

Laura Celine Ortiz

Professor Ramser

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Psychological Effects of Refugees Living in the U.S.

There is a pattern of psychological trauma that affects almost, if not all, every refugee living in America. In the book, “The Displaced: Refugees Writers on Refugees Lives,” different authors use different strategies to depict the psychological trauma, pain, and pressure of becoming, being and living as a refugee in a new country. Fundamentally, whenever a society grows and experiences the presence of diverse communities coming from different parts of world, many local communities welcome them as they consider them a valuable contribution towards economic growth and society. In today’s America, many organizations are unable to find skillful workers for completing their technical and technological tasks and purposes. Under this situation, they hire foreign workers by welcoming them in the country. Subsequently, when foreign workers work and contribute economically, they provide revenue to the government. Despite their valuable contribution to the government and private organizations, many narrow-minded people target and torment them psychologically and socially as well. In the book, “The Displaced: Refugees Writers on Refugees Lives,” different writers and creators give readers a peek into their mindset and mentality which connects to their suffering. That being said, the audience being targeted in the distribution of this essay is the artists and creators who don’t understand anything about being a refugee and how living in America is impactful. Being labeled as “the other” has psychologically affected the mental development and capacity of many

refugees living in the United States. Many of them have written their stories about their social and psychological plight of their parents and their personal experiences as well. The psychological effects these narrators depict consist of their struggles regarding the assimilation with of their names and identities, the association of traveling with fleeing through flashbacks, and the separation from their families.

The genre of song lyrics was chosen because I have always believed that songs display a satisfying amount of emotion that can't just be elaborated on with words. In this case, the emotion displayed in the lyrics is hope. The lyrics are the last lines from the song "Epilogue: Ragtime (Reprise)/Wheels of a Dream (Reprise)" from finale number in the musical "Ragtime". The lyrics are the finale note the musical ends on that the audience walks away with. The musical consists of immigrants, Black Americans, and White Americans striving for a better future not only for them, but their children as well. This fits into the topic of this essay because refugees flee their homeland with the well-meaning intentions for their children to have a better life, however, a cost of that fleeing comes with the possibility of obtaining psychological trauma in adapting upon the families. This specific genre targets my audience because it can appeal to their musical taste and can help them absorb the words, along with the music if they were to look up the song online. Hope is of the main motivations for those refugees, which is why it's unfortunate that they still suffer psychologically after arriving to America. Despite this, refugee parents remain strong and try to sacrifice as much as possible for their children with a hope for better opportunities.

WELL, WHEN HE IS OLD ENOUGH
I WILL SHOW HIM AMERICA
AND HE WILL RIDE
OUR SON WILL RIDE

ON THE WHEELS OF A DREAM

Assimilation is a major challenge for many refugees. In “Last, First, Middle,” Azam states, “I don’t recall ever not knowing the feeling of being an outsider. It didn’t help that for years the only identification I had was a green card with the words ‘Resident Alien’ across the top. As a child I watched helplessly as my parents struggled, like many refugees, to integrate into the United States,” (29). This statement clearly exhibits how the label of refugee is tormenting their psychological well-being. Within this context, it is important to emphasize that the word “alien” negatively affects many refugees’ psychological well-being because it does not allow them to become a part of their society. In this statement, the author unequivocally narrates that the past events and treatment of local people towards the refugees have not allowed many refugees to experience integration, nor assimilation in American society. Despite the fact that refugees maintain all those social and economic characteristics, which are highly essential for becoming a natural citizen, the narration of Azam and his experiences with the local or native population clearly highlights the plight of refugees living in the United States. Additionally, this situation has various negative ramifications for the affected refugees. For example, many refugees find it difficult to chat or talk with a white stranger as they have encountered anti-social behavior against them. The standpoint of the current Trump regime against refugees, more precisely against Muslims, have further added a fuel to the fire of social alienation of refugees and Muslims as well. In today’s America, due to the rising right-wing nationalism globally and locally as well, the divide between the refugees communities and the local population has been increasing at a rapid pace, highlighting how today’s politics affecting the very social fabric of America. Additionally, it is worth highlighting that many refugees have become an integral and

important part of today's America as they not only provide their economic services but also contribute for building a harmony against many diverse communities living side by side. However, the current narrative of the Trump administration is not enabling the refugees to become integrated to the U.S. society. Since many refugees have been born locally and have become natural citizens of this country, it would not be possible for them to undo their past or go back to their ancestral country. Under this situation, if the local population does not support them, they would further suffer psychologically and socially as well. As a result, this would not enable them to become a productive resource for this country because the society is not accepting their existence and contribution they have made for this country. In other words, they are more likely to face post-traumatic stress disorder due to their experiences in a country where it's institutional racism is most recently finally being recognized (Mghir & Raskin 29).

Recurring traumatic flashbacks also affect refugees. In "Perspective" and "What Gets Lost," Bui illustrates that "family, friends, language, roots, job, home, cultural savvy local know-how, way of life are some of their basic challenges," (Bui 74). The woman in the center of the image in "What Gets Lost" looks at her own life breaking away from her own reality with a longing for the way her life was before she fled. This creates an overall disconnection between those basic necessities and these more psychological necessities, arising from her constant feeling of loss. From this, one can interpret it as Bui opening up her experiences anxiety because of her refugee status. Even though it may not be Bui specifically as the centered woman, one can see that she is trying to connect herself with other refugees with distinctly different, yet similar, pasts in order to not feel truly alone in the situation she is encountering now. The audience can see a more in-depth look into her mindset in the illustration "Perspective". The top image shows a

modern day Bui with a packed suitcase, and the bottom picture of what seems to be her and her family fleeing as refugees taking only a handful of items. The positioning of these images is reminiscent to a flashback sequence where a person is reminded of their past based on what's going on at the moment. This can signify that whenever Bui is in any way traveling: she is reminded about how she quickly had to pack in order to flee Vietnam. She is giving us insight of her mindset by focusing on an action mundane, such as packing a suitcase, and showing how she associates it as a refugee. These illustrations can be seen as a way for Bui to cope with these damaging experience and having her fall back into creativity in order to carry her mental wounds.

This genre of a poetry displays the same kind of creativity that Bui uses in her illustrations. Just like Bui's positioning of the drawings, poet Jason Fotso also depicts his anxiety for refugees in a poem with an ultimate theme on perspective. Artists and creators who read this will appreciate the layout of the poem, as well as be pleasantly surprised by it's message regarding allowing refugees to come to the country.

The Refugees, authored by Jason Fotso.

(Follow the punctuation, ignore the spacing.)

Turn away the refugees.

We will not

open up
our homes and hearts
for

children.

Close our doors on
the weak.

Only

fear behind
our
love can put

strength in our
hands.
We cannot let them bleed into our
nation.
They share the blood of our
enemy.
Our own
are endangered by
the refugees.

We have forgotten
the words that
the Statue of Liberty shines.
In this darkest hour,

terror
stands stronger than
our people
of
power.
This

fear
conquers
the home of the brave.

(Read from bottom to top, use the spacing.)

In Grande's "The Parent Who Stays," it necessarily points out that parents are emotionally attached with their children. For them, they are always ready to take all those steps which could benefit their children. For them, their children are the most precious gift in life. In this narrative, Grande is considering the effects of leaving one's own family for the sake of better future. Since they are emotionally connected to their children, it become a nightmare for them when are forced to leave just because of their refugee status or any other circumstances relating to refugees. Additionally, when a father starts to see that he would be forced to leave his own

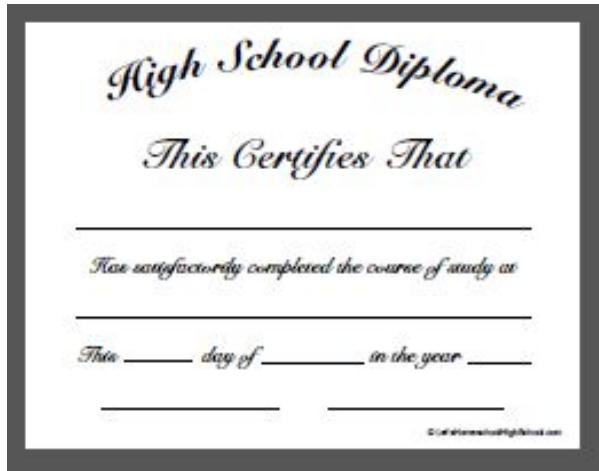
family, this thought does not allow him to sleep well or think positively or normally as well. As a result, this perspective does not allow his mind to function in a normal fashion as that situation leads to anxiety and other mental disorders. Subsequently, it becomes difficult for them to contemplate things normally and resolve issues properly and quickly. Due to this situation, their mental capacity starts to decay as there is no other way to rebuild their normal behavior and thinking process. Additionally, they also start to experience a change in their routine behavior as they find it difficult to cope up with their changing behavior. In other words, it would not be incorrect to say that their refugee status negatively affects their mental capacity and that situation leads to unusual behavior towards others and even with family members as well. Additionally, anxiety does not stop but it creates depression and other similar symptoms that add a fuel to the fire of the mental degeneration of the affected refugees. In other words, anxiety directly and indirectly affects psychological, physiological and behavioral mindset (Steimer 231).

Additionally, anxiety leaves crippling effects on the affected individuals (Robinson, Vytal, Cornwell, & Grillon 1). Fear severely affects one's ability to perform normal cognitive functions (Erickson, Drevets, & Schulkin 241). Grande writes, "My childhood was defined by the fear of being forgotten or abandoned, of being replaced by U.S.-born siblings," (75). This statement clearly reflects how fear becomes an inalienable memory part of refugees. When economic situation is not favorable or one is unable to find a decent job in one's own country, it becomes very difficult to live in one's own country as the economic situation does not provide them with ample and reasonable economic opportunities. Subsequently, the affected families are forced to leave their own country for a better future. In the quoted text, the author narrates the personal events that have severely affected her childhood memory. At this particular age of life, children

always want to play with their peers in their neighborhood as they little care about their family situation. Additionally, they are mainly interested to play with toys and their friends. However, for many refugee children, it has become a distant reality as their parents are forced to look for a better family future. More precisely, the author highlights the word “fear” that clearly speaks volume about their mental state. Whenever a child experiences or observes unnatural happenings at her home, it becomes very difficult to erase the effects of those events. At the same time, for many, it becomes almost impossible to figure out whether they are suffering from their own past events. Even if a few recall their memories, that situation becomes a nightmare for them. Fear considerably affects one’s cognitive functions, such as creating a lack of decision-making skills. In today’s highly challenging and uncertain social world, it is highly essential to remain active for making strong personal and economic decisions. Without this type of mindset, it becomes almost impossible to succeed in one’s own life. More precisely, the major effect of fear is that it does not encourage taking initiative or a bold action because the subconscious mind continually tries to create some fearful outcomes if the action is taken. At the same time, fear does not allow one to maintain a normal level trust on others. In today’s America, society has become diverse as people from different countries, cultures, and races have migrated here for a better future. Under this situation, one cannot live in isolation. In other words, it is necessary to develop and retain trust on some people. But, it is hardly possible for those refugees who have an unfavorable past memory in which fear is centrally ingrained to their cognitive mind (Ainamani, Elbert, Olema, & Hecker, 1).

I chose the visual genre of a high school diploma because of the significance it has with Grande as an immigrant refugee. In “The Parent Who Stays” she states, “The day I started junior

high, I surpassed my parents, who had gone only to elementary school, and so my education further separated us. What is supposed to be seen as an accomplishment and a mile in everyone's life, Grande gives us her perspective of it by displaying her mindset in seeing every one of her accomplishments as barriers between her and her parents.



The refugees face a variety of psychological problems in the United States of America. They have come from various countries as some of them have become the natural citizens of the country. However, still many of them find it difficult to pass a normal life due to their refugee status. These authors have highlighted how their lives have been affected by the issues relating to their refugee background. It's difficult to integrate to the U.S. society as the racial divide between various communities does not allow them to experience a normal behavior from other community members. As a result, they often experience the effects of anxiety and depression as well. This highlights the effects of fear on their decision-making ability and cognitive process as well. In other words, it would not be incorrect to say that many refugees have failed to enjoy a normal life in today's America.

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