



Book Reviews

Ricento, T. (2021). *Refugees in Canada: On the Loss of Social and Cultural Capital* (2021, 157 pp.), Palgrave Macmillan. \$24.99 (US) (Paperback), ISBN: 978-3030764524

Humans are on the move. As refugees are forced and flow over borders due to war, violence, upheaval, and opportunity, the value of their language and professional experience is constantly questioned and often dismissed. Past and present research holds that learning a new home country's language is the critical component in refugee adjustment, success, and connection (Chiswick & Miller, 1995; Kosyakova et al., 2022). Much attention is focused on providing basic language training to refugees as a path to self-sufficiency, but there is little focus on language training for specific professions of expertise to help refugees retain and contribute to highly skilled professions. With *Refugees in Canada: On the Loss of Social and Cultural Capital*, Ricento fills a void by examining the need to recognize the capital that refugees bring and the pressing demand to refocus the language curriculum to better support and promote professional transitions.

Summary

Canada is often epitomized as a multicultural mecca, a blended country that celebrates diversity and welcomes newcomers seeking a home within its borders. Through a rich case study methodology layering personal narratives with labor market data, Ricento provides a much-needed alternative picture of the refugee experience in Calgary, Canada. This reality is one of assimilation, isolation, devaluing, and deskilling from previous professional positions in home countries. In a longitudinal study entitled *The Linguistic and Capital Barriers to Refugees Access to Medical and Social Services*, the author exposes how specific gaps in English language curriculum intertwined with credentialing policies that favor western-trained professionals create a severe loss of capital for refugees and an overall economic loss for Canada. Through applying a dense collection of literature, Canadian immigration policy, and employment and education data to firsthand refugee experiences, the method, ideology, and design of English language curriculum for refugees emerges as a key focus.

In the first chapter, "The Problem," Ricento dissects the disconnect between Canada's welcoming image and the reality and background of policies of indigenous othering and immigrant exclusion that contribute to unemployment and a decrease of social and professional capital. Highlighting the results from a longitudinal study on foreign medical credentials using a point system in Canada and the interwoven hegemonic value of Western English, the author richly paints Canadian immigration policy history, bringing to life the harsh environment for refugees that motivated the main study.

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Ricento also deftly argues that the intersection of specific hurdles faced by refugees with these policies deserves a specific focus from ELL teachers to lawmakers because of the unique situations that these immigrants encounter. The author sets the stage for these issues by examining the struggle between the Canadian government's desire to attract highly skilled, linguistically compatible immigrants and the reality of the transitional experience. The study discusses two main factors: lack of recognition of foreign, nonwestern professional credentials and deficiency in English language training for specific professions.

In chapter two, "The Researcher and the Researched," Ricento points to key scholarship that encapsulates humanistic values and a demand for social change, providing a guiding social compass for the study and the book. The chapter explores the pivotal works of Marx, Hymes, and Labov to bring awareness of the hegemonic structures that may inadvertently influence research and the responsibility of the researcher to work for change for the participants. Historical scholarship centered on economic capital, unequal linguistic power relations, and the strength of language ideology provides a theoretical backdrop for comprehending the current state of the loss of capital by refugees in Calgary. These pieces build nicely into the examination of Lightman and Good Gingrich's social exclusion (2012), serving as a theoretical umbrella to demonstrate the loss of capital of the refugees through the exclusion of economic power by limiting access to the entire capital of English.

In chapter three, "The Study," Ricento provides the history, rationale, motivations, methods, and participant profiles for the study featured in the book. The author details previous research within Calgary focusing on refugee experiences with English language learning curriculum and content, analyzing the illuminating data that surfaced from refugee questionnaires demonstrating that highly educated professionals were overwhelmingly underemployed in lower-skilled jobs outside their fields or not employed. Projected possible factors of language, policies, and lack of curriculum focusing on language for professional fields were identified for future study. Ricento outlines the recruitment, selection, and interview process of refugee families for the study and individuals who work within the refugee community. The chapter highlights the gap in research for refugees in Calgary. It also breaks down the essential need to understand their specific obstacles instead of other classes of immigrants due to the often traumatic nature of preceding events before they arrived in Calgary.

The first three chapters provide a rich theoretical and data-based landscape complete with frameworks of capital, Canadian immigration history, and carefully selected methodology aligned with and informed by previous and current refugee experiences. In chapters four and five, Ricento gives voice to the refugees themselves and delves into an analysis of two longitudinal case studies with refugee families. The author provides two contrasting cases of refugee transitions to Calgary with many common threads of loss of capital between them. Careful thematic analysis is applied to interview data to describe and highlight the inability to retain capital and identity, and the impediments specifically around language learning and use in Calgary.

In chapter four, "The Martinez Family," the author shares the first longitudinal case study of a refugee family living in Calgary, Canada. This chapter focuses on losing professional status in licensing fields, specifically medicine and accounting, and the role of language in deterring one from establishing capital as a refugee in Canada. Ricento provides a careful analysis of the narrative that reveals themes of lack of opportunity for language training around specific professions, loss of identity, and the underlying system of economic oppression around nonwestern-trained refugees in professional fields. The findings reveal that language is identified as the main factor for mobility, and lack of opportunity to learn English for specific professional settings displaying an underlying system of economic oppression favoring western-trained professionals. Through a detailed description of the family's journey, the author provides insight into how environments for loss of professional capital

are created. Through unpacking a narrative provided by in-depth interviews, the author pinpoints these areas of loss and their origins in the Canadian system, specifically in a highly specialized field such as medicine. Ricento also selects extremely compelling excerpts from the interviews outlining gaps in English language courses offered for refugees and specific needs for gaining professional linguistic capital. This provides a sense of urgency to advocate for focused English language courses around professions, rather than general day-to-day topics.

The fifth chapter, “Patrick, and Chantel,” details the second case study, which contrasts the first study in refugee status, language, and country. Yet Ricento succinctly demonstrates similar long-term life results. Both case studies, despite their differences, demonstrate similar loss of professional status and linguistic blockades in their stories. This chapter does reveal a focus on two areas of difficulty: the additional burden of race and the categories of refugee classification on immigrant success. Ricento demonstrates that the term “visible minority” may negatively impact job mobility even if language is not a factor. This chapter provides an analysis of the bureaucratic process of refugee claimants and stressful situations encountered when working through a system that seems to prevent gaining more capital due to seemingly arbitrary rules and timelines. Analysis of policies for specific classifications of refugees also reveals illogical roadblocks which may leave people unable to access capital in language or work positions due to adherence to the refugee policies themselves.

In the sixth and final chapter, “Challenges and a Way Forward,” Ricento presents a wealth of research on the central issues refugees face globally and the economic and ideological agendas that may drive refugee policy rather than the actual needs of these populations, linking back to the analysis of the book’s case studies. Connecting again to the concept of exclusion as a central theme, the author demonstrates a common thread of countries opening doors yet placing multiple stops before truly allowing people past the threshold, resulting in extreme feelings of isolation and lack of mobility for refugees. An examination of the role of language as the key indicator for success in claiming and retaining professional capital in transnational moves is analyzed through past attempted English course curriculum design for newcomers, the prevalence of cultural transmission and assimilation through language, and the lack of opportunity for critical components to integrate with professional language. Ricento concludes by returning to the fundamental role of language in all refugee policy and capital and the desperate need for curriculum redesign and course access to better meet the needs of new groups arriving in Canada and the world at large. Hymes (1973) and Labov (1972) are revisited to reconnect the refugee experience with the power of language and positioning minorities as outsiders, and remind us that these root issues may persist even with policy changes. Ricento issues a warning that within these layers of language, the prevalence of othering, devaluing visible minorities and nonwestern languages, and lack of curriculum connection to professions must be addressed if the economic return desired by countries will come to fruition and for families to ever truly be welcomed.

Evaluation

Ricento succeeds in exposing and sharing the realities of extreme loss of capital and life-altering hurdles within the refugee experience in Calgary, Canada. The comprehensive look at the difficulties from highly professionalized fields, specifically medicine, is incredibly profound given the years of training needed in one’s home country and inability to qualify for credential review in Calgary. They effectively demonstrate the direct connection between language ability, language value, and social capital in Calgary, extrapolating to Canada and worldwide regarding English. By sharing refugee stories and data, Ricento also exposes another layer of bias towards nonwestern, nonanglophone professionals, as those who lose the most significant capital tend to transition from non-English speaking, nonwhite, and nonwestern countries. Ricento humanizes the numbers beautifully and

painfully summarizes the pitfalls and tragedies along the way that place refugees in impossible situations. He also pays close attention to demonstrating the unique needs of refugees as opposed to other immigrant groups. The realistic picture painted is so vivid as one follows the paths of the families that the book begs for sharing even more case studies, or perhaps a future study with further followup on the families described in the book.

I appreciated that the author does not shy away from pointing to and examining the fact that race and language are inextricably linked and that this impact on refugee capital must be probed as well. The crucial inclusion of an example revolving around the use of a desired national language, even though refugees still face employment bias possibly due to race, is also revealing. This is such an important reminder that not only language may impede continuing one's career in a new country, but race may also play a part, adding another layer of oppression. The use of the Canadian terminology "visible minority" is so vital to understanding yet another level of the refugee journey and fight to reclaim capital. It would have been fantastic to see an additional entire chapter dedicated to a vignette of the single female Somalian refugee mentioned in earlier chapters. This may have provided more focus on the vulnerability of female refugees that the book mentions and pushed for further examination of the intersectionality of the racial, linguistic, and gender identities of minority refugees.

Ricento's analysis of obstacles for refugees to gain full social capital in Canada, in large part due to the value and ideologies of English, pairs well with Bourdieu's theories of capital, specifically linguistic capital and social capital (1986) and Blommaert's (2010) sociolinguistics of globalization and inequality. Phillipson's (1992) framework of linguistic imperialism holding English as a global expectation and driving standard for global language and ideology may be interwoven effectively as well. The combination of concrete Calgary labor market data supported by the day-by-day accounts of the refugee families provides an impactful step-by-step guide on how social capital is lost.

Conclusions

Collectively, the book highlights, specifically in Canada, the substantial and perhaps intentional lack of process to legitimize the value of expertise held by highly skilled refugees and the urgent need for inclusive, specific, and flexible English language course design to support this transition. The reader is left with the grim reality that nations may impose policies based on the hegemony of linguistic and racial hierarchies to build new lower-wage labor forces, promoting policies of total assimilation into existing hierarchical arrangements, rather than embracing and supporting a more inclusive multiracial/multilingual national identity. The reader is also left with a realistic and hopeful solution for a way forward that may inform future English language practitioners, policymakers, credential specialists, and curriculum designers. The evaluation of firsthand refugee stories, and wide gaps in access to appropriate language courses show the crucial need to incorporate pathways for refugees to regain or retain their valuable skills from their home countries. The book centers on the authentic needs and experiences of refugees and justifies research that may involve refugees themselves in the design of language education courses (Karavas & Mitsikopoulou, 2021). The book's powerful combination of first-person experiences, supported by a robust quantitative backbone of data, renders it highly relevant to several fields, including adult ELL curriculum and pedagogy, language loss, refugee studies, language policy and planning, economic and labor policy studies, and migration studies.

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