

# Weaving Our Stories of Displacement: Gender, Place, and Identity in Newfoundland

## Research Fact Sheet



### Key Findings

- Colonization, resettlement, and outmigration are related processes of displacement for Newfoundland women.
- Women's experiences of displacement are affected by their social positions and related systems of power.
- Exploring diverse women's experiences unsettles the dominant stories about each of these processes of displacement that currently exist in Newfoundland.

### Key Policy Recommendations

- Include more contemporary Indigenous Studies content for all levels of education in the province.
- Ensure adequate supports for all members of communities who choose to resettle.
- Create hiring policies and employment opportunities that will entice well-educated young people to return to the province.

### What Is Displacement?

The concept of displacement recognizes that place for many, is an essential component of one's personal identity. Newfoundlanders form very strong connections to place, which informs our sense of a collective cultural identity. Displacement is a loss or disruption of sense of place, which occurs through a disconnection from home, culture or tradition. Displacement often involves a physical move to a new place. Displacement can result in feelings of loss, exclusion, and of being 'out of place,' 'not at home' or 'not belonging,' affecting one's sense of identity and wellbeing. Displacement is gendered and is affected by multiple systems of power including racism, sexism, classism, colonization, and capitalism. Displacement affects people differently depending on their individual circumstances and social location.

*"I claim, as many other Newfoundlanders do, an identity that evolves out of hard-felt connections to the concrete, material land and sea, to the island. I make claims to a home that is a fixed geographical space, a home that is solid, touchable and able to be seen"*

Susan Tilley

#### The Researcher

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### Processes of Displacement in Newfoundland

This research focused on three processes of displacement that have occurred in Newfoundland and shape Newfoundlanders' collective identities:

- **Colonization** – Colonization of Indigenous peoples on the island, including the historical colonization of the Beothuk and historical and contemporary colonization of the Mi'kmaq people.
- **Resettlement** – Government sponsored resettlement of outport communities on the island from 1954 onward.
- **Outmigration** – Experiences of leaving the province for employment, education, and other reasons.

## Methodology

This research followed a multi-methods, feminist, qualitative, intersectional approach. Intersectionality recognizes that individual circumstances, aspects of personal identity, systems of power, and institutions shape lived experience, including displacement. Feminist researchers are concerned with social justice and doing research that promotes social change. The primary data source was semi-structured interviews with 7 Newfoundland women who self-identified as having experienced one or more of the chosen processes of displacement. A number of secondary data sources were consulted to place their stories in context and are listed in the box on the right. An intersectional analysis of interview data was conducted to determine some ways that aspects of identity, systems of power and institutions affect diverse women's experiences of displacement. Some policy recommendations were developed that will be helpful to lessen the effects of future displacement.

### Secondary Data Sources

- Provincial, federal, and Indigenous government documents
- Non-governmental organization publications
- Media articles
- Scholarly publications
- Think tank reports
- Stories, songs, and poems

## Key Findings

Findings have been developed into four peer-reviewed scholarly articles. Below is a plain language summary of some of the main findings.

### Related Processes of Displacement

Close readings of research interview transcripts and secondary data sources revealed that resettlement and outmigration are widely understood on the island to be part of a long process of colonization that began when the island was under the control of Britain and continued when Newfoundland joined Canada in 1949. Women who were resettled feel that their outport life was seen as inferior and backward by the federal and provincial government. They stated that they felt they had little choice but to resettle. Women who experience outmigration tell of stereotypes they face when living in other parts of Canada and how they perceive that the province is not widely respected. They point to current high rates of outmigration as a result of the province's poor economy and link this to the mismanagement of the fishery and inadequate control over resources like hydroelectricity and offshore oil.

The colonization experienced by Indigenous peoples on the island is connected to this system of British/Canadian colonization. The colonization of Indigenous peoples was a necessary first step to establishing the island as a British colony. A lack of recognition of the Mi'kmaq nation's claims to the island helps to justify current understandings of Newfoundland history and identity tied to place. First Nations people on the island were done a disservice when they were not recognized under the *Indian Act* when Newfoundland joined Canada. Today, Qalipu applicants' current struggles to reconnect to their culture and for status recognition show the power and harms of colonization. Many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians know very little about Indigenous peoples in the province.



Figure 1: Many Mi'kmaq families were displaced during the construction of the American Air Force Base in Stephenville.

## Diversity of Experiences

A number of aspects of identity, related systems of power, and institutions shape women's experiences of displacement. An intersectional approach reveals that looking below the surface unsettles some of the dominant stories that exist on the island about each of these displacements.

**Gender & Sexism:** Women tend to consider the wellbeing of their families as a primary factor when making decisions that affect displacement. Women who were resettled often were able to find work outside the home, which was not always socially acceptable or possible in outport communities. Women are more likely to leave the island to pursue education opportunities than for employment reasons.

**Age & Ageism:** Women who were resettled at a young age feel their opinion was not taken into account. Older women who were resettled sometimes had problems adjusting to the different way of life in the new community. Women who leave the province for education at a young age experience difficulties in finding well-paid employment opportunities that would entice them to return.

**Class & Capitalism:** Integration into the wage economy sped up the process of assimilation for Mi'kmaq people on the West Coast. Living in big towns requires much more cash than outport living, which puts a strain on resettled women's finances. The stereotypes about Newfoundlanders that women who migrate encounter can rely on notions that Newfoundlanders are poor and demand too much federal financial support.

**Ethnicity & Racism:** There are many negative, racialized stereotypes about Indigenous people in the province and several are gendered. The common understanding 'Newfoundlander' as an ethnic identity tied to the island can displace Indigenous identities. Newfoundland women who have been living away can be labelled as 'mainlanders' when they return, which has a harmful effect on their sense of identity and wellbeing and contributes to social exclusion.

**Indigeneity & Colonization:** The diversity of Indigenous identities and distinctions between Indigenous peoples are not well understood in the province. Mi'kmaq women have faced many challenges in asserting their Indigenous identity and reclaiming their traditions.

**Region & Resource Allocation:** Indigenous Newfoundlanders tend to face less racism in urban areas and this can cause tensions when trying to become involved in Indigenous organizations based in rural areas. Rural areas generally receive less government funding for services and infrastructure and have less employment opportunities, which affects women's experiences of both resettlement and outmigration.



Figure 2: The community of Greenspond is an outport community that has successfully avoided resettlement.



Figure 3: Multiple factors shape displacement.

### Dominant Stories of Displacement in Newfoundland

**Colonization:** The Beothuk were the only Indigenous people of the island. Because there are no Beothuk people anymore, now there are no Indigenous people who have claims to the island.

**Resettlement:** Resettlement was a much needed policy, but many people who were resettled regret it.

**Outmigration:** Newfoundlanders leave to pursue employment in resource industries in other provinces.



## Policy Recommendations

An intersectional analysis allows us to see where changes might create more just and equitable policies for all people. A number of policy recommendations have emerged from this research and are listed below.

### Resource for Policy Makers

[\*An Intersectionality Based Policy Analysis Framework\*](#), published by the Institute for Intersectionality Research and Policy, provides an excellent set of questions to evaluate the effects of a policy on diverse groups of people.

**Indigenous Education:** Women who experienced colonization in this research recognized education as an essential policy solution to counter the lack of knowledge about Indigenous peoples on the island.

- At all grade levels, give equal focus to the experiences of Beothuk and Mi'kmaq people on the island.
- Integrate contemporary Mi'kmaq, Innu, Inuit, and Métis experience into the required Newfoundland culture components of the English high school curriculum and the Grade 11 Newfoundland and Labrador Studies course. Spend at least one month on Indigenous content in the Grade 8 Social Studies course.
- Require all teacher candidates who wish to be licensed in the province to take a mandatory Indigenous Studies course.

**Supports for Resettled Communities:** Women who were resettled said that better supports for members of resettled communities need to be available and offered some suggestions for needed supports.

- Government supports in finding housing and employment in the new community are essential.
- Ensure that all members of resettled communities, especially older people, are able to successfully integrate into their new communities and have a quality of life that is at least equal to what they left. Consult communities about their anticipated needs post-resettlement.
- Reimburse non-permanent residents of resettled communities for the value of their property if they are not eligible for government supports given to permanent residents.
- When communities achieved the required vote to resettle, ensure the moving process begins promptly rather than leaving them in limbo for multiple years due to bureaucratic cost analysis processes.



Figure 4: Many Newfoundland women migrate to pursue higher education opportunities on the mainland at institutions like the University of Toronto.

**Outmigration Policy:** Women who outmigrate often say they have a strong desire to the return to the province someday, but face barriers, including a lack of understanding of why they left and harsh judgements for doing so.

- Collect statistics about reasons for leaving disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, and income, when former residents terminate their provincial medical coverage.
- Make jobs for university educated young people a priority in rural job creation programs.
- Create an official policy that will ensure that youth who were educated away and choose to return to the province will be considered equally for public sector jobs.
- Provide mechanisms to allow salaries and benefits in the province to be competitive with the mainland.

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