim refugee status even several months after having entered the country.

During this initial contact, the youth makes his or her refugee claim and has a preliminary interview with an immigration agent. The agent determines the youth's eligibility to claim refugee status, as defined by the *Geneva Convention*, and to present his or her case before the Refugee Division of the Immigration and Refugee Board. Claims are rarely refused at this stage.¹⁰ Once their eligibility has been established, the youth receive a *Refugee Claim Kit* which includes the following documents: Certificate of Determination of Eligibility, Condition Departure Order, Personal Information Form (PIF), form for obligatory medical examination, information on services provided under Interim Federal Health Program (medical and dental), Notice to Appear at IRB and claimant's guide (Ayotte, 2001). During the preliminary interview, the agent also takes note of other basic information relating to the youth's situation, such as the date and port of entry, the province of destination, the money in the possession of the youth, the medical status of the youth and the type of entry status.

For separated youth in Quebec, the next stage leads them to the Ministry of Relations with Citizens and of Immigration (MRCI) where they meet with a Quebec immigration agent whose task is to emit documents attesting to the identity of the youth (*Certificat de situation statutaire*) and, if accompanied by an adult, to verify the nature of the relationship between them. In a typical meeting, the agent takes note of the information provided by CIC and identifies a language of communication for administrative purposes. When the youth resides with an adult other than his parents (i.e. another member of the family or of the ethnic or religious community), a letter is sent to SARIMM to advise them of the youth's status and address in Quebec. If, during the interview, the agent has doubts as to the security of the youth, his identity or that of those accompanying him, SARIMM is contacted immediately by telephone. They are also advised directly of minors who are completely unaccompanied in order to ensure that appropriate temporary placement be found for them.

The CIC, and also the MRCI in the case of Quebec, are responsible for ensuring that administrative formalities concerning separated youth are carried out prior to the commencement of procedures for

¹⁰ Claims from separated youth are rarely refused at this stage. A person may be found ineligible to make a refugee claim for any of the following reasons : previous recognition as Convention Refugee in another country or in Canada; previous conviction of serious crime in Canada; suspected participation in a terrorist association or of serious violations of human rights or war crimes; existence of agreement with country to which claimant can be returned (no such agreement exists between Canada and other countries at time of writing); previous rejection of refugee claim and has not been outside of Canada for at least 90 days thereafter (Ayotte, 2001: 16).

determining refugee status. The task of status determination belongs to the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB), a quasi-judicial administrative tribunal created in 1989 through an amendment to the Immigration Act. In response to a growing number of claims from minors, the IRB adopted specific guidelines for children in 1996, entitled *Child Refugee Claimants: Procedural and Evidentiary Issues* (IRB, 1996). Although not legally binding, the guidelines set up a framework for processing children's claims. Three categories of child refugee claimants are identified in the *Guidelines*, the latter two referring more specifically to separated youth:

1. Children who arrive in Canada at the same time as their parents or some time thereafter;
2. Children who arrive in Canada with, or are being looked after in Canada by, persons who purport to be members of the child's family;
3. Children who are alone in Canada without their parents or anyone who purports to be a family member (IRB, 1996).

The procedures set out in the *Guidelines* are essentially of two types. The first outline the criteria to be used for selecting a Designated Representative whose role is to accompany and provide support to the youth throughout the processing of children's claims. The Designated Representative may be either a professional, such as a lawyer or social worker, or an individual known to the youth, such as a family or community member. The second type of procedural guidelines refer to more specific criteria relating to the processing of children's claims. These latter include prioritising claims from separated youth, selecting panel members with experience in dealing with children, taking into account the age and mental development of the child in the hearing procedures, creating an informal environment during the hearing, questioning children in a sensitive manner, using alternative means of soliciting testimony (such as videotaped testimony) and ensuring, where possible, that hearings be contained in a single sitting (IRB, 1996).

Despite the well-foundedness of the *Guidelines*, their actual implementation has been criticised. Drawing on accounts of diverse professionals involved directly or indirectly in the refugee determination process, Ayotte (2001) documents some of the more serious concerns, such as inappropriate forms of questioning; the uneasiness of some youth in telling their stories; the lack of facility of some Board members in communicating with children; the lack of understanding of the impact of trauma, personality and cultural background on a child's testimony; and contradictions between the testimony of the designated representative and that of the child's. Some also expressed concerns with respect to the role and status of the designated representative in the proceedings. Some

respondents felt that the honorarium (\$400 for normal procedures and \$200 for expedited procedures) were too low to attract qualified individuals. Others questioned the choice of some Designated Representatives or their motives in wanting to play this role. On the other side, some Designated Representatives commented on the lack of understanding of the Board members themselves with respect to their expected role in the process, suggesting that their presence is not always welcomed. One respondent summarised the concerns in relation to the *Guidelines* by stating that they contain 'half measures' dealing more with administrative issues rather than substantive ones. In order to address some of the weaknesses identified, the study recommends the need for renewed training programmes for persons involved in the refugee determination process. Although IRB members currently receive three weeks of training, the *Children's Guidelines* and issues relating to separated youth are presented only in a half day session, a period judged insufficient for preparing members for the specific situations and needs of this population.

In their study of the influence of legal, psychological and cultural factors on the process of refugee determination for claimants in general, Rousseau, Crépeau, Foxen and Houle (2001)¹¹ also document the shortcomings of the determination system, noting in particular difficulties in evaluating evidence, assessing credibility, and conducting hearings; poor knowledge of the political context, false representations on war, and cultural misunderstandings or insensitivity; and the negative impact of legal, psychological and cultural dimensions upon board members' ability to evaluate credibility and upon overall conduct of hearings. The study draws attention to the necessity of re-evaluating the procedures used in the determination process, emphasising two specific areas for improvement. First, they propose that criteria for selecting Board members be revised and call for relevant experience in working with refugee populations in general and separated youth more specifically. Second, they underline the urgent need for training programmes which are better oriented towards knowledge of the refugee process and immigration law, situations of political violence and armed conflict, the impact of trauma on the capacity to give testimony and awareness and sensitivity to cultural difference.

Both studies point to a serious concern for the negative impact of the weaknesses of the refugee determination system on refugee claimants. For separated youth more specifically, this concern takes

¹¹ At the time of writing, a second research project on the refugee determination process and the role of the IRB was just beginning. This study, directed by François Crépeau, Cécile Rousseau, Patricia Foxen and Catherine Montgomery, draws on pan-canadian data and includes a specific section on separated children and youth.

on further meaning in light of the significant increase in claim refusals in recent years, rising from 14 % in 1998 to 35 % in 2000 (Table 2-2).

Table 2-2. Acceptance and Refusal of Refugee Status Claims by Separated Youth, 1998-2000
(Ayotte, 2001)

Year	Claims Referred	Claims Finalized	Positive Decisions (%)	Negative Decisions (%)	Abandoned, Withdrawn, Other ¹²
1998	340	253	186(74%)	36(14%)	31(12%)
1999	404	361	235(65%)	65(18%)	61(17%)
2000	671	417	209(50%)	147(35%)	61(15%)

Welfare and well-being: the role of the provinces.

Following the initial contact with *Citizenship and Immigration Canada*, immigration agents notify the appropriate child welfare agencies in each of the provinces in order to ensure that there is adequate care and follow-up of separated youth. There are, however, significant differences in the ways in which the provinces play this role.

In Ontario, child welfare is the responsibility of the *Ministry of Community and Social Service*. The services themselves, however, are provided by the network of 52 Children’s Aid Societies, non profit agencies funded by the Ontario government. Separated youth may receive services from any one of these agencies, although some have a greater concentration than others because of their geographic locations. This is the case, for instance, of the Peel Children’s Aid Society in Toronto which services the area around Pearson International Airport where most separated youth arrive. The Children’s Aid Societies are responsible for placing the youth in stable environments, for the most part in group homes. Unlike the other provinces, child welfare services in Ontario only care for youth under 16 years of age. Youth over this age are largely left on their own, depending for survival on informal networks in their respective communities, community-based organisations or peer groups. According to respondents in the UNHCR Canadian study, the cut off age of 16 has drawn concern from various actors citing cases of minors over 16 in very precarious living situations (Ayotte, 2001; MRCI, 2000).

¹² The category ‘Other’ may refer to cases in which a claimant receives permanent residence before the refugee claim finalised, for whom IRB does not have jurisdiction to determine a claim or who is deceased.

In British Columbia, it is the *Ministry of Children and Family Development* (MCFD) which is responsible for child welfare in general and for separated youth more specifically. Unlike Ontario, the age limit for protection in British Columbia is higher than the international standard, being fixed at 19 rather than 18 years. Since 1999, the year in which 134 Chinese minors landed off the west coast of the province, the province has established a Migrant Services Team which has the mandate for centralising the care and protection of separated youth. This team also acts as the Designated Representative for most separated youth in the refugee determination process. Like Ontario, the preferred form of placement for minors are group and foster homes (Ayotte, 2001; MRCI, 2000).

In Quebec, the *Service d'aide aux réfugiés et aux immigrants de Montréal Métropolitain* (SARIMM) has the primary responsibility for providing protection and services to separated youth. After obtaining the status of permanent residence, on average following a period of two years, the responsibility for separated youth in Quebec is transferred from SARIMM to the Youth Protection Centres.¹³ At SARIMM, services cover six basic domains: evaluation of need for protection, placement, support to families taking separated youth into their homes, psychosocial support, representation in the refugee determination process (as the Designated Representative for most separated youth), and collaboration with various other instances involved with child welfare in Quebec (schools, hospitals, community-based and international organisations). In addition to its offices in the CLSC Cote des Neiges, SARIMM also has a branch office situated in a downtown YMCA which is also used for temporary placement for many separated youth in the period immediately following arrival. Separated youth are then assigned more permanent placement resources which, unlike Ontario and British Columbia, are of four basic types. In the first category, group homes may be used, although these are generally temporary placement arrangements in the period immediately following the arrival of a youth. The second, and most commonly used long term placement resource, is the 'host' family (*familles d'entraide*). Host families are comprised of individuals within the youth's extended family network (an uncle or aunt, an older brother or sister, a grandmother already living in Quebec) or within the same community of origin (persons known or unknown to the youth). When an appropriate host family cannot be found, or there are special needs in terms of supervision, regular foster families designated by the Youth Protection Services (*Direction de la protection de la jeunesse*) may also be used. Finally,

¹³ Exceptionally, separated youth may be referred to Youth Protection Centres prior to receiving permanent resident status. This is especially the case of youth who need specific protection because of citations of negligence, behavioural problems or delinquency. The actual number of separated youth in the Youth Protection Centres is not known, because they are not acknowledged as such as comprising a target population for intervention. Instead, they are integrated into the general clientele without specific identification relating to their status as separated youth.

older youth who have demonstrated sufficient maturity may be placed in supervised or semi-autonomous apartments (CLSC Cote des Neiges, 2000).

Child welfare services working with separated youth in all three provinces face a very serious problem in terms of lack of resources. Not only has the number of separated youth arriving in Canada been on the rise, but so too has the number of youth in the regular Canadian clientele, thus creating an enormous strain on available resources. Although child welfare is under provincial jurisdiction, there have been recent calls for added federal financial support for separated youth because their care arises from a shared immigration and child welfare concern. Although there has been some resistance on the federal level to such demands, special financial relief was given to British Columbia following the precipitated arrival of Chinese separated youth in 1999. Discussions on this issue are still ongoing (Ayotte, 2001).

What emerges clearly from the portrait of provincial aid to separated youth are the differences in approaches, whether in terms of age limits, the centralisation of services, placement options or guardianship. While each system has its merits and weaknesses, these differences do constitute somewhat of a challenge to the development of a coherent national policy on the protection and care of separated youth in Canada. Such a policy must not only be based on analysis of the services provided to this population, but also on an in-depth understanding of the process of establishment of separated youth themselves, their experience of migration and integration, the specific obstacles with which they are faced and the formal and informal resources called into play to surmount them. It is to this end that the remaining chapters are oriented, drawing on a case study of social practitioners and separated youth in Quebec.

Chapter 3.

PORTRAIT OF A POPULATION. PROFILES AND MIGRATION TRAJECTORIES OF SEPARATED YOUTH

“What frustrates me the most in these things, whether for refugees or for minors, is the idea that their problems are the same everywhere. It’s simply not true.” – Practitioner

Separated youth in Quebec constitute a heterogeneous population, whether in terms of their origins, their histories or the circumstances surrounding their departures. While they do have common needs as refugees and as minors, their individual trajectories also reveal differences. This chapter provides a portrait of separated youth in Quebec, placing particular emphasis on their migration stories and experiences.

Separated youth in Quebec: a statistical portrait of SARIMM’s clientele.

In 1999,¹⁴ thirty five countries were represented in SARIMM’s separated youth clientele, all reflecting recent zones of conflict in the world. Together, Africa and Asia accounted for 84 % of the regions of origin of the youth during this period (48.2 % and 35.3 % respectively). The remaining youth came from countries in South America (8.2 %) and Europe (8.2 %) (Table 3-1). The languages of these youth are as diverse as their countries of origin. In addition to their mother tongues, upon arrival almost half of the youth spoke some French (49 %) and a fifth some English (19 %). Meanwhile, close to a third (32 %) spoke neither of the two official languages of Canada. All of the youth were refugee claimants, which is reflected in the reasons for departure from their homelands: persecution on the basis of ethnic or religious identification (27 %), persecution for reasons of political opinion or activity (50 %), protection from situations of war or violence in general (11 %), family reasons¹⁵ (8 %) and other (4 %). More than two-thirds (70 %) were young men and boys and less than a third, young women and girls (30 %). In terms of age, the majority (64 %) were over 16 years of age, followed by 22 % between the ages of 13 and 15 and 14 % under 12 years.

¹⁴ This data was compiled by SARIMM between July and October 1999 and is based on the files of 170 separated youth in their clientele at that time.

¹⁵ Parents reported missing, youth rejected by their families, youth protected from physical or sexual abuse.

TABLE 3-1. Separated youth by region of origin, 1999, SARIMM, internal statistics		
Africa Algeria, Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Congo (Zaire), Ivory Coast, Erithea, Djibouti, Ghana, Guinea, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Chad	82	48.2 %
Asia Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka	60	35.3 %
Latin and South America Colombia, Costa Rica, Grenada, Guatemala, Haiti, Mexico, Peru, Venezuela	14	8.2 %
Europe Ex-Yugoslavia, Turkey, Rumania, Russia	14	8.2 %
Total	170	100 %

*Towards a typology of migration trajectories.*¹⁶

While these figures provide a general portrait of separated youth in Quebec, the personal profiles and trajectories of these youth are in fact quite varied. Neither do they migrate for the same reasons nor do they share the same conditions upon their arrival. Among those who have arrived in Quebec in recent years, several migratory profiles were identified in the interviews with social practitioners.

The first, and by far the largest, category corresponds to those for whom the departure from their homelands is provoked by events beyond their control: these are the obliged departures. For some, exile follows tragic situations involving the loss or the disappearance of family members or situations of extreme violence. According to one practitioner, there has been a marked increase in the number of youth who are victims or witnesses of violence since the 1980s. Prior to this period, she suggests that the majority of victims were adults, particularly men. In recent years, however, more and more women and youth have become victims of persecution. In part, this is due to the changing nature of war in which civilian victims are increasingly numerous, but it is also the result of a growing practice by which persecutors extend punishments to wives and children : “When the [adult] men disappear in order to save their skins, then they come and get the women [...] or the come to get the oldest sons.” Knowledge of this practice incites many families to send their children into hiding and, eventually, into exile. She gives the example of a young man, aged 17, from Nigeria whose life was turned upside down the day that a friend of the family arrived at his school to tell him that he could not return to his home because his mother and brother had been killed. He was sent to hide-out in a small village for several weeks. Fearing for the safety of the youth, the friend arranged for his passage to Montreal. The events were so rapid that the youth did not have time to reflect on his situation. It was only after his arrival in Quebec that he realised the full impact of his loss.

For others in this same category, the departure may also be provoked by persecution or the fear of persecution because of involvement in political activities. In some instances, it is the youth who decides that he or she must leave, in others it is the family who makes this decision. A practitioner describes the case of a young man from Pakistan who, along with other members of the family, were very active politically. At the time of his departure, he had already lost an older brother, killed by members of the political opposition, and his father had been imprisoned. His mother and other family

¹⁶The typology of migration trajectories was previously published in Montgomery, Rousseau and Shermarke (2001).

members hastily made the decision to send the youth to Canada, saying “we’ve already lost one, that’s enough. We’ll send you to the devil, but at least we’re going to keep you alive.” The youth had no say in the matter, but would have far preferred to stay in Pakistan and continue his political activities, despite the risks involved. As in the preceding example, the will of the family often supersedes that of the youth. Departure plans may even be made without the youth’s knowledge or consent, as one practitioner suggests:

There are some youth who don’t even know they will be leaving. Either their parents didn’t know themselves when the ticket would be ready – because there are often false papers and all and the youth is absolutely not aware – or he is not told because it is not part of family authority or this type of family relations to ask for the opinion of youth. One day he is told ‘Well, there you go. You’ll be leaving at such and such a time.’ So the parents decide what is best for the others and they don’t consult the youth. And, in these cases, the youth arrives here... and he knows nothing of his itinerary.

A second profile corresponds to youth described by one practitioner as ‘adventurers’. These youth also come from countries in turmoil, but the decision to leave is a personal rather than family one. Generally older in age, some of these youth are in search of autonomy and independence. While their departures are primarily provoked by the situations in their homelands, they also wish to establish themselves as young adults, to escape family constraints or to flee countries in which opportunities are limited because of war, political unrest or economic instability. An example was given of a young woman who, at the age of 17, joined a dance troop which had planned a tour in Quebec. Shortly after her arrival she left the troop and claimed political asylum. Tired by the political situation in her country and wanting to break away from her family, she took what means were necessary to get away. Commenting on the motives of the young woman, her social worker said “In her case, there is the attraction of newness. She was really a girl who wasn’t so worried about her refugee status, but who wanted to choose a country, the best country for her [in terms of opportunities].”

A third profile corresponds to youth who have been caught up in trafficking networks. Once again, these youth are from countries in the throes of war or political unrest. These are contexts in which they are easy victims for such networks. While this profile is exceptional in relation to the separated youth population in general, it nonetheless represents a certain reality which is both difficult to measure and to control. For the most part, these youth are destined to end up in the United States, possibly for black market or criminal activity, and only pass through Quebec. Sometimes, however, the chain is broken and the youth are intercepted at the border and taken into protection in Quebec. Speaking of the case of

two Indian youth, a social worker comments on the fact that they tend to ‘disappear’ after a couple of months, presumably having been smuggled into the States: “What is clear in cases like this is that we [youth protection services] are like a grain of sand in a well oiled gear that was supposed to work otherwise. These youth were supposed to cross the border where they would be given papers. They end up making their claims here and afterwards someone takes them to the United States by God knows what means”.

Although these are the three principal profiles of separated youth in Quebec, there are nonetheless other exceptional situations by which youth may become part of the clientele of services for separated youth: young immigrants who arrived with their families, but whose parents have either left the country or died since that time; youth who have been sponsored by the state or by other private organisations and who are referred to organisations such as SARIMM if they encounter problems with immigration or their placement situations; situations in which separated youth are reunited in Canada with a parent who is practically a stranger to them, following many years of separation, and for whom the placement situation is considered to be vulnerable; youth who may have been sent alone to Canada for educational purposes, but who are later unable to return to their homelands because of situations of war or political unrest.

Voices of exile: trajectories of the separated youth in the study.

All of the separated youth who participated in the study can be situated in the first migratory profile; that is, those for whom their departures were provoked by events beyond their immediate control. This category also constitutes the majority of SARIMM’s clientele. These youth have in common the fact that their homelands have been torn apart as a result of armed conflicts and other forms of political and military terrorism. This being said, however, their migration trajectories reveal a diversity of experiences and hardships.

Of the thirteen separated youth, four were themselves victims of arrest, harassment and, in two cases, beatings by military or police forces. Goldie’s father was very active in an opposition political party in the Punjab region of India. Arrested for having hidden a political leader in his home, the father was taken into custody and beaten. After his release, he went into hiding, but police harassment of other family members continued. When Goldie was arrested and beaten, the family arranged for his

immediate departure from the region. He was first sent to New Delhi, but within two months he had left India altogether. Talking about this period, he recalls: “It all happened very fast. Before that we have problems with the police, but not that kind. They didn’t beat me up before. When they did this I was so scared. That is why I left that country”. Three other participants in the study had fled their homelands following the disappearance or persecution of one or both parents. Their respective stories tell of a father killed by the military police, a mother killed in a bomb attack and both parents kidnapped by political opposition members. In this latter situation, the two children would likely have been kidnapped too had their hiding place in the family home been discovered.

The migratory histories of the above youth were influenced by events directly involving family members or situations of immediate threat. The trajectories of four other participants in the study were not the result of direct or immediate threat, but rather were undertaken as precautionary measures against potential persecution. The story of Tiffany, a separated youth from Zimbabwe, illustrates well this type of situation. She was sent to Canada for protection because of the degradation of the political situation in her country. Although past conflicts targeted especially farmers and the control over farm lands, more recent troubles had spread into other sectors of public life. In the following account of the situation, Tiffany expresses well the apprehension which led her family to send her abroad:

So they, I guess if the parents, they do what they think is best. They’d rather suffer but then try to make a future for their children and that’s quite a sacrifice, I’d say. That’s what they’d rather do and some of them like we’ve got these farm invasions, like these war veterans take over the farms and they want the land. It’s just a dispute about land, power and what so ever. So they take over the land. [...] now going into offices terrorizing people. They’re supporting, it’s like there’s one ruling party, and so they want everybody to support that party. So if you don’t it means trouble for you. They come into the offices and soon they might start going into houses and what so ever terrorizing people, beating up people, killing people. Some parents are even leaving. They sell everything and they come here, you know and in a way I don’t know, it’s just not good. (Tiffany)

The situations which led to requests for asylum in Canada were not easy for any of the participants in the study. In the case of two separated youth from Angola, however, the horrors experienced prior to their departure were even too difficult to recount. While they talked unreservedly about the events which have marked their post-migratory trajectories, they stated clearly that they did not want to talk about the conditions or reasons for their departures. Instead, during the interview situation, they lowered their heads and thanked God who had helped them find their way to Quebec.

Depending on the circumstances surrounding their migrations, separated youth may be more or less prepared for such an abrupt life transition. In all of the cases, the migrations were planned either by their parents or someone close to their parents. Most of the youth in the study, however, had very little prior knowledge that they would be leaving their countries. For those whose departures were precipitated by specific events, plans were made very rapidly in order to protect them from immediate danger. Some were evacuated to other regions in the same country or to another country of transit before coming to Canada. Following difficulties with the police in the Punjab region of India, for instance, Michael's family sent him into hiding in New Delhi where he first stayed with an uncle for two days. However, fearing police reprisal, the uncle was reluctant to provide shelter for any longer. The uncle arranged instead for contacts with an 'agent' who moved Michael around to different places in New Delhi for a period of close to four months, before he was finally put on a plane destined for Canada. He had learned that he would have to leave his own country only a couple of months earlier. Vange, whose story was described in the introductory chapter, also went into hiding for several months before ending up in Canada, although he did not remain in his country during the interim period. Instead, he had been advised to go to South Africa, with his younger sister, and remain there until he had further instructions. He had been there for six months when one day a man arrived and hastily told him to leave South Africa and to go to the United States. From there, he made his way up to Canada on the advice of a taxi driver and fended for himself as best he could. In the following passage, he explains his trajectory from New York to Canada and the insecurity of not knowing who to talk to or what to do:

[In New York] I just talked to anybody around until someone gave me some help. I explained my situation to him. That's when he told me: 'I'm telling you really that if you stay in the United States it will be difficult for you. Also you are a minor and they might return you to your country, because a minor can't come here just like that without knowing anybody or anything'. So, the solution that he proposed [...] I had never heard of Quebec or Canada. He told me that that would be the best way because if you stay here you are going to end up being a delinquent. It's after that [that I thought] this person seems honest. I don't know anyone and I have to trust him, you see. And so it was the only person in the world that I could find to trust. He was a taximan, someone who transports people. He's a taximan, he saw me with my bags. I was sitting there for a long time. I was looking all around. He was wondering: ' Does he want a taxi? Does he know how to get around here? Is it his first time? [INT: Did he bring you to the border?]' Yes, one of his friends brought me, because he had to work and I had to pay another taximan who brought me to the border [...] That's how I made my refugee claim. (Vange)

Even those for whom the departures were less urgent, few actually knew that they were leaving their countries until a few days or weeks prior to getting on the airplane. In most cases, however, the parents or other family members had been planning their departures over a period of several months, the time needed to make contacts for the voyage and to get together the necessary money. The fact of not being informed of the preparations for departure stems in part from the will of parents to protect their children psychologically from the seriousness of events faced by the family. At the same time, such decisions may also be indicative of cultural and familial values, particularly with respect to relations of authority existing between parents and children in some countries.

Natasha also suggests that it is necessary for parents to ensure the utmost secrecy for the longest period possible in order to avoid the plans being interfered with. In explaining this logic, she tells the anecdote of a cousin who she met up with accidentally at the YMCA in Montreal during the first week following her arrival. Both had probably left their homeland at the same time, but neither knew that the other was leaving because their parents had kept everything quiet:

“I think we [cousin and herself] arrived at the same time. I’m not really sure cause we met up with him at the YMCA. [INT: You mean it was a coincidence?] Yeah, it was a coincidence like. Cause you know when you left you didn’t tell anyone that you were leaving cause you didn’t want people to... Hounding your parents. Or interfere with you leaving cause and then you won’t leave at all. So I couldn’t tell anyone that I was going so I was just quiet. Then I left and get here and I’m like “what you doing here?”.

Most separated youth do not arrive completely alone. In fact, of the thirteen youth interviewed, only two were completely unaccompanied in the migratory process. There are principally two types of accompaniment. Some may arrive accompanied by a sibling, a close friend or relation. In the study, this was the case of Chef and DC (brothers), of Komar and Shanti (brother and sister) and of Tiffany and Natasha (long time family friends). These youth agreed without hesitation that their travelling companions provided an inestimable source of support, both in the pre- and post-migratory periods. Chef, for instance, appreciated the fact that he and his brother could turn to one another and say “Everything is going to be okay. God is with us. We just have to keep on pushing”. Similarly, Natasha commented on the importance of being able to share her anguish and anxieties with Tiffany:

[INT: Do you think the fact that you came together, that you weren't alone, do you think that it helped you out? Do you think that it makes a difference?] Yeah, because we're now, because like leaving home was the biggest thing we had to do. Our parents like, it was the last time we were going to see them. We don't even know when we're going to see them, you know. If I'd come by myself, I don't think I'd be ok. I mean I'd have been crying like 24 hours a day, cause it was better when you're crying and you have someone with you, not when you cry when you're alone cause no one will know what's going on. But she knew, you know, what was going on with me so any time I feel like 'ohh', she'd be there for me.

Other separated youth may arrive in Canada accompanied by a person known as an 'agent'. In general, agents act as facilitators during the immigration process.¹⁷ Mostly men, they are usually from the same country of origin as the youth. They are responsible for making travel and passport arrangements and, in some cases, placement arrangements in the selected country of asylum. The cost for families in hiring an agent to make departure preparations for their children can be quite high. Ruby, for instance, talks of a sum of \$15,000 (CAN) that was paid to the agent. Of those interviewed, seven were accompanied by an agent during at least some portion of their voyage.

In some cases, the role of the agent is minimal and the accompaniment also. Nikita, for instance, was accompanied by an agent only as far as the airport in her own homeland. Although he had arranged for her travel plans and papers, she was otherwise alone during the voyage and upon arrival in Canada. In addition to the difficulty of leaving her parents behind, it was also the first time that she had travelled alone or even been on an airplane:

[INT: And how did you feel?] Scared, but I managed. [...] Yeah, I was coming to a place I didn't know, leaving my parents and coming to a place I didn't know no one. You know, it was scary. It was a different experience. [INT: Have you gone away by yourself before?] No, it's the first time. [INT: Or, or travelled to other countries, been on an airplane?] Alone, no. This is the first experience actually. (Nikita)

In other cases, the agent may accompany the youth during part of the voyage, but not as far as the final destination point. Michael, for instance, was accompanied as far as Toronto, but then the agent disappeared, leaving him in a hotel room on the airport strip: "he left me and he went out. I don't know where he went". After discussion with other persons from his country of origin staying in the same hotel, it was decided that his chances for immigration would be better in Quebec and these strangers

¹⁷ The agents discussed here are those which facilitate immigration and should not be confused with those who are involved in trafficking networks for exploitation purposes. None of the separated youth in the study, at least as far as is known, had been victims of exploitation.

arranged for his passage to Montreal. Komar and Shanti were also accompanied for only a part of the way. After having transited a couple of days through Singapour and spent two days in a hotel with the agent in New York, they were placed alone in a taxi which took them to the Canadian border. In still other cases, the youth were accompanied directly to Montreal, often times being declared as the 'son' or 'daughter' of the agent in order to pass through immigration. Ruby, for instance, was accompanied to Montreal by an agent and his two children. Her photo had been added to his passport in order to establish 'proof' of a father-daughter relationship. After arrival, she was left with friends of her father's living in Montreal and she never heard from the agent or his children again.

Aside from the strictly technical aspects of travel, some agents play a reassuring role during the process of migration, explaining the different stages that the youth will have to pass through and comforting them when they are feeling depressed or anxious. This role is well described in Goldie's account:

I was like, I usually cry when I was with the agent, I was crying, but that guy told me, whenever he saw me, like I was doing this, and sometimes I was, I don't eat, because I was thinking: Where I am? And what I am doing? But, he told me: How long are you going to do that? You don't have to kill yourself. He told me a lot of things, in my language. (Goldie)

The establishment of a relation of confidence was easier in some cases than in others, particularly for those who had met their agent in the months preceding their departure. Mandeed and Michael, for instance, both stayed with their agent in New Delhi for two and four months respectively, while awaiting to see how things would work out for them and whether or not they would be able to return to their families. They did not necessarily know that they would be leaving their country. Komar and Shanti had also met their agent several months prior to leaving home. He had been introduced to them as a friend who had helped the family establish themselves in a new city after having had political difficulties elsewhere. Like Mandeed and Michael, however, they did not know that the friend was in fact an 'agent' with whom they would leave the country.

In fact, Komar and Shanti, like two other separated youth in the study, did not even know that they would be coming to Canada. The decisions had been made by their families or agents without their knowledge and they learned of their final destination only prior to arriving at the Canadian border. Three reasons were given for the choice of Canada as a country of asylum. Some, such as Mandeed, had extended family members or friends of family already living in Montreal, which weighed in the

parents' decisions: "Like, somewhere else, nobody was like supporting me, like my uncle said, if possible you came [*sic*] to Canada, to Quebec, and we can live together. And he would apply my case and everything." Some ended up in Canada almost by accident, such as Vange who first transited through South Africa and then through the States before arriving in Canada. For at least four others, it was Canada's reputation on humanitarian issues which influenced the choice of destination, as the following accounts suggest:

Canada Yeah. I came to Canada because of the signature agreement on Human Rights Charter. Yeah, I came here, cause I thought there to be freedom, liberty, like you know, and, more education. (Nikita)

I could have gone to other countries like in Africa but then they don't really respect human rights, you know. That's how it is, cause they would have sent me back and hell knows what could have happened to me. So, I've got an Uncle who works for the United Nations. So, he's like the best thing is, you try Canada and he gave us, there was another list of other countries but he's like Canada's good because they respect human rights and hopefully you'll be safe and who knows you might carry on with your schooling and lets see if all goes well. So my mom chose Canada, she was like ok, I think this is best for you, I'd rather stay here and suffer but you're young go ahead. So it was quite a big decision. (Tiffany)

Few knew very much about their new country of asylum prior to arriving in Quebec. Many did not know where it was located geographically and one was not sure if she was presently living in South or North America. Many had heard that it was cold, but did not expect it to be that cold. Most did not understand the distinction between Canada and Quebec or know that French was the principal language of Quebec. One knew nothing at all about Canada, except that she had seen it indicated on the price lists on the back of comic books ("\$.50 CAN")!

Getting settled in Quebec: the first days.

For most separated youth, the point of first entry is the airport, although some may claim asylum at land or water border crossings. Of those who participated in the study, only four did not arrive by plane, three of them having transited by land through the States and one through Toronto. Their first impressions upon arrival were marked at once by exaltation and by fear. Mandeded, for instance, felt relieved when he touched down at the airport stating "I was free, I was feeling free". For others, however, the impending encounter with immigration officials at the Canadian border remained an

important source of apprehension, which Mandy explains in the following words: “I was just like, what if they tell to go back? Just that. You know, just afraid of that. But I prayed, that all goes well”.

Administratively, the initial immigration procedure at the point of entry is the same for everyone: presentation of passport, responding to questions, filling out immigration forms and having pictures and fingerprints taken. The actual experience of the separated youth in these proceedings, however, varies from one case to another. In the study, three of the youth had in fact little direct contact with immigration at the point of entry. These are all youth who were accompanied by agents through to Montreal and who were declared to be children travelling with a parent. In such situations, the youths’ names and photos were included on the agent’s passport. It is thus the agent who went through immigration on their behalf. This type of situation is described in Ruby’s account:

[INT: You mentioned earlier you came with the agent and that he was like your father, and you were like his daughter, on the airplane. When you were in immigration did you say the same thing, you were his daughter?] Yeah, we told them. I come with me and two other boys coming, like my brothers, yeah. The agent’s children, three children like coming like that. His passport, they don’t have an own passport for them, his passport add to the photos for us. Like that, we are coming. (Ruby)

For the others, the length of the initial encounter with immigration at the point of entry ranged from 5 to 24 hours. Long waiting periods were the result of a number of factors, including difficulties in establishing identification, time and period of arrival, number of claimants to be processed and language barriers. Vange, for instance, had had his passport stolen during his transit through the States and had to explain the details of his passage there. In his account, he describes how he felt quite lost, particularly because he did not even know what political asylum or refugee status were prior to meeting with immigration officers at the Canada-US border:

I didn’t even know what asylum was in the beginning, because I had just arrived. So I said ‘Sir, myself I am in this type of situation. I am like this. I am lost and I really don’t know what to do with my life. And then, they told me that when you give that kind of explanation that means that you are asking for asylum and they told me what asylum was. I understood and we proceed with the first documents and then I arrived in Montreal. (Vange)

Chef and DC had what they described as being a difficult experience at immigration. Both were scared because they did not know what was going to happen to them. After meeting with the immigration

officer they were even more scared. According to Chef, the officer ‘screamed’ at them. According to DC, he was very aggressive in the way that he asked questions. Their anxiety was increased during the long period that they spent at the border, totaling close to 24 hours. DC described another man who was crying in the waiting room and mothers with young children who had nothing to eat. Although there was a place to buy food in the building many of the people waiting, including themselves, did not have money to buy any. They spent the night in a hallway, catching bits of sleep on plastic chairs. Tiffany and Natasha also spent the night in the immigration offices at the airport. They arrived in the early evening and waited until close to 11 p.m. before being called to the office where they began opening their immigration files. The process was delayed because of the number of claimants who had arrived that day and Natasha was asked to come back the next morning, because they were not able to finish before closing hours. The two friends laid down on the waiting room floor with no blankets. They hardly slept because they were panicked about some information which had been given to them by another traveler, also a newcomer to Canada. They had asked him if he knew where the YMCA was located, because immigration officers had informed them earlier that they could stay there the following evening. The fellow traveler mistakenly told them that it was 2000 miles away and that it would cost close to \$4000 to get there. They were sick with worry, because they did not have that kind of money on them. It wasn’t until the next morning that they learned that the YMCA was only a taxi ride away. While these difficult experiences with immigration did not have any long term implications for any of the youth, they do nonetheless demonstrate their vulnerability in such situations.

Most of the youth were initially housed in temporary shelters while awaiting more permanent placement elsewhere: four stayed at the YMCA, three in group homes (one a home for youth and, the other, for women) and two in a temple belonging to members of the same religious community. The length of stay in the temporary shelters ranges in most cases from one day to three weeks. Four of the youth were immediately taken in by members of extended family or friend networks. Generally speaking, the experiences in these placement situations were positive ones. Those residing with family members or distant friends of the family found themselves in relatively familiar surroundings, even in cases where they had never actually met their hosts prior to arriving in Quebec. As for those in temporary placement situations, they were generally appreciative of the support that they found there. Despite her loneliness, for instance, Nikita felt that the group home she was brought to was somewhat ‘like a home’: “Yeah, it was quite nice. Yeah, they were all very kind. And, yeah, that was it. Yeah, they made supper for me. [INT: Did you feel comfortable?] Yeah. I did. But I was quite lonely (laughter) [...] Yeah, I was more comfortable here. It’s got a homely feeling. You feel at home.” DC

also qualified the YMCA as being 'like a home', commenting especially on the warmth of the receptionist. Tiffany and Natasha found the staff at the YMCA friendly, although they were a bit disappointed with the hygienic conditions of the washrooms and with some rules which they considered to be too strict. Only Vange was unhappy in the group home where he was sent upon arrival, because he had difficulty adapting to the rules and found it difficult to share space with young delinquents.

The first few weeks represent a period of substantial activity and adaptation for the youth, particularly in terms of the numerous administrative procedures that have to be taken care of. For most, there are initial contacts with a social worker from SARIMM who, in addition to listening to their stories and fears, also find placement situations and give them necessary information on the immigration process, medical examinations, the city and on practical day-to-day things such as how to ride a bus or where to buy food. In addition to contacts with the social services (discussed in more detail in the following chapter), the first week was described as a frenzy of activity: "I think I was caught up in just [being] busy doing paper work" (Nikita). Consultations, waiting rooms, filling out forms: these are the activities which best characterise this period. Generally speaking, the first contact with Immigration Quebec takes place within the first few days of arrival. After having received their federal immigration papers at the port of entry, the youth were then directed to the offices of Immigration Quebec. For some, the apprehension which they had felt in their first encounter with Immigration Canada at the port of entry came back to them here, especially the ever present fear that they might be turned back. This fear is well expressed in Ruby's and Nikita's accounts:

[INT: Do you remember how you felt when you were in front of the immigration officer?] Yeah, nervous because they asking lots of questions, so I don't know [the answer] sometime, they told me no, they are not accept here I live here. So I am scared, I don't know where I am going after. (Ruby)

[INT: And how did you feel when you were waiting?] Yeah stressed and nervous. But, I was okay when I went inside, I was quite okay. [INT: Okay, What were you nervous about before you went in?] I don't know. I just had this weird feeling. [INT: Is it because you didn't know what was going to happen?] Uh hum.

Nikita's fears were calmed somewhat once she entered the immigration office. Most of the youth agree that they had been made to feel comfortable and that the immigration officers were friendly and patient

with them. Aside from the administrative aspects of these meetings, some youth also commented on the long waiting period and on the confusion in not knowing what step to do next and how to do it, for instance:

[INT: Okay. And tell me a little bit about Immigration Quebec. How long were you there?] Well, for a lot of hours. I think for about three hours. You know, I went to the wrong [counter] , then I had to wait for, to see my number. And when I went there, they told me what to do, and I went downstairs to photocopy my papers, then I went back, that delayed it, and at the counter told me to another cue, so I could hand in my papers, and that lady, who I've seen at that side, the other side. She didn't take the papers first; I don't know what she was doing, she was doing some other things. So, I should take my papers back to that lady who had told me what to do, and, I waited again to be called, and another officer, then they called me again and I went and I had to wait for them to go for lunch, and to come back. It's only that, I was with some other people so, it was just I had to wait for them. I just said maybe that's the way they do things, I mean, you know? And I just should be patient, cause I was the one who needed help. (Mandy)

As part of the immigration process, separated youth also have to undergo a medical examination. Generally speaking, they are directed to the designated clinics and doctors by SARIMM or Immigration Quebec. For most of the youth in the study, this stage was relatively non problematical. Chef even paused to say “Ah, the nurses, they were so sweet”.

For more than half of the youth in the study, the activities of the first weeks were greatly facilitated by the fact of being accompanied by another person, whether a family member or friend, a worker in a group home or temple, another separated youth who had already been through the process, or other refugee claimants met through SARIMM. In most cases, the accompaniment was a source of comfort for the youth, who felt more at ease because they were not alone and because many of these persons had some prior professional or personal knowledge of the process they would be going through. In some cases, the persons accompanying the youth also served as interpreters. Mandy comments on her appreciation of being accompanied by another separated youth who she had met in the group home where she was staying: “Yeah, it's nice [being accompanied]. It is more secure.” Aside from the more official activities of the first weeks, for most this was also a period of getting acquainted with their new city and learning how to get around in it. Some of the time was spent picking up essentials, such as appropriate clothing for the weather here or, in Nikita's case, a teddy bear to keep her company. Some separated youth, particularly those living with family members or friends, also had the chance of being guided around the city.

To some extent, the frenzied activities of the first few weeks played a cathartic function for the youth, leaving them less time to constantly ruminate over the circumstances of their departures. Once things calmed down, however, the concrete impact of how their lives had been changed began to set in and they found themselves caught up between all the unknowns of the future and all the losses of the past. This period of very strong emotions is best expressed in the words of the youth themselves, for instance:

I was very worried about my mother and everybody because they were alone. I was feeling very homesick too. I was weeping there, here also I was weeping for some days. Then, I was thinking, I am not smile after next day - why I was weeping? [...] Yeah, I was very nervous. That full month, March was difficult for me. I was weeping too much. Because I left India, before I was weeping in India too, in New Delhi, I was feeling very homesick because I was missing my family. (Michael)

But that night I couldn't sleep. I didn't sleep the first night. Then the next day I went to temple, I did prayer, and felt a little bit good. After next day, in the evening, I sleep like 4 or 5 hours, after that I woke up at night again. I didn't sleep all night again, I watch TV, I did the prayer and after that I again go to the temple. Ah, when I sleep I just turn off the light, you know. I don't see exactly what time, it takes me hours sometimes, an hour and a half, sometimes more than that. [...] I am still taking medicine, so sometimes, like when I sleep I see everything in my dream, like what I have in my mind, what happened to me, everything back, sometimes I see what was happening in my back life, you know? I woke up after that, I couldn't sleep. It doesn't matter what time I woke up. That is why I have medicine. Whenever this happens to me I take my medicine, and I go to sleep. (Goldie)

Chapter 4.

MAINTAINING CONTINUITY : WORKING WITH SEPARATED YOUTH IN THE SOCIAL SERVICES

The loss of their country, the loss of their parents, the loss of the relations which they had, of the place that they had somewhere, of the role that they were brought to play as children coming from a given culture, country or family culture, the emotional investment and often the future that had been placed in these children. They had friends, they had things that they loved there. They sometimes had farms. I had children [in my caseload] who had come [from farms] and who had animals that they loved. It's all of these types of losses. – Social practitioner.

As illustrated in the migratory histories and in the above comment, separated youth have experienced multiple losses in a relatively short lapse of time, whether in terms of familial and other support networks or even simply in terms of an environment which was familiar to them. Many are in a state of shock upon arrival, particularly those who had little or no previous knowledge that they would be leaving their families and their homelands. In addition to the radical nature of the departure itself, they are also confronted with the realisation that the course of their lives has changed dramatically. Faced with a new country, new lifestyle, new language and so on, their futures remain uncertain. The image given by one of the practitioners of two separated youth describes well this state of shock: “They arrived at the Y on the weekend. They were in a state of shock. They couldn't talk. They smiled, but their faces were closed, closed, closed. They were like two baby birds who had fallen from the nest. That image often struck me... just like birds fallen from a nest.”

Working with separated youth: a practice developed in the field.

It is in this context that social practitioners work with separated youth. The practitioners who participated in the study all have extensive knowledge in working with this group, their experience ranging from five to twenty-seven years, with fourteen years as an overall average. Although none had actually chosen separated youth as the principal focus of their professional careers, they all share a common interest in working with refugee and recent immigrant populations. Underlying this interest is also a strong belief in humanitarian ideals and principles, as the following comment illustrates:

“Actually, there was a particular reason which brought me to work with – not specifically with separated youth, but especially with refugees. And the reason was that I found myself at a time in my life where I felt ready to touch human misery and the problems that humans can cause to another individual.”

At the time when most of the practitioners began working with separated youth, the reality of this population was a relatively new one for the social services. Although separated youth had migrated to Quebec prior to the 1970s, it is especially the arrival of the Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian ‘boat children’ between 1978 and 1983 that incited reflection on the needs of this population. Intervention methods and strategies, however, could not be learned from textbooks, but rather had to be developed in the field, pieced together from one experience to another. Commenting on her first professional contacts with separated youth one practitioner recalls: “I [started working with this group] in 1978 with the arrival of the Vietnamese, the ‘boat people’, when we had a massive arrival of refugees, a lot of whom were separated youth. They couldn’t go back to Vietnam. So I entered into the portfolio like that and I learned how things worked in the field.” According to another practitioner, it was not until 1984 or 1985 that there was even an established procedure for signalling to the social services the names of separated youth who passed through the Ministry of Immigration.

In the short term, the role of the practitioner is to stabilise the situations of the youth by establishing a relation of confidence in which the youth is able to express feelings of loss and externalise his or her fears and anxieties of the future. It is in this role too that the social services are considered to be among the primary support networks for separated youth in the initial period following their arrival:

We are in a sort of primary network for the person, for the youth or even the child. It’s as if we were like a member of the family because we see them regularly, it could be for a year or two, and we are there during situations which are highly charged. In their minds, we belong to their primary network. Sure, we’re not with them at home or on the weekend or the evening or during holidays, but we are there. We are part of the network. Bit by bit, over time, I think we become like someone who was already in their network.

Through the establishment of a relationship of confidence, the practitioners place emphasis on maintaining continuity for the youth. In creating links between their past and present experiences, the underlying objective of intervention is to avoid provoking a radical break in their conception or sense of self: “there is a lot to do for maintaining continuity for these children, here and there, so that there

are not two worlds, that there is a continuity. At that also, we do not do enough. Often we are concerned with what is happening here [...] and we increase the rupture in doing that.” As the comment suggests, the focus of intervention should not be restricted to the here and now, but rather should provide an opportunity for youth to make their own observations and choices which will enable them to conciliate values and practices from their homelands with those which prevail here. In this way, intervention strategies are not meant to impose a standard model for functioning in Quebec society. On the contrary, integration is conceived of as being a form of patchwork constructed out of an accumulation of values and practices which draw on the youths’ past and present experiences. From this point of view, integration is more a creation of the youth than the outcome of his or her adherence to a standardized model of action. The role of the practitioner in this process is to facilitate the piecing together of the diverse elements of the patchwork without actually imposing any one given pattern on it. This role cannot be defined strictly in the immediate, but rather must be thought of in the long term, as an aid to preparing the separated youth for assuming his or her future.

We have to leave time for the other [person] to settle a little bit and then take the time. It’s not true, if we talk about integration, that that child who is 13, or 17, who has arrived from who knows where, that he’ll be interested in going to an activity of integration to meet good old Quebecers who know nothing [of his past] and whose only interest in him is to know ‘What is your country like? What do you eat there?’ -- while the other person is completely shaken up. Once the dust has settled, that he is a bit more secure, that he has even been accepted as a refugee, then he can start to look around and see how people live here, what youth his age do; that is, to be in contact with a world of values that he can see himself, feel himself, not through an intermediary person.

Working within an intercultural framework

This conception of integration is grounded for the most part in what is referred to as an intercultural approach to social practice. It is not really until the 1970s that pluralism became a veritable preoccupation in mainstream health and service institutions, largely due to changing immigration patterns and the influx of immigrants from a much greater diversity of origins.¹⁸ As a result, many who participated in the study form part of the ‘first generation’ of practitioners for whom an intercultural

¹⁸ Roy, Ghislaine and Catherine Montgomery. 2003. “Practice with Immigrants in Quebec” in *Multicultural Social Work in Canada*, (Alean Al-Krenawi and John Graham, eds.) Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 122-145.

approach had been integrated into their intervention schemas. This approach, which draws largely on the writings of Margalit Cohen-Emerique,¹⁹ has also been largely documented through the expertise held by the practitioners of SARIMM and other social service agencies working with separated youth.²⁰ Generally speaking, three basic tenets underlie this approach: reciprocity, complexity and flexibility.

The intervention encounter is based on a relationship between two actors, the separated youth and the practitioner. This relationship is reciprocal in that interaction constitutes a dialogue between both actors rather than a unidirectional process. This dialogue is possible only if both sides are open to the other person's way of expressing and conceptualising ideas. Reciprocity, however, is not always easy to establish. On the one hand, both the practitioner and the youth must be able to step outside of their own schemas of reference and to put aside any preconceived or stereotypical images that they might have of the other person. In so doing, they also have to be able to identify and to decode differences in their respective schemas which could become barriers to understanding. Potential barriers may result from a variety of factors. Conflicting perceptions of institutional and professional roles, for instance, may create difficulties in establishing a relation of confidence between practitioners and youth. In many countries, social work as a profession is either non-existent or relatively little known. As a result, some separated youth do not know what to expect during their initial encounters with social service agencies. Some may be wary of any type of institutional intervention whatsoever. A case described by one of the practitioners illustrates well this type of situation:

I remember two from Guinea who arrived in Chicoutimi. I went to pick them up here at the Montreal bus station. At the time, I was thinking about the way they looked at me and I said to myself : 'Who am I to them?' Later, they told me that they had been afraid.

¹⁹ Cohen-Emerique, Margalit. (1984). "Choc culturel et relations interculturelles dans la pratique des travailleurs sociaux." *Cahiers de sociologie économique et culturelle*, no 2, December 1984, pp. 183-218. Cohen-Emerique, Margalit. (1989). "Travailleurs sociaux et migrants: la reconnaissance identitaire dans le processus d'aide." In Camilleri, C. and M. Cohen-Emerique, eds., (pp. 77-117), *Chocs de culture*. Paris: l'Harmattan. Cohen-Emerique, M., (1993) "L'approche interculturelle dans le processus d'aide." *Santé mentale au Québec*, vol. xv11, no 1, pp. 71-92.

²⁰ Chiasson-Lavoie, ed. (1992). *L'approche interculturelle auprès de réfugiés et de nouveaux immigrants*. Montreal: Centre de services sociaux du Montréal métropolitain. Falcon, G. (1994). "Un photo-roman: outil de pratique interculturelle". *Intervention*, numéro 97, pp. 28-32. Fiorino, G. (1996). "SAVI... SMI... SARIMM... Quarante ans d'intervention sociale auprès des non-résidents, des immigrants et des réfugiés". *Intervention*, no. 103, pp. 48-56. Legault, G., Roy, G. (2000) "Les difficultés des intervenants sociaux auprès des clientèles d'immigration récente", in Legault, G., ed., *Intervention interculturelle*, pp. 185-203. Roy, G. (1991). "Pratiques interculturelles sous l'angle de la modernité, Montreal: Centre des services sociaux du Montréal métropolitain". Roy, G. (1993). "Bouillon de pratiques interculturelles". *Intervention*, no 96. Roy, G. (2000). "Le protocole de discussion de cas". In G. Legault ed., *L'intervention interculturelle*. Montreal: Gaétan Morin éditeur, pp. 147-158. Roy, G. and M. Shermarke. (1996). "Errance d'exil et cul-de-sac institutionnel". *Intervention*, no 103, pp. 43-47.

They thought I was a police officer in civilian clothes who was going to bring them to prison. Finally, I brought them to a [group home] and afterwards, when I returned a week later, I saw that they were smiling. They had finally understood that we weren't the police who were going to arrest them. That too, that is part of the reality of these youth.

Gender differences may also have an impact on the intervention relationship. One of the youth, for instance, had difficulty at first accepting to see a social worker who was a woman. He explained this difficulty in terms of the cultural habits in his home country by which it would be considered improper for a young man to have meetings with a woman who he did not know:

You see, in Africa we always have this pride. Most of the practitioners [at the group home] are women. In our country it is rare that you will see a boy who will go to a woman's place that he doesn't even know, because I didn't know anybody there [at the group home]. I didn't even know the private life of these people [...] I had a bit of difficulty trusting the women who were there. (Vange)

Other types of factors such as age, language and ways of constructing personal histories or making sense of events may also intervene in the practitioner-youth relationship. In part, such factors may be based on variations in cultural values, although it would be a mistake to interpret all differences in terms of ethnicity or culture. It is in this respect that the second tenet of the intercultural approach, that of complexity, enters into consideration. According to this tenet, both practitioner and youth are situated in a locus of types of affinities and affiliations, some of which are culturally based and others which are not. Identity construction is thus conceived as being the product of multiple forms of belongingness, whether based on origin, language, lifestyle, profession, socio-economic status, gender, sexual orientation, political views (etc.). Consciously or not, these diverse affiliations enter into the professional relationship. From the point of view of the practitioner, it is necessary to develop an intervention plan which takes into account the different forms of belongingness in which the youth is situated.

At the same time, it is important that the practitioners be aware of their own positioning as social actors and the possibility that their own affiliations may influence the intervention process. One practitioner gave a personal example of the way in which her identification as a 'white' person was perceived by some separated youth coming from former colonial contexts:

Also, how they see us as Whites. Because we musn't forget that we are White. The first time I heard that expression – I know very well that I'm White, but I had never considered myself as being White. One time I phoned [a separated youth]. [The person who answered] called her and said : 'It's a White woman'. I remember. First, I would never have introduced myself like that. Then I said to her [the separated youth] : 'It's the White woman calling', because I knew her well and she started laughing. But that gave me a bit of a tilt and later I started to think about it. How do these youth perceive Whites? Obviously, I don't ask them this question when they arrive, but if I am able to establish contact – because it is not always easy – I learn all sorts of things. Like, for instance, that Whites, we really want to break up families. There are a lot that have that type of idea in their head.

Matching practitioners and youth from the same origin, a process known as ethnic matching²¹, is not necessarily a solution to this type of misunderstanding. While cultural proximity may sometimes facilitate interaction, in terms of language or adherence to certain values, ethnic matching is not a common practice in intervention with separated youth. Given the great diversity of countries of origin of separated youth in recent years, such an approach would not be very practical. However, the reluctance to adopt such an approach is not strictly a question of resources. The fact of coming from the same origin or language group is not in itself sufficient for establishing a strong care relation, since this relationship is also structured by the other types of identity factors mentioned above, such as class, gender, age, profession (etc.). In discussing her experience with Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian separated youth, for instance, one practitioner commented on the reluctance of these youth to be seen by a professional of the same origin: "They felt much more threatened by those of the same origin. When you have experienced war and then you're in an intervention relationship with someone from the same origin as yourself, you're not sure if you can trust that person."

Thus, the positioning of the practitioner should not only be understood in terms of ethnic origin or belongingness. Another example shows the way in which the class origins of the practitioner can influence the interpretation given to intervention goals. When asked to talk about what the future reserves for separated youth in Quebec, the immediate response of one practitioner was "it is scandalous". After reflection, he acknowledged that his perception was partly coloured by his own class affiliation and the projects which he would have considered appropriate for his own children:

²¹ Weinfeld, Morton. (1999). "The Challenge of Ethnic Match: Minority Origin Professionals in Health and Social Services." In H. Troper and M. Weinfeld, eds., *Ethnicity, Politics, and Public Policy: Case Studies in Canadian Diversity*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 117-141.

“Some [practitioners] will tell you that you shouldn’t feel guilty. That we can’t [feel guilty], that we do all that we can. They say ‘You know, not everybody has the same ideal about education. You are perhaps a bourgeois. Your children go to university. Yourself, you are well educated.’” The reflexivity of the practitioner, such as illustrated in this example, thus becomes an essential element of the intercultural model.

According to Cohen-Emerique’s work (1993), reflexivity in the intercultural model involves three basic stages: the defining of one’s own identity, the penetration of the other’s system of reference and the process of negotiation between systems of reference . This process of negotiation also underlies the third tenet of the intercultural model, that of flexibility. Separated youth constitute a heterogeneous population because of their diverse forms of belongingness. This heterogeneity implies also that there are no clear cut recipes in working with them. Instead, practitioners must develop intervention plans which are adapted to the specific circumstances and experiences of each youth, as the following comment suggests: “If there is no flexibility, it is very difficult to give help, because the youth come from a different context. They have schemas of reference which are completely different”.

The limits of the professional relationship

Despite the role of protection played by the practitioners, the establishment of a relation of confidence is not always easy or even possible. Some separated youth are simply not ready to open up to a stranger right away and need time before they can place their trust in someone and recount events which have been very painful to them. The old adage ‘time heals all wounds’ is not always true, but the importance of time in the construction of a good care relationship is nonetheless acknowledged by all of the practitioners. Other separated youth may do all they can to sabotage intervention plans by providing false information (or none at all), not respecting appointments or administrative delays for immigration and defying any type of authority. This may be the case, for instance, of youth who are very angry about their forced departures and who, consequently, refuse any form of help perceived as being contrary to their desire of returning to their homelands.

There are those who never wanted to come here and who sabotage any possible plans. They don’t want to integrate. The only thing they want to do is to return home and stay with their parents. They don’t want to stay because they never wanted to leave. They were obligated to leave so that their parents could protect them from what was happening there. That is, it wasn’t voluntary. But it was the will of the parents and the children submit themselves to the parental will. Of course, they will go through the determination process because that is

what the parents wanted, but they won't be happy being separated from their parents and that's where they can sabotage intervention plans because they are not their plans. It is not what they wanted. It becomes very difficult to work with these children when they have come from dangerous situations and they have left their parents behind.

Youth may also refuse to collaborate for other reasons. Some may receive contradictory messages from family members or other support networks as to what they should or should not do. This was the case, for instance, of a youth who had enormous difficulties getting along with the families in Quebec where he was placed and, as a result, his placement situations changed at least four or five times. One day his practitioner asked him how his parents, with whom he was still in contact, felt about him living in Quebec and he answered, "My parents told me not to trust anybody, to pay attention to everything." Thinking that this message may have been the source of the youth's difficulties, the practitioner decided to contact his parents who then explained their fear that their son would become 'westernised' and lose his values. It was this fear that was creating conflict in the placement situations. The conflict was resolved by reassuring both the parents and the youth about the role of these families.

Collaboration may also be difficult in situations where trafficking is suspected. A practitioner gives the example of a young girl from Africa who arrived in Quebec at the age of nine. She was carrying false identity papers and was intercepted at the airport. She insisted that friends of the family were going to pick her up at the airport. However, when the social services called the number she had given them, the person who responded said that they knew nothing of the girl. It was later discovered that she was meant to cross over the American border, although the reason for her migration there remained nebulous. As the practitioner explains, the contact persons in Quebec "completely refused to help. I believe that they were people who were very afraid and thought perhaps that they were going to be accused of something. In brief, the problem was that the child was very bright and she had refused to collaborate."

The motivations of practitioners in working with separated youth are structured around a help-relationship; that is, the possibility that they can relieve suffering and facilitate the process of establishment for these youth. Intervention goals, however, do not always work out as planned. Situations such as trafficking create a feeling of powerlessness among practitioners. Although their professional role is to protect separated youth, cases like this are difficult to act on. Not only is collaboration difficult with the youth or their sponsors, but follow up in these cases is further

complicated by the lack of concertation between immigration and social service agencies and by the absence of existing mechanisms for investigating potential trafficking networks, as one practitioner explains:

There's not much that can be done. When you try to call the Youth Protection Services, they say 'Perfect, where is your proof. Because if we go before the judge, we have to have proof'. We need facts, but we only have suspicions. So, Youth Protection says, 'No, we can't do anything'. Immigration says, 'They are youth, it is not humane to detain them. We can't detain them on a long term basis on a suspicion'. And ourselves, the social services, we do what we can, but we can't lock them up either. At some point in time, they just disappear.

The ideal of the practitioner role may also be challenged on other fronts, such as situations in which separated youth are refused refugee status. While the practitioners readily agree that some separated youth do not correspond to the definition of refugee as set out in the Geneva Convention, they are frustrated, and even angry, when they see separated youth expelled for what they consider to be arbitrary reasons. Some feel that their professional responsibility is called into question in cases like this: "It questions me a lot, because these are youth who arrived as minors and who needed protection. They're not necessarily mature enough to defend their case. I tell myself that we have a professional responsibility towards these youth." The reflection of this practitioner is especially an ethical one and he questions himself as to whether or not it is possible to prepare a separated youth for return to a country in the throes of war: "How can you prepare a return when the youth tell you 'We don't know where our parents are. We left our country because we were at risk. We don't have a family anymore'".

A similar type of introspection arises in relation to youth who no longer have access to the social services because they have attained the age of majority, although they were separated youth at the time of the arrival. While many are autonomous enough to continue on without the support of their social worker, this is not the case of all. Outside of the juridical definition of majority at age 18, the line of demarcation between adolescence and adulthood is an arbitrary one. Some separated youth are dysfunctional even at eighteen and are not ready to assume the responsibilities which are expected of them. Although they could use extra-support in the period of transition, one practitioner comments that such services would be a luxury in the present context. One of the youth in the study, Natasha, turned eighteen shortly after her arrival in Quebec and was envious of the position of other separated youth because they received help that could have greatly benefitted her: "Cause I didn't know anything about Canada, so I needed help but there was no one, so I just had to guess, guess, guess [...] It's a new

country, it's so far from, you know where we come from, so a little help would be much appreciated". Ethically it is difficult for some practitioners to admit that the professional role must end abruptly at age eighteen when a youth is still in need of support. The fact of losing contact with those who turn eighteen, particularly when a strong care relationship has been established, is expressed by the practitioners both in terms of loss and responsibility:

It's rare that they come back to see us. Occasionally they give us some news, but in my experience, even with youth who we have invested a lot in, it is rare that they keep in touch. It is perhaps this part of the professional role that is difficult for us to assume – to say to yourself, I invested so much, how is it possible that when I don't have any more money for him, he doesn't come back to see me anymore. Then I tell myself 'That's the way it is. They have other priorities, other preoccupations'. We give them a hand at some point, but we can't expect that the relationship will last a lifetime. Anyways, on a professional level, it is not a good thing either.

Okay, I close the case, that's perfect. But what did we do? What was done? I have to say that I have some colleagues who will say 'Ah, we do what we can. They'll find their own way' And I tell them, 'I don't know. What do they become?' They haven't finished highschool. What have they become? You don't want to see, but you can't not see. I really feel for that. What have these youth become? These are future citizens, whether we want them or not.

Structural barriers in the intervention relationship

Outside of the professional relationship itself, the practitioners also face more structural barriers in their work with separated youth. Decreasing resources in public service sectors was at the top of the list. Most existing resources in the placement networks, the schools and youth services were designed for Quebec youth in general who have quite different needs than those of separated youth. As a result, it is often necessary to piece together intervention plans from resources which are ill-adapted for this clientele. Consequently, the needs of separated youth tend to be marginalised within these sectors and the lack of complementary resources in general only adds to this marginalisation:

One of the obstacles is a misunderstanding in the different service sectors: we can talk about the school, the placement network, the leisure network also. There is a lack of knowledge [about these youth] and we try to insert these youth in a network which has been structured for completely different types of problems or situations. There is a passage that is missing.

The practitioners also commented on the resources within their respective agencies or institutions. At the time of the interviews, for instance, the average caseload at SARIMM consisted of thirty-five separated youth per practitioner. While some cases are easier than others, many require a very significant investment which is difficult given time and workload pressures. As one practitioner argues “working with that type of clientele requires a lot of energy. Sometimes it is not obvious and the problem seems huge. You could lose three days for a question of a lost cheque or because the youth didn’t go to immigration.” This practitioner gave the example of a young woman whose case seemed to be relatively straightforward at the outset. During their first meeting he helped her set up an appointment with an immigration lawyer and presented her with a cheque which was to go to the host family. He not only discovered that she had lied to the host family about the amount of the cheque, but also that she had not shown up for her meeting with the lawyer. It took several phone calls to clear up the cheque situation: to confirm with accounting the amount of the cheque, the date that it was cashed and to reassure the host family as to the amount they should be expecting. He also rescheduled her appointment with the lawyer, only to be informed later that she had not shown up the second time either. The lawyer was reluctant to accept another appointment, because he did not want to waste his time and it took several calls before the practitioner was able to convince him again. Commenting on this case, he stated “You see, just to give you an example of things which may appear simple, but which are not always simple”.

The heavy caseloads are a source of frustration for the practitioners. Not only do they feel overworked because they have difficulty keeping up with the demand, but they sometimes feel guilty that they are not able to invest the time necessary that could really make a difference in some cases, as the following example illustrates:

Sometimes we are torn because there are major constraints if we do not do certain things. And when it is relating to minors, we are a bit like the parents. A concrete example : a minor is refused after his hearing and I know that it is dangerous if he is returned to his country. I would have to invest a lot of time myself in order to make recommendations to Immigration, draw up a report, but I have to find the time to do it. I also have to feel competent to do it and it is not always evident because it is not my role to do that. But whose role is it? Lawyers are not paid to do that. There is no aunt, no uncle, or if there are, they do not have the competence to do it. But someone has to. That eats away at you.

Despite such misgivings, the social services constitute a key actor during the initial phase of establishment of separated youth in Quebec. Through the development of a care relation which addresses both emotional and material needs, they fill an important void created by the loss of the youths' primary support networks. This role is greatly facilitated by the fact that most of the practitioners, and more particularly those in SARIMM, have specialised knowledge in humanitarian issues, migration processes, immigration procedures and intervention with a multiethnic clientele. This knowledge is crucial in that it allows them to tailor intervention practices around the specific needs of separated youth, rather than adapting the youth to a system which was designed for other purposes and needs.

Chapter 5.

THE BARRIERS OF PARTICIPATION: ACCESS TO RESOURCES FOR SEPARATED YOUTH²²

I believe that the obstacle is misunderstanding. Our lack of openness, that of our system. There is no space for mystery, no space for reflection. - Practitioner

Facilitating the establishment of separated youth in Quebec necessarily extends beyond the social services to other crucial sectors in society, such as education, immigration, health, commerce and community resources. However, the rationalization of the public sector, discriminatory practices and even simply a lack of knowledge about the life experiences of these youth can become important barriers to accessing these resources. This chapter examines some of these barriers in the schools, the refugee determination system, the health system, the employment, housing and commercial markets and, finally, the community and leisure sectors of activity.

Going to school

Whereas for adult refugee claimants it is the job market which provides the principal means of integration in society, for separated youth it is the school which, in principle, plays this role. For many of the practitioners who participated in the study, this sector is often the most problematical in terms of access. Separated youth are also more vulnerable in the school system because of the situation of education in their home countries. In many contexts characterised by war and political instability, schools have been closed down or education interrupted because youth have had to flee or go into hiding. Of those who participated in the study, several talked about the precarity of the school systems in their respective countries:

²² Large portions of this chapter have already been published in Montgomery, Catherine. 2002. "The 'Brown Paper Syndrome': Unaccompanied Minors and Questions of Protection", *Refuge*, Vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 56-67.

You really don't have a future with what's going on, you know. You really want to go in university. You work so hard, your A levels, this is your last year in high school and then suddenly you can't go to school anymore (Tiffany);

We don't have the opportunity to study. There, at this point in time, I would be killing people. I would be a murderer because military service is obligatory. So I got into my head the idea that I have to build my future, because it was the dream that I had there and if there is a place where I can make it come true, it is here. (Vange)

Other youth talked about their specific situations. In Ruby's case, for instance, the schools were closed down because of bomb attacks in her city. An informal system of tutorials was put into place in the teachers' homes, which she attended for a couple of years. Michael also had private tutors in periods of school closings. Not all separated youth, however, are able to continue with their schooling even on an informal basis. Vange, for instance, missed an entire year of school prior to coming to Quebec. He was in his homeland for six months of this period and didn't attend classes because of school closings. For the other six months he was in hiding in South Africa, waiting to see if he would be able to return to his country. Such interruptions have particular implications for the integration of separated youth in the Quebec school system: "They have also had very long interruptions if they have come from countries where there is social crisis, war, conflicts. They are obliged to go to classes where they are much older. They are very behind in their studies. Thus, to catch up... it's very easy to give up because of all they have missed."

Generally speaking, universal access to education is taken for granted in Canada. The opportunity to continue schooling is also an important factor which weighs in the decisions of parents living in war zones to send their children abroad. For separated youth in Quebec, however, access to education is not always without difficulties.

In the initial period following arrival, some youth express the fear that they might not be accepted into the school system here. Mandy, for instance, had been in Quebec for a week only at the time of the interview. She desperately wanted to go to school, but didn't know if she would have the right to and was visibly reassured when she learned that she would be able to enroll once some of the immigration paperwork had been settled. Beyond such fears, separated youth may also encounter other types of obstacles, such as long delays before being able to attend school. Among the youth who participated in the study, such delays ranged from one to five months. A waiting period of a month or so appears to be

the norm, because of the time needed to process immigration papers and to establish communication between immigration and education authorities. Longer delays, however, can be attributed to a number of other factors. A practitioner gives the example of a client who had been staying at the YMCA for over a month because they had difficulty finding more permanent placement for him. During this period, he wasn't able to make preparations to go to school, because registration in educational institutions requires that the youth have an address. Waiting lists for welcome classes may also retard entry into the school system. Of the youth in the study, for instance, Shanti had to wait a month longer than her brother in order to go to school because there was no place left in the neighbourhood where she was living. When space did become available, it was in a school well outside of her sector, which meant that she had to travel 45 minutes each morning and evening to get there. Although she had requested a transfer to a school closer to her neighbourhood in her second year, she was told that she would have to remain where she was because of space. Tiffany experienced the opposite situation. She waited two months before attending school because there were not enough students to fill the welcome class in the neighbourhood where she was living. She was called only when they had a full class list.

Whatever the reason for delays in entering the school system, for most the waiting period is a difficult one. For some, such as Tiffany, it is remembered especially as a period of boredom: "Gosh! I got so lazy. Oh my gosh! I used to go check my e-mail, ummm... read, sleep, take walks. That's about all I did. I didn't do much. [...] I was bored. I was really bored" (Tiffany). Vange also talked about the loneliness he felt everyday when the other youth in the group home where he was staying left for school and he was left behind in an almost empty residence: "I wasn't doing anything in the home. Everyone was at school and I had to wait. It took me a long time [to go to school]. I started getting bored because most of the youth were at school. It took a while, but when I started I said 'Glory to God' " (Vange). The potential consequences of boredom should not be underestimated. As one practitioner explains, with boredom comes temptation. He gives the example of one of his clients whose school registration had been delayed by a couple of months. Finding the time long, one day he walked into a music store where he slipped a CD in his pocket so that he could at least listen to some music during the day. He was later picked up by the police and charged with small theft. Although he describes his client as being a good person, the incident could easily have very serious implications for his impending immigration hearings. Even more than boredom, such lengthy delays in being able to attend school are especially difficult because the youth have too much time to think about their losses. Such feelings are well expressed in Michael's account: "I was thinking about my family. That was very

boring days, thinking, thinking, I was so weak, my eyes were very black from this. Everybody was saying: are you eating well? But I was not eating well, I was not going outside. Really it was difficult. It was a difficult life” (Michael).

For most separated youth, the first experience with schools in Quebec is in welcome classes. These classes are conceived specifically for integrating young recent immigrants into the school system, particularly those who do not yet master French or those who need some extra help in catching up on curriculum. Some of the youth in the study recognized the welcome class as being a necessary step for them. Mandeed felt that it was the only way that he could really learn French. DC also comments on the role of school and teachers in helping youth integrate more easily into Quebec society: “The teachers, they talk and tell you what you have to do, so you get to know about French culture. Especially my French teacher. She is a nice teacher. Next year I hope I’ll find a teacher like her in the regular class. She helps all of us for all the kinds of things, like even though we are from different countries, she helps us to have a Quebec mind” (DC). There are nonetheless some substantial obstacles associated with welcome classes, one of the most important being the question of stigmatisation. Sometimes the feeling of stigmatization is associated with age. Lack of knowledge of French, non recognition of school equivalences and catch-up needed because of interruptions in their schooling: these are all reasons for which separated youth may find themselves in classes with students much younger than themselves. The differences in age may be an important source of embarrassment, or even shame, for the youth, as suggested in Michael’s account: “Because last year I had classmates, they were very small and I had to sit with them, that was difficult for me” (Michael). Apart from age, stigmatisation may also result from the feeling of being singled out from regular students.

[M]any times people think that when you are in the welcome class you are not able to do the things. You’re not smart. People think that. But it’s not like that. Many people are in that class to learn the language because they don’t understand that. But if I’m in the regular school, class, nobody would tease me, because I would be between you guys. [INT: Who teases you?] Actually, nobody teases us, but you feel like low level, like a lower level. [INT: You feel like you’re in a lower level, has anybody ever told you that?] Yes, there are people that have said it. There’s always people saying it. (Chef)

In some schools this feeling is accentuated by the fact that welcome classes are physically separated from regular classes, placed either in separate wings or even on different floors. In at least one school

attended by a youth in the study students in the welcome class did not have access to all of the same activities as regular students, such as sports and other leisure programmes. In these cases, there is a construction of difference which leaves the youth with a sense of inferiority. This feeling itself can also become a factor of demotivation, as suggested by one of the practitioners:

It is clear that [such situations] tend to single out these youth. They are in a welcome class which is a special section. Obviously, when you are in a regular class, you are with other youth in your level and it is open. There you can have contacts. Whereas here they feel set aside. What is going to motivate these youth to put energy into studying, to do something? When they feel accepted, valorised, but if we marginalise them? If we accept them, if we appreciate them, it is certain that they will feel more motivated to study.

Others also expressed the importance for separated youth to attend regular classes as rapidly as possible. In many cases, the transition to a regular class is long awaited for. DC, for instance, brandished a broad smile when asked if he was ready to go into a regular class and commented on the importance for him of being in contact with other students who are already well grounded in Canadian culture. “I just don’t want to be between people who have arrived in Canada. I want to get along well with people who live in Canada, who were born here, you know. Culture and all that stuff, I want to get into it. I want to move in that way. I want to do all the things possible to move in that way” (DC). At the same time, however, the transition to a regular class may be a source of apprehension for other youth. Komar, for instance, felt shy when he entered a regular class for the first time, but another student facilitated things by introducing him to the other class members.

A large part of the insecurity felt by Komar and others is related to language. Of those interviewed, several expressed their difficulties in using French in the classroom. Some talked especially about feeling intimidated when speaking out in class or talking with other students. They especially feared making mistakes and being laughed at, as the following comment suggests: “[communicating is] a bit difficult cause you don’t know how to pronounce some of the words and you’re afraid you’ll make a mistake and everyone will like ha, you know” (Tiffany). For others, the difficulties mentioned are not only related to pride, but rather indicate very serious problems of comprehension, particularly in the first year of school attendance: “Last year, when I was new, it was hard to understand French, what they are doing, what they are telling. I was knowing nothing (Goldie).” Despite such difficulties, the attempts of their teachers to make the language transition as easy as possible for them was greatly appreciated. In a half-joking and half-serious tone, Komar suggests that the great amounts of

homework given by one teacher helped him to improve his language skills. Others commented more specifically on the use by some teachers of another language, such as English, in order to facilitate the transition to French in the initial period of language learning. The way in which language learning is perceived, however, appears to vary from one youth to another. Mandeded, for instance, expresses his frustration that his teacher forbid the use of English altogether, despite his incapacity to say some things in French: “[INT: Is there anything you don’t like in the school?] Sometimes, when the teacher says: ‘Speak in French’. Whatever I say in English and she says: ‘Say that in French’. And I say: ‘I don’t know how to say’. And she says: ‘look in the dictionary and find out how to say’” (Mandeded).

Although most do eventually arrive at an understanding level of French, this is not always the case. According to the practitioners, some never really learn the basics at all and end up not being able to follow classwork or they even leave school altogether. One expresses her frustration with the school system in promoting students who have not mastered basic language skills, citing as a specific example one of the youth in her caseload:

They put him in second year and the level is more advanced than when he started, but he doesn’t understand because he didn’t understand anything the first year. He isn’t able to follow. Listen, when a teacher explains something, he doesn’t understand. Why doesn’t he understand? Because he hasn’t mastered the basics. He hasn’t even mastered the verb. To have, to be. So what does he have as a choice?

Ruby’s situation is a case in point. She had quite serious language problems in school. After a year in the welcome class, she left school without finishing either secondary four or five levels. She had hoped to enroll in an English language school, but she eventually gave up the idea after having difficulty getting through the bureaucracy of school administrations:

[INT: Did you finish when you had the other grades, secondary four, secondary five?] No, no, I am stopping. [INT: Secondary four?] No, no, no..cause here, accueille after first accueille and post accueille I’m stopping. [...] [INT: Why did you stop?] Um, I thinking after I go to English school you know, so that’s why I stopped. That’s why I stopped, and after, I go to...I try to apply for the English school, but after lots of problem, and I am not going. [INT: the French was very difficult?] Yeah, yeah, that’s why. (Ruby)

Ruby’s example of difficulties in school and those of others bring up the issue of the degree of support given to separated youth in order to facilitate language learning and school integration more generally.

In this respect, these youth have many needs in common with other young immigrants recently arrived in Quebec, yet at the same time also have needs which are specific to them because of the particularities of their migratory histories, such as school interruptions, trauma, loss of family and the uncertainty of their juridical status. In many cases, their particularities also make them more vulnerable in the school system.

The experience of Goldie's first year of school in Quebec provides an excellent illustration of this vulnerability. He describes himself as having been a good student in his homeland, but when he started school here he had enormous difficulties concentrating in class because he was constantly thinking of his recent hardships. Sometimes he would put his head down on his desk because he was crying and the teacher would scold him for sleeping in class and send him to the Director's office. After a few such incidents, the Director decided that Goldie's situation was too difficult for the regular school system and made preparations for him to be sent to the adult sector.²³ Goldie admits that the teacher was right in saying that he wasn't paying attention in class, but felt that things may have been handled differently had the school authorities taken into account the circumstances behind his lack of concentration: "I mean, she was right, I was wrong. But she didn't understand my problem. I didn't tell her what happened to me. It might happen to anyone what happened to me. Everybody going to be in my situation maybe, because I lose everything in a couple of months [...]. If she knows that I was having that much problems maybe she wouldn't do that to me" (Goldie).

This type of difficulty is not specific to Goldie's case. In the words of one practitioner, separated youth are often left to fend for themselves. They are placed in what he refers to as 'avenues of avoidance' (*voies d'évitement*) because they are too much trouble to keep in the regular school system. In many cases, there is thus a tendency to farm them out to adult sector schools once they have reached the age of sixteen, the legal age at which schools still have the responsibility to keep them in their walls. The adult sector, however, is not well-adapted to this population. Offering even less support than the regular school sector, the adult sector requires a greater degree of maturity and discipline on the part of students. Due to their age, language knowledge and previous interruptions in their schooling, separated youth are not an ideal population for the adult sector. In the words of one practitioner,

²³ The adult sector was conceived for individuals returning to school because they had never completed the Secondary V level. There is no age limit for enrolment in the adult sector, although most are mature students who have tried their hand at the job market and later realised the importance of finishing highschool.

When you're all alone at home or with a friend who is watching television or listening to music, and there is no one behind you to push you to do your homework – they are less tempted [to do it]. The adult sector is very autonomous. Sure, you can go there even at age 50, there is no age limit. But the adult sector, you know how it works there? You have a book and you read. If you don't understand, you go see the teacher who is over there reading his novel or doing something else. It isn't very stimulating if you are not very determined.

While Goldie's social worker was able to negotiate with the school authorities in order to keep him in the regular sector, Chef was not so lucky. He was to be transferred to the adult sector in the next school term, although he would rather stay in the regular system. In the following passage, he describes feeling 'sad' about this decision and worries about not having adequate support to motivate him in his studies. He is nonetheless resigned to the fact of his transfer and hoped that his religious faith would be enough to carry him through:

In the first place I felt sad, because since I was born I was hoping that my school would be everything fine. I would finish my school. And then I came here and found out I had to go to adult school. I've never been there, I don't know how it looks like. So, I was really afraid, but they told me 'you don't have to be afraid. You can do two courses at the same time and you can go faster than the people who are in normal school'. But I find that even like that there is nobody that will push you. I know you have to push yourself, but you need a little help too. Out there like, maybe I'll find somebody that have 28 years old there and that will be difficult to study and everything. But we know that only one man can help us, Jesus. He's the only one that can help us. I'm not afraid about it, because I have someone that can help me. (Chef)

Beyond individual cases, the practitioners commented more globally on the infrastructural problems underlying such situations, particularly in terms of the lack of resources in the educational sector. The schools have been hardest hit in terms of budgets allotted to complementary resources, such as psychologists and other types of education and social service professionals whose role was to work specifically with special needs youth:

More and more, with budget cuts, the schools have eliminated most of the complementary resources. They used to have liaison officers, psychologists, orthopedagogues. The cutbacks in the schools, like the social services, mean that many of these professionals disappeared. [...] There are youth from all sorts of countries and it is not obvious that it will be easy to integrate them rapidly.

Although they acknowledge that cutbacks to this sector have affected all students and not just recent immigrant youth or separated youth, they also emphasise that these latter need additional support which is not possible without a certain investment on the part of the state. There is particular concern that the cutbacks in education have led to a standardised model of educational practices which tends to push those with special needs towards the periphery of the school system where they become lost in the mass of regular students. Without more personalised support, these students tend to get left behind or even leave school altogether, as was the case of Ruby described earlier. The following passage, describes the implications of school uniformisation for separated youth:

There is, unfortunately, a demand for uniformisation in the schools. In the sense where the schools say: 'Listen, we have 2000 students. We are not going to follow-up or look at the needs of each one'. And these children are children with huge needs. If we don't pay attention to these needs in the very beginning, they will take a tangent which will not help them. So there is all of that. There are a lot of problems in the schools. Often, it is too easy to blame the minor by saying 'They aren't doing anything to improve their situation'. Often, they have been put in this situation, but as minors who have left their parents behind, who do not know the structure of this country and who have to take advice and orders from people who they don't know at all. I find that really the burden is too much for them and, unfortunately, I have the impression that the school system has a tendency to minimise this burden.

Such situations also indicate a lack of awareness of the special needs of groups, such as separated youth. Furthermore, the ignorance of such needs can lead to the development of stereotypes or prejudice which may hinder even further the development of adequate pedagogical support for separated youth. According to one practitioner, the stereotypes about separated youth reflect in many ways more global public sentiment with regards to refugees in general in which they are portrayed as being burdens on an already overworked system: "Not only budgets, but there is a sort of mentality and prejudice that have been created: 'Refugees cost too much. They are troublemakers and all the rest'."

Despite the circulation of such 'troublemaking' stereotypes, the reality of the separated youth in the study suggests quite a different picture. Most separated youth who make it overseas come from middle class backgrounds in which education is highly valorised. They also come from educational contexts in which disciplinary measures tend to be fairly strict. One of the youth in the study, for instance, was surprised to discover here that "the teachers do not beat students", another finds that youth "have it easy here" and still others expressed concern about the violence in the schools. Two were even highly

critical of what they perceived to be a lack of discipline in Quebec schools, a sentiment which is well expressed in Tiffany's account:

[I]t's not like the school I'm used to. Like back home the children used to be disciplined. You don't back chat at teachers, you don't swear what so ever. You get punishment for that, but here it's so different. I was actually shocked. The teacher, my form teacher, he's telling some student behave, behave, the child is like umm..."fuck you". Yeah and he's actually, the teacher's standing there, he's actually pointing a finger and shouting. I'm like in my country that would never happen. You respect your elders, you respect those and they don't have it here and they're not so serious about school. (Tiffany)

While it would be a mistake to ignore the fact that some separated youth do demonstrate behavioural problems in the classroom, the comments of the youth in the study also relativise the stereotype of separated youth as troublemakers. There is thus a need to break down stereotypes with respect to this population which, according to practitioners, could be achieved through special awareness programmes in the schools: "the school boards don't understand the needs of these youth. Sometime, we'll really have to set up a programme to train schools on the[ir] needs". The objective of such a programme would be to make their histories and needs better known.

In talking about barriers faced in the school, blame is not placed directly on the individual teachers or school directors. Instead, there is an acknowledgement that the problem is largely a structural one and that the lack of resources has led to an overburdened school system. This acknowledgement also brings some practitioners to emphasise that the responsibility for school integration of separated youth does not only lie with the educational institutions, but that solutions can also be found in other sectors. One practitioner gives the example of a pedagogical programme run by a church organisation which helps immigrant and non immigrant youth with homework. The potential role of community organisations was also suggested by one of the youth in the study who commented on the significant improvements to his French after having enrolled in summer activities organised in his neighbourhood.

Others cite the importance of inviting foster and host families to take on a greater role in supervising the school work of the youth in their care. Komar and Shanti, for instance, suggested that the woman in their host family was a very important source of support, both in terms of organising their registration in school and in terms of helping them with their school work. This parental type role, however, is not always an easy one to accomplish. As one practitioner suggests, it is always a bit of a vicious circle in which the parents think the schools should be responsible for educating youth, and the schools think

that the parents should have a greater responsibility. In the case of foster and host families, this situation is even further complicated by the fact that many have limited resources or knowledge of the school system themselves, particularly those who have recently immigrated to Quebec. Consequently, they don't necessarily know what role to take or how, as is expressed in the following passage:

One of the youth who I see regularly started school recently and his guardian, as they call him, told me 'Ah, I went with an interpreter to meet with someone in the committee' – he doesn't speaking French or English well – 'It was just to avoid having problems [understanding]'. Not all of these people know the system or are able to communicate with the school. When there is a parent meeting, often they don't go, and if they do then they have to bring an interpreter with them. So, you see?

Going through the refugee determination system: liberating or limiting?

I used to think these people [immigration officials] enjoy playing God, you know, you can have it, you can't. Then I was like no, I can't think that way cause I just came here [...] I should just be patient and I guess good things come to those who wait, but I just wished things would like [be faster] and I would know where my life was going -- Tiffany.

The refugee determination process is a highly significant moment in the trajectories of separated youth, both symbolically and materially. Symbolically, because it represents the passage from one world to another, not only in terms of geographic space, but also, and even especially, in terms of mental space. In this latter sense, it represents a form of liberation from the fear of return or of persecution. The process is of material significance because it determines the objective conditions by which the youth are permitted to participate in society. It is a process by which futures are decided and on which lives are dependent. The adoption of the Immigration and Refugee Board's (IRB) *Children's Guidelines* in 1996 (cf. Introduction) reflects the explicit acknowledgement of the particular vulnerability of refugee minors in the asylum process. However, despite the merit of such guidelines, both practitioners and youth who participated in the study had significant reserves as to their efficacy in everyday practice. While some commented on obstacles facing separated youth in the determination system more generally, others drew attention more specifically to limitations in the hearing procedures.

The determination process is a ritualised event, organised around a structured set of rules and procedures which are highly juridical and administrative in nature. Although juridical-type proceedings do exist in some form or another in most countries, the practitioners emphasise that separated youth are

generally unaccustomed to the rules and procedures which make up such decisionary processes. Consequently, the process is seen as being confusing. The youth do not necessarily understand all of the stages involved, the roles of the different institutional actors or the importance of the official documents and forms which they are constantly filling out. This confusion is expressed in the following accounts:

Yeah, it [immigration process] is funny. I don't understand it, it is very long. I don't understand what is the process. I don't know, there are too many things [...] Because there was some mixing, I get many letters, I went many places – Michael.

I've got an idea of what's going on, but then I'm not so sure. You go to the hearing. What happens after that? If they refuse your claim what goes on after that? [...] What happens after the hearing? Say you get your status, whatever, what happens after that? I don't even know – Tiffany.

On a more immediate level, the practitioners commented on the very subjective nature of the hearing procedures themselves. Decisions sometimes appear to be arbitrary, their justification reflecting more the personalities of the Board members present during the hearings rather than the facts of the cases themselves. One practitioner gives the example of a separated youth in his caseload who he considered to have a clearcut case. The decision of the Board, however, was split with one member stating that the story lacked credibility and another, the opposite. Commenting on the case, the practitioner states: “For having worked with him for months on these questions, I knew, I mean that youth was an authentic refugee right down to the tip of his fingernails. But it was close, it passed really closely”.

Other practitioners called for an urgent need to rethink the entire process of testimony for separated youth, placing significant emphasis on the very different ways in which separated youth may tell their stories. While they suggest that some Board members have a tendency to over-estimate the capacity of youth to give testimony, for others this capacity tends to be under-estimated. A more specific problem which is encountered in the hearing process is the inability of some separated youth to tell their stories simply because they are not aware of the details surrounding their departures. The lack of knowledge of their own stories was already discussed in the chapter on migration trajectories. This lack of knowledge is the result of two types of logic: on the one hand, the desire of parents to protect their children from the horrors which are taking place in their homelands and, on the other, the relations of family authority by which children do not participate in decisions such as those which lead to their departures. In the following passage, a practitioner gives the example of a young man from Nigeria who was

completely unaware of the events which had forced his departure because he had led a relatively protected life despite the turmoil which reigned in his country:

One of his biggest problems when he was writing his refugee claimant story for why he left is that basically he knew very little about his family because he had been living in a boarding school. He was a boarder. There are a lot of rich children who go to boarding school, in part because it is good, a good education, and at the same time, it protects them from everything that is going on in the country. He had lived there since he was four. He's now 17. His parents hadn't told him anything. That is very important for [understanding] issues for minors. It is not the parent-child dialogue that we have here. There is the universe of women, the universe of children, the universe of men; they are completely separate universes. So, that is also why children, minors, often don't know much about what their parents were doing. We really have to be aware of this. Because if a child doesn't know what his parents were doing, it is not because they are lying to us or that they just don't want to tell us, it is really because he doesn't know. [...] What did his father do? Why was he killed? What happened? He [the youth] was in his protected universe and he studied a lot. So it is very difficult because he was someone who didn't understand what he was into. [...] He is not able to explain... because he doesn't understand what has happened in his life.

In some cases, the inability to recount details, or confusion on certain points, may also be the result of trauma. While some may block out traumatic events completely, others may consciously withhold information so as not to be obliged to relive very painful experiences. In some cases, these situations may lead to incoherence in the narrative structure of their stories which may be negatively interpreted by Board members as indicators of non credibility. This type of problem is well illustrated in another case described by a practitioner in which the young woman had been a victim of rape, but was unable or unwilling to talk about it during her hearing:

I had [a separated youth] who was with her brother who was 21, she was 16. I thought the case was an easy one. They came from Zaire. I talked with them and I had no problem giving them the benefit of the doubt or believing what they said. But it went very badly and they were refused. They are still under a moratorium. [...] She is a young girl who has remained extremely secluded, imprisoned by her traumas since she arrived here. Paradoxically, the fact that she didn't pass [the hearing] is because she is too closed in to herself. Among other things, it is because she didn't want to reveal the real traumas that she had experienced. She talked about them in masked words, veiled words. They knew something wasn't working, but without being able to put their finger on it. She talked about it only at the end of her hearing. She broke into tears during her hearing, but the Commissioners said 'No, it is not credible because she had already had about 6 hours of hearing and that her designated representative had insisted a lot and that, in other words, it must have been a lie, she must have been acting because her representative had told her that she had to be more dramatic or something like that. It was a case of revictimisation.

The accounts of the separated youth in the study also illustrate some of the principle difficulties encountered during the hearing procedures. A first difficulty is the formality of the event itself. Most of the youth felt intimidated during the hearing procedures. This was the case, for instance, of Ruby whose refugee claim was rejected in the initial hearing and accepted only after her case was later appealed. When asked about what had happened during the first hearing, she explained that she had been scared. She believed that her case had been refused as a form of punishment because she talked too much: “[INT: Why didn’t they accept you the first time? Do you know?] Yeah, because before, I noticed that I [ask] lots of questions. I talk lots of things, that’s why they thinking I am talking too much, so that’s why they don’t accept me” (Ruby). Goldie was also extremely nervous during his hearing. He couldn’t understand why he was able to tell his story so easily to his social workers at SARIMM and yet was scared that he wouldn’t be able to answer the questions at the hearing. The tone of questioning used by the lawyer made him even more nervous, as he explains:

Everything was right, but the problem is, I don’t know why I was so nervous. I don’t know. Because they [social workers] were asking me questions of my life before: what happened at this time, why it was like this, and this. [...] I think the guy from, you know, the lawyer from immigration, from the government, the question he is asking me, he is making me very deeply. That is why I got scared. That is the only reason I got nervous. I was thinking, if they ask me anything I could not answer them – Goldie.

Goldie’s comment also reveals a second difficulty mentioned by several youth in the study relating to the strategies used for questioning. Some were surprised by questions which they did not consider to be relevant to their individual stories. Although refugee hearings are meant to be non-adversarial in nature, the youth described what they considered to be a confrontational environment. Tone of voice and repetitiveness of certain types of questions were interpreted as signs that their stories were not believed. Michael, for instance, describes the type of taunting, or ‘teasing’ as he says, used by one of the Board members: “I answered good what they asked me. They were teasing also. They were asking one time one question ten times, very like, they are compressing. The first question was, they said that there were some difficulties in my story, some wrongs”.

Language barriers are another significant difficulty encountered by youth in the hearing process. Of those who participated in the study, all spoke either English or French. However, the degree of language proficiency varied greatly from one youth to another. Despite a basic ability to communicate

in one or another of the two languages, more than half were accompanied by an interpreter during the hearing process. Although the presence of the interpreters was generally appreciated, problems of translation heightened the insecurity of some youth. Vange, for instance, had a Portuguese-speaking interpreter from Brazil, although he is from a country in Africa where the Portuguese dialect is quite different. The differences in dialect between the interpreter and Vange led to some confusion during the hearing, so much so that he sometimes resorted to hand gestures in order to ensure that there were no misunderstandings:

[There was] a bit of confusion, because they [the Board members] did not understand Portuguese. There were certain words, because Brazilian Portuguese and the Portuguese [in my country], there are certain differences, you see. And there were certain parts that I spoke in a Portuguese that only those from my country know and that he [interpreter] didn't understand. He explained things in a certain way that the jury members didn't understand either, but after that, I tried to explain some things by gestures and they understood – Vange.

In other instances, problems of translation were more critical because of mistakes which weakened the credibility of the stories in the eyes of the Board members. Michael, for instance, had worked with a translator when he put together his written testimony. While he dictated in his mother tongue, the translator transcribed directly into English on the computer. According to Michael, the translation was done too rapidly because the translator was very busy during that period. As a result, there were some mistakes in the transcription concerning names and addresses which aroused the suspicion of the Board members.

In addition to problems of translation from one language to another, another type of communication barrier was also mentioned in the youths' accounts: the use of juridical or technical jargon used during the proceedings. In a somewhat comic situation, Vange described how he did not understand right away when the Board pronounced its decision, a positive one, because the person had used a technical word that he did not know. It was only after seeing the expression on his social worker's face that he knew that something important had just taken place. That 'something important', of course, was the granting of refugee status.

Outside of the difficulties encountered in the hearing process itself, both practitioners and youth also commented on the long delays before status is determined. Not all of the youth had obtained status at

the time of the study. The national average for processing claims of separated youth is 7.3 months, although for some of the youth in the study the waiting period was over a year. Also, while the *Children's Guidelines* emphasise the importance of prioritising minors' claims, the practitioners suggested that this practice is not observed systematically and that delays can in fact be quite long in some cases. The long waiting period constitutes a significant source of anxiety for these youth and its effects should not be underestimated. Some complained of difficulties sleeping during this period, of headaches, of problems concentrating in school, of episodes of crying and of various physical discomforts likely caused by stress. Goldie, who had not yet received the decision of his hearing at the time of the interview, describes the impact of the wait on his health.

It is not good for the health, you know. Sometimes I get sad. I don't know what is going to happen to me. I was thinking, and I don't feel like to eat. I don't feel to do something. I don't feel like go to school. I was scared, you know. I am still scared because if they want to, whatever they want, in little time, five, six months, the time I am going through, it is a long time – Goldie.

Still others just wanted to put this period behind them in order not to be constantly reminded of the situations which forced them to leave their countries and, also, to be able to plan for the future. For Komar, the happiest moment since arriving in Quebec was the day he learnt that he would be able to stay in Canada: "Yes, that was a very nice gift". For Michael, the day his case was accepted was the day he "started living". For Vange too, he just wanted to get on with his life: "I already wanted to enter into this society like everybody else".

Thus, the immigration process, and in particular the determination of refugee status, constitute significant moments in the process of establishment of separated youth. As both practitioners and youth suggest, however, this process is riddled with obstacles. Confused understandings of the different stages in the process, confrontational types of questioning judged inappropriate for youth, communication barriers relating both to a lack of knowledge of English or French and to the use of technical and juridical terminology, anxiety and psychosomatic symptoms provoked by the long delays: these difficulties all contribute to the vulnerability of separated youth. While the IRB's *Children's Guidelines* constitute a potentially valuable tool for improving the conditions of establishment for separated youth, the lack of systematisation in their implantation would appear in fact to add to this vulnerability.

Staying healthy: access to medical care.

The wait for refugee status also becomes an obstacle to accessing other types of resources, whether in public, private or community domains of activity. Access to health care, for instance, forms part of what most Canadians consider a basic right. Refugee claimants are not covered under regular provincial health programmes, but rather under a separate federal plan known as the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP). Through this programme, claimants do have access to medical services considered to be ‘essential’, but are not covered for routine medical, dental or mental health services. Although this programme ensures all essential services, it is based on a curative approach to health care rather than a preventive one. Thus, separated youth have access to medical, dental or mental health services only if the consultation is considered essential and, even then, their papers are not easily accepted in all health centres and clinics.²⁴

Difficult access to health services is best described in the accounts of the youth themselves. Komar, for instance, had a medical condition resulting from an operation he had had several years earlier and, in his country of origin, the condition was followed up in regular medical consultations. Prior to obtaining his refugee status in Canada, however, he was not able to seek medical aid because he was not yet covered by the Quebec health regime and the condition was not covered under the federal programme. Although he did not suffer any adverse effects of his condition in the early period of establishment, the curative logic of the IFHP implies that he would have had to wait for his condition to worsen before being able to seek treatment. Such a logic places separated youth in a very delicate position which could potentially increase health risks. In a situation described by another youth, access to services was almost refused because the health professionals in the clinic where he sought help were not sure that they would be paid for the consultation. After pleading with one of the doctors, he was finally able to receive medical attention, but the doctor insisted that a letter be written in order to ensure payment. In the following comment, Vange describes the situation:

It was complicated, because the doctor didn't know. He doesn't work with immigration. I don't know if I understood well, but he wasn't sure who was going to pay the consultation fees. I explained to him that I was at SARIMM. He almost refused me, but since I was the last client I said ‘Monsieur, I really need to know my state of health, because I don't feel

²⁴ Outside of the regular network of health service clinics, separated youth living in Montreal also have access to a specialised health service for refugee claimants, the *Clinique Santé Accueil*, which is housed in the CLSC Côte-des-Neiges. The specific needs of this population are well known to the practitioners of this clinic and, consequently, minors do not encounter the same types of barriers here as they do in the regular health network.

very good'. He did it and they wrote a letter. I don't know if they sent it to SARIMM... It was because I wasn't a permanent resident yet, I wasn't a resident at that time. – Vange.

Natasha describes her own experience of refusal because a health professional would not accept her immigration papers. Following a medical examination, her doctor told her that she could fill out her prescription at a local pharmacy and that all she had to do was present her immigration papers and there would be no cost to the medication. When she arrived at the pharmacy, however, she felt at once frustrated and humiliated by the way in which the pharmacist reacted when he saw her papers: “So I had to go to the pharmacy and they didn't accept my brown papers, my immigration papers [...] I wish someone had told me before, cause I don't like making a fool out of myself [...] The doctor said go to the pharmacy downstairs, show them your papers, then they'll give you the medication”. These situations illustrate both the difficulty of access to healthcare and also the confusion surrounding what services are covered and what the modalities of payment are. This confusion is felt not only by health professionals who are unfamiliar with this population, but also by the youth themselves who are not necessarily aware of what their rights entail in matters relating to healthcare.

Access to health services is even more complex for separated youth under the age of fourteen. According to Quebec laws, youth over this age are able to give authorised consent for medical interventions. Youth under this age, however, need the consent of a parent or of a legal guardian. Unlike some other provinces, such as Ontario and British Columbia, there is no designated legal guardian for separated youth in Quebec. While there have been no serious cases involving medical consent as of yet, this juridical void does nonetheless pose some serious ethical considerations with respect to the protection and care of separated youth. Vaccination and other health programmes in the schools, although relatively routine occurrences, illustrate the potential consequences of this void. Students under fourteen need parental consent for such interventions at school. For separated youth, consent forms are sometimes signed by foster families or social workers although, strictly speaking, they do not have the authority to do so. As one practitioner suggests, such practices are not without risk: “If something goes wrong afterwards? We put a signature somewhere. Imagine that something happens to the child; that he has a major infection and dies [e.g. following a vaccination]. Who is responsible?”. The stakes are potentially even higher for interventions such as surgery or other serious forms of treatment. Thus, vulnerability in these cases is amplified by the status of these youth as minors.

Access to private sector domains: employment, housing and commercial institutions

Since the basic needs in terms of placement, food and clothing are provided for by the government, separated youth do not have the same urgency to find employment and housing as do adult refugee claimants. However, for 'older' minors, particularly those between 16 and 18, access to these domains may nonetheless be problematical.

Although the principal daily activity of separated youth is school attendance, some older youth may also look for part-time jobs which can give them a little bit of pocket money for buying such items as clothes or music. Like adult claimants, however, access to the job market is not always easy. Not only are employers reluctant to hire them because of their immigration status, but the working conditions are less than ideal in places where employment is more accessible. Natasha, who comes from a former British colony in Africa, was educated in English and has a British sounding accent. When she applied by telephone for a job in a telemarketing firm, she was told right away to come in for an interview. When she arrived at the firm, however, she noticed that the employer seemed to react negatively towards her. She suggests that he was surprised by the colour of her skin and that he showed even further resistance when she presented her immigration papers. Commenting on the experience, she just shrugged her shoulders and said "You see that funny look in their faces. You're like, I've got no job" (Natasha). In another type of situation, Vange found himself working illegally in a manufacturing company because other employers wouldn't accept his immigration papers. He described the working conditions there as being difficult and waited with anticipation the acceptance of his refugee status so he could find something more appropriate:

The status was very useful to me, because I wanted to participate in this society. I wanted to work in places with good conditions, because the place where I have been working up to now, most of the time the people who work there don't have their status or even the insurance card [...] It is not a job that I love, not at all. I found it difficult. I didn't have documents. I worked like a crazy person. Since I have good qualities and could work in better places. – Vange.

Similar experiences may occur to those who try to rent apartments. However, since most separated youth are in structured placement situations, such as foster and host families, group homes or supervised apartments, obstacles in the rental housing market are much less frequent than for adult

refugee claimants. Only youth over sixteen are allowed to live in independent apartments, the age at which Quebec laws authorise them to sign leases. Despite the right to sign leases, however, discriminatory practices based on age and immigration status persist, as one practitioner suggests: “It’s true. [Immigration status] creates a credibility problem for the tenant. I am thinking about one of my youths. It took several weeks before he could obtain an apartment – because he was a minor, because he didn’t have any revenue, because he was a new [immigrant].” Of the youth who participated in the study, only Goldie had experienced this type of difficulty, since most of the others were in placement situations. In fact, Goldie was still living with a family at the time of interview, but he had just begun an apartment search with a friend who was over eighteen years of age. Of the few apartments he had seen so far, he described most as being ‘dirty’ and ‘smelly’. When they did finally see a place that suited them both, the landlady responded by saying “we don’t give apartments to young people” (Goldie).

Even such administrative activities as opening a bank account or cashing a cheque can become bureaucratic ordeals for separated youth. Although SARIMM tries to direct the youth to banks which are more tolerant, there is nonetheless a reluctance to serve this clientele. Not only do they have too little money to be of any real interest to these commercial institutions, but their status as minors and as refugee claimants tends to arouse the suspicion of bank employees, as one practitioner suggests: “They [the minors] have three photos, with immigration papers, but the banks consider them to be suspect”. Natasha’s experience with banks also confirms this type of reaction: “[W]hen I got there I had to make an appointment to open an account and she looks at me funny. She told me to sit down. Immediately, I saw like the barrier, kind of thing, then she serves everybody else. I got there like first. [...] They talk nicely to you when you’re talking like this, [but] when you produce the [immigration] paper, then Oh! My goodness!”

Access to other domains of daily life: the community sector

Even outside of more structured sectors of activity, such as those mentioned above, separated youth may also encounter obstacles in other, more informal, spheres of daily life, such public libraries and leisure activities. One of the youth in the study, DC, is an avid reader. Although he has free access to the school library, he prefers to use the public library which is located near his foster family’s home. At

this library, however, he is not allowed to borrow books because of his immigration status. Instead, he sometimes spends a half a day there reading a book which has been put aside for him. At the time of the interview, he was deep into the works of Shakespeare. Although DC did not complain about not being able to borrow books – he mentioned that the library is quieter than the home where he lives – the example nonetheless demonstrates the limits imposed by status.

Participation in leisure programmes may also be limited by immigration status. A practitioner gives the example of a community organisation which pairs new immigrants with individuals and families already residing in Quebec, the objective being to create support networks during the first few years of establishment. Believing that such an activity could be a valuable source of support for several separated youth in her caseload, she called the organisation in order to register them. Due to limited resources, however, the organisation had been obliged to adopt strict criteria for accepting new members into the programme. Excluded in the criteria were those whose immigration status was not yet regularised: “I find that it would have been important. I have youth at the moment who would gain a lot from going to a family from time to time, even if they aren’t accepted as refugees yet. Or going with an adult who would take them to an activity once a month. But that doesn’t exist for refugee claimants”.

This chapter reveals several types of obstacles encountered by separated youth in the initial phase of their establishment in Quebec, particularly in terms of access to resources which are considered to be crucial to long term integration. Whether in terms of shortcomings in the educational system, weaknesses in the refugee determination system, or limited access to other public, private and community sectors, their opportunities for participating fully in Quebec society are limited by these barriers.

Chapter 6.

NEGOTIATING CONSTRAINT: BRINGING INTO PLAY PERSONAL AND OTHER RESOURCES

The youth, and even adults, detest this label [being victims]. Anyways we know that in general these youth come from privileged backgrounds. Thus, they were well regarded in their society. Then they arrive here and they don't want to be looked at with pity. There is a certain foster family among others who say things like: 'Poor little thing, how awful'. That doesn't go over very well. – Practitioner

Despite the obstacles faced by separated youth in their pre- and post-migratory periods, they are survivors. Although they have experienced events which are beyond what most persons would believe imaginable, it would be a mistake to consider them only as victims of a world gone awry. Despite the multiple losses which they have experienced –family, country, lifestyle, peer and other support networks – and despite the obstacles with which they are faced in the context of asylum, most demonstrate an astounding capacity for adaptation even in adverse situations. In part, this resilience is the product of personal resources, that is, strengths and values of the youth themselves which enable them to better manoeuvre in a context of constraint. Resilience is further strengthened by other types of resources which the youth are able to bring into play in order to overcome the difficulties they encounter, such as family continuity, formal institutional support and other informal sources of aid.

Growing up fast: personal resources of separated youth.

Practitioners working with separated youth are often touched by their force of character and their appearance of maturity. They are described by some as 'little adults' because they have had to grow up fast, sometimes too fast, due to the circumstances surrounding their departures. Many come from relatively stable family backgrounds in which they were not accustomed to making decisions, being on their own or taking on adult responsibilities. The radical turn of events which precipitates their exile also leaves them to fend largely for themselves, even those whose departures are organised. Thus, they have no choice but to rely on their personal strengths and knowledge, as one practitioner explains:

They have to rely a lot on their own resources. Thus, some of these youth ... come from families where they were relatively spoiled, they didn't know how to do anything

themselves, like cooking. They have had to adapt to everything, to get used to budgeting, etc. Despite everything, they function. They have become adults and they function. It is really admirable in certain cases.

While some aspects of their lives in exile imply only minor adjustments, most require a much greater degree of responsibility. Pursuing education without parental guidance, taking care of immigration and other administrative procedures, looking after younger siblings or making decisions which may affect their futures are some examples. These are heavy responsibilities for anyone, let alone youth whose access to traditional support networks has been completely ruptured. Yet, in most cases these youth demonstrate an incredible capacity for adaptation:

In general, what strikes me is the force of survival of these children, the courage they have. Some may not realise it. You know sometimes when you are in great danger, you don't realise it. If you realised it, you would panic and that would be it. There are others who realise it and who have a great strength of adaptation to get through it. And I try to tell them 'you know, I really admire you. I admire your courage.' That's what strikes me.

At the same time, however, the responsibilities which have been imposed on these youth may also incite negative reactions. For some this may be manifest through an exaggerated expression of autonomy by which the youth defy all forms of authority. Being 'tough', for instance, is a survival strategy brought into play by some. One practitioner recalls well an experience with separated youth from Ethiopia and Somalia in the early 1990s. These youth lived together in a group home and created havoc for the practitioners because they refused to abide by the rules and resented any attempts of supervision. While their defiance was certainly not a trait appreciated by those who had to work with them, according to this practitioner it is precisely this trait which had enabled them to flee their countries and to seek refuge elsewhere. Describing the experience, he explains that " They are not youth who will give in. [...] They know what they want. Generally, we don't like people who protest all the time. We don't like them. We prefer those who give in."

Other youth adapt relatively well to their new responsibilities and demonstrate, at least outwardly, a sense of assurance or seriousness which distinguishes them from other youth of their age group. While this appearance of maturity constitutes an important coping mechanism for separated youth, it can also mask insecurities or even fear. This was the case, for instance, of a 9 year old girl whose parents had been killed in a bomb explosion. When she arrived in Quebec, she refused to talk about the event, but otherwise seemed to be coping relatively well, particularly at schools where she was a very serious

student. At night, however, she would wake up with nightmares and, during the day, she interacted very little with the other children at school. Her teachers and foster family became worried because she did not know how to play. Instead, all of her energies were put into studying, which became her way of compensating for her losses. Her seriousness was an important coping mechanism for her. At the same time, however, it was also acting as a veil for other types of suffering.

The story of a young man from South America also illustrates the limits of maturity. According to his social worker, he gave the impression of being very autonomous, an “adult before his time”. He had been brought up alone by his mother, knew how to cook, had a facility in conversing with people and had met a lot of friends since his arrival in Quebec. At first, his social worker thought that he would need minimal accompaniment. Then one day he met a copatriate who was returning to his home country and he got the idea that he would really like to send a gift back to his mother. Since he didn't have any money, he stole a gift and was caught. Commenting on the case, the social worker suggested that it is symbolic of a lot separated youth who give the impression of being very autonomous, but who in fact still need a lot of guidance: “A youth who looks extremely autonomous, who has a packet of potential, but who fundamentally misses his mother. I find that it reflects well this type of youth who are very autonomous, but who are not completely mature either.” As these examples illustrate, personal strengths and autonomy may constitute factors of protection for many separated youth in the initial period of establishment. Despite outward appearances of maturity, however, separated youth are not adults and their situations do not preclude the need for other types of support.

Family continuity as protection

The previous example also illustrates the highly significant role that the family continues to play in the lives of the separated youth, even following separation. As one practitioner suggests, these youth have not been abandoned by their families. Instead, they have been invested with family values and projects: “This is very, very, very important – an unaccompanied minor is not an abandoned child. He is a child who is still invested in, even if it is in his mind. He is still invested with a past, with a system of values.” Adherence to these values constitutes one of the most important strengths of the youth in confronting the various barriers which they come up against.

Family continuity may be maintained in different ways. For the luckier ones, it is preserved through direct contact with family members. In 1999, 40 % of the separated youth in SARIMM's caseload had regular contact with their families, 5.9% had some contact and 48.8% had no contact at all (5.3% non

response).²⁵ Of those who participated in the study, only three had regular contact with one or both of their parents through letters, e-mail or phone. Four others had indirect contact through other family members, such as siblings, cousins and grandparents. These youth were unable to communicate directly with their parents either because they did not know of their whereabouts or because it would be too risky to attempt contact. This was the case, for instance, of Natasha who receives news of her family through her sister who is exiled in a neighbouring country. She does not want to contact her parents for fear that her calls would be intercepted by the authorities in her country:

I can't phone her because if they like find out...it's a long story. It's a problem with my dad, that's why I had to leave home cause they want to kill him. So if I phone home they're going to ask why he... cause both children are not there. So they're like, "why did they leave?" Cause they want people to stay in the country, cause they want people to vote for their party. So they want us to be there, so they're trying to make it so you do not move from there. So if I phone home and they like catch wind of that, I don't want anything to happen to my parents. So, I'd rather talk through my sister. (Natasha)

Whether direct or indirect, these contacts reassure the youth as to the security of family members left behind, while at the same time enabling them to resituate the circumstances of their departures and, most importantly, to construct an essential link between their pasts and their presents.

Continuity may also take the form of projects which enable the youth to look towards the future rather than to the past. For some, the adherence to a family project may be manifest in terms of professional orientation. Michael, for instance, would like to be a pilot in order to fulfill the dream of his parents: «Because a long time ago my family is like farmers only. I am the first one [pursuing studies], my sister she is studying in the 11th class. And my parents are saying that I will be a pilot. OK I will be a pilot. Just now, until today, I want to be a pilot. And I want to study» (Michael). For others, it may be a project of family reunification. Of those who participated in the study, for instance, three spoke determinately about the possible immigration of one or both parents. This possibility alone can be a source of strength because it allows the youth to conceive separation as being a temporary situation. Natasha, for instance, recently turned eighteen and works for a telemarketing firm. She realises that she could never support her mother's migration on her present salary and hopes one day to get a degree in Finance which will make the project financially feasible. In her case, the responsibility for the migration project creates a pressure to succeed. While this pressure is positive in the sense that it gives

²⁵ Internal statistics, SARIMM, CLSC Côte-des-Neiges, 1999.

her a goal to work towards, at the same time it is a source of anxiety because she fears that she may not be able to meet the conditions of sponsorship.

For those who have been unable to establish contact with family members or whose parents are no longer living, adherence to projects may preserve continuity on a symbolic level. Vange, for instance, had had no contacts with his parents since they were taken away one morning by the military police. Although he fled with his younger sister, they were separated while in transit in a neighbouring country. Once in Quebec, he tried unsuccessfully to trace his sister and parents. After a number of failed attempts, he became depressed. It is only after several months of reflection that the sentiment of loss was transformed into the realisation that it was his obligation to continue the family name and to bring honour to it by investing in his future. Consequently, he put all his energy into his studies in order to be able to pursue the life path that his father had planned for him and which had become unthinkable in his own country where postsecondary institutions had been closed down because of the war. The adherence to his father's project liberated him from the feelings of loss and gave him the power to carry on in the name of the family.

I started to become more fragile in spirit. I was telling myself that today I have no father, I have no mother, I don't have a brother. I don't have a sister. Everything was lost. Who will carry the family name one day. You see, that is something which motivates me a lot, even now, because today I look at myself and it is as if I represent my family for the next generations. On one side, I want to carry my family name. I want to honor my family for the next generations. It is in this way that I decided to keep to my studies, since I also see that there are a lot of things here that we don't have there. (Vange)

The symbolic role of the family may also be transferred to objects which help the youth to maintain continuity. A case described by a practitioner as the 'carpet saga' provides a good illustration of this role. The case involved three brothers and sisters from Afghanistan who had lost contact with their parents when they went into hiding for political reasons. Several months after the arrival of the youth in Quebec, they received a very large package with no return address. It was an Afghan carpet. A couple of months later a second carpet arrived and, after several months, two more. They later learnt that the carpets had been sent by their grandmother living in Russia. The carpets became the focus of a conflict between the youth and their foster family. For the youth, the carpets gave them a precious link to their family past, even though they still did not know the whereabouts of their parents. The foster family recognized the symbolic significance of the carpets for the youth, but were frustrated that the carpets

took up a lot of space in the family home. They were even less pleased about the mothballs that the oldest child had insisted on using in order to protect the carpets and which created a rather unwelcomed odour in the household. The conflict was eventually resolved when the carpets were put into storage, but their important symbolic value remained central throughout the saga.

Seeking aid. Formal and informal support networks in the context of asylum.

Despite the symbolic role of the family which carries on for many in the context of asylum, the fact remains that they have been uprooted from their primary support networks and forced into new life situations in which they must reconstruct a sense of self. Access to diverse types of networks in the host country, both formal and informal, may compensate to some extent for the loss of primary support networks. Such networks may contain an instrumental value in providing immediate material relief in terms of food, housing and other basic needs. At the same time, however, they also play an important emotional role by breaking solitude and recreating a sense of belongingness. In the study, the youth were asked to identify the five most important persons or agencies which were a source of support to them in the initial phase of their establishment in Quebec. While most easily identified one or two persons or agencies which played a significant role in facilitating their establishment, they found it difficult to indicate more than that. This fact in itself indicates that their integration in support networks is relatively restrained during the initial phase of establishment. The help relations that they do have, however, are considered by them to be very significant. In order of importance, their responses indicate that the social service, placement and peer support networks constitute the primary sources for support in the early period of establishment.

The social service network

The social service network was identified by the youth as a principal source of support in the initial period following their arrival in Quebec. Most have contacts with a social worker from SARIMM within the first week of their arrival. In more exceptional cases, the youth are directed to SARIMM only after several weeks or even months. Mandeed, for instance, did not meet with a social worker until

three or four months following his arrival. Since he had been taken in by friends of the family, he didn't have the same needs as some other youth. In fact, he did not even know of SARIMM's services until his name was forwarded to them by immigration officials.

In part, the support provided by social workers is practically oriented. The social workers ensure that the youths' basic needs are met in terms of placement, food and clothing. They are also the principal source for a host of practical information concerning the immigration process and statuses, the roles of various government agencies, the papers that have to be filled in, the medical clinics, how to get around in the city and even what to do if they should get lost. As Natasha commented, this practical information takes a lot of the stress out of the period surrounding arrival in Quebec:

Sarimm was really nice, he was really nice and everything was ok. [...] Waited and saw the Sarimm and he gave us metro tickets and he's like go do this, your medical. Go to square Victoria, this and that, this and that, so we were quite stressed the first week. Cause you don't even know where this place is, you ask people, they look at you like your talking some other language you know, they're like, huh? So stressed in catching the metro, you get lost so many times. [...] Cause if you don't know anyone to help you go around things then that's when you really get even more stressed. Cause I know people who get stressed cause they don't know what's going on. So if there's someone to help you out then it's ok. (Natasha)

For some, such as Mandeed, contacts with the social services are strictly instrumental: "I like it because they give me money. [I: Do you come here for any other reason?]. Just for the money." For most of the youth in the study, however, the role of the social services extends much beyond the practical or material aspects of their establishment. Their appreciation is expressed in terms which reveal the development of a more personalised care relationship which approximates that of a substitute family; for instance, "my social worker, she is like my mother", "she has helped me like my Mom", "she's like a big sister", "a nice guy who really helps me. He helped me stop crying". In part, this relationship reveals the professional role of social workers in helping youth to come to terms with recent losses, such as the family or other primary support networks. Vange, for instance, had a lot of difficulty coping in the initial period following his arrival. At first, he refused the help of social workers, both at SARIMM and in the group home where he was placed, because he did not feel comfortable confiding in strangers. Over time, he was eventually able to establish a very strong relationship with one of these persons. In retrospect, he considers that it is this relationship which enabled him to get out of the depression which he had fallen into:

A social worker there at the home, because she noticed that I wasn't eating, that I wasn't participating in activities. I didn't even smile, I had lost my smile with everyone. It was like that. She tried to offer [help] : 'Listen, if you continue like this, it won't help. It won't help, there will be no results. You will always continue to be [depressed]. You won't evolve in society'. She made me understand that. She was a social worker there. I thank her and everything. That really helped me alot to try to express my feelings.
(Vange)

In addition to helping youth with more serious problems, such as trauma or other coping difficulties relating to their migration, contacts with social workers also provide an opportunity just to talk to someone, even for the smallest of anxieties. Tiffany, for instance, looks forward to her bi-monthly visits because she can talk about anything: "Yeah, just talking and 'so what's going on?... so, have you heard from home? What's going on?I What are you up to? How's school?'. You know, just general talk and I was like wow, this is so cool and I enjoy that. Yeah, it's lovely. I can't complain. Just full of praise for those people, that's all I got. Respect and praise for them" (Tiffany).

The care relationship is not limited to the professional role of psychosocial support. Natasha, for instance, was very moved by the fact that her social worker was "not strictly down to business" and that he took time to talk to her about the city and even to drive her to a meeting once. Michael also commented on the human qualities of his social worker. He was having a lot of difficulty sleeping and consulted a doctor for that reason. The doctor told him that there was nothing he could do to help and left it at that. When Michael discussed the situation with his social worker, she suggested that he try drinking herbal teas before going to bed. Although Michael realised that there was no magic in the suggestion, the mere fact that she had listened to his concern was very comforting to him.

Placement networks

[Int: If you had to identify the most important factors for facilitating the establishment of separated youth...?] As I was saying, first good support in general. Good support, resources, a place where the child feels good and feels cared for, a responsible adult who takes care of him and who helps him in his adaptation, his learning, in school. --
Practitioner

Although most separated youth arrive alone, many are integrated relatively quickly into some form of established placement network. Of the thirteen separated youth in the study, for instance, six found refuge in the homes of members of the extended family network, including older siblings, ‘aunts’ and ‘uncles’,²⁶ and cousins. Prior to their arrival in Quebec, only three of these youth had actually ever met the persons with whom they would be living. For the others, contacts had been established specifically for immigration purposes. While some of these host families were long time friends of the parents who had immigrated to Canada several years earlier, others were friends of friends and were unknown even to the parents.

Two other youth were placed in families from the same community of origin, although placement in these cases was decided only after their arrival in Quebec. There were thus no existing family links or established contacts which had been made prior to migration. Some communities are particularly well organised for this purpose. This is the case, for instance, of the Sikh community in which youth are often given immediate shelter in a temple where they stay until someone in the community assumes responsibility for them and invites them into their homes. Goldie, for instance, spent the first few days in the temple where he was taken in by the priest who lived in the basement. Goldie describes the priest as being like a father to him, because of the great comfort which the priest gave to him during the first few days following his arrival:

And I came there and they, the temple priest, who do the prayers, like a father, you know. He told me about here a little bit, like how we do here, and he told me he is going to take me in his basement. He was living in a basement, he was doing a prayer, like at 8 o’clock we eat, after that we went to his basement, he live just after the temple, like very near the temple. And we went to his house. When we get there we drink milk, after we were, like he asked me all, whatever I was, why I came here, what happened to me. I told him everything, and I was start crying, and he said, no problem. He said I am like your father. He said OK, no problem, everything is going to be alright. (Goldie)

Placement within already established networks, or more generally within the same community of origin, can be an important factor of protection for many separated youth in the initial phase of establishment. Those rapidly inserted in a network generally have more support and encouragement, as one practitioner suggests: “Well, the advantage for the youth is that he is in a familiar environment very

²⁶ The terms ‘aunt’ and ‘uncle’ have a broad meaning in some countries. For the youth in the study, the terms do not only refer to persons who have a blood relation to them, but also to friends of the family with whom an emotional relationship has been established.

rapidly, whether in terms of food or even the type of dress. In any case, [...] I have the impression that they are told more about what is going on [in terms of immigration procedures]. They are more reassured. I think it is a form of passage which is more harmonious. They are better accompanied.” This accompaniment is implied in the comments of some of the youth who refer to their placement situations as being “like home” or to the persons responsible for them as “Mom and Dad”.

Inversely, for youth who are completely alone and have no contacts whatsoever in Quebec, the initial phase of establishment is often more difficult, as one practitioner explains: “those who arrive alone are often missing a family frame of reference. Thus it is certain that we will invest more in these youth than in those who have an extended family network or neighbour [to help them].” According to this practitioner, in recent years there have been a growing number of young Africans in this category, although youth from other origins may also arrive without an existing network to fall back on. Vange’s experience is a case in point. Due to the lack of placement resources in the social service network, he lived in a group home for several months where he was surrounded by other youth, but felt that he had nothing in common with them. For the most part, these youth were born in Quebec and came from broken families. Vange, who had involuntarily lost all trace of his parents and his sister, couldn’t understand how families could choose to be separated from one another. In the beginning he had difficulty finding someone in the home with whom he could share his pain and, consequently, was very lonely and depressed during the initial part of his stay:

When I arrived there I wasn’t used to seeing all sorts of youth who had problems with their parents. There were youth who had done this, others who had done that. So we were all mixed up together. So I told myself, this is really a new place for me because I have never seen this. Because in our traditions, homes like this don’t exist where there are youth who are delinquents and all that. Since it was a home where there were a lot of youth, there has to be order so that things go relatively smoothly. But I wasn’t used to these laws, so I had to adapt and often I found that difficult. The food was very different from mine, so there were days that I didn’t eat and also I was always remembering my family. I started getting depressed that I was all alone, lost, in the world – no papa, no mama. It really hurt a lot. I didn’t know who I could trust. (Vange)

Despite the difficult beginnings, over time Vange adapted relatively well to his new environment. He developed two significant relationships, one with another separated youth and the other with a practitioner who worked in the home. He also became a sort of spokesperson in that he decided it was

his role to help other youth by talking about his own experience and showing them that it is possible to adapt even in the most adverse situations.

The placement network is not only a factor of protection for separated youth, but may also become a risk factor. Many youth are placed in families or with individuals whom they have never met. Even those who are in an extended family network may find themselves living with persons with whom they had never had previous contacts. In such circumstances, it is not always easy to develop a relationship of confidence. Personality differences, divergences in habits or rules of conduct, and also situations of abuse within a placement situation may increase the vulnerability of the youth. This was the case, for instance, of Michael. After having been given temporary refuge in a temple in Montreal, he was placed in the care of an adult from the same community of origin. Not only did the youth's 'guardian' (a term used in this community) demand an exaggerated sum for rent, but he also charged fifty dollars every time he accompanied Michael for immigration procedures, medical visits, and so on. It was only after discussing the situation with another member of the temple that Michael realised the extent of his exploitation. He then went to live with the person who he had confided in and who he now considers to be his closest friend in Quebec. When asked to identify the five most important persons or agencies he had met since his arrival, his response was a determined one: "Only that person with whom I am living, he is a very nice person. He behaves like a friend. He is old (50!) but he is very interesting [...] He is like five persons!" (Michael).

The degree of support may also depend on the profile of the host family and such factors as the age of the persons responsible for the youth, their immigration or socio-economic status. Due to a lack of placement resources, some youth may be placed in situations which are less than ideal. A practitioner gave the example of two brothers and a sister, aged 7, 9 and 15, who arrived as separated youth from Africa. Following their arrival, they were placed with an older brother, aged 20, who had arrived in Quebec about a year earlier. In many ways, it was a logical placement decision made in the interest of keeping the family together. At the same time, however, the care of three younger siblings proved to be a heavy responsibility for the twenty year old. Lack of maturity, wanting to be with friends his own age, financial insecurity : these are factors which greatly increased the vulnerability of the younger siblings.

Also, many of the families in which these youth have been placed are recent immigrants or refugees themselves. Not only do many speak a language other than French or English at home, but they do not

necessarily have full knowledge of the resources available to them or to the youth. While placement in the community of origin in the initial phase of establishment is generally considered to be a factor of protection, some social workers question the impact of such placements on long term integration, as the following comment suggests:

Most of the time, these people [host families] have arrived only recently or even during the same period as the youth. Thus, they have little knowledge of the language or the school system. They are themselves isolated and don't know how things work. They are not able to help the youth a lot, especially when it comes to contacts with the school [or] in terms of understanding French. The youth doesn't understand [...] and there is no one to give him a helping hand.

This theme, of course, opens up an important debate on the meaning of integration and the creation or maintenance of what have been referred to as 'ethnic enclaves' or 'ghettos'. For the practitioners in the study, however, there is another issue which is of more immediate concern. They emphasise that it is not only the separated youth who need the support of social services in these cases, but also the host family as a whole. At the same time, however, they express the frustration of not being able to intervene on both the individual and familial dimensions because their caseloads are too heavy: "It's evident that it would take a lot more resources and time, which is not the case at the moment. It's the same for the youth and for the family. If I compare for the family, I have to say that I feel a little bit guilty, because I have too many cases and when I have too many cases, I completely neglect the families". According to the respondents, real protection for these youth must take into account all of the dimensions of vulnerability, including those of the host families in which they are placed.

Peer networks

Outside of the more formal support provided by the social service and placement networks, the insertion of separated youth in more informal peer networks also constitutes an important factor for facilitating their establishment. This is particularly true for those youth who were accompanied by friends or siblings during the migratory process, which was the case of half of the youth in the study. Although separated from their parents, these youth still had someone with whom they could share their fears and apprehensions. For Chef and DC, two brothers, the fact of having each other gave them strength in confronting their drastically new life situations because they could turn to one another and say "Everything is going to be okay. God is with us. We just have to keep on pushing" (DC). Similarly, Tiffany found support in a long time friend who was sent abroad with her. Not only were they able to

confide in one another and keep one another's spirits up, but they also shared common memories which helped them to maintain continuity with their pasts: "If I'd come by myself, I would have gone mad. I would have been so depressed. Oh gosh! It's better with her, you know. She's from home and we've had some experiences together. You know, we've had our good times together and any time we just feel like we are missing home, we just recall on those events" (Tiffany).

Others, such as Vange and Mandy, arrived alone in Quebec, but made special friends in the group homes where they were placed. In both cases, these friends were also separated youth and had experienced many of the same types of losses. This common frame of reference created an even stronger bond between the sets of friends. Mandy, for instance, describes her friend as being "like a sister to me. I think me and her have almost the same things in common" (Mandy). As for Vange, he considers this friend to be "like a brother" to him. Although the friend does not come from the same country as Vange, he had been through the same types of difficulties. As a result, he was able to understand Vange's pain and was also able to share coping mechanisms with him:

Oh yeah. He lived there too. I confided in him. We confided in each other. In a sense we recomforted each other, since we had experienced the same type of situation. I tried to learn from him what he did to survive and he tried to learn how I survived it. I started learning and I said, we will continue together and we can unite [energy] and form a very solid team. We will stand up straight and continue. (Vange)

School also provides a context for meeting friends. For the most part, friends are made in the welcome classes and, consequently, come from diverse countries of origin. For some of the youth in the study, such as Mandeed, Michael and Komar, these friendships extend beyond the school walls; that is, they sometimes get together after school or on weekends to play soccer or baseball in local parks. The others, however, had relatively few contacts with school friends outside of class hours and talked about their difficulty in meeting friends who had been born in Quebec. Tiffany in particular commented on the 'snobbishness' of students in the regular classes: "it's ok, they're friendly [in the welcome class], they're nice and all that but then those outside the classroom they're not so friendly. The girls especially, yeah. Like one time I almost -- well some girls wanted to scare me into a fight" (Tiffany). While some preferred to spend time with their host or foster families, others mentioned that they did not like the types of activities that their school friends were up to in their spare time, particularly the fact that they smoked and frequented night clubs, as the following comments suggest:

That's the problem, because we don't see each other the weekends. Because they hang out club nights. They go to club nights. And we don't go to club nights. [I: Because you don't want to? Because you can't?] It's because of the smoking. We don't smoke... And the person that is with someone who smokes, one day he will smoke. So we meet at school, but after school we take the same bus and then we take different directions. And in the school you don't smoke, so it's cool, because nobody makes smoke inside of the school (DC).

But there was something that I didn't like. Some of them like going to nightclubs. I don't like clubs. Places where there is too much noise don't interest me at all. (Vange).

Only three of the youth in the study mentioned being in a relationship with someone of the opposite sex. These relationships, however, are not always easy given the cultural universes of the youth. Ruby, for instance, met her boyfriend at school. They later lived together, had a child and were expecting a second child at the time of the study. The family which had hosted Ruby when she first arrived in Quebec refused to acknowledge the couple and even to see the baby, because he was born out of wedlock and because the father was of a lower caste than Ruby according to traditions in her homecountry. Although she has found a stable life partner and is very happy in her new roles, she remains sad that her 'aunt' and 'uncle', as she refers to the host family, have broken all contact, particularly since they had been like a substitute family to her. Goldie also met his girlfriend at school. Their relationship, however, remains a secret to the girl's parents because, according to him, they would not approve: "We are just between us, you know, because in my culture it is not like that. She shouldn't talk to me, because if her parents know that, her parents are going to beat her and they are going to try to stop us dating. But it is not going to work" (Goldie).

Places of worship and integration in community networks

Adherence to religious values or the frequentation of a place of worship also emerges as an important source of support for most of the youth in the study. In fact, when asked to identify the persons who had helped him the most since his arrival in Quebec, DC responded spontaneously "God is the most important person that helped me out, that helped us through all the pains that I had. Cause it's not easy to come alone and to face it. All by yourself you can't face it, it's hard" (DC). Similarly, Vange expresses the importance of religious faith in helping him to overcome his sadness : "I tried, despite the fact that I was very weak. I also prayed a lot to God to help me regain my spirits, despite the fact that I was so weak. It is as if I was listening to the voice of my father trying to re-console me and that was that. I started to change" (Vange). Although to lesser degrees, religion nonetheless constitutes an

important reference for at least nine of the other youth in the study who frequent a place of worship on a regular basis. In the first few weeks following his arrival in Quebec, for instance, Goldie went to the temple every day because it helped him to ease the pain of separation from his family. Now that he's in school, he has less time and need and has other activities to keep him occupied, but he still manages to go to the temple two or three times a week. Most of the others attend their respective places of worship at least once a week.

While it is the spiritual aspect of religious participation which is important to some, such as DC, Chef and Vange, for others the place of worship is primarily a social space where they have an opportunity to meet new people. For Tiffany going to church every Sunday is a social event which reminds her of being at home: "they are very friendly, the pastor, the people there they're also nice. 'Oh, how are you?' And they kiss you. 'Oh! Good to see you'. You know, you feel at ease there and some how remind you of home. So it's quite interesting. It's quite cool" (Tiffany). At the same time, however, she was disappointed by the fact that the contacts with other church members remain on a superficial level and wished that there was more interaction. Outside of general expressions of politeness, she noted that there is "nothing personal, you just stick to your own business and they stick to their own business" (Tiffany). This was not the case of Ruby for whom the members of the temple that she frequents have become like a second family to her. Unlike Tiffany's church, the temple is frequented by persons who are all from the same community of origin. Ruby herself has been involved in the temple for a couple of years and participates as a volunteer in organizing community dinners and festivities.

Ruby's example also illustrates the importance of integration in ethnic community networks. In addition to her participation in the temple, she is also very involved in an association which brings together persons from her country. The association is very dynamic in the neighbourhood where she lives and organizes several types of activities, including dances and festivities. Michael, Komar and Shanti also have a lot of contacts within their respective ethnic communities where they attend communal suppers and, for Komar and Shanti more specifically, participate in sports, leisure and language programmes organised within the community. These are very privileged contacts for these youth in that they create a sense of belongingness which is in continuity with their pasts. Participation in the community of origin, however, is not necessarily a positive experience for all youth, particularly for those from countries in which there are intense political rivalries between groups. This is the case of three youth in the study from African countries who have specifically chosen not to frequent other

compatriots, either because of their own political affiliations or because they wanted to avoid politically oriented activities altogether.

Outside of involvement in religious and ethnic-based associations, the participation of separated youth in other types of neighbourhood activities constitutes another source of support for some. Ruby, for instance, does volunteer work from time to time for a local advocacy group where she has helped with campaigns for putting in a new pool, erecting a street light on a dark corner and developing an awareness campaign for garbage collection in the area. The fact of “helping people, the district people”, as she says, constitutes a source of pride for her and also introduces her into networks which are not structured around ethnic lines. Municipal leisure and sports programmes may also become important sources of support for separated youth. However, while some of the youth participate in pick-up sports activities with friends, particularly soccer and basketball, few are actually involved in organized sports. Chef and DC had only recently discovered the YMCA and were looking for another place where they would be able to take swimming and dancing courses. Vange mentioned that he would like to take some form of martial arts, but did not know where to turn for information. Similarly, Tiffany thought that sports would be a good way to meet new friends. In her home country, sports were integrated into the school curriculum, but she had the feeling that in her school all sports activities were extra-curricular. During the interview she asked where she could get more information on sports and leisure programmes. Thus, despite the potential of such activities for these youth, they tend to be under-utilized. One practitioner also mentioned the fact that such activities tend to be neglected in intervention strategies:

We neglect a lot the time that the children spent in leisure activities, especially these minors. Because most intervention is focussed on the school and how they are doing in the family and all that. The practitioner doesn't look enough at the opportunities they have for leisure or if there are places where they can have leisure activities.

Futures

There is no doubt that the lives of the separated youth in the study have been turned upside down. There is no doubt either of their vulnerability and need for protection or of the obstacles with which they are faced in accessing certain types of societal resources. At the same time, however, the findings in this section also demonstrate the other side of vulnerability; that is, the diverse mechanisms and

strategies by which separated youth are able to negotiate barriers even in a context of constraint. In the midst of turmoil, many remain optimistic about their futures and astoundingly lucid in their evaluation of their migratory experiences. Vange's account illustrates well this optimism: "This period will remain engraved in my life for eternity, until the end of my days. It has taught me to live, it has had a lot of deceptions, it has taught me to see encouragement, it has taught me that I must continue. It has taught me that things are not always the way you want them to be. So, it has taught me to adapt to new things." Vange's reflection also leads him to compare what he refers to as his 'old world' and his 'new world'. In the old world he explains that opportunities for the future would have been severely limited because of the context of war. By contrast, Canada is perceived by him, and by the other separated youth in the study, as being a land in which they can improve their life chances. Some of their comments best describe this perception: "I feel free and easy to live in Quebec" (Mandeed), "Whatever I get here, is everything easier. That is what I think" (Goldie), "Here in Canada, you are lucky. Actually, our foster family, our social worker, immigration Canada and things, it's all good. Canada is lucky for us" (Chef).

Their projects for the future in terms of training and employment are also indicative of this optimism. Most talk of attending college or university. Several see their future in computer science or information technology, while others aspire to professions in medicine, engineering, dietetics and nutrition, economics, law and piloting. In many cases, the status of these types of trades and professions plays an important symbolic role, because the youth measure their achievements through an idealised image of what their parents or other close ones would have wanted for them. The symbolic place of the family in the definition of life projects has already been discussed. The emphasis on 'being somebody', however, may even extend beyond the family. DCs account, for instance, reveals a desire for fame, stardom and fancy cars. While this desire may correspond to adolescent fantasies in general, DCs dreams are also intricately linked to his past and, especially, his anger that the dreams of so many youth in his country are being broken. Sereinly, he describes his project to become a symbol for other youth so that they can keep their own dreams alive:

You have to have money. You have to have peace. Especially in my country, there is a lot of dreams being destroyed. I'll be recognised in my country for all of these things. Many people there, you know, it's hard to start over there. They have a dream. Dreams are being destroyed like this. So if I have the money, don't just spend for you, cause God said share. Share with them. So if I have money I can show people there that they can build their dream. So I want to be someone. (DC)

According to one practitioner, this capacity to project into the future is in itself an important coping mechanism for separated youth in the early stages of their establishment: “when we look at what they would like to do, they have a plan. Whether or not the plan will be successful, we don’t know, but at least they are able to project into the future.”

The extent to which these dreams may or may not come true, however, is a matter for conjecture. The social practitioners who work with separated youth are more reserved in their perception of the youths’ futures. Some believe that the obstacles faced in the early phase of establishment, particularly in terms of the lack of resources, do not place them in a position which will facilitate access to post-secondary education or orient them towards stable forms of employment. In the words of one, their trajectories “do not take them very far at all.” While the age of majority gives them adult rights, it also gives them adult responsibilities and, for many, this period is a difficult one. Once they reach the age of eighteen, the passage to social assistance is imminent for most, as the following accounts suggest:

Most of the youth to date, except maybe 2 or 3, finish Secondary IV or V. At 16-17 years of age, they are in welcome classes, post-welcome classes. And when they’re in regular classes, they might go as far as Secondary I or II or maybe III. So, when they’re 18, they’ll be on welfare. So that’s it. But what do they become?

These youth, when they become adults, they go onto social welfare. If they share an apartment with someone, they receive about \$392. Even in sharing an apartment, they can’t get away with under \$250-300; they don’t have anything left. All that to tell you that these youth become adults, but it is a real transition. It’s quite difficult.

There is general agreement, however, that in the mid- to long-term most do find jobs, although not necessarily the prestige professions that the aspirations of the youth in the study would suggest. Instead, the practitioners suspect that they probably move into the more precarious sectors of the employment market, but nonetheless cope relatively well, as the following comment suggests:

Sure, there are some who have difficulties. But on the whole, they make out relatively well. The biggest problem is that most of these people are destined to a form of marginalisation because of their studies. It is rare those who are able to finish their highschool and then go on to college. The majority make it to the job market where they do odd jobs, like many disadvantaged youth in Quebec. They form part of the disadvantaged youth in Quebec.

Unfortunately, the research material does not enable an objective evaluation of the longer term perspectives of separated youth in Quebec. It would seem to be clear, however, that the transition from

minor status to majority status constitutes a shock for many. It is during this period that the safety net provided by the various institutional resources gives way and that these youth are brought face to face with the reality of being in an adult world with fewer resources at their disposal. It is at this point especially that their personal strengths and their integration into other forms of support networks will be crucial to guiding their trajectories into the future.

Chapter 7.

SUMMING UP

In both international and national contexts, the phenomenon of youth separated from their families and living in exile does not seem to be a transitory one. Instead, all indicators seem to point to an increase in the numbers of such youth seeking asylum in countries such as Canada. Although the present study was limited to a case study of separated youth in Quebec, it is likely that the life situations and migratory trajectories of these youth bear similarities in other regions of Canada. Their stories tell of war and political upheaval, of violence and brutality, of the shock of being uprooted, often involuntarily, from their homelands and torn from the security of their families, their friends and the familiarity of their surroundings. Within a short time frame, their life courses have been irremediably altered, giving way to numerous anxieties and insecurities for the immediate and the long term.

In the absence of their primary support networks, they have no choice but to assume these losses as best they can, piecing together fragments of their past and present lives. The initial period following their arrival in Quebec is often the most difficult. Although the frenzied activities of the first weeks may turn their attention briefly to the more immediate administrative aspects of their migration, the full realisation of their situations leaves many with an overwhelming feeling of numbness or shock. The manifestations of shock can be found in the accounts of the youth: crying, homesickness, sleeping difficulties, concentration problems, nightmares and observable physical symptoms caused by anxiety. Access to appropriate sources of support during this initial period is thus crucial for helping them regain some sense of stability or security. As the findings suggest, the sources of support considered to be significant for separated youth during the early stage of establishment are relatively few in number, most limited to one to three persons or agencies. Those accompanied during migration by siblings or acquaintances, and those integrated rapidly into placement settings arranged prior to their arrival, tend to cope more easily than those who arrive without any form of pre-established contacts. Even for these latter youth, however, this period remains a very difficult one. It is in this context too that access to close institutional support is also a necessity.

In the Quebec context, the practitioners of the *Service d'aide aux réfugiés et aux immigrants de Montréal Métropolitain* (SARIMM) are particularly important during this period, both in terms of

immediate material assistance and psychosocial support. Their role is not strictly a technical or instrumental one, but rather is grounded in the establishment of a relation of confidence in which both practitioner and youth become accomplices in the reconstruction of life projects and identity referents. In many cases, the practitioners become a form of substitute network for these youth, a fact which is revealed in the familial words used by the youth to describe them (i.e., sister, mother). Intervention is further facilitated by the fact that these practitioners have a specialised knowledge of the needs of this group which allows them to better tailor intervention plans. This knowledge includes awareness of the political contexts from which the youth have fled, training or field expertise in intercultural practice and a sound understanding of refugee and immigration issues, such as humanitarian principles, trauma resulting from political violence, losses provoked by migration and immigration procedures. At the same time, however, cutbacks in the social services are considered to be a serious obstacle to intervention. Growing caseloads, lack of placement and other resources, limits in the help given to the host families of the youth are among the difficulties mentioned that compromise their capacity to intervene in the best interests of these youth.

Cutbacks have also hit other sectors providing crucial support to separated youth, such as education. This is a key sector in terms of the long term integration of these youth and, especially, their eventual entry into the job market. Unlike a service such as SARIMM, separated youth as a group are not concentrated in any one educational facility, but rather are distributed among the existing school network according to their neighbourhood of residence. In this respect, they tend to be swallowed up in the mass of the student population where the special circumstances of their pre- and post-migratory histories -- interrupted schooling, trauma, other stresses related to migration -- are neither known nor understood. As a result, there is an increasing tendency for their needs to be swept aside in the school context. Limited complementary resources in the schools, standardisation of educational practice and lack of awareness of the specific situations of these youth all contribute to placing them in fragile situations which may threaten the continuity of their schooling and the possibility of realising their future projects.

The refugee determination system is another sector in which the vulnerability of separated youth is particularly felt. Like education, the acknowledgement of refugee status is a fundamental condition for the orientation of their life courses. The adoption of the Immigration and Refugee Board's *Children's Guidelines* in 1996 is certainly a very positive acknowledgement of the fragility of separated youth in the refugee determination process. As the findings suggest, however, their implementation does not

always attain the ideal of their formulation. Several types of problems were identified by the study participants, including confused understandings of the process and the role of actors; arbitrariness and subjectivity of some Board decisions; difficulties in telling their stories because they have been protected from details by their parents, or because of psychological blockages relating to traumatic experiences; feelings of intimidation or nervousness when confronted by adversarial forms of questioning; and misunderstandings created by communication barriers or the use of technical jargon. A greater systematisation of this process for separated youth would not only reduce the anxiety and the barriers provoked by the long waiting periods, but also ensure more just and equitable hearings which better correspond to the humanitarian ideals which they are meant to embody.

In addition to these sectors, barriers in accessing societal resources were also identified in other domains of social life, such as health care, housing, part-time employment, commercial institutions and leisure activities. Such barriers identify separated youth from the outset as being outsiders in our society. While many of the obstacles faced by separated youth in the public, private, and community sectors could be resolved by more rapid obtention of refugee status, others could be minimized through the promotion of a greater awareness of the special needs and rights of this population. Although the private sector remains a difficult target for promoting change, the development of informational tools and training programs for the various institutional actors brought into interaction with separated youth would increase awareness of their lived experiences, their rights, and the resources available to them.

The findings do not only point to barriers and constraints. Despite the difficult circumstances of their migration and the obstacles they face in accessing diverse societal resources, these youth also demonstrate an enormous capacity for adaptation. Many draw on incredible personal strengths, such as anger, assertiveness and resourcefulness, which help them manoeuvre in difficult situations. The family, even in its absence, also continues to play a very significant role following migration. Whether through direct contacts or through the symbolic adherence to family projects and dreams, these youth have been invested with the values of their parents. These values are instrumental for many in recreating a continuity between their two worlds, that of the past and that of the present. The capacity to mobilise other types of formal and informal resources around them, such as significant persons in the social service, placement, peer and community networks, also demonstrates their capacity of resilience.

Most of the youth who participated in the study have long term plans and goals. They are able to project into the future and to talk about their experiences with surprising lucidity given their ages and the events which they have experienced. In this sense, their trajectories reveal a delicate balance between vulnerability and strength. They should not be perceived simply as victims, but rather as youth who have accumulated a greater number of handicaps than youth in general. It is generally acknowledged that the first three years of establishment are crucial in determining decent living conditions for new immigrants in the long term. From this point of view, it is in the best interests of this population that more coherent policies and measures be developed in order to minimise some of the more adverse constraints with which they are faced.

In the late seventies and early eighties, following the arrival of the Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian 'boat children' (Adelman, 1984; Beiser, 1999), the media constructed and conveyed an image of refugees in a way which moved public sensibilities. Refugee children were welcomed with open arms in Canadian families, schools and social service organisations. Since that period, public sentiment has grown indifferent, even hostile, to the plight of refugee populations. The combined impact of economic recession and budgetary restrictions in social programmes, has made many Canadians resentful of resources allotted to humanitarian aid programmes. The ideals which inspired such international human rights instruments as the *Convention on the Status of Refugees* and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* have become secondary to cost benefits analyses based on economic rather than social indicators. Consequently, there is growing misunderstanding of the very essential and important role that we can play in helping innocent persons whose lives have been torn apart by events beyond their control. As one practitioner reminds us, these youth will be our future citizens. In this respect, it is our responsibility as a society to help them by minimizing barriers which can hinder their life chances and, in so doing, to facilitate their process of establishment by making of them full status members of our nation.

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