Putting Family First

Migration and Integration
in Canada

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UBCPress · Vancouver · Toronto

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Introduction

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Migration, settlement, and the integration of newcomers are often seen through an economic lens and as processes that involve individuals rather than groups or families. The cliché of the entrepreneurial-spirited young man leaving a life of impoverishment behind in Europe and coming to North America in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century and making his way from rags to riches reflects this misperception. Looking more closely, we realize that the migrant-millionaire could not claim all the credit for his success. Relatives likely helped finance the expensive journey across the Atlantic, and once in North America, the migrant might have had an aunt or distant cousin providing him with food and shelter. Later, a wife likely provided essential support, ranging from doing the laundry to going shopping, cooking, and running errands. Furthermore, most immigrants never became millionaires but continued to struggle to make ends meet. To these immigrants, family – whether in the same household or abroad – was essential for financial, social, and emotional support. The family unit often ensured the survival of its migrating members.

Today, travel is easier, faster, and cheaper; migration policies are less racist; and state policies regulate migration flows much more tightly, but family continues to be of crucial importance to many migrants. In fact, a growing body of research points towards the role that families

have in the migration, settlement, and integration of individual family members, and *Putting Family First* explores their role in the contemporary Canadian context. It investigates how family members in Canada and abroad contribute to the social and financial well-being of immigrants; the benefits that families provide newcomers; and how individual family members are dealing with the economic, political, social, and personal challenges. By bringing these realities to light, this book shows how a family-centred approach can be mobilized at the practical and policy levels to facilitate the successful integration of newcomers.

Migration policy has mixed effects on families. On the one hand, the migration policies of immigrant-receiving countries in the Global North are ripping many families apart. The US experience shows the brutal consequences of immigration law, border enforcement policies, and administrative practices. Children are separated from their parents. Family members are being deported, leaving their dependants without income or support. Parents refrain from returning to see their children and family members in their countries of origin because they fear not being able to return to the United States. Enhanced border security is driving minors into the hands of tricksters, criminals, and rapists (Boehm 2017; Zatz and Rodriguez 2015). In Europe, too, deportations and other policies are having profound impacts on migrant families (Drotbohm 2015). In addition, migration is increasingly deadly. Thousands of mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters are dying every year in the Arizona desert, off the Australian coast, or while trying to cross the Sahara Desert or Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe (Bauder 2017).

Canada has a different geographical situation. Isolated by large oceans to the east, west, and north, and protected by a Safe Third Country Agreement with the United States to the south, the country is relatively inaccessible to migrants not authorized by the Canadian state. Nevertheless, its immigration policies also impose hardship on many families. The Caregiver Program has resulted in mothers leaving their own children and elderly relatives in order to care for Canadian families. The temporary foreign worker programs have caused fathers to separate from the children whom their work in Canada's greenhouses is supposed to benefit. The recent implementation of a super visa, which permits parents and grandparents to visit but not settle permanently in Canada, prompted Xiaobei Chen and Sherry Xiaohan Thorpe (2015, 81)

to observe that "who counts as family ... has been biopolitically determined by Canadian immigration policy."

On the other hand, the family also plays an important supportive role in immigration policy, especially when it comes to immigrant selection. In many Western immigrant-receiving countries, family-related migration is the main channel for legal entry into the country, and family relationships are recognized as an important factor when it comes to the settlement and integration of newcomers. However, opinions diverge on whether the presence of family members benefits or hinders the process (Yong 2016). In countries such as Spain and Italy, family reunification is considered helpful in integrating immigrants into the receiving society (Kofman and Meetoo 2008). In contrast, in countries such as Denmark, France, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, families are often considered an impediment to integration, and family sponsorship regulations have been tightened.

In Canada, family reunification through the family immigration class accounts for a considerable portion of immigrant selection. Nevertheless, in Canadian immigrant selection, family considerations are outweighed by economic factors. In fact, over the last decades, Canadian governments have pushed forward a one-dimensional emphasis on the economic value of newcomers as individuals. In addition, the family context of immigrants tends to be neglected in government policies that address settlement and inclusion. These policies and the political debates surrounding them largely ignore what has long been established in feminist and progressive circles: economic production is inseparably tied to reproduction within the family.

Canada's current immigration system has three classes: economic-class immigrants are selected based on the human capital criteria of the principal applicant as well as on domestic labour market needs; family-class immigrants are selected to serve the purposes of family reunification; and refugees are admitted based on humanitarian grounds and to meet Canada's international obligations. Between 2006 and 2015, family-class immigrants constituted between 23.4 percent (2010) and 32.2 percent (2013) of the total (Government of Canada 2017), although this class was once the dominant mode of immigration. These statistics, however, are misleading. For example, more than half the economic-class

immigrants who entered Canada between 2006 and 2015 were spouses, children, and other dependants of principal applicants. These statistics illustrate that migration and settlement cannot be separated from the familial context – either when individuals migrate with their families or when they are supported by family members who either stay in their country of origin or are already in Canada.

In Canadian public policy discourses, the family has long been considered a relatively minor factor in determining the economic and social contributions of immigrants to society (Triadafilopoulos 2006; Collacott 2006). However, policy makers, service providers, and the general public are becoming increasingly aware of the role that families play in facilitating migration and settlement. Similarly, the value of the family in immigrant integration is increasingly attracting the attention of Canadian-based researchers (Kustec 2006; Tyyskä 2007). We therefore build on the concept of family as a holistic framework of analysis, one that adopts a wider perspective on who is considered a family member. Patrizia Albanese (2013, 8–9) lists multiple definitions of family, illustrating that the concept changes over time and differs between contexts. Margit Eichler (1983, 3–4), for example, writes:

> A family is a social group which may or may not include adults of both sexes (e.g., lone-parent families), may or may not include one or more children (e.g., childless couples), who may or may not have been born in their wedlock (e.g., adopted children, or children by one adult partner of a previous union). The relationship of the adults may or may not have its origin in marriage (e.g., common-law couples), they may or may not share a common residence (e.g., commuting couples). The adults may or may not cohabit sexually, and the relationship may or may not involve such socially patterned feelings as love, attraction, and awe.

As the chapters in this volume illustrate, the migration experience adds a transnational dimension – with complex cultural, financial, and legal implications – to this definition. The Canadian government, however, applies a rather narrow definition of family, a definition anchored to the notion of the nuclear family and "Western" ideas of love, which deny the

complexity and contingent nature of *family,* as the word is understood by many migrants.

Multiple characteristics define the role of families in the settlement and integration processes. First, all members of the family are relevant: they all can play a role in facilitating or impeding the integration of other members, and they can all affect how newcomer families draw on and contribute to diasporic communities and the arrival of immigrants in society. Scholars acknowledge the role of the family in migration decision making; in providing support to members across space and time; and in creating, maintaining, and accessing larger social networks (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002; VanderPlaat 2006). But relatively little is known about how these processes shape the specific challenges and opportunities of migrant families.

Second, family members make various contributions to the migrant family's financial, social, and emotional well-being and to the arrival economy and society. Even in cases where migrant families are viewed through a narrow economic lens, researchers and policy makers increasingly recognize either that the family members of primary applicants are also entering the labour market or that their reproductive and nonmonetary contributions are enabling other members of their family to work and establish careers (Tyyskä 2007). Families are critical for nurturing and sustaining "society's present and future human capital and social capital" (Skolnick 2005, 4).

Third, family members are interacting across international borders; the costs and benefits of migration are not contained within the territorial borders of the arrival country. While concepts such as chain migration have a long history in migration research, more recently, the concepts of remittances and brain circulation have captivated the interest not only of academics but also of policy makers. The rapid pace of globalization has increased interest in the study of transnational families, families who maintain strong economic, political, social, and emotional ties to their countries of origin (Kelly 2003; Tyyskä 2011; Kobayashi and Preston 2007). Problematically, international migration often results in "split" families – families in which members live in different countries – because of national immigration policies or the families' migratory decisions. Support provided by family members can be an important

source of resilience for immigrants dealing with stressors inherent in the immigration process (Bernhard, Landolt, and Goldring 2008), but longer durations of separation often have negative impacts on families (Lewchuk, Procyk, and Shields 2017; Díaz Mendiburo et al. 2017; Cohen 2000). The way in which these transnational ties and separations affect the settlement and integration trajectories of immigrants in Canada still presents a considerable knowledge gap.

Putting Family First reports the findings of our investigation into how immigrant families settle and integrate into Canadian society and how family members navigate the presumed (i.e., socially constructed and imposed) boundaries associated with gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, family, community, and nation. We also explore how families ultimately challenge, transform, or reproduce these limitations. This fluid understanding of the family and its role in settlement and integration reflects the ongoing reframing of familial relationships in Canadian society. Same-sex and common-law relationships, single parents, and adopted children are much more accepted today than they were in the past. At the same time, the increasing difficulties faced by Canadian immigrants to sponsor family members, including long processing delays for applications, reflect a tendency to individualize newcomers' experience and to devalue the family as a catalyst for settlement and integration.

We adopt a two-pronged approach that allows us to tackle the complex relationship between family and integration through a range of thematic perspectives. First, we focus on the integration trajectory, the fluid process that extends from the newcomers' initial reception to their deep involvement in and attachment to the receiving society. An integration-trajectory approach is especially useful because it enables researchers to address the complexity of the settlement process in Canada, which involves a continuum of activities (OCASI and COSTI 1999, 9–13). The integration process is commonly understood as possessing a number of progressive stages: (1) initial reception (aka adjustment), when newly arrived families orient themselves in their new settlement context and when members often acquire information and referral services, language training, and short-term shelter; (2) an intermediate stage (adaptation), when appropriate employment, long-term housing, and access to education and social rights are secured; and (3) the final stage (integration), which involves

the development of a deeper sense of attachment and belonging to the receiving society (Richmond and Shields 2005).

The goal of this integration trajectory "is for every immigrant to have full freedom of choice regarding her level of participation in the society. If the immigrant wants to participate actively in the society, there are no systematic barriers preventing her from doing so, and there are mechanisms in place to positively facilitate this process" (OCASI and COSTI 1999, 9–13). It is clear that integration should not be measured purely as individual performance in the labour market because integration also involves the challenges and contributions of families in reproductive and nonmonetary activities. Furthermore, the integration trajectory is not a mechanistic process. Not all newcomer families and their individual members move through the three stages at equal speeds and in similar ways. In fact, at all stages, migrant families confront a diverse range of structural, discursive, and individual obstacles. Scholars have identified various barriers – including institutional hurdles, racial and cultural discrimination, poor job matches, high poverty levels, and the persistence of residential segregation – that affect integration in different and intersecting ways (Bauder 2006; Galabuzi 2006; Shields et al. 2010; Shields et al. 2011; Qadeer, Agrawal, and Lovell 2010; Liu and Kerr 2003).

Second, we take into consideration how the intersectionality (Hill and Bilge 2016) of various factors affects the integration trajectories of immigrant families (Sullivan 2017). Integration is a multidirectional, ongoing process with shifting goals and mechanisms. It engages several intersecting domains, including the economic, the social, the political, and the ideological. In addition, it is embedded in the nested contexts of individuals, families, neighbourhoods, towns, cities, nation-states, and global geopolitical relations. Furthermore, individual attributes – such as age, gender, language, education, and personal wealth – affect the settlement trajectory of each immigrant. The individual's racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic, or national identifications also make a difference. What is less commonly understood is the role of the family and how it underscores and mediates individual and communal factors in the immigrant's integration. The integration trajectory is shaped by premigration factors (including those mentioned above), the process of migration, and postmigration factors. For example, were they refugees

or economic immigrants? Did they come on their own, or did they bring along members of their families? Where do they live and work and why? What is enabling or limiting their social, economic, and political activities? These questions clearly show that institutional practices, policies at various levels of government, and the cultural norms that categorize immigrants in different ways are implicated in the process. While we simply cannot – and do not – claim to account for all the factors that shape the integration trajectory, we do highlight some of the threads in a complex tapestry.

The first thread is the policy context. Public policies and government support for settlement services are critical elements of successful settlement and inclusion (Omidvar and Richmond 2005). Settlement policies, programs, and practices reflect a society's willingness to support newcomers and their families and indicate the "warmth of welcome" experienced by newcomer families (Reitz 1998; Siemiatycki and Triadafilopoulos 2010). Neoliberal ideologies have changed policy making and program design in the areas of immigration, citizenship, and newcomer settlement and integration with the aim of holding immigrant families more responsible and accountable for their own integration. These ideologies have shifted the focus to the economic utility of migrants (Bauder 2011) while devaluing family-class immigration and other important contributions by immigrants and their families (Gabriel 2017). They have also devolved many aspects of settlement services to regional and local jurisdictions and not-for-profit or charitable organizations (Lowe, Richmond, and Shields 2017) and restructured the welfare state to trim services, often restricting or excluding newcomer access in the process (Evans, Richmond, and Shields 2005; Arat-Koç 1999; Trudeau 2008; Gabriel 2017). Such changes in policy have shifted the blame onto immigrants for failing to integrate, ignoring structural circumstances and obscuring most newcomers' active contributions to the societies in which they settle (Barrass and Shields 2017). The individualistic lens of service delivery neglects, in particular, the service needs of families as a unit. Furthermore, serious challenges exist in coordinating policy and programming between levels of government and other public and private actors (Richmond and Shields 2005). To understand the contemporary pathways of settlement

and integration requires grasping the rapidly changing policy context in which they occur.

The second thread is children, youth, and gender. Children and youth are a central part of the family structure. In fact, the future life prospects of children and youth are often a key motivator for families to migrate to a new country (Ali 2008). In the context of settlement and integration, children can facilitate or impede the participation of newcomer families and communities in Canadian society. In addition, children and youth can themselves suffer greatly when migration and migration policies split families (Cohen 2000; Tyyskä 2008). The presence of children and youth in the family also affects gender roles. In the migration context, the need to put food on the table is often associated with a switch in traditional gender roles: women enter the labour market in relatively low-skilled jobs while men upgrade their credentials and skills and may find themselves unable to perform traditional breadwinner functions (Creese, Dyck, and McLaren 1999; Grewal, Bottroff, and Hilton 2005; Este and Tachble 2009).

From a policy perspective, it is crucially important to understand newcomers' family structures to accommodate them in the arrival society and its institutions, including schools, civic society, the housing market, the welfare system, and the health care system. For example, although an increasing portion of Canadian society lives in one-person households, increasing the demand for single-person housing units, multigenerational households (those that contain at least three generations of a single family) are the fastest-growing household type in the country. Statistics Canada (2017b, 9) attributes this trend to "Canada's changing ethocultural composition," stemming mostly from immigration. In larger urban centres, the share of multigenerational households is relatively high compared to Canada as a whole.

The third thread is domestic conflict. Stressors such as financial burdens, language barriers, racial discrimination, and challenges in navigating the educational and health care systems can negatively affect partner relationships, provide catalysts for domestic violence, and impede a mother's ability to support the family and perform traditional maternal and caring roles (Simich, Wu, and Nerad 2007; Simich et al. 2005; Menjivar and Salcido 2002; Guruge, Khanlou, and Gastaldo 2010).

Domestic conflict and abuse are sometimes tolerated because of fear of deportation, lack of social support, or a desire for family sponsorship by the partner (Smith 2004). While many women experienced physical and psychological abuse in their countries of origin (Lafrenière and Diallo 2010), the Canadian legal and welfare systems provides opportunities to escape abusive relationships. But youth grappling to find their place in Canadian society may experience conflict with the expectations of peers, parents, and other family members. A family's efforts to integrate into the arrival society, procure and maintain appropriate employment, and pursue education are greatly influenced by the strength and character of its domestic relationships. The chapters in this book reveal how domestic relations can impact the integration trajectory and shape a family's sense of belonging in Canadian society.

The fourth thread is labour and work. Employment is a critical factor in the well-being of immigrant families. There are many challenges, however, that influence whether newcomers successfully enter the labour market, including the nonrecognition of foreign credentials and work experience, the demand for Canadian work experience, a lack of cultural capital, and racial and other forms of discrimination (Bauder 2006). In addition, the changing structure of the labour market has made it more difficult for recent cohorts of immigrants to secure stable, well-paying jobs that offer favourable career-development prospects (Procyk, Lewchuk, and Shields 2017). The result has been the proliferation of "survival jobs" that fail to make use of the newcomers' skills and education and trap them in low-paid, precarious employment (Dyson and Akter 2017; Gottfried et al. 2016). In particular, the economic crisis of 2008 and the subsequent austerity measures have had a detrimental impact on many immigrant families, resulting in considerable social dislocation and economic hardship (Barrass and Shields 2017). Positive employment experiences, however, tend to fast-track the settlement and integration process, while unsuccessful participation in the labour market can disrupt integration trajectories. The dependants of skilled-worker applicants, however, often have a difficult time finding positive employment experiences (Banerjee and Phan 2015). Experiences in the labour market also intersect with identities related to gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and generation (Buzdugan and Halli 2009; Boyd and Norris 2000;

Reitz 2007). One important issue is the capacity of the labour market and workplace environment to not only absorb newcomers as workers but also accommodate racial, ethnic, and cultural differences among immigrant women, men, and youths.

The fifth thread is the settlement sector. The Canadian model of settlement service delivery traditionally encompassed pro-immigration public policy and extensive programs to support nonprofit providers, community groups, educational institutions, and faith-based organizations. An important question is how settlement services can be designed and delivered effectively to all members of newcomer families in light of recent changes in policy contexts (Lowe, Richmond, and Shields 2017; Shields 2014; Richmond and Shields 2005). Families need the most assistance in acclimatizing themselves to Canadian society, locating housing, starting children in school, learning languages, finding jobs, and building social networks. Services that address these needs include reception, orientation, translation, interpretation, referral, counselling, general information, and employment facilities (Shields, Drolet, and Valenzuela 2016). A holistic – rather than an individualistic – approach to service delivery that includes all family members at all stages of the integration trajectory would constitute an important shift in the delivery of settlement services (Dargy 2017).

The overarching aim of *Putting Family First* is ambitious. We acknowledge the work of previous researchers in the first part of the volume then contribute to a paradigm shift in scholarship, public discourse, and policy making in the second, which is based on empirical research. We open the volume by offering rigorous literature reviews that outline the contemporary state of knowledge on the role of families in the immigrant integration trajectory and the shortcomings of current immigration and settlement policies and practices in areas that range from the role of neoliberalism and community-based institutions to economic integration and intergenerational violence. Overall, the chapters in Part 1 challenge the myth of the self-sufficent migrant.

The chapters in Part 2 are based on a qualitative study involving twenty-three family units. The interview-based data enabled us to identify and describe circumstances and relationships that help us better understand the integration trajectories of immigrant families (see the

Appendix, by Marc Yvan Valade and Maria Gintova, for our methodology). Our research was conducted in Greater Toronto, the most significant destination of immigrants in Canada. Unlike earlier cohorts, more recent immigrants no longer settle predominantly in Chinatown, Little Italy, or Greektown in the urban core; rather, they have dispersed to suburbs such as Brampton, Markham, Mississauga, and Richmond Hill, where housing is more affordable. In fact, some of the former immigrant reception centres in Toronto's core are gentrifying (or have already gentrified) and are unaffordable to many newcomers and members of marginalized groups.

In 2015, 30.2 percent of immigrants chose Toronto as their destination (Government of Canada 2017). According to the census, 5.9 million people lived in the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) in 2016, and 2.7 million were foreign-born. Of those immigrants who landed between 1980 and 2016, 1.1 million were economic-class immigrants. Furthermore, 3 million individuals living in the Toronto CMA identified as belonging to a racialized non-Indigenous group or visible minority (Statistics Canada 2017a). In terms of family and household structure, the average nuclear family was slightly larger (three persons) in the Toronto CMA compared to Ontario as a whole (2.9 persons), and the household size was also larger (2.7 persons) than in Ontario (2.6 persons) (Statistics Canada 2017b). Because of the high concentration of immigrants, settlement and integration issues are compounded in Greater Toronto, providing an excellent case study for other geographical contexts in Canada and beyond.

As seasoned academics, early-career scholars, highly knowledgeable community partners, and graduate students, we bring different disciplinary backgrounds and professional experiences to our research and writing. Incorporating diverse perspectives in a single research project is, we believe, an innovative aspect of this book. The same quotations from interviews can appear in multiple chapters, reflecting that complex data can be interpreted in multiple ways, especially within a framework that emphasizes intersectionality. We changed the names of participants to preserve confidentiality.

Although we focus on significantly shifting the lens through which researchers, public commentators, and policy makers look at migration,

we refrain from advocating radical transformation. For example, we do not explicitly challenge the nation-state as a regulator of migration flows, as radical scholarship often does (Walia 2013). Instead, we promote meso-level transformation (Bauder and Matheis 2016) that goes beyond everyday business-as-usual political manoeuvring but not so far as to advocate for revolutionary change that would lead to a world that we cannot imagine today (Bauder 2017). In other words, we advocate for substantial change within dominant political configurations such the nation-state and social institutions such as the family.

Acknowledgment

This Introduction draws on the original grant proposal that funded the partnership project on which this book is based. The core ideas emerged from discussions among the partners, many of whom are coauthors of the subsequent chapters.

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