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**Book reviews: Janet McLellan, CAMBODIAN  
REFUGEES IN ONTARIO: RESETTLEMENT, RELIGION  
AND IDENTITY, Toronto: University of Toronto  
Press, 2009, xiii + 263 pp., CDN\$55.00 (hb)**

Item Type	Other
Authors	Healey, Ruth L.
Citation	Healey, R.L. (2010) Book Review: 'Cambodian Refugees in Ontario: Resettlement, Religion and Identity', <i>Ethnic and Racial Studies</i> , 33(10): 1842-1844.
DOI	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2010.517016">10.1080/01419870.2010.517016</a>
Publisher	Taylor & Francis
Journal	<i>Ethnic and Racial Studies</i>
Download date	2026-05-10 17:12:55
Item License	<a href="http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/">http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/</a>
Link to Item	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10034/620978">http://hdl.handle.net/10034/620978</a>

**Janet McLellan, CAMBODIAN REFUGEES IN ONTARIO: RESETTLEMENT, RELIGION AND IDENTITY, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009, xiii + 263 pp., CDN\$55.00 (hb)**

Throughout the 1980s the resettlement of displaced persons was considered the most 'durable solution' (p. xi) to managing refugees. The experiences of a variety of different refugees who have been resettled in different countries have been explored over the last 30 years. What has been less common is a reflection of the changing nature of a specific group's needs and support structures as people become more immersed within their host society. *Cambodian Refugees in Ontario* is an in-depth analysis of the experiences of Cambodians who were resettled in Canada after they were forced to flee Cambodia during the civil and regional war of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the subsequent persecution under the Khmer Rouge regime. This book reflects upon the shifting features of the Cambodian refugee community in Ontario at specific points from the early-1990s through to the mid-2000s.

This is a moving, predominantly empirical text written by Janet McLellan, an Associate Professor in the Department of Religion and Culture at Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada. It provides an excellent, well written and comprehensive discussion of the experiences of the research participants, and should be praised for the quality of the story told and the engaging flow of the narratives. Broadly underlain by social capital theory, as a means of exploring the social connections and networks Cambodians employed during their resettlement, the book is structured around three themes: 1) first generation Cambodians in Canada and the impact of their pre-migration experiences on their resettlement experiences; 2) the dynamics of resettlement, adaptation, integration and transnational linkages; and 3) the shifting identities of three generations of Cambodians in Ontario (the original adult refugees; the children who accompanied them; and the children who were born in Canada). These themes offer a useful analytical framework through which to analyse the refugee experiences.

The book contains seven chapters beginning with an overview of the events that led Cambodians to seek refuge in different countries. Importantly the reader is introduced to the variety of ethnic characteristics of the different Cambodian groups before considering their resettlement specifically in Canada. Here it explores the routes by which Cambodians received refuge, including an analysis of the process of sponsorship. As part of this discussion insight is given to the community structures through a detailed analysis of several social cleavages (e.g. class, ethnicity, gender and education) within Cambodian society.

The book provides a thought provoking and nuanced discussion of the idea that 'to be Khmer is to be Bhuddist' (p. 121). It investigates the way Cambodians dealt with trauma and resettlement issues in the absence of a sustainable Bhuddist infrastructure. This is then contrasted with the experiences of individuals who arrived through the sponsorship of Christian Churches, which often led to perceived or actual pressure to convert or risk disappointing their sponsors. Such experiences are further complicated by generation, addressed through an analysis of the complex identity struggles of Cambodian youth in Canada. Finally, the book concludes through a reflection upon the cathartic potential of transnational links and temporary return trips to Cambodia.

Despite these many strengths one thing which is missing is a clear statement as to the intended audience. The accessible nature of the text could make it of

interest to individuals beyond academia, particularly on account of its relatively low theoretical content. However, for an academic audience, the absence of in-depth theoretical exploration leaves the book lacking in a broader contribution to the literature beyond its specific and detailed contribution to Cambodian experiences, and a historic reflection on the nuances of the Canadian asylum system. Some of the theoretical ideas presented could usefully have been developed. First, despite the four page introduction to social capital theory at the beginning a more critical discussion of the 'darker side' of social capital (Field, J. *Social Capital*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2003, pp. 71-90) and the negative obligations refugees may experience is largely absent. For example, an analysis of the feelings of gratitude towards the Christian groups who had sponsored them from this perspective would have been particularly interesting. Second, the lack of critical discussion of terms such as integration, multiculturalism and identity, used throughout the text without exploration as to their meaning for the author or the participants is a pity. How these were being interpreted within the context of the research is important. That said, had the theoretical content been considerably higher restrictions on book length might have meant the loss of some of the rich empirical data, which offers a relatively rare example of an extensive connection to the 'voice' of participants.

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