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– BOOK REVIEWS ESSAY –

HOSPITALITY BY COLLECTIVE MEANS

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Books Reviewed:

WORKING WITH ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES: WHAT TO DO, WHAT NOT TO DO, AND HOW TO HELP
By Sarah Crowther; foreword *by* Debora Singer
London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers 2019, 269 pp.
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SOCIAL WORK WITH REFUGEES, ASYLUM SEEKERS AND MIGRANTS: THEORY AND SKILLS FOR PRACTICE
Edited by Lauren Wroe, Rachel Larkin and Reima Ana Maglajlic; foreword *by* Debra Hayes
London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2019, 296 pp.
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Generalising lessons about refugees, asylum seekers and migrants from one country to another is fractious work. Not only do these categories cover the movement of people from every one of the world's 195 countries of origin, but any generalisation also needs to cover every one of the world's possible countries of destination. Simply consider the extent of the UNHCR's statistical yearbook to see the dazzling array of possible movements – and those are only covering forced migration – asylum seekers and refugees! Add into this cosmopolitan gumbo the fact that specialist work done with these communities must mirror all functions of government, often with translation added to the mix, and you can see the challenge in creating recipes for success.

Both *Working with Asylum Seekers and Refugees* and *Social Work with Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants* make rich attempts to document best practice and offer lessons for working with asylum seekers, refugees and migrants in the context of the United Kingdom. We are lucky to have both books published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers for a reasonable price, both in e-book

and paperback formats. Locals interested in these volumes can actually afford to purchase them, which can be rare where academic publishing often makes work inaccessible. It is also refreshing to read books that realise the solution to the oft-feared politicisation of the broader sphere of migration is to get active with the activists, rather than to hope for the politicisation of migration to ebb out of its own accord. This version of politics, then, could be conceived of as hospitality pursued by collective means.

The first question for the reader of *Sites* might justifiably be: which of these lessons are transferable to New Zealand and the wider Pacific? Sarah Crowther's *Working with Asylum Seekers and Refugees* opens by questioning the discourse of a massive influx of refugees in 2015, the year when the Syrian civil war spilled into Europe through large scale movements of asylum seekers. While media attention increased, she notes, the actual numbers of asylum claims had not increased. By contrast, New Zealand *is* going through a growth in the number of refugees welcomed. Our refugee quota grew to 1,000 people in 2016 and 1,500 in July 2020. The quota has doubled and there are expectations that there will be a similar increase in family reunification from 300 to 600 places. Asylum seeker applications are also on the rise, with 510 in the 2018/19 year (Immigration New Zealand 2019, 4), though this is far fewer than the 2,000 applications in 1999/2000 (Haines 2010).

The real difference between a book aimed at the United Kingdom and one that is relevant to New Zealand, is less the number of refugees, and more the means by which protection is achieved: four of five refugees who arrive in New Zealand do so with automatic permanent residency with their cases having been decided and processed offshore. In the United Kingdom, the vast majority of refugees arrive onshore where they seek asylum and go through that determination procedure within the country's borders. Australia's refugee and asylum seeker settings, for a regional contrast, have also been controlled by the government rather than by arrival numbers, especially since their Pacific Solution has led to them breaking their commitment to international law and turning back boats. A humanitarian quota of 20,000 – which includes resettlement places as well as accepted asylum seekers – was cut back to 13,500 in 2013, which then rose to 18,500 in 2018.

Of the two main refugee receiving countries in Australasia and the Pacific, the contentious politics of asylum that underlies Crowther's book is most similar to the Australian situation. However, that situation is not the one most commonly discussed in terms of the offshore detention policy of successive Australian governments, but of the onshore detention and lax processing of

asylum seekers who arrive by air. The focus on these differences between the United Kingdom and Australasian systems is not a minor aside since much of the focus of Crowther's work is on asylum seekers, including those whose claims have been denied. The path of proactive resettlement, of which I have already noted around 80 per cent New Zealand's hosting numbers is comprised, features in appropriately sporadic notes on the United Kingdom's now complete Syrian resettlement process.

Perhaps the starkest lesson for those in New Zealand from Crowther is how the resettlement process leads to far more controlled and formalised systems and how it could easily be otherwise. With the New Zealand Red Cross leading resettlement in conjunction with Immigration New Zealand (and partnership with some local providers in new locations), the refugee journey is centred on integration and belonging, not on legal processes that determine whether one is or is not a refugee. Challenges identified by Crowther around simple things like tracking where refugees live become a lot simpler when the government is not intent on creating a hostile environment to deter asylum seeking. For those going through the asylum system in New Zealand, the resettlement pathways may be envied, hence recent advocacy through the Asylum Seeker Support Trust and the Asylum Seeker Equality Project, which seeks to extend resettlement services to all potential refugees.[2]

Despite these differences in the subject of Crowther's study and our local experiences there is much to commend in her work, even for those not in the United Kingdom. The audience for the work is primarily those who work with refugees and asylum seekers, and this is expertly handled through her use of an instructional, second person narration. 'Before you think about *their* English, how is *your* English? Is it plain and clear?', she asks in an excellent and transferable chapter on teaching English. The use of the second person is expertly handled, and, as a sole author book, leads to a sense of familiarity and care without being didactic. Other easily transferable chapters deal with the complexities of advocating for clients at the same time as keeping a professional distance. Crowther aptly emphasises encouraging agency in clients while not diminishing the good that can be done by informed advocates and service providers.

The final four chapters of Crowther's book are micro-focused on the United Kingdom experience, so local readers may struggle with the processes and systems of an unfamiliar system. It is worth noting that Crowther's book is not an academic text, or a review of practice, but a handbook intended to be instructional. Some scholars working in the region might be frustrated that academic insights are rarely touched on and for those readers I would suggest

considering Lauren Wroe, Rachel Larkin and Reima Ana Maglajlic's edited collection.

The political situation in the United Kingdom, including austerity as well as all the anti-migrant rhetoric at the forefront of Brexit, is the contextual ground on which Wroe, Larkin and Maglajlic situate their collection. While Crowther hints at the hostile environment of Conservative politicians, Wroe, Larking and Maglajlic bring migrants into the subject of their study, and make their exclusion explicit: 'we have seen an intensification of right-wing, anti-migrant activity across Europe and an explicit political commitment to the exclusion of migrants in the UK, implemented through the government's hostile environment agenda.' With the Conservative party set to lead the United Kingdom for five more years there are no indications that these conditions will change.

The tension in work with asylum seekers is even more pronounced in this collection than in Crowther. The book begins with the challenge 'of central importance, both then and now, is the exploration of the relationship between immigration control and welfare delivery.' The tension between policing migration and helping migrants lead the editors to argue for a social work of social justice, not of the social work as an immigration officer. This work will resonate with some Australian readers, and the handful of New Zealanders working in asylum spaces but these are challenges rarely reported in New Zealand.

As with Crowther, some of the chapters in Wroe, Larkin and Maglajlic are more relevant to the Pacific than others. The opening chapters on cultural and political climates are useful both as a study of the United Kingdom as well as indicative of collective strategies for resistance to racism and dehumanisation more locally. The editors' commitment to using a range of narrative tools – for example, the interview with Lynn King – is to be applauded. It is also good to see intersectional feminist thought given room to move in chapters by Suryia Nayak and Lucy Mort. The middle and final section of their book are less relevant to the local context with a more in-depth consideration of social work practice with the United Kingdom's diverse population which skews to Africa, while the Pacific setting skews towards Asia.

There is always the challenge with edited collections in smoothing out the stuttering tone of assorted chapters into a coherent book. This approach is smoothed out, not by attempts to homogenise each chapter within a wider tone, but with the inclusion of eight 'Learning From' first-person narratives from people who have gone through the system. These narratives diversify the tone and reject any underlying assumption that unity should be the aim of such a

collection. Nevertheless, sitting alongside Crowther's work these chapters do feel a little disjointed. On the plus side, they do go into much more theoretical depth and would hold a greater appeal for scholars of social work, in contrast to the action-oriented second person imperatives of Crowther.

For the last six months of 2019 New Zealand was lucky enough to have had Professor Alison Phipps from the University of Glasgow translate much of the Scottish, and wider United Kingdom, context for a New Zealand audience as part of her eight-part De Carle lecture series hosted by the Centre for Global Migrations at the University of Otago. While Crowther's book would be a useful read for people in the Pacific who are already experienced in refugee resettlement and asylum seeker processes, and Wroe, Larkin and Maglajlic's work will appeal to scholars who are looking to reflect on these ideas, it is also important to value scholars who can connect the settler-colonial context in these lands to their own overseas experiences.

The broad lesson across both books is the manner in which austerity and racism has led to a strong definition of social workers (and those more broadly working with migrants) as political agents. There is a rich current of resistance to state practices in Crowther, alongside an awareness that rights were won in the United Kingdom but there are still people who want to take those away. Similarly in Wroe, Larkin and Maglajlic, a key theme in the conclusion is the need to move from individual resistance to systems that fail, to collective action.

Just after the publication of Crowther's work the United Kingdom agreed to resettle 5-6,000 people via a UNHCR quota (UNHCR, 2019). While there is much for those in the Pacific to learn from the politicised practices in both of these works, there is perhaps also something for those in the United Kingdom to learn from established resettlement practitioners in Australia and New Zealand. In New Zealand, in particular, there is space for those reflections to be collected into a similar edition with the forthcoming increase in resettlement locations and anticipated expansion of the Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) pathway. Given the difficulty of generalising about this work and resettlement experiences, I would counsel potential writers to take Crowther's approach where one author takes on the mammoth task of writing of all aspects of resettlement, with help from specialist colleagues. While there is a place for edited collections, especially in academia, in the resettlement space – covering such a multitude of services, experiences and nationalities – making that into a cohesive overview is perhaps an even more onerous task.

NOTES

1 Independent Scholar

2 The Asylum Seeker Equality Project was established in 2016 as one of four of Victoria University of Wellington's Community Justice Project areas, drawing from research from Changemakers (2013) on the difficult experiences of asylum seekers in New Zealand.

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