

## The 'In-betweenness' of Emerging Newcomer Scholars

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*In 2015, the European Union experienced a 51% increase in asylum requests. Kosovars constituted the fourth largest group of these asylum seekers, yet only 2.3% were granted asylum. Rejected applicants continue to be forcefully returned to Kosovo partly because repatriation, or the right to return to one's country of origin, is the EU's preferred solution to migration crisis. A significant body of research substantiates that repatriation is neither voluntary nor a durable solution. To address the discrepancy between existing evidence and the adoption of repatriation as a sustainable solution, I employed Critical Discourse Analysis to explore the involuntary repatriation of rejected asylum seekers from Kosovo. Findings from semi-structured interviews with rejected-asylum-seekers suggest that this population uses discourses which construct EU countries as superior to Kosova and migration to these countries as an opportunity for a better life. These discourses uphold the Global North superiority and encourage participants to consider remigration, rather than reintegration, as a solution to their current challenges. These findings have implications for repatriation policies and highlight important aspects of being an emerging newcomer scholar. My focus on Kosovo was partly a result of the fact that I am originally from Kosovo yet have completed my post-secondary and graduate education in Canada. As such, this research brief explores how the identity of emerging newcomer scholars is shaped by transnational research.*

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For half of my life I have navigated spaces of hybridity (Bhabha, 1994) because I live in a country where I was not born, in a world where borders define how we interact with each-other. Hybridity means embracing “the messiness of ongoing negotiations between cultural formations of unequal stature where new discourses are shaped in the interstitial spaces between them” (Spitzer, 2007, p. 54). I am originally from Kosova<sup>1</sup>, and I have completed my post-secondary

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<sup>1</sup> I decided to use the term Kosova and not Kosovo throughout this brief. While this might seem like an insignificant difference, it was important to my study, which focused on the link between discourse and power. First, Kosova is the name of the country in Albanian language, which is spoken by 92% of the population in Kosova (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017). As such, using the name Kosova is an attempt to reflect and give importance to the voices of the local population. Second, in Serbian language, the country is called Kosovo, a term Serbians have used in the past to emphasize that Kosova is Serbian land (Phillips, 2012). For example, statements such as “Kosovo is the heart of Serbia” (Phillips, 2012, p. 65) were used by Slobodan Milosevic, whose regime carried out the ethnic cleansing of Albanians in Kosova during the 1999 war. Therefore, my second reason for deciding to use the name Kosova is an attempt to make apparent the power of language while also resisting the use of a word which has been used as the basis for oppressing Kosova-Albanians.

and graduate education in Canada. Often, when I introduce myself to someone in Canada, I am met with either confusion or a sense of pity because many people have never heard of Kosova or have only heard of it because of the 1999 war that took place there. Considering this, I am often constructed as a foreigner – a person who comes from an unfamiliar place, or as a victim of the war—a construction that invites pity in my interactions with others. At the same time, I also have friends and colleagues within higher education who are curious to learn more about Kosova and approach me with a willingness to learn about the unfamiliar.

As a Kosovar-Albanian in Canada I have had to navigate tensions that emerge from living a transnational life. By transnational, I mean that I am constantly moving between two countries and have contextual and embodied knowledge of both (Kerri, 2010). Indeed, this has been a key aspect of my time in Canada and something that I grappled with especially during my Master of Social Work (MSW) thesis research. My research focused on the repatriation experiences of rejected asylum seekers from Kosova partly because I wanted to bridge my Canadian and Kosovar realities. In this brief, therefore, I reflect upon the process of my MSW thesis research as a way of discussing the tensions that emerging newcomer scholars often have to navigate. Newcomer is an umbrella term for those who have left another country to settle in Canada, including immigrants, refugees, protected persons, and recent permanent residents (Government of Canada, 2019). I begin with an overview of my study, and rather than share my findings I focus on key insights that I gained about being an emerging newcomer scholar.

In 2015, the European Union (EU) experienced a 51% increase in asylum requests (Eurostat, 2017). Kosovars constituted the fourth largest group of these asylum seekers, yet only 2.3% were granted asylum (Eurostat, 2017). Rejected applicants continue to be forcefully returned to Kosova partly because repatriation, or the right to return to one's country of origin, is the UN's preferred solution to migration crisis (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 1996; UNHCR, 2015). Repatriation continues to be a preferred solution despite a significant body of research which substantiates that repatriation is neither durable, nor the end of the migration cycle. To address this discrepancy, I grounded my study in postcolonial theories and used Critical Discourse Analysis to explore the involuntary repatriation of rejected asylum seekers from Kosova. Findings from my semi-structured interviews suggested that rejected asylum seekers use discourses which construct EU countries as superior to Kosova and migration to these countries as an opportunity for a better life (Kusari, 2019). These discourses uphold the Global North superiority and encourage participants to consider remigration, rather than reintegration, as a solution to their current challenges (Kusari, 2019). These findings do not only have implications for repatriation policies, but also highlight important aspects of being an emerging newcomer scholar.

The Global North-South dichotomy that participants highlighted in this study relied on the assumption that Global North countries are superior to Kosova because they are more developed, have better human rights policies in place, and, unlike Kosova, do not suffer from poverty and corruption (Kusari, 2019). This distinction is striking in Kosova's case because Kosova is geographically located in Europe but has the socio-economic development of a Global South country—it fits into neither the Global North nor the Global South categories, thus challenging this dichotomous separation of the world. Much like my own country, I also do not nicely fit into any category. Among others, I am an immigrant in Canada and a Western-educated woman when I return to Kosova—constructions which often other me.

Such experiences of othering came to the forefront for me when study participants inquired whether I would choose to live in Canada or Kosova. Their questions made me feel

uncomfortable at first because I was forced to choose between the two. Nonetheless, this question later became an entry point into my own identity as an immigrant and a scholar in Canada. I no longer belong to just Kosova or Canada, but to both, and sometimes to neither. Participants encouraged me to never return to Kosova because they thought that I would lack the opportunities that Canada has to offer. I often felt an urge to resist because, as the place where I grew up, Kosova holds immense value for me. At the same time, I came to realize that I could not really explain why Kosova remains the place that I refer to as home because, unlike me, Kosova for them has become a place they wanted to escape but could not. I came face to face with the privileges I hold because I can travel to Canada without restrictions, and I reflected on how such privileges shaped the participants' perception of me.

As a newcomer scholar, therefore, I have grappled with the tensions of coming to terms with my privileges while also finding ways to relate to those who do not enjoy the same. Among the most helpful techniques to do this has been talking to other newcomer scholars who experience similar tensions. Such conversations have not only normalized my experience but have also made me aware that when I feel like I belong to neither Kosova nor Canada, I know that I belong to a new, and emerging community of those who do not neatly fit into one country.

For example, in talking with other emerging newcomer scholars, I have delved into issues of representation. That is, newcomer scholars are not only completing their degrees in order to advance their own careers, but also in order to show their communities that immigrants can navigate higher education successfully. Indeed, after my MSW, I considered the idea that instead of starting a PhD, I would return to Kosova and work with non-profit organizations there. The response that I received from my Albanian community in Kosova and here in Calgary left me puzzled. Most of my family and friends highlighted the fact that while returning to Kosova might help me address the tensions I feel, starting a PhD might do a bigger service to my community. While this attitude has its benefits, seeing that I have received immense support from my Albanian community, it also adds an extra layer that newcomer scholars have to consider. Goldsworthy (2013) very neatly summarized this:

As a Balkan scholar working in Britain, and preoccupied with British writing about my home region...I worried about creating a version of the thing that I was trying to undo, a perpetuation of Western dominance. Would I be seen as a janissary [devoted follower] serving the Western concept of university – a system of learning which is global, flexible, Anglophone, and threatening to indigenous scholarship? Was I fighting imperialism of the imagination with another version of imperialism, namely liberal, Western-manufactured theory? Or was I a Balkan cuckoo in a British academic nest, enjoying its relative comfort while writing about faraway lands of which most Britons know little and care less? (Goldsworthy, 2013, p. xvii)

Goldsworthy highlighted the need for newcomer scholars, especially those coming from non-Western countries, to be reflexive about their role in perpetuating and/or resisting hegemonic ways of being which rely on colonial practices that uphold Western dominance. Being reflexive about such global power dynamics adds a layer of complexity to our work, but rather than holding us back, these tensions are among the reasons newcomer scholars can make unique and valuable contributions to research and teaching. That is, gaining insight into our own fluid identities and grappling with the in-betweenness of our realities allows us to contribute to transdisciplinary projects that are increasingly part of higher education.

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