The settlement of refugees in Australia: a bibliography (8th rev. ed.)

Klaus Neumann

Since the end of the Second World War, Australia has resettled over 800,000 refugees. Australia’s resettlement efforts were most pronounced in the late 1940s and early 1950s when it accommodated hundreds of thousands of European Displaced Persons (DPs) who were brought to Australia under the auspices of the International Refugee Organization (IRO), the immediate predecessor of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In 1949 alone, Australia resettled 75,486 DPs sponsored by the IRO. In 2014–15, Australia accepted 13,756 people under its humanitarian program, including 6002 refugees selected off-shore.

Australia has accommodated refugees throughout its history, including approximately 10,000 people fleeing Europe between the mid-1930s and the early 1940s and thousands of asylum seekers who engaged Australia’s protection obligations. The first refugees formally resettled in Australia were 843 Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians – 729 single men, and 114 single women – who had been selected by Australian immigration officials in European DP camps and who arrived in November 1947 on board the General Stuart Heintzelman.

Between the late 1940s and the late 1950s, refugees who had been selected by Australian officials overseas in collaboration with the IRO, the UNHCR and the Intergovernmental Organisation for European Migration (ICEM) and were resettled in Australia, were considered to be an integral part of the overall migrant intake. They had to meet criteria similar to those developed for other components of the immigration program: they had to pass stringent medical tests, and the adults among them had to have good employment prospects. The elderly and those with mental or physical illnesses were not offered resettlement places. Neither were non-European refugees. In the 1950s, however, Australia began accepting a limited number of refugees who did not meet its normal criteria on account of their age or their state of health; many of these refugee migrants were European refugees living in the People’s Republic of China.

In May 1977, the Fraser government introduced a comprehensive refugee policy, with criteria that clearly distinguished between refugees (who were admitted in pursuance of Australia’s obligations as a signatory to the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol) and other migrants. In 1981, the same government launched Australia’s Special Humanitarian Program. It provided for the resettlement of migrants who were not refugees according to the criteria of the 1951 Convention but did not meet the usual criteria of Australia’s immigration policy either.

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1 The Australian Research Council has generously funded much of my research on Australia’s response to refugees. I thank users of earlier editions of this bibliography for drawing errors and omissions to my attention. I am particularly grateful to Edgar Burns for pointing out several errors.
During the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, Australia agreed to resettle contingents of refugees in response to specific refugee crises. In early November 1956, for example, the Menzies government decided that Australia would accommodate up to 3000 refugees from Hungary who had fled after the suppression of the anti-communist uprising (that number was subsequently increased). Since the late 1980s, the government decides on an annual quota of humanitarian entrants, including refugees; the immigration department then determines the composition of that quota in consultation with the UNHCR and organisations involved in Australia’s resettlement effort.

The first published scholarly text about the settlement of refugees in Australia was a report about European refugees who had arrived in the late 1930s and settled in New South Wales, which had been commissioned by the Ministry of Post-War Reconstruction and had been authored by the anthropologist Caroline Kelly from the University of Sydney. Until the second half of the 1970s, refugee resettlement issues attracted only a handful of scholars. It was only from the late 1970s, in response to the resettlement of refugees from Indochina, that scholars began to write about refugees as refugees, rather than as members of an ethnically distinct group of immigrants. In Australia, the field of refugee studies is therefore about forty years old.

Until 2010, the output of books, journal articles, book chapters, postgraduate theses and reports gradually increased. More than half of all texts listed in the bibliography are from the last ten years; more than 40 per cent of the texts listed here have been published – or, in the cases of dissertations, submitted – since 1 January 2010.

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*Table 1: Publications and theses about the settlement of refugees in Australia (by decade)*

The output of texts peaked in 2010 (with a total of 126, or more than 8 per cent of the items in the bibliography, published or – in the case of postgraduate theses – submitted that year). Because of the
inevitable delay between the publication of an article and the successful submission of a postgraduate dissertation, on the one hand, and its registration in databases and catalogues, on the other, it is too early to say whether the decrease in the number of recorded publications after 2010 is indicative of a long-term trend. If there were such a trend, it could be due not so much to a declining interest in issues of refugee settlement, as to the introduction of the Excellence in Research in Australia initiative, which has encouraged academic researchers to focus their energies on publishing in high impact journals.

Research on the settlement of refugees in Australia has been concentrated in about a dozen Australian universities. The number of relevant PhD theses is one indicator of research concentration. The bibliography includes 212 postgraduate dissertations, among them 134 PhD theses. Of the latter, the University of Melbourne has been responsible for 13, the University of Adelaide, the University of Western Australia, Monash University and the University of New South Wales for nine each, the University of South Australia and Flinders University for seven each, and Swinburne University of Technology for six.

Most of the literature about resettlement has been published in the form of journal articles and reports. Over time, the number of journal articles has grown more quickly than the number of reports. This is an indication of the fact that nowadays a greater proportion of the relevant research is produced by academics employed in universities, rather than by researchers working for government agencies or service providers, than used to be the case in earlier years.

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*Table 2: Publications and theses about the settlement of refugees in Australia (by type of output)*

Much of the literature is concerned with particular groups of refugees. Given the number of Indochinese refugees resettled in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, it is not surprising that much of the scholarship, particularly from the 1970s and 1980s, is exclusively concerned with them. Similarly, much of the scholarship published in the past ten years is exclusively concerned with the settlement of Southern Sudanese refugees. More than 16 per cent of all texts published or successfully submitted since 2010 are about Sudanese refugee migrants.

While this bibliography is evidence of the depth and breadth of the relevant scholarship, it also suggests several gaps:

2 The limitations of this scholarship have been discussed in more detail in Klaus Neumann et al., Refugee settlement in Australia: policy, scholarship and the production of knowledge, 1952–2013, *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 35,1 (2014), 1-17.
First, researchers have shied away from comprehensively analysing Australia’s resettlement effort. (Jean Martin and Ann-Mari Jordens are notable exceptions.) In fact, very few authors have tried to write about resettlement without focusing on one particular, ethnically defined group of refugees and/or on one specific aspect of resettlement.

Second, there has been no comprehensive study that relates the findings of the available scholarship on resettlement to an analysis of changes in government policy.

Third, with few exceptions, authors have been concerned with the present. Given that government-sponsored refugee resettlement in Australia goes back sixty-nine years, it is surprising that it has not attracted the attention of more historians. This is gradually changing, with a significant number of publications in the past five years about the historical dimensions of Australia’s resettlement of refugees.

Fourth, scholars have tended to be concerned with identifying obstacles to the successful resettlement of refugees. In doing so, they have focused on the refugees themselves (for example, their lack of formal educational qualifications or their health problems) or on Australian service providers (schools, hospitals, etc.). In other words, much of the scholarship has been underpinned by the assumption that successful resettlement is dependent on refugees’ ability to adapt and on the ability of Australian institutions to recognise the specific needs of refugees. There has been little recognition of the broader changes to Australian identities and cultures that were brought about by the settlement of refugees.

Fifth, there has been little recognition of the fact that some resettled refugees return to their countries of origin; the complex issue of refugees’ return migration deserves more attention than it has received to date.

The bibliography lists books, articles, reports and Masters and doctoral theses about the resettlement of refugees in Australia. It aims to cover the relevant scholarship. It does not include newspaper or magazine articles, or articles of only one or two pages. The sizeable literature on asylum seekers is included only in cases in which authors are concerned with settlement issues. The even more extensive literature on Australia’s postwar immigration, including that of culturally and linguistically diverse migrants, is included only in cases in which it focuses on refugees.

This is the eighth edition of this bibliography. Since the publication of the seventh edition in January 2016, 77 new items have been added, and several others corrected.

As always, I encourage readers to draw omissions and errors to my attention to allow me to make amendments and corrections.³

15 July 2016

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