

## Special Issue Introduction

Belma Sadikovic

*Minnesota State University Moorhead, USA*

*Assistant Professor of Curriculum and Instruction*

Email: [sadikovicbelma@gmail.com](mailto:sadikovicbelma@gmail.com)

I owe a tremendous amount of appreciation to Dr. Bernhard Streitwieser, who introduced me to the *Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education* and for encouraging me to propose a special theme to the journal and my utmost admiration to the editor-in-Chief, Dr. Rosalind Latiner Raby, for accepting the topic on the plight of refugees and supporting my role as the guest-editor through the entire process. I am beyond thrilled to see a volume in an academic journal that captures the complex experiences of refugees across the globe in which sheds lights of their complex journeys from fleeing their war-torn countries to the overall integration into their new society. Moreover, this special topic examines the educational aspect of acclimation pertaining to formal education to explain the role of educational participation as a relevant factor in refugee integration, and self-sufficiency.

What compelled me to propose this topic is derived from my own account as a refugee who escaped her birth country of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a child in 1993. Waking up one morning to the sound of my mother's favorite radio station to waking up the next morning to the sound of sirens signaling the upcoming shelling on my city. On the night my mother and I fled, I was forced to leave behind everything I had known as a child. As a refugee, I experienced multiple gaps in education while on my many-year-long journey towards a permanent relocation in the United States. My journey toward obtaining an education is an account that shines light toward reaching for the American Dream for someone who is foreign to its new country. While I was able to succeed and achieve the American Dream, not many refugees do. Refugees across the world have a history of

being cast in a negative spotlight as ones who do not participate in the wellbeing of our society. However, based on my own story and the articles shared by the authors studying refugees in the United States as well as across the globe, it is to conclude that refugees are eager to contribute, only if they are given the opportunity to effectively integrate and become self-sufficient.

The Winter 2020 Special Issue is comprised of seven articles that examine the impact of refugee resettlement policies and immigration ideologies on refugee integration and academic success of refugee students across the globe. This issue specifically maps the complex experiences of refugee students in higher education and offers theoretical as well as evidence-based implications that enable individuals with a refugee background to thrive not only academically but in all aspects of life.

Two of the articles investigate the role of gender and its impact on refugee female students. Svinjar looks at refugee women from various parts of the world and describes the multilayers obstacles that refugee women must transcend on their quest to obtain an education and the responding initiatives some programs and countries have created in order to more effectively assist these women. Obtaining an education enables women to step into a position of a positive role model for their communities as well as their host community.

The other article by Obradovic-Ratkovic, Woloshyn and Sethi specifically focus on the multilayered experiences of the being a female refugee in higher education in the capacity of a graduate student and professor. Using reflexive ethnography, researchers discovered the importance to honor female refugee graduate students' strengths, the necessity to establish safe and inclusive scholarly communities, as well as delivering social justice mentoring.

With the rapidly growing number of refugees and the unrest across the world, Peralta's article focuses on the experiences of refugee students within the United States school system, during the Trump administration. Critical Race Theory as a framework along with semi-structured interviews with refugee student participants provided detailed examples of their lives and education

experiences in their journey to the United States, portraying refugees as a promise and an asset to the US rather than a burden and a threat.

MacIsaac, Martin, Kubwayo and Wah conducted a study, focusing on the refugee-background learners experiences in the United States higher education system. The study results highlight the use of multiple capacities of refugee students to succeed in college. Authors urge for responsibility of higher education to acknowledge and defy deficit thinking that devalues learners as unable to succeed due to their background or status as a refugee.

Hoff and Shreet, highlight that only 1% of refugees pursue higher education because of various obstacles on the path to college. Hoff and Shreet's article detail the findings from a qualitative case study aimed to understand ways a competency-based college program enables access to college for refugee students, stating that refugee students benefited from the combination of flexibility of the program and the intensive in-person academic support.

Britwell, Duncan, Carson, and Chapman studied a short-term, intensive bridging program in Malaysia which aimed to help refugee youth access higher education. Survey data and interviews with students 1-3 years after they had completed the program, along with Bourdieu's theory of capital, habitus and field as the framework the results demonstrated that the program helped students to navigate ways of accessing higher education.

Duri and Ibrahim, studied The Borderless Higher Education for Refugees (BHER), a development project seeking to build the capacity of untrained refugee teachers in the Dadaab refugee camps by delivering online and face-to-face university-level courses that can build the capacity of future leaders in their communities. Ibrahim, a Somali refugee living in the Dadaab refugee complex in Kenya offers an important perspective into refugee participation in education.