

Filling a Critical Gap: Refuge at 40

Jennifer Hyndman

Volume 39, numéro 1, 2023

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1100880ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.41169>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Centre for Refugee Studies, York University

ISSN

0229-5113 (imprimé)

1920-7336 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce document

Hyndman, J. (2023). Filling a Critical Gap: Refuge at 40. *Refuge*, 39(1), 1–4.
<https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.41169>

© Jennifer Hyndman, 2023



Cet article est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

érudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>



Filling a Critical Gap: *Refuge* at 40

Jennifer Hyndman^a

HISTORY Published 2023-03-28

KEYWORDS

forced migration studies; refugees; *Refuge*: Canada's Journal on Refugees

Refuge is an engaged scholarly outcome of the fraught Cold War in Vietnam and the human displacement that it spawned. It is a fundamental catalyst of Refugee Studies, also known as Forced Migration Studies, as an interdisciplinary scholarly field and vital medium for mobilizing knowledge about human displacement. As I begin to co-author my next paper for *Refuge*, I accepted this invitation to mark the journal's four decades of publishing as an opportunity to reflect on how critical this venue has been to the emergence of the field of refugee studies, and on my own avid interest in the journal as a scholar. My engagement with *Refuge* has been as frequent author and co-author (Brunner et al., 2014; Hyndman, 1996, 1997a, 1997b, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2013; Hyndman & Reynolds, 2020; Hynie et al., 2019; Khan & Hyndman, 2015; Sherrell & Hyndman, 2006) beginning in the 1990s as a graduate student. I later served as an editorial board member, and as champion of the journal from 2013 to 2019 in my role as Director of York University's Centre for Refugee Studies (CRS), during which time I contributed to funding submissions and editorial searches to support *Refuge*.

While I have witnessed *Refuge's* impact factor soar in the last decade (Clark-Kazak

et al., 2022), that has never been my motivation to publish in the journal. *Refuge* stands out for other reasons, in many ways leading the modest pack of periodicals in the field by addressing forced migration issues with an open-access, peer-reviewed, bilingual approach, making new research findings and insights easier to access and share in regions of the Global South and among academics who may not have subscriptions that transcend the paywalls that characterize so many periodicals today. With more than 85% of refugees in Global South locations and many scholarly refugee and forced migration research centres based there (UNHCR, 2022), this open access enables much wider and more inclusive participation in conversations with scholars from across the world.

Understanding the founding of the interdisciplinary field known loosely as Refugee Studies, or Forced Migration Studies, is inseparable from the foundation of *Refuge* in 1981 and underscores its fundamental role in translating interdisciplinary knowledge, while also being produced by it. Both the interdisciplinary field of refugee studies and the journal can be traced back to the 1980s and massive human displacement in Southeast Asia. They are scholarly legacies of global human displacement generated

CONTACT

^a jhyndman@yorku.ca, York University, Toronto, ON, Canada

by the Cold War, and specifically by the end of the U.S. war in Vietnam in the late 1970s. Molloy & Madokoro (2017) underscored the generous Canadian resettlement response to very large numbers of refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, arriving in their new space of refuge. The United States accepted unprecedented numbers and proportionally more refugees, as well, given its direct ties to allies from these countries who supported the U.S. invasion of Vietnam. Since then, so much more has been written in the realm of fiction, non-fiction, and more diasporic infused 'refugee studies', depicting the fraught reception, racialized social exclusion, and economic struggles so many faced upon arriving in North America. Viet Thanh Nguyen's amazing book, *The Sympathizer* (2015), won the Pulitzer Prize for its fictionalized account of rupture and displacement-in-resettlement when people from these Southeast Asian countries came to North America. I see such work as a kind of literary complement in fiction in relation to the scholarly work of *Refuge*.

Refuge - established in Toronto in 1981 - was the first journal in the field of refugee studies and in an unsigned editorial in the periodical traces the emergence of the field this way:

In the late 1970s, coinciding with the large-scale resettlement of Indo-Chinese refugees in Canada, a literature began to emerge concerning the origin and dynamics of refugee movements and the policies related to the reception and integration of refugees in Canada. *Refuge* was founded at York University in 1981 to serve as a communications medium for this new interdisciplinary field of enquiry (*Refuge*, 2021).

Refuge was followed by *The Journal of Refugee Studies* (JRS) in 1988 and by *The International Journal of Refugee Law* (1989) at the University of Oxford, as well as many others throughout the years.

Geographer Richard Black (2001, p. 59) noted that an array of research centres affiliated with universities emerged alongside these journals. In 1981, the Refugee Documentation Project began at York University in Toronto, tracing what would become the two decades-long exodus of refugees from Southeast Asia and their resettlement across Canada and North America. In 1988, the Refugee Documentation Project led by Howard Adelman morphed into the current Centre for Refugee Studies at York (Adelman, 2022).

In 1983, the Refugee Studies Programme at the University of Oxford was established, later becoming the Refugee Studies Centre. In 1992 and 1993 respectively, Moi University in Kenya and Makerere University in Uganda founded their own refugee-related research centres, signalling the importance of conflict in generating human displacement in Sub-Saharan Africa. The 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention added additional grounds for defining refugees under international law. Many more refugee-related research hubs, labs and graduate programs have also emerged in this time. There are possibly too many to count without missing one, yet this proliferation of interest in Forced Migration and Refugee Studies signals that the field remains alive and well.

After the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union under Gorbachev in the early 1990s, the Cold War 'warmed', signalling a dramatic shift in the meaning and decline in the valence of refugees as indicative of ideological superiority. Yet there was no reduction in the number of violent conflicts and people displaced by geopolitical war, resource conflicts, and/or competing nationalisms. The scholarly, critical field of Forced Migration/Refugee Studies flourished with new work, questions, and insights (Black, 2001; Adelman, 2022).


At the time of writing, the number of forcibly displaced people on the move, including but certainly not limited to officially recognized refugees, has reached unprecedented levels. New flows of human displacement, such as from the Russian war on Ukraine or the U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan, may be top of mind, yet most dislocated people are in Global South regions and experience protracted displacement for years, if not decades. Borders are very selectively open and often violently reproduced, especially for uninvited asylum seekers. Countries like Canada may have a reputation for welcoming *resettled* refugees, but as *Refuge* authors have long illustrated, this country is a difficult place to reach as an *asylum seeker*. Bordered by three expansive oceans, Canada's cold-water geography serves to deter most maritime asylum seekers, but its biometric visa regime for non-preferred visitors serves to further seal its borders from the uninvited. The Safe Third Country Agreement (STCA), currently being challenged in Canadian courts, aims to ward off asylum seekers coming through the United States. All these dynamics of forced migration, and the tacit policies that undergird them – the geopolitics of displacement, the externalization of asylum, the extended exile for those living in camps or settlements, refugee determination and resettlement – are taken up by the authors of *Refuge* in nuanced and challenging ways. I am but one curious and excitable scholar, always provoked by the incisive debates, questions, and revelations of the journal's scholarship, the quality of which has been enhanced greatly as successive editors fine-tune its review processes and streamline open access online digital production.

This brings me back to my original question: why would I publish in the same journal more than a dozen times? Long be-

fore it became a normal practice in publishing, *Refuge* was open access and a welcoming venue for early career researchers from across the world. The premise of democratized knowledge-sharing is vital in this interdisciplinary and globally relevant field. *Refuge* is also a community of practice and venue for scholars who may not find disciplinary belonging elsewhere; its knowledge production can be more relevant, innovative, and frankly more interesting to those of us stirred by global geopolitics, competing nationalisms, and the human rights atrocities of rogue governments, all of which create people on the move under conditions not of their own making. As a scholarly forum, *Refuge* has been receptive to the work of early career researchers and Global South scholars who challenge the Occident-centric notion of the 1951 Refugee Convention, and of Refugee Studies and forced migration scholarship more generally. It engages, provokes, and produces vital new knowledge based on original scholarship, often steeped in lived experiences of displaced persons who are racialized and attuned to marginalized groups affected by violence at home. It has long analyzed the statecraft, conflict and violence that produces human displacement in all its forms.

As governments grapple with how to engage the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), and scholars debate the political stakes of refugee-versus-migrant in a context where all tallies of forced migration across world regions are surging (Hyndman & Reynolds, 2020), analyzing and re-imagining protection strategies through scholarly research and debate are more important than ever. *Refuge* continues to be a central and vital place for all to access and create new knowledge produced in all parts of the globe.

ORCID

Jennifer Hyndman <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6962-4730>

REFERENCES

- Adelman, H. (2022). Celebrating 40 years: The origins of refuge. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 38(1), 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.41018>
- Black, R. (2001). Fifty years of refugee studies: From theory to policy. *International Migration Review*, 35(1), 57–78. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2001.tb00004.x>
- Brunner, L. R., Hyndman, J., & Mountz, A. (2014). "Waiting for a Wife": Transnational marriages and the social dimensions of refugee "Integration". *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 30(1), 81–92. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.38664>
- Clark-Kazak, C., Reynolds, J., & Shandy, D. (2022). Celebrating 40 years — Reflections on refuge: 2012–2018. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 38(1), 6–10. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.40964>
- Hynie, M., McGrath, S., Bridekirk, J., Oda, A., Ives, N., Hyndman, J., Arya, N., Shakya, Y. B., Hanley, J., McKenzie, K., & SyRIA.lth. (2019). What role does type of sponsorship play in early integration outcomes? Syrian refugees resettled in six Canadian cities. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 35(2), 36–53. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1064818ar>
- Hyndman, J., & Reynolds, J. (2020). Introduction: Beyond the global compacts. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 36(1), 66–74. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.40768>
- Khan, A. A., & Hyndman, J. (2015). Navigating civil war through youth migration, education, and family separation. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 31(2), 75–84. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.40311>
- Molloy, M. J., & Madokoro, L. (2017). Effecting change: Civil servants and refugee policy in 1970s Canada. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 33(1), 52–61. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-9336.40448>
- Hyndman, J. (2013). A refugee camp conundrum: Geopolitics, liberal democracy, and protracted refugee situations. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 28(2), 7–15. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.36472>
- Sherrell, K., & Hyndman, J. (2006). Global minds, local bodies: Kosovar transnational connections beyond British Columbia. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 23(1), 16–26. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.21339>
- Hyndman, J. (2001). Change and challenge at UNHCR: A retrospective of the past fifty years. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 19(6), 45–53. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.21238>
- Hyndman, J. (1999). Globalization, immigration, and the gender implications of not just numbers in Canada. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 18(1), 26–31. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.22004>
- Hyndman, J. (1998). Representing refugee women: Gender and work in three Kenyan camps. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 17(1), 10–15. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.21955>
- Hyndman, J. (1997a). Managing and containing displacement after the cold war: UNHCR and Somali refugees in Kenya. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 16(5), 6–10. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.21936>
- Hyndman, J. (1997b). Refugee self-management and the question of governance. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 16(2), 16–22. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.41161>
- Hyndman, J. (1996). International responses to human displacement: Neo-liberalism and post-cold war geopolitics. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 15(3), 5–9. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.21190>
- Nyugen, V. T. (2015). *The Sympathizer*. Grove Press.
- Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees. (2021). *About the journal*. <https://refuge.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/refuge/about>
- UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2022). *UNHCR Global Trends Report: Forced Displacement in 2021*. <https://www.unhcr.org/publications/brochures/62a9d1494/global-trends-report-2021.html>



This open access work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

This license allows for non-commercial use, reproduction and adaptation of the material in any medium or format, with proper attribution.