

Refugees in New Destinations and Small Cities Resettlement in Vermont, by P. Bose. Springer Nature, 2020, 267 pp.

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Volume 39, Number 1, 2023

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1098116ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.41105>

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Publisher(s)

Centre for Refugee Studies, York University

ISSN

0229-5113 (print)

1920-7336 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Özdemir, G. (2023). Review of [Refugees in New Destinations and Small Cities Resettlement in Vermont, by P. Bose. Springer Nature, 2020, 267 pp.] *Refuge*, 39(1), 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.41105>

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Refugees in New Destinations and Small Cities Resettlement in Vermont

Gülce Şafak Özdemir

BOOK REVIEW

Pablo Bose (2020). *Refugees in New Destinations and Small Cities Resettlement in Vermont*. Springer Nature, 267 pp. ISBN: 978-981-15-6385-0 (hardcover)

HISTORY Published 30 January 2023

Refugees in New Destinations and Small Cities Resettlement in Vermont provides a broad perspective on refugee resettlement in “small” urban areas based on the author’s ethnographic fieldwork of over 10 years in Vermont, United States. This fieldwork consists of 800 interviews with several stakeholders involved in refugee resettlement, including politicians, refugees, resettlement workers, community leaders, social service providers, and state officials; participant observation in various settlement areas across Vermont; a photovoice project with refugees in Burlington and Winooski; and pre- and post-settlement surveys with 100 recently resettled refugees in Vermont in 2015 and 2016 respectively.

The book consists of 10 chapters. In the introduction, Pablo Bose offers a perspective on nationwide migration policies by highlighting the restrictions under the Trump

administration. He underlines some of the obstacles faced by newly arrived refugees, such as the lack of integration measures (e.g., language classes); isolation and stigmatized racial experiences in a culturally homogeneous society; tough winter conditions, as most newcomers originate from warmer climates; post-traumatic syndrome resulting from stressful processes migration; and difficulties accessing the labour market.

In the second chapter, Bose illustrates the contextual background of migration policies in the US starting with the drivers of (forced) migration. This chapter is fruitful for two reasons. First, it touches upon contemporary trends in forced migration and highlights some of the underestimated migration drivers, for instance, climate change. Second, starting with the beginning of the twentieth century, Bose gives an outline of the US migration policies by bridging them with the

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global migration crisis in 2015 to show how the changing rhetoric on migration and subsequent policies are interrelated.

This backlash in US migration policies includes increased xenophobic rhetoric, restrictive citizenship, and immigration controls including increased detention and deterrence of asylum seekers, protests against refugees, and diminished capacity and willingness to allow resettlements. In a nutshell, Bose details a macro-level perspective on the link between the xenophobic political discourse on migration and policy-making.

The third chapter highlights the historical background of immigration to Vermont. This chapter acts as a short introduction to the motivations of refugees in settlement. It is based on interviews and opinion polls conducted between 2015 and 2019 with more than 650 randomized Vermont residents over the age of 18 regardless of their legal status. Unlike other migration scholars, Bose does not portray the refugees as a homogenous group. The author pays attention to the fact that groups of varied races, religions, ethnicities, and nationalities have their own migratory trajectories. Through portraying such heterogeneous experiences, the chapter underlines refugees' decisions to choose certain destinations. These decisions are dependent on many variables, such as feeling secure and independent or having gained recognition by the locals. As these interviews mainly show the migrant perspective, Bose also conducts a survey with the residents of Vermont to understand their perspectives on acceptance, tolerance, and xenophobia, including assumptions regarding integration and acculturation. Based on survey results, Bose concludes that Vermont becomes a more welcoming place in 2019 compared with in 2015. One of the main research highlights is that despite the

heated and xenophobic public rhetoric on immigration, support for refugee resettlement remained high in Vermont and, in fact, grew over the course of the five study years.

The next three chapters of the book shed light on the towns of Burlington, Winooski, and Rutland, focusing on their different migration histories and the importance of the settlement in refugee welcoming. Bose uses photovoice in Burlington and Winooski to capture the refugee perspective on their different urban migration experiences. Scoping the urban space through photographic narratives sheds light on the refugee experience as a comprehensive social, administrative, and, above all, political phenomenon. In both cities, migrants are welcomed more than their antecedents were. Compared to Burlington and Winooski, Rutland shows relatively failed resettlement due to its lack of experience with resettlement and its small size as determining factors.

The last three chapters of the book offer an intersectional perspective on what refugee resettlement looks like in Vermont. It considers mobility, food, and aging as representative of the refugee experience at the individual, group, and community levels. Bose focuses on the most significant factors of a successful integration for the refugees based on a survey with 100 refugees. While learning English is the leading answer, access to education and child and elderly care emerge as other important factors for integration.

Chapter 7 explores refugee lives in terms of mobilities—how does the ability or the lack of it to access locations affect resettlement outcomes? For instance, many refugees in Vermont face transportation difficulties, mainly resulting from structural circumstances (e.g., winter conditions, physical distance, lack of proximal service provision) and/or identity-related conditions

(e.g., women's insecurities about using public transportation at night).

Chapter 8 illustrates the relationships between food and migrant identities by highlighting some of the ways in which refugees attempt to forge connections between old and new homes through their consumption practices. Migrants engage in gardening and farming, open restaurants, and search for familiar food ingredients. These experiences mainly show how to build a two-way integration through food practices. On the one hand, as refugees engage in gardening and farming, they become familiar with local products. On the other hand, ethnic restaurants run by refugees make residents of Vermont familiar with the refugees' culture through food. In this regard, food practices and options (e.g., gardening, ethnic restaurants) emerge as significant components of refugee identities.

Chapter 9 reveals the experiences of elderly refugees and children. A primary concern among many refugee elders is to learn English, to pass the citizenship test, and to gain access to social services and support. Other issues are related to their inability to work, their inability to contribute to their family budget, and their isolation from the community. Another vulnerable group, underage refugees, experience issues based on negotiating the balance between education and family obligations, the impact of racialization on youth experiences, and the consequences on their lives of the rules and strategies applied within and outside schools to manage student behaviour and practices.

The major contribution of this book lies in opening up new domains to discuss the importance of the size of settlements in refugee integration and long-term national and local integration plans. Furthermore, this in-depth ethnographic book sheds light on two important phenomena. On the one

hand, the integration of refugees is dependent on national, regional, and local contexts. On the other hand, refugees constitute a heterogeneous group, with different origins, religions, genders, ages, and cultural backgrounds. The book, however, falls short in providing generalizable answers concerning the role of civil society and more normatively, the issue of whether spatial segregation may or may not provide stronger refugee integration.

Refugees in New Destinations and Small Cities Resettlement in Vermont is a great source to understand how small settlements engage with refugees' integration. It is rigorous and robust, and it draws on immersive storytelling. It is a text that can be of great use to many scholars engaged with the urban governance of migration and refugee integration and to anyone interested in migration studies.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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