

# Understanding the Refugee Experience in the Canadian Context



# Understanding the Refugee Experience in the Canadian Context

Edited by

Bharati Sethi, Sepali Guruge,  
and Rick Csiernik

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



Understanding the Refugee Experience in the Canadian Context

Edited by, Bharati Sethi, Sepali Guruge and Rick Csiernik

This book first published 2021

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2021 by , Bharati Sethi, Sepali Guruge and Rick Csiernik

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-6300-6

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-6300-1

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables and Figures ..... viii

Preface ..... ix

## **SECTION I: Introduction**

Chapter One ..... 2

What Brought Us Here?:

*Bharati Sethi, Sepali Guruge, and Rick Csiernik*

Chapter Two ..... 13

Refugee Demographics

*Karun K. Karki and Dhruba J. Neupane*

## **SECTION II: Refugee Resettlement**

Chapter Three ..... 30

Syrian Refugee Reflections on Canada's Sponsorship Programs

*Nimo Bokore*

Chapter Four ..... 45

"We Are a Gift to Canada": Refugee Women's Voices

of Resettlement and Resilience

*Bharati Sethi and Snežana Obradović-Ratković*

Chapter Five ..... 60

Parenting in Contexts of War, Displacement, and Resettlement:

Voices from the Syrian Conflict

*Abdelfettah Elkchirid and Bree Akesson*

Chapter Six ..... 70

Listening to Innocence: Effects of Islamophobia on Muslim Youth

*Siham Elkassem, Rick Csiernik, Andrew Matulak, Gina Kayssi,*

*Yasmine Hussain, Kathryn Lambert, Pamela Bailey, and Asad Choudhary*

Chapter Seven.....	86
Queer and Trans Migrants with Precarious Status Living in Canada: Policies, Ideologies, Realities, and Practices <i>Edward Lee</i>	
Chapter Eight.....	100
Group Refugee Resettlement in Canada: Learning from the Karen <i>Ei Phyu Smith, Sheila Htoo, Michaela Hynie, and Susan McGrath</i>	
<b>SECTION III: The Promise of Education</b>	
Chapter Nine.....	114
Educating Refugee Children in Canada: Toward A Pedagogy of Healing <i>Snežana Obradović-Ratković, Dragana Kovačević, Neelofar Ahmed, and Claire Ellis</i>	
Chapter Ten .....	133
Aiming Higher: The Case for Refugee Access to Tertiary Education in Canada <i>Claire Ellis, Courtney Oreja, and Emma Jankowski</i>	
<b>SECTION IV: Refugee Health</b>	
Chapter Eleven .....	150
Fayyaa-Nagaa: Health and Wellbeing among Oromo Women and Girls in Ontario <i>Baredu Abraham, Tolee Biya, Martha Kuwee Kumsa, and Nardos Tassew</i>	
Chapter Twelve .....	161
Refugee Mothers' Perinatal Mental Health Experiences and Access to Health Care <i>Joyce O'Mahony and Nancy Clark</i>	
Chapter Thirteen.....	176
Considering Primary Health Care as a Social Determinant of Refugee Health Through the Lens of Social Justice and Care Ethics: Implications for Social Policy <i>Nancy Clark and Joyce O'Mahony</i>	

**SECTION V: Where Do We Go Next?**

Chapter Fourteen ..... 192  
Change Making  
*Bharati Sethi*

Contributing Authors ..... 200

# LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

## Tables

Table 1: Refugee Statistics

Table 2.1: Global Displacement and the Displaced Population (2007–2017)

Table 2.2: Asylum Claimants by Claim Office-Type and Province (2013–2018)

Table 3.1: Resettlement Phases of Government-Assisted Refugees in the City of Ottawa

Table 3.2: Participant Perceptions of Resettlement Programs

Table 14.1: Nations Accepting the Greatest Numbers of Refugees

## Figures

Figure 2.1: The World's Population of Concern

Figure 2.2: Top Ten Source Countries of Refugees – 2017

Figure 2.3: Top Ten Host Countries of Refugees – 2017

Figure 2.4: Number of Permanent Resident Refugees in Canada (2008–2017)

Figure 2.5: Twitters Showing Leadership Stances to Refugees Crisis

Figure 3.1: Resettlement Phases of the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program

Figure 3.2: Resettlement Phases of the Blended Visa Office-Referred Program

Figure 4.1: Empty Crib

Figure 4.2: Hanging On

Figure 9.1: Scoping Review Prisma Flow Diagram



## PREFACE

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that at the end of 2018, approximately 70.8 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced as a result of “persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violation” (2018, p. 2), primarily from the Middle East and Africa (Table 1a). This displaced population includes refugees (25.9 million); refugees under UNHCR’s mandate (20.4 million); Palestine refugees under United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)’s mandate (5.5 million); internally displaced people (41.3 million); and asylum-seekers (3.5 million). More than half of the global refugee population is under the age of 18 (UNHCR, 2018). In 2018, Canada hosted the largest number of refugees among the five developed nations by taking in 28,100 of the 92,400 individuals who were resettled in 25 countries (Table 1b).

Table 1: Refugee Statistics

Table 1a: Country of Origin

Top 5 Countries of Refugee Origins	Number of Refugees Displaced
Syria	6.7 million
Afghanistan	2.7 million
South Sudan	2.3 million
Myanmar	1.1 million
Somalia	0.9 million

Table 1b: Resettlement Country

Top 5 Refugee-Settling Countries	Number of Refugees Resettled
Canada	28,100
United States of America	22,900
Australia	12,700
United Kingdom	5,800
France	5,600

Source: UNHCR (2019), pp. 3, 32

Based on Canada's 2019–2021 multi-year immigration strategy, potential admissions in the Total Refugees and Protected Persons category are expected to rise from 46,450 in 2019 to 51,700 in 2021 (Government of Canada, 2018). The increasing number of refugee admissions has raised concerns among some political quarters, contributing to social conservative-leaning government victories in Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, and New Brunswick. Jean-Nicolas Beuze, UNHCR Canada representative in Ottawa, told the *National Observer* that “The terminology we hear in Canada lately, like ‘queue jumper,’ ‘bogus claim,’ and ‘illegal,’ just taints refugees as a threat and neglects completely the reason why they come and their individual stories” (Beuze cited in Syed, 2018). The reality is that refugees will continue to play a vital role in Canada's economic and population growth by addressing gaps in the labour market and challenges related to Canada's aging population [Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada Government of Canada (IRCC, 2018)].

Currently, more than 60% of new immigrants worldwide come from Asia (Table 1), including the Middle East (Statistics Canada, 2017), and 67% of all refugees worldwide originate from Afghanistan, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, and Syria (UNHCR, 2018). Many studies have demonstrated that racialized newcomers to Canada experience racism (Gilbert, 2013; Parker, 2018) and discrimination (Stewart et al., 2015). Racialized refugees bear the additional burdens of emotional and physical trauma, forced separation from loved ones, and political or religious persecution (Murray, Davidson & Schweitzer, 2010). During post-conflict/post-war situations, refugee girls and women experience sexual and gender-based violence including systemic rape, sexual assault, torture, and slavery, trafficking (Forced Migration Research Network, 2017), and “corrective rape of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) identifying women” is prevalent (Forced Migration Research Network, 2017, p. 1). It is noteworthy that despite these experiences of trauma and sexual and gender-based violence, refugee women are not passive victims. In the absence of men in refugee camps and sites, many courageous women provide financial, economic, social, and physical support to their own families and other refugees. Researchers have found that refugee women arrange for childcare, earn money by running small businesses with no funding or external support, organize basic education classes, and even build physical thorn barriers as protection from enemies (Bartolomei, 2015; Olivius, 2014; Forced Migration Research Network, 2017).

In the context of global policymaking and peace-making affecting the lives of refugees including women and girls, certain members of the refugee population have less social power. Members of the LGBTI community,

youth and children, individuals living with disability, people from small ethnic or religious groups, and older adults “have unequal access to decision-making, infrastructure and resources, and have their capacities ignored” (Forced Migration Research Network, 2017, p. 1).

This edited volume includes contributions from 32 authors, with the goal of engaging readers and helping them appreciate the shared and distinct migration and resettlement experiences within refugee communities. It is divided into five sections, and each chapter concludes with key takeaway points that can serve as a useful guide and a source of reflection for researchers, educators, students, service providers, and policymakers.

Section I, “Introduction,” includes two chapters. In Chapter One, *What Brought Us Here?*, Bharati Sethi, Sepali Guruge, and Rick Csiernik reflect on their personal and academic experiences, which led to their engagement with this topic and the content of this edited volume. In Chapter Two, *Refugee Demographics*, Karun Karki and Dhruva Neupane provide insights into the global numbers of displaced persons, where they originate, and where they settle. They conclude the chapter by focusing on the real-world situation in Canada, setting the stage for the remainder of the book.

Section II, “Refugee Resettlement,” includes six chapters. In Chapter Three, *Syrian Refugee Reflections on Canada’s Sponsorship Programs*, Nimo Bokore evaluates the advantages and disadvantages of Canada’s three refugee sponsorship programs: Government-Assisted Refugees (GAR), Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR) refugees, and Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSR), with specific attention to the objectives of each sponsorship program and their ability to meet the resettlement needs of newcomers.

In Chapter Four, *We Are a Gift to Canada: Refugee Women’s Voices of Resettlement and Resilience*, Bharati Sethi and Snežana Obradović-Ratković combine data from two distinct studies to explore the resettlement experiences of refugee women in Canada and resilience strategies they use. The experiences of university-educated refugee women from Africa, the Arab world, Korea, Japan, Latin America, and the former Yugoslavia included individual and structural oppression, racism, and discrimination. Sethi and Obradović-Ratković explored resilience strategies in the face of adversity and the importance of recognizing refugee women’s agency and honouring their gifts to Canada, and conclude by stressing the need for collaboration between the government, local community, ethnic community, employers, service providers, and educational authorities.

In Chapter Five, *Parenting in Contexts of War, Displacement, and Resettlement: Refugee Voices from the Syrian Conflict*, Abdelfettah Elkchirid and Bree Akesson explore parenting experiences during the pre-flight, flight, and resettlement stages. Parenting during pre-flight tends to follow cultural and societal norms, with conflicts and issues handled from an intergenerational perspective with extended family and community support. However, during flight and displacement, parents tend to focus on the safety of the family unit, which sometimes leads to them engaging in harmful coping mechanisms to maintain family survival. During the resettlement stage, family roles again tend to shift, challenging ‘traditional’ family norms related to authority, identity, and culture, and creating additional pressure as the family transitions to life in Canada.

In Chapter Six, *Listening to the Children: Effects of Islamophobia on Muslim Youth*, Siham Elkassem and her colleagues explore the experiences of young Muslims once the family arrives in Canada. Specifically, they focus on the increasing anti-Muslim bigotry within the current political and societal climate, and how Islamophobia has fuelled significant negative attention to young Muslim refugees. This chapter adds to the limited body of knowledge about how Islamophobia affects Muslim youth, drawing directly from the experiences of young Muslim refugees living in a Canadian urban setting.

In Chapter Seven, *The Realities of Queer and Trans Migrants with Precarious Status Living in Canada*, Edward Lee examines the realities and challenges faced by LGBTQI refugees as well as other migrants with precarious status in Canada, including visitors, international students, temporary foreign workers, refugee claimants and protected persons, and individuals who are detained and undocumented. This chapter explores how queer and trans migrants have been ideologically framed as ‘non-genuine’ by the Canadian immigration regime, along with pathways to critical and anti-oppressive practices that could benefit queer and trans migrants with precarious status.

Section II concludes with Chapter Eight, *Group Refugee Resettlement in Canada: Learning from the Karen*, in which Ei Phyu Smith, Sheila Htoo, Michaela Hynie, and Susan McGrath explore the experiences of Karen refugees from across Canada and settlement workers working with this community. The authors also discuss the implications of the findings for future resettlement of other groups.

Section III, “The Promise of Education,” includes two chapters about the education of refugee children in Canada. In Chapter Nine, *Educating Refugee Children in Canada: Toward A Pedagogy of Healing*, Snežana Obradović-Ratković, Dragana Kovačević, Neelofar Ahmed, and Claire Ellis explore how education can serve as a healing process for refugee and war-affected children. Based on their analysis of previous research, they chart a pedagogy of healing for school-aged children, arguing that teachers, resettlement officers, and policymakers must develop cross-cultural competences, a social justice focus, and transformative leadership skills to enhance the role of education as a tool in helping heal refugee children in Canadian classrooms.

In Chapter Ten, *Aiming Higher: The Case for Refugee Access to Tertiary Education in Canada*, Claire Ellis, Courtney Oreja, and Emma Jankowski build on the previous chapter to examine the current landscape of global policy initiatives to address disrupted post-secondary education. They focus specifically on the resettlement process of the World University Service of Canada’s (WUSC) Student Refugee Program (SRP), an education-centric refugee resettlement sponsorship model in Canada. They conclude that post-secondary education can serve as a pathway for social and economic inclusion, and that more research is needed to develop pragmatic and holistic ways to address the disparity in post-secondary educational access for students with experiences of forced migration.

Section IV, “Refugee Health,” focuses on the Social Determinants of Health. In Chapter Eleven, *Fayyaa-Nagaa: Health and Wellbeing among Oromo Women and Girls in Ontario*, Baredu Abraham, Tolee Biya, Martha Kuwee Kumsa, and Nardos Tassew explore the cultural resources that Oromo refugees in Ontario draw on to redress the disparities they experience in their health and wellbeing. The findings of their community-based participatory action research project provide a holistic understanding of the experiences faced by this population.

In Chapter Twelve, *Refugee Mothers’ Perinatal Mental Health Experiences and Access to Health Care*, Joyce O’Mahony and Nancy Clark discuss the multiple contextual factors and structural processes that can lead to negative mental health outcomes among pregnant women refugees. This population has experienced the traumas of war and displacement, followed by social isolation and challenging settlement contexts, and the authors argue that health providers must find best practices to support newcomer mothers who are refugees. This chapter adds to the body of research on mental health among immigrant and refugee women, with a specific focus on how they access and receive health care and support to deal with mental

illness during the perinatal period and how contextual factors intersect with race, gender, and class to influence mental illness treatment and prevention.

In Chapter Thirteen, *Considering Primary Health Care as a Social Determinant of Refugee Health Through the Lens of Social Justice and Care Ethics: Implications for Social Policy*, Clark and O’Mahony identify the social determinants of refugee health required for promoting social justice in primary health care for refugees. Based on a care ethics framework, the authors explore primary health care models in Canada and what components of social policy could promote broader social justice in terms of refugee health.

Section V, “Where Do We Go Next?,” provides conclusions and directions for next steps. In Chapter Fourteen, *Change Making*, Bharati Sethi demonstrates that refugees are an integral part of the Canadian mosaic: they bring economic, ethnic, religious, and social diversity that enriches the Canadian mosaic.

We hope that the chapters in this volume will inspire researchers, educators, students, service providers, and policymakers to foster safe and nurturing environments for the increasing numbers of refugees within Canada who seek safety from political, religious, and environmental challenges – back home and in Canada.

## References

- Bartolomei L, 2015, 'Surviving the city: Refugees from Burma in New Delhi', in *Urban Refugees: Challenges in Protection, Services and Policy*, pp. 139 – 163.
- Gilbert, L. (2013). The discursive production of a Mexican refugee crisis in Canadian media and policy. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 39(5), 827-843. doi: 10.1080/1369183X.2013.756693
- Government of Canada (2018). Supplementary Information 2019-2021 Immigration Levels Plan. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/notices/supplementary-immigration-levels-2019.html>
- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. (2018). Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/ircc/migration/ircc/english/pdf/pub/annual-report-2018.pdf>

- Murray, K. E., Davidson, G. R. & Schweitzer, R. D. (2010). Review of refugee mental health interventions following resettlement: Best practices and recommendations. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 80(4), 576-585.
- Olivius, E. (2014). (Un)Governable Subjects: The Limits of Refugee Participation in the Promotion of Gender Equality in Humanitarian Aid. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 27(1), 42–61.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fet001>
- Parker, S. (2018). “It's ok if it's hidden”: The discursive construction of everyday racism for refugees and asylum seekers in wales. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 28(3), 111-122.
- Puzic, S. (2017). *Record number of refugees admitted to Canada in 2016, highest since 1980*. Retrieved from  
<https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/record-number-of-refugees-admitted-to-canada-in-2016-highest-since-1980-1.3382444>
- Schwarz, D. (2015). *Canada's refugees by the numbers: The data*. Retrieved from  
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/canada-s-refugees-by-the-numbers-the-data-1.3240640#arrivals>
- Statistics Canada. (2017). *Immigration and ethnocultural diversity highlight tables, 2016 census*. Retrieved from  
<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/htfst/imm/index-eng.cfm>
- Stewart, M., Dennis, C. L., Kariwo, M., Kushner, K. E., Letourneau, N., Makumbe, K., . . . Shizha, E. (2015). Challenges faced by refugee new parents from Africa in Canada. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*, 17(4), 1146-1156. doi:10.1007/s10903-014-0062-3
- Syed, F. (2018, December 20). Canada's top refugee authorities call out conservation fear-mongering. National Observer. Retrieved from  
<https://www.nationalobserver.com/2018/12/20/news/canadas-top-refugee-authorities-call-out-conservative-fear-mongering>
- The Forced Migration Research Network, University of New South Wales (2017). THE WORLD'S BIGGEST MINORITY? Refugee Women and Girls in the Global Compact on Refugees. Retrieved from  
<http://www.unhcr.org/59e5bcb77.pdf>
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2018). Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018. Retrieved from  
<https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.htmlhttps://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/5d08d7ee7/unhcr-global-trends-2018.html>

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2018). *UNHCR resettlement handbook: Canada*. Geneva: United Nations.

Bharati Sethi, London, Ontario  
Sepali Gurugee, Toronto, Ontario  
Rick Csiernik, Hamilton, Ontario  
September 2020



**SECTION I**  
**INTRODUCTION**

## CHAPTER ONE

### WHAT BROUGHT US HERE?

BHARATI SETHI, SEPALI GURUGE  
AND RICK CSIERNIK

#### **Reflections: Am I home?**

Bharati Sethi

I have lived in Canada for most of my adult life. My reasons for taking asylum in Canada were embedded within the socio-cultural web of gender-based violence. Resettlement is a complex process, as is the question of belonging and home, and until the day I received my permanent residency, I constantly feared deportation. Those nine and a half years living as an alien motivated my community-engaged work with refugees.

In my 14 years as a community-based participatory researcher, I have met people from many different countries. Their unique stories have intersected at the site of trauma (invasion, loss, marginalization, and Othering) and hope (resilience, strength, and perseverance). Many of these people have demonstrated a unique ability to learn to live again in a foreign land, and they often resist the label of ‘refugee.’ I understand their struggles and loss as they work to replant their roots and make a home for themselves and their family – even after living in Canada from two decades, I still sometimes need to touch the piece of paper that allowed me to stay here. However, I am also aware of my privileged position as an academic, so I sometimes find myself in undefined territory, trying to reconcile my subjective-objective and refugee-citizen positionality – I feel uprooted again.

To feel rooted is to feel safe. To feel rooted is to feel at home. Unlike economic and family-class immigrants who enter Canada primarily out of choice, refugees often have no idea where they will land. It is also important to be careful when using the word ‘choice.’ For example, my previous work demonstrated that women from India who are sponsored to Canada by their husband may not have the choice to refuse; they are bound by cultural

obligations and fear being cast out of the community if they rebel (Sethi, 2014).

Refugees differ from those other immigration categories in that their lives depend on finding a safe territory. Unlike immigrants, who choose to settle permanently in another country, refugees are forced to flee their homeland due to the risk of torture, abuse, persecution, war, and environmental or other disasters. Before the Immigration Act of 1978, which distinguished between immigrants and refugees, Canada did not have a refugee policy. The incorporation of a humanitarian category within this act was a substantive step forward, and continues to reflect Canada's humanitarian ideals by permitting entry to a displaced foreign national or refugees in need of protection. However, it was not until 2012 that a foreign national could apply for permanent residency as a "Convention refugee" or "a person in similar circumstances." Canada's refugee system now offers protection to people who risk torture, loss of life, or unusual and cruel punishment if they leave Canada through the In-Canada Asylum Program, while the Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program assists people seeking protection from outside Canada (Government of Canada, 2017).

Under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, the federal Liberal Government of Canada rebranded Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) as Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). The inclusion of the word 'refugee' reflects the government's ongoing commitment to upholding its obligation under the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to protect the fundamental rights and freedom of refugees. However, the government needs to do more to protect those who are considered 'irregular' or 'not genuine' refugees. Canada's multiculturalism policy also needs more work to reflect Canada's changing demographics and intersectionality of social locations such as race, ethnicity, and gender identity. Although Canada is largely a welcoming nation, some people believe that refugees live free on welfare, do not want to work, are security threats or criminals, and fear that a refugee invasion will make White people a minority in Canada (Samuel, 2018).

With regard to my earlier comments about the complexity of resettlement and home, I am never really 'at home,' and I don't know if I ever will be. I am outside the borders of India (my original home) and of Canada (my current home). When in Canada, I ache for the smell, taste, and love of India; when I am in India, I wonder when I am going 'home.'

What I do know is that the narrative of ‘resettlement’ involves a complex set of Otherness, identity politics, and social relations of power. As I moved up the socio-economic ladder in Canada, my racialized ethnic body became viewed quite differently than when I worked as a maid, but even after two decades in Canada, I still get asked where I am from. Even after obtaining my permanent residency, I did not feel integrated within the Canadian mosaic – until I began to be heard in social, economic, cultural, and political spaces. Integration into a multicultural Canada is not just about Canadian citizenship: fostering newcomer belonging is about allowing the Other to speak – and then listening. The question is not: Am I home? Rather, it is: How am I perceived?

This edited volume is an investment in individuals and families who deserve safe spaces to have their stories heard. We hope that the information will be valuable to researchers, educators, students, service providers, and policymakers who share our commitment to imagining a nation where refugees and asylum seekers feel rooted and safe in our communities.

## **Reflections: On divides and imperatives**

Sepali Guruge

Both personal and professional interests, as well as a line of thinking and understanding that I have been developing since my undergraduate studies shapes my interest and engagement in research on immigrant and refugee health. According to Thorne and Varcoe (1998), locating the researcher’s identity in relation to those of the study participants has been commonly acknowledged as an imperative in feminist research. My venture into immigrant and refugee health research, especially in relation to women’s health, that began when I was still an undergraduate student in Nursing arose out of the struggles I endured as a newcomer to Canada.

Even though this book focuses on refugees, my thinking here goes back and forth between immigrant health and refugee health. This divide is based on the presumed, assumed, and real social, political, and economic realities of the lives of immigrants and refugees. Of note is that within the same family, sometimes, some members can be refugees while others can be immigrants. Another divide that is prominent in the research literature relates to the insider-outsider positionality of the researcher. This divide and related concerns are based on the premise that insider researcher is a member of the immigrant community that is being ‘studied’ and the outsider researcher belongs to the majority population (read: white in the Canadian context). As

Jorgen Carling et al (2014) note, one of the underlying assumptions here is that former may lead to more emancipatory outcomes and the latter can (re)create on colonial/neocolonial practices. While it is important to critically examine how the researcher social identity and positionality shape the research we do and their outcomes, these overt divides and dichotomies are problematic.

One of my many struggles during my own engagement in research with individuals and families who are immigrants and/or refugees has been to learn how to portray their shared experiences, while acknowledging the many personal, professional, and socio-economic and cultural differences that shape their experiences and in their ‘choices’ about building their life in the Canadian context. Many immigrants and refugees experience micro, meso, and macro-levels of violence in Canada. If we are not careful, we may view these experiences from a culturalist lens, further damaging the very lives we, as researchers, educators, practitioners, advocates, and policymakers, hope to improve. Yet, we cannot overlook the cultural, patriarchal, and ethno-religious systems that often create situations of vulnerability for women and children, and older persons. In grappling with such concerns, I have attempted to avoid a dichotomous approach – culturalizing and essentializing versus disregarding the role of culture – and to search for a framework that would help explore the intersectionality of race, gender, class, and culture in the context of post-migration. While taking a reflexive and relational stance to my work has helped to address some of my concerns, and frameworks of interpretation have helped me understand the topic in all of its complexity.

During the last 30 years of conducting research, I have worked with many immigrant and diaspora communities. I was an outsider to the individuals and families from these communities on the basis of ethno-cultural, and religious backgrounds as well as reasons of immigration to Canada. Yet, during these times, I faced many difficulties that I share with some of the immigrants and some of the refugees. For example, I found that a lack of fluency in English (defined differently within each job category, educational institution, and discipline), limited my potential for job security and advancement. In order to obtain university entrance, I had to study Grade 13 in Ontario (which meant that I had written Grade 13 exams or their equivalent three times – and in a different language each time). Lack of fluency in English has been one of the rationales given for the aggregation of refugees, in particular, at the lower echelons of the workforce in Canada. While professionals and especially those with university educations continue to be one of the preferred target groups of immigrants, as Mojab (1999) has noted, their “intellectual capacity had been undermined in

Canada and, consequently, they were seen as a potential source of manual labour” (p.125).

Problematic access to information and services is one that I faced within the first 5 to 10 years of my life in Canada. Having access to information is power, and many newcomers are rendered powerless because of lack of information which in turn limits their access to services, even when they are available. This lack of information and services is the result of exclusionary attitudes of those in power. Refugees face racism at every level of society. As my co-editor Bharati has noted, refugees are seen as a burden to this country. Immigrants are also often seen as a burden to this country, especially the racialized individuals, families, and communities. Racialized individuals and families in general are worse off as immigrants or refugees. The experience of racism is a not-so-rare occurrence in my life in Canada. My first attempt at formally addressing racism was quickly dismissed by someone whose responsibility was to help address students’ complaints with a question: “Are you sure you want to go ahead with this – it is after all your word against your teacher’s word?” Ng (1994) has elaborated on racism (and sexism) as being systemic in the university. My second (and formal) complaint, which was against a large hospital/institution in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), was rejected because the hospital claimed that it was a case of nepotism and not racism. My experience of racism now (after being in Canada for 30 years) often comes in more subtle forms, while my encounters on the street is as overt as it was 30 years ago. I believe that my experiences, however, have been minor compared to the horrific stories I was privy to during the in-depth individual interviews and focus groups that I conducted with refugees from many social, cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.

Am I a refugee? Am I an immigrant? Why and how does it matter? After 30 years of being in Canada, would my initial immigration status still matter to you? How do you think my initial immigration status still shape my life? How does my initial immigration status shape my approach to research? Many of the chapters in this book are based on qualitative research; Rigor and trustworthiness of qualitative research involves the critical engagement of the readers with what is written in research reports. This can only be done in the context of their reflection on their own positionality in relation to the phenomena explored and the communities involved in these reports. So, as you read this book, I invite you to think about these questions in relation to who you are and what these study findings mean to you and your communities, and what you can do with this information as you forge

alliances in improving the lives of many refugees and immigrants who make Canada one of the best countries in the world.

## **Reflections: ...but you don't look like a refugee**

Rick Csiernik

I am a White, able-bodied, university-educated, professional, cis-gender male. My demographics place me in every category of privilege that exists in Canada, despite being the grandchild and child of refugees. This irony is one reason why I contributed to this book, with the goal of encouraging readers to become an ally in what?

From my perspective, which may differ from those of other contributors to this volume, Canada doesn't currently have a refugee crisis, nor has Canada ever had a refugee crisis. What we do have is a historical relationship with refugees who come to Canada to create a new home. This is a relationship that will not abate given the current health, economic, political, and environmental issues that are shaping our planet. However, a minority of people fearfully claim, and have historically claimed, that refugees are a threat to the nation's stability, integrity, and values. Despite these beliefs, refugees (including my family) have made Canada one of the most prosperous nations on the planet. The major difference now is that the refugees are not 'Canadian enough,' meaning that unlike my own family, many contemporary refugees don't 'look' like the majority – a dog whistle word; a symbolically loaded word; a lived reality. Refugees have never been Canadian enough for the minority of 'true' Canadians who object to and fear newcomers invading their home ... the irony of this situation is that the only 'true' Canadians are the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island.

A quarter of a million economic and political refugees have come to Canada to find new homes. My mother's family were economic refugees who came to Canada during the Great Depression of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In order to survive, my great-uncle jumped off a moving freight train during his resettlement process: he had been taken to Saskatchewan to be a farm worker, but he realized this was not possible in February and rode the rails back to Ontario to try to find a home and start again. He would have been called a hobo. Later, he became a sharecropper who, along with his sister and brother-in-law (my grandparents), saved enough money to buy a small business and then a larger business, all family-run, and worked that business 18+ hours a day seven days a week. This is, of course, a story familiar to wave after wave of refugees.

My father was a political refugee, although many would not consider him the smartest of men, for as a young adult he threw rocks at Russian tanks during the Hungarian revolution. As in many popular uprisings against more weaponized and technologically superior regimes, the outcome did not end well for him or his brothers in arms. He was fortunate to escape to a refugee camp in Austria, which was his home for six months. Next, he was shipped to Burlington, Ontario. He spoke no English, but was able to stay with a man from his home village. Later, he changed his 'foreign' name in the hopes of finding work in the Alberta oil patch. Unfortunately, he purposefully chose the Irish-sounding name Paul Kerry, without knowing how Irish refugees had been treated in Canada.

My family's story is hardly unique. It is one that has been repeated by those far older than I am and is being repeated now by those far younger. The commonality is how I, they, and most possibly you and your families have been treated and why now is the time to stand up and address that through the means described by the contributors to this book. In closing, a brief summary to support my earlier claim and to lead you into the book, that despite the purported refugee crisis after refugee crisis, Canada has continued to exist, grow and prosper because of not despite the Other.

1770 - 1779: The first wave of Quakers arrive to what is now known as southern Ontario as refugees from the American Revolution. More arrive in the 1820s escaping religious persecution in England and Ireland.

1776: 3,000 Black Loyalists, among them freemen and slaves, flee the oppression of the American Revolution.

1789: Lord Dorchester, Governor-in-Chief of British North America, gives official recognition to the "First Loyalists": individuals loyal to the Crown who fled the oppression of the American Revolution to settle in Nova Scotia and Quebec.

1793: Upper Canada becomes the first province in the British Empire to abolish slavery, resulting in Canada becoming the final stop in the Underground Railway which over the course of the 19th century will aid thousands of black slaves escape from the United States.

1750: The forced eviction of inhabitants of the highlands and western islands of Scotland, sees an influx of Scottish refugees to Canada throughout the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.



1812: Over 500 African-Americans are settled at Hammonds Plain, Nova Scotia escaping the War of 1812.

1830 - 1860: After Poland is annexed by Russia, thousands of Poles flee to Canada, to escape economic, political, and military reprisals.

1847: Hundreds of thousands of Irish flee the country, driven out by starvation during the potato famine. With passage to Canada cheaper than to the United States or Australia, Canada receives a majority of the most destitute many of whom are children whose parents perished prior to or during the escape.

1858: The first significant mass migration of Poles escaping Prussian occupation in northern Poland.

1880-1914: Thousands of Italian refugees arrive in Canada as an outcome of Italy's state reforms that drove peasant farmers from their lands.

1891: The migration of 170,000 Ukrainians begins, mainly to flee oppression from areas under Austro-Hungarian rule, marking the first wave of Ukrainians seeking refuge in Canada.

1899: More than 7,500 Doukhobors arrive in Canada to escape persecution in Russia, aided by author Leo Tolstoy and Canadian pacifist groups such as the Quakers whose ancestors had themselves been refugees.

1920 - 1927: Thousands of Mennonites, fleeing religious and ethnic persecution in the newly created Soviet Union are allowed into Canada.

1948: The first of 10 boats carrying 1,593 Baltic refugees, mostly Estonian, arrives on the east coast of Canada. These refugees sailed from Sweden, where they were living under threat of forced repatriation to the Soviet Union. They were detained on arrival and finally processed through an ad hoc arrangement with all but 12 being granted refugee status.

1947 - 1952: 250,000 displaced persons from Central and Eastern Europe come to Canada, victims of Nazism, communism, and Soviet occupation

1950s: Canada admits Palestinian Arabs, driven from their homeland by the Israeli-Arab war of 1948.

1956 - The crushing of the Hungarian uprising led to over 200,000 Hungarians fleeing to Austria. In response to public pressure, the Canadian

government implemented a special program, offering the Hungarian refugees free transport, instead of loans. Thousands of Hungarians arrived in the early months of 1957 on over 200 chartered flights. More than 37,000 Hungarians were admitted in less than a year (including Csiernik's father).

1960s: Chinese refugees enter Canada fleeing the violence of the Cultural Revolution.

1968: Warsaw Pact troops enter Czechoslovakia leading to 10,975 Czechs entered Canada between August 20, 1968 and March 1, 1969.

1969 - 1972: An unknown number of American conscientious objectors flee to Canada to avoid the mandatory military draft that would have forced them into active duty to fight the war in Vietnam after Canada changes its laws regarding individuals conscripted into military service

1970 - 1990: Deprived of political and religious freedom, 20,000 Soviet Jews settled in Canada.

1971: Canada welcomes 228 Tibetan refugees fleeing Chinese persecution after the occupation of their country.

1971 - 1976: Fearing economic instability and persecution following the liberation of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) hundreds of Bengalis seek refuge in Canada

1972 - 1973: Ugandan president for life Idi Amin announced that Ugandan Asians, primarily Ismaili Muslims would be expelled. Canada responds swiftly, setting up an office in Kampala. By the end of 1973, more than 7,000 Ugandan Asians had arrived, of whom 4,420 come in specially chartered flights.

1973 - Arising from the American supported overthrow of the leftist Chilean government by military dictator Augusto Pinochet's 7000 Chileans are accepted as refugees.

1979: Iranian refugees flee Iran following the overthrow of the American-backed Shah and the imposition of an Islamic Fundamentalist regime.

1979 - 1980: Nearly 70,000 Vietnamese Boat People are offered refuge in Canada after the American withdrawal and democratic government collapse in Vietnam.

1980s: Khmer Cambodians, victims of the Communist regime and the aftershocks of Communist victory in the Vietnam War, flee to Canada.

1992 - 1997: Nearly 13,000 thousand Bosnian refugees enter Canada to escape ethnic cleansing after the breakup of Yugoslavia.

2000 - 2011: Canada resettles 3,900 Karen refugees from Thailand, Myanmar, and Burma.

2015: Over 6,500 Bhutanese refugees arrive in Canada

2016: Canada resettles 25,000 Syrian refugees and commits to accepting 3,500 refugees from Sudan, primarily Eritreans and Ethiopians.

2017: Canada resettles more than 1,300 survivors of Daesh along with Haitians who sought refuge in the United States from the devastation of the 2010 earthquake but were threatened with deportation by the Trump government.

2018: Canada resettles more refugees than any other nation. According to the annual global trends report released by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Canada took in 28,100 of the 92,400 refugees who were resettled across 25 countries.

Sources: Canadian Council for Refugees (2009); Government of Canada (2018); Nagy (2018); The Canadian Encyclopedia (2019).

## References

- Carman, T. & Elash, A. (2018). Gender persecution the top reason women seek asylum in Canada. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/asylum-seekers-data-gender-persecution-1.4506245>
- Canadian Council for Refugees. (2009). *Brief history of Canada's response to refugees*. Retrieved from <https://ccrweb.ca/sites/ccrweb.ca/files/static-files/canadarefugeeshistory.htm>
- Government of Canada (2017). How Canada's refugee system works. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/canada-role.html>

- Government of Canada. (2018). *Canada: A history of refuge*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/canada-role/timeline.html>
- Nagy, A. (2018). *Canada's refugees*. Retrieved from <https://www.canadashistory.ca/explore/settlement-immigration/canada-s-refugees>
- Samuel, S. (2018). *There's a perception that Canada is being invaded*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/05/theres-a-perception-that-canada-is-being-invaded/561032/>
- Sethi, B. (2014). *Intersectional exposures: Exploring the health effect of employment with KAAJAL Immigrant/Refugee women in Grand Erie through photovoice* (Order No. 3662103). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1646467937). Retrieved from <https://www-lib-uwo-ca.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/docview/1646467937?accountid=15115>
- Simmons, A. B. (2010). *Immigration and Canada: Global and transnational perspectives*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.
- The Canadian Encyclopedia. (2019). *Refugees*. Retrieved from [https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/refugees?gclid=CjwKCAjwq832BRA5EiwACvCWsXsooawy9decIou6pP4-yzKxHsndGhwJ4vlJFN4DaI6-RFKvrqkBNxoC8ZkQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/refugees?gclid=CjwKCAjwq832BRA5EiwACvCWsXsooawy9decIou6pP4-yzKxHsndGhwJ4vlJFN4DaI6-RFKvrqkBNxoC8ZkQAvD_BwE)

## CHAPTER TWO

### REFUGEE DEMOGRAPHICS: A GLOBAL PICTURE

KARUN K. KARKI AND DHRUBA J. NEUPANE

#### **Introduction**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is witnessing an unprecedented rise of forced refugees, asylum seekers, and involuntary migrants globally. In countries such as Afghanistan, Congo, Myanmar, Somalia, Sudan, and Syria death, desolation, and trauma make a daily spectacle. And almost routinely, social media and news outlets are filled in with graphic images, tragic, numbing stories of fatal swims, capsized boats, as well as formidable resilience of people fleeing for their lives.

A study conducted by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee (UNHCR, 2017) shows that world's "population of concern", a term that it uses to signify the displaced people that include refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced populations (IDPs), stateless persons, returnees, and people who need protection based on other special grounds, has reached a record high (71.4 million) by the end of 2017 (Figure 2.1). Of the total 71.4 million, 68.5 million were forcibly displaced, making up refugees (25.4 million), asylum seekers (3.1 million) and internally displaced persons (40.0 million). That is, in 2017, one out of every 118 people on the planet were displaced. If all these displaced people were to live in a single country, it would be the 21<sup>st</sup> largest country in the world (Hilado & Lundy, 2017).

Figure 2.1: The World's Population of Concern

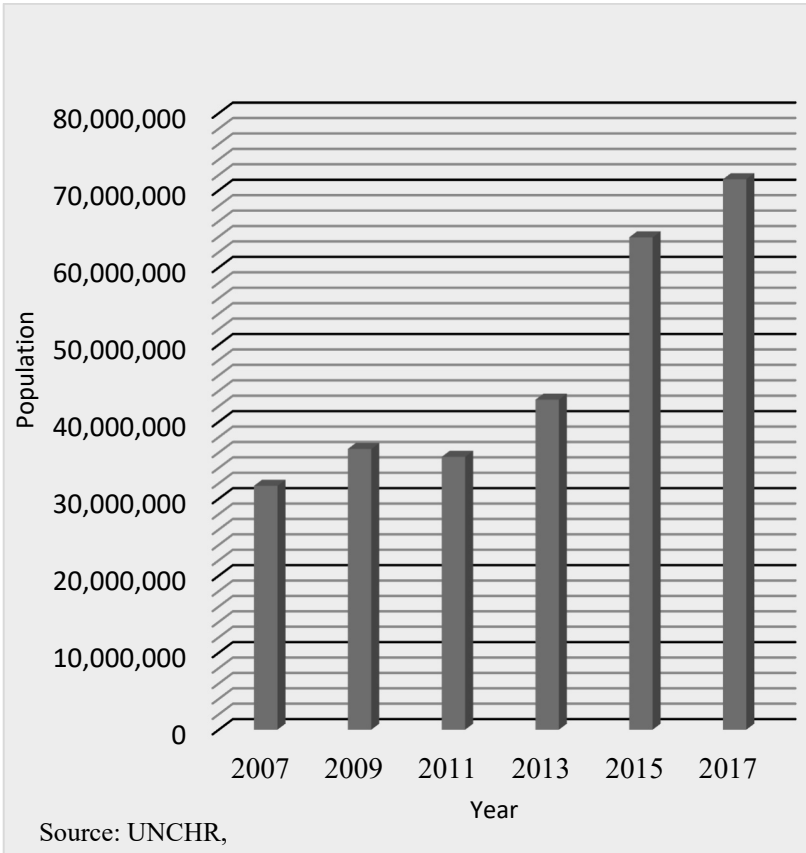


Table 2.1 provides further insights into the world's refugee crisis by specifying further categories of refugees and by showing the substantial growth of forcibly displaced people over the past decade. For example, in 2007, there were 31.7 million people who had been forcibly displaced whereas in 2017 there were now 71.4 million, an increase of over 125%. While the Syrian conflict can be considered a significant contributor to this increase, there have been many other major displacements throughout the world as illustrated in Figure 2.2.