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Book Review: *Resisting the Dehumanization of Refugees*

Editors: Yasmeen Abu-Laban, Michael Frishkopf, Reza Hasmath, and Anna Kirova (AU Press, 2024, 420 pages). ISBNs: 978-1-771-99410-1 (paperback), 978-1-771-99411-8 (PDF), 978-1-771-99412-5 (epub).

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On a bus to the Geneva Airport, four Swiss police officers boarded, asking only my seatmate and me for tickets. We stood out as the only two individuals of color among the rest of the passengers on board. The police officer challenged my seatmate's pass, noting the lack of a name, to which he, speaking with an American accent, explained he received it from his hotel. After they exited, I remarked, "I hope I'm on the right bus." He smiled and replied, "Me too." I discovered he worked for the U.S. State Department. He asks me where I am from. I say, "Oregon." I ask him where he is from. He says, "Virginia." We both carry on a longer conversation, never repeating the words. No, really, where are you from? We continued our conversation, implicitly understanding we share an American identity without needing to question each other's origins.

I share this story as it illustrates the many layers of navigation when it comes to traveling to a foreign country that one day you may call home. The word "home" is a term that is used in general terms; however, it often encompasses the emotional and personal meaning that includes feelings of belonging and familiarity.

Resisting the Dehumanization of Refugees, edited by Abu-Laban, Frishkopf, Hasmath, and Kirova, has a familiar quality when I read it. The book explores the profound struggle to cocreate a sense of home and belonging amidst the relentless dehumanization refugees face from restrictive policies, biased media portrayals, and societal prejudice. It adopts a transdisciplinary approach, featuring contributions from scholars, practitioners, and refugees themselves, who focus on the Canadian context and draw on broader international comparisons that support both the mechanisms of dehumanization and strategies for resistance.

The book is structured into four parts, each comprising three to five chapters that explore a particular theme. In the first two parts, the authors explain how immigration policies and the media systemically dehumanize refugees, while educational institutions can either exacerbate or mitigate this. The last two sections explore rehumanization through state apologies. The chapters emphasize the vital role of refugee agency and artistic expression in building a sense of home.

Part 1 focuses on how immigration policies and media narratives systemically dehumanize refugees. In turn, these policies create vulnerability and precarity for refugees. The policies and media reinforce the negative stereotype narrative.

Abu-Laban's chapter compares the immigration policies of and public discourse in Canada, the United States, and Australia. It also examines how these factors contribute to either the dehumanization or humanization of refugees in the three countries. This chapter lays the foundation for the book by defining dehumanization as the act of viewing some individuals as fully human while perceiving others as limited or inferior.

Ayres's chapter explores the "double movement," which the author contends is the interdependency of state policies, media, and social action that might create migrant and refugee precarity. There is also a countermovement that emerges from collective action and mobilization on the Canada–United States borderlands. This chapter is intriguing as it offers a glimpse of the collective protests between bordering countries that humanize the migrant and refugee experience.

Birjandian's chapter is the first of several chapters told from a first-person narrative perspective. This chapter offers a rare glimpse into a refugee's journey, detailing the arduous steps of resettlement (e.g., asylum process, resettlement, and integration) into a new country.

Khasanova's chapter examines how Canadian print media depicts Syrian refugees, particularly after the 2015 Paris attacks, resulting in their dehumanization. The chapter critiques the media's misrepresentation of Islam through three dominant narratives: Islam as Other, Islam as anti-Semitic, and the portrayal of Islamic/Muslim terrorism.

Part 2 examines the dual role of educational institutions, which can either exacerbate or counter dehumanization depending on their approach to refugee students' needs.

Bhattacharyya, Songose, and Wilkinson's chapter explores the experiences of Yazidi refugee families with children. They focus on how families engage with the Canadian education system and how that system either fails or facilitates humanization and integration. They advocate for more multifaceted approaches to create more accessible and supportive environments, thereby lessening refugees' transition and strengthening their integration.

Jalal's chapter is another first-person narrative that explores the challenges faced by refugee youth as they navigate between two cultures—the host and refugee contexts. This chapter poses the seemingly innocent question: "Where are you from?" As seen in this chapter, it is not so innocent and raises questions about where one belongs and the location of their identity, particularly for young people. This chapter is significant, as it served as the impetus for why I shared my own story at the beginning of this review.

Gutiérrez Rodríguez's chapter examines the effectiveness of transcultural learning experiences for asylum seekers in an academic setting in Germany. It highlights strengths, such as course accessibility, cooperative learning environments, and place-based instruction, as well as addressing the negative factors that are

brought on by power imbalances in day-to-day living issues (e.g., inaccessible transportation, restricted movement due to status) and German language proficiency, as well as limited access to university resources.

Kirova's chapter poses the question of how refugee children experience school in Canada, which often fails to meet their needs adequately. The chapter concludes by considering how educational theorists can develop a framework for humanizing education, drawing on the principles of intercultural education. Kirova promotes this approach as one that cultivates understanding, respect, and equitable relations across diverse groups through meaningful dialogue, critical thinking, and a sense of belonging. This approach means moving beyond mere cultural awareness to challenge inequities actively.

Part 3 explores strategies for rehumanization and supports the role of state apologies in acknowledging past wrongs so that reconciliation can happen.

Bakan's chapter examines the complex "politics of apology" through the lens of Canada's apology to Jewish refugees. The chapter explains that state apologies often serve to redeem or favor the apologizer rather than create reparations that support rehumanization. Bakan, as a Jewish person whose parents were the children of refugees, moves her critique to contemporary issues, emphasizing that efforts to hold Israel accountable for its actions are often unfairly dismissed as anti-Semitic, thereby silencing critical Palestinian voices.

Hasmath, Ho, and Kay-Reid's chapter explains how state apologies can hinder or contribute to the rehumanization of refugee, Indigenous, and ethnic minority groups. They argue that for an apology to be reparative, it must include recognition of the harm done, a commitment(s), and accountability with tangible redress.

Gurnett's chapter offers a person-centered perspective on displacement. The chapter emphasizes the importance for refugees of fostering hope, inclusion, and a sense of "home" as a means of countering dehumanization. The chapter critically examines how Canada often highlights only the success stories of refugees in its refugee policies. In sharing just the success stories, systemic shortcomings and the lived realities of displaced individuals are often overshadowed.

Part 4 provides spaces for cocreating meaningful collaborative action in the resistance to dehumanization through artistic expression. This action focuses on the role of refugees' agency, self-determination, and belonging. Individuals can reclaim their narratives, assert their humanity, and build a sense of home.

Barzanji's chapter presents a first-person narrative of a writer in exile. The author highlights how artistic expression and writing can be used to resist dehumanization while asserting one's humanity. This chapter is significant in that it shows how poetry can transform personal suffering and imprisonment into universal themes of humanity (e.g., persistence, courage, resistance, and hope).

Harrington and Waissi's chapter explores how Kurdish refugees in Canada negotiate and express their cultural identity. The chapter conveys a message of hope by demonstrating the resilience of Kurdish culture and identity within the diaspora through cultural preservation and expression.

Frishkopf's chapters highlight the role of music in rehumanizing refugees, exploring its therapeutic impact on the psychological trauma of displacement. Mapfumo and Chikawa showcase music as a tool for political

change. Frishkopf's concluding insights then offer practical applications for enacting rehumanization through musical initiatives.

Resisting the Dehumanization of Refugees brought me to familiar places in my teaching (e.g., supporting third spaces, higher education in protracted contexts), research (e.g., community-based action research and art-based approaches), and critical hope and despair peace-building scholarship. As a reader, I appreciated the first-person narratives, the different formats of the chapters (e.g., poetry and interviews), and the profound hope of humanizing refugees in the face of restrictive policies, biased media portrayals, and societal prejudice.

This is a timely and yet timeless book that showcases how refugees reclaim their narratives, preserve their cultural heritage, and utilize creative outlets to convey their experiences, resilience, and unique perspectives. This book is written in a way that is accessible and that aims to foster empathy and understanding among host and refugee communities. I believe the book effectively challenges stereotypes and offers practical solutions to combating Othering that contributes to dehumanization.

