Chapter 3
Cultural Citizenship and Refugee Integration:
The Case of African Youth in Australia

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ABSTRACT

This chapter sheds light on the cultural citizenship of refugee-background Black Africans in Australia. Specifically, it elaborates on cultural citizenship as an analytical framework, outlines recent multicultural policy provisions in Australia, and highlights how conservative politicians and media personalities racialize youth violence and stigmatize Black Africans as dangerous criminals. Then the chapter proceeds to explain why racialized moral panic undermines the integration of African refugees. It argues that public humiliation emasculates self-efficacy, leading to youth disengagement. Second, the deprivation of cultural citizenship diminishes refugee youth's sense of affiliation. Third, public racial disparagement reinforces interpersonal racial prejudice and discrimination. Fourth, racial stigmatization perpetuates socio-economic disadvantages of refugee communities, durably positioning them on the margin of society. In light of these points, it is argued that a claim for equal respect and dignifying representation is a demand for full citizenship.

INTRODUCTION

We live in a time of mass displacement (IOM, 2020; UNHCR, 2020). The latest UN Refugee Agency's report shows that by the end of 2019, there were 79.5 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, including 45.7 million internally displaced persons and 26 million refugees (UNHCR, 2020). The luckiest ones have been resettled in economically advanced and politically stable countries. In 2019, 26 countries admitted 107,800 refugees (UNHCR, 2020). As part of the resettlement effort, there have been international efforts to meet the complexity of the economic, social, and educational needs of refugees. In 2016, all 193 Member States of the United Nations unanimously adopted *the New York Declaration for*

Refugees and Migrants (UN, 2016). The Declaration specifically aims at widening refugees' access to social and economic opportunities. Signatory governments (including Australia) expressed their commitment to widening educational opportunities for refugee children and youth. Further, under the *Global Compact on Refugees*, the United Nations General Assembly emphasises that integration necessitates "preparedness on the part of refugees to adapt to the host society" as well as "a corresponding readiness on the part of host communities and public institutions to welcome refugees and to meet the needs of a diverse population" (UNGA, 2018, para.98). Likewise, the 2018 *Kolkata* Declaration (YU, 2018) on the *State of the Global Protection System for Refugees and Migrants* states that any humanitarian protection framework 'must combat discrimination based on race, religion, caste, ability, sexuality, gender and class that affect rights and dignity of all human beings'.

Anderson (2010) defines integration as an intergroup cooperation "on terms of *equality and mutual regard* in all institutions of civil society" (p.95, emphasis added). Genuine integration is reciprocal—both new arrivals and hosting societies should make efforts toward cultural adaptation. For refugees, integration is a preferred acculturation strategy because it allows them to maintain their cultural identities, to stay in touch with their past and tradition while fully interacting with society. The notion of integration underscores the fact that it is impossible for an adult refugee to completely detached herself from the past, from her origin, her tradition. But, as Berry (1992) notes, integration "depends on the policies and attitudes held by the dominant society, and whether acculturating individuals prefer strategies that correspond to these views in the larger society" (p.74).

This chapter deals with the representation of refugee-background Africans in Australia. Although the presence of Black Africans in Australia traces back to the arrival of the First Fleet in January 1788 (Pybus, 2006), the first substantial number of African refugees (106 in total, including 96 Ethiopians) arrived on humanitarian visas and settled in Melbourne in 1984 (RCA, 2016). Starting from the second half of the 1990s, the settlement of African refugees increased considerably. In the first decade of the century alone, more than 48,000 Africans were settled in Australia under the humanitarian program and Africa remained one of the three regions targeted as priorities by DIAC (DIAC, 2010, p.10). However, the integration of the community remains a critical public issue. Refugee integration is a reciprocal process. As much as refugees have to adapt to the shared values without losing their own, destination societies need to offer necessary opportunities for the refugees to re-establish their lives. Although multicultural societies such as Australia usually offer an ideal condition for refugee integration and there exist a range of government and non-government initiatives that aim to support refugee resettlement and integration (Australian Government, 2019), Africans in remain largely on the margin (Molla, 2020). Conservative politicians and media personalities routinely accuse the groups of failing to 'fit in'.

With the rise of what Stevenson (2003) refers to as 'cultural society', ensuring cultural citizenship needs to be a critical measure of democratic systems. In this chapter, deprivation of cultural citizenship is primarily concerned with discursive mechanisms of exclusion, with special attention to the racialization of youth violence. Cultural citizenship of refugees is often weighted against their skin colour or country of origin. For instance, in Australia, unlike the 'good refugees' (Anderson, 2012) who arrived before the end of the *Immigration Restriction Act*, recent non-White humanitarian arrivals are often framed as 'undesirable immigrants' (Dyrenfurth, 2005). This form of negative framing is evident in the social stigma attached to Black African youth.

The broader project from which this chapter has drawn applies a multimethod research design (Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2015), combining data generated through interviews, document review, and trend mapping (using longitudinal national statistical data). The triangulation of different forms of data was

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