

*The interrelationships of violence – from the transnational to the domestic. Experiences of refugee women in Cape Town.*

**BY**

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A project submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Medical Anthropology, University of the Western Cape.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Although gender-based violence has been identified as highly problematic in South Africa, it has not been given much scholarly attention in relation to refugee women. This study focuses on the experience of some of these women who have resettled in Cape Town. The main focus is on gender-based violence and the linkages between conflicts at home, fleeing from it, as well as the problems faced by women when they reach the 'new' country where they are suppose to be safe, but yet continue to experience gender violence. By referring to my own empirical research I try to tease out the many instances of violence and abuse such women face, how they understand and try to make sense of it and how they try to take up their lives in Cape Town. I utilized the much used ecological framework to analyze gender-based violence and argue that, while this 'model' is dynamic and allows one to make analytical linkages across different 'levels' of violence, it nevertheless does not adequately provide for understanding the relationship between larger global and international processes, the connection that women may still have with their countries of origin and the impact of being a refugee or unwanted 'immigrant' in South Africa.

Data was collected through in-depth interviews and participant observation. The participants were 25 and a descriptive analysis indicated that three quarter of the women have in one way or the other been abused by their husbands/partners. The findings also indicated that refugee/forced immigrant women just like any other woman in South Africa do encounter gender-based violence but other factors beyond their control has exacerbated it's occurrence amongst them. Thus, the findings were based on ethnographic research that analyzed how forced immigrant/refugee women talk about gender-based violence.

## **KEYWORDS:**

Gender- based violence  
Domestic violence  
Violence  
Violence against women  
Refugees  
Abuse  
Migration  
Gender  
Survivor  
Culture



**DECLARATION**

I declare that *the interrelationships of violence – from the transnational to the domestic. Experiences of refugee women in Cape Town* is my own work that it has not been submitted for any examination in any other university, and all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Ngwetoh Nchangmum Wanka

November 2008



Signed:.....

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this piece of work to my lovely daughters WANKA HEPSIBA ASYNWENE  
NUINEFOR and WANKA MIYAHNUI - NGUM EDNA NDOLO



**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

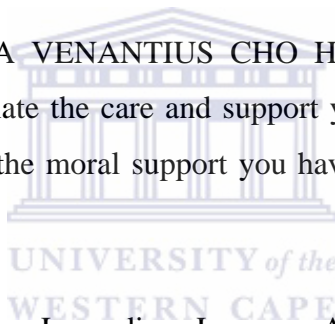


I would like to thank the Lord Almighty for making it possible for me to complete this piece of work.

Sincere thanks also go to my supervisor Prof. DIANA GIBSON for leading me throughout the whole research process. I also want to thank you for the encouragement you gave during times when I felt like abandoning the research. I also want to thank you for the financial and moral support you gave me during this time.

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To my parents, WANKA VENANTIUS CHO HELBERT and PATRICIA NGWE WANKA I really appreciate the care and support you gave to me. I acknowledge the emotional, financial and the moral support you have given me. I am really blessed to have you as my parents.



To my brothers and sister, Leocadine, Lwanga, Azah, Vivian, Ali, Awah, Mangwi, Tansi, Sonita and Nadia I say thank you very much for the love and care you sent over the phone during this time.

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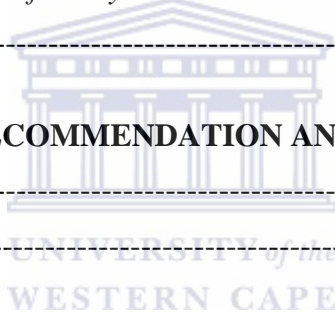
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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1. Background

There are an estimated 2.7 million refugees or displaced people in Africa (UNCHR)<sup>1</sup> at the moment. Many Africans today have become refugees/forced immigrants due to threatening political developments and conflicts on the continent. One of the reasons for the ongoing movement of people across borders can be traced to the fact that many African states were brought into being by colonial powers, and most of the independent states that materialized afterwards cross-cut previous ethnic and other boundaries. Thus almost all African states include a wide variety of ethnic groups who compete for resources, power etcetera (Pouilly 2007:28). When conflict escalates, nationals of one country will flee or migrate to another in bigger or smaller numbers.

Many African countries have experienced extensive periods of civil conflicts/war e.g. Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia, Angola, Mozambique etcetera. These conflicts have also resulted in high rates of forced migration to other countries including South Africa and its neighbouring states. The negative impact of forced migration has affected women in many ways. In this regard Hass et al. (2000) argues that the incidence of gender-based violence among the forced immigrant/refugee populations is often exacerbated by their specific position as non-nationals. Refugee/forced immigrant women are particularly vulnerable –many have fled from a threatening or violent situation and may have experienced it themselves.

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR. 2007. Protecting refugees & the role of the UNHCR> 2007/08 edition. United Nations. <http://www.unhcr.org/basics/BASICS/4034b6a34.pdf> retrieved 23/02/08

Violence against African immigrants in South Africa has been evident recently - as many people were beaten and killed in xenophobic attacks in South Africa. About 35 000 people fled their homes. Many of the victims, who were women and children, had to escape from their homes to find refuge at the police stations, churches and in temporal tents that were set up in various places. The conditions under which these refugees had to live were appalling; as many as 9 -10 people had to sleep under the same tents. Women nonetheless make up a rapidly growing percentage of the world's migrant and/or refugee population. In this regard Hammond (2002) writes:

“A report on the agony and pain of women immigrants by the end of March 2002 indicated that 1.2 million refugees had made their way to Southern Africa most of them women and children”.<sup>2</sup>

Refugees/forced immigrants and displaced people do not enjoy the protection of their own governments and women in particular are vulnerable to acts of aggression, including sexual and gender-based violence. Gender-based violence against refugees/forced immigrants, especially women and children, continues unabated. It occurs within the forced immigrant community itself and is also perpetrated against women of such groups as recent xenophobic attacks above in South Africa demonstrated. Thus the occurrence of Gender-based violence is a result of gender relations, power and of the women's positions as forced immigrants/refugees. It can be further exacerbated by unequal gender relations within communities<sup>3</sup> were women end up living after they had been forced to leave their countries of origin.

Although gender-based violence has been identified as highly problematic in South Africa, it has not been given much scholarly attention in relation to refugee/forced immigrant women. One of the reasons is that, South Africa did not recognize the

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<sup>2</sup> Hammond, S. (2002) *The Agony and Pain of Women Immigrants*. City Press, 29September2002. <http://www.queensu.ca/samp/sampresources/sam> retrieved on 12/8/2005

<sup>3</sup> United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees (1995)

status of 'refugee' until 1993. This followed on the country's own transition to democracy and the Refugee Act, which governs admission of asylum seekers (refugees). The Act was passed in 1998 and became effective in 2000. A report by the Public Service of South Africa in 2004 indicated that in the first month of 2003, 14.000 new refugees arrived in South Africa, bringing the total number to 90.000. Of these, 24.000 have official status as refugees, and 66.000 are asylum seekers. The most recent number for refugees in South Africa is 35570. The numbers of immigrants have increased drastically with the turmoil in neighbouring Zimbabwe<sup>4</sup>.

### *1.1 The violence of war/conflicts*

This study examines African refugee/forced immigrant women in South Africa and in particular their perceptions and experiences of gender-based violence, as well as their strategies to survive. The reason being that little is known about the occurrence of gender-based violence amongst refugee/forced immigrant communities in Cape Town. Yet it is suspected to be at least as high as in the wider South African society into which they have settled. Although there is a scarcity of information on this issue in relation to South Africa, evidence from a few settings elsewhere in the world indicates that gender-based violence is an enormous problem. Nduna and Goodyear (1997), for example, found in a study amongst the Burundian refugees in Tanzania that 26% of the 3,803 women in the Kanembwe camp setting had been subjected to sexual violence.

The general breakdown in law and order which occurs during wars and displacements lead to an increase in all forms of violence. The tensions of conflict, and the frustration, powerlessness and loss of traditional male roles associated with dislocation may be manifested in an increase in the incidence of gender-based

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<sup>4</sup> Home Affairs Pretoria South Africa (2007)

violence against women in the country where forced immigrants settle and/or in the refugee camps where they stay. It has been argued that men in refugee camps feel disempowered because they cannot meet their traditional roles as providers and care givers to their families. Alcohol abuse may also become more common and exacerbate the situation<sup>5</sup>. Life in refugee camps can lead to a breakdown of 'traditional' social structures, frustration, boredom, alcohol and drug abuse, and feelings of powerlessness. The magnitude of the problem is difficult to determine. Even in normal situations sexual violence often goes unreported. The factors contributing to under reporting -fear of retribution, shame, powerlessness, lack of support, breakdown or unreliability of public services and the dispersion of families and communities are all exacerbated in refugee/forced immigrant situation.<sup>6</sup> Under normal circumstances for example, women still have the support of their families, friends and communities and may even have access to public services.

Jobson (2005) explains that refugees/forced immigrant women in Congo witness the destruction of their homes and communities and the devastating disruption of their own lives and those of close family members. Jobson has highlighted refugee/forced immigrant women's vulnerability during wars and the effects of conflict on women and children. Many women are raped in their homes, or while they are fleeing, by men from government or rebel forces, and/or by fellow internally displaced persons. At times they are even sexually abused by members of the military and humanitarian services tasked with protecting them. While pregnant women have had their abdomens pierced, adolescent girls are also very much at risk because they are believed to be 'safe' targets as they are assumed to be virgins and therefore free of HIV/AIDS. While many women give birth to children as a result of rape, others seek out risky terminations of their pregnancies through 'back street abortion' procedures -

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<sup>5</sup> (World Health Organization 1997)

<sup>6</sup>United Nation High Commissioner for Refugee (1995). Sexual and gender based violence. <http://www.searo.who.int/en/section125/section32> retrieved 10/09/2007



because reproductive health care services are usually non-existent in these situations. Some women survive through becoming sexual slaves, while those who escape and manage to return to their families may be rejected and treated with disdain.

The effects of displacement depend on its duration. The immediate manifestations include family separations, exposure to gender-based violence, trauma associated with the injury or death of family members, impaired health and loss of the home and possessions. The long-term impact of displacement on women may mean the permanent loss of social and cultural ties, the termination of careers and regular employment, and disruption or loss of educational opportunities (Benjamin 1998). Benjamin (ibid) highlighted the problems faced by refugees and displaced persons around the world - and South Africa is not an exception. According to Snow (2000) displacement shatters the environment that enables women to meet their family's needs, sometimes triggering abuse as a reaction to women's failure to fulfil this primary social role.

Gender-based violence can be capricious or random. Women often are perceived or treated as - the 'spoils of war'- resulting from the breakdown in social and moral systems. In addition, sexual violence may be systematic, aimed at destabilizing populations and destroying bonds within communities and families; advancing ethnic cleansing; expressing hatred for the enemy and supplying combatant with sexual services. In Rwanda, Hutu extremist encouraged mass rape and sexual mutilation of Tutsi women as an expression of contempt. It sometimes included intentional HIV transmission. In Sierra Leone and Burma, rebels, paramilitary and military contingents forced women and girls into sexual slavery and, in some cases coerced marriage (Women Commission for Refugee Women and Children 2002)<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (2002). If not now, when? Addressing gender-based violence in refugee, internally displaced, and post conflict settings

During war and political hostility civilian populations suffer not only violence, but also the loss of social and cultural foundations that provide stability and connections (Sideris 2003). Al Gasseer et al. (2004) adds that women civilians often experience the highest burden during conflict and they may be subject to all forms of violence, including torture. Amidst food shortages, collapse of the health infrastructures, increasing chaos and displacement, women struggle to maintain responsibilities for their family's physical, emotional and financial well-being during war and conflict (Ashford and Huet-Vaughn 2000; El- Bushra 2000).

Both suffering and resilience is often part of the legacy refugees bring with them to countries of resettlement. Nearly all refugees have experienced losses, and many have faced multiple traumatic incidents, including torture. A number of studies conducted around the world found that refugees who had survived trauma commonly go through a range of traumatic disorders including post-traumatic stress disorder (Robertson et al. 2006). Giles and Hyndman (2004b) argue that refugees' account of their lives before flight are usually of violence, conflict and the disruption of previously taken-for-granted distinctions between public and private spheres of their life. Their stories demonstrate how impossible it is to draw clear divisions between the spaces of battlefield and home front in today's violent conflicts. Differences between soldiers and civilians, state security and human security have broken down in refugees' experience.

### ***1.2 The aftermath***

When women immigrate as refugees/forced immigrants their social and cultural frameworks may be further eroded through the multiple losses of language, extended family, social belonging, cultural values, social and economic status, and general connectedness to community (Eisenbruch 1991). Sideris (2003) opines that, successfully navigating the resettlement experience requires resilience. Refugee/forced immigrant women also exercise power, gain agency and are actively

involved in trying to improve their health and the health of their families. Iglesias et al. (2003) however, stresses that such women nevertheless often live in poverty and isolation and may feel even more powerless to reduce the stress in their families than they did before forced immigration.

Grasping refugee experiences is to acknowledge that forced immigration necessitates an adjustment in relationship with kin members - those who migrate as well as those who stay behind (Szczepanikova 2005). D' Avanzo et al. (1994) furthermore argues that these women's vulnerability to isolation is exacerbated by lack of education, literacy and local language skills.

Conflict situations and its aftermath also often involve shifts in discourses to include a renewal of patriarchal family ideology and essentialized gender categories, thus deepening the differentiation between men and women, masculinity and femininity. "Women are reminded that by biology and by tradition they are the keepers of hearth and home, to nurture and teach children "our ways" (Cockburn 2004:19). Cockburn (2004) further conceptualizes gender-based violence as a continuum. It is never confined to armed conflicts and wars but is present also in every day domestic life. Cockburn opines that the sites of gender-based violence -the battlefield and household - are intertwined and interact with each other. Other authors reiterate this and argue that gender-based violence grows significantly when societies militarize and when the aggressiveness of nationalist discourses increases (Preston & Wong 2004 and Yuval-Davis 2004). Violence often continues after the escape from the immediate threat of war and persecution (Szczepanikova 2005).

According to Giles (1999) the occurrence of domestic violence increases among refugees/forced immigrants during their life in exile. This problem has been particularly severe in refugee camps where enforced idleness, boredom, and despair constitute breeding grounds for such violence (Martin 2004:51). Enleo (1998) illustrates how decision making and economic power belong primarily to men, while

international relations and politics are played out on women's bodies in various ways such as propagating particular conceptions of femininity. In this regard, Korac (2004) is of the opinion that in the context of violence and ethnic conflicts women in the diaspora are often ideologically positioned into the eternalized roles of biological reproducers and cultural cultivators of the boundaries of ethnic-national collectives and their ideologies. Women are the ones that give birth and at the same time they are responsible for the moral upbringing of the child, thus teaching their children their values, norms and beliefs.

Studies have shown that gender ideologies often harden in refugee camps (Szczepanikova 2004). While some of the camp rules and workers may draw on values of gender equality as expressed by United Nation High Commissioner for Refugee's recommendations and international standards, much of what actually happens -such as men being in control, reinforce unequal gender relations (Giles 1999). This is either because management and controlling practices in the camps, give little significance to gender-based violence and discrimination. Or because what happens in the refugee/forced immigrant households is considered to be determined by normative gendered rules of 'their patriarchal tradition' so that no inquiry or change is deemed possible (Giles 1999:91). Refugee women and children in the camp become more vulnerable to abuse and violence which nevertheless becomes less visible and harder to address (Szczepanikova 2004).

A study by Turner (2004) indicates that changes induced to empower refugee women in Tanzanian refugee camps for example, have been reinterpreted as social and moral decay by the dominant groups of refugee men. At the same time women in Tanzanian camps have been forced into more dominant positions such as heads or leaders in the camps. They have been placed in decision making positions in the camps especially in areas of food distribution. Although the inclusion of women as a vulnerable group as part of the humanitarian agenda is important, it is also critical to recognize the

competing conceptualization of refugee women together with the impact of class and ethnicity on social relations in the camps (Hyndman 2004 :209).

Even though women may attain more authoritative positions in camps, gendered relations in refugee/force immigrant's households and families are constructed and negotiated in line with particular 'remembrance' of home (Giles 1999:85). Most refugee/forced immigrant women as well as the men tend to refer traditional roles as per their country of origin. It is against this background that the experiences of refugee/forced immigrants in Cape Town became my main drive to undertake this research.

## **2. The study**

### ***2.1 Background to the research***



According to a National Catholic report (1994), refugee/forced immigrant women in South Africa are even more at risk to abuse and exploitation than those who live locally (Clinton 2002). The majority of refugees/forced immigrants into the Southern African region are women and children -many of whom have fled, or were lured from their countries of origin under false pretences. These include promises made by traffickers who aim to use them as sex workers or as undocumented workers. Whether women come to escape violence and instability in their own countries, false promises made to them by illegal operators or in the hope of making a living, it is difficult to obtain legal documents to stay in South Africa. Once in the country, and away from their familiar surroundings and possible support or legal resolution, they are vulnerable and easily exploited or abused. Many of these women end up at the Lindela Camp for refugees, the largest detention facility for undocumented immigrants in the country on the outskirts of Johannesburg. Early this year, violence struck the nation at the eve of the African day celebration. Thousands of foreigners

were sent packing and thousands more were displaced. Some were relocated into various recently created refugee camps around the country. A few months down the line the government has decided to close the newly created camps and, once again, to leave these displaced people wanting, the majority of whom are women and children.

In recent years, South Africa has been home to forced and economic immigrants from all over Africa. No reliable statistics are available on the number of refugees/forced immigrants who enter the country and only projections can be made. The projection around the number of Zimbabweans coming into South Africa has shown remarkable increase with the present economic crisis in their country. It has also been estimated that an average of 1,000 women are trafficked across the country's borders every month. Traffickers promise them jobs and decent wages. Girls, some as young as eight or nine years of age, are lured from their places of domicile with false offers of work in homes and restaurants in South Africa and neighbouring countries.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, South Africa is not necessarily a safe place for women. Mama (2000:1) states that with its extremely high prevalence of gender-based violence, it is rather 'one of the world's most deadly environments for women'. Refugee women's vulnerable position is further, as indicated above, exacerbated by issues like differentials in power, inadequate language abilities, cultural and gender differences, perceptions and practices transferred from the women's countries of origin that make refugee/forced immigrant vulnerable to violence. To survive, some get involved in relationships with local or foreign men but they have little or no recourse to

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<sup>8</sup>SouthAfricaBulletin1/2002.[http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home/o/country\\_information/bulletins/south\\_africa](http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home/o/country_information/bulletins/south_africa) retrieved 12/8/2005.

protection when a relationship becomes abusive. This is particularly the case when the abuser is also an intimate partner or when they are living together.

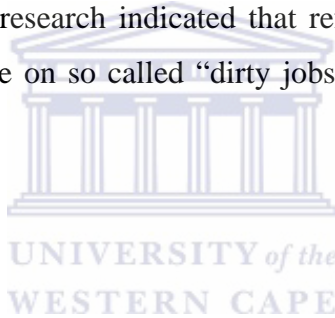
Violence against women is traumatic to the body, mind and spirit and can prevent women from being fully active participants at home and in the world (16 Days Activism against Gender Violence). The intensity of the problem of violence against women has been highlighted by the World Bank Report (1994)<sup>9</sup> as indicated below;

- Trafficking of humans world-wide grew almost 50 per cent from 1995 to 2000. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that as many as 2 million women are trafficked across borders annually.
  - More than 90 million African women and girls are affected by female genital cutting.
  - At least 60 million girls who should be alive are 'missing' from various populations, as a result of sex - selective abortion, infanticide or neglect.
  - In recent years, mass rape in war has been documented in Bosnia, Cambodia, Liberia, Peru, Somalia and Uganda.
  - Ninety-four per cent of displaced household's surveys in Sierra Leone have reported incidence of sexual assault, including rape, torture and sexual slavery. At least 250,000 - perhaps as many as 500,000 - women were raped during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.
- ❖ World wide, an estimated 40-70 per cent of femicide committed, is perpetrated by an intimate partner, often in the context of an abusive relationship.

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<sup>9</sup> From Violence Against Women : The Hidden Burden (World bank Report 1994)

- ❖ Around the world, at least one in every three woman has been beaten, forced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime.
  
- ❖ According to Sherry (1996) women (including refugees and forced immigrants) in developing countries often negotiate their lives within a framework of gender informed and influenced by their particular cultural groups. When their live change drastically, as in the case of refugees/forced immigrants, women often lose their position and are forced into less equitable social statuses. For example some women, before they were forced to migrate, were working as skilled labourers. After migration they were forced to pick up any unskilled job for survival purposes. My research indicated that refugee/forced immigrant women are more willing to take on so called “dirty jobs” in their host country than the men.



## ***2.2 Definition of terms***

For the purposes of this study sexual violence, gender-based violence, domestic violence, women abuse and violence against women will be used interchangeably. It is nevertheless prudent to clarify the terms as represented in different protocols. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2003) indicates that all of the above<sup>10</sup> refers to violations of fundamental human rights that perpetuate sex-stereotyped roles, deny human dignity and self determination of the individual and hamper human development. They refer to physical, sexual and psychological harm that reinforces female subordination and perpetuate male power and control. Broadly speaking, the term gender-based violence is used to distinguish common violence from violence that targets individuals or groups of individuals on the basis of their

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<sup>10</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2003). Sexual and gender based violence against refugee, returnees and internally displaced persons. Guide lines for Prevention and Response. <http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3F696bcc4.pdf>.



gender. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, the threat of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty.<sup>7</sup> According to Gartner (2000 in Rees and Peace 2006) the definition of what gender-based violence constitutes nevertheless varies from one cultural setting to another. Gender-based violence has been defined by the United Nation Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)<sup>11</sup> as:

*”any act... that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or physiological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in private or public life...violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, the community, including battery, sexual abuse of female children, marital rape...”* (Bennet 2000: 4).

Hof and Richters (1999) argue that gender-based violence may or may not be consciously used to perpetuate male power and control, however the effect causes harm and/or suffering in ways that reinforces female subordination. At the same time hand Dabby (2007) argues that gender-based violence is more than physical, sexual, economic, and emotional abuse, it is also about living in a climate of fear, misery, loss, mistrust, humiliation and despair.

Domestic violence reinforces gender-based discrimination and keeps women subordinate to men. The United States Office on Violence against Women (OVW) defines domestic violence as a “pattern of abusive behaviour in any relationship that is used by one partner to maintain power and control over another intimate partner”<sup>12</sup>. Domestic violence can take many forms, including physical abuse, economic abuse,

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<sup>11</sup> United Nation Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

<sup>12</sup> About Domestic violence Office on Violence Against Women. Retrieved 8/09/07

emotional and/or psychological abuse and sexual abuse. The Children and Family Court Advisory and support Service in the United Kingdom in it defines domestic violence and abusive behaviour as;

*“...Patterns of behaviour characterized by one person over another who are or have been in an intimate relationship. It can occur in mixed gender relationships and same gender relationships and has profound consequences for the live of children, individual, families and communities at large. It may be physical, sexual, emotional and/or psychological. The latter may include intimidation, harassment, and damage to property, threat and financial abuse”<sup>13</sup>.*

Since my own study was done in the context of South Africa, it is also very important to look at what constitutes domestic violence in local legislation. ‘Domestic violence’ as stipulated in the Domestic Violence Act No. 116 of 1998<sup>14</sup> includes physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, psychological and economic abuse. The Act further recognizes intimidation, harassment, stalking, and damage to property as part and parcel of domestic violence. Entering a person’s residence without consent, as well as any other controlling or abusive behaviour that may cause harm to the safety, health or wellbeing of a person can be viewed as domestic violence.

Like other South Africans, refugee/forced immigrant women in South Africa can be subjected to various kinds of violence. They already had to deal with it from the time they were forced to flee or migrate from their various countries, on their way to safety and upon arrival in South Africa. The inadequate sources that currently exist on the topic indicate that refugees/forced immigrants tend to view domestic violence as only

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<sup>13</sup> Domestic Violence Assessment Policy on Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service. Retrieved 8/09/07

<sup>14</sup> Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998. Pretoria, South Africa: Government Gazette

inclusive of physically aggressive behaviour such as assault. For my study I have incorporated a global and a South African perspective with respect to gender-based violence of refugee/forced immigrant communities.

Other key words used in this research have been defined below<sup>15a, 13b, 13c, 13d and 13e</sup> footnotes

In South Africa it might not be easy to distinguish a refugee from an immigrant. For the purpose of my research I will use the terms refugees and forced immigrants, interchangeably.

### ***2.3 Research Problem***



A good number of studies have been done on the abuse of women in South Africa (Wood and Jewkes 2001; Gibson et al. 2005; Gelles and Cornell 1990; Artz 2001 and Gilbert 1996) but very little attends to African immigrants -legal or illegal. One exception is the above report by Hammond (2002) and a study by Jonathan et al. (2003) which indicates that women are being trafficked into the Southern African region as sex workers as mentioned above.

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<sup>15a</sup>Violence against women refers to any act of gender-based that results in or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, and psychological harm to women and girls, whether occurring in private or in public. Violence against women is a form of gender-based violence and includes sexual violence. <sup>13b</sup>Gender -is the term used to denote the social characteristics assigned to men and women. These social characteristics are constructed on the basis of different factors, such as age, religion, national, ethnic, and social origin. They differ both within and between cultures and define identities, status, roles, responsibilities and power relations among the members of any culture. <sup>13c</sup>Abuse is the misuse of power through which the perpetrator gains control or advantage of the abused, using and causing physical or psychological harm or inciting fear of that harm. Abuse prevents persons from making free decisions and forces them to behave against their will. <sup>13d</sup>Violence is a means of control and oppression that can include emotional, social or economic force, coercion or pressure, as well as physical harm. <sup>13e</sup>A refugee is a person who has left, or has been forced to leave, his state and move to another one because of well-founded fear for his/her safety.

There is nevertheless an almost complete lack of knowledge and literature regarding the position of refugee/forced immigrant women in relation to gender-based violence in South Africa. This research, therefore, focuses on gender-based violence from the refugee/forced immigrants' perspective while also bringing out their survival strategies in the country in which they now reside. It is important to look at gender-based violence from the forced immigrant woman's point of view because there are immigrant specific factors that have contributed to these forms of violence. Menjivar and Salcido (2002) argue that the incidence of gender-based violence is not higher than it is in the local population but rather that the experiences of immigrant women in domestic violent situations are often aggravated by their positions as refugees/forced immigrants.

Involving a number of women who arrived from other African countries as refugees/forced immigrants in Cape Town, my study examines their perceptions, experiences of gender-based violence and how they deal with it. I gave attention to the following questions

- a. What is considered as gender-based violence from the women's point of view?
- b. What forms of gender-based violence do refugee/forced immigrant women have to deal with?
- c. What is the response of these women to their experiences of gender-based violence?
- d. How do they try to survive this violence?

This research accordingly examined the daily experiences of gender-based violence among African refugee/forced immigrant women in Cape Town. In the course of the

thesis I show that refugee/forced immigrant women do indeed experience different forms of gender-based violence in their daily lives. I argue that gender-based violence takes various forms and it is very difficult to separate one form of abuse/violence from the other.

I examine the factors, as highlighted by the women, which contributed to its occurrence. These involve the following: Language barriers, cultural issues, isolation from society due to their busy work schedule, isolation from families and friends, lack of protection by the law, unemployment and job insecurity. Some of the above mentioned factors could be unique to refugees/forced immigrants but some of them also affects the host population (South Africans), e.g. unemployment and job insecurity.

Through women's narratives, I tried to gain an understanding of their perceptions of gender-based violence. Most of my research participants only perceived physical abuse as the above kind of violence. They viewed other forms of violence, such as sexual and emotional abuse, as 'normal' and inherent in men.

I try to argue that the ecological model of gender-based violence is useful and applicable for analysis of my own research materials. It is nevertheless contained by its inadequate acknowledgement of the intersection of wider global or at least transnational processes on gender-based violence in the case of refugee/forced immigrant women. This model is more fully discussed in chapter two. I further argue that an institutional level of analysis will make the model everywhere versatile. (See chapter two)

#### *2.4 limitation of the Study of gender-based violence among refugees/forced immigrants*

According to Yashihuma (2001) gender-based violence in refugee/forced immigrant population remains largely unexplored and poses enormous methodological challenges to researchers such as aggregation of population groups; exclusion of certain sub-groups of refugees/forced immigrants (e.g. due to language barriers); and lack of attention to the socio-cultural context, such as values and norms from country of origin which still has an influence on the women's lives.

The lumping of people into one broad category regardless of ethnicity is common in studies of domestic violence. In this case immigrants might come from the same country but from different ethnic groups. Likewise during my own research I did not take into consideration women's individual ethnic groups, but as Yashihuma (ibid) argues, I grouped them as refugee/forced immigrant women and not as necessarily as representatives of different African countries or ethnic groupings.

The language used during data collection can lead to the exclusion of large segments of refugee/forced immigrant populations. Due to the fact that all my interviews were conducted only in English, French and Pidgin English, it led to the exclusion of people who could not speak or understand any of the languages. As a result possible participants were therefore excluded from my study because of the language barrier. Women's perceptions and behavioural responses to violence are also shaped by socio-cultural backgrounds. What is considered gender-based violence differs across different cultural groups. I looked at gender-based violence from a South African perspective, but also tried to come to grips with how the women themselves understand it.

### **3. Structure of Thesis**

This thesis is composed of seven chapters. Chapter two is the literature review that underpins gender-based violence. This chapter explains the lives of African immigrants in South Africa; it further explains gender-based violence in a South African context. In this chapter I also look at gender-based violence amongst refugees/forced immigrants and displaced people in a global context. The last part of this chapter has attended to gender-based violence from a theoretical point of view.

In chapter three I discuss the research methods that I used throughout the research process. Here I focus on the qualitative methods employed in the data collection process and why I used them. Gender-based violence is a very sensitive topic which requires particular methods to get into its intricacies. Active participation in my community and in-depth interviews were the key tools for women disclosing their experiences and evidence of gender-based violence. By explaining my personal experiences to these women also enabled them to talk about theirs. I also took into account the women's reactions and feelings during my personal observations to gain an understanding of how they felt about certain behaviours which they considered normal from their partners/husbands actions.

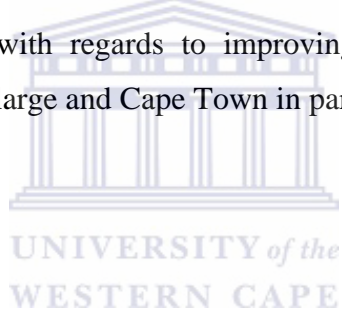
The key findings of the research are presented in chapter four. This chapter provides a vivid description of the five main research participants and others telling us about their lives. It provides us with another level to the ecological theory of violence which is the historical and political level.

Chapter five examines the data obtained from the field. Firstly it provides us with the factors that perpetuate gender-based violence among refugees/forced immigrants. It also gives us the women's experiences of gender-based violence. From in-depth

interviews and personal observation, the perceptions of the participants of what constitute gender-based violence was also brought out.

In chapter six, I discuss the survival strategies and the effects of gender-based violence on these women. It explains how women survive through these violent conditions in which they find themselves in and how it affects their lives. To survive most of the women try to create individual strategies to deal with violence. But all coping mechanisms have an awful effect on their lives.

Chapter seven presents the conclusions and recommendations for further research. It presents critical findings with regards to improving the lives of refugees/forced immigrants in the world at large and Cape Town in particular.





## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 1. Introduction

“The impact of armed conflict and specific vulnerabilities of women can be seen in all phases of displacement.” UN Sectary General (2002)<sup>16</sup>.

Displacement is viewed as an endemic phenomenon that affects the uprooted and the local communities as well as institutions that deal with refugees/forced immigrants. This includes the South African government as well as the international agencies which increasingly play a major role in dealing with displacement. Uprootment and the movement into new communities or settings involve processes such as labelling, identity management, boundary creation and maintenance, management of reciprocity, manipulation of myth, and forms of social control. Wars lead to a loss of trust in governments and existing political leaders especially in the country of origin. It also creates new diasporas with their own political interest (Colson 2003:1).

At the same time Oliver- Smith (1991) refers to forced migration and resettlement as a:

‘totalizing phenomenon’ that involves or evokes rapid and radical changes... The process is invariably difficult and painful, engendering feelings of powerlessness and alienation as people are uprooted from their familiar circumstances. Whole communities suffer acute degrees of disintegration as community structures, social networks and even kin groups may be dispersed to different resettlement sites. The effective ties between individuals and communities and their material environment are destroyed by displacement and resettlement (1991:2).

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<sup>16</sup> UN Sectary General (2002) <http://www.whrnet.org/docs/issue-refugees.html> retrieved 9/06/07

It is increasingly clear that migration, whether forced or voluntarily, is gendered and that gender relations change with such processes (Hondagneu-Soteto 2000:116).

We will look at the lives of African immigrants in South Africa as a whole. In this regard my emphasis is on gender-based violence. I subsequently focus on literature concerning gender-based violence in relation to major receiving countries. Lastly, this chapter attends to some of the other theoretical approaches that inform gender-based violence analysis in social science. Before I continue this chapter I first want to introduce the analytical framework I have chosen to use for my analysis. This is necessary to enable the reader to make sense of my argument that the ecological model, which I utilized in relation to my own fieldwork, needs some additional nuances to increase its analytical power. I will accordingly first discuss this framework.

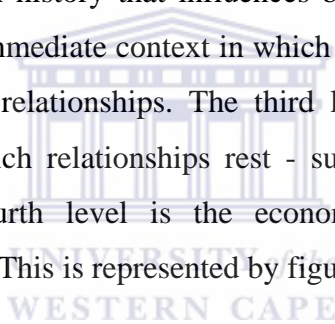
## **2. The ecological framework**

The ecological framework is often used to analyse gender-based violence. Eisikovitz and Edleson (1989) opine that there is no single-level explanation for violence but rather a need to address the interaction of multiple variables from the individual to the society across a backdrop of the social inequality of women. In order to fully comprehend and understand the prevalence of gender-based violence amongst refugee/forced immigrant, we have to first of all know how gender and violence is constructed in that particular community.

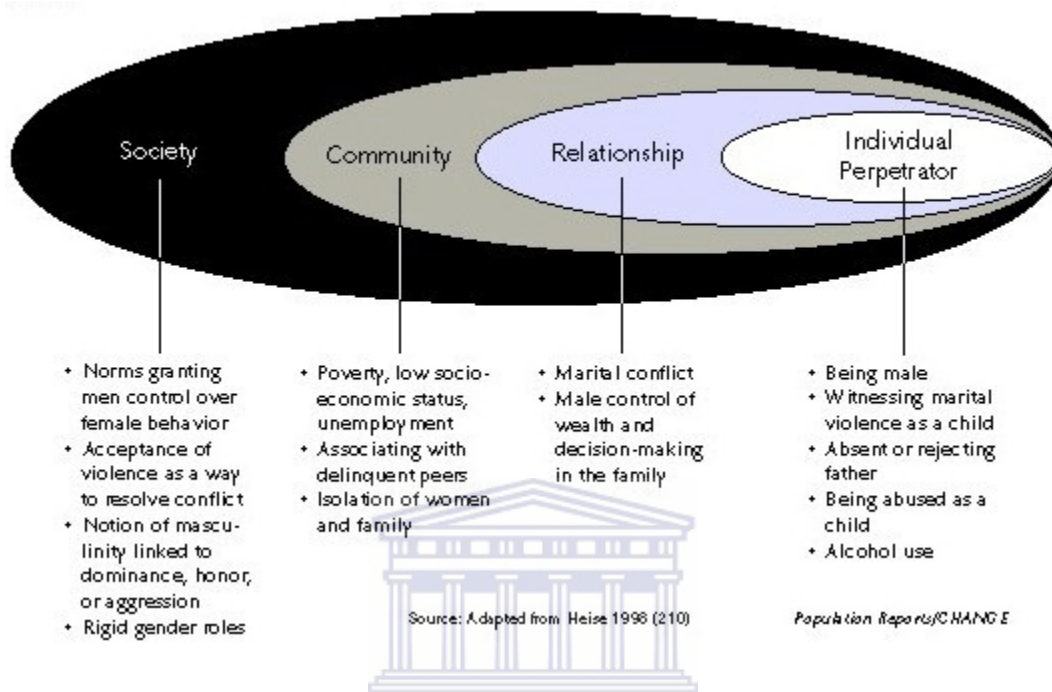
This model seeks to examine violence as the interrelationship between individuals in a family relationship, relations with friends and all other social institutions that involves human beings such as schools, mass media, churches etc. It also involves the beliefs and values according to which people live and construct a sense of self. According to this model, there is interdependence between an individual and his/her

environment. Individuals are involved in an interactive and dynamic relationship with their environments at different constantly interlinked levels in their lives that influence each other. Violence is viewed as rooted in the social, economic, cultural and political context in which it occurs. According to this theory therefore, there is no single factor that causes gender-based violence. Instead different levels interact with each other in a variety of ways in different settings and times.

Heise (1998) used the ecological model to explain the aetiology of gender violence. This model consisted of four levels of analysis; individual level, family/relationship level, community level and the societal level. The individual level in a way describes the biological and personal history that influences behaviour in a relationship. The second level looks at the immediate context in which violence takes place, frequently in the family or intimate relationships. The third level embodies the formal and informal structures on which relationships rest - such as work place, school peer groups' etcetera. The fourth level is the economic and social environments, comprising cultural norms. This is represented by figure 1 below.



**FIGURE 1**



Looking at domestic violence from a refugee's/forced immigrant's point of view, I think the ecological perspective might be quite useful because it broadens the scope and understanding of gender-based violence while also creating different ways and intersecting levels of understanding it. According to this model violence in society could be compared to the human body, which is made up of various parts, each of which contributes to the functioning of the whole body. The model is very important in that it has given us a broader perspective in looking at various factors that impact on gender-based violence. It offers a multidimensional scope of understanding gender-based violence among refugee/forced immigrant from an individual, family, community to the societal level.

At the individual level factors such as dislocated sociocultural support structures, low economic status and language barriers can increase the occurrence of gender-based violence among refugee/forced immigrants (Menjivar and Salcido 2002). At the family level gender-based violence refers to the processes in the family such as stress,

family environment, pre-arrival experiences (from home country), post-arrival experiences (host country) such as settlement challenges, and traditional masculine identities. These are important factors in the incidence and manifestations of gender-based violence among refugee/forced immigrant women (Pittaway 2004). Stress associated with financial difficulties and unemployment is one area that may affect a family's capacity to function (Little and Kantor 2002: 134). Higher rates of gender-based violence may be associated with the stresses and strains of socioeconomic hardship (Kantor and Straus 1999).

Community factors refer to the community the family lives in, formal and informal social support, social isolation, job availability and access to community services (shelter, food stamps, transportation, mental and health services) (Little and Kantor 2002:135). For the purpose of my own study, I want to argue that an institutional level of analysis can be added. Issues such as lack of legislation or policies are the institutional responses which make the provision of shelters, access to health services/legal protection etcetera possible in the first instance.

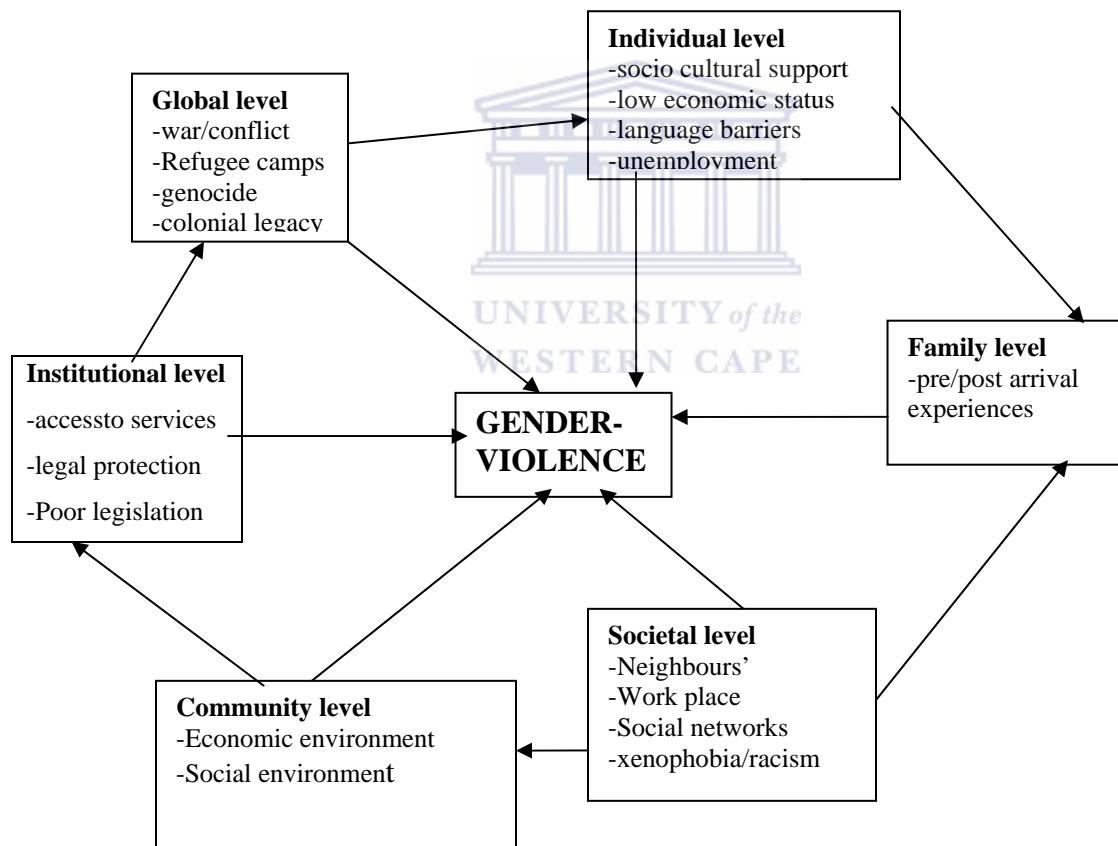
At the societal level, laws and politics aimed at protecting refugee/forced immigrant women can mediate gender-based violence. Refugee/forced immigrant women are often reluctant to contact the police if they are experiencing gender-based violence due to xenophobia and racism (Rees & Pease 2006). Service support is denied to refugees/forced immigrants with respect to their status (Burman et al 2004). Individual, family, community and societal factors have a great impact on the occurrence of gender-based violence with respect to refugees/forced immigrants.

The ecological model, as it is currently used, will be very helpful for my own study, but it also needs to be contextualized since it will not play out in exactly similar ways for all women. Finally the ecological model also does not give much attention to global processes which affects and even lead to an escalation of all the processes and issues that impact on gender-based violence. They include, situations of conflict, war,

oppression by the state, persecution and such in the country of origin, which can exacerbate the violence, lead to the forced migration of people and add additional layers of causes and effects in relation to gender violence, as I discussed in Chapter 1 (Introduction). I will include global political process for the purpose of analyzing my research as seen on the diagram below.

**FIGUR 2**

**The ecological model of gender-based violence.**



However, the ecological model often does not look at violence from the victim's point of view but rather concentrates on the perpetrators - in most cases the men. I

have therefore modified the model by focusing on the women thus we can clearly see the context in which gender-based violence occurs.

### **3. The lives of refugees/African immigrants in South Africa.**

As discussed above, different intersecting levels are always dynamically implicated in gender-based violence. Accordingly the global or transnational affect what happens in South Africa. At the same time the latter country is increasingly seen as stable and prosperous and as a haven for citizens of other African countries. Since 1994 the number of African immigrants/refugees has increased markedly. At the same time, South Africans have shown more negative attitudes towards non-citizens; migrants and refugees and especially African immigrants. These have been documented in a number of studies (Crush 2000; Crush and McDonald 1999; Danso and McDonald 2000; McDonald 1998; Morris 1998). Crush and McDonald (1999) for example, argues that South Africa has the highest opposition to immigration in the world. About 25% of South Africans want a total ban on immigration and 45% support strict limits on the number of immigrants allowed into the country. Only 17% would support a more flexible policy to the availability of jobs and only 6% support a totally open policy of immigration.

Harris (2001) is of the opinion that African immigrants are represented in a number of negative ways throughout South African society. Some South Africans have argued that African immigrants have jeopardized the ability of the government to provide resources and employment, while also supposedly increasing the level of crime. African immigrants are moreover portrayed as carriers of disease such as HIV/AIDS, TB and other infections.

Some South Africans opine that African immigrants in South Africa have taken their jobs, but it can equally be argued that African immigrants in South Africa potentially

provide jobs to some South Africans. For example African immigrants have employed them to sell goods or make use of South Africans for other kinds of work.

A number of researchers have focused on undocumented immigrants (Madson 2004; Adler et al. 2003; Matloff 1995). Matloff (1995) indicated that the influx of African immigrants into South Africa has resulted in unrest in this country. There is an increasing arrival of illegal immigrants into South Africa and a majority of them are destitute and jobless and as a result they further contribute to the squatter problem (Adler and Gielen 2003). According to reports of Christian Democratic Party (2006) there might be up to eight million illegal immigrants in South Africa. These immigrants are viewed as threats to the national economy and as potentially leading to a general unrest in the nation (Matloff 1995).

The recent xenophobic attack and the killing of African immigrants in South Africa further underscore the fact that South Africans do not want African immigrants in South Africa. A recent survey by the Human Science research council revealed that 70% of South Africans do not want African immigrants in this country<sup>17</sup>

#### **4. Gender-based violence in South Africa.**

The World Bank Report on gender violence indicates that each society has mechanisms that legitimize, obscure, deny and therefore perpetuate gender-based violence (Wright 1995:9 in Artz 2001). This is particularly meaningful for the South African context where violence against women is often seen as a pandemic (Artz 2001). There are no reliable South African statistical databases on the prevalence of domestic violence and it is difficult to gain a clear picture of the enormity of it in this country (Gilbert 1996). Violence in South Africa is seen as “rooted in the social context and related to problems such as poverty, unemployment, poor housing, rapid urbanization, gender inequalities, erosion of family and ‘social decay’ in a society in

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<sup>17</sup> A representative from the Human Science Research council on Morning Live on eTV in June 2008



transition” (Gilbert 1996:870). Women abuse then is seen as a classical outcome of social and historical forces and it is inevitably contextualized against the legacy of apartheid (Gibson et al. 2005: 149). Simultaneously, Shefer (1995) argues that there is increasing evidence that the occurrence of domestic violence is on the rise in South Africa. This is evident in the fact that e.g. in 1999 8.8 per 100 000 of the female population aged 14 years and older died at the hands of their partners (Mathews et al. 2004). According to the Medical Research Council (MRC) a woman is shot to death by her current or former partner every six hours and such cases rose by 78% between 1990-1999 (IRINnews.org 2006). The Medical Research Council also found that one in nine women reported being raped (Jewkes and Abrahams 2002).

A study by Jewkes et al. (2000) of three South African provinces, revealed that almost a quarter women reported having being abused in their lifetime by a current or ex-partner. They further revealed that up to half of the women in their sample were affected by emotional or financial abuse, with 51% of women in the Eastern Cape, 50% in Mpumalanga and 40% in Northern Province. In the same way another study undertaken with a sample of 168 women drawn from 15 rural communities in the Southern Cape, estimated that an average of 80% of rural women are victims of domestic violence (Artz 1999). A study conducted with 1394 men working for three Cape Town municipalities further indicated that approximately 44% of the men admitted that they abused their female partners (Abrahams et al 1999). Maconachie et al (1993) indicated that domestic violence is the most insidious form of violence against individuals in South Africa.

Violence against women in South Africa has been declared a pandemic (Artz 2001:5). Artz (Ibid) further explains that resources and support systems to assist and protect victims of gender-based violence are few and inadequately funded. According to Gibson et al. (2005) gender-based violence in South Africa has been contextualized against the legacy of oppressive patriarchal and apartheid system. In the research

Gibson et al. (ibid) did in three areas in Cape Town 76 per cent of the participants had been physically abused during the previous six months.

It is clear from the above that a considerable number of studies have been done in South Africa on gender-based violence in recent years. However, a study of gender-based violence in refugee/forced immigrant communities is absent. As a result of this absence in the literature I have drawn on studies on domestic violence and immigrant research from other parts of the world as well.

## **5. Gender-based violence and refugees/forced immigrants**

The recent xenophobic attacks in South Africa targeted women and children because they denote a more permanent move and lying down of roots. Some of these women were raped and their homes burned down or looted.

‘Migrant and refugee women in South Africa tend to emphasise socio-economic needs and trauma over mental ones and, as such, may depict the primary ways in which they are targeted as by having their possessions taken from them’<sup>18</sup>

Due to inadequate literature on African immigrants and gender-based violence in South Africa I reviewed literature from other parts of the world. Pittaway (2002) stresses that literature referring to gender-based violence among refugees/forced immigrants are scarce. However, a number of studies have been undertaken involving refugees. They lay emphasis on the fact that being a refugee/forced immigrant has a great impact on the experiences of gender-based violence (Abraham 2000; Menjivar 2000; Menjivar and Salcido 2002 Rees 2004 and Rees and Pease 2006).

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<sup>18</sup> Palmary, I. (2005). Sited in Fuller R (2008). Double jeopardy women migrants and refugees in South Africa. Perspectives .www.boell.org.za accessed 6 /08/08

Some studies emphasize social isolation, economic status, and inadequate access to service and support groups (Abraham 2000; Sharma 2001 and Yoshioka et al. 2003). For example, Yoshioka et al. (2003) identified a decrease in social and economic status as factors that increase gender-based violence among South Asian, African American and Hispanic refugee communities in the United States. Isolation from families and friends further enhance gender-based violence among refugee/forced immigrant women (Abraham 2000).

The negotiation of values and norms in the country of settlement adds to the risk of gender-based violence. When people migrate to other countries they are informed by their values and norms, however, when they get to the new country they are faced with conflicting ideas and practices (Caetano et al. 2005). Women in most African countries for example play the subordinate role of house wives while the men are constructed as breadwinners or providers of money or financial wherewithal. But after migration these 'traditional' roles change and women become the income earners in their families. As a result the men usually become violent to counter-act the women's growing economic power in the household.

Others have argued that refugees/forced immigrants women face multiple challenges. Some of which include their occupation, education and the social network in the host country (Menjivar 2000). For example the women in my study, upon arrival in Cape Town, have challenges creating new social networks and finding jobs due to language barriers. They might have had sound educational backgrounds in their countries of origin but when they get here this education becomes virtually useless due the language in which they studied. As a result they are forced to take up jobs which do not require formal education. Bui and Morash (1999) for example observed that immigrant women from Vietnam arrived from their host countries with a disadvantage in relation to immigrant men concerning social status and basic human

capital and resources. Immigrant women often live in their host countries as dependents of men or have to work in low paid jobs.

Some studies have documented the prevalence of and problems concerning gender-based violence among specific refugee communities in receiving countries (Abraham 2000; Bauer et al. 2000; Kaplan and Webster 2003 and Perilla et al. 1994). Bauer et al. (2000), for example examined the barriers to health care for abused Latina and Asian women in the United States. Studies on South Asian women in the United State found that there are ‘immigrant specific’ factors, such as isolation, that exacerbate the occurrence of gender-based violence. Among these the author identified three levels of isolation that may affect violence -the quality of a woman’s relationship with her partner, the frequency and quality of social interaction with her friends, relatives and co-workers, and access to and participation in the ethnic community (Abraham 2000: 221).

Other studies have related patriarchal cultural values to domestic violence in some refugee/forced migrant communities (Bhuyan et al. 2005; Menjivar and Salcido 2002; Perilla et al. 1994; Rees and Pease 2006; and Yoshihama 2001). Apparently violence is not endemic in one particular society, but these writers emphasize the close link between violence and the reinforcement of traditional roles for women by their partners. In this case a kind of ‘cultural’ argument is used to explain gender inequality in certain communities/societies. In this regard I have to stress that I do not understand culture as static but rather as changing with time and space. Thus Rees and Pease (2006) argue that culture is a system of shared beliefs, customs, behaviours and values that are operationalized and constantly emerging in practices, and influenced by both imposed and voluntary change. Thus culture should not be understood as a static entity that could somehow be blamed for domestic and family violence. Studies indicate that gender-based violence is more common in some cultural groupings than in others. Accordingly some cultural values amongst certain immigrant communities enhance gender-based violence. Even though culture changes

over time and space some refugee communities maintain and even idealize some aspects of their cultural heritage, which in turn, can in one way or another perpetuate gender-based violence.

Literature concerning gender-based violence in culturally and ethnically diverse populations that moved to western countries frequently argue that cultural difference, gender roles, shame and collectivism combine with factors related to the experience of migration to place immigrant and refugee women at heightened risk from domestic violence (Rees and Pease 2006; Menjivar and Salcido 2002). Domestic violence is then perceived as somehow 'cultural' in relation to some communities and consequently as not warranting a serious response from authorities such as police and magistrates, thereby placing women at greater risk from violent partners.

Yoshihama (2001), for example, argues that the Japanese culture influences the experience of domestic violence among Japanese women in the United States. Conflict avoidance, acceptance of male domination, the value of collective welfare, and aversion to help seeking were presented as dominant factors that impact on gender-based violence (2000:214). Yoshioka et al. (2003) also identified issues such as isolation, low socioeconomic status and, racism as factors leading to the increase of domestic violence amongst refugee communities in the United States. Once again, although it is not necessarily analysed in this way, it is apparent that an ecological framework is useful to relate the various issues that intersect in gender-based violence in various ways at a variety of level (see p 24).

According to Song (1996) cultural factors have influenced the help seeking behaviours of Korean women who experience domestic violence in Australia. She explains that the status of women in Korean society is critical to understanding behaviour and intervention needs of such females in Australia. She argued that Korean women have a low social status and that this is transferred to Australia where the men still treat them like second class people. Song further asserts that the

importance of the length stay in Australia, level of integration, individual factors and language skills have a great impact on women's independence. The longer the women live in Australia, the more they became integrated into the Australian way of life. This in turn, can either lower levels of gender-based violence or, contrastingly, increase as men try to retain their power and control in at least one level of their lives in a new country.

In Canada Shirwadkar (2004) focused on oppressive gender roles regarding Indian immigrant women. She found that despite progressive policies of multiculturalism and domestic violence policies in Canada, Indian women continue to experience gender-based violence and repressive gender roles. Shirwadkar argued that abused immigrant Indian women in Canada do not have the same knowledge or access to the justice system as other women, and that many of them do not report violence to the police because the women have high regard for marriage and believe it has to be upheld at all cost. Thus indicating that, the occurrence of violence is a result of multiple factors as seen in the ecological model.

Some writers have attributed gender-based violence amongst immigrants to stress. On arrival in the host country immigrants and refugees expect a better life than what they left behind in their home country. But some of their hopes are shattered when they realize things are not what they expected –this results in stress. Menjivar and Salcido (2002) further argue that refugee/forced immigrant women are unable to return home because of state persecution and other significant risks to their well-being in their country of origin. They then have to bear the abuse as best they can.

Some researchers looked at individual factors that influence gender-based violence in the groups under study. Perilla et al. (1994) for example, observed that stressors stemming from environmental sources, such as work and school contribute to the occurrence of gender-based violence amongst immigrant Latino women in the United States. In relation to my study many refugees/forced immigrants in South Africa have

embarked on studies to better their lives thereby increasing their personal stress. The majority of those who study are men, who do so while also taking care of their families in South Africa as well as family back home. Menjivar and Salcido (2002) also observed that the incidence of domestic violence amongst immigrants may be attributed to specific circumstances that can be stressors. These include inadequate host language skills, cultural background, racism, unemployment, uncertain legal status and prior experiences such as rape in their home countries can prevent women from seeking assistance and early intervention and therefore reinforces strategies of violent behaviour by perpetrators. Pittaway (2004) argues that pre-arrival experiences, traditional masculine identities and settlement challenges and barriers are important factors in the incidence and manifestations of domestic violence amongst refugee women. This is especially the case in South Africa where forced immigrants or refugees are not formally resettled. When this group of people get into South Africa they are only given the necessary documents to stay in the country and they have to take care of their own accommodation and everyday survival.

It has been argued that there is a link between migration experiences and violence. In this regard Burman et al. (2004) argues that the eligibility of service support is denied to many women by virtue of their immigration status and they are accordingly excluded from service and welfare support. Furthermore Sharma (2001) stresses that immigrant and minority women are often reluctant to contact the police if they experience domestic violence primarily because of institutionalized racism. Rees and Pease (2006) argue, racism and xenophobia amongst officials in some countries negatively affects refugees/forced immigrant women who try to access support from mainstream health and welfare services.

Many studies conclude that immigration or mass movement also happens for economic reasons. In this regard Kofman et al. (2000) argues that many female immigrants move to seek jobs in the 'casualized welfare sector' such as domestic work, caring for dependent children and elderly disabled people. Others have

attended to immigrants' way of coping in their new resettled environment, showing that immigrant women can become adept at locating and using financial and social services available in the new society to gain extra sources of support than their men. (Franz 2003a; and Ong 2003).

In the next section I will attend more closely to other theoretical approaches to gender-based violence.

## **6. Theoretical approaches to gender-based violence**

There is a wide variety of theoretical approaches to studies of gender violence in the social science. I will try to clarify the most common approaches including social learning theory, psychological theories, the impact of patriarchy and feminist theories. Theoretical frameworks attempt to define the boundaries of violence and hence, where to intervene if we want to control it. Each theoretical approach in a sense tries to provide a way to place gender-based violence in a larger analytical framework of society. Multiple theoretical perspectives have accordingly been developed to try to understand and address gender-based violence.

### ***6.1 Social learning theory***

Social learning theory argues that violence is a form of socialized behaviour that is reproduced from generation to generation from parents to children. Growing up, children see their parents as role models and tend to behave in similar ways when they themselves grow up. Thus children learn from their parents and tend to perpetuate violent behaviour in their own families/relationships.

Bandura (1977) coined the term 'social learning' to describe how such socialization into violent behaviour happens as a result of direct reinforcement by abusers and observation by children. Straus et al. (1980) found that children witnessing parental



violence are three times more likely to be violent to their own partners than those who were raised with non violent parents. Empirical evidence also found that the effect of witnessing violence varied according to gender. O’Leary (1988) argued that males who witness parental violence are more likely to abuse their own partners than females in the same violent situation.

Others have stressed that aggression is learned behaviour (McCue 1995) that is transmitted from generation to generation and reinforced by a society that promotes belligerent behaviour. In the case of South Africa, Abrahams and Jewkes (2005) similarly argue that gender violence is a learned response. They further indicated that witnessing the abuse of one’s mother as a child is associated with engaging in several types of violent behaviour in adulthood, including domestic violence. Gelles and Cornell (1990) also argue that there is a clear evidence that men who grew up in violent families are more likely to abuse their partners than men who did not experience violence in their childhood environment. The family therefore, can be regarded as the ‘cradle’ of violence because experiences of violence in childhood and in family life are socialized into a cycle of violence within the wider society in many forms (McKendrick and Hoffmann 1990:164).

The social learning theory nevertheless fails to explain why certain individuals who were exposed to family abuse during their childhood have not resorted to violence in adulthood, and why some who were never exposed to violence have resorted to violence in their adulthood.

## ***6.2 Psychological theories.***

The above was largely influenced by the work of Gelles and Strauss, (1979). They argue that violence is a result of various psychological abnormalities, such as inadequate self-control, sadism, and psychopathology. Psychological theories focus on the personality of the victim and the perpetrator. The personality traits of an

individual such as aggressiveness, low self esteem and lack of power is perceived to impel them to be violent. According to this theory, the individual level of stress, anxiety and anger comes into play when explaining, e. g. men's violent attitudes. Several factors can increase the stress level of an individual, e.g. poverty and unemployment in South Africa can heighten stress level.

Psychological theory further suggests that violence is a result of interference in attaining an objective (Wieche 1998:5). The goal may e.g. be for an unemployed person to get a job. An early study by Gelles (1972) emphasized the role of social class in violence, arguing that working class individuals engage in it because of their limited prospects for educational and occupational attainments. When these opportunities are blocked, it results in frustrations which, in turn, can lead to violent behaviour. Men can become individually abusive in response to social and environmental pressure on them. For example, an unemployed father, frustrated by his inability to find work to support his family, may physically or verbally lash out at his spouse and children (Muller 1996).

In relation to African immigrants/refugees in South Africa, their inability to get jobs in the country may have an impact on interpersonal gender-based violence. Adler and Gielen (2003) indicated that there is an increasing influx of illegal immigrants into South Africa and a majority of them are struggling to make a living. While violence cut across the social strata, Kosloff (1993) argues it is more common among the more economically disadvantaged.

Looking at the situation of African immigrants in South Africa, one may be tempted to think that their level of depression, frustration and anxiety might influence their responses and could even lead to violence. While frustration resulting from a person's inability to attain certain goals might lead to violence, violence is influenced by multiple factors such as the life experiences of an individual, personality traits, and environmental conditions.

The main criticism of the psychological theory is the occurrence of violence amongst people who might be considered in an economically stable situation in society or among people without any specific personality disorder. It may also be criticized for neglecting the cultural aspects of society. As a result, Hearn, (1996) criticized this theory for neglecting questions of power, cultural and historical relativity, and morality. On the other hand, the stress theory of violence mostly refers to men, although women may have similar life experiences and stress, came from violent homes, have childhood history of abuse, get drunk, fired from work, suffer economic hardship etcetera -yet relatively few women resort to physical abuse (Dabby 2007).

### ***6.3 The impact of Patriarchy***

This approach seeks to explain domestic violence in relation to gender relations and hierarchy in particular cultural settings, e.g. where women and men have been socialized to view females as inferior to males. Women are raised to believe that men are in control of their lives and that deviation from the norm needs a form of correction. This is especially true within some African societies. In the community where I grew up for example, it is common for a man to say “women of today are not like the women of old”. This implies that the women of today do not respect their husbands anymore. Before, for example, a woman was not allowed to talk when men are conversing. Women were socialized to think that their place was in the kitchen. As result therefore, gender-based violence has been normalized and internalized to an extent that it is viewed as part of their daily lives.

Some researchers e.g. McCue (1995), explains that men abuse women because it is socially and culturally accepted. Society expects men to be dominant over women. Where this dominance cannot be achieved, violence is used as a means of regaining it. De Sousa (1991) therefore suggests that violence is an accepted means of control

in society. Violence or the threat of it is used to maintain patriarchal dominance and to keep women in a subordinate position (Gelles and Cornell 1990).

Men as a group are commonly represented in discourses of masculinity as dominant and powerful (Gibson et al. 2005:153). Wood and Jewkes (1998) argue that violence against women in South Africa is often perceived as socially acceptable to both men and women of all ages. These researchers argue that violence has become part of the South African male identity. Mager (1998) writes that violent practices are deployed by men against women in an attempt to maintain a particular image and to prove that they are real men. More generally, Artz (2001) argues that women in South Africa are victims of deeply patriarchal norms that teach men to view women as possessions, with a result that tradition and stereotypes that repress women and male domination, is encouraged at an early age.

In South Africa, domestic violence and the battering of women is often understood as the embodiment of African society's most fundamental inequalities, problems and conflicts (Gibson, et al 2005:149). Violent masculinities are often explained as an outcome of male response to colonial and apartheid oppression. The ways of being a man or a woman are largely reified and reproduced through being enculturated and socialized into accepted gendered ideas and practices, media representations, legislative measures, education and exposure to the submerge emphasis on male domination and female subservience in everyday life. Abrahams (2004) has also argued that, although violence in South Africa is multi-factorial and that the role of apartheid cannot be ruled out.

According to Mohanty (2003) gender is not just about natural division of sex, but is about understanding the social organization of differences - in particular in relation to race and class dimensions that, in turn, affect the structure of economic and political systems of power. Meeto and Mirza (2007) argue that race, class and patriarchy are embedded in South Africa social, political and economic systems and are manifested

in the legal and judicial systems. As a result gender-based violence becomes a way of maintaining control over female behaviour.

Bourdieu (1998) argues “male domination is so rooted in our collective unconscious that we no longer even see it”. He further explains that it is a kind of violence that is hardly noticed, almost invisible for the victim, on whom it is perpetrated. More recent studies on domestic violence draw on this theory and argue that male domination has been normalized and frequently perceived as not unusual in every day life in some societies. In the most part the roles played by each member of society is informed by culture. In this regard Wattie (2004) argues that unequal power relations form and are shaped by everyday social practices and are internalized by individuals and by the community. In this respect, it is hard to recognize and challenge gender-based violence because it is part and parcel of every day domestic, community and work life.

#### ***6.4 Feminist theories***

Feminist theories do not have a single founder; rather it is a collective of ideas by various people Corey (2001). Ganley (1995) supports this view and states that there is no single feminist analysis of domestic violence, but a multitude of perspectives. Feminist approaches to understanding domestic violence are based on the assumption that men target women to prove that they are real men. Feminist seek to understand why men abuse their partners. Bograd (1988) has identified four common strains to domestic violence - these are;

- (i) That as the dominant class, men have differential access to material and symbolic resources and women are devalued as secondary and inferior.
- (ii) Intimate partner abuse is a predictable and common dimension of normal family life.

- (iii) Women's experiences are often defined as inferior because male domination influences all aspects of life.
- (iv) The feminist perspective is dedicated to advocacy for women.

Bagrad (1998) explains that heterosexual intimate relations are structured along lines of gender and power. Wife abuse is thus conceived not as an aberrant phenomenon but as a fundamental dimension in most families. Feminist theories have presented the picture of the family as a system of social expectations regarding masculinity and femininity as a primary driver of relationships. Feminist therefore, argue that one's behaviour in a relationship is socially constructed and that this creates and maintain male power within the family and society at large (Kupers 1997:113).

Other feminist have argued that violence and the threats of violence are gendered social acts that establish and maintain control of men over women (Baker 1997; Lampert 1996). Partner violence is more likely to occur under conditions in which men's sense of masculinity is threatened. Qualitative studies find that men report perpetrating partner assaults when they perceive a threat to their authority or status (Dobash and Dobash 1998). Violence is deeply located in the institutional and ideological fabrics of society (Lampert 1996). Lampert (ibid) further argues that women's roles are socially constructed and the inequalities are institutionalized in society.

As the dominant class men have different access to important material and symbolic resources, while women are devalued as secondary and inferior (Yllo and Bograd 1998). Feminists further argue there are many ways in which men as a group maintain women in oppressed social positions. Abuse is the most effective, short-term means of social control.

Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) have characterized mainstream feminism into 3 central elements;

-Firstly gender is central to understanding social relations, institutions and processes.

-Secondly, gender relations are viewed as problematic since they are linked to dominance, inequality and conflict.

-Thirdly, gender relations are socially constructed since they are a result of cultural and historical conditions that can be changed by human actions.

Some feminist theorists such as Richardson and Robison (1993) have argued that feminist theory offers an explanation of how and why women have less power than men and how this unbalance could be challenged and transformed. Feminism therefore tries to account for women's subordinate positions in society. The fundamental assumption of feminism is that society has been historically structured in patriarchy. According to this model law and religion have traditionally endorsed the husband's authority and justified his use of violence over his wife and children (Cunningham et al. 1998:20). This has been important in producing useful ideas on challenging gender inequality and leading to social, economic and sometimes political transformations of society (Richardson and Robinson 1993).

Critics of the feminist perspective argue that patriarchy and the gendered view of power and control do not necessarily provide adequate conceptual frameworks for other forms of violence such as child abuse and same sex violence (Featherstone 1997).

## **7. Conclusion**

The current study takes place against the background of the above-mentioned theories. It has looked at a number of theoretical frameworks for understanding gender-based violence. These theories have highlighted the importance of individual,

psychological, social, cultural and political factors in relation to the occurrence of gender-based violence in societies. These factors emerged within these theories in different ways as a result the need for intervention according to the various theories. The ecological model encompasses all the other theories in looking at gender-based violence as a multi-factorial issue. The ecological model has included the individual, family, community and societal as all inclusive in understanding gender-based violence in every society. In the case of refugee/forced immigrant women I have extended this model to include the institutional and the global level which together with the above mentioned levels interact with each other.

The following chapter describes the research methods which I think is very important when looking at a very sensitive topic like gender-based violence.





## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODS

#### 1. Introduction

This research was based in Cape Town, more specifically two suburbs namely Maitland and Brooklyn. The history of Cape Town dates back to very ancient times. Prior to European settlement, it was inhabited periodically by San hunters-gatherers and the nomadic Khoi-Khoi.<sup>19</sup>

Cape Town is the third most populous city in South Africa, forming part of the metropolitan municipality of the city of Cape Town. It is the provincial capital, as well as the legislative capital of South Africa, where the national parliament and many government offices are located.<sup>20</sup> According to the 2001 census, the city has a population of 2.95 million and a land area of about 2,499 square kilometres and a population density of 1,158 people per square kilometres.<sup>21</sup>

Maitland and Brooklyn are both suburbs of Cape Town. Brooklyn is found in Milnerton which is situated in the North Atlantic Coast of Cape Town in the Western Province. Milnerton got its name in 1902 and became a municipality in 1905 and it is named after Sir Alfred Milner, British High Commissioner.

#### 2. Selection of participants

The selection of participants for this study was based on a snowball sampling technique.

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.routes.co.za/wc/capetown.index.html>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.routes.co.za/wc/capetown.index.html>

<sup>21</sup> Cape Town municipal profile 2006. Municipal Demographic Board.

## ***2.1 Personal contacts***

The delicacy of the topic asks for various methods to gain entry into the world of women. In this regard, I attended several workshops with refugee women at the Centre for the Healing of Memory in Wynberg. These workshops were organized by Whole World Women Association, a non governmental organisation that caters for the needs of refugee women and children. During those workshops I spent a lot of time with other women and with their informed consent interviews were conducted with some of them. During these workshops I arranged for further contacts with the women and as I gained their trust before they consented to discuss their experiences of gender-based violence to me.

By recounting my personal experiences to these women we could immediately relate as a result they were open to share their personal life experiences. Some women expressed their dismay to hear that I was also going through the same things like them. We have since then shared our experiences on a regular basis and hope to form a support group so that we can help other women. In this space women can share their stories without fears of retribution or discomfort as we are all in the same boat.

## **3. Data collection techniques**

The main data collection techniques included participant observations and in-depth interviews. A qualitative research approach has been selected in the study because it provides a comprehensive understanding of complex social settings and it is flexible in understanding complex social behaviours. Interviews were based on a one-to-one interaction due to the sensitivity of the topic.

### ***3.1 Participant observation***

Anthropology's method of participant observation in a natural setting over a period of time is an effective way to study social marginal groups (Yoshihama 2001). The five key informants live quite close to me and I spent most of my day in each of their houses. I often went to one of them in the morning and only came back home at night. During this time I participated in whatever activity was going on in their houses while also observing. With their informed consent I kept detailed field notes documenting their every day lives and interactions, body language, emotional state and such.

### **3.2 Interviews**

Walter et al (2004) argues that interviews are to be conducted as free flowing conversations in the course of routine daily activities in order to diminish distortions to statements. Throughout the research I interviewed 25 participants, 5 being key participants and 20 other women who were not key participants. I met some of the women during workshops with refugee women organized by Whole World Women Association. During these workshops, I started building up relationships with these women by telling them what I was doing at the University and most of them became interested and opted to participate. During the workshops I built long lasting relationships with most of the women who became very interested in my research and the fact that I was doing a masters degree. These relationships have continued and we have become very close friends. As a result of the confidence in me most of my participants were able to share their most intimate moments with me especially when they heard about my own experiences on gender-based violence and of being a refugee/forced immigrant. Although I was continuously aware my own experience of gender violence and my subjectivity influenced my choice of research topic and also affected my interaction with participants, I feel unable to narrate this aspect for the purpose of this thesis. It is simply too personal and painful for me. I will thus not engage in auto ethnography to enhance my thesis.

The selection of the key participants was based on the fact that they lived close to my residential area. The five main research participants live in the Brooklyn and Maitland area because I live in Brooklyn myself and Maitland is just a stone's throw from where I live. They were also limited to the Maitland and Brooklyn regions because these areas have been "favoured" by African immigrants in recent years.

Most of my interviews were conducted as normal conversations. In-depth interviews allowed me to get an insight into the minds of the research participants. Yashihama (2001) noted that studies of immigrants who have limited English proficiency necessitate instruments in their native language. As a result I conducted the interviews in three languages depending on the one that was most suitable and convenient to the research participant. Face to face interviews were conducted in French, English or Pidgin English depending on the one most preferable by the respondent. Written consent was obtained from each participant. Some interviews were tape recorded with the consent of the respondent with each interview lasting on average for 45 minutes.

In cases where the participant was being abused, I made sure that adequate information was provided as to where they could seek help. They were provided information on the various domestic violent help lines save houses and facilities available to them both in and around their area of residence.

The age range of my informant was from about 18 – 45. Only those who were in a heterosexual relationship were selected because it would have been very difficult to find African immigrants in same sex relationships. This not to say they do not get involved in such relationships, they do but they try as much as possible to keep it a secret. My study focused on women because they present the majority in violent relationships as compared to men. According to Campbell (1993) even when there is physical aggression against men, women's injuries tend to be more severe due to the disparity in height and weight between the two. Most often men are the perpetrators

of intimate violence and women their victims. During the study both the participants and I had to deal with this reality. I interviewed and observed 25 refugees/forced immigrant women and selected five case studies to represent as the main empirical basis of my empirical work as seen below.

### *3.3 A tabulated description of the main research participants*

**TABLE 1**

**Participants**

<b>variables</b>	<b>Sandrine</b>	<b>Pauline</b>	<b>Patricia</b>	<b>Philo</b>	<b>Christel</b>
<b>Age</b>	35	44	27	29	32
<b>Marital status</b>	Married	Widow	Not married	Divorced	Separated
<b>Home country</b>	Congo	Angola	Congo	Burundi	Cameroon
<b>Home language</b>	French/Lingala and English	Portuguese and English	French and Lingala	Swahili	English
<b>Number of children</b>	4	3	2	1	2
<b>Employment status</b>	Business	unemployed	Business	Hair dresser	Student/work
<b>Number of dependents</b>	2	None	1	none	3
<b>Number of years in SA</b>	6	12	About 5	3	4

Figure 2 indicates that all the participants were based in the Cape Town Metropolitan region. They also ranged between the ages of 27-45. One of the participants is married; one is a widow, one divorced, one separated and the other one not married. Two participants had no dependents and the other three had people who depended on them economically. Two of them are from Congo, one from Angola, Burundi and Cameroon respectively. Two of the participants spoke French as their first language while another one spoke Portuguese, one Swahili, and the other one spoke English. Participant 1 has four children, participant 2 has three children while participant 3 has two children, Participant 4 has one child and participant 5 has two children. Employment wise, one of the women is a hairdresser, the other employed, one unemployed and the other two are doing petty business. All participants in this research have been in the country for not less than three years. They all live in their various houses with other people who are not depended on them but they share the burdens of the rents and all bills together.

#### **4. Study method**

The study method in my research process was based on literature review and secondary data. This research was also based on the use of qualitative and participatory research methods (semi structured interviews, in-depth interviews and informal discussions).

#### **5. Method of data analysis**

Creswell (1994:155) proposed the following guidelines for a qualitative data analysis, which I adhered to.

- Following Creswell's proposal all my interviews were transcribed individually from my tape-recorder into my note book. I also did personal observations which were also incorporated into the record.
- Transcripts were coded, grouping the responses of the research participants into various topics/keywords to bring out their similarities and differences.
- Transcripts were supplemented with additional information obtained from personal observation such as attitudes, perceptions and language during interviews.
- The transcripts were checked on a regular basis to avoid omissions.
- Topics were grouped into various categories. The various topics were later grouped into even wider categories based on their relationships to each other.
- Quotations were later on recognized to support the various categories. I used direct quotes from my research participants to analysis my data.

## **6. Ethical statement**

I recognized and ensured that respect, protection and promotion of the rights of participants were made intrinsic to every stage and level of research undertaken. This research provided for the comfort of the participants as well as for protection against all possible and potential risk. A safety plan was developed with each individual participant and they were referred to the nearest domestic violence shelters available in their area.

The relevant social, cultural and historical background of the research participants were taken into consideration and given appropriate importance in the planning and

conducting of this research. Given the fact that some of the participants, were from a currently war-torn country (the Democratic Republic of Congo), special attention was given in relation to their historical background. This is so because in most wars women and children are the first victims.

I obtained consent from the research participants based on adequate briefing given to them about the details of the project.

- The updates were given both verbally and in writing in a manner and language that the participants knew and understood.
- Participation in this research project was voluntary and participants were allowed to withdraw at any stage of the research process.
- Participants were informed about the use of tape recorders in case of any recording.
- The participant had to choose whether or not to be part of the research.
- They also had the right to withdraw at any stage of the research process without assigning any reason.

Confidentiality, anonymity and privacy were guaranteed. Anonymity and privacy were inherent of all participants. Research on behaviour is more than ethical knowledge and cognitive choices. It also involves the researcher's personal morals (Kvole 1996:117).

## **7. Conclusion**

This chapter described the methodological perspective that informs the concept of gender-based violence. Research on gender-based violence requires appropriate strategies in conducting it since it is a very sensitive topic. In order to gain the trust of my research participants I had to build up and maintain a relationship with them and to get core information that I needed for my research process. I used the following data collection methods to collect all information needed for the research, active



participation in refugee issues in my community while also observing, and doing in-depth interviews.

The ethical issues considered in the research process were also spelled out clearly. The next chapter presents a description of the main events that pushed these women out of their various countries and the presentation of findings.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE MANY INTERSECTIONS OF VIOLENCE.

#### 1. Introduction

The refugee experience is one of violence. Refugee women, men and children endure and survive extremes of physical and emotional violence that most of us can not even begin to imagine. The very basis of being a refugee is that you have had to flee for your safety. You cannot return because of a genuine fear that if you do, the persecution will continue. Across the world, many people die as a result of persecution. The violence that constitutes persecution is either state based violence perpetrated by military, police or other state officials such as doctors in hospitals, teachers and bureaucrats, or it can be violence from other sections of society, such as religious bodies, guerrilla groups and sectional interests, which the state is powerless or unwilling to prevent. It includes physical, sexual and gender-based violence, institutional violence, emotional violence, the violence of discrimination and exclusion and torture, and the violence of entrenched class systems and racism (Pittaway 2004: 4).

From the above it is apparent that refugees/forced immigrants frequently have been subjected to violence at various levels and in different forms. As I argued in chapter 2 gender-based violence needs also to be analysed and contextualized within a socio-political level of conflict in the country of origin. It is often violence that forces Africans to leave their homelands, their families and all that is familiar to them. Many risk dangerous journeys and uncertain futures in the hope of finding a place of safety and freedom from violence and persecution.

Pittaway (2004) argues that in order to understand the complex dynamics of domestic violence in what is supposed to be a 'safe haven' -in the country where a 'new' life is started and its impact on refugee/forced immigrant women, it is important to examine the many facets of the refugees' experiences, from the persecution which forced them to flee from their homelands, the journeys they first took and what happened once they arrived a new destination. It is against this background that I will try to bring out the many layers of issues that impact on gender-based violence, starting with the participants' experiences of conflict from their home country and their experiences as they flee from the war/conflict. As seen in chapter 2 figure 1, the ecological model I used focuses on the individual, relationship, community, institutional, societal and global levels.

I proposed that the model is expanded further to include broader macro political and historical issues, because the violence experienced in the country of origin may affect and reproduce later violence within inter-personal relations in the country of refuge.

This framework makes it possible for researchers to analyze the intersection and interaction between different levels of violence and helps us to try and make sense of it. The original ecological model generally seems to assume that the experience of gender-based violence is in some way 'contained' within a particular societal setting which remains stable. However in the case of refugee/forced immigrants I tried to expand the model to a global or at least transnational level to include politico historical issues of violence which includes the political circumstances and armed conflict from which these women fled and how it impacted on their lives before escaping to other countries for safety. The politico-historical level will include disparities in the rights of women in war/conflict regions, limited access to resources during conflicts and vulnerability to attacks by rival fighting groups.

This chapter begins with a description of the five main research participants telling the reader where they came from and how they got themselves into South Africa.

While I focused mainly on the lives of the five key participants, I also bring in the voices and experiences of other women whom I interviewed or who participated in focus group discussions.

I focused firstly on acts of persecution, war/conflict and such which forced them to flee from their homelands, the journey they first took to arrive at their various destinations, because the different analytical levels of the ecological model interconnect, and interrelate with each other. I also identified factors affecting refugee/forced immigrant women's help seeking behaviour and forms of gender-based violence experienced by these women in Cape Town. These issues speak about the women's personal positions in South African society, as well as to other local factors that perpetuates this violence. I think it is imperative to add the women's positions in the society as refugees/forced immigrants to the individual level of the model.



## **2. The global political and historical level**

The political instability in most African countries has had a great impact on the lives of women (Bowman 2003:7). Lengthy civil wars and repressive practices of many African post colonial regimes have exacerbated the culture of violence. This level of analysis will include political and historical issues such as political unrest, civil war and other forms of conflict, fleeing to another country or being in a refugee camp, social and cultural norms regarding gender roles and the acceptability of gender-based violence from the country of origin that still influence the behaviour of refugees/forced immigrants. By adding another level of analysis I hope to expand the ecological model and to further enhance the understanding of gender-based violence among refugee/forced immigrants. It can include the political organization at refugee camps, the rape of women in camps by the same people who are there to protect them, authorities who engage women in sexual acts against their will in the pretext of protecting them or in exchange for food parcels etc. In this light Menjivar and Salcido

(2002: 900) argue that woman's experiences in gender-based violence is intimately linked to broader structural forces - political, economic, and social - that creates multiple layers of oppression and hierarchies within which immigrant women's lives are enacted.

This section provides a description of the five key research participants, as well as the voices of some other women. The names of the research participants have been changed.

### ***2.1-PI Sandrine -Congo***

Sandrine was born in Congo and fled from this strife-torn country. The country has been in turmoil since 1998 with about six armed groupings fighting against each other. The war in the Congo includes conflict over basic resources such as minerals and other resources as well as the various political agendas of opposing groups. This war has been fuelled and supported by various other external regimes, national and international corporations which have interest in the outcome of the conflict. Since the outbreak of fighting in August 1998, at least 3.3 million people, mostly women, children and the elderly have died because of the conflict, most from diseases and starvation<sup>22</sup>.

An area of land that was formally under Rwanda was annexed to the Belgian Congo after World War 1, together with its inhabitants. This group of people, known as Banyarwanda's, expanded as a result of subsequent waves of migrations in the 1970's. The 1994 genocide in Rwanda saw a massive influx of refugees and fighters into the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo thereby destabilizing the region further. In the complex conflict in the eastern Congo, the many combatant forces have attacked civilians, killing, injuring and raping thousands of people and causing more

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<sup>22</sup> Conflict in Congo <http://www.globalissue.org/geopolitics/Africa/DRC.asp>.

than half a million others to flee their homes. Even today the political situation in the Congo remains unstable and many human rights abuses are reported from there.

Sandrine arrived in South Africa six years ago. She is currently 35 years old, mother of four and married. She lives in a two bedroom flat with their four children and also shares with two additional people in order to reduce the burden of the rent. She explained what forced her and her entire family to leave her country.

When the war broke out in Eastern Congo, particularly in the Town of Kisharu, they decided to leave the country because her husband had been a member of the late Kabila's government. Her husband decided that Sandrine should travel with the children to another province where the violence was less, while he remained behind to see to the rest of their belongings. She and her two children took a flight from Kisharu to Lubumbashi, a province in Congo, and stayed there for about three weeks before her husband joined them. The fighting soon spread throughout the country and they decided to flee. From Lubumbashi they travelled by bus to Zambia. From Zambia they went to Zimbabwe where they stayed in a refugee camp known as Tongogara for about four months. During this time Sandrine's daughter fell very sick due to the living conditions in the camp and they decided to try to enter into South Africa. While in the Tongogara camp her husband had some money with him and did petty business. He went to neighbouring towns, bought food and sold it in very small quantities to other people in the camp. After raising some money in Tongogara camp they decided to go to Mesina because it was closer to the South African border and they could easily have entry into South Africa.

In Mesina her husband paid people to transport them to South Africa. When they arrived in South Africa they stayed with one of her husband's friend's in Johannesburg for about two weeks. He was not welcoming, as a result they decided to come to Cape Town to stay with her cousin. Since her cousin only had a one

bedroom, Sandrine and her husband stayed separately -he went to live with some acquaintances while she and her children moved in with the cousin.

After about one month in Cape Town her husband started to work as a car watch earning about R40 a day. Sandrine now has an informal hair dressing salon where she earns income to support her husband. In her salon she also sells a lot of other things to enable her get more money.

## ***2.2-P2 Patricia -Congo***

As I indicated above, the outbreak of the war in the Congo in 1998 left the country in a state of political instability. More and more people are still leaving the war torn country and seeking refuge elsewhere. Patricia is from Congo and has been in South Africa for five years. She is living with her partner and they now have one child. They live in a two-bedroom flat which they share with one other male.

Back home in Congo, and under the general circumstances of lawlessness, Patricia was raped by a neighbour outside their home. Afraid and ashamed she did not tell anyone, but a month later she became very ill and was taken to hospital where a doctor discovered that she was pregnant. Despite intimidation she told her mother who then went to the police. A year later the perpetrator was arrested but he was released again. After threats against her life and fearing retribution in the volatile climate Patricia decided to leave the country.

Patricia's older sister was a refugee in France and she (Patricia) wanted to join her. She (the sister) sent Patricia money to travel to Angola where she hoped to obtain a visa for France because it was almost impossible to do so in the Congo. After staying in Angola for about six months, her visa attempts failed and she was afraid to remain in this dangerous and uncertain environment. She fled from Angola to Windhoek in

Namibia. In Namibia refugees were sent to a refugee camp and she decided to rather leave for Cape Town.

Another participant in my study, also from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sophie, explained how she was abducted and raped repeatedly by the militia in her home country:

*...when the war broke out in the Eastern Congo, my father went to attend a meeting in Kinshasa when the hall, in which they were, came under attack. He was killed alongside many other people. When my mother heard about this, she was devastated because my dad was the bread winner in our house. My mother then left for Kinshasa to prepare for my dad's funeral leaving me and my other siblings behind and that is when our house came under attack from gunmen. My younger sister was taken away to an unknown destination and my brother forced to join the military which he accepted. Until today we haven't seen our sister. Meanwhile my brother stopped schooling as he was forced to join the military. About three days after my sister's disappearance I was also abducted on my way to the shop by the militia and taken to an unknown destination. During this time I was kept in a house and raped repeatedly by a militia who called me his girlfriend.*

*After about two months in captivity, the house in which I was kept in came under attack and I managed to escape. While I was still in captivity I felt very sick but was too scared to tell the man who kept me. Immediately I escaped I went to a police station nearby and my aunt was contacted. She came to my rescue and took me to the hospital and she managed to pay all the bills. I told her everything that had happened to me since I left. While in the hospital I was diagnosed with severe syphilis and I took several injections and I became fine.*



*A few months later I found a job in a local primary school in our area and I started teaching there. No sooner the news broke out that I was a victim of rape. It was the talk of the day in our school and in our community and people started looking at me with a different eye. I could not stand it any more so I decided after a year to travel to Namibia. In Namibia things were not also good so I decided to come down to South Africa (Sophie).*

In line with the shame and frustration that Sophie and Patricia suffered in their home town because they were victims of rape in a time of civil unrest Jobson (2005) argues that refugees/displaced women who survive rape or sexual enslavement and manage to return to their families may be rejected and treated with disdain.

Like Sophie, Patricia (P2 above) knew nobody in Cape Town. When Patricia arrived at the bus station she went to a shop nearby and asked the shopkeeper if there were any people from Congo around. This woman directed her to where she could meet Congolese. She met with another female who took her to her house later that day. When they arrived Patricia realized that eleven people were living in a one bedroom flat. Life was very uncomfortable there but there was nothing else she could do. After about five months in Cape Town she went to drink with some friends in a local bar. There she met a man who asked her to move in with him. She did so because she had nowhere else to go.

When she moved in she realized that this man had an eight-month old baby who had been abandoned by its mother, his ex-girlfriend. Patricia has since been taking care of the child. When she arrived in Cape Town she could not speak English and could not find a job. Life was very hard. Now she sells beer, fresh fish and cooked food in her house and that is how she makes a living. Her partner is working as a security guard at a factory in Cape Town.

### *2.3 –P3 Pauline –Angola*

It has been estimated that 500,000 people have been killed since 1989 in the civil war and an estimated 3 million refugees have fled from Angola to other countries. In 1975, after a protracted liberation war against Portugal, Angola became independent. Almost immediately a civil war started with, Movimento Popular de Libertacao de Angola (MPLA), Uniao Nacional para a Independencia Total de Angola (UNITA) and Frente para a Libertacao do Enclave de Cabinda (FLEC) as the main protagonists. A great deal of the conflict revolved around politics and disagreement about access to resources such as diamonds and offshore oil. Various factions fought over these, often supported by multinational corporations and other governments.<sup>23</sup>

Pauline is from Angola, a mother of three and a widow. She is about 44 years old and has been in South Africa for twelve years. Her husband died in 2002 and she has been living with a boyfriend for over 5 years. After the death of her husband, Pauline had her third child with the new male friend. She lives in a three bedroom house with him and the children. She is unemployed and depends on her boyfriend for a living. They are sharing this flat with a family of four. She speaks Portuguese, Swahili, Lingala and a bit of French.

She is an Angolan but grew up in the Congo. She moved from Congo to Angola when she fell pregnant and wanted to live with the father of her child. She subsequently got married to him and during the civil war in Angola she was shot and badly wounded. Fearing for their lives they fled to Namibia where she received some treatment. They stayed in Namibia for about a year while her husband worked as a security guard in a small factory to raise some money. He then bought tickets on the Intercape bus and they travelled to South Africa. On the advice of friends they moved down to Cape Town from Johannesburg.

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.globalissues.org/Geopolitics/Africa/infor.asp#manyConflictssthroughoutAfrica>

In Cape Town her husband did a training course to become a security guard. He worked as such until 2001 when he was pushed out of a moving train by armed robbers. His leg was mangled and subsequently amputated. Due to the amputation he became very depressed. He died a year later.

#### ***2.4 -P4 Philo -Burundi***

The people of Burundi have experienced a civil war and a great deal of ethnic violence since 1993. According to estimations between 9 and 10 percent of the population has been displaced. Having been at the mercy of attacks from both government forces and rebels, Philo and her former husband fled the country. They travelled through many African countries, including Tanzania, Malawi and Mozambique. They stayed in Malawi for about three months and moved on to Mozambique and then to South Africa.

Philo is from Burundi and she is divorced. She is about 29 years old and has one child. She has been in South Africa for three years. Her first language is Swahili but she can also speak French and a little English.

Another participant from Burundi, Mirabel, explained her own ordeal. She talked about events in 1994 which precipitated the flight of her and her family:

*...I was married to a Tutsi and we lived happily for about six years when the war broke out in Burundi. Fearing for our lives we took off to a rural town of Bujumbura, a suburb that was quiet. Two days after we arrived the killing started extending into the suburbs and my husband was targeted. He was burned and killed in front of my children just because he was a Tutsi. The killers took tyres and petrol and set him alight before our eyes. I heard my husband screaming to the top of his voice. I will never forget what happened that day. My children were almost burned as well but with the help of a militia*

*who was well known to the family my children were taken away to a place of safety. Memories of my husband's ordeal are still glued to my mind. It now about 13 years on but to me it's still like yesterday.*

Szczepanikova (2005) has argued that violence does not only take place in situations of wars and armed conflicts but it continues also after the escape from the immediate threat of war and persecution. After escaping from Burundi with her two children Mirabel explained:

*...I escaped to Tanzania and stayed in a refugee camp which was dominantly Hutus. They could tell from my looks that I was a Hutu but my children looked like Tutsi's. Realizing that the camp posed a danger to my children I decided to seek refuge in a near by church. As a result we were arrested and kept in jail in Tanzania for about two weeks for not possessing the legal documents to stay in the country. With the help of some members of the local church I was released and I left for Malawi with my children. In Malawi we stayed for about a month and I decided to take my children down to Zimbabwe passing through Mozambique. In Zimbabwe we were sent to a place known as the Waterfalls Transit Centre. In this centre there were both Hutus and Tutsi's living side by side but the tension was very high. People did not disclose their identities but you could tell from their looks. Seeing this danger I got my children to a nearby house to spend the night. The next morning they directed me to the same centre that I came from, but after explaining my case to them they then led me to a nearby church. From then on I managed to raise some money working as a house maid for the pastor to come down to South Africa with my children.*

Unlike Mirabel, both Philo and her husband survived. When they first arrived in South Africa they lived in Durban where their child was born. They subsequently moved to Cape Town. In South Africa her husband found a job as a car watch. He later became a barman at a restaurant in Cape Town after receiving training at a

centre. A year after their arrival they started to have serious financial problems since Philo could not find employment. She started to do people's hair in the place they lived, but her husband abandoned her and the child and moved in with a South African woman.

A few months after her husband left, Philo found a place where she could braid hair. She divorced her husband and he only occasionally contributes a little money towards the support of their child.

### ***2.5 -P5 Christel -Cameroon***

Cameroon is a country of about 16 million people in Central Africa. Its colonial history has made it politically unstable. Originally colonized as part of the German scramble for Africa, it was ceded partly to Britain and partly to France in 1918. This resulted in most natural resources being in the Anglophone region to the North, and South West being under British rule. At independence in 1960 the two parts (French and British controlled) of the country were reunited, but not without protracted civil strife. Since then the country has experienced cycles of civil conflict while Cameroon is also engaged in an ongoing dispute with neighbouring Nigeria over rights in the oil-rich Bakassi peninsula. Since reunification the citizens of southern Cameroon have been marginalized resulting in political tensions and armed conflicts. This has forced millions of Cameroonians to flee to other parts of the world.

Christel is aged 32 and a mother of two. She has been in South Africa for about four years. She is married to the father of her children. While they lived in Cameroon both Christel and her husband were involved in political activities that opposed the government. Her husband wrote several articles criticizing the Cameroon government. He was threatened, harassed and blacklisted by the government and was advised by friends and family to leave the country. He applied for a visa to travel to the United States of America but the rector of the University of Buea advised the US

embassy to turn down his application. Several visa attempts to enable him travel out of the country failed. He then travelled by land passing through many African countries into South Africa.

Before Christel's husband left Cameroon they had one child. Six months after he had fled, her husband sent for her as he feared that she might now be targeted by the government. Christel explained:

*...after I finished my university education in 1999, I became actively involved in politics by joining the Social Democratic Front the only opposition party in Cameroon at the time. And we started advocating for change. By then my husband was already actively involved. With the increase in the political tension in the country by 2003 my husband went to neighbouring Nigeria and he eventually ended up in South Africa leaving me behind. A few days after he left the police received tip off from our neighbours and they came into our house twice and searched the whole house without a search warrant. Some of them stole stuff belonging to my husband. After realizing that they couldn't find what they were looking for the commissioner of police ordered my arrest two weeks later. I was locked up in a concentrated prison cell where my perfume was urine and I was tortured for about four months with my parents not knowing where I was. After several months of inquiries my parents finally heard where I was and they came to my rescue. But a bail application was refused until after two weeks then my bail application was granted. Knowing that the tormentors will come after me, my parents with the help of my husband who had flee to South Africa and one of my uncles working at the international air port Cameroon, they contacted a travelling agent in Gabon and I was eventually granted a visa to join my husband in South Africa. Two days later I left.*

Their second child was born in South Africa. She lives in a two bedroom flat and shares it with three other people.

While she was still in Cameroon, her husband started an affair with a South African woman. It was only after the birth of her second child that Christel found out that her husband had impregnated his South African lover. She later started to threaten Christel and sent her insulting messages on her phone. On Valentine's Day friends came over to spend the day with them but the husband opted to spend the day with his lover. Such incidents became very common and she decided to separate from him. She enrolled for studies in information technology at a university in Cape Town and is currently employed.

### **3. The experience of other women**

As seen above, all the women had in some way or the other felt it imperative to leave their own conflict ridden countries. Some of the women were forced to flee because their husbands became targets, while others were themselves victimised. Before they fled, their lives in the country of origin had already been stressful, uncertain and full of hardship. In South Africa their lives were also diminished and difficult.

In order to understand the complex dynamics of gender-based violence it is therefore important to examine the many aspects of refugee/forced migrant experiences. As a result therefore, I think it is important to give even more attention to what forced them to leave their country. This history will give us a broader perspective to the understanding of the ways in which different levels of violence affect and intersect with each other. To gain an understanding of the complexity of violent practices in the domestic sphere, it is useful to link it to the history of violence within the community under study (Gibson et al. 2005:148) as well as to broader processes originating in the country they fled from. I want to argue that refugee/forced immigrant women's past experiences interact with other factors in the receiving country to influence their understanding of gender-based violence. From the women's narratives we get an insight into the effects of various forms of violence and fear.

It must be kept in mind that the act of being a refugee/forced migrant often implies that the person was forced to leave her country for fear of being persecuted or harmed. The women's experiences were all gendered –Sandrine and Philo fled with their husbands, but all the other women fled by themselves, with or without their children. Sophie was incarcerated and repeatedly raped before she could escape. All the women carry with them memories of violence and fear. Christel had been incarcerated and tortured. Sophie's father was killed, her sister abducted and she was abducted herself and used as a 'wife' for a military commander. Pauline had been wounded. Mirabel's husband was killed in her presence and she still feared for the lives of her children in a transit camp in Zimbabwe, where they were quickly identified by other refugees as belonging to the 'wrong' ethnic grouping. Because of their ethnicity, Sophie and Patricia carry with them the memories of rape and the stigma attached to them.

Once they were outside their country of origin, the women's concern was with the safety and survival of their families. At the same time the process of flight was also not a neutral one, but affected the women and their families in different ways. I therefore argue this that, in order for us to understand gender-based violence of refugee women in Cape Town it will also mean understanding the various forms of violence and persecutions they suffered in their home country and on their way to safety.

### ***3.1 Epi- Rwanda***

Epi told about some violent situations that she and her family encountered during the flight from their home country until they arrived in a refugee camp in Zaire.

*During the genocide in Rwanda we witnessed several disturbing events some of which are still stocked to my mind until today. The saddest of all was the torturing, raping and killing of my 14 years old daughter in front of my*



*husband and I and my husband was carried away by the militia to an unknown destination. By this time I had taken two of our younger children to their grand parents because it was safer there. I took off in a bus packed with people running away from the fighting with bombs exploding every second after second in front and behind of the car in which I was travelling in. We were so lucky none of the bombs hit the car in which we were. Upon arrival I took my children with me leaving behind my father and mother who refused to come with me saying they will rather die than leave their motherland to rebels. I flee with my children on foot for about two months to Goma, a refugee camp in Neighbouring Zaire (Congo).*

*We flee carrying with us no water, food no clothes. In the camp there was neither water nor food. We drank water from the rain and eat food that was being brought to us by local people in very small quantities and waited endlessly for peace to come to our country. Soon after, we started receiving food and water supplies from the United Nations organization. It was not long my daughter contracted cholera and became very sick. With the help of some humanitarian aid my daughter was treated. A few months later I was reunited with my husband who had escaped from captivity. In the camps we witness a lot of violence from rival groups. Nobody could disclose their identities whether they were Hutus or Tutsi's but judging from their skin colour and nostrils the people in the camp could tell.*

*One Sunday afternoon after a prayer meeting in the camp, the pastor walked up to me and asked what I was doing with that man (meaning her husband). I knew exactly then that something was going to happen because my husband and I were from two different ethnic groups. Two days latter a friend who had overheard people planning to kill us advised us to leave the camp and find shelter somewhere else. We immediately took our children to a church that was just about 2 km nearby. Here my husband found a job and we were able*

*to raise some money and moved over to Zambia. In Zambia we stayed illegally for about three months and moved over to Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe we went to the home office and we were given legal documents to stay in the country. But due to the economic situation in Zimbabwe my husband decided that South Africa will be a better place and that is how we ended up in South Africa.*

*While in the camp in Goma, cases of rape were very common. Every day women will talk about being forced to have sex by unknown people in the camps.*

In this regard Ziebell (2005) explains that the violence experienced by women in, or fleeing from conflict, does not happen in isolation. Disparities in the rights of refugees/forced immigrants as opposed to the host population, limited access to resources, and restricted autonomy which exist in times of peace exacerbate the impact of violence on women in conflict. Once they flee and end up in a refugee camp or find another location in which to stay, the situation does not necessarily become easier for women. This is the case for Epi and her family whose lives were in danger in the camp because of tribal differences and they fled the camp.

In camps, women are highly vulnerable to sexual abuse by other refugees and even humanitarian workers. Some humanitarian workers have also been accused of pimping or acting as facilitators for the prostitution and sexual trafficking of refugee women. Since they are displaced, these women face more hardships and vulnerabilities, for example, in times of hunger, they carry the burden of searching for food and other means for their family or children's survival. Pregnant women, mothers and their children suffer or die due to insufficient health supplies and services (Bello 2003).

A report from the United Nation High Commission for Refugee (UNHCR) on cases of rape in 1998 confirms the issue of rape in refugee camps could be seen on table 2:

**TABLE 2**

Review of reported cases of rape: (1) in refugee situations (1996-1998).

Goma – Zaire

Dadaab – Kenya

Ngara, Kibondo -Tanzania

Situation	Goma	Dadaab	Ngara	Kibondo
Population	740,000	109,000	110,000	76,740
Actual rape cases reported	140	128	24	129
Number of months	(7)	(12)	(12)	(12)
Adjusted number of rapes for 12 months period (2)	240	128	24	129
Year reported	1996	1998	1998	1998
Cases of rape/10,000 population/year	3.24	11.78	2.16	17.08

UNHCR, Geneva, 1996 and 1998

(1) It is assumed that the cases reported here are confirmed rapes

(2) Actual cases of rapes reported for part of the year and projected for remaining months by taking the average of rapes per month.

Nduna and Goodyear (1997) argue that among Burundian refugees in Tanzania 26% of the 3,803 women in the Kanembwa camp setting had been subject to sexual violence.

### **3.2 Askia – Rwanda**

Askia, a refugee woman from Rwanda, also explained how she and her, then two year old, daughter experienced violence and how it affected her life.

*...In 1994 during the genocide in my country I saw many people being killed, this left me wondering whether life was worth living. I saw my dad being beaten to his death and my younger brother's hand literally being chopped off by our then neighbours. They killed everybody in our neighbourhood and they made sure everybody they left behind was left to die. I was fortunate because on that night when the murders were being committed I went with my daughter to one of our neighbour's house late that night and she asked me to pass the night with her. She actually forced me to sleep over and I agreed to do so. It was about 2:00 am when I heard people shouting outside. On looking outside I saw about 20 men holding sticks and cutlasses in their hands it was then I knew that we were all going to be killed. I still remember hearing people screaming at the top of their voices. My brother cried so loud that you could hear 2 meters away from our house.*

*Early that morning we went out to see what had happened and we were in complete shock about 30 bodies lying in pools of blood all over the place. You could tell that there was heavy fighting in the way they were laying. The few of us that survived took off on our way to Zaire- Congo in trucks. We also had to walk on foot in some instances. You could see bodies of both old and young laying on the streets and sometimes helpless children lying next to dead bodies. When I was growing up I was very much scared of dead bodies but at that stage we were jumping on top of dead bodies like no one's business. There was hardly time to stop and check if you knew them or not.*

*I ended up with my daughter in a refugee camp in Zaire. We had no food to eat. My child was dehydrated and almost died of hunger and thirst. Before we came to Goma she could walk but just a few months later she couldn't walk or talk. I thought she was going to die. But with the help of humanitarian workers we survived. She was given some medical attention and she started walking and talking again.*

Not only did the women in my study encounter violence in their home country but they also did on their way to safety in neighbouring countries. Violence is frequently a defining characteristic of the forced migration experience, particularly for women, who make up the majority of forced migrant around the world. Some form of violence is usually a root cause of women's flight to begin with, and too often, violence continues to plague women even in the receiving countries or areas to which they have fled to seek safety and protection. (International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women)<sup>24</sup>. As a result Szczepanikova (2006) argues that migration is not only a process that is "passively" shaped by gender ideologies and practices in countries of departure and countries of destination or, more specifically, by gendered demands for labour or changes in family reunification laws, to mention a few examples. It is also a process which can be analyzed as an "active" force that influences how migrants perceive themselves as gendered beings and gender ideologies in societies of origin and arrival. The participants in this research process have undergone a series of violence from their home country on their way to safety and in the countries in which they resettled. In this process their experiences were deeply gendered, as indicated by the women's narratives above.

For example in Sierra Leone beautiful women were often used by the police as their 'wives'. Patricia was abducted and raped, her father was killed and her sister disappeared. Mirabel's husband was killed. Christel was imprisoned and tortured.

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<sup>24</sup> International day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.  
<http://www.forcedmigration.org/browse/thematic/eliminationofviolence.htm> retrieved 9/09/07

Epi's adolescent daughter was raped and killed. Askia's father was killed and her brother was mutilated. These women were abused in their country by the people they had trusted. In this regard Robertson et al. (2006) argue that suffering, but also resilience is often part of the legacy refugees bring with them to countries of resettlement. The prejudices and experiences from the past can nevertheless have a negative influence on the way in which they can reconstruct themselves and their lives in their new environment.

It is clear from the above that refugee women suffer various forms of violence as they flee from wars and conflicts and from their home countries or countries of origin. The occurrence of violence in their home country is related to the general social and political upheavals that confront them at the time of war or conflict. In refugee camps, for example, some women have to sell themselves to those distributing food in order to get more food to be able to feed their children. With the exception of Sophie, my research participants did not refer to such personal experiences although they indicated that some women in their camps had to sell themselves to get food.

In order to understand gender-based violence against refugee/forced immigrant women it is equally important for us to get a closer look at their lives in their home country, their lives as they flee away from violence and lastly their lives in Cape Town. I argue that all of these issues are part of an interrelated continuum that should be taken into consideration if we want to analyze gender-based violence amongst refugee women. The interaction between the various 'risk' factors influences the occurrence of gender-based violence in the refugee/forced immigrant community.

These women have fled traumatic circumstances and experiences and are now trying to make a life in another country. My argument here is that the experience of being a refugee/forced immigrant is not quite the same as that of a long term citizen of a country. As a refugee/forced immigrant a woman has to deal with the stresses resulting from what she experienced in her home country and the constant worries

and strain she encounters in South Africa. As women they have to deal with the necessity of taking care of the family even if there is little or no income. Their jobs in most cases are low paid and that they would have not done if they were in their own country, but as a means of survival these women are forced to do them.

In the next section I will give attention to refugee/forced immigrant women's experiences at the level of the larger South African society. Although they are relatively safe in their new environment, they are also outsiders whose status and lives had been diminished. At the same time their lives would be very similar to those other South African women who have e.g. moved to Cape Town from rural areas and such.

#### **4. From societal to the everyday gendered perceptions and practices**

At the societal level, rigid gender roles represent women as house keepers, but in their new 'home' they have to work full time. These women start of the day very early and work until very late at night. This has put women at risk of experiencing gender-based violence. I will now briefly describe the 'work' of a number of women who have tried to build a life in Cape Town.

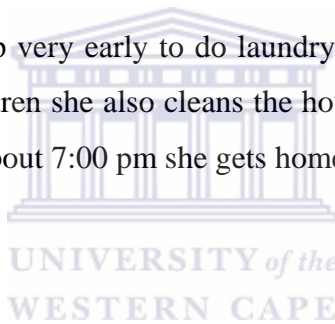
##### ***4.1 Sandrine***

Sandrine wakes up every morning at about 3:30 am to prepare breakfast and lunch for her family while also cleaning the house. She wakes the children up one at a time to get them ready for school. She also gets her youngest child ready for crèche. Before they leave for school they must have their lunch boxes ready. Their father only wakes up at about 6:30 am and prepares himself for work. After breakfast he takes the children to school, after which he goes to work while Sandrine also gets ready to go to her shop.

While in the shop Sandrine must see that everything is well and attends to her customers' needs. At 2:00 pm she must fetches her children from school. She makes sure they take their lunch and force them to sleep while she makes her way back to the shop. At 5:00 pm her eldest child goes to crèche to fetch the youngest one.

Later in the evening, Sandrine leaves the shop because she must ensure that there is food on the table for her husband and the rest of the family. She sometimes goes to sleep very late because she has to organize herself for the next day. She makes sure that her children's uniforms and books are in order before she goes to bed. She also makes sure that there is everything she needs for breakfast the next day.

On weekends she wakes up very early to do laundry for the whole family. With the help of her two eldest children she also cleans the house. She then prepares food and moves on to the shop. At about 7:00 pm she gets home and starts ironing the clothes.



#### **4.2- Pauline**

Pauline is currently unemployed but she sometimes prostitutes herself to get food on the table for her family. During the day she is at home trying to prepare food for her children and boyfriend. Sometimes at night she receives phone calls from other men and she goes to them so that she can get some money for her children's education and food. She occasionally goes to night clubs to look for men to prostitute herself especially when her partner is working night shift. She hopes one day to get a rich tourist from abroad to marry her and take her abroad were she believes life is better.

Pauline explained:

*...One of my friends was taken by her boyfriend who was a tourist from South Africa to the United States of America and they have since then gotten married and he has adopted her children. By the end of the year her three children will be joining her over there...*



Every morning Pauline's eldest child gets her sisters ready for school while Pauline prepares breakfast for them. Sometimes she does not have money to buy bread and her boyfriend might not provide any. Then Pauline goes to a nearby shop to borrow. If she has outstanding debts the shop owner may refuse and her children sometimes go to school hungry. Pauline tries to provide at least one meal per day for her children and will engage in sexual transactions or borrowing to buy foodstuff.

#### ***4.3- Patricia***

Patricia looks after two children -one her husband had with an ex-girlfriend and one of their own. Every morning she gets the children ready for school and for crèche. She also tries to clean the toilet each time before her children use it since her costumers (she sells beer at home) use and mess it up after drinking. She cannot stop customers from using the toilet, because she wants them to buy a lot of beer from her. During the day she sleeps and gets up to prepare some food when her stepdaughter comes back from school. Since she runs a local 'shebeen' and sells fresh fish, she is sometimes woken up by customers who want to buy something. At night it is very busy in her house. People come from all over to buy take-away or to drink in her house.

She goes to sleep only the next morning because she must wait for the last customer to leave before she goes to bed. Month-ends are usually her most busy time and also the most stressful as people sometimes can drink until dawn.

#### ***4.4- Philo***

Since her husband left, Philo's life has been a struggle. She cannot pay for a crèche for her baby so she takes her to Cape Town where she works. Every morning she wakes up 5.00 in the morning and gets ready for work. She prepares her food and that

of the baby before waking her child up. After cleaning the child she feeds her, while also eating something herself. Then they head to work.

While in Cape Town she carries her child on her back and does people's hair. She is afraid of putting him down because he might get stolen. She goes to work six days a week and only gets off on Sundays. On Sundays, she spends her entire day cleaning her house and washing cloths. Unlike the other women who have to make sure their houses are clean before they leave for work, Philo only cleans her house when she returns home in the evening.

Every evening when I pay her a visit I always find her cleaning. She explain to me that when she was still with her husband she was forced to always clean the house before leaving in the morning but it is no longer like that as she owes no one an explanation. This shows that these women try to earn their partners' appreciation by working and cleaning their houses, cooking, caring for the children etc.



#### **4.5- Christel**

For Christel every day in South Africa is a struggle. She has to make sure that the children are ready by 7:30 am so that her husband could drop them off at school and at crèche on his way to work. She has to make sure that breakfast is done before 7:00am every Monday to Friday, and also prepare lunch boxes for both children and their father. Afterwards she also has to get ready for work because she also starts work at 8:00am.

When she gets back home in the evening her husband brings the children and leaves them with her and sometimes goes out to visit friends or sits and watch television.

*...On weekends he is never at home so I have to struggle with these children all the time on my own... I am bringing up the children all by myself (Christel).*

The younger child is very fond of her father and each time he goes out she cries, but there is nothing Christel can do. Once in a while he takes the children out with him on weekends.

Like many South African women, the refugee/forced immigrant woman are both housekeepers and workers at the same time. These women work round the clock to meet up with their traditional roles as housekeepers and their new roles in providing for their families economically. The women are often exhausted and sometimes unable to keep their houses in perfect order as their partners expect them to do, thus adding another layer of stress to the ecological model -the work load of the women. At the individual level the women in my study have faced gender-based violence due to the fact that they cannot always meet up with gendered expectations of the home.

As refugee/forced immigrants the women in this study also have to deal with much 'everyday' violence resulting from the fact that they are seen by South Africans as not really 'belonging', or as taking the jobs of "real" South Africans. Scheper-Hughes (1993) argues that it is not only physical violence but also other things that function as forms of violence on a daily basis. Issues of xenophobia have affected African immigrants in South Africa- more especially women and children who have been under attack from South Africans.

## **5. The violence of everyday life**

Violence in the life of a refugee/forced immigrant women in South Africa is a continuum. My research participants, and myself included, encounter gender-based violence every day. The violence stems from our inability to make certain decisions, lack of social networks, and from factors within the wider community where we reside. The violence stems from our partners/husbands to neighbours and even strangers.

### 5.1- Sandrine

If her husband happens to come home and does not find food on the table it becomes a big problem in the house. He starts shouting at her even in the presence of the children. Sandrine explained:

*...Saturday afternoon my sisters-in-law came to visit me because they are two of them here in South Africa, and the only food left in the house was for my husband. So I gave it to them and he came back very hungry and met me struggling to make food that night. He became very upset and didn't even want to listen what I had to say about the food. He left and went to a nearby restaurant and bought himself a plate of food and he never ate the one I was preparing. Sometimes he will prefer to buy food from restaurants and eat especially when there is not enough meat in sight.*

He also gets very upset if his clothes are not ironed. He expects her to wash his clothes and to iron them for him. Sandrine sometimes irons his clothes and puts in the wardrobe but he forces her to iron it again before he puts it on.

*My husband burned me with an electric iron because I asked him to help. We were invited to a party by one of his friend who was graduating from the University and I think he did not want me to go with him. So the shirt he wanted to wear was ironed a few days earlier but he wanted it ironed again and got dressed and left leaving me behind. He can never help me do anything especially when it comes to doing the things that I should be doing like ironing and washing of cloths.*

Sandrine's husband doesn't help out with the children but he gets very annoyed if he finds either their children or the house untidy. He will never help to clean the house or the children even when he finds her busy.

*Once he came home one evening with his colleagues and found the house very dirty and he started shouting at me in front of his colleagues. He even hit my first son for not putting things in the right order in the house. I could see from his colleague's reaction that he was not happy with his behaviour. I cannot be everywhere at all times. Nor can I do everything that he expects because I am a human being and I also get tired. He thinks he is the only one that gets tired. When we both return home from work he always complains that he is very tired but if his friends come you will hear him shouting at the top of his voice...*

Sandrine also explains that on several occasions her husband shouted at her in the presence of their children and visitors alike. I have also on several instances observed him talking to her abusively.

## **5.2- Pauline**

Since Pauline's boyfriend does not know that she does sex work she tries as much as possible to hide it from him. But there are times when she is with her boyfriend and her phone rings. Pauline explained what happened to her once when one of her customers called:

*...I was lying in bed ones with my boyfriend when another guy called. My phone was on the other side of the bed so he picked it up and answered and it was a male voice. He started questioning that guy and the guy asked him very rudely "who are you by the way, give that phone to the owner..."? My boyfriend got very upset and threw my phone against the wall and shattered it into pieces. He started hitting me right in front of my daughter. But when I am wrong I just try to defend myself and not fight back. In this case I was very wrong so I just kept defending myself especially my face because he can destroy my face with his hands.*

She also has to deal with the fact that two of her children are from her late husband. Her boyfriend shows open discrimination between the children. He sometimes insults her children as bastards.

*...He often calls my children bastards and he sometimes tells me to take them out of his house. He more often than not brings presents only to his daughter each time he goes out. My children know that he doesn't like them but I try as much as I can not to let them see that he is discriminating. If he brings something for his daughter when the other children are not I make sure that I get also for the rest of the children if I can. It hurts when he discriminates against my other children especially when they ask for something from him and he tells them that he is not their father. Before he was very nice to all my children but as time went on he started with this his discrimination.*

Pauline, just like any other woman, struggles to put food on the table. She does all she can to make sure that her family has food on the table. She prostitutes herself to meet her children's daily needs like transport money to school. Once again the violence in the past is now affecting Pauline's two children. Their father was pushed out of a moving train by armed bandit and his legs amputated he later died of frustrations from his handicap nature.

### **5.3- Patricia**

Every day Patricia has to argue and fight with people who come to her house to drink beer. Her costumers are usually people with no respect for themselves or others. Customers, she explains, are very rude, especially when they are drunk.

*One evening I was selling beers to some customers when one of them came up to me and asked if I could borrow him some more beers and I refused... He got very upset and stabbed me with his knife in my arm and my boyfriend got him well beaten and his friends called the police. My partner and I were*

*arrested for selling beers. I had to pay a fine of about R1, 000 at the police station and about 6 crates of beers were seized by the police (Patricia).*

Sometimes in the middle of the month she gave beers to customers on credit, but at the end of the month they do not pay. So she decided never to 'lend' anymore beers. But people still come to her to borrow, and if she refuses it becomes a big problem. Often customers throw xenophobic insults at her. Patricia explains:

*...they often tell me to go back to Congo that I have come here to finish their money. One guy even attempted to break my iron bar but with the timely intervention of my partner he ran away. Attacks from my customers always come in the middle of the month when they have no money to buy drinks. Some of them tell me that I have come into South Africa to finish their money so I must go back to my country (Patricia).*

Patricia also has to deal with potential robbery as on several occasions people have attempted to steal from her. She lives in constant fear of being robbed.

*...One night as I was selling beers, one guy walked up to me with a knife in his hands and asked quietly for money. As I bent down to open the drawer, his other friend walk up to my partner and held him at gun point and everybody in the house was quiet. They made away with all the money I had sold that weekend. A lot of people were drinking in my house at the time but no body offered a word to the rubbers who made away with all my money. I still believe that it was a planned act with the people who were in my house on that day.*

Patricia thinks what she is doing is very risky but she cannot stop doing it because there is no other way to make money. For her, selling beer was a last resort. In trying to play safe Patricia tries to select her customers by not opening her house to people who make her feel suspicious.

#### **5.4 -Philo**

Before her husband left her for another woman Philo had problems with him on a daily basis. His sisters often came to their house and insult her, but he would say nothing. They even found him the girl he is with now. Philo said:

*...they called me all sorts of names; they even said that my child wasn't their brother's child. One afternoon I was sitting in my room when I heard a knock on the door, on going there I found my sister in law with another girl and I opened the door for them. They came in my room and waited for about 3 hours for my husband without offering a word to me. When he came in I noticed he greeted that girl with some concern. Later that day they all went out and he only came back into the house the next morning. When I asked him where he was he jumped on me and started hitting me. One of our neighbours phoned my sister in law on arrival everything had calm down and she started insulting me. It wasn't up to two weeks when my husband finally left the house with all his cloths and moved in with that lady, and then I realized who she was. My sister in-law told me I was very poor and lazy that their brother needs a hard working lady who can support him. It was only then I realized why my husband left me for that lady.*

Philo also indicated that she encounters violence at her job from her fellow colleagues. She explains:

*...one day I received a phone call from my customer coming to braid her hair. Two hours later I tried to call the customer but she refused to answer her phone. After a few minutes I tried again and she responded that she was already doing her hair in a stand nearby. I decided to check on her. As I went on looking I found her in another ladies stand then my customer jumped up and said this is the lady I was looking for. The customer then explained to me that she came looking for me but the lady said I have just been taken to the hospital. So the customer now said she wanted me to continue the braiding.*



*When I did this lady, who had started doing the hair, asked for her share of the money and I refused. So we started fighting and the police intervened and we were both taken to the police station where we both paid a fine of R300 each before being released...*

### **5.5 - Christel**

Christel, unlike the other women in my research is a part time-student and at the same time works full-time. Many of the research participants were distressed by their partners/husbands' cheating'

*Each time my husband takes my children out and they came back home they will tell me they were in Auntie Belinda's house. When I ask him who Belinda is he always tells me she is his colleague. For over a year I was wondering who this lady was until a friend of his came and explained the whole thing to me... When I confronted my husband he was very bitter about it and he refused every thing. I got his cell phone and got this lady's number. He had changed the name and wrote a different name but something told me that it was her number. As he went out I called the lady and asked her who my husband was to her and she said he is her boy friend. She then asked me who I was, when I told her she insulted me and said he has been her boy friend long before I came to South Africa and that they are expecting a child. When I confronted my husband about this he replied you have to deal with it because I can not leave her. It continued until I finally separated with him because I couldn't handle it any more (Christel).*

Christel also indicated that she has to provide for most of her children's material and emotional needs since their father is never at home. In cases where the children have homework she alone helps them. She also has to be absent from work to attend school meetings for the children because their father never goes there. Most of the research participant expressed their inability to cope with the household workload. Their

partners are unwilling to assist with household chores and child-minding. Even on important events, like end of term Christmas activities, Christel's partner never attends.

*...On one occasion where my child was present in an end of year drama and poem residing my husband never came and he left my child wondering and she kept on asking me where her father was. My husband after taken his lunch goes out and only comes home when the children are asleep, but my youngest child was so found of my husband and she doesn't sleep until he comes back home. This was also a kind of disturbance because she will keep me awake until she saw her father. One evening my husband went out and only came back early the next day at about 3.00am in the morning and I hardly even slept because my child was crying for him to come before she sleeps, so I had to stay awake with the child until he came back home (Christel).*

All participants have to survive daily abuse from their partners/husbands. Despite such experiences they do not fully consider their partners/husbands actions as abuse. They all expressed the belief that a woman must be subservient to the man and obey him.

## **6. Conclusion**

As indicated by the experiences of the refugee/forced immigrant women in this chapter, it is important to include global historical political issues to the ecological frame work, Krug et al. (2002) argues that domestic violence or violence against women perpetrated by male partners, or ex-partners, has been articulated as one of the most concerning and prevalent public health issue in the world today and is the major cause of injury and mental illness among women and children. They further show that intimate partner violence is usually at its highest point when communities are in transition, when women begin to assume non-traditional roles or enter the workforce

or when men are less able to fulfil their culturally expected roles as providers and protectors.

Some of the women in this research have to maintain a balance between being a ‘traditional’ housewife in doing what is expected of them i.e. (cleaning the house, washing of cloths and dishes, preparing food and all the like) and working full-time to support their families because their husband/partners on their own might not be able to be sole providers of the family. All five main research participants have encountered violence in their day-to-day domestic and public lives. As refugee/forced immigrant women they have to deal with the threat and sometimes reality of violence in or from the host community as seen from the recent xenophobic attacks earlier this year.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND THE LOCAL

#### 1. Introduction

This chapter examines women's experiences of gender-based violence and their perceptions of it. I also try to bring out issues that influence the occurrence of violence against refugee/forced immigrant women. By presenting the women's voices I endeavour to give a picture of their perceptions and feeling about gender-based violence.

Firstly I present the factors that exacerbate gender-based violence amongst refugee/forced immigrants. Secondly I attend to the experiences of gender-based violence by these women. Following the ecological framework the factors that were identified exist on the individual, family, community, institutional, societal, global level. Although all of these levels seem to be discreet, in reality they are always interlinked and cannot easily be teased apart.

This chapter presents the common factors that perpetuate gender-based violence in the daily lives refugee/forced immigrant women.

#### 2. Issues that affect violence.

##### *2.1 The cultural practices and perceptions from 'home'*

According to Erez (2003) refugees/forced immigrants often use their home country as a point of reference to make sense of and to deal with their present situation. In this regard Rees and Pease (2006) have argued that cultural values and refugee/forced immigration status enhances the complexities normally involved in cases of domestic

abuse. Menjivar and Salcido (2002) are of the opinion that domestic violence is 'culturally' acceptable in some communities and it is not viewed as warranting a serious response from authorities such as police and magistrates. In some of the countries from which the women in this study originate, it is unusual for women to report cases of domestic violence. In Cameroon, where I came from, if an abused woman calls the police, they usually respond that it is a domestic matter which should be sorted out at home. Also in Cameroon it is not uncommon for you to call the police and to be told that there are only two people at the police station so they cannot come. Sometimes there is no service car available. Rees, (2004) for example, argues that refugee/forced immigrant women who have been persecuted from their home countries continue to associate the authorities of the receiving country with violence.

Refugee/forced immigrant women are also at greater risk of violence from their partners because gender-based violence has been internalized and normalized. As discussed in the previous chapter, the gender-based violence some of the women experience seems to be of little importance in comparison to the horror they had already gone through. In South Africa the women often feel rootless and alone and seem to rather accept violence than be abandoned. One participant in my study said:

*...I prefer him to hit me rather than to ignore me. If he hits me we can still make things up because he will beg me. And I like when he begs me because it makes our love to grow. Every time we fight we get to understand each other better. But if he has to ignore me we can go for one week without him talking to me because he will spend all his time with friends drinking in shebeens (Christel).*

Erez (2000) argues that violence against women in refugee/forced immigrant communities are also frequently deflected by local community leaders in the 'new' country. The issue of preserving family honour or dignity also seemed important in some of the women's own attitude to domestic violence. A number of the participants stressed that, if a woman brings dishonour to her family, any violence committed

against her can be justified (Johal 2003:37). At the same time women's experience of personal shame as a result of abuse, as well as their dedication to children and family has prevented them from seeking help and assistance (Bauer et al.2002:33). One participant said:

*...I cannot get another boyfriend because it will be a shame to my family and to my children. I have got four children with this man and I cannot just leave him. I am still there for the sake of our kids. The last time I attempted to leave, I was actually gone for a week, I heard from neighbours and friends that my children were all over the place and no one to look after them. My husband I was told, left the house early in the morning to go to work and only come back late at night (Sandrine).*

Erez (2000) further opines that the overriding rationale for many refugee/forced immigrant women to stay in abusive relationships is the prospect of losing their children. Sandrine for example always says:

*the reason why I am still with this man is because of my children. There is nowhere I can go to with four children. When I think about divorce...then I think especially of my children. What will they do if I am not there? How will they feel if I have to leave them? All these things come to my mind when I think of divorcing that man....*

Another participant explained:

*...my children are very close to their father especially the small one who cannot sleep without him in bed. Each time I think about divorce my children come to mind. I also feel my children are entitled to both parents especially in South Africa were there are no family members to turn to. If we were in Congo they could have had the love and support of their grand parents who will treat them as their own (Sandrine).*

In South Africa refugee/forced immigrant women also find themselves in a kind of 'contest' over men, especially when the latter have a fairly steady income. In this regard Sandrine said:

*...my husband works in an institution that rents houses to the public and he often finds South Africa ladies requesting to go out with him. He once told me "...there are many women who need him if I do not want him". One of his colleagues was proposed by him and he started dating her and this lady knew fully well that he is married and she also knew me personally but she still went on with him. This is not the case in my country because I will not go out with a married man especially if I knew his wife (Sandrine).*

Religion was also presented as a factor that hinders women from seeking legal help in gender-based violence situations. Some of my research participants indicated that they could not take their partners to court or to the police because they believe in God. He sees everything and can bring a change in their lives, no matter what problems they have. Some women said praying and fasting was vital in a domestic violence situations.

*...My husband is a drinker and every weekend when he was drunk he will use abusive languages on me and my children. He says what ever he feels like saying and if I offer a word he jumps on me. This has been happening since we came into South Africa about five years ago. But I kept on praying and I even asked the pastor of my church and some members of our congregation to pray for me and they did. For over five years he carried on with this attitude but I never relented my efforts in praying. Until one day God answered my prayers and he came to church and asked our pastor to pray for him. Since then my husband has been a changed man. It is now about two years since he stopped drinking. Things are now very fine between us in the house and he respects me and my children... (Anna).*

In this regard Boonzaier and De La Ray (2003) argue that a woman's response to gender-based violence is linked to her self-concept, her beliefs about gender roles/identities, and her perceptions of marriage and family life. Fiorenza (1992) argues that patriarchy is perpetuated through Christianity and other religions. Gnanadason (1993) also argues that women frequently fear being condemned by the church for violating the sacrament of marriage if they opt to leave an abusive partner. While Burnett (1996) adds that divorce is not an option for a woman who believes in the holy vows of marriage. These refugee/forced migrant women view the church as a refuge in the uncertainty of living in South Africa and religious principles guide their actions. Difficult economic circumstances amongst refugees further promote gender-based violence.

## *2.2 Economic factors and the belief in dependency*

The South African job market is not easily accessible to refugees/forced immigrants, especially if they do not have the necessary legal status to apply in the formal sector. At the same time unemployment and job insecurity has a great effect on family life and violence. Christel, for example said:

*...when I came to South Africa in 2004 my husband was a very happy man but since he lost his job at the beginning of this year he has been very impolite and unsupportive. We get big fights in the house when it comes to money. Things are fine when I do not ask for money, you can hear us talking nice to each other but the moment you ask for money it becomes a problem (Christel).*

According to Christel her husband has changed since he lost his work. Most of the women who were interviewed viewed their husbands as the 'breadwinner' in the house, even in cases where he was not employed. Being the breadwinner carries with it a certain gendered connotation and the expectation of being respected as the head of the household, not having to share domestic duties, to have authority over the woman and children, and such. The economic position of all the women in this study had



worsened from what they had been used to in their countries of origin. All the women expressed a strong sense and experience of being dislocated – not only financially but also in their everyday lives. Although they all found some or other way to either support the whole family or to contribute to the family income, they all still viewed themselves as being unable to survive financially. They could not really conceive of themselves as ‘breadwinners’ and felt unable to leave their abusers because they cannot support themselves and their children. Even in the case where a woman is working and earning money the women expressed the belief that they cannot be on their own. These women still feel the need to get a man for protection.

One of my participants said:

*...when I was plaiting in Cape Town I was supporting my partner to pay the rent and sometimes, buy food. But since we were removed from the area and relocated to another site. Things have been very quiet; we are no more making money. And now my partner is threatening to throw me out of the house. He went as far as bringing another lady into the house and sent me to live in the garage with our one year old son (Philo).*

Susan, a very well respected woman in our community, has been living in an abusive relationship for years. She provides for her husband and children. She owns a bakery shop and runs a local community television station that offers her a salary of up to R7000 a month, but she explains:

*...even though this man is treating me badly I still feel protected while with him. No body can speak to me any how because of him. Each time we go out the people call me by my partner’s name even though we are not legally married this for me is an honour. I also think a woman of my status needs a man by her to keep her position intact (Evelyn).*

Evelyn is an example of a woman who believes she needs a man with her to maintain her public status. She feels she cannot command respect in her community in the

absence of a man. Some of the women felt trapped in their relationships but think that they will be unable to survive on their own. Their low economic situation is another reason why they stay in abusive relationships.

Kasloff (1993) argues that violence is more common among the more economically disadvantaged in society. For most refugee/forced immigrant women their only means of support (at least until such time as they can find work for themselves) is an abusive husband/partner, who had often been traumatized himself. It might be true that refugees/forced immigrants' low economic situations keeps them in abusive relationships but some of the economically stable ones equally remain in violent relationships. Sharma (2001) opines that some refugee/forced migrant men turn to abuse as a means for solving problems, deal with stress and express their feelings. The women may also lack alternative support networks, such as extended families, in their new country. Leaving a husband/partner may mean the loss of financial support and possessions, but also their shared past and experiences. At the same time they do not have the extended family or community that, under 'normal' circumstances, may have provided them with support and assisted financially or with efforts to obtain work.

Menjivar and Salcido (2002) have also argued that language and job opportunities go hand in hand. English proficiency is important in getting a job in South Africa. Some refugee women that come to South Africa are highly qualified but cannot get a job due to the fact that they studied in languages other than English. One participant for example holds a Master degree in French literature but cannot find a job. A Burundian woman in my study explained:

*...I was a teacher in my country, but since I came here, I worked as a domestic worker for about six years. It is only recently that I was advised by a friend to send my documents to Johannesburg for evaluation. It took over a year for the documents to be evaluated. After the evaluations I have since then found a job as a French teacher in Wynberg (Epi).*

Another woman said:

*I was working at the Ports Authority in Cameroon as a welder but when I first came here there were no jobs for me. But after two years of learning English I went to the Port to look for a Job, I was immediately told to pick up a machine and weld and the manager was very impressed with my work and asked me to start working immediately that is how I got the job I am in today (Juliet).*

Other participants working in the field of nursing explained that they had to rewrite the South African nursing examinations in order for them to work in the local healthcare system. Not all the nurses have been able to write the examination as some refugees/African immigrants still need to learn the language, which is not an easy task. Even though they could work in hospitals, they still need English language skills to communicate with patients and their fellow colleagues. A few of them have been fortunate to get jobs in clinics where they act as interpreters for other refugees or immigrant women making use of clinics.

Epi, unlike the other women, is a very bilingual. She can communicate in both French and English but studied in French so her certificates are in French. She needed to have them translated into English. Ignorant of how this could be done, she did not have her certificates translated or training evaluated for a long time. Many other women said that they studied in their various countries but could not find jobs in Cape Town because of their inability to speak English e.g. Sandrine has a Bachelors degree in Economics from Congo but works as a hairdresser and runs a spaza shop.

### ***2.3 Isolation from and within the community***

Most refugee/forced immigrant women in South Africa work in informal sectors such as hairdressing and selling on the streets. They leave their houses early in the morning and only return late. Thus they have limited access to knowledge about the area in

which they live. They are in a sense isolated from everyday situations in it. Abraham (2000) identified isolation as an issue that affects immigrant women's experiences of domestic violence. The three levels of isolation include the quality of a woman's relationship with her partner, the frequency and quality of social interaction with her friends, relatives and co-workers and access to and participation in the community and other social functions (Abraham 2000:221). Most of the participants led quite socially isolated lives.

*...My husband has never taken me to any party, not even to his end of year party by his job site. I don't know if I am not beautiful enough for him or he is just doing it to hurt me. Once I only heard from the wife of his colleague that he was (at a party with a South African lady (Patricia)).*

This form of isolation is exacerbated by the women's long working hours. This makes it very difficult for them to familiarise themselves in the community in which they are a part. Another participant explains:

*I am a hair dresser on the deck of the taxi rank and we depend on our costumers to make a living. Sometimes a customer can call you to come and do her hair as early as 6.00 am so I leave my house as early as 5.30 am and only get home around about 6.00 pm, sometimes 8.00 pm depending on how busy we are at the taxi rank. Some times it is very difficult to meet with people in my community. In most cases I only hear of something when it is too late (Dede).*

This form of isolation experienced by refugee/forced immigrant women means that they are less informed about things going on in the environment in which they live. This includes knowledge about the law on domestic violence in South Africa. Some women were obliged to stay home and look after their children. As a result of this they couldn't go out to look for jobs. This has made them dependents of their men. Even when a refugee/forced immigrant woman does find a way to make some money, like Sandrine, life consists of doing chores with no time to visit or socialize. I have

often visited her and she only sits down to rest late in the night when she goes to bed. She knows very little about the community of which she is a part. She spends her time looking after her family while also managing her shop.

Some of the women view gender-based violence as very personal and therefore keep silent about it. They only opened up to me when I told them about my own personal experiences in my relationship.

#### ***2.4 Isolation from family and friends***

According to Menjivar and Salcido (2002), loneliness may occur more easily for refugee/forced immigrant women as many have left behind families and loved ones. They have entered an environment where they might only encounter a few familiar faces. They enter a foreign environment where they may not know the language, culture or physical geographical area. As a result, in situations like these, it is easy for men to control women's lives both emotionally and physically (Menjivar and Salcido 2002).

Refugee/forced immigrant women in South Africa are isolated because they lack the traditional support of family members. Due to the absence habitual family support the women are easily at risk of gender-based violence. One participant said:

*he is tormenting me because I don't have any body here to go to. Back home when he came to marry me he was like a child. I dictated everything to him. But since we entered South Africa things have never been there same. He doesn't listen to any one not even when I complain to his parents. He started going out with other women and he deceived that he was going out for a business venture in Hermanus and I only found out later on that he had moved in with another lady in Hermanus (Orelie).*

Orelie strongly believes life would have been different for her in Congo. Respect for in-laws leads to a certain behavioural standards for both men and women at 'home'.

Women feel strong and safe in the presence of their family members such as their parents, aunts, uncles and even grandparents. These extended relatives can also provide women and their children with shelter in the case where their partners/husbands become violent. In the case of Orelie above, her father was a very wealthy man who owned many houses in Congo. After the war most of his property was destroyed and he also passed away. She explained that they were forced to leave the Congo because her late father was a member of the then Kabila's government. Thus, if it had not been for the war in Congo, she could still be with her three sisters.

Another participant said:

*unfortunately my brothers are not here that is why he is hitting me like this. My elder brother will never sit and let a man torment me. There was a time back home when we had a fight and my elder brother and my late mom came to my house and took all my belongings and I stayed with my mom for over two weeks and he kept on coming to beg. I think the reason why he is hitting on me here a lot is because I don't have any were else to go to...(Christel).*

Fernandez (2006) argued that proximity of a woman's family can serve as a form of protection against domestic violence. For the women in my study isolation was further exacerbated by the fact that they had small children at home. This has further increased their loneliness and continuous dependence on their male partners for material/financial and emotional support. Like Orelie, Christel also strongly believes she is vulnerable due to the lack of family support. One of the participants said:

*I have six children so there is nowhere I can leave my children and go to work. If we were in Congo I would have left my children with my parents, but here you can not trust even your own neighbours. To look after six children has not been easy for me. I have to make sure that they are clean at all time and also make sure that my house is clean while also prepare food for all of us. My duties are endless every day I sleep very late and I am the first to wake up (Hilda).*

## *2.5 Language barriers*

For most of the research participants inadequate English language skills are a significant barrier in seeking help. All the women found it very difficult to access service providers, be it the police or domestic violent shelters, because they cannot express themselves in English. Rees and Pease (2006), argued that language skills are fundamental to successfully negotiating and understanding complex social contexts. English proficiency in South Africa is important in any form of communication with institutions. Most refugee/forced migrant women are unable to access services in South Africa due to language problems. Bui and Morash (1999) argued that in such cases, language is a barrier in accessing and communicating their needs to community service providers and in seeking protection from their abusers. One participant explained:

*I went to the police and tried to explain what had happened on my face he couldn't understand me so he asked me to get someone to translate for me so I got very angry and left. When I turn to leave, one of the police on duty that day made a comment in Afrikaans and they all started laughing. I don't know what he said but I believe that they were talking about me (Pauline).*

As a result, Menjivar and Salcido (2002) argue that cultural sensitivity and the inability to speak the language of the refugees/forced migrants can affect the ability of professionals in the community to communicate in the victim's language and to understand domestic violence in a particular group. It also affects their ability to provide adequate information and, if applicable, to take legal action. In the case of women who do not speak the local language, vulnerability, alienation, and ridicule can ensue. In the case where an interpreter is used, the information given to the police officer may be filtered and altered by an interpreter who may even favour the aggressor. Thus the language that practitioners use to handle domestic violence cases is crucial to the victim.

Merry (2000) argues that there is a realization and greater understanding of women of their rights as they spend more time in the host country. In the case of refugees in France, Nicollet (1998) observed that women from Mauritania, Mali, Senegal and Guinea-Bissau increasingly use French law to deal with domestic violence once they have spent more time living in France. As a result Menjivar and Salcido (2002) have argued that language can break barriers for immigrant women in domestic violent situations since language proficiency can reduce the batterer's ability to reinforce his power to control. In some cases language proficiency may exacerbate the abusive behaviour since male control and orthodox gender roles are contested. However, Menjivar and Salcido (2002) have argued that language skills exert greater influence when combined with other limiting conditions such as isolation, employment and legal status.

## ***2.6 Seeking help and trying to negotiate institutions***

Some women have actually sought help from the police and even the family court in Cape Town but the violence in their house had worsened. Pauline said in this regard:

*...I went to the police once when my husband assaulted me and he was arrested but one day latter he was released. So each time I tell him about the police he is not scared (Pauline).*

Sandrine took her partner to court, but due to pressure from family and other members of their group, she withdrew the cases. Some of the participants complained that their husband's family members support or at least condone the abuse against them.

*I have taken my partner to a court in Cape Town but I later on withdrew the case because his brothers and sisters forced me to do so. Whenever he behaves badly I complain to them but they do not say anything to him. The other day in front of his younger sister he hit me on the face and I had a 'blue eye' but she said nothing to him. Another day he burned me with hot iron on*



*my lap and I immediately went to his elder brother who lives with us in the house to show him but he said nothing. Yet they were the first people to come to court to insult me and forced me to withdraw the case. They even called his family back home in Congo and reported the matter to them. Soon after everybody started calling my phone and asking that I withdraw the matter and that is how it all ended (Sandrine).*

Most of the women who had sought help from the police, said that the violence in their houses had increased since then. According to Ida:

*...my husband will hit me and tell me to call the police and you will see what I will do to you. I can not even call the police because they are tired of coming into our house. Each time we fight and I call them so they already know us (Ida).*

A number of the women went to the police and consequently were perceived in their communities as ‘bad’ women. When charges of violence were laid against a partner it instead led to a spiral of violence and abuse. In this regard Sandrine explained that, after she had taken her husband to the family court in Cape Town, her neighbours started mocking her and calling her names. Some even told her that she is now behaving like a South African and not like a ‘proper’ woman anymore.

Some women in the study approached their pastors to try and deal with domestic violence. Christel for example, attended the same church as her husband when she arrived in Cape Town. One year later they started having problems at home. She spoke to their pastor and he arranged a meeting in church one afternoon to help solve the problem. After leaving the church that day her husband beat her badly and told her never to go to that church again.

Some of the women in my study were ignorant about where to go when they are abused. A majority of them were not aware that there were institutions that actually deal with abused women. One participant for example said:

*...where can I go to complain about him? I can only go to my friends and tell them about him, and when you tell your friends about your problems they sometimes laugh at you or they go around gossiping about you. As a result I do not say my problems to them. I rather die than tell people from my country about what my husband does to me (Francine).*

## **2.7 The complexities of the law**

Even though the law, in principle, serves to protect all who live in this country, the refugee/forced immigrant women in my study have not been able to access it. It has been argued that there is a link between migration experiences and violence. Burman et al (2004), argues that the eligibility for service support is denied to many women by virtue of their immigration/refugee status and they can be excluded from service and welfare support. Sharman (2001) argue that immigrant and minority women are often reluctant to contact the police if they are experiencing domestic violence primarily because of institutionalized racism. Furthermore, Rees and Pease (2006) argue, racism and xenophobia amongst officials can combine to disadvantage women accessing or continuing to gain support from mainstream health and welfare services. In line with this some of the participants argued that the police will not respond when they hear the voice of a foreigner on the phone. They strongly believe this because they have called the police several times and there was no response. Others have argued even when the police respond they might only act depending on the severity of the injury inflicted upon the victim.

*...The police can only intervene when they see physical marks on your body. When I am fighting with my husband and I call the police, they only respond when the fight is over, and when they come they only manage to take written statements from us but nothing has ever happened to him. The police ask me*

*to open up a case in court. How do I go to court? Where is the court? I do not know. They have never called me up for further enquiries. Or maybe one day they will call us because I am still waiting (Patricia).*

One refugee woman, Nadia, was nevertheless very conscious of her rights and knows what to do in case of domestic violence in her home. Yet she does not report it to the police, she said:

*..my husband cannot hit me hard because if he does I will call the police. But I am not saying that if he hits me I will call the police for real. I am just saying so to threaten him. If I call the police it might result into a different matter because in my country we do not take family matters to the police. If you do you risk being rejected in your community because it is an unusual thing to take family matters into the public (Nadia).*

Another woman said:

*...this is not where a man hits his wife any how gets away with it. If he touches me I will put him in jail. My partner hit me on the eye once very badly that I had to go to the hospital after which I went to the police and I was sent to the family court in Cape Town Were, he was given a restriction order against me. I was instructed that if he ever lays his hands on me I should call them immediately. So each time he tells me he will kill me and go to jail. He keeps on saying every day that I am very lucky that the police is protecting me otherwise he would have taught me a lesson (Comie).*

Thus, some participants felt protected from physical violence in South Africa, but they still feel they are not protected from other forms of violence. A study by Goldman (1999) indicated that authorities favour primary evidence over a victim's written account of the abuse. Another participant said:

*I can only report him to the police if I have wounds on my body so that*

*they can act as evidence from his violence. When ever you call the police they respond when they want and even when they come they only send you to the family court in Cape Town. But if they see blood on you, only then will they arrest the perpetrator. I have made several attempts to get my partner arrested but to no avail because I have failed to prove to the police that he hit me*

*( Michealle).*

Ferraro (1989) noted that even when policies instruct police arrest, officers will rely on the victim's and offender's characteristics to determine whether to arrest. Ferraro further found that police officers viewed arrest in domestic violence situations among immigrants/refugees as a waste of time because violence is perceived as a 'part' of their lives.

Mama (1993a) established that in some cases of gender-based violence police intervention increases the violence and exacerbates the women's vulnerability and alienation. This has been the case with some participants, when they said the violence in their houses increased after they reported the matter to the police. In this regard Sandrine reported

*...since I took my husband to the police the violence in the house has increased. He has been very aggressive and even sometime he tells the people that I am not a good wife because I took him to the police. Most of the people are in support of him. Since I went to the police he stopped talking to me like we would in normal situation. He also stopped buying food in the house. He always tells me to call the police or the South African government to buy me food. He has since communicated to my in-laws in Congo who do not call me any more because of what happened. (Sandrine).*

Olsen and Scharffscher (2004) have argued that perpetrators of violence are assisted by institutional settings that work to their advantage. Some of the research

participants in the research openly said they could not access the police in time of gender-based violence because their refugee permits had expired. One participant explained:

*last year I was told to leave the country because my reason for asylum was not strong enough to grant me asylum in South Africa. So I contacted a lawyer at the University Of Cape Town who began helping. At this time I had no documents to leave in the country so going out at night was a very big risk for me because the police can stop you at any time to ask for your papers. One evening I came back from work very late and my partner had just come back also, it was about 7.30 pm and my child was still not back from crèche. My partner started blaming me for not coming home early enough to fetch the baby because the crèche closes at 6.30pm. Knowing fully well that going out at night was a risk I was taking it did not mean a thing to him. I then went and fetched the baby but we were told to pay for the extra hours which I did pay. When I returned home he started with me saying I will have to look for another job because my present job is taking a lot more of my time and I can not look after his child properly. When I told him that I will never leave my job he started shouting and when I shouted back at him he jumped on me and started hitting me very hard as though he was fighting with a friend. When my friend heard me crying she came to my rescue only to find me on the ground with blood oozing out of my mouth. She held me up and gave me some water to clean my mouth and she applied a rub on it. I never phoned the police because my documents at the time were not right and the police when they come to your rescue, the first thing they ask are your papers if you do not have them you might be arrested (Nina).*

Other women were reluctant to contact the police because they believed the police do not take foreigners seriously. Pauline explained:

*...I was fighting with my husband and I my child called the police and they did not respond until one of my neighbour's a South African lady contacted them*

*and in less than 10 minutes they were at my house. But very little was done or said to him, I was only told to go to a place of safety to spend the night and then go to court the next day to lay charges against him (Pauline).*

### **3. The reality of gender-based violence**

To understand the experiences of gender-based violence, one needs to ask questions about the 'ownership' and access to women's bodies within and outside marriage, to public and private spaces (Astbury 2003:163). This research indicated that African refugee/forced migrant women in Cape Town suffer from various forms of abuse in their lives that has directly or indirectly affected their psychological, physical, social and economic wellbeing. The above-mentioned factors have also in one way or another increased the occurrence of gender-based violence. Friedman (1999 cited in Rees and Pease 2002) argues that where women's chastity and honour is viewed as the property of men, rape or sexual assault is seen as a violation in the eyes of husband's and communities and can lead to increased violence against women. Friedman also contends that refugee men witnessing rape and experiencing violence suffer from a 'heightened male vulnerability' that, when combined with the stress of settlement in a different country, can lead to domestic violence as a means of gaining control and re-establishing power (1999:65). The psychological strains of refugee life may aggravate aggressive behaviours towards women by men. Heise et al, (1999) argue that gender-based violence affects the health and well-being of survivors their families and their societies.

#### ***3.1 Physical violence***

Physical abuse is said to include punching, slapping, kicking, biting, throwing of things at persons, threatening, and attacking with weapon. Brown (1992) distinguished wife beating from wife battering. Fernandez (2006) argues that, in Russia, the words "battering" and "batterer" does not exist. In Ghana Ofie- Aboagye

(1994) argues that for the “discipline” of a woman to be perceived as abusive, the beating must exceed the norm. The refugee/forced migrant women as well as their partners’ perceptions of domestic violence shifts between the norms and ideas from the ‘home’ country and the perceptions about gender-based violence in South Africa.

Most of the women in the study have experienced physical violence in one form or another. The nature of violence included choking, slapping, kicking, boxing, throwing of objects etcetera resulting in injuries ranging from minor to severe ones. In most cases the violence has occurred repeatedly with no signs of ever stopping.

Christel explained:

*...one day I came back from work very tired and the baby laid in bed while I was busy cooking. About 20 minutes latter he got up and started crying and my hands were dirty, so I called on his father to pick him up but he didn't respond so I continued what I was doing. A moment latter I heard the baby scream loud and I jumped out to his rescue. On going there I found him with his father. Before I could ask what had happened he gave me a big clap on my face and he started blaming me for what had happened. The baby had fallen on the ground from the bed.*

Another participant also recounted an event that landed her in the hospital with about eight stitches on her face:

*...I was preparing food one late afternoon like I normally do, when my boyfriend arrived home earlier than usual. He then asked me why the food was only being prepared now and I told him that I was very busy the whole day. He then went into the room offering no word to me. When he returned to the kitchen to fetch some fruits from the fridge I scowled at him and told him that the food is almost ready and there is no need for him to eat them before meals. He immediately throw the breakable plate of fruits on my face wounding my face and I started screaming aloud when one of my neighbours*

*heard me crying he, immediately came to my rescue and I was rushed to the hospital and my face stitched (Maggi).*

Pauline describes how:

*...we were fighting one day in the house and I manage to open the door and jump out of the house but he would not let me go. He followed me on the street to hit me and one police man actually stopped him and he ran away from the police before he could even be arrested. He came back home late that night drunk and started with me again, this time I never said a word he went on and on until he felt asleep (Pauline).*

Some of the participants have been admitted to the hospital because of physical injuries that had been inflicted on them as a result of violence. Amanda reported that she ended up in the hospital after severe injuries resulting from a fight between her and her partner:

*...one Saturday afternoon while we were arguing over some money which I had spent on food the previous day from his account without his permission, he suddenly turn and hit me very hard on my chest when I was about seven months pregnant and I collapsed. I lay in the hospital for two days and only realized then that I was actually in the hospital. In my hospital file I found out that he had told a lie to the doctors saying I had been hit by a cupboard when we were trying to move it. I stayed in the hospital for over four days and on the forth day I was discharged, but I continue to have chest and back pain resulting from that act from time to time. But the doctors said the pain will go away gradually. It is now a year and a half and yet no signs to show that this pain will disappear (Amanda).*

Yvonne also explains her ordeal:

*I had been treated for a neck injury by the hospital as a result of domestic violence from my husband. One night he came to the house drunk and he*



*asked me for food while I was already in bed and I told him to get his food in the pot. He immediately jumped on me and threw me on the floor and I injured my neck. When I started crying about the neck he called one of his friends who had a car and I was rushed to the hospital where I was treated for a minor neck injury and we returned home that same night with a bandage on my neck (Yvone).*

The physical injuries commonly resulted from weapons such as knives, bottles and some times the fists. Patricia reported:

*I was receiving a call from a friend one day and he asked me to give him the phone and I refused to give him. So he came up to me and held my wrist so tight to force the phone out of my hand in doing so he dislocated my wrist bone (Patricia).*

Battered women are more likely to have been injured in the head, face, neck, breast and abdomen. Many have also experienced physical abused on several occasions and in most cases will end up with a 'blue eye'.

### **3.2 Verbal abuse**

Verbal abuse involves swearing at or using vulgar language to a partner. Most participants indicated that they were regularly verbally abused. Some women view this form of abuse as normal while others consider it as a form of violence. One participant explained:

*...he has never hit me since we came to South Africa, he can only insult me. This for me is better than a man that hits the wife. I still feel he really loves me because he has never lifted his hands on me. Unlike other men who bit their women as though they were their slaves (Miriam).*

While another said:

*...he constantly insults me by telling me how dirty I am and he sometimes swears my vagina. He even calls me names in front of our children (Christel).*

Miriam accepts it when her husband verbally abuses her. But Christel feels extremely bad about it, especially when he does it in the presence of their children. Most of the women in this research did not consider verbal abuse as a form of aggression. Yet, Meyers (1997) argues that verbal aggression can be very harmful and devastating to a women's mental and physical health. More often than not verbal abuse leads to physical violence. As Christel explains:

*...if my husband is verbally aggressive I keep quite because if I say anything it might provoke him and lead to physical violence. As a result my mother taught me that in order for me to avoid beatings from a man I must keep quite when he is shouting and only talk to him when the situation has calmed down. Each time I get very angry and talk back to him when he is angry, it always leads to a fight in the house.*

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While some women have resorted to keeping silent while their partners/husbands are verbally abusive others refuse to do so. Miriam explained that her partner often verbally abused her in the presence of her younger sister of 15 years. One day when he was insulting her, her younger sister got very angry and jumped on her husband and he started slapping her. Miriam joined in the fight and they both hit him.

*From that day he stopped buying food in the house and when ever we were not at home he will cook a very small quantity of food and eat it all up so that there will be nothing left for us. I have heard from several people who tell me that he often goes to restaurants to buy food for himself (Miriam).*

There are no clear cut distinctions between the various forms of abuse as one always leads to the other. Let us take the case of Miriam for example - verbal abuse led to physical violence and financial abuse.

### **3.3 Financial abuse**

Financial abuse is any form of withholding of resources or economic deprivation by a partner. It may include the following: talking or spending another person's money, withholding money, preventing a person from paid job. Almost all the research participants mentioned that their partners do not support them financially. As a result they have to find other means of earning money to support themselves and their children. A majority of the women were hairdressers on the deck at the Cape Town taxi rank and some of them were domestic workers. In almost all the cases the women provided food for the whole family. Others have resorted to prostitution as a means of survival like Pauline above. One participant said:

*...my husband has not supported me for the past two years since I felt pregnant with our child until now that the child is one year. When I first met him he had one child from another woman and he was giving me money to prepare food. Later on when the mother of that child heard about my pregnancy she came and took her child and we were now only two in the house. Since then he has never given me any money. He told me children are very expensive in South Africa and that I should abort the child but I refused. So he told me if I have to keep that child I will suffer and that was it he never gave me money to prepare for the birth of the child. I did all the preparations by my self and with the help of some friends (Patricia).*

Christel explained:

*...I can only have peace in the house if I don't ask him money the moment I ask money we start fighting. My partner only thinks of him self. He has never gone to the shop and bought something for me or my children. He provides very little money for food that can not last for a month. But he expects to meet food on the table every time he gets home.*

Nadia reported that:

*when I first met my husband after a very short while he decided we get married and he deceived me to pay the rent and buy food for us while he will be saving money up in preparations for a grand wedding. One year later we got married and a month into marriage I asked him to take up his responsibility of paying the rents and he said he still had some outstanding bills to pay off which he incurred during our wedding. One year after our wedding he still wasn't able to pay the rents as a result last month I moved out to a friend and left the house for him. I will see if he is not going to pay the rents this time around...*

Economic abuse was very evident in the lives of almost all the women I interviewed. Some of them complained that their husband was withholding money from them:

*...my husband is earning a lot of money. I never knew that he was earning such a lot of money. He had told me a lie in the beginning about his salary and I believed him. He told me that he was earning only R 2,500 but I latter on after about one year realized that he was lying. One day when I was dressing the bed, I decided to turn the mantras over and I discovered that he was hiding his pay slips underneath away from me because he only disclosed part of his salary to me (Patricia).*

Mary-Anne said:

*...my husband abandoned me and my kid in the house where we were living and moved in with another lady in the same neighbourhood. This was when I was pregnant with our second child and I was tested HIV positive. I had been married to him for over 5 years with our first child negative. When I confronted him about the issue he immediately packed his stuff and moved in with our neighbour. When I went to tell the neighbour about his HIV status she pushed me out of her house and they got a restraining order against me (Marry-Anne).*

Different financial concerns raised by all of these women can lead to domestic violence. When a woman receives a small amount of money that cannot meet her family's needs it becomes a problem for her because she has to make sure that there is food on the table no matter what happens. The burden of providing for the entire family now rest on the shoulders of one person - who is the woman.

### ***3.4 Sexual violence***

Krug et al (2002) defined sexual violence as any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. It is therefore any sexual activity that renders the other partner vulnerable.

When asked whether they had ever been forced to have sex by their partners, most of the women said yes. But they did not regard it as violence because they considered it as part of marriage vows or of a relationship. Astbury (2003) argues that women uphold men's entitlement to sexual access to their wives or partners regardless of whether women consented to sex. One participant said:

*...no matter how tired I am when he wants sex I must give him because he is a man and he can not control him self. A woman can better control her sexual desire because we do not erect and because it doesn't cause us any pain but a man will have pain if he fails to have sex when he wants (Sandrine).*

According to Philo:

*if I say no to sex he tells me that I am pushing him out side. As a result I have decided never to refuse him. At any time that he asks for sex I always give him. I also think our love has grown ever since I made the decision to also satisfy his sexual desires.*

Two participants had different perceptions with regard to sexual violence. They felt sexual desires should be satisfied reciprocally. One participant said:

*...my husband thinks he is the only one to propose that we should have sex. If I ask him he will say he is tired but if I say I am tired he doesn't listen (Hilda).*

Christel explained:

*I think my husband is cheating on me because when we first started it was like twice a week but now things have changed. Before our separation he could stay for over three months without even touching me or say he loves me. This I found very strange and I strongly believed he is 'jollyng around' with other women.*

One participant, Sandrine, explained that her husband has on several occasions threatened to throw her and her four children out of the house just because she will not give in to his sexual desires at all times. She said:

*he came home late one night and I think he was drunk and he wanted to have sexual intercourse with me and I refused. He got very angry and drove me and my children out of the house that night. So we walked to the police station that night and the police responded instantly by issuing a warrant of arrest. The police drove us back home and he was arrested and taken to the police station where he spent two days and was released on bail.*

Some women felt sex is a biological phenomenon that can affect a man's well-being if refused. One participant said:

*...I will never refuse my husband from having sex with me because it will affect his mental health. After all it will not change or remove anything from my body if I do have sex every day with my husband with or without my consent. A woman can control her self better than a man in a situation when the man does not want sex but she wants (Comie).*

Sexual violence is directly linked to physical violence. It might also lead to psychological violence especially in the case where sex is being withheld by one partner to punish the other. Heise and Ellsberg (2001) argue in any intimate relationships psychological, physical and sexual violence frequently overlap.

### ***3.5 Emotional or psychological abuse***

According to Follingstad et al. (1990) emotional or psychological abuse is difficult to define and women themselves find it hard to define or identify it. This is partly due to the fact that this kind of abuse cannot be seen physically. Secondly patriarchy has led women to accept male abusive behaviours towards them (Murray 2000). Mullender (1996) argues that abuse is a complex process that interacts between personal, cultural, political and economic factors. However some researchers have been able to come up with a definition of what constitutes emotional violence. This involves verbal or a non-verbal act, which is intended to humiliate, make someone feel worthless and stupid. Carden (1994) defines emotional violence as verbal and non verbal behaviours intended to humiliate, isolate, deny, and control a partner in an intimate relationship. It includes insults, humiliation, intimidation, possessiveness and threats. According to Browne (1993) emotional abuse is usually accompanied by verbal abuse and can possibly result in physical violence. Mullender (1996) argues that emotional abuse overlaps with sexual abuse, especially in the case where the abuser openly tries to take other partners.

Most of the participants in this research had difficulties identifying emotional abuse but they however managed to come up with a series of description of what it is by providing some examples. This sort of abuse was evident in their language and their physical expressions. The most common forms of abuse identified were threats, strong language and humiliation. One participant said

*...he humiliates me in front of people all the time. We were preparing to go out for a party one day and we both dressed in the room but when we came to the lunch were some friends were waiting for us he then turned to me and said I was not properly dressed and he further said I looked very shabby. This was the most embarrassing moment in my life (Philo).*

Another woman explained:

*...my husband keeps on talking to me rudely in front of our children and sometimes other people. Once we went to the meeting and he insulted me in front of the whole gathering (Christel).*

Emotional violence can lead to sexual and physical violence. Levy (1991) argues that emotional abuse causes exhaustion, feelings of helplessness and incompetence with the intention of lowering the self-esteem of an individual. In the case where a woman is being abused emotionally she might react and this can lead to physical violence. If she keeps quiet it will affect her psychologically. Emotional abuse might form the base of physical and sexual abuse (Wiehe 1998:76). A man might deliberately want to have forced sexual encounters with his wife in full view of his children to humiliate her. According to Edleson and Tolman (1992) physical maltreatment always accompanies psychological maltreatment. Thus separating physical violence from emotional abuse might be impossible. Let us take the case where a man physically assaults his wife in front of his children and other people, thus causing physical pain and humiliating her at the same time.

Rees (2004) argues that there are additional issues such as institutions and political situations, which compound an already complex set of cultural, social, and economic factors impacting on the experiences of gender violence by refugees. Menjivar and Salcido (2002) further argues that refugee women who have experienced gender-based violence are unable to return home (their country of origin) because of their well-being and lives being under threat.



#### **4. Conclusion**

The examples from my participant's experiences of gender-based violence have highlighted the importance of looking at it through the lens of an ecological framework. The main premise of the ecological model is that gender-based violence is multifaceted. According to Heise (1998), in order to understand the aetiology of gender-based violence, we have to look at the interaction between the personal, situational, and the socio cultural factors at different levels of the social environment.

At the individual level refugee/forced migrant women are isolated from families and friends. This separation creates a vacuum and opens a way for their partners to violate them due to the lack of support and protection. Refugee/forced immigrant women's lives have been uprooted and they have to learn to deal with their problems on an individual base. These women also put themselves under a lot of stress because they realise that they are the caregivers and providers of their families' physical, emotional and financial needs during wars and afterwards. That goes some way to explain why women are ready to undertake any kind of job to support their families and to fulfil their gendered roles as well.

The second level of the ecological model is the relationship level which involves the control of wealth and decision making within the family. With the event of war and subsequently migration women play the role of sole providers in the family. These changing roles do not necessarily reduce gender-based violence as men turn more violent because they believe women are challenging their traditional roles as the sole providers in the family. They look at women's independence as a challenge to male power and main providers. As a result they resort to violence as a means of retaining their maleness.

At the community level refugees/forced migrant women are isolated and they lack the necessary social support to get out of abusive relationships. At the same time

expatriate communities can condone and legitimize gender violence. Some of the research participants in my research indicated that they were seen as a disgrace to their communities because they tried to deal with issues of gender violence by going to the police. But due to pressure from other family members and members of their communities they had to withdraw the matter from the hands of the police and treat it as a domestic problem.

At the institutional level inadequate legislative policies and institutional responses have encouraged gender-based violence against these women. Some of the research participants indicated that the police response to them has been very negative. Some were unable to access some social services due the lack of appropriate documents.

At the societal level, the tolerance of gender violence, stood out in the case of refugee/forced immigrants communities. The response of some of the research participants indicated that violence was seen as a normal phenomenon and to be dealt with in the confines of the home. From my personal observations it seemed that gender-based violence have been normalized and internalized by some of the research participants to the extent that they no longer considered certain aspects of gender-based violence as violence. Things such as sexual abuse and economic deprivation were no longer considered as a form of abuse. I came to realize from my personal observations and in-depth interviews that that some of my research participants had also experienced other forms of abuse than the physical. They spoke of forced consensual sex as if it was the right of the man whenever he wants it.

Women work almost 15 -17 hours every day both at home and at their jobs. Things like cleaning the house, washing of clothes, going for shopping, cooking food, attending meetings at their children's school, going with children to the hospital, having sex at night etcetera are considered as the duty of a woman. Failures to do any of these tasks are represented as not being a good woman. As a result all the women in my research often go out of their way to meet the criteria of a 'proper' woman.

At the global level we find that the political conflict that forced these women to flee have a negative impact in their lives as the rights of women are not respected during any war/political conflict.

Waldman (2006) argues that understanding the complex and multifaceted nature of domestic violence requires subjecting the conceptualization of 'domestic' to greater scrutiny. She further argues numerous extra-domestic factors may affect, influence, enhance or moderate the enactment of gender violence (2006:94). In the case of refugee women for example, other external factors such as the history and politics in their country has also lead them to experience gender-based violence.



## CHAPTER SIX

### SURVIVING VIOLENCE

#### 1. Introduction

Refugee/forced migrant women are faced with a number of challenges once they settle in South Africa. Not only are they displaced from their country and community of origin, they are, at times, also victims of xenophobia and racism in their host country. Life as a refugee in South Africa is very tough economically for both men and women. Unlike in other countries where refugees are given a place to live, in South Africa this has mostly not been the case. This has resulted in economic hardship. Faced with adversity women are still able to keep their families going. In order to survive most refugee women have developed a number of strategies.

Though gender-based violence was prevalent amongst the research participants in this study some of the women blamed themselves for it and found reasons to justify their husbands/partners abusive behaviour. Yet other participants perceived gender-based violence in their relationships as a form of abuse against them and relied on a number of things to enable them to deal with it and to survive.

Their strategies include isolating themselves from the public, keeping quiet when the husband/partner is angry, forgiving the violence, finding jobs to support the family, providing money to their partners to prevent them from looking for other women, having children with their unmarried partners, and, as a last resort, separation from the abusive partner. Most of these women deal with the dual role of being wives and income-earners at the same time. They actively engaged themselves in strategies to survive. In this regard Wattie, (2004) in a study on domestic violence among central Java women plantation workers in Indonesia described women as “survivors” of violence. She argues that this term should be used to both challenge the notion of

victims and blame on the one hand, and to make visible abused women's resistance and coping on the other hand.

## **2. Perceptions of gender-based violence by refugee/forced immigrant women**

It is important to look at the understanding of gender-based violence from the viewpoint of forced immigrant/refugee women. They often position themselves (and their abusers) in fairly stereotypical gendered ways to make sense of their experiences. At the same time they also showed a great deal of organization when trying to deal with the violence. Many participants thought that gender-based violence only involved physical acts and their impact such as slaps, kicks, beats, rapes. However, through personal observations and providing women with the space to speak up resulted in an expansion to the definition of gender-based violence.

### ***2.1 Self blame***

Some of the women interviewed believed that they were the cause of violence in their homes and blamed themselves for the abuse inflicted on them by their husbands/partners. These women take responsibility for their partner's actions. One participant said:

*...I blame myself for what is happening in my house. My husband was a very nice man when we first got married but over the years he has changed just because I cannot make up my self like other women outside are doing. He wants me to dress sexy but I do not dress like that. In order to attract him I have started dressing the way he wants but he is still going after other women (Christel).*

The feeling of self-blame was evident in yet another participant who highlighted the fact that she was very thin when she got married to her husband but after about ten

years of marriage and four kids she had grown fat and have lost her figure. She blames herself for not looking after her body. She said:

*...my husband loves very thin women and that is why he got married to me. But over the years I have grown fat he has lost interest in me. He always complains of my big stomach. I have tried so many things to make me loose weight but the more I try the more fat I become. I think that is why he started dating other women (Sandrine).*

These women blame themselves for their partner's actions. They try to guess the cause of their abuse. Christel, for example, thinks that because she is not always well groomed, she has opened up the way for her husband to get other partners. Meanwhile Sandrine blames her size for her husband's unfaithfulness. Gallers and Lawrence (1991) argue that women's accepting responsibility for victimization is linked to low self-esteem. Low self-respect would thus be continuously reinforced (Fallingstad et al. 1990). Coming from war torn countries, some of these women had terrible experiences and feels reduced to nothing. They have to redefine themselves in the new country where they have resettled. Because the women feel so vulnerable the men have power over them.

## ***2.2 Attributing violence to 'moods' and normalizing it***

Some women attributed the domestic violence in their house to 'bad moods' of their partners. They felt it was because of their partners/husbands' bad frame of mind that they acted in an abnormal way. One participant for example said:

*...I know my husband as a very kind and loving man. He only acts abnormally when he has a bad day especially at work. His job is very stressful and the people he work's with are giving him hard times as a result he gets home after work every day in bad moods and it is my duty as a wife to calm him down (Christel).*

Yet another woman said:

*...I just keep quiet when my partner is shouting at me especially when I see that he is in a bad mood. If he is not in a good mood and you shout back at him he can lash on you. (Pauline)*

Both cases above represent the ways in which women accepted blame for their partners/husbands actions. They think they need to be stoic and bear it when a man releases his anger on them. The way these women behave or act in their homes depends very much on the mood of their partner. Some of the research participants are in a way trying to rationalise the actions of their partners/husbands.

Some participants also considered harmful remarks as part of their daily life experiences and they perceive it as ordinary. Sandrine for example thinks her husbands negative remarks about her figure only serves as a way of stimulating her to cut down her weight. She explains:

*...he often reminds me of how big I am. Most often when we are in the shopping centres or any public places he draws my attention to very fat people, fatter than my self reminding me that I will soon be like them. I remember when Third Degree once screened a programme on a very fat South African lady who later on died after her surgery. I was in the kitchen cooking when my husband shouted my name and I came rushing and he told me I will soon be like that lady.*

Pauline is also a victim of verbal abuse in her house but she finds it abnormal only if her children are around. If her partner insults her in the absence of her children she explains it is not a problem. She only finds it problematic when her children hear. She explains

*when my children are at school we can quarrel and fight as we wish but not in-front of them as I feel when we do that we are disrespecting the children....*

Many of the participants view physical violence as a trait inherent in men and believed there was nothing they could do about it. They argued that men are more aggressive at the end of the month because they have bills to pay.

One participant for example said:

*...there is no woman that can claim that her husband has never hit her or even slapped her. All men hit their wives. I cannot leave my husband because he hit me that will be a big mistake. If he hits me and even puts a scare I might forget but words to me are more destructive as they stick to my brain (Christel).*

Sandrine argued that:

*I rather have my husband hit me than ignore me when he thinks I do something wrong. There was a time in the house when my husband comes back from work he will eat and go to friends and only come back late in the night when we are all asleep. He did this for about a month or so and I think this hurt me more than him hitting me.*

I realized that most of them were not aware of what constitutes gender-based violence. Refugee/forced migrant women in Cape Town, considered physical assault as the only form of abuse. Other forms of abuse referred to in South Africa's Domestic Violence Act, like sexual, psychological, and economical abuse they view as 'normal'. From personal observations and in-depth interviews with the research participants and from talking with friends, these forms of abuse are more likely to take place than physical violence. The participants have in the most part internalized and normalized these forms of abuse. Most of the research participants considered verbal abuse as customary and stated that men use foul and demeaning language to release their anger.



Sexual abuse was viewed as a normal part of a love relationship. Some considered forced sex from their partners as inherent in men and did not consider it as violence. In some societies women are considered as sexual and reproductive possessions of men (Clark and Lewis 1977). Gender violence amongst these refugee/forced immigrants women is embedded in their cultural origin, but also in wider South African societal norms. According to Koss et al (1994) even though an individual perpetuates each act of violence, it has been demonstrated that violent behaviour is strongly shaped by the wider social and cultural environment in which these individuals find themselves. Farmer (2004) developed ethnography of socially structured inequality -what he termed “structural violence”. He focused on the embodiment of macro forces that resulted indistinct patterns of social suffering. It highlights the causal linkages macro dynamics and individual action with full attention to the nuances of culture and lived experience, or what Bourdieu (1998) calls symbolic violence.

Not only have the participants’ perceptions and experiences been brought out, it was also important to talk about the strategies, mechanisms and techniques used by these women to survive violence. This is especially so because all the women in this research project have been abused in one form or another but they are still with those partners. Only Christel has since separated from her husband and Philo divorced.

### **3. Trying to survive**

#### ***3.1 Staying silent and keeping to oneself***

Women in my research developed individual strategies to deal with the conditions in which they find themselves. A number of participants indicated that, in trying to deal with their abusive partners, they endeavour as much as they can to stay away from their neighbours and community members. They keep their problems to themselves

because they think others are unsympathetic and will blame them for it (the violence).

Christel said:

*...I cannot deal with the shame that my husband is causing me so I just have to isolate my self from the rest of the world. I don't even go to church because most of our church members know about us. Once we had a big fight after church when he asked me for a hundred rand and I asked him what he wanted to do with it. He got very upset and started yelling at me I just kept quiet and he went on talking for about 5 minutes until one of the church elders had to intervene. This thing happened in church but the whole community knows about it. Incidence like this is common between us no matter where we are (Christel).*

Patricia, in turn, reported,

*...I am too ashamed to go out of my house because my neighbours will make a mockery of me. Most of the times when we engage in a fight my neighbours call the police because they can hear me screaming. He even sometimes insults me in front of our neighbours in our native language but I sometimes pretend as though we were just talking. I prefer that we insult each other and even fight silently in our room so that people wouldn't know what is going on even the people we are sharing the flat with, but this is not the case he doesn't care whether people are listening (Patricia).*

The more isolated these women are, the more they depend on their husband/partner for emotional and even material support. By hiding their suffering from neighbours and friends barriers are created between them and the ability to seek assistance. "Once the woman stops interacting with other people, the abusers' influence becomes paramount. She is bombarded with misfortune and distorted values, and there is no one to reinforce her own ideas of truth" (Nicarthy 1986:288).

A number of women in this research also said they kept quiet to avoid abuse from their partners. They fear any words or actions that may spark tension and violence. According to Gamache (1991) women have been socialized to assume responsibility for solving problems in a relationship. Christel explained:

*...I learnt from a friend that silence is the best answer. Each time he comes up with a problem I just keep quiet and pretend that there is water in my mouth so that I would not talk. This really helped me because before when I quarrel with him he ends up hitting on me. So I have learned that keeping quiet is the best thing to do when he is angry (Christel).*

The unpredictable behaviour of abusers forces the women to develop 'special tactics' to deal with potential violence. This nonetheless creates a sense of fear and anxiety in the minds of these women. This is the case with Christel who keeps quiet when the husband is in a bad mood to prevent any further anger being directed at her. Because she is afraid of his anger, she ensures that he does not get angry by doing what he wants her to do or by modifying her behaviour to please the abuser (De Sousa 1991). Gamache (1991) argues that trepidation makes women have a sense of instability in their lives. Fear and anxiety leaves women in a state of uneasiness, since they never know what is going to happen next (Murray 2000).

In trying to deal with gender-based violence individually, some participants preferred to pray about their situation and to trust God to change it. In this regard Das and Kleinman (2001 quoted in Wattie 2004) argue that, in everyday violence women seeks escape in the transcendental. Religion acts as a source of support, comfort and hope. They hope that their prayerful supplications will change their abusive partners. Barnett and Laviolette (1995) call this 'learned hopefulness'. "Learned hopefulness is a battered woman's ongoing belief that her partner will change his personality" (ibid 1995:16).

Some of the participants talked about forgiveness of abuse with reference to the Bible, that you must forgive as many times as possible. The women in Cape Town want to be good Christians. Christel explained:

*...my husband has done a lot of things to me, I caught him several times with many different women in different instances but I still forgive him because the Bible says we should forgive as many times as we can (Christel)*

Another participant explained that she forgives her abusive husband for the sake of peace in the house:

*each time he hurts me he quickly apologizes and takes me out for lunch or supper. Not only does he take me out to a restaurant but he also makes sure he gets me new clothes (Comie).*

The concept of gender-based violence and the understanding of it develop through learning. This learning process stems from our individual social environment. The ability to understand gender-based violence is therefore based on our families, social environment and the society at large. Parkins (1995) therefore argued that the cultural expression of feelings invokes “questions of choice, interpretation and personal identity”. In this case the women choose not to see social workers because gender violence should be kept secret.

Women believe that they have to provide for their families especially in extreme circumstances like war and migration. Society views marriage as a necessity and women therefore view marriage as an obligation. At community level, women avoid speaking about the violence in their houses because it is a disgraceful thing to do – both in the community from which they came as well as the community of which they are now a part.

### ***3.2 Taking responsibility for the family***

In order to keep their relationships going most of the women in my research have to work Franz (2003). Refugee women often become the main provider for the family; they adjust better to the structure of a labour market in the receiving country. However, reversal of economic roles between spouses does not necessarily lead to reversal in power relations or a change in the division of household labour. Lydia for example said:

*...men these days do not need women who are not working. Since I came to South Africa I have been working. I started off as a domestic worker in Goodwood where I was only paid R150 a week but it helped us a lot because at that time my partner was not working. I later on found another housekeeping job in Table view with the help of my friend who was also working in the same residential area and this was far better than my previous job. That is how we managed to live until my partner found a job one year later as a security officer at a pharmacy in Cape Town...*

Forced migrant women are required to work both at home and out of the home. E.g. they are expected to be productive at home as well as at the work place. Franz (2003) argues that forced migrant/refugee women often appear to show greater resilience and adaptability than men because they maintain household and childcare routines, which provides them with occupation and also self-confidence during the stressful period of uncertainty in exile.

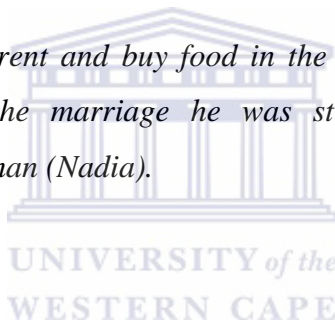
Some of the women in my study emphasized the fact that they provided full financial assistance to their husbands and partners in order to save their relationships. I observed that even where a woman was the main provider in the house the major

decisions in the house, like what school a child goes to, still was in the hands of the man. On this light a participant explained:

*...I have to pay all the bills, buy food in the house and still buy him cloths in order to keep him. I also sometimes provide him with pocket money so that he can go out with his friends. I do this so that in case we broke up he will never find a woman like me and it will make him think of me and may be came back to me. In the mornings as well I prepare breakfast and a lunch box for my partner as well (Jean).*

Another participant said:

*...I had to pay the rent and buy food in the house for him to get money to marry me. After the marriage he was still not ready to take up his responsibility as a man (Nadia).*



Maya explained:

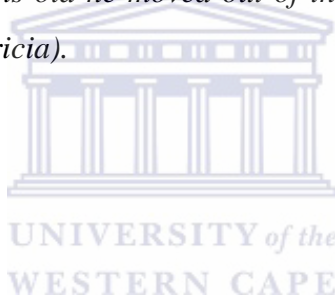
*...I work as a waiter in a restaurant at the waterfront and only get offs ones a week while my husband also works five days a week. He has never washed his cloths or cook for me I do not know what he does with his money. I make sure that he gets breakfast before living for work and make him a lunch box. In the evenings as well when I came back from work I prepare food for the both of us. He only pays the rent and buys light while I take care of food and all household necessities like toiletries and so on (Maya)*

Some of the women in this research felt the need to have babies in order to keep their partners attached to them and thereby hoped to save their marriage/relationships. One participant explained that she thought having a baby with her partner would make their relationship secure. Yet, when he learned of her pregnancy his attitude towards

her changed. He became very indifferent and he has never provided anything to support the child. Most of the participants felt, at a certain age, a woman must have a man or risk remaining single. According to Patricia:

*...I thought when I make a child with my partner he will love me more or even get married because each time we have a problem he reminds me that I cannot give birth. He loved women with children and he will play with my friends' children. But when I became pregnant and told him he wasn't very excited. When the baby was born he decided to sleep in the lounge in the pretext that the baby was disturbing him at night since he has to go to work very early. Before I knew it he started sleeping out of the house at night. When the baby was only four months old he moved out of the house completely and I never saw him again (Patricia).*

### **3.3 Learning the language**



Research participants indicated that they could not access the police and other services due to language barriers. When asked why she could not take her son or a friend who could speak English she responded:

*...I will never make my child to understand what is going on between my boyfriend and I let alone my friends. Even though my boy friend insults me in front of my children I still try as much as possible to hide it from them. I will not even let my neighbours see us fighting because they will pretend to help you but turn to laugh at you behind your back (Pauline)*

The women who can now communicate in English have learned it by taking classes, from friends, family members or their children. These women were more able to

communicate with others. This broadened their knowledge of life goes in South Africa. One participant explained:

*...when I first came to South Africa I hated speaking to South Africans and there was one of my neighbours who loved speaking to me but it will upset me because I never understood her. Each time she talks I will only say yes. And one day she came to me and asks why I always say yes to what everything she says? But after about Two years in South Africa my English improved I started communicating and relating to people in my neighbourhood. We shared our secrets together. I preferred telling a foreign woman of my abusive relationship than telling a woman from Congo who will use it as weapon against you. We became very close and through this woman I became aware of my rights as a woman in South Africa and she tells me where to go to in case of any violence on me by my husband.*

On the other some women have been able to break this barrier of silence and have opened up to their South African neighbours who have educated them on their rights on gender- based violence.

#### **4. The effects of gender-based violence on refugee/forced immigrants.**

Joyner et al. (2007) in her study of trauma and resuscitation unit of public hospitals in South Africa argues even though domestic violence poses significant health threats and cost to the health system, it appears to be a neglected area of South Africa health care. Gender-based violence has acute physical, psychological and social consequences. Survivors often experience psychological trauma, depression, guilt, shame and loss of self-esteem<sup>25</sup>. (Friedman 1999 in Rees and Pease 2002) argues refugee women have fled hostile environments where rape and the abuse of women was a weapon of war and persecution, or a common occurrence in refugee camps, the

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.unfpa.org/emergencies/manuall/4.htm>



effects of abuse among refugee women need to be accounted for in health and welfare policies and interventions in receiving countries.

#### ***4.1 Physical health effects***

The following section describes the physical health effect of gender-based violence on the research participants. Some of the effects of the health problems mentioned by most of the participants of my research include physical injuries, rape, miscarriage, sexually transmitted disease, irregular menstrual cycles and death. The injuries sustained by women because of physical violence may be extremely serious. Some of the research participants have been treated in hospital for injuries ranging from minor to severe. For example, *Magi* ended up in the hospital where she received stitches on her face after her husband threw a plate in her face. Another research participant, *Amanda*, explained how she found herself in the hospital.

*...We were arguing over money I had spent from my partners account. I woke up in hospital two days later. The only thing I could remember was us quarrelling over money. I stayed in the hospital for over four days and eventually went back home. Since then I have been having severe back and chest pain. I can no more carry anything that is heavy.*

Yet another participant, *Yvonne* ended up in the hospital as a result of injuries obtained from her husband's violent behaviour:

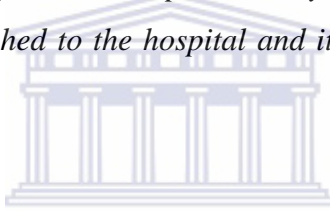
*...I was treated at the Summerset Hospital late one night as a result of a neck injury inflicted on me by my husband. He came home late one evening and met me sitting in the lunch and he told me to come and sleep with him in the bed and I refused. He immediately gripped my hand and started pulling me in trying to resist I hurt myself so badly that he had to call the ambulance*

Yet another participant, Yvonne ended up in the hospital as a result on injuries as well:

*I was treated at the Somerset Hospital as a result of a neck injury inflicted on me by my husband. He came home late one evening and met me sitting in the lounge and he told me to come and sleep with him in the bed and I refused. He immediately gripped my hand and started dragging me... I was hurt so badly that he had to call the ambulance.*

Patricia had a dislocated arm as a result of her husband's violent behaviour.

*my partner in trying to take the phone away from me by force he dislocated my arm... I was rushed to the hospital and it was rearrange and tied with a bandage. Patricia.*



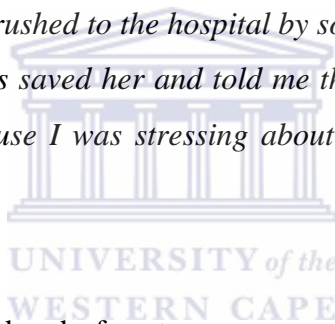
Not only have some of the research participants received severe injuries but in one case the injuries had actually resulted in death. This was the case for Christel's cousin.

*my cousin had been living with her boyfriend for over two years and they always had small quarrels over little things. One evening they had a big fight and my cousin was hit on the stomach and she fell on the ground and collapsed. Her husband fearing for his life ran to a friend's house and called for help, and he disappeared that night. My cousin was rushed to the hospital where she spent over three months. It was found that her kidneys had been destroyed... she died as a result of kidney failure (Christel).*

Christel thinks men release their anger and tension on women. The death of her cousin resulted from the fact that she stopped providing money to her partner which resulted to an increase in violence

Gender-based violence can also result in miscarriages. This was also the experience of Patricia and Gladys. Heise et al. (1994) argue that violence during pregnancy can have serious health consequences for women and their unborn babies. These consequences include Sexually Transmitted Diseases, premature labour, miscarriages, and bleeding during birth. Patricia explained that during another pregnancy:

*He started maltreating me and not even wanting to see me. He never gave me a cent from the time I was pregnant until I gave birth. He has never showed any parental love for my child. So when I was pregnant I would cry all the time until one afternoon when I was six and half months pregnant I started bleeding and I was rushed to the hospital by some friends and I almost lost my baby but the doctors saved her and told me the problem was stress related. I believed them because I was stressing about my husbands changed attitude (Patricia).*



The unfaithfulness of a husband or partner can expose the women to infection with STDs and HIV. Sandrine explained that:

*my husband has never accepted to use condoms during sexual intercourse. He always says he cannot use a condom with me because I am his wife I contracted an STD when I was pregnant. This to me served as an eye opener that my husband was being unfaithful. I got myself some female condoms but he still will not allow me using it...*

Hilda's partner stopped her from using birth control as well. In South Africa people are discouraged from having many children. The cost of living in South Africa is very expensive and refugee/forced immigrant women often can only maintain a threadbare lifestyle. Despite living under very tough conditions refugee women still believe in having many children. This culture of having many children has been handed down to

us from generation to generation from our great grand parents. As a result women who refuse bearing many children are regarded as stubborn or deviant. This is especially true with people who are living together with their in-laws.

Women in this case are vulnerable to STD's because they can not negotiate the use of condoms - be it male or female condoms. Neither can they use preservatives against pregnancy. Sandrine has four children because her husband would not let her use any contraceptives. Four years after their third child she failed to conceive and he realized that she had been using contraceptives and he ordered her to stop using it. She fell pregnant again. According to her religion abortion is not an option.

Yet another participant's partner stopped her from using birth control saying he wants to have many children. This is the case in many African cultures that consider many children as a symbol of prestige. In South Africa people are discouraged from having many children. The cost of living in South Africa is very expensive and many people are living below the average. Having many children puts more strain on the family. Hilda for example has never wanted a big family because she grew up in such circumstances and the burden of the family rested on her mother. Her father was never there for them as a result her mother was unable to send them to school.

*..My husband forced me into having six children with him. After our fourth child I decided to get birth control without his knowledge, in order to avoid falling pregnant. After about three years he wanted a fifth child and I refused. This created a lot of tension in my marriage and he decided he was going to get a second wife, realizing that there was a change of attitude from my husband I became pregnant. Two years latter we had the sixth one. All my children are almost of the same height. Because my husband does not go to church I take them to church alone and this makes it hard to control them. When we get to church they start running all over the place and get people*

*laughing. This puts me in a lot of shame. It also makes me feel like not going to church again. I am forced to use public transport. Each time we get into a taxi the people inside start laughing at me. Some go as far as asking if they are all my children and everybody starts laughing. I get very angry and ashamed. (Hilda).*

Another participant contracted the Human Immune-deficiency Virus (HIV). Susan, a refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo, explains how she contracted HIV after she and her husband came to South Africa.

*... I came to South Africa with my husband and two kids. After four years we had the third child. My husband decided to go down to Durban for a job opportunity that was offered to him. He went leaving my children and me behind. From time to time he will come down to Cape Town.. Then he told me that it was costly coming down to Cape Town every time, so he would only send us money by post and only come ones a year and I accepted. He sometimes stayed away for over six months without even calling. The he became very sick and his boss took him to a private doctor and found out that he was HIV positive, and he sent him to come and join his family in Cape Town so that he will be well looked after. He eventually died. He never told me that he was HIV positive. It was only after he passed away that I also became sick and went to the doctor then I was told that I am HIV positive. Since then I have been living with the disease (Susan).*

Some participants reported having irregular menstrual cycles when they have problems in their relationships. One participant explains how she sometimes has her periods twice a month if they had a problem in the house:

*...when ever I have a problem in my house I see my menses after two weeks instead of 28 days like it normally comes and I think it is because of my problems with my partner (Christel).*

Another participant, Philo, indicates that when she experiences a lot of abuse she sometimes menstruates continuously for about a month. This has happened to her twice and when she goes to the doctor they find out that there is nothing actually wrong with her.

*...I had never in my life menstruated for that long before but since I moved in with my present partner he stated treating me like dirt and each time we have a serious problem I will bleed for over a month non stop. The first time it happened I thought there was something wrong so I went to see a medical doctor whom after several test and medical check up found that there was nothing wrong with me. So the second time I called my mom in Cameroon and she told me that it was stress related and she sent me a local herb which is really helping (Philo).*

## **5. Psychological health effects**

Some of the women also mentioned that they have encountered psychological problems such as nightmares, indignity, stigma, depression and embarrassment According to Murray (2000) and Mullender (1996) psychological abuse more often results in shame, humiliation, and anger. Even though the research participants complained of physiological effects they did not see a medical practitioner for it. Most of the women who made mention of these problems did not really perceive themselves as having any serious side-effects from the abuse and would not seek medical help for it. Stanko (1985) identified weight loss or gain, gastric ulcer and suicidal thoughts in women experiencing emotional abuse. Because the participants

do not know what they experience can be constituted as gender-based violence, it was very difficult to get a clearer picture of its psychological effects. However women identified many 'negative' feelings in their bodies. In the next section I will discuss these.

### ***5.1 The experience of worry and stress or nerves***

Some women complained of having nightmares. Christel for example is plagued by dreams about her husband and his present girlfriend:

*I always have nightmares about my husband and his girlfriend. Since he left me for that lady I have never stopped dreaming that I am fighting with her. Once I had a dream that I met them and she mocked at me and I attacked her and we started fighting. When I woke up that morning I had body pains and I went to consult the doctor who found nothing wrong with me and only gave me panado.*

Most of the research participants admitted to the feeling of shame. One participant for example explained that she feels deeply embarrassed because everybody in her community knows that she is a very 'dirty' woman. Her husband calls her 'dirty woman' when ever they have a fight. He even tells people that she is very dirty. She explains

*he keeps on humiliating me when he gets home with his friends... He never really cares when we are all by ourselves in the house... I still feel ashamed especially to those people whom he was telling them about me (Christel).*

Looking at Christel's example it is clear that the effects of emotional/ psychological abuse are long lasting and damaging (De Sousa 1991; Follingstad et al. 1990). It is

behaving or acting in a way that will reduce the victim's status. Even though she has divorced him she still feels very bad about what he was doing to her. She even broke down in tears when she was telling me about it. She still seems to be in deep pain.

Research participants were often humiliated by their partners. Patricia's partner constantly tells her she is not beautiful enough, dresses very poorly and is out of fashion. He uses this as an excuse for taking out other women.

Hilda is sometimes overwhelmed by her husband's verbal abuse, particularly when he does it in the presence of the children. She has developed a terrible headaches and high blood pressure. When her husband rants against her, her oldest boy will tell her:

*mama do not worry when I am big I will buy you a house to live in so that daddy will not see you or shout at you again.*

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Another participant explains

*I feel very bad when my husband shouts at me in front of people. I always have a heavy head when he talks to me in a certain manner in public. When I sit alone on my own and think about all what he was doing to me I would cry. I could cry for even an hour non stop. I might only stop crying if my children come into my room because I never want them to see me crying (Christel).*

Another participant explains that her husband is well known in their community as a womanizer. As a result some people make mean comments to her, like 'you are not beautiful enough that is why your husband is chasing other women'. When she accompanies him, they often run into his girlfriends and: "The girls mock me and make comments that affect me":



*I was in a party one day when one of my husband's ex-girlfriends came over to him and hugged him in my presence. Incidents like this put me in a lot of dilemmas with people and they have created more enemies than friends to me (Sandrine).*

In the refugee/forced immigrant community, of which I am a part, people tend to know other people's business. There is a lot of gossiping about relationships. Some of the participants feel they have been stigmatized in their communities and labelled as bad women.

One participant explained that she was stigmatized because she took her husband to the police.

*I was chased out of the house late one night by my husband and I went to the police and he was immediately taken to the police station where he spent two days and he was released. All his family came to the police station as if I had killed somebody and started shouting at me. Back home the people were all talking about it and some even saying Congolese ladies have started acting as though they were South Africans (Sandrine).*

The community, in which I am a part, has great influence over our actions. This explains the kind of control the local group, of which Sandrine is now part, tries to have over her – she is behaving like a South African – so she is not a good woman anymore. According to them, a good woman should try to solve her problems within the confines of their homes and not resort to the police. The women in my study wanted help in resolving family violence and in keeping the family together. Bhyan et al (2005) found in a study on Cambodian women in the United States victim/survivors of domestic violence did not want to leave their abusers despite the urging of mainstream service providers.

## 6. Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated that various forms of gender-based violence occur amongst African refugee/ forced immigrants in Cape Town and on a daily basis. These women have learned coping mechanisms to deal with it. Not only do they work to support their families but they also have to maintain their role as housekeepers in their various homes. Almost all the women do not have the sense of independence to leave these abusive marriages. They believe they will shame and disgrace to their communities if they do so. Some stressed economic dependence on their partners as reason for in the abusive relationships. Some, like me, have however in the end decided to leave the abusive partner.

Benjamin (1998) argues that the effects of displacement on women depend on its duration. The immediate manifestation include family separations, exposure to gender violence, trauma associated with the death of family members, impaired health, loss of the home and possessions. The long-term impact of displacement on women may mean the permanent loss social and cultural ties, the termination of career and regular employment, and disruption or loss of educational opportunities.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

#### 1. Conclusion

This chapter provides a summary of the key findings of the research and some recommendations for further research. Being a refugee and an abused woman myself enabled me to research on gender-based violence in my community, paying attention to women's perceptions of gender-based violence. My research results and key findings have brought out gaps for further researching and have provided some recommendations to policy makers.

Displaced women and girls are often resilient survivors, courageous, protectors and untiring caregivers, they hold their families together under the most difficult and inhumane of circumstances and do so while at increase risk of their safety and well-being, risk that include rape, beatings, torture, hunger and abandonment<sup>26</sup>.

This research has brought out the experiences of refugee/forced immigrant women and gender-based violence in Cape Town. Some of these experiences are common among immigrant women all over the world such as language barriers, isolation, and legal status. Some of the factors are unique to refugees in Cape Town, such as xenophobia and lack of workers union for refugee to protect their interest in a workplace. The study made use of a qualitative data collection technique, with its main focus on gender-based violence among refugees/forced immigrants in Cape Town. This study examined the perceptions, experiences and survival strategies of gender-based violence.

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<sup>26</sup> (Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children 2006).

Gender-based violence takes place within the wider social environment in which we find ourselves. Looking at a single causal factor might be problematic as indicated in my research where refugee/forced immigrant women experienced violence from a multifactorial point of view. Refugee/forced immigrants are victims of violence both from their governments where they fled from and individual action from the men in which they entrust their lives in. The political and historical factors that give rise to and sustain gender-based violence amongst refugee communities must be taken into account when dealing with it.

Drawing on the experiences of refugee/forced immigrant women above, it is very important that a politico-historical level be included in the ecological model. It is necessary to look at the life of a refugee/forced immigrant from the time they flee from their various countries of origin right until they get to the 'new' country. Some political factors in their home country forced them into becoming refugees, and having a look at these factors adds an interrelated layer to the ecological framework. At the same time it means that one should give attention to societal influences in the 'new' setting, e.g. xenophobia and labelling, economic hardship, and changing roles within the family that impact on gender-based violence.

Refugee/forced immigrant communities are in continuous flux and under a great deal of stress. Although this was not the focus of the study refugee men have lost their status as the providers for the family during uprootment. As a result of their loss of status, and because sometimes the women become the breadwinners in the family, these men, in turn, resort to violence as a means of upholding their power. According to Moore (1994:68) this is an 'appropriate' resolution because the violent act confirms his masculinity and reinforces his otherwise denied identity. More and more refugee/forced migrant women, on arrival in South Africa, are able to get into lower paid jobs like house-keeping and hairdressing on the streets of Cape Town. The men may find it difficult to integrate themselves into the new system. Thus most of the

research participants have in one way or the other become breadwinners in their various houses.

Although access to gender-based violence services is open to all women in Cape Town refugee women still face a lot of difficulties such as language barriers and cultural values in accessing them. Some service providers do not consider refugee permits proper identity documents. They demand more documents which these women do not have. Although there are places of safety in Cape Town for abused women, the ones in my study did not consider it an option because they think such abuse should remain a private matter. Some women sought help from the police but pressure from their communities (and sometimes threats from the partners) made them drop the charges.

To understand gender-based violence amongst refugee/forced immigrant women in Cape Town, it requires a complex and comprehensive approach that addresses the individual, interpersonal, the societal, community, institutional, historical and political level. For the purpose of my research therefore I used the ecological model to have a critical look at gender-based violence. Using the model I examined the factors contributing to gender-based violence starting from their countries of origin - war and conflicts. These women should not have been in South Africa in first place if not for the war/conflict. The influence of war/conflicts on gender-based violence can be well understood from the stories of the five main research participants in chapter four. A critical look at the life of Epi and Askia for example brings out clearly how the experience of daily violence in South Africa is a consequence of forced migration. Epi fled from her country after her 14 year old daughter was tortured raped and killed before her eyes and her husband kidnapped. She fled to a camp in Zaire, where she was joined by her husband who had since escaped. When people accused her husband of being a Hutu, they fled again. Epi, a former teacher, had to work as a domestic worker in South Africa. Her husband had to watch cars. They live with a lot of other people to save money. Privacy is scarce and so is money. Both Epi and her husband

had to deal with the stress of living under vastly reduced and sometimes incomprehensible circumstances. They have fled from their house during the xenophobic attacks and have since returned to it. They feel cut off from the past, their homes, and their wider family and have a hardscrabble existence. They work long hours and Epi's husband drinks too much and this culminates to verbal and physical abuse. She is afraid of leaving him because of what the neighbours would say and because she thinks she should bear with the burden God has given her. She feels that the local institutions continuously fail her because they do not understand her or do not seem to care. Yet Epi's experience is similar to that of many refugees/forced immigrants the world over.

At the individual level, women are housekeepers while holding down low paid jobs/petty business, childminding etcetera. Gender roles and expectations from their home countries nevertheless still have an influence on the lives of these women in Cape Town. They come from and are again somewhat settled in a society where men dominate women and accept violence against them as normal. In the 'new' community setting in which they find themselves gender-based violence is condoned and when women are expected not to upset the status quo by questioning it – if they protest, they are labelled as 'bad' women who had probably earned or been responsible for their own 'chastisement'.

Inadequate access to, and lack of knowledge about certain service such as police and shelters affect these women negatively at the institutional level. In this way it is obvious that different 'levels' of analysis are interlinked with each other. For example, the notion of 'culture' is used by most women to explain and defend the violent behaviour of their partners or husbands. Such ideas reinforce patriarchal ideologies and practises. Gender-based violence is a complex issue that is experienced differently by different people. As such it requires sophisticated approaches in methods and conceptualization in studying it. Gender-based violence takes multiple forms -it is embedded in some cultures and social structures of some

societies. The side effects of such violence are devastating to the victims and long lasting. They not only affect the individuals in a society in particular but they affect the development of the society as a whole. While refugee/forced immigrant women in Cape Town do experience gender-based violence as a result of war and conflict from home, they have also developed various coping mechanism to survive gender-based violence in all its forms.

## **2. Recommendations for further research**

The effects of gender-based violence are devastating, because of its devastating effect on both the individual on which violence is committed and the society at large, research on it should be taken seriously and treated as a public issue.

Research on gender-based violence among refugee/forced immigrant women in Cape Town is necessary because it will inform policy makers on the needs of these women.

- The government should enact laws that will address refugee specific need as concerns gender-based violence so that they can get easy protection.
- There should also be social services that are specific to refugee women in domestic violent situations. Refugee women will be very confident to speak out to another fellow refugee woman rather than in an institution with other women who have not experienced what they have experienced.

A study of this nature is very important because it will create a platform for theoretical considerations. “Gendered lenses” can assist social science researchers to ascertain which roles and situations are made available to individuals in the context of war (and in its aftermath) in a new country, and what discursive categories appear legitimate to them (Schott 1996: 27) There is nothing that has been done or written on issues of refugee/forced immigrant women and gender-based violence in South Africa, thus more research has to be done on the subject matter. I hope this research

will set as a kick-starter for other researches. This research has not only pointed out to the complete lack of knowledge in this area but it also brought out the importance of conceptualizing gender-based violence from an immigrant's perspective.

Several reasons have accounted for the complete lack of knowledge of research on refugee and gender-based violence in South Africa. Some of the reasons may include the following:

- Refugees were not reorganized in South Africa until its transition to democracy in 1993 following the country's own transition to democracy.
- Most immigrants are unable to speak out about their situation.

Menjívar and Salcido (2002) argued that to avoid the continued perpetration of physical, mental, emotional and economic violence against immigrant women and their children, service providers need to recognize that immigrant women have special needs from those of mainstream population. Services therefore could be provided in their various languages, they should also be educated about their rights thus enabling them to improve on their immigrant specific situation.

**The United Nation High Commissioner for Refugee (UNHCR) (2002), in Liberia put forward the following Guide to prevent sexual and gender-based violence in refugee communities (SGBV)<sup>27</sup>**

- \* Any programming that seeks to reduce (SGBV) must also challenge the social, cultural and political determinants of violence. Such programming therefore requires long term commitment to awareness- raising and advocacy, as well as recognition that addressing SGBV includes providing women and girls access to power.

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<sup>27</sup> UNHCR (2002). How to guide sexual and gender-based violence programme in Liberia. Health and community Development Section <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/pub/opedoc>.



\* National governments should review their charge of protecting refugees and internally displaced population (IDP) and ensure that the same degree of protection accorded the general population also applies to refugees and IDP populations.

\*Wide Spread multi-media campaigns that utilize television, radio, and print should be used to conduct prevention campaigns and inform survivors about the availability of health social services, and legal aid in all refugees, IDP and post conflict communities.

\* Sexual and gender-based violence can be seen as complex issue, marrying together medical, community, protection, legal, security and human rights. Survivors of gender-based violence therefore are in need of services from more than one of the above mention sectors at any given time in order words the Multi-Sectorial Approach. This approach aims to bring change through the involvement of all the relevant sectors, systems, structures and communities that are involved in the provision of services to survivors.

\*The term “refugee” suggests that the people are homogenous and thus lose their identity. Refugee populations are comprised of diverse groups of professionals just like a non refugee community. It is not surprising to find among refugee populations highly educated and qualified people. Under the Multi-sectoral Programme Approach responding to and Preventing Sexual Gender-Based Violence it is important to recognize that the community does posses the capacity to effectively respond and prevent Sexual Gender-Based Violence issues.

Service providers should engage in training activities aimed at dealing with the special needs of refugee women in Cape Town. Gill and Rehman (2004) argued that a

multicultural approach to service provision on domestic violence has to take the form of multi-agency work.

Crenshaw (1997) argues that domestic violence is only one form of oppression and control. While Rees and Pease (2006) in view with Crenshaw have suggested that social injustices impacting on refugee communities, occurring at multiple sites, require urgent attention for refugee women to feel safer in their own homes. Social support networks groups should be created to bring these women together so that they can have a common ground to speak about their problems as a result help each other.



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**APPENDIX A – Consent letter in English**

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

**TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT:**

*The interrelationships of violence – from the transnational to the domestic.  
Experiences of refugee women in Cape Town*

**REFERENCE NUMBER:**

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:**

Miss Ngwetoh Nchangmum Wanka

**ADDRESS:**

University of the Western Cape  
Department of Anthropology  
Private Bag X17, Bellville, 7535

**CONTACT NUMBER:** 073 404 3800

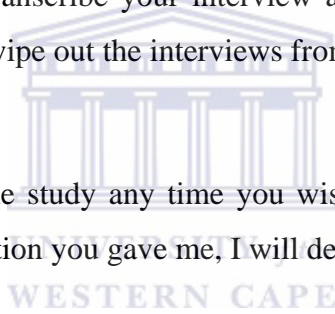
You are invited to take part in a research project. The following information contains details of this research project, go through it carefully. Please ask me any questions about any part of this project that you do not understand. Participation in this project is voluntary and you are free to decline at any stage of the research.

This study has been approved by the Ethics Committee at the University of the Western Cape and will adhere to the ethical guidelines and principles of the South

African Anthropological Association and the Medical Research Council (MRC) Ethical Research Guidelines.

You are invited to participate because of your experience as a refugee or immigrant woman in Cape Town. If you agree, I will ask you questions related to your life and your experiences of being a woman refugee or immigrant. Because the research also examines the understandings concerning the experiences of gender violence among African refugee/ immigrant women in Cape Town, I will also ask you what you understand as gender violence, what you know about it in Cape Town among refugee and immigrant women and such. I will ensure that any information is confidential and that you will remain anonymous. If you are willing, I will tape record our conversation, then I will transcribe your interview and give you a number to keep your identity secret. I will wipe out the interviews from the tape after transcription.

You can withdraw from the study any time you wish. If you withdraw and do not want me to use the information you gave me, I will destroy it.



**DECLARATION BY PARTICIPANT**

I -----have read the document and understood the content of the document there of and have agreed to take part in the research project.

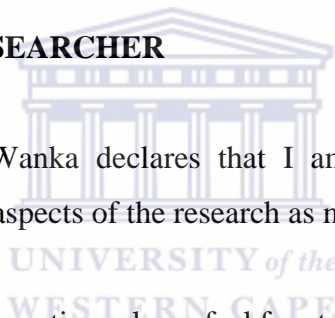
Sign..... Date..... Sign.....  
Date.....

**Research participant**

**Researcher**

**DECLARATION BY RESEARCHER**

I Ngwetoh Nchangmum Wanka declares that I am satisfied that the participant adequately understands all aspects of the research as mentioned above.



If you want any further information, please feel free to contact my supervisor

Prof. Diana Gibson at:

Tel.(021) 959 2336

email.gibson.diana@gmail.com

## **APPENDIX B – Consent letter in French**

### **AUTHORISATION DU PARTICIPANT**

#### **TITRE DU PROJET DE RECHERCHE**

Perceptions, expériences et stratégies liées à la violence féminine parmi les femmes Africaines refuges de Cape Town.

#### **NUMERO DE REFERENCE :**

#### **INVESTIGATEUR PRINCIPAL**

Mlle Ngwetoh N. Wanka

Université de Western Cape

Département d'Anthropologie

Boite Postal x17, Belleville, 7535

#### **NUMERO DE CONTACT : 073 404 3800**

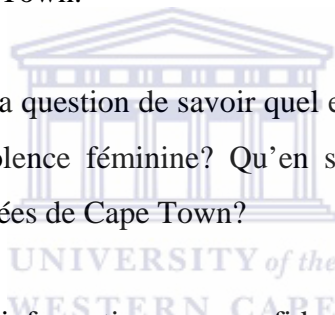
Vous êtes invités à bien vouloir prendre part à un projet de recherche. L'information suivante contient les détails de ce projet de recherche, veuillez s'il vous plaît lire attentivement. Vous êtes libres de poser toutes sortes de questions échappant à votre compréhension de ce projet. La participation à ce projet est volontaire, et vous êtes tout aussi libres de vous déclinier à tout niveau de la recherche.

Cette étude a été approuvée par la comite d'éthiques de L'université de Western Cape et adhère aux critères et principes d'éthique de l'association Sud Africaine Anthropologie et du Conseil Médical de Recherche (CMR).

Vous y etes invitées a participe a cause de votre expérience en tant que femmes réfugiées de Cape Town.

Si vous etes d'accord, alors je vous poserai de questions liées a votre vie et expérience de femme réfugiée. Parce que la recherche examine aussi les perceptions concernant diverses expériences de violence liée au genre féminin parmi les femmes Africaines refuges de Cape Town.

Je vous poserai également la question de savoir quel est votre entendement ou qu'est-ce vous entendes par violence féminine? Qu'en savez vous a propos en ce qui concerne les femmes réfugiées de Cape Town?



Je vous garantis que toute information sera confidentielle et que vous resterez dans anonymat. Si vous etes d'accord, j'enregistrerai votre conversation sur cassette, puis je transcrirai votre interview et vous attribuerai un numéro afin de gardes secrète votre identité, après quoi j'effacerai de la cassette toutes les interviews.

Vous pouvez a tout moment de l'étude vous retirez si vous le désirez, et si vous le faites et ne me voulez pas utiliser votre information, alors je détruirai la cassette selon votre désir.

## **DECLERATION DU PARTICIPANT**

Je..... ai lu et compris le contenu du document qui ma ete rendu et accepte de prendre part au projet de recherche.

Signature..... Date.....

Signature.....

Date.....

Participant de Recherche

Chercheur

### **DECLARATION DU CHERCHEUR**

Je..... déclare être satisfaite de ce que le participant ait convenablement compris tout les aspects de la recherche susmentionnée.

Si vous avez besoin de plus amples informations, veuillez s'il vous plait contacter mon superviseur,

Professeur Diana Gibson au :

Tel : (021) 959 2336

E-mail [gibson.diana@gmail.com](mailto:gibson.diana@gmail.com)



## **APPENDIX C - Coding**

PARTICIPANT 1 - Sandrine

PARTICIPANT 2 - Pauline

PARTICIPANT 3 - Patricia

PARTICIPANT 4 - Philo

PARTICIPANT 5 - Christel





## **APPENDIX D – General question guide**

Surname:

Name:

Nationality:

Educational background:

Occupation:

Number of years in South Africa:



## **APPENDIX E- Interview guide**

- I. What do you consider as gender based violence?
2. Have you experienced it before?
3. If yes, tell me about it
4. What did you do?
5. Did you seek any help?
6. What sort of help did you seek?
7. Did it help you?
- 8 Have you had any family support?
9. Tell me about their support
10. Did any member of your community or members of your community get involved?
11. If yes tell me about their involvements

