Launching issue: Immigration, poverty and change

The recession is nothing new for immigrants. Jobs have always been hard to find. Work that uses their skills and pays them fairly is even harder to secure. Far from getting better, this “racialized” economic downturn is getting worse. In 1980, immigrants earned 85 cents for every dollar received by their Canadian-born counterparts. In 2005, this figure dropped to 63 cents for immigrant men and 56 cents for immigrant women.

Newcomers bring to Canada a wealth of skills and knowledge essential in a globalized economy – technical and professional expertise, international work experience and valuable contacts. Ironically, this rich potential goes largely untapped as internationally trained workers struggle against non-recognition of their skills and credentials, as well as unrealistic demands for work experience in Canada. Many newcomers find themselves vulnerable to labour exploitation and abuse, due to temporary or uncertain immigration status. In a recession, these workers are the first to lose their jobs.

Meanwhile, Ontario has released an official Anti-Poverty Strategy to attack the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Proposed solutions include increasing the Ontario Child Benefit, as well as enhancing funding for early childhood education and youth-oriented programs. For many newcomers, this intergenerational focus misses an important point – poverty is not a learned behaviour, but the result of systemic barriers.

Newcomers’ voices are critical to developing new insights and solutions to the problem of poverty in Ontario. For this reason, the Mennonite New Life Centre is pleased to present this first edition of New Voices, a bi-annual advocacy bulletin created by and for newcomers and their allies.

In this first bulletin, five internationally trained journalists bring us engaging and thought-provoking articles in which they explore some of the many barriers newcomers face in their struggle to put their skills to work, and to build a future of dignity and hope for themselves and their families. The bulletin also highlights a series of advocacy and social change initiatives led by newcomers, including our very own Newcomer Advocacy Committees.

For 25 years, the Mennonite New Life Centre has walked alongside newcomer communities in Toronto. We firmly believe that our future, as a city and as a society, depends on full participation of newcomers in all areas of civic life.

It is our hope that this bulletin inspires you to reflection and action. We invite you to join your voice to ours in the struggle to improve access to fair and meaningful work for all.

Tanya Chute Molina, Executive Director, Mennonite New Life Centre
At the last light of day, in the few minutes before the sun sinks below the white marble dome of Lahore’s Shahi Mosque, the call of “Allah o Akber” resonates, pouring out from lofty, red stone minarets and flooding streets and alleyways. Mostly old men, but also a few younger ones, rush to answer the call with eternal devotion.

Elsewhere similar calls are being made from countless minarets. Many of the city’s 10 million inhabitants heed the call, but some who are lazy like me, mark time and struggle to cling to their dreams.

Now, oceans apart, the first rays of sun strike another minaret, the CN Tower, signaling a new day. Breakfast Television goes live and I jump out of bed and rush to the coffee maker.

Immigration. Expatriation. Exile. An immigrant from Peru, an expat from India or an exile from Palestine, they all appear and exist separately here.

Except me, I am all of them. I immigrated to Canada for economic opportunities, but I am also in exile, as I cannot live in my native Pakistan. And yet, I am an emotional expatriate who dreams of going back one day. But with roots growing and spreading here in Canada, my compass is broken.

My thoughts are here and there at the same time. The minarets of Shahi Mosque murmur far away, but in my dream they rub shoulders with the gleaming heights of the CN Tower. There is some comfort knowing that the sky shelters both sides of the ocean.

A flight of fantasy likens my life to the object of affection for Grandmasters Khan, Jahangir and Jansher, tracking its trajectories within four white walls. “Like the poor squash ball, contested by two great masters,” the dream whispers, “you can go your own way, but you will always come back!”

I recall a conversation with a Montreal-born author in his thirties who had settled down with a successful publisher, slightly older than himself, in Paris.

From the back seat of the taxicab, he explained: “Toronto lacks essence. Each day, hundreds of hopeful new immigrants arrive at Pearson international airport, each loaded with credentials and dreams, but for the next 10 years they have no identity.”

“They become nobody in particular, but from their perspective they are swimming against the current of Niagara Falls! A few may jump out and appear on posters celebrating their diversity, Canada’s multiculturalism, but many will fail.”

“Toronto never becomes the melting pot of its diversity, like London or New York,” the man is saying.

“Not even like Paris,” his partner adds. “Toronto is in a continuous cycle of discovery and loss of its identity.”

“True,” I murmur in reply, sinking behind the steering wheel, “I always buy no-name brand groceries. I never dare to walk into costly Loblaws.”

Thousands of people gather for Eid prayers at Lahore’s Shahi Mosque in Pakistan.
There’s a hidden deal for newcomers, unspoken rules. Swap your credentials for minimum wage and work long hours and your kids will get the benefits of a quality education and better job opportunities. Meanwhile, you get a lifetime guarantee on welfare cheques, burritos and halal meat.

Many mistake multiculturalism as a fair deal. Canadians brag about it. But who really understands it?

Sometimes it resembles a colony of bees. The queen bee and her associates rest in the centre of the hive, while worker bees collect sweet nectar to feed them.

For immigrants, a similar cycle is hard to break: improve your language skills, get job training, a mortgage, maybe some credit cards, an RRSP, then get laid off, start your second career training, file for bankruptcy, move into social housing, donate your organs and, finally, make funeral arrangements.

“Hundreds of new immigrants arrive at Pearson airport, each loaded with credentials and dreams, but for the next 10 years they have no identity.”

A few lucky ones manage to break the cycle, while the rest of us become losers for life and end up driving cabs and delivering pizzas.

Contrast the American dream. From each new beginning, people arrive there already marginalized. Slowly they try to move to the centre, making or pretending their issues match the mainstream.

Newer newcomers take their place at the margins. The process is fusion, a melting pot for a cohesive society. O, Canada! Multiculturalism has become tolerance, but how much will you tolerate?

There are exceptions. I see Brampton, a small city touching Toronto, where new immigrants, especially southern Indians, blacks and eastern Europeans are reinventing themselves, building shopping malls and their own community centres from scratch.

Late at night, I drive by Michael Lee-Chin’s Crystal, growing out of the Royal Ontario Museum. Lee-Chin is a Chinese-Jamaican immigrant, who began his own billion-dollar odyssey here almost 40 years ago. Rags to riches, his story rises with a donation of $30 million to build the Crystal, the price of admission to Toronto society’s royal club!

It is a triumph for immigrants, shared only in the telling.

Elsewhere in this multicultural and diverse city are heard the quiet murmurs of an aging security guard, climbing endless stairs behind nearby Yorkville penthouses, and asking, “O Canada! Where are you, my Canada?”

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**Haris Sheikh**

A Canadian of Pakistani origin, Haris Sheikh has Canadian credentials as Film Director, complementing the Masters Degree in Political Science and Fine Arts he obtained in Pakistan. Haris’ career began as a columnist and political activist. In 2000, he left this work and the military regime in Pakistan to immigrate to Canada, where he became the Associate Director of an award-winning documentary, “Fundamental Freedoms.” Currently, Haris is enrolled in the Canadian Journalism for International Writers program at Sheridan College. At the same time, he is working on a documentary and writing a book. His interests include: international affairs, Muslim civilization, global immigration, multiculturalism and Canadian identity. To find out more about his work, visit: [www.virgopictures.com](http://www.virgopictures.com)
Protectionism: The root cause of poverty among immigrants

By Innocent Madawo

Too many newcomers have heard employers cite their lack of “Canadian experience” as the reason for not hiring them. The explanation is well known and loathed with a passion.

“Canadian experience” is not recognized as reasonable criteria for hiring by any law, but it is thrown around by employers with such impunity that it has had a negative impact on newcomers struggling to survive in Canada.

I know. As an internationally trained journalist, I have encountered this barrier many times in the five years I have been here. I have approached many local media outlets in the Greater Toronto Area, offering my close to 20 years’ experience in international business reporting and editing but, in various ways, editors have told me to acquire local skills before I apply for employment.

Canadian experience is not recognized as reasonable criteria for hiring by any law.

Trying to maintain a positive attitude, I have taken that advice and contributed hundreds of columns, analyses and news articles, building a sizeable portfolio. Still I am not considered good enough for employment in the Canadian industry.

The ill-defined and unreasonable demand for immigrants to have “Canadian experience,” in my view, is the main cause of poverty among us. Data collected on poverty trends in the GTA—and indeed all of Canada—has consistently shown that poverty is more prevalent, and is growing, among immigrant communities.

Take this data from Statistics Canada: The unemployment rate for immigrants in Ontario as of last year was 6.8 per cent, compared to Canadian-born workers whose unemployment rate was 4.4 per cent.

For immigrants who arrived in Ontario in the last five years, the rate is 11.9 per cent and, in Toronto, the figure is 12.7 per cent.

This is contrasted sharply by the fact that many foreigners, who are the target of Canada’s immigration policy, are educated and skilled professionals.

Like other immigrants, I have taken up “survival jobs” that perpetually confine us to poverty. Some will go back to school—where their previous qualifications are often unrecognized—with the hope of landing that dream job when they produce a Canadian degree. But by then, other barriers are thrust in their faces.

One is called “This is a union job” and the other is age discrimination.

The fact that this trend has been perpetuated over years, and may never be fixed, speaks more about Canadian socio-political attitudes than this country’s economic capacity.

In my view, the origins of this conundrum are in this country’s foreign policy, which emphasizes humanitarian aid, not sustainable economic development.

Canada is perceived to be among the world’s leaders in providing aid. However, its companies largely shun investing in poor countries unless they have minerals or oil.

This very scenario is transposed here. Canadian politicians and humanitarian groups are among the best in the world in terms of luring people to this country.
Those fleeing political and social persecution are offered protection, healing and renewal. Professionals are promised good jobs with competitive remuneration. But once they are on Canadian soil, the vicious circle of poverty begins, often handed down through families for generations.

There seems to be a complete disconnect between the intentions of the politicians to boost Canada’s aging workforce with newcomers, and employers’ protectionist instincts.

Employers and professional associations are reluctant to open the doors to “outsiders,” particularly in professional and leadership positions. This is why there have been countless stories of doctors who end up driving taxis and engineers who become janitors.

The irony is that when immigrants apply to come to Canada, it is their professions and the promise of available jobs in those professions that secure them visas to come over. They would not be granted entry had they said they could drive taxis or clean toilets.

The Ontario government has come up with a number of programs to improve the chances of foreign-trained professionals to secure the jobs they deserve. However, at best, these programs have produced unpaid internships or short-term, non-renewable contracts from employers. What do we conclude from all this? It is not that Canada is failing to provide jobs for immigrants; after all, right now this country is among the best positioned to ride out the worst of the global economic recession.

There are definitely enough economic resources to go around, but those holding them are reluctant to share.

**Innocent Madawo**

Innocent Madawo is a freelance journalist based in Toronto. Innocent is originally from Zimbabwe, where he worked as a business journalist. In Toronto, Innocent writes a socio-political column for the Toronto Sun and contributes articles to other local media, including The Globe and Mail and CBC. He is currently a student in International Relations at York University.

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**Stuck in a survival job?**

**Think it’s time for change?**

**Tell your MPP: “Ontario Workers Need a Fair Deal”**

The “Ontario Workers Need a Fair Deal Campaign” demands are: bring the minimum wage up to $10.25 and update and enforce labour laws to protect all workers.

Contact the Worker’s Action Centre for brochures in English, Chinese, Spanish and Tamil.

**The Workers’ Action Centre** is a worker-based organization committed to improving the lives and working conditions of people in low-wage and unstable employment.

720 Spadina Avenue, Suite 223, Toronto ON M5S 2T9
Tel: (416) 531-0778, Fax: (416) 533-0107
www.workersactioncentre.org
The family in one room

By Shan Qiao

I used to live in a three-bedroom rooming house in Toronto. The landlords were an elderly couple originally from Fujian province, in southern China, now more prosperous after following their son here.

Downstairs in the somber-looking basement, a family of four from Guangdong huddled around meager furnishings and suitcases, while I had secured relative luxury in the second-floor master bedroom with its private bathroom. My lodgings were bright, next to my housemates who included the elderly landlords, in the smallest room of the house, and another immigrant family of three from northern China, renting the middle room.

Such rooming houses in Toronto are not uncommon. Some are literally crowded to the rafters. Last year, the Toronto Star discovered a house in Scarborough that had been subdivided into 18 bedrooms and 8 shared bathrooms.

Some rental houses are legally licensed to operate, others are not. As newcomers, newly landed immigrants or settled immigrants, we take what we can get.

Back then I had no problem with nine roommates until late one night when my door was almost knocked off its hinges by a furious pounding. It was the mother of the family in the middle room.

“...bitch! You’re crazy! You can’t take a shower after midnight! You woke everyone up and I can’t fall asleep anymore!” she was yelling in Chinese, loud enough to draw attention from the rest of the house.

She was right, I had come home after midnight, but I didn’t think taking a shower would cause so much trouble.

I opened the door. The woman, whom I hardly knew despite living in such close quarters, tried to slap me across the face. Then, she struck me harder with her fist and I shouted that I would call the police.

“I want to kill you, and I want to dump your body in the middle of nowhere so your parents cannot even find your body!” she shouted, sending shivers through me. At the time, news about 21-year-old visa student Wei Zhao, who went missing in Burnaby, B.C., and was later found dead near a lake, had been splashed across the front pages of every Chinese newspaper

I’d rarely seen this woman. We had only casually talked when we bumped into each other in the kitchen. I knew she had applied to immigrate to Canada as a professional, bringing her husband and young daughter with her. Since landing in Canada a few years previous, she had graduated from Seneca College with an accounting diploma, and had been eagerly looking for a job. She told me she wanted a bigger place to raise her daughter.

The landlords maximized every square inch of the house and let the rent pay off their mortgage, even making a profit.

“You f--- bitch! You’re crazy! You can’t take a shower after midnight! You woke everyone up and I can’t fall asleep anymore!” she was
were, otherwise we’d be living somewhere else. But everyone has their own way of dealing with the stress of immigration and our circumstances were different.

The overall situation for newly arrived and settled immigrants hasn’t changed much in the seven years I’ve been here.

According to the Colour of Poverty Campaign (COPC), 80 per cent of newcomers depend on rental housing. Within Toronto, where there’s an acute shortage of affordable housing, more than 43 per cent of recent immigrants have “core housing needs,” meaning that their accommodation “is too expensive, too crowded or in need of major repairs,” COPC says.

It’s easy to reflect on these studies, having experienced some of the findings first-hand. Mental health, particularly depression, is a constant challenge for immigrants faced with the disappointment and even shame of not realizing their goals.

Getting back to that night, I realize now that my neighbour was probably under a lot of pressure.

I had seen more of her husband whom I called Mr. Liu. The woman kept to herself mostly. Heavy-set and more laid-back, Mr. Liu supported his family by working night shift in a label factory. After paying $500 for rent every month, Mr. Liu used whatever he had left to pay for food and bus tickets.

“That’s what my wife gives to me,” he confided one day, showing me the Toronto Transit Commission tickets. “She looks after the money, always anxious about spending.”

Mr. Liu told me then he particularly liked summer, sometimes skipping a ride on the bus and walking 45 minutes to get home. “That way, there is one more TTC ticket saved for the next trip,” he said.

During all the shouting, Mr. Liu has appeared and he is out of character. I can still see him roaring at his wife, “Stop this!” I am dumbstruck, never having heard him utter a word in anger. Later, he walks me out of the house, pleading with me not to call the police. “She has not been well for months, because she can’t find a job,” he says, his voice a near whisper. “She gets stuck in the room, searching for jobs on the Internet all day. She’s become very angry. You know, the place we live is just too small. Nowhere to talk or even complain.”

I didn’t call the police. But I did move out very shortly afterward.

Patrick Ou, director at Chinese Family Services of Ontario, says in a recent interview, “Many Chinese still have the traditional mentality of keeping their family problems hidden. It is often difficult for social workers to reach out and help until it’s too late.”

Scenes from that night are still in my head. I wonder if I should have done anything differently. When I see other immigrants struggling here, I think about Mr. Liu and his family. I hope life has turned out better for them.

Shan Qiao
Born in China, Shan Qiao came to Canada 10 years ago as a visa student, obtaining a Bachelor of Arts degree from York University. A skilled journalist and photographer, Shan has worked for two major Chinese daily newspapers in the GTA and has freelanced for mainstream newspapers such as the Toronto Star and the Toronto Sun. Her career highlight was covering the Beijing Olympic Games, where she used her bilingual skills in Mandarin and English to contribute to both ethnic and mainstream media in Canada.

Concerned about housing conditions for new immigrants?
Want to raise awareness and work for change?

Join the Colour of Poverty Campaign!

For fact sheets on housing and homelessness, and other aspects of racialized poverty, go to www.colourofpoverty.ca

Colour of Poverty is a community coalition working to raise awareness and seek solutions to the growing problem of racialized poverty in Ontario. In addition to raising concerns about newcomer housing conditions, the Colour of Poverty campaign is advocating to bring back employment equity legislation in Ontario.
From dreams to desperation

By Delmy Cruz

Where Next?
After nine years in Canada, eking out an existence and moving from one survival job to the next, Martha Saenz has a question: When does the dream life of an immigrant begin?

“We wonder if we should go back to Argentina, with many dreams in our luggage,” Martha says, “or settle here and continue working survival jobs that will never allow us to reach our personal goals.”

Now living in Mississauga with her husband José, and raising their two children, the couple still cling tenuously to their dreams of landing jobs in Canadian mainstream media.

A decade ago, the prospect of leaving Argentina for Canada — and Toronto in particular — seemed like a good idea. Confident their combined 10 years of experience in media would transfer to skilled jobs and a brighter future, they pulled up stakes and moved.

Soon after arriving here, however, José and Martha started hitting obstacles, finding out quickly that their language skills, apparently, were not good enough. “When we arrived in Toronto, our first problem was that with English as our second language, it was incredibly difficult to understand Canadian society,” says José.

“We never have time to go to the school,” he says. “We need money to live. I work many hours in a construction company and Martha got a job in an Italian bakery.” Both tried to get a job in Toronto’s small Spanish-speaking media, “but we couldn’t . . . the Hispanic circle is so closed in this city,” Martha notes.

Newcomer journalists, established professionals and college trainers reflect together on barriers and opportunities for foreign-trained journalists during a networking seminar at the Mennonite New Life Centre last November.

Toronto prides itself for its diversity and is well-known as the most multicultural city in the world. This is great news if you are an immigrant and you dream about your life here, because the city would seem to be the perfect place to live and grow.

Sometimes, however, reality is not the same as your dreams. Many immigrants who try to restart their lives here discover this multicultural city has some problems, many of which can only be discovered along the way.

Over the years, Toronto’s immigrant community has grown. People come for a variety of reasons, but all of them have the same mission: to “have a chance,” to become involved in Canadian society, to create space for their new life, to contribute and to be a part of the economy.

A lot of people bring their own tools to this mission, such as a university degree, or special skills and other studies from their home countries. But this is where it gets complicated, because most of the time these tools are not useful—or not valued—in Canadian society.

The reality is that many immigrants, who were deemed skilled professionals at home, are not having their credentials recognized.

This situation is just the tip of the iceberg of the poverty problem in the Greater Toronto Area.

A couple that I met recently, Martha and José Saenz, are both journalists from Argentina. They moved here nine years ago, and at the time had more than 10 years’ combined experience working in Argentina’s media sector.

Despite much effort, they have been unable to land jobs in mainstream English-language media, or even in the Spanish-language press.

To support their family and make a living, both have taken up various survival jobs. José’s “second career” is in the construction industry and Martha works at an Italian bakery.

For José, the situation isn’t likely to change any time soon. “The economic crisis is widespread and many people are losing their jobs daily. Canada is not an exception.”
Now they are stuck, trying to decide whether or not to return to Argentina or to continue in Canada without fulfilling their career aspirations.

They are not alone. Martha and José share this dilemma with multitudes of foreign-trained professionals.

New immigrants find barriers in the labour market for several reasons, including poor language skills, the necessity of Canadian professional licencing and lack of so-called “Canadian experience.”

For these reasons they get survival jobs, for which they are overqualified, and receive low wages that eventually result in a higher poverty rate in the province. Immigrants are not the only victims in a slowing economy, but they are among the most vulnerable, because it is so difficult for them to organize and to contribute their skills and ideas to social change.

In order to reduce poverty, it isn't only necessary to train people to ask for food, housing and clothes; these things are important, of course, but it is also necessary to help newcomers become active participants in their new society.

Recently, some foreign-trained journalists organized a workshop to address the necessity of being part of a professional community.

Most of them haven't been able to find jobs in journalism, but they believe in working together for a more inclusive society.

Delmy Cruz
Salvadoran journalist Delmy Cruz started her professional career as a news producer and broadcaster at Radio LABIO in Los Angeles. Back in El Salvador, Delmy worked as a broadcaster for commercial and alternative radio stations, including Maya Vision, where she was anchor of a morning news program. During this time, Delmy was also a feature writer for the Co-Latino and participated in establishing a Central American Environmental Journalists Network. Delmy holds a journalism degree from the University of Technology in San Salvador, El Salvador. She and her family moved to Canada in 2006.

Agree or disagree?

Working Ontarians, who work full time throughout the year, should reach a living standard above the poverty line.

Show your agreement by endorsing the 25 in 5 Declaration at www.25in5.ca/endorse.html

25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction is a multi-sectoral network comprised of more than 100 provincial and Toronto-based organizations and individuals working on eliminating poverty. 25 in 5 stands for the coalition’s main goal: to reduce poverty by 25% in 5 years.

Join the 25 in 5 Network on Facebook at www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=8373990661 and participate in upcoming events!
It was the death threats that brought Mauricio Martinez and his family to a new life of poverty in Canada.

Martinez, who arrived in Toronto with his wife and two children from Mexico last November, is now awaiting the outcome of a claim for refugee status. His family is surviving on welfare and he is struggling to make ends meet.

“If there is only one voice, nobody will listen. But if we work together, we can join more voices.”

“Every month the government gives me money,” says Martinez in Spanish, “but the money isn’t enough. We can barely pay the rent and buy a few things to eat. It is really difficult.”

The Martinez family has managed to find an affordable apartment in Toronto’s east end, but finding a good job has been tough for Mauricio, who has several years’ experience working as a social activist in Mexico.

Martinez’s situation is not uncommon. In fact, similar circumstances are shared among a growing community in the Toronto area. Many current refugee claimants come from Mexico and Colombia.

“Getting a start in Canada is no easy matter,” Martinez told a gathering of recent immigrants, refugees and activists at the Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto. About 20 people attended the meeting earlier this year, organized by the centre’s Newcomer Advocacy Committee.

Committee members invited Ontario MPP Michael Prue (Beaches-East York) of the New Democratic Party to engage in dialogue with newcomers concerning their experience of poverty and the solutions proposed in the province’s Anti-Poverty Strategy. Prue is the MPP for the riding where the centre is located.

“It was helpful to have a speaker like Mr. Prue because he understands the real concerns of newcomers on issues of minimum wage, housing and welfare,” Martinez said in a recent interview.

“These topics are important for people who live in an expensive city like Toronto.”

Prue drew strong connections between immigration and poverty, insisting that ethno-cultural communities, non-governmental organizations, political parties and the federal and provincial governments should make a more sustained effort to unite in the fight against poverty.

Immigrants already struggling to survive in Toronto and other parts of Ontario are further pressured by the ongoing economic recession.

Talk about job cuts in many sectors of the Canadian economy has dominated news, feature stories and analysis for months. There have been many calls for economic stimulus.

Canadian economic researcher Nathan Laurie says Ontario’s poverty rate will grow at least 13.6 per cent over the next year, placing more than half a million Ontarians below the poverty line.

If that projection holds true, it will confirm what at one in two newcomer children in Ontario already knows: poverty is on the rise.

There is more evidence.

The average low-income family would need to increase their earnings by more than $5,000 a year just to reach the poverty line, according to the 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction.
Anecdotal evidence shows families are increasingly turning to food banks because they can’t afford to feed themselves, on top of paying for shelter, clothing and transportation.

“Poor Ontarians are being forced to choose between paying the rent or feeding their kids,” Prue says.

“The NDP has proposed the formation of an independent committee to ensure that social assistance rates are adequate to cover the real costs of food, housing and other basic needs as well.” Prue promised to strive for genuine changes that improve the lives of thousands of people living in poverty.

He supports an urgent increase in minimum wage, from $8.75 to $10.00 per hour, an enriched Ontario Child Benefit and initiatives to speed up access to subsidized housing.

In its Budget 2009 announcement on March 26, the Ontario government pledged to double the Child Care Benefit for low-income families.

Such changes are welcome, but do little to address the unique employment challenges faced by newcomers: non-recognition of skills and credentials, unrealistic demands for Canadian work experience; exploitation by unscrupulous employers who take advantage of the vulnerability of those with temporary or uncertain status in Canada.

Martinez thinks Queen’s Park could go further to help immigrants who “need more help with things like job training, mentoring, etc.”

The Newcomer Advocacy Committee, created last year, has been trying to engage newcomers, settled immigrants and refugees living in poverty to address and transform their situations.

Says Martinez: “If there is only one voice, nobody will listen. But if we work together, we can join more voices and the provincial government will listen to our requests.”

With files from Luis Matta

Want to make your voice heard?

The New Life Centre invites you to join our

Newcomer Advocacy Committees

Take action / Develop your leadership skills / Learn about the political process in Canada

The Newcomer Advocacy Committees seek to support newcomers to engage in collective analysis of systemic barriers to fair and meaningful employment, and to formulate their own proposals and strategies for change.

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International voices assert new perspectives on the growing problem of racialized poverty, while building new media. New Voices team (R to L): Shan Qiao, Innocent Madawo, Haris Sheikh, Bradley Lee (Editor), Delmy Cruz and Gilberto Rogel.

New Journalism: The stories written by this group of internationally trained journalists deliver new perspectives on the long-standing issues of immigration and poverty.

Over just a few weeks, we’ve pulled together this collection of writings that get to the heart of the matter for many newcomers: the exploration of identity and belonging in a new country, through the experience of searching for sustainable jobs to becoming involved in community life, and surviving the loneliness of being different.

Haris’s story provides an introduction to the immigrant experience, depicting longing for his native Pakistan while struggling to make a living in Toronto — all told from the driver’s seat of a taxicab! Photographer and writer Shan Qiao moves beyond abstraction and describes poverty from a different angle, writing about the tough living conditions many immigrants endure to get a start in Canada. Veteran business journalist Innocent Madawo, a refugee from Zimbabwe, offers his analysis and views on the barriers that foreign professionals face in the job market. Salvadorean journalist Delmy Cruz examines the gap between expectations and reality in her story, “From dreams to desperation,” while Gilberto Rogel joins a meeting of recent immigrants looking for ways to work together to improve their lives here in Canada.

It has been an enriching experience listening to these “new voices” in Canadian journalism. Their journalistic skill is apparent, as is their understanding of the political, social and economic themes that are shaping our country. As Canadians, we could do better, by including them more often in the telling of our common story.

Brad Lee, Editor

Interested in supporting New Voices?
Contact us to contribute, join our mailing list or make a donation.
All donations are gratefully acknowledged with a receipt for income tax purposes.

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