WOMEN, CITIZENSHIP AND MIGRATION: THE RESETTLEMENT OF VIETNAMESE REFUGEES IN AUSTRALIA AND JAPAN

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The book Women, Citizenship and Migration: The Resettlement of Vietnamese Refugees in Australia and Japan explores the settlement of Vietnamese refugees, and in particular, women refugees, in Australia and Japan from 1975 to 1995. Yoshida asks key questions about nation building, citizenship and refugee settlement. She explores key concepts of citizenship in both Japan and Australia and how citizenship discourses are mediated by the nation state, with impact on rights, obligations, supports and inclusion of refugees and immigrants. She excavates whether the concept of citizenship and granting of special entitlements promote integration of migrant ethnic women in a national community and if so what entitlements are important. Additionally, Yoshida interrogates whether the legal status of citizens assists migrant ethnic women to integrate into a national community.

The findings from Yoshida’s research in relation to these key questions are fundamentally important. She found that Australia had an egalitarian approach to citizenship, with strong systems of special entitlements and legal incorporation of immigrants and permanent residency on arrival. Japan had more restrictive forms of citizenship, with minimum entitlements and temporary residential status. Yoshida concludes that despite differing constructions of citizenship, Vietnamese refugee women in both countries were concentrated in marginal socioeconomic positions and did not have a sense of belonging to the membership of the national community. She states:

at one level, these results could suggest that special citizenship entitlements…as well as granting of formal status of citizen, seem to have little influence on the participation of Vietnamese refugee women in the wider society. . . . Special entitlements the Australian Government granted Vietnamese refugee women did not resolve their low socioeconomic status and their isolation from the wider community. However, many essential needs of these women for everyday life . . . were satisfied to some extent through special entitlements. Through special entitlements to alleviate financial and childrearing, Vietnamese women in Australia gained better opportunities than their counterparts in Japan. (Yoshida 2011, p. 225)

The book also reminds us that the policy and citizenship considerations need to be viewed from perspectives of not only ethnicity but also gender. Yoshida argues, correctly, that despite growing awareness of women’s issues, there is a scarcity of scholarship and research linking citizenship, ethnicity and women. Thus, the book takes an intersectional approach, of gender and ethnicity, via the experiences of Vietnamese women refugees in their resettlement in two countries. The book highlights the importance of cultural determination of role of women, in areas such as caring responsibilities and attitudes to women in the workforce and education.

The strength of the book is in the comparative analysis it makes between Japan and Australia in a number of ways: it contrasts the different historical evolution of citizenship and nation building concepts in both countries, including legal status of citizenship to
migrants; provides a detailed account of approaches to refugee and migrant settlement and special entitlements by the nation state in Japan and Australia; and explores experiences of Vietnamese women refugees in areas such as on arrival life, employment, education, caregiving, ethnic identity, social interaction, racial discrimination, nationality and naturalization and belonging. Yoshida draws some conclusions about citizenship. She argues that the 'Australian form of citizenship appeared to be more desirable than the Japanese' (p. 218). She argues that evidence from the studies in both Japan and Australia suggests that neither form of citizenship enabled a structural inclusion of Vietnamese women refugees, particularly in occupational and educational spheres of society. Additionally, non-inclusion of Vietnamese women in broader national community was attributed to the cultural role of women and the attitudes of wider community towards ethnocultural differences. Yoshida argues that Vietnamese women confined themselves to their own community due in part to their own attitudes towards their ethnic identity, but partly ‘because of racist attitudes of the wider community’ (p. 221). While issues of gender receive sufficient analysis in the book, issues of attitudes of wider society, in particular racism, although central to her thesis, did not receive adequate attention. Yoshida touches upon notions of racism throughout the book, but does not elaborate in any significant way. The book would have been strengthened by exploring how constructions of citizenship, national identity, gender or migrant settlement are determined/impacted by racism.

The book concludes with a very brief look at inclusive forms of citizenship and future areas of research. The book is a valuable contribution to our understanding of citizenship, women and migrant settlement. It provides a rare comparative examination across two countries. The case study of Vietnamese refugee women enables a detailed consideration of very large and challenging issues at different scales.


The Neoliberal Deluge tackles an important theme – the causes and consequences of the worst disaster in the US history. The word play of the title leaves one to question: Is the book about neoliberal policy before the deluge of water that engulfed 80% of the city after Hurricane Katrina’s landfall on 29 August 2005 or does it focus on the chaos of weak government, its failed levees and its failed response as the cause of a disaster of epic proportions? Will the book criticize the deluge of neoliberal privateers that descended upon the city like vultures hoping for a piece of a corpse and will it take issue with deluge of books and articles using the case of New Orleans to criticize the direction of global public policy? The answer to each is a rewarding, yes.

Through this edited volume, Cedric Johnson examines disaster as one of the unintended consequences of neoliberalism. This is a refreshing remixing of ideas, which include but move beyond the well travelled analyses of the disaster as structural racism, competition in an urban growth machine, ‘state’ failure and official incompetence. Instead they bring into ‘moral and interpretative focus’ (p. xx) the role of neoliberalization before, during and after the disaster.

Featured authors approach the disaster from a variety of intellectual traditions, disciplines and methods, but like Johnson, are all critical of what he terms ‘the ideological project that elevates market freedoms over all others’. They criticize the retreat of government from concern for the general welfare and safety of American citizens while highlighting how