

Cambodian resettlement in Canada:

A literature review

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## Introduction

In the late 1970s changes were made to the Canadian immigration system that were significant enough to pave the way for an unprecedented experiment in humanitarian protection and refugee resettlement. As refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos streamed out of their homelands by sea and by land, Canadians busily got to work resettling them across the country and supporting their integration into communities big and small. Not only was the resettlement of the Indochinese in Canada unprecedented in its scale (60,000 resettled within a one-year period) but also in the way it influenced Canadian ideas about refugees. The undertaking resulted in Canadians being awarded the Nansen Refugee Award – the first and only time an entire nation of people has been recognized for outstanding service to the cause of refugees, and it can arguably be credited for shaping numerous aspects of Canadian refugee policies and programs to follow.

Forty years later and Canada's resettlement of the Indochinese continues to offer a foundational case for lessons in public policy on refugees, as well as for understanding the challenges and experiences of refugee resettlement. While this period in Canadian refugee history, and those involved in the resettlement, have rightfully attracted the interest of social science researchers who have explored the resettlement from multiple angles, considerable knowledge gaps remain. Studies on those, who are often insufficiently/inaccurately referred to as the "Boat People", have frequently failed to question and explore distinctions between the different nationalities and ethnic origins of the resettled refugees, and the thousands of "Land People" among them. A search for literature on this topic provides numerous examples of researchers who blur and/or overlook distinctions between the different nationalities in three distinct ways: 1) by focusing on the 'Indochinese' as a group with a certain implied

homogeneity (Picot, Zhang, & Hou, 2019; Strong-Baog & Bagga, 2009), 2) by referring to the Vietnamese and Indochinese interchangeably, and thus neglecting the resettled Cambodians and Laotians (Bun & Christie, 1995; Neuwirth & Clark, 1981), and 3) by differentiating between nationalities but focusing little on their distinctive features (Bun & Christie, 1995; Chan & Indra, 1987; Dorais, 1991, 2009; Dorais, Chan, & Indra, 1988). Furthermore, while countless studies have focused on the resettlement of the Vietnamese, considerably fewer books and articles have been written about the Cambodians or Laotians. In a comprehensive bibliography of research on Southeast Asian refugee settlement in Canada compiled by Doreen Marie Indra (Chan & Indra, 1987) ten years after the major flow of refugees to Canada, not a single publication focuses exclusively on the Cambodians<sup>1</sup>, while there are dozens of examples of research on the Vietnamese.

This review of literature seeks to provide an overview of research that proves an exception to the rule, in its focus on the distinctiveness and defining characteristics of the Cambodians who were among the thousands of resettled Indochinese. Having identified a small number of resources that provide insight into the Cambodian experience, this paper will demonstrate what quickly becomes evident when reviewing literature on this topic, namely that Cambodian refugees in Canada are a unique community with specific experiences and challenges that distinguish them from other nationalities resettled in the Indochinese refugee flow. To present this case, this paper will demonstrate how literature has contributed to understanding the distinctiveness of Cambodians at a few different levels.

Following the organization of McLellan's (2009) book, *Cambodian refugees in Ontario*, which explores three themes in refugee research, this review shall also examine: 1) the

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<sup>1</sup> The one exception to this is an article published in the Journal of the American Medical Association looking at the health of Cambodians in refugee camps.

significance and consequences of pre-migration experiences, 2) the dynamics of resettlement adaptation, and integration, and 3) the shifting and contested nature of ethnic and religious identity. These themes have been organized into six sections. The first section explores the historical context from which Cambodian refugees came to be. The next section looks at their migration to Canada in terms of when and where they came. Section three explores what researchers have contributed to understanding the challenges of resettlement and integration for Cambodians in Canada. The next section examines how authors have treated collective issues of religion, community and identity. Section five explores contributions on resilience and continuity, while the final section reviews ideas related to sub-groups within the population of Cambodians in Canada. The conclusion discusses generally how literature in this area has contributed to understanding Cambodian refugee resettlement and points out some of the gaps and opportunities for future research.

## History in Cambodia

In comparison to Vietnam and Laos, Cambodia is characterized by Beiser (1999) as a traditionally more insular country whose history is “more mysterious” (p. 17). The Khmer Empire was established in the early 9<sup>th</sup> century and lasted until the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when the country entered a period of decline. Once a kingdom that ruled the region, by the 18 and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was largely dominated by foreign protection from Vietnam and Thailand (McKinlay, 2007). From the 1860s to the 1950s, Cambodia, along with Vietnam and Laos, formed part of the French protectorate known as Indochina. When the three countries gained independence in 1953, Vietnam was divided into the two states of North and South Vietnam, while Cambodia was placed under the rule of Prince Norodom Sihanouk. When war broke out in Vietnam in 1965 between Communists in the North and the US-backed South, violence and instability quickly

spilled into Cambodia and Laos (Dorais, 2009). In 1970, Prince Sihanouk was ousted in a US-supported military coup that placed General Lon Nol in charge. As the Americans began to withdraw from Vietnam, they became more trained on Cambodia and the growing influence of the communist Khmer Rouge, who had been gaining control in the Northern and Eastern regions of the country. The Americans began a carpet bomb campaign in Cambodia dropping 15,000 pounds of explosives per square mile, more than ever dropped on Japan throughout the Second World War, and resulting in the death of 150,000 civilians (McKinlay, 2007). The US bombings further destabilized the country and encouraged peasants to join the Khmer Rouge (McKinlay, 2007). By April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge, under its leader, Pol Pot, took over the whole of Cambodia, renaming the country Democratic Kampuchea.

Pol Pot espoused a radical version of Maoist Communism that dictated an erasure of the current social structures and elimination of the past, starting Cambodia off again in the year zero (McKinlay, 2007). The new regime wanted to wipe the slate clean, turn the whole country into a giant work camp, and control the actions and thoughts of the entire population (Litalien & Thibeault, 2005). To achieve this vision, cities, hospitals, schools, factories, libraries and monasteries were evacuated and closed down, and anything from the West (including medicine) was outlawed (McKinlay, 2007). Pol Pot's regime, "...abolished religion, executed Buddhist monks, banned all forms of private ownership, extended working hours, and declared that all non-labour time was to be devoted to party indoctrination" (Beiser, 1999, p. 19). Educated people, urban dwellers, military and government employees, Buddhist monks, and ethnic minorities (Chinese, Vietnamese, and Muslim Cham) were all targeted for elimination (McKinlay, 2007). Merchants, educated and professional people, classical dancers, musicians, artists and anyone perceived to be influenced by Western culture (for example by wearing

glasses or speaking French) were also targets (McLellan, 2009). Religious institutions were closed or destroyed, and Buddhist activities were forbidden – including burials and commemorations of the dead (McLellan, 2009). Some monasteries were occupied as compounds for the Khmer Rouge and used for administrative purposes, as centre of torture and execution, as storehouses for food, or as animal stalls (McLellan, 2004).

“Every Cambodian man, woman, and child was affected by the forced evacuation of Cambodia's cities and towns. The evacuation resulted in horrific living conditions in rural slave labour camps, mass killings and executions, starvation, rampant disease, family separation, and complete social disintegration.” (McLellan, 2004, p. 5). While the War in Vietnam had already displaced millions of people in the region, Rogge (1985) contends that the displacement of up to 70 percent of Cambodians is “the more tragic in terms of total proportion of the population affected” (p. 3). During the four years under Khmer Rouge rule, ninety percent of people in the educated and upper classes were killed (Chan cited in McKinlay, 2007, p. 40). An estimated 2 million Cambodians died out of a population of only 6 to 7 million. More than one hundred thousand died as direct targets of torture and execution, while the rest were victims of starvation, forced labour, lack of medical care, or war (Kiljunen 1983 and Welaratna 1993 cited in McLellan, 2009). Labelled an “auto-genocide” because of the self-destructiveness of Cambodians killing Cambodians (McKinlay, 2007), actions by the Khmer Rouge damaged and destroyed lives but also, an entire civilization. The entire cultural and religious system, previously known for its temperate and tranquil lifestyle, was brutally dismantled (McLellan, 2004).

Internationally, the Khmer Rouge also had expansionist ideas. Rather than aligning itself with the communists of Vietnam, Pol Pot denounced them (Litalien & Thibeault, 2005). In 1978,

the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia, chased out the Khmer Rouge, and installed a pro-Vietnam government. This liberation soon became an occupation (McKinlay, 2007) and crackdowns on the population continued, resulting in the death of 150,000 more Cambodians (Litalien & Thibeault, 2005). The invasion did however provide an opportunity for the exhausted and emaciated Cambodians to escape to neighbouring countries into refugee camps that were eventually set up along the border in Thailand. Cambodian escapees joined the 2 million people in total who were fleeing from homelands in the Southeast Asian peninsula between 1975 and 1980 (Beiser, 1999). McKinlay (2007) suggests that 600,000 Cambodians fled to the Thai border, while Litalien and Thibeault (2005) puts the number of Cambodian refugees in Thailand at 350,000. Rogge (1985) adds nuance by noting that 350,000 Cambodians fled to Vietnam, where they did not fall under UNHCR protection. Regardless of how many eventually crossed borders, the journeys were often harrowing and dangerous. Refugees who were ill, wounded, exhausted and starving took treacherous journeys to Thailand during which they were frequently targeted by soldiers, guerillas, and bandits who confiscated belongings and raped women and girls (McLellan, 2009). A film produced by the National Film Board of Canada featuring stories of Cambodians in Thai refugee camps, includes testimony by one woman who lost her husband and all but one child, and who survived by walking 500km through the jungle eating only on wild potatoes along the way (Régnier, 1980). The Thai response to Cambodians crossing the border went from acceptance to deterrence (McKinlay, 2007). In 1979, the Thai army forced tens of thousands back into the jungle, where most were killed by Khmer Rouge guerillas or landmines (McKinlay, 2007). International aid eventually flowed through and refugee camps were properly established.

Literature on the Cambodians who resettled to Canada helps to illustrate how no one in Cambodia was unaffected by the Khmer Rouge regime and the aftermath of its defeat. As McLellan writes, “Khmer people who are now resettled in Canada speak of how men, women, children, and even hospital patients were forced at gunpoint to leave Phnom Penh and other cities. Several recall how family members were separated or died of exhaustion and illness along the roadside during this time” (McLellan, 1994 cited in McLellan, 2004, p. 5). Omidvar and Wagner’s (2015) volume featuring the stories of refugees who have built lives for themselves in Canada features two Cambodians who share horrific stories of terror and loss. Sorpong Peou, his parents and his six siblings were marched out of Phnom Penh by the Khmer Rouge and barely survived the labour camps. His father, who had been a civil servant, was taken away one night by Khmer leaders. The family assumed for years that he had been killed, only to discover decades later that he had in fact survived and was living in Cambodia. Samnang Eam, was only an infant when her parents set out to escape to Thailand with her five siblings. By the time the family arrived at the refugee camp in Thailand (after crossing the Thai border twice), only one of her siblings was still alive (Omidvar & Wagner, 2015). These stories speak to the experiences of brutality, trauma and survival of individual refugee families resettled to Canada.

### Migration to Canada

When one considers that there are six to seven times as many Canadians of Vietnamese origin than there are of Cambodians or Laotians (Dorais, 2009), it is not surprising that research on Cambodians has taken a backseat to that focused on the Vietnamese or Indochinese writ large. Where research does exist, a considerable segment is dedicated to understanding when the Cambodians arrived, where they settled, and how many are now in Canada.

Cambodian migration to Canada can be divided into four general waves (Dorais, 2009; Litalien & Thibeault, 2005). The first wave was made up of mainly of international students who began arriving to Quebec in the 1950s and eventually settled. A few also came from the US as asylum seekers and were given status (Litalien & Thibeault, 2005). Prior to 1975, these Cambodians numbered only about 200 and lived mostly in Montreal and Quebec City (Dorais, 1991, 2009; Litalien & Thibeault, 2005). The second wave of migration, and first wave of humanitarian resettlement, occurred between 1975 and 1976 when 250 Cambodians – mostly professionals, military officers, or people with family in Canada – arrived and settled mainly in Quebec (Litalien & Thibeault, 2005; McLellan, 2004). This period of migration would also have included some Cambodian orphans brought to Canada as part of the airlift out of Saigon in 1975 (Strong-Baog & Bagga, 2009). It was the third wave of migration that brought the first significant group of Cambodian refugees, who are now settled in Canada.

When nearly 500,000 “land people” migrated to refugee camps in Thailand, they were part of a large-scale population displacement going on in the entire region (Rogge, 1985). Thailand was not a signatory to the Refugee Convention and viewed the migrants not as refugees but as illegal entrants. The Thai government forcefully demanded their resettlement and threatened to repatriate the refugees if action was not taken quickly enough (Rogge, 1985). Canada, along with other Western nations took up the cause and participated in what was, at the time, the single largest population transfer from the “Third World” to western industrialized countries (Rogge, 1985). All told, roughly 300,000 Cambodians were resettled to the West, with Canada becoming home to the fourth largest number (after the US, France and Britain) (McLellan, 2004).

Between 1978 and 1979, Canada changed its immigration laws to allow for larger-scale humanitarian resettlement and to create the refugee sponsorship program (Litalien & Thibeault, 2005). It was during this period that Canada brought in 60,000 refugees, including 7000 Cambodians (Litalien & Thibeault, 2005), a quarter of whom were of Chinese origin (Dorais, 2009). According to McLellan (2009), Canada's refugee selection process reflected self-interest, with well-educated and skilled refugees favoured for resettlement. Because Cambodian refugees were from mainly rural settings, with low-levels of education, it was assumed that they would not adapt well to living in the West. There were also fears that some Khmer Rouge might be among the applicants. These issues help to account for why the majority of those selected for resettlement to Canada were not Cambodians (McLellan, 2009). Sixty percent were Vietnamese, while forty percent were Cambodian or Laotian (Régnier, 1980).

From the 1980s to the early 90s, another 18-20,000 Cambodians resettled to Canada (Dorais, 2009; McLellan, 2004, 2009), many were brought through family reunification (Litalien & Thibeault, 2005). Fifty-five percent of all Cambodians came as government-sponsored refugees, the rest as privately sponsored, largely through church congregations (McLellan, 1995, 2004). By the 1990s, the number of Cambodians coming to Canada had slowed considerably. Fewer than 10,000 came each year in the first half of the decade and fewer than 4000 per year in the latter half (Dorais, 2009). McLellan (2004) attributes the slow-down to difficulty faced by Cambodians in sponsoring family members to come to Canada.

The total number of Cambodians now living in Canada is difficult to estimate. The 1991 census included 18,620 individuals who identified themselves as Cambodian. This is not however likely to include approximately 2000 Chinese refugees of Cambodian nationality (Dorais, 2009). The census is also assumed to underestimate the number of Cambodians living in

Canada because language difficulty or unwillingness to divulge personal information may have prevented many from completing their questionnaires (McLellan, 2009). Immigration figures are also difficult to rely upon. They may underestimate the number of Cambodian nationals resettled because some Cambodians are assumed to have lied and said they were Vietnamese in order to improve their chances of being chosen for resettlement (McLellan, 2004).

In addition to informing the “when” and how” of Cambodian migration to Canada, researchers have contributed to understandings of where Cambodians live. McLellan’s (1995, 2004, 2009) work on Cambodians in Ontario refers to communities in Toronto and surrounds, Ottawa, Hamilton, London, St. Thomas, and Windsor. Approximately 5000 live in Toronto and another 5000 in other Ontario towns (McLellan, 2009). Beyond Ontario, researchers point to 2001 census data, which included 9405 Cambodians living in Quebec, with 8450 of those in Montreal (Litalien & Thibeault, 2005). Dorais’ (1991) study of the Cambodian community in Quebec City describes a community of about 700, including both Khmer and Sino-Cambodians. The 2001 census further includes fewer than one thousand Cambodians in each of British Columbia, Alberta, and Manitoba (McLellan, 2004), however McKinlay’s (2007) study of Cambodians in Vancouver estimates that 2000 Cambodians live in the lower mainland of B.C. In 1991, there were no Cambodians living in Newfoundland, PEI, New Brunswick, or the Northern Territories (Molloy, Duschinsky, Jensen, & Shalka, 2017). Anecdotal evidence from McKinlay’s (2007) work suggests that some of the Cambodians resettled to Canada are former Khmer Rouge, including an apparently high proportion in Vancouver and others in Toronto and Montreal.

## Challenges to settlement and integration

Given the uncharted territory embarked upon by Canada when it engaged in refugee resettlement on such a large scale, and the unique circumstances and history of the Cambodian people, it is perhaps not surprising that those who settled in Canada faced multiple challenges with adaptation and integration. The following section explores what research on the Cambodian refugees in Canada has identified as some of the most significant and unique challenges faced by this population. These include: human capital and economic integration, barriers to social capital development, trauma and mental illness, lack of appropriate service, and multiple overlapping barriers.

### Human capital and economic integration

Cambodian refugees, arriving from 1978 onward, did not bring the kind of human capital needed to facilitate easy entry into the economy and society of Canada. Unlike the first and second waves of Cambodian migrants, and unlike the other Indochinese arriving at the same time, refugees from Cambodia were generally peasant farmers with little education, no command of English or French, and no relatives in Canada (Dorais, 1991, 2009; Joy, 2018; McLellan, 2004, 2009; Rousseau & Drapeau, 2003). McLellan's (2009) analysis of immigration statistics notes:

...of the 18,602 Cambodians who resettled in Canada between 1980 and 1992, only about 8 per cent reported some fluency in French or English; 5,678 had no education; 9,980 had some primary school in Cambodia, with 624 having completed the equivalent of Grade 9; 1,513 had some and 393 had completed secondary school; while 488 had some post-secondary school education (Employment and Immigration Canada 1980–92). Over half of

the Khmer men and the majority of Khmer women were functionally illiterate in Khmer."  
(p. 45)

The Cambodians were further distinguishable from the other Indochinese refugees by their poor physical health. Cambodian refugees showed "...more symptoms of malnourishment, more tuberculin reactors, higher hepatitis B indicators, more parasites, and much lower mean haemoglobin and red blood count volumes than other Southeast Asian refugee groups tested" (Cantanzaro and Moser, 1982 cited in McLellan, 2009, p. 34).

These factors meant that Cambodian refugees were generally poorly equipped to integrate easily into the Canadian labour market at a time when the Canadian economy was already in a period of crisis (Dorais, 1991). In her study of Cambodian refugees 10-15 years after their arrival in Ontario, McLellan (1995) found high rates of unemployment with or people working as unskilled labour in processing plants, mushrooms farms, babysitting, sewing, cooking, and cleaning. Some could not work due to chronic health conditions (attributed to suffering under the Khmer Rouge) and most faced significant employment barriers due to language and education (McLellan, 1995). An update on this research in 2009 found more instances of Cambodians who were taking advantage of education and training programs and who, by the late 1990s, were financially stable enough to purchase houses in suburbs. While McLellan interprets this as a sign of upward mobility, she also notes that the need for Cambodian parents to pay large mortgages has affected the post-secondary opportunities available to their children (McLellan, 2009).

In general, research on the economic integration of Cambodian refugees is limited and/or elusive. A recent study by Picot et al. (2019) comparing labour market outcomes for several refugee groups concluded that the Indochinese are among the highest earning refugees after

fifteen years. Unfortunately, this study (like others) does not differentiate between different nationalities. Given that the Cambodians are known to have had fewer human resources and arguably greater economic barriers, one wonders about the extent to which these results provide insight into the labour market outcomes of the small Cambodian minority among a much larger group of Indochinese.

### Barriers to social capital development

In addition to the dearth of human capital among the Cambodian refugees who resettled to Canada, literature on this population also refers to the challenges that Cambodians faced in developing and using to their advantage social connections, both within and outside the community. In other words, the development of strong social capital among the Cambodians was limited by barriers specific to them and their background. Research in this area, alludes to three main reasons for this challenge: 1) a lack of trust in others, 2) social divisions, and 3) a lack of capacity, especially in places other than Quebec.

The bonds and personal relationships that contribute to social integration have, according to some researchers, been hard for Cambodian refugees to establish because of the trauma and terror they experienced under the Khmer Rouge. Both McKinlay (2007) and McLellan (2004, 2009) emphasize how difficult it is for Cambodians to trust other people. As one interviewee explained to McLellan, “Surviving the Khmer Rouge onslaught required a heightened sense of suspicion of everyone and everything, for life itself hung in the balance” (2009, p. 76). It is not surprising then that Cambodians would have a hard time trusting in others and/or easily building social bonds. McLellan (2009) suggests that Cambodians in Ontario are hesitant to attend anything identified as a ‘meeting’ or ‘association’ and are suspicious and critical of anyone aspiring to or acting in a leadership role.

Through ethnographic research conducted in Vancouver, McKinlay (2007), describes a population of refugees that wants to be together and to establish relationships with others, but is too afraid to do so – “...the legacy of fear has manifested itself in the unfulfilled desire to gather together as a group, and the residual difficulty of expressing oneself freely” (p. 96). She writes of the difficulties that community leaders have had in establishing a community centre, stating that people are too afraid to come together because they are worried it could make them a target. Part of their fear could have to do with the fact that the Khmer Rouge were never appropriately punished for their crimes and that there is a perception that Khmer Rouge cadres are among some of the Cambodians who resettled to Canada. According to McKinlay (2007), this is especially true in Vancouver where many Khmer Rouge members are believed to live in large numbers, and where there is fear that bringing Cambodians together could be volatile and/or lead to conflict. Describing the situation of suspicion without knowledge, McKinlay writes:

The presence of Khmer Rouge in the Lower Mainland intrinsically entailed the possibility of accidentally meeting up with a person who might have participated in the murder of friends or family members. But, while Cambodians may claim to be able to sense who was and who was not Khmer Rouge, there was no way, unless you had watched the event, of knowing who might be the person who killed your family members, or friends. This creates an element of the unknown, and like the unanswered question, conceals a threat that always hangs over the present, but can never be known for sure. (p. 95-96)

While fear and mistrust act as a barrier to Cambodians' developing strong social connections with each other, Hamilton's (1996) work also implies that social capital is inhibited by socio-economic and cultural differences among the refugees. She draws attention to the high

number of Cambodian single-mothers (widowed or divorced), coping on their own, when traditionally they would have been supported by large extended families. Describing the isolation of felt by senior Cambodians in Vancouver, McKinlay (2007) writes: “Seniors who had expected to live the rest of their lives at the center of extended families instead now lived alone in rented housing in a foreign land, too afraid of strangers or haunted by nightmares to learn English” (p. 107). Social and cultural capital that was destroyed for these refugees under Pol Pot, have been nearly impossible to re-establish in the Canadian context. This situation is exacerbated by what Hamilton (1996) refers to as divisions among the population - between those who have been upwardly mobile and those who are not, and between those who have converted to Christianity, and those who continue to follow Buddhist religious practices. Many of the Cambodians refugees who came to Canada were of Chinese ethnic origin. It is possible that they might have benefitted from social connections to the Chinese community in Canada, but this would have done little for the ethnic Khmer. These cleavages, within the context of trying to adapt in a completely new setting and culture, could act as a significant impediment to community cohesion and social capital development.

Finally, the weak social bonds formed by Cambodian refugees can be partly attributed to the weak human capital discussed previously. According to McLellan (1995), low levels of human capital among the Cambodians meant that few had the skills or capacity necessary to act as community leaders and/or to offer any advantages to one another in the Canadian context. This barrier was especially acute outside of Quebec where no Cambodian communities were established prior to the major waves of refugees. According to Joy (2018), the presence of a Cambodian community in Quebec made up of people who could serve as interpreters, help the refugees learn French, and otherwise connect them to services and opportunities, eased the

transition of the refugees and made their adjustment easier than those who settled elsewhere. Dorais' (1991) study of Cambodian refugees in Quebec City focuses specifically on the success of this community and concludes that the economic integration of the refugees was greatly enhanced by the previous existence of an already established culture group who provided much needed social capital to ease the refugees' establishment and integration.

### Trauma and mental illness

Another major theme in the literature related to the challenges faced by Cambodian refugees who settled in Canada, is unsurprisingly, their high rates of post-traumatic stress and associated mental illness. As McLellan (2009) points out, "More than 90 percent of all Cambodian refugees experienced sustained trauma and inhumane living conditions, regardless of age, gender, religion, ethnicity, or class status" (p. 34). While there is no comprehensive study on rates of mental illness among Cambodian refugees in Canada, a study conducted by Marshall et al. (2005) on Cambodian refugees living in California, showed a 51 percent rate of depression and 62 percent rate of PTSD – far higher than the general population of the US (cited in Beiser, 2009). While the scale of trauma and its effects may be difficult to define, research interviews and ethnographic work by Beiser (1999), McKinlay (2007) and McLellan (1995, 2004, 2009), bears witness to the trauma (and its effects) born by the refugees who resettled to Canada.

Cambodians now in Canada who survived the communist Khmer Rouge regime recall their hard labour in fields, working long hours without rest, the lack of food and sanitation, being under constant surveillance, and witnessing murders and numerous other acts of brutality. They speak of watching their children and parents die of starvation, family members being shot and beaten, countless acts of petty cruelty and suffering, and

feeling unceasing indignity, despair, fear, and terror. (McLellan, 1995 cited in McLellan, 2004, p. 5)

McKinlay describes how even though traumatic ordeals are in the past, the refugees she spoke with, carry them with them in the present. While participants in her research expressed feeling safer in Canada, they also admitted to fear and anxiety in their daily routine and to suffering from nightmares. Beiser's (1999) book, looking specifically at the mental health of the Indochinese in Canada, describes one refugee from Cambodia who suffers from major depression and PTSD. He describes how she spends most days at home alone in her unkempt apartment, trying to forget her memories of the past. When it becomes too much for her, she cries out loud and suffers nightmares regularly. McLellan (1995) writes of Cambodian women who are "...too afraid to go places on their own, take public transport, walk in racially mixed neighbourhoods, venture out of doors in cold weather, and meet and socialize with other women" (p. 5).

For some refugees, resettlement to Canada does not actually spell the end to living life under threat. McLellan (2009) describes a man in Ottawa who ended up living in the same apartment building as a Khmer Rouge cadre who taunted him and reminded him about the control he had over him in Cambodia. Others in her study describe being in contact with former Khmer Rouge who boasted about their power and their intent to take over in Cambodia again. Even without the ongoing threat of Khmer Rouge power, it seems clear that many refugees remain haunted and sometimes debilitated by their memories. Yates' (1989) review of a documentary film profiling a Cambodian refugee family in Ottawa reminds us that memories and trauma can continue to haunt us at any time. The refugee woman profiled in the documentary describes how working in a daycare brought back memories of the children she witnessed starving to death in the camps in Cambodia.

Further, adapting to a whole new life in the context of these personal histories, can itself be detrimental. Describing a participant in his study, Beiser (1999) states, “In Min Ran’s opinion she lost her mind during the years before she left Cambodia. She expected to feel better once she got to Canada. She doesn’t. In fact, she feels worse” (p. 21). Dewitt (2007) describes how participants in her study use the terms, “depression”, “headache” and “thinking too much” when asked to describe their lives in Toronto. What is significant when considering the trauma of Cambodian refugees is that arrival in Canada is not necessarily the end of their ordeal. Resettlement does not necessarily protect against disorder and may indeed be a contributing and/or exacerbating factor.

#### Lack of appropriate services

Amid the barriers to resettlement and integration already described, Cambodian refugees (especially those arriving to places outside Quebec) often lacked services that were appropriate to their needs. While Cambodians of Vietnamese or Chinese ethnic origin would have had access to already established communities and concomitant ethno-linguistic services, this was not the case for the majority of Khmer Cambodians (Joy, 2018). Most Canadian towns and cities faced a shortage of Khmer interpreters and a lack of knowledge about Khmer culture. The lack of interpreters and the limited English or French spoken by the majority of the refugees created barriers for accessing even the most basic of services (housing, health insurance, school registration, social assistance, etc.) (McLellan, 2009). While it would be tempting to assume that this issue would resolve over time, many Cambodians, especially women and elders, never managed to learn English or French, and still required interpreters, fifteen years later (McLellan, 2009).

In addition to the barrier of language, many Cambodians also faced an absence of appropriate and/or culturally relevant services (McLellan, 1995, 2004, 2009). Due to the lack of established Cambodians in most parts of Canada, workers hired in the 1980s to assist with resettlement were themselves newly arrived refugees who had as much need as the people they were supposed to be serving (McLellan, 2009). Many didn't understand their job and/or couldn't gain the trust of the people they were serving. Participants in McLellan's (2009) research reported being treated poorly by these early workers. For their part, many refugees didn't understand the concept of resettlement services. Service providers had a difficult time getting participation and/or commitment from the Cambodian refugees and little government funding was available to support programs (McLellan, 2004).

Psychological service provision was also hampered by a lack of Cambodian counsellors or social workers (McLellan, 1995), and by the stigma attached to accessing such services. As a participant in McLellan's (2009) research states: "For a Cambodian to talk with a psychiatrist about such personal problems...is unthinkable, it just does not happen. That is strictly a Western thing to do" (p. 105-106). More culturally familiar services for these refugees would have included Khmer Buddhist spiritual leaders. "For many Ontario Cambodians, traditional healers and Buddhist monks remain the only trusted source of wisdom and knowledge to explain the causes and cessation of suffering in their lives" (McLellan, 1995, p. 6). Khmer Buddhists, unlike the ethnic Chinese and Vietnamese, are Theravada Buddhists. While temples and monks were established in Canada, at the time of the arrival of the refugees, these were all Mahayana Buddhists, who could not serve the needs of the Cambodians. With the annihilation of monks in Cambodia and the lack of established religious institutions in Canada Cambodians found themselves with no place to turn to for spiritual and culturally appropriate support. All of this

resulted in an exacerbation of suffering and pain (Dewitt, 2007), did little to support effective establishment in Canada, and continues to impact upon the capacity of Cambodian refugees to seek help (McLellan, 2004).

The situation in Quebec was somewhat different to elsewhere in Canada. The Association of Cambodians in Quebec was already established and was able to be involved in helping with the resettlement by providing language and psychological assistance (Litalien & Thibeault, 2005). Furthermore, refugees in Quebec were given full financial support and accommodation while they studied French for the first year. This contrasted heavily with their counterparts in Ontario who were pushed into low-wage unskilled jobs at the expense of language-acquisition and further education (McLellan, 2009).

### Multiple overlapping barriers

In considering the barriers to integration faced by the Indochinese refugees resettled to Canada in the late 70s and early 80s, McLellan (1995) outlines five factors that make the Cambodians distinct. These include: 1) the trauma of the Khmer Rouge, 2) the loss of traditional family structure and support (lack of familial connections in Canada, high number of female-headed households, and the significant number of unaccompanied minors), 3) their worse physical health, 4) their different service needs, and 5) their backgrounds as rural people with little education and/or English/French language proficiency. By acknowledging these factors, we can begin to understand how and why culture shock and difficulty adapting, may have been that much more acute among these refugees. In describing the arrival of a Cambodian family in Ottawa, Yates (1989) wrote: “Their problems are far from over; in a sense, they're just beginning. They must still look after their survival, and that means working in a different culture and language, learning new skills. There is no rest for them. They must adapt to their new

country - to a new climate, new food, to a population whose perception of refugees is not necessarily favourable” (p. 68) – all this from a position of such critical disadvantage.

While research can help us to consider the individual challenges faced by the Cambodians who came to Canada as refugees, it is important to emphasize that it is not each of these issues on their own that made life in Canada so difficult for the new arrivals. The difficulties they faced were not simply in the lack of human and social capital, the trauma, or the gap in services. It is these multiple challenges in concert with one another, overlapping and exacerbating each other, that contributes to a sum of challenging experiences greater than their individual parts. It would seem difficult to underestimate just how physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually difficult the lives and experiences of Cambodians refugees would have been in the early years of resettlement and beyond.

#### Religion, culture, identity, and community

While the hardship of individual adjustment and integration presents as a key theme in the literature on refugee resettlement in Canada, a second major theme relates to the collective adaptations and negotiations of Cambodian refugees in terms of religion, culture, identity, and community. Just as the refugee experience of Cambodians makes them distinct among the Indochinese, so too does their religion and culture. Dorais (2009) points out that although Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos were all agrarian economies based on rice, they were otherwise very different. More than ninety percent of Cambodians are ethnic Khmer, whose culture, systems of belief and social stratification have been based on Indian-influenced Theravada Buddhism, Sanskrit language, Indian script, Indian judicial laws, and Hindu conceptions of the monarchy (McLellan, 2004, 2009). By contrast, the Vietnamese, and ethnic Chinese practice

Mahayana Buddhism and are generally more influenced by Chinese culture and philosophy (McLellan, 2009).

While Canada had some well-established Mahayana Buddhist temples at the time of the Indochinese arrivals, this was not the case for Theravada Buddhism. As discussed previously, communities of Cambodians in Canada did not exist outside of Quebec, nor did any significant communities of Theravada Buddhist followers. If Cambodian refugees in Canada were to engage in practice in their own religion, and by extension to express their own culture, they would have to develop their own infrastructure and have the personnel available to support them. This possibility was greatly hampered by the liquidation of monks under the Khmer Rouge. Estimates suggest that in 1979, only two thousand monks had survived the starvation, heavy labour and execution that befell their previous population of more than sixty-five thousand (Boua, 1991 cited in McLellan, 2009). Of those, few seemed to be able to come to Canada and/or to assist in establishing temples. In the 1980s, only a few monks were available for sponsorship from refugee camps (McLellan, 2009) and by 1993, only five Cambodian monks (and a few of Laotian monks) had made their to Canada (Dorais, 2009). “For many Khmer, Buddhism remains the primary expression of the Cambodian way of life” (McLellan, 2004, p. 10). Prior to 1975, all aspects of social life in Cambodia were intimately connected to Buddhism, “the view of the world, the periodic festivals, the education of the young, were directly inspired by the teachings of Buddha” (Dorais, 2009, p. 24). The lack of religious leadership in the early days of resettlement meant that important rituals could not be carried out and that Cambodians were unable to “effectively channel their extensive feelings of grief and loss, or to attain reconciliation with the dead” (McLellan, 2009, p. 485).

Despite the obstacles they had to overcome, Cambodian Buddhist temples were established in many Canadian cities, often without a monk in residence (Dorais, 2009). In Ontario, two temples were established by 1999, one in Ottawa (founded in the early 80s) and one in Toronto (McLellan, 2009). With support of the Kampuchea Krom (ethnic Khmer from Vietnam), three more were eventually established in Hamilton, London and Windsor (ibid). Edmonton and Montreal also have well-established temples run by monks. Adapting to a new reality, many Cambodians are involved with the many Khmer Buddhist associations that exist throughout the country without a monk or a temple (McLellan, 2009).

For some Cambodian refugees, religious practice took on a new direction through conversion to Christianity. McLellan's extensive research among Cambodians of Ontario (1995, 2004, 2009, 2011), includes an examination of Christian conversion among some Cambodian refugees and how it impacts upon their identity and relationship to the rest of the community. According to her, the conversion of Cambodian refugees first began in refugee camps, where Christian identity served to enhance opportunities for refugees to participate in training, gain access to services, and obtain opportunities for resettlement through Christian organizations (Smith-Hefner, 1999 and Mortland, 1994 cited in McLellan, 2009). Once resettled, conversions continued, mainly through sustained contact with private sponsors from church and faith-based organizations. "Sponsors were recognized as "patrons," and refugees felt it necessary to "pay back" their sponsors by attending church when they were asked to come" (McLellan, 2004, p. 14). According to McLellan (2009), several Cambodians converted out of a sense of obligation to their sponsors, rather than a genuine interest, while others were attracted to the values or sense of community and support that was available among Christian Canadians. In many cases, Christian Canadians offered the emotional and practical support, and social capital unavailable to

Cambodian refugees elsewhere. One older Khmer woman informed McLellan (2009) that she decided to become a Mormon because they were the only ones to consistently call in on her and to keep her company. Many of the converts were older individuals and/or women who had lost husbands, children, and parents and who experienced marginality among the Khmer. Of all the Cambodians to resettle to Ontario, fewer than 500 are Christians, the majority of whom are Evangelical Protestants, as well as Catholics, Mormons, and Seventh-Day Adventists (McLellan, 2004). Despite their shift to Christian values and religious practice, many of these Cambodians still retain strong adherence to Khmer ethnic identity and linkages to homeland, only without the Buddhist framework (McLellan, 2009).

While genocide and resettlement greatly impacted practices of Buddhism among Cambodians in Canada, they also had significant bearing on broader aspects of culture and identity. McLellan (2009) argues that one cannot understand Cambodian identity in Canada, without appreciating the severity and extent to which they have suffered. "First-generation Cambodians in Ontario cannot be separated from their identity as survivors of genocide: that is why they are here, and that is who they are" (McLellan, 2009, p. 12). However, not only are they a community of survivors, but they are a people who have had to negotiate the additional challenges of resettlement in a foreign land - establishing new conceptions of themselves as a people within an entirely new society. As Dewitt (2007) points out, resettlement had the fundamental impact of challenging Cambodian ways of "knowing and doing" (p. 14). While the genocide itself "...posed a serious threat to the Khmer sense of self and the notion of Cambodian identity" (Hamilton, 1996, p. 12), this threat became that much more acute upon resettlement to Canada.. As McLellan (2009) articulates:

Western social ethics of individualism, secularism, materialism, self-reliance, and autonomy are distinct from a Khmer Buddhist ethics-regulated society of hierarchy and extended-family dependency. Making this transition has had an impact on all facets of Cambodian lives in resettlement: their religious identities, family and generational dynamics, community social cohesion, transnational networks and linkages, and coming to terms with the past and its lingering effects. (p. 36)

Tensions arising from these challenges often manifested themselves in domestic violence, marital breakdown and/or inter-generational conflict (McLellan, 2009) and instilled in many Cambodians a general fear and insecurity about cultural loss (Hamilton, 1996). According to Hamilton (1996), some Cambodians have responded by devising increasingly rigid boundaries of Cambodian identity and have "...invented a static traditional culture, through which they are seeking continuity with an idealized, pre-1975 Cambodian past" (p. 144). Other, take a different perspective, pointing out how in this context, many refugees have succeeded in maintaining a sense of Cambodian identity and community by getting together (often with potlucks) (McKinlay, 2007; McLellan, 2009), by maintaining transnational connections to diaspora and to Cambodia (McLellan, 2009), and by participating in efforts to visit, restore, and remain connected to the homeland (McKinlay, 2007; McLellan, 2009, 2011).

### Resilience and continuity

Examining the contexts and experiences of Cambodian refugees, it would be easy to report only on the traumas, the challenges, the difficulties and the negative outcomes faced by this community – there are indeed many of these. However, the work of some scholars has also contributed to an understanding of Cambodian refugees in Canada as resilient, and as deeply engaged in promoting the continuity of themselves, their families, their communities and their

culture. Examples of the capacity of this community to move is found in literature referencing Cambodians who are generally happy in Canada (McKinlay, 2007), who have established comfortable lives for themselves (ibid), and who have discovered a sense of freedom in their new environment (Yates, 1989). Thanks to McLellan's long-term engagement in research on Cambodians in Ontario, one notes how over time, Cambodians were able to move past the horrors they experienced and think more about their successes:

During interviews in the early 1990s, many Cambodians spoke about their horrendous experiences of suffering, even though it was not asked of them. These experiences were disturbing to hear and distressing to those who related them... Ten years later, Cambodians did not express the same need to share their survival stories, and the research was more focused on their successful strategies for social cohesion rather than the difficulties of resettlement. (McLellan, 2009, p. 17)

Research has also demonstrated that despite the barriers to economic integration faced by Cambodian refugees, many have been able to find employment, to raise enough money to buy homes (McLellan, 2009), and to send remittances and/or to contribute to development efforts in Cambodia (McLellan, 2004). McLellan's research on the transnational ties between the Cambodian community in Canada and their homeland, demonstrates how Cambodians in Canada engage in efforts to sustain their culture and community in both countries. When the situation in Cambodia began to stabilize in the late 1990s many former refugees, began travelling back to Cambodia, bringing with them large sums of money to support their families in Cambodia and/or to assist in the building of a community or temple (McLellan, 2004, 2011). Some have even returned to living in a Cambodia on a temporary or permanent basis, and at least two were members of Parliament in Cambodia in 2002 (McLellan, 2004). Visits to Cambodia have

allowed former refugees to undertake religious duties to the dead and bring themselves the peace that was so elusive in the earlier days of resettlement (McLellan, 2011). They have also managed to confront memories and fears, be reunited with family, and to more effectively involve their children in their pasts and in Khmer culture and experience (McLellan, 2011).

Successes and continuity can also be seen in the next generation of Cambodians, many of whom have completed secondary and post-secondary education, and who have found employment in professional fields (Joy, 2018). Contrary to what might be assumed, Rousseau's research (with a number of other scholars) on the educational outcomes of the children of Cambodian refugees, found little evidence of educational disfunction (Rousseau & Drapeau, 2000, 2003; Rousseau, Drapeau, & Platt, 1999, 2000; Rousseau, Drapeau, & Rahimi, 2003). Instead, it is suggested that parental trauma may act as a protective factor, leading the children of Cambodian genocide survivors to have a deeper commitment to making successes of themselves out of obligation for those who never got the opportunity.

Finally, literature on the resilience and continuity of Cambodian refugees in Canada, alludes to their tenacity in coming together as a community and in sustaining and adapting their culture to living in a Canadian context. McKinlay (2007) sees a community that is committed, through a sense of obligation, to be together and live their lives well and with success, out of a sense of obligation and duty to remember. Dewitt (2007) notes how the coming together of Cambodian women has contributed to their communal healing. while McLellan (2009) observes the innovative methods that Cambodians in Toronto suburbs and surrounding towns use to get together. She also points to the establishment of Khmer Buddhist temples, Cambodian dance troupe, musicians and events, as proof of a community that has managed to sustain itself against all odds (McLellan, 2004). In describing her work and her observations of the ways in which Cambodians have moved forward and created a space for themselves in Canada amid a complex mix of emotions and experiences, McKinlay (2007) writes:

The experiences of the Cambodians I have met here over the past few months have made me realize that the Vancouver they live in is not the same Vancouver I have lived in. Within their Vancouver is an imagined Cambodia; not in the same way that 'Chinatowns' and 'Little Italys' have become a visible part of the urban landscape in many cities, but a Cambodia which occupies a small discursive space in which they are able to interact with one another and collaborate in moments of shared practices, language and acceptance. It is a space built upon their memories, which has captured simultaneously a Cambodia of laughter, hope, nightmares and betrayals. (p. 160)

### Sub-group research

Recognizing the importance of understanding the unique characteristics of Cambodians, among a larger population of Indochinese refugees, some scholars have gone further by examining sub-groups among the larger population of Cambodians who settled in Canada. The following section reports on what literature has contributed to understanding women, youth, and ethnic minorities from among the population of Cambodian refugees in Canada.

### Women

While most of the published work on the Cambodian refugees pays little to no attention to gender and/or the situation of women, theses by Dewitt (2007) and McKinlay (2007) offer an exception to this rule. Their observations and analysis of the role of women in the Cambodian diaspora of Canada echoes the notion put forward in Yates' brief article, that Cambodian women are the "the backbone of the family" and by extension the bearers of culture (Yates, 1989).

Dewitt's (2007) ethnographic work in Toronto is interested in the ways Cambodian women describe their reproductive experiences and how these descriptions relate to their experiences and identities as Cambodian women, and as refugees. Her work sheds light on how Cambodian women, despite their suffering recognize their own strengths and the contributions

they have made sustaining themselves, each other, their families, their communities, and their culture. According to Dewitt, the reproductive narratives of Cambodian women demonstrate how their daily experiences and choices are driven by efforts to ensure “the safety, survival, and continuation of family” (2007, p. 3).

McKinlay’s (2007) thesis, involving an ethnography of the Cambodian community in Vancouver, is not exclusively gendered-focused in its orientation, though it does include several observations about the role of women in Khmer society, and the ways in which women contribute to cultural continuity. She sees Cambodian women as *choosing* to enact traditional gender roles as an act of resistance to the Khmer Rouge and to the norms of western society. Inhabiting these roles is not, from her perspective, an issue of subjugation, but is instead a way for women to “maintain a role that was symbolic of their memories of how things should be” (McKinlay, 2007, p. 164). Cambodian women are observed to be engaging in “seemingly innocuous acts such as sewing, cooking, or maintaining societal roles” as a show of strength against their past experiences of a regime which sought to destroy their culture, and amid present experiences in a society that constantly threatens to erode it.

## Youth

Another sub-group that has received a fair share of attention in the literature is Cambodian youth. Literature on this topic calls for an acknowledgment that different generations of Cambodians now living in Canada, share different characteristics and experiences. McLellan (2009) organizes Cambodians into three generations: 1) adult survivors of the Khmer Rouge, 2) the children and youth who accompanied them, and 3) the children born in Canada to survivors. Seemingly left out of this classification would include children born to individuals in the second and third category. Nevertheless, efforts to understand the Cambodian refugee community in

Canada has largely focused on the experiences of the adults who arrived in late 70s and early 80s. However, to understand the community as it is today, it would be important to consider the very different experiences and contexts faced by the children and youth of these refugees. It would seem equally important to recognize the differences between older Cambodian young people who arrived in Canada with their parents, and their younger siblings who were born or raised in Canada (McLellan, 1995). Adult refugees and their older children will have memories and perspectives shaped by their own first-hand experiences of the genocide. Those who came to Canada as older children and teenagers arrived as both refugees and as children of refugees (Hamilton, 1996). They may have little to no understanding of Cambodia before the Khmer Rouge, but they will remember the suffering. The younger generation of children and youth have no such memories, their understanding of the Pol Pot regime, and of Cambodian identity, is completely mediated by their parents, their families, their community, and their environment (Hamilton, 1996). Yet, while they may not have a full grasp on what went on in Cambodia, “upon closer observation it becomes clear that the experience of their parents and elder siblings during that time have had a dramatic impact upon their lives” (Hamilton, 1996, p. 17).

As described earlier, many of the adult refugees resettled to Canada found meaning in efforts to sustain their Khmer culture and identity. Parents worried about the negative effects of westernization on their children (Hamilton, 1996) and responded by imposing strict sets of behavioural criteria - expecting their children to adhere to prescribed gender norms, to demonstrate proper etiquette, and to agree to arranged marriages (McLellan, 2009). This contributed to both a crisis of identity for many Cambodian youth, as well as to resistance. Many young people found that cultural practices at home were not easily compatible with the dominant Canadian culture that surrounded them (McLellan, 2009). Some also felt shame about their

culture and reported being taunted by other Southeast Asian youth about the savageries of the Khmer Rouge and powerlessness of the Khmer people (McLellan, 2009). Many also experienced what might be considered vicarious trauma, leading them to view the world as dangerous and unpredictable (McLellan, 2009). "These experiences, combined with the severe shortage of Khmer cultural and language programs and community role models or leaders, inadvertently encouraged youth to renounce their Khmer identity and seek alternatives to develop self-identity, self-esteem, and success" (McLellan, 2009, pp. 152-153). While works by Hamilton (1996) and McLellan (2009) allude to a resistance by youth, that has sometimes been negative (e.g. gang involvement) they also allude to the development of new and innovative expressions of Cambodian identity among the next generations (McLellan, 2011). For many youth, Buddhism is no longer central to their identities as Cambodians and as Canadians, nor are traditional ideas about dating and gender roles, yet many have developed a sort of hybrid identity allowing them to be both Cambodian and Canadian simultaneously. Some have even become actively engaged in efforts to support and engage with other Cambodian youth (McLellan, 2011). Furthermore, as some youth begin travelling to Cambodia, they seem to be developing a new respect for what their parents went through, gratitude for the opportunities they have in Canada, as well as a stronger sense of connection to their history and culture (McLellan, 2011).

While Cambodian youth identity formation emerged as a significant area of research, scholarship has also paid attention to questions of educational engagement and achievement. In this area there seems to be significant contradiction and/or disagreement. McLellan's (2009) research refers to a community of parents with low educational goals and young people with "low educational achievement" (p.14). She refers to an almost ninety percent drop-out rate of Cambodian students in mid-1990s Ontario, and speaks to the particular challenges faced by

Cambodian women with higher educational and career aspirations (p. 151). On the other hand, Rousseau and colleagues, who conducted research on the educational outcomes of Cambodian youth in Quebec found that Cambodians did not necessarily fare worse than other refugee youth, or the general population, in terms of educational performance. This was attributed to the parents' high expectations for their children's' educational achievement (Rousseau & Drapeau, 2000, 2003; Rousseau et al., 1999, 2000). While the contradictory evidence between these two authors could be attributed to the differences between Ontario and Quebec, or to their different sample sizes and research methods, it is hard to imagine how or why educational expectations among Cambodian parents would be presented as so entirely different. This contradiction would certainly be worth exploring in future research.

#### Minorities and ethnic non-nationals

Acknowledging that at least ninety percent of Cambodians are ethnic Khmer (McLellan, 2004, 2009), it is still notable to recognize and consider those Cambodians of different ethnic origins who resettled to Canada. Ethnic minorities in Cambodia include the Vietnamese, Chinese (Sino-Cambodians), Burmese, Lao, Cham Muslims, and several hill tribes (McLellan, 2009). One must also acknowledge the Khmer populations outside of Cambodia, including the Kampuchea Krom whose lands were annexed by the Vietnamese, and the Khmer-Sarin, who lived on lands governed by Thailand (McLellan, 1995). Among those who resettled in Canada, many were Sino-Cambodians and Kampuchean Krom (Dorais, 2009; McLellan, 2009), there is also anecdotal evidence of a few Cham Muslim families living in Toronto (McLellan, 2009).

Experiences of these Cambodian minorities and Khmer non-nationals will be shaped by both their ethnicities and their nationalities. While Vietnamese and Chinese Cambodians will have suffered similar ordeals in Cambodia, their experiences of resettlement would have been

very different. They were welcomed and integrated into the larger Chinese and Vietnamese communities already established in Canada, something that was not available to the Khmer (Joy, 2018). While this likely brought some considerable benefits, Beiser's (1999) research indicates some possible drawbacks as well. According to him, refugees of Chinese ethnic origin were less likely to speak English or to have non-Chinese friends, than their counterparts who had no established diaspora groups on arrival in Canada. It seems plausible then, that in not having already established communities across Canada, the Khmer might have been more likely to integrate linguistically and socially.

The Kampuchean Krom on the other hand have a culture and religion shared by the Cambodian Khmer. This has meant that they have been able to contribute to and assist in the development of Khmer cultural centres and Buddhist temples. There are monks from this community who are educated, politically active and, who speak English. Important to consider however, "The Kampuchea Krom never experienced the ultimate powerlessness, unrelenting fear, horror, and hopelessness of those who survived the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia" (McLellan, 2004, p. 13). They do however understand the lack of culturally appropriate services that characterized their resettlement in Canada.

## Conclusion

Thanks to the work of a few scholars, journalists and film makers, who have dedicated themselves to examining different elements of Cambodian refugees resettled in Canada, there is now a foundation of knowledge, which points to the unique characteristics and experiences of this community. Literature and film have told the story of the Cambodian refugees in important and varied ways, from statistical analysis, to story-telling, to thematic research. The multiple disadvantages of Cambodian refugees, as well as their resilience and dedication to community

and continuity, are now far better perceived. Nevertheless, there remains some gaps in understanding and perspectives about this community that would seem worthy of pursuit.

Firstly, although Dorais (1991, 2009) has contributed to outlining some of the demographic characteristics of Cambodians and other Indochinese in Canada, there exists no large scale study of welfare and integration indicators of Cambodians. Evidence put forward in the literature regarding educational achievement and economic participation is contradictory and there seems to be no definitive answers to questions about how Cambodians actually fared against all the barriers they faced. Back in 1985, Rogge commented, "Some five years have now elapsed since the first major wave of Indochinese was resettled, and for the geographer, as well as the other social scientists, the time is ripe to evaluate the socio-economic impact of this large diffusion of Indochinese into the alien cultural milieu of Western industrial societies" (p. 71). While the framing of this question might today be different, the call for a large-scale analysis seems not to have been taken up, at least not in the case of the Cambodians.

Another significant gap in the literature involves the question of government versus private sponsorship. While many scholars allude to both forms of resettlement in reference to the experiences of Cambodians, it would seem especially poignant to understand if and how each of these programs produced similar or different experiences and results for the people who participated in them. Given how many barriers to integration were present for Cambodian refugees, did different forms of resettlement offer any benefits or disadvantages?

Third, while literature on the challenges faced by Cambodian refugees presents a thorough picture of the many barriers, very little, if any attention is given to the how the reception Cambodians received in Canada may have shaped their experiences. Nor is considerable attention paid to the racialization, marginalization and overall inequity they almost

certainly faced in Canada. While McKinlay (2007) does make reference to the “loss of power and the structural ‘inequity’ they face in their new ‘home’” (p. 5), there seems a complete absence of literature exploring the resettlement of refugees from a more critical perspective.

Finally, and this is a significant gap, none of the authors whose work contributed to this literature review claims to be of a Cambodian or refugee background. It seems safe to assume that they are all Canadian-born and white. This is pointed out not to discount their efforts to genuinely understand the experiences of Cambodian refugees, nor their attempts to respectfully and effectively represent the voices of the refugees with whom their research was engaged. It does however point to a gap in the inclusion of Cambodians in directly shaping knowledge about their community and calls into question the justness of efforts to formulate understandings about a people entirely on their behalf. Without the voices of refugees and of Cambodian Canadians contributing to this literature, it seems that a massive opportunity for insight is missing.

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