

INTRODUCTION:

REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN EARLY TWENTY-FIRST  
CENTURY NEW ZEALAND

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On 15 March 2019, Muslims at prayer in the Al Noor Mosque and Linwood Islamic Centre in Christchurch, New Zealand, found themselves under a terrorist attack livestreamed on the Internet. All told, 51 Muslim worshippers, former refugees and migrants, New Zealand and foreign born, were murdered in cold blood while a further 40 were wounded. They were the target of an Australian white supremacist who believed them to be a visible and large group of so-called invaders with high fertility rates and strong traditions seeking to occupy lands and replace ‘his’ people. The terror attack had particular resonance in Dunedin for it was here that the gunman resided, and he had initially planned to launch his assault on the city’s Al Huda Mosque. In September 2020 he was sentenced to life in prison. This multidisciplinary collection is a tribute to the mosque victims and survivors.

Several of the articles in this volume were first aired at the ‘Refuge in the City: Former Refugees in Urban New Zealand’ conference in November 2018, hosted by the Centre for Global Migrations at the University of Otago, Dunedin.<sup>2</sup> At that event, established and emerging scholars, refugees, activists, NGOs and community members came together to examine the challenges and opportunities of recent refugee resettlement, for former refugees, those working to assist their adjustment and the communities into which they were settling. The gathering traversed key themes including space and place, education, social support, citizenship, family reunion, integration, and health and wellbeing. These themes, while not all-encompassing, reflect current research and address areas of interest for former refugees. A range of disciplines were represented including anthropology, conflict studies, education, geography, and history. Participants drew on photographs, interviews, narrative inquiry, comparative study, and refugee voices to develop theoretical, practical and policy perspectives.

This volume emerges out of the conference but primarily focuses on refugee resettlement in Dunedin, New Zealand, since Otago/Southland has become the largest resettlement region in the country. Politically, the terms ‘former refugee’ or ‘refugee-background’ are frequently used for those individuals after arrival in New Zealand. This is to recognise that they are no longer refugees, but also because of negative connotations surrounding the label. That said, the term ‘refugee’ can also be politicised to generate more resources, while some refugees are proud to use the term to acknowledge what they have been through. In light of such diverse approaches to the label ‘refugee’, contributors were given flexibility to choose the terms that they deemed most appropriate throughout their contributions to this volume.

The volume begins with the reflections of Govinda Regmi who moved to New Zealand from Bhutan in 2010 after living for years in a refugee camp at Nepal. Surrounded by death, poverty, and poor health care, Govinda was a teacher but suffered the resentment of locals who deemed that he and others had taken their jobs. Govinda’s narrative outlines his family’s move to New Zealand, their orientation at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre, their initial relocation to Nelson and their subsequent move to Dunedin. Govinda identifies a number of challenges for refugees: being without a car, culture shock, problems with accent, accessing health, education, taxation issues, isolation of the elderly and managing expectations. Govinda also offers solutions including community and refugee-led projects but situates these within ongoing challenges. As a former refugee, Govinda shows that former refugees often act, in formal or informal capacities, as the first hosts in communities for new refugee arrivals.

With the transmission of Covid-19 around the world in 2020, the educational experiences for former refugees (along with other international as well as local students) has met with severe disruption. Writing before this global pandemic, Vivienne Anderson, Tiffany Cone, Naoko Inoue, and Rachel Rafferty explore the experiences of female refugee-background higher education students in New Zealand and Bangladesh, drawing on narrative enquiry to emphasise the importance of time, context and intentionality. Their refugee-background participants emerge from a range of national and ethnic backgrounds and see higher education as an expected pathway or avenue to escape, not just for them but for their communities. Their narratives highlight their aspirations for the future and identify ways for tertiary education providers to support refugee background students.

Olivia Eyles and Christina Ergler also utilise interviews, as well as photographs with former refugees and stakeholders, to examine the role of outdoor thera-

peutic landscapes in Dunedin in generating mental and physical wellbeing and a sense of belonging. Yet, whether small or large, scenic spots or backyards, former refugees often confront barriers in accessing these landscapes; transportation, climate and time constraints are the key obstacles. Participants in Eyles' and Ergler's study, however, were able to devise solutions including drawing on their personal networks and acquiring their own vehicles.

In their article, Rachel Yzelman and Sophie Bond turn the spotlight on refugee support providers and their work helping former refugees to resettle and feel a sense of belonging (everyday citizenship). Carrying out eleven interviews with support providers, NGO advocates and a researcher within the refugee sector in Christchurch, Wellington, and Auckland, Yzelman and Bond draw attention to the constraints and limitations of this work. Inadequate funding, variable resourcing for volunteers, and tensions between different organisations for scarce resources all impinge on an ability to help former refugees settle well. Discrimination, prejudice and racism likewise impede the work of refugee support providers.

Although Dunedin became a formal resettlement centre for former Syria refugees in 2016, the city has a long history of welcoming refugees. As Angela McCarthy points out, the city's history of Cambodian refugee resettlement since the late 1970s was a key factor in that decision. Casting an historical eye over the refugee landscape in Dunedin, McCarthy's article identifies similar challenges confronting refugees in the past and present: work, language, family reunification, health and conflict within communities. Drawing on interviews with Syrians and Cambodians, McCarthy also questions whether past knowledge can assist with similar challenges in a new environment. Despite similar concerns confronting former refugees in the past and present, McCarthy argues that today's society – and its 'new' refugees – differ socially, politically and culturally from the past, and proposed solutions to ongoing challenges need to take account of this.

Rachel Rafferty, Anna Burgin, and Vivienne Anderson, meanwhile, move away from a traditional focus on physical violence in refugee experiences to cast a broad eye over the impact of structural violence (institutional monoculturalism and neoliberal economics) in the lives of former refugees. Such structural violence, they argue, can equal or exceed the impact of direct violence in the lives of former refugees, making the resettlement period sometimes more traumatic than prior trauma. Monocultural institutions which fail to comprehend cultures of minorities along with an expectation that migrants adapt to a *Pākehā* New Zealand culture demonstrate this along with neoliberal poli-

cies which have widened economic inequities in such areas as housing, health, education and social welfare. They make a clarion call for future research to take strengths-based approaches that highlight the ways former refugees have overcome challenges.

An anonymous refugee from Syria to Dunedin then reflects on many of the issues raised in the preceding contributions. They note the terrifying impact of the Syrian War, initial refuge in Lebanon (another war-torn country), and their move to New Zealand with subsequent support from Red Cross. Among the key challenges they had to grapple with were separation from family, and dealing with stress and trauma. Opportunities for education, employment and social participation in the community, however, helped to ease the resettlement journey.

The final contribution is Alison Phipps' reflections on the preceding articles. As the UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts at the University of Glasgow, Scotland, Phipps was the 2019 De Carle Distinguished Lecturer at the University of Otago, hosted by the Centre for Global Migrations. She spent an extended period in New Zealand while this volume was in preparation and here she situates her reflections in a comparative context with her work in the UK and further afield to pinpoint ten crucial guidelines for future work and research.

Phipps's input and the volume as a whole is timely. In 2020, before the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, New Zealand's quota refugee numbers were due to increase to 1,500 per annum. In addition, existing areas of refugee resettlement – Auckland, Hamilton, Palmerston North, Wellington, Nelson, Christchurch, Dunedin and Invercargill – will be joined by new settlement locations in Ashburton, Blenheim, Levin, Masterton and Timaru, to support the newcomers (Immigration New Zealand, 2020). The research, voices, and experiences appearing in the articles that follow therefore offer useful and timely practical and policy implications as well as theoretical perspectives relating to the challenges and opportunities of former refugee resettlement. Such issues, as the volume reveals, include isolation, unemployment, language, housing shortages, bureaucratic hurdles, violence, trauma, inequality and discrimination. While much of the volume grapples with the challenges of resettlement for former refugees, this reflects their concerns. We must be alert, however, to balancing such 'asset' and 'deficit' based approaches to refugee resettlement, with an eye to refugee agency and resilience including positive bilingual and multilingual opportunities and participatory and arts-based methods of integration into communities. Future research will continue to build upon the themes traversed

here including issues relating to child refugees, Māori/Indigenous concerns and inter-ethnic relations.

While New Zealand, and particularly Dunedin, is the focus of the articles in this volume, the findings have international resonance. With population displacements continuing – in 2020 the UNHRC reported 26 million refugees globally (UNHCR, 2020) – international obligations to offer refuge will continue. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that only a small proportion of refugees worldwide are resettled (less than 64,000 during 2019), with most refugees seeking refuge in their neighbouring countries (UNHRC, 2020b). Efforts to deal with such movement, as some scholars argue, should not therefore be conceptualised as a ‘refugee crisis’ but a ‘refugee reception crisis’ (Rea, Martiniello, Mazzola, Beuleman, 2019). Guided by the Māori concept of *manākitanga* (hospitality) and Immigration New Zealand’s Welcoming Communities initiative that encourages communities to welcome newcomers, together with efforts to combat racism and xenophobia, those living in Aotearoa New Zealand will hopefully provide a welcoming reception and safe haven for all who reach its shores. It is from within this hopeful context, then, that the previously mentioned efforts by New Zealand to increase both its refugee quota in 2020 (Adern and Lees-Galloway 2018), and its refugee resettlement sites, could be understood as an attempt to respond to our very own and local reception crisis. To what degree this widening of our hospitality is a sufficient humanitarian response is something that all New Zealanders – those recently arrived and those of long standing citizenship – must now consider carefully. This collection of articles makes a contribution to such deliberations.

#### NOTES

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