

Critical View of Skilled Migration and Skilled Immigrants, Post-Migration

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ABSTRACT: Despite the growing body of research confirming the struggles that many skilled immigrants face post-migration, little attention is given to their realities in immigration strategies for recruitment. Countries such as Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom continue to boost their efforts to attract highly skilled immigrants with no commitment to ensure their success. Many skilled immigrants are faced with increasing instances of poverty and discrimination and their efforts to settle and thrive are undermined. The focus on potential economic growth for host countries and faster rates of settlement over other immigrant groups, continue to be the driving force to increasingly attract skilled immigrants. At the same time, the many challenges of discrimination and economic disenfranchisement that especially racialized skilled immigrants face, lead to lower standards of living with certain descent into poverty for many. This article is informed by Critical Race Theory and engages a discussion on the discrimination and economic consequences of poverty that racialized skilled immigrants face in Canada. The article draws on existing literature on skilled immigrants, to provide an overview of the challenges that they encounter with unemployment and underemployment post-migration, which increases their risk of poverty. In an effort to preserve the well-being of skilled immigrants, the discussion outline ideas to developing a path to social justice that is guided by social work principles. The article concludes with key suggestions to address systemic issues that contribute to the challenges that skilled immigrants face in Canada and highlight areas for future research.

KEYWORDS: skilled immigrants, racialized, immigration, Critical Race Theory, poverty

1. Introduction

The use of selective immigration policies to attract skilled immigrants of the highest calibre, continues to increase among potential host countries (Koslowski 2013, 26). In fact, Shachar (2006, 151) pointed out that many European countries have adopted measures in their immigration policies to prioritize the admission of highly skilled immigrants. Similarly, over the past several years the United States (U.S.) have proposed comprehensive immigration reforms that prioritize immigrants who are highly skilled (Boyd 2014, 47). In the same token, many of the ongoing changes in Canadian immigration policies, include revisions to specific programs that will expedite the application process for highly skilled applicants (Boyd 2014, 7; Kaushik and Drolet 2018, 2). The emphasis on the recruitment of this group of immigrants, is due in part to the reported advantage in the global economy that host countries enjoy as a result of a highly skilled workforce. The faster rate of settlement and contributions to local economies are also considered to be part of the allure to prioritize their recruitment over other immigrant groups.

For developed countries like Canada whose birth rates have not kept up with the aging population, skilled immigrants are used to supplement this birth rate decline as well (Sakamoto, Chin, Young 2010, 145). Their ability to add to the local workforce in a shorter timeframe than other immigrant groups, is similar to their anticipated contribution to global economies. These are just some of the added benefits highlighted for prioritizing their recruitment. Despite these anticipated benefits for host countries, reports on the barriers that many skilled immigrants face to enter the Canadian labour market for example, raise questions about these priority recruitments (Schellenberg, Grant, Hou and Feng 2005, 49; Taylor 2018, 92). The complexities of some of these barriers especially for racialized skilled immigrants who make up a significant portion of the skilled immigrant groups in Canada, are huge impediments to their contributions (Creese and Wiebe 2009, 58). While the recruitment fervour to attract them intensifies in several countries, the post-migration discrimination and precarious economic conditions that many face gets worse. In addition, the reality for racialized immigrants seems to be synonymous with increased risk of poverty. Urgent attention is needed to chart a better course for their success.

This article uses Critical Race Theory lens to engage a discussion on the discrimination and economic consequences of poverty that racialized skilled immigrants face in Canada. Existing literature on skilled immigrants is used to provide insights into the challenges that they encounter with unemployment and underemployment after migration. The increased risk of poverty that they face post-migration, is of key interest in this discussion. This article engenders a discussion on ideas to creating a path to social justice for skilled immigrants, drawing on social work principles as a guide. The discussion is intended to highlight avenues that preserve the well-being of skilled immigrants and change the current social conditions they face for better. The paper concludes with key suggestions and highlight key considerations for future research. This article calls for the development of more effective measures to eliminate the systemic and institutional barriers that skilled immigrants face post-migration. The rewards for them need to be on par with the potential contributions they were recruited to make to receiving countries.

The following terms are defined for better understanding of how they are used throughout this article. The definitions draw on the meaning of the terms as used in scholarly and/or institutional contexts, that are similar to their intended use in this article.

Skilled Immigrants: Skilled Immigrants usually possess college or university level certification and extensive work experience in their field (Syed 2008, 30). The Federal Skilled Worker Program (FSWP) in Canada is geared to attract highly skilled immigrants through the allocation of a points system that is based on six selection factors. These factors include: education, work experience, age, language, adaptability and arranged employment in Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2019, para 1). Individuals who qualify under the Canadian skilled worker program are granted permanent residence and are believed to make greater contributions to the economy faster. An electronic 'Express Entry' component was added to the FSWP in 2015, to ensure even faster processing of selected immigrants, for permanent residence, which includes the skilled immigrant category (Kaushik and Drolet 2018, 2). Whereas the skilled worker program in Canada focuses on human capital, similar points system program in Australia to attract skilled immigrants, focus on a state selection model with business and labour participation (Koslowski 2013, 27). This is different from the supply and demand market-driven model that is used in the U.S. to attract highly skilled immigrants. A points system program is also used in New Zealand, and many developed countries have placed more emphasis on recruiting skilled immigrants (Koslowski 2013, 26).

Racialized: Individuals who are non-White by way of race and colour but does not include Aboriginal peoples (The National Council of Welfare reports in Canada 2012, 1). This use is also similar to the understanding of the term as engaged by many scholars to refer to non-White individuals who are identified by the social construction of their race (see Baines 2002, 188; Gosine and Pon, 2011, 136).

People of colour and Black: These terms are used interchangeably throughout this article which is consistent to the use in many scholarly literature. Both terms refer to the difference in pigmentation for groups considered as minority groups which is unlike that of individuals who are members of dominant group (see Aylward 1999, 27-28; Gosine and Pon 2011, 135-139; Dhruvarajan 2000, 166). The social consequences of oppression and discrimination for members of non-dominant or minority groups, is unlike the association of privilege and power that is constructed for members of dominant groups.

2. Critical Race Theoretical lens

The origins of Critical Race Theory (CRT) is firmly rooted in the U.S., and central to its foundation is its unique feature that challenges racial oppression as a way to redress societal inequities. CRT is informed by the works of legal scholars such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman and Richard Delgado and emerged as a counter-discourse to Critical Legal Studies (DeCuir and Dixson 2004, 26). Of key concern in its creation, was the ongoing erosion of racial equality that was made for Black individuals during the Civil Rights Movement. Concerns were also raised by many legal scholars and activists in the U.S. about the absence of justice in the legal system for Black people, and they demanded that these legal and social inequities be addressed (Delgado and Stefancic 2012, 4-5). As such, CRT emerged with the aim to bring attention to the impact of race and racism on the daily lives of Black individuals in the U.S., especially in the legal system. Similarly, the emergence of CRT in Canada more than a decade after its origin in the U.S., focused on the lack of representation for Black individuals in Canadian laws and Canadian society (Aylward 1999, 40-41). As part of its origin and as a theoretical framework, CRT seeks to highlight issues of oppression and inequities that are driven by the relationship of power, privilege and race (Daftary 2018, 1). Simply put, CRT seeks to unmask issues of marginalization and discrimination in the everyday experiences of people of colour.

The multidisciplinary platform that informs CRT approach adds to its unique position to analyse the impact of race and racism and propose avenues towards solutions (Daftary 2018, 3). It has a strong activism component that challenge inequities and oppression for people of colour, in its quest for social justice. Fundamental to its application is its challenge of Whiteness and White privilege as a core part of the structure of institutions that feeds into racial oppression. It engages oppression within the social, political and historical contexts to challenge and demand redress for these impacts on people of colour. CRT also advances the voice of people of colour and their unique experiences of oppression in its quest to create changes in existing oppressive structures (Delgado and Stefancic 2012, xix). It unapologetically seeks to transform the dynamics of race, racism and power as part of its commitment to achieve social justice.

Lynn (2004, 155) called attention to the key tenets of CRT and the five most common tenets that scholars frequently use as guide, when CRT framework is engaged. Similarly, DeCur and Dixson (2004, 27) discussed the use of CRT analysis that also engages five core tenets, many of which overlaps with the ones Lynn (2004, 155) identified. Regardless of the tenets engaged in a CRT approach, the primary focus of

CRT is unwavering. The pervasiveness of institutional racism; the importance to critique accounts of history to address the current inaccurate marginalizing and oppressive accounts for Black people; and the convergence of interest for Whites that are put forth as gains for Blacks, are parts of its core tenets. The engagement of race as a social construction that further oppress people of colour are of equal importance in the application of the key tenets. Also of importance for deconstruction, is the construction of Whiteness as inherently valued and as such Whites are positioned as automatic beneficiaries of the law and the defining standard of racial identities.

Another commonly used and unique tenet of CRT highlights the overlapping and, in some cases conflicting identities, that are interconnected for people of colour. This is in accordance with the acknowledgement of CRT, that people of colour face discrimination because of their colour and in combination with other characteristics such as, their gender, ethnicity, sexuality and other defining factors. These intertwining and multiple markers of marginalization are at the crux of the different and simultaneous experiences of oppression that are unique to people of colour. These intersecting markers further amplify the degree and dimension of oppression that people of colour encounter. CRT actively engages the social, contemporary, historical and political aspects of intersectionality and seek redress for the resulting social inequity that impact their experience. This framework allows for the isolation of the realities of people of colour, so that the different forms of oppression can be problematized the effects of dominant ideologies is deconstructed, in the quest for social transformation and social justice (Hylton 2012, 24).

3. Discrimination and economic consequences of poverty for racialized skilled immigrants

The percentage of visible minority immigrants in Canada who possessed a university degree is very high, yet their reported earnings are below par to that of non-racialized immigrants (Akbar 2019, 78). In addition, many are faced with significant challenges to enter the Canadian labour market as a result of their race, gender and ethnicity. This is notwithstanding the fact that the barriers and challenges that racialized people in Canada face, limit their chances to find stable employment (Wilson, Landolt, Galabuzi, Zahoorunissa, Pham, Cabrera, Dahy and Joly 2011, 1). More specifically, disparities in income and deep-rooted poverty was reported to be on the rise for racialized Canadians in Calgary, despite the reported economic success in this region of Canada (Pruegger, Cook and Richter-Salomons 2009, 1). A decline in income was reported for over a 30 years span among Black, South Asians/Chinese groups, with gaps in income as high as twenty per cent for average households, compare to other groups (Ibid).

While trends in immigration showed that more immigrants migrate to Eastern Canada than the West, the gaps in income between Canadians and immigrants are consistent across regions. It is yet to be seen if these gaps in income will shrink, with the recent announcement made by the government, to attract and retain skilled immigrants to rural and Western parts of Canada, through a 5-year economic immigration pilot plan. Efforts are also underway through a government approved program in Nova Scotia Canada, to fast-track the hiring of internationally trained family doctors. This move is as a response to the shortage of family doctors in that region. Again, any bridging of the divide towards economic parity and earnings between skilled immigrants and Canadians, are yet to be determined. The levels of discrimination especially for racialized immigrants in many of these areas however, leaves the success of these initiatives for racialized skilled immigrants uncertain.

The impact of social factors such as race, visible minority status and gender were found to influence the pathways of participation in the Canadian labour market among immigrants in Toronto, who migrated from Bangladesh (Akbar 2019, 75). Immigrants from this source country were among the highest numbers of visible minority immigrants admitted to Canada in 2005. Almost fifty per cent of this population in Toronto alone were report to have a university degree in 2006, compared to other immigrant groups (Akbar 2019, 75). The levels of discrimination that members from this racialized group face in the Canadian labour market is very high, with added challenges of discrimination based on names. Oreopoulos (2011, 151) noted similar findings from research completed in the U.S., where resumes sent to blue-collar jobs with Black-sounding names, received fifty per cent less call back than resumes with White sounding names. These challenges to secure employment most certainly impact the economic success of skilled immigrants and consequently their ability to afford the basic necessities of life. The quality of life and standard of living for many, is well below pre-migration levels.

In his 2011 field experiment that investigated why skilled immigrants were struggling in the Canadian labourmarket, Oreopoulos (2011, 150) found significant evidence of occupational and ethnic discrimination towards skilled immigrants who were looking for work. The study found evidence of discrimination by employers towards skilled immigrant job applicants with non-English sounding names and those with no work experience in Canada. Findings for this study is based on thirteen thousand mock resumes sent to employers in Toronto, in response to job postings. In another study completed with ten immigrant families in Toronto, Yogendra (2013, 1) found that upon migration to Canada, racialized immigrants were being channelled into jobs that are precarious. Many of these families became stuck in these initial low-income employment with sub-par conditions. They faced ongoing precariousness in employment as a result, which became a consistent challenge in their attempts to secure a better quality of life. Many structural barriers such as systemic distrust and discrimination impeded the progress of these families who also reported deteriorating health and overall conditions. These realities only serve to push them closer to impoverished conditions and ultimately into poverty.

Many neighbourhoods in the U.S., with higher concentration of immigrants were found to be associated with higher levels of poverty (Jargowsky 2009, 1129). For Black individuals who were considered low-income, they were found to be living in extremely poorer neighbourhoods at a rate of four times that of other groups. This is similar to the high correlation noted between poverty and race and the overrepresentation of immigrants in poorer neighbourhoods in Canada (Kazemipur and Halli 2000, 86 & 97). While the levels of education among those who face higher risks of poverty were not made clear in the aforementioned research, the consequences that limits access to basic resources were unmistakable. The lower economic productivity and heightened risk of chronic poverty and the decrease in health outcomes, were also added barriers to success. It is also worth noting that forty-one per cent of immigrants in Canada who were considered to be chronically poor in the late 90s, possessed a degree (National Council of Welfare report Canada 2012, para 1). Combined with the increased risk of poverty that racialized individuals reportedly face in Canada, which is three times that of non-racialized Canadians, the instances of poverty are concerning (Galazabuzi 2005, 3).

The Canadian National Council of Welfare (2012, 1) reports indicated that racialized persons in Vancouver and Toronto make up more than half of the population living in poverty in both cities. The report also found that in 2006, racialized Canadians make up twenty-two per cent of the overall eleven per cent of the poverty rate in Canada, compared to nine per cent for individuals who were considered non-racialized

(Ibid, 1). It is expected that by 2031, one in three Canadians will be from a racialized group. Considering that immigrants currently make up more than two-thirds of the racialized population, with more racialized women than men living in poverty in Canada, the issue stands to get much worse. The report further revealed that of the fifty-four per cent of immigrants who account for racialized groups among immigrants in Canada in general, seventy-four per cent of this population are living in poverty. More than three-quarters of the total number of racialized immigrants living in Canada, speak a language other than English or French in their home country (Ibid). Many of these racialized individuals are between twenty-five years old and sixty-four years old and are reported to have a university certificate or degree. Sixty-eight per cent of the overall thirty-two per cent of those with a post-secondary education, was reported to obtain their post-secondary certification outside of Canada. The report also finds that in 2006, many of the racialized individuals between the ages of twenty-five years old to fifty-four years old who were living in poverty, were either working or looking for work. It is no surprise with these numbers, that the report finds that the rates of unemployment among racialized persons living in poverty in Canada in 2006, were higher than the rates of poverty for non-racialized persons who were also living in poverty (Ibid).

Discussion on the discrimination and economic consequences of poverty that racialized skilled immigrants face in Canada is necessary to generate change. The precarious situations that many skilled immigrants encounter, reduce their contributions and economic stability in Canada. Many are driven into poverty and poverty-like situations that exacerbate their struggles. The economic instability force many to be constantly moving to find work and/or affordable housing, which is typical for forced moving among people living in poverty (Canadian National Council of Welfare 2012, 8). These issues become more prevalent for racialized skilled immigrants who encounter different forms of racism and discrimination based on social identifiers. The promised upward trajectory that attracted them, dissipates after migration and is replaced with the downward struggle into poverty. This creates a stark reality of deprivation for especially racialized skilled immigrants.

4. Overview: Challenges with unemployment and underemployment post-migration and heightened risk of poverty

The rate of unemployment among immigrants who possess a university degree and who were in Canada for over 5 years, was at 12.4 % in 2012 (Sakamoto, Jeypal, Bhuyan, Ku, Fang, Zhang and Genovese 2013, 2). This is an increase from previous years despite the increased levels of education reported among immigrants year over year. Picot, Hou and Coulombe (2007, 9) found that the higher levels of education among especially skilled immigrants in Canada post-2000, did not improve their chances of moving beyond the chronic low-income category. The authors found that the effects of factors such as language, source country, age and family status, increased the chronic low-income rates on immigrants in Canada, between 1992 and 2000. This is similar to the downward mobility in employment that Creese and Wiebe (2009, 56) noted among highly educated African immigrants in Vancouver. Many skilled immigrants from this group reported settling for low skilled and low paying temporary jobs, in an effort to cover their immediate needs and 'survive' (Creese and Wiebe 2009, 62).

The limited access to social and economic capital and the challenges that skilled immigrants face in unemployment and under employment is well documented (Bauder 2003, 701; Kaushik and Drolet 2018, 3; Syed 2008, 30; Wald and Fang 2009, 457-458). The lack of credential recognition for many, the limited access to comparable employment and under-utilization of labour market potential, were seen as key factors

that limit their performance in Canada. The higher rates of unemployment, declining earnings and reduced labour market participation that they encounter, are among the primary cause of their declining economic circumstances (Somerville and Walsworth 2009, 147-149). The gaps in earnings are not consistent with the levels of education and skills that many immigrants can offer. Alboim, Finnie and Meng (2005, 2) pointed to racial discrimination and the discounting of immigrants' skills as core causes of the gap in earnings between Canadian-born individuals and immigrants. The responses to address these challenges in host countries such as Canada have been slow, if not non-existent.

Research evidence confirms that racialized immigrants in Canada face the worst levels of poverty and unemployment with many working in low-waged jobs that does not provide stability is very prevalent (Access Alliance 2013, 1). This reality is similar to that of only racialized Canadians whose economic instability is also dire. The Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) reported 20.8% rate of low-income among racialized Canadians in 2015, which is an increase from previous years (OCASI 2017 para 14). The 2015 rate was almost two times the rate among non-racialized Canadians which was at 12.2% (Ibid). The unemployment rates among African-born immigrants is at the highest levels of all the immigrant groups in Canada. The heightened risk of poverty is prevalent among racialized Canadians as well as racialized immigrants including those with high levels of skills (Access Alliance 2013, 1; Creese and Weibe 2009, 69).

Dietz, Joshi, Esses, Hamilton and Gabarrot (2015, 1318) assert that the higher the level of skill that an immigrant possesses in Canada, the more likelihood that they will face employment discrimination. The authors consider this "skilled paradox" phenomenon to be instrumental in some of the recruitment biases that highly skilled immigrants encounter. This diminish their chances of employment as well as any chance to gain parity with their counterparts in host countries. The economic returns for skilled immigrants are well below that of their host countries counterparts (Alboim, Finnie and Meng (2005, 26). In 2014, Statistics Canada reports showed an 11.1% gap in employment rate between immigrants with a university degree and their Canadian counterparts (Dietz, Joshi, Esses, Hamilton and Gabarrot 2015, 1318). This is unlike the narrow gap of just 0.6% difference in employment rate between immigrants without a certificate, diploma or degree and their Canadian counterparts (Ibid). The devaluing of immigrant skills and work experience in Canada, is at the root of many of the challenges that they face with under employment and unemployment post-migration. Issues of race and racism are also key factors. The erosion of their anticipated higher levels of contribution to the labour market of host countries, increase their risk of economic instability and moving into poverty.

Several challenges that impact the social and economic integration of skilled immigrants were identified by Kaushik and Drolet (2018, 3). Among them were challenges faced due to prejudice, stereotype and discrimination. This results in social and economic instability among racialized groups in Canada and creates more risk for precariousness in employment and increased poverty. The issues of race and racism that shape the experiences of skilled immigrants in Canada in particular, are of grave concern within a CRT construct. The diminished value of the education and experience of skilled immigrants, speaks to a dominant agenda that associate skills and education with Whiteness. This concept of dominance construct immigrants, especially racialized skilled immigrants, as unskilled and uneducated. Despite the acknowledgement of their skills on one hand for expedited and/or selective entry to host countries, the dominant construction of immigrants supersedes their value once they migrate. They are less equipped to secure economic stability in order to escape poverty post-migration.

5. Path to social justice guided by social work principles

The level of productivity of a worker is associated with their level of skill and higher levels of skill is believed to generate higher levels of productivity (Syed 2008, 28). This should also translate in better options for job selection and movement in the labour market. This reality for skilled immigrants however, is compounded by their race, ethnicity, lack of credential recognition and work experience. The anticipated outcomes that is based on of their skills are thwarted due to systemic and institutional barriers. Many are left on the brink of poverty or find themselves in a full state of poverty after they migrate. This is despite many migrating from solid middle-class earnings and occupations, that were once on par with their skill sets. The higher levels of unemployment and underemployment among individuals from this group are painting a different reality from what is depicted by receiving countries such as Canada. This is while the reported benefits for these countries continue to rise and the social and economic conditions for skilled immigrants continue to decline.

A path to social justice for skilled immigrants will require accountability in immigration policies and labour market practices. From a social work and social justice lens, this will mean incorporating measures in policy, principle and practice that promote social justice for skilled immigrants. From a CRT perspective, issues of race, racism, ethnicity, where credentials and work experience are acquired, cannot be used as markers of the potential. Their integration in the labour markets of hosts countries, is contingent on the valuing of the education and skills they can add. Furthermore, based on the human dignity component, the accomplishments and successful integration of immigrants into host countries' labour markets are but basic rights that immigrants should enjoy. Their worth should be understood and accepted in their own right and not in the shadow of citizens of host countries. The markers of success should be contingent on the provisions of support that host countries implement, to ensure participation based on their full potential.

While there is no one path to social justice for skilled immigrants, ideas to support specific actions for change in the current systemic and institutional barriers that they face is crucial. The most prevalent challenges to settlement, integration and the alleviation of poverty are known and so developing solutions should be geared to address these challenges. It is important to also realize that their contributions to the vitality of economies of host countries and the struggles that they face in Canada for example, are at odds with how many of these programs are marketed. Their descent into poverty is imminent and the added factors of racism and discrimination for many, have produced even more struggles for them to overcome.

Despite the lack of immigrant voice in its development, countries such as Australia and New Zealand have established markers of accomplishment to ensure the successful integration of immigrants. This include specific milestones that immigrants are expected to achieve to be considered successful (Kyeremeh, Arku, Mkandawire, Cleave and Yusuf 2019, 1). Canada can adopt these best practice models and identify and eliminate oppressive elements before implementation. Attacking dominant views that promote Canadians as the ideal and racialized immigrants in particular as inferior, are necessary for substantial changes to occur. The current practices in immigration and towards skilled immigrants in Canada, is a continuation of Canada's egregious settler colonial ways that must to be debunked and dismantled. CRT can be instrumental in dismantling many of these false beliefs and narratives and move us closer to a social justice agenda for skilled immigrants.

Regets (2007, 2) highlight the need for more understanding of the effect of highly skilled immigration on the global economy as the need for skilled immigrants increases. I

would argue that research needs to inform substantive policies and recommendations that are geared to improve the reality for skilled immigrants that can move them out of social and economic poverty. The shifting historical context of migration and immigration and its impact on skilled and racialized skilled immigrants are areas of interrogation from a CRT lens (Razack and Jeffery 2002, 259). Social work principles of self-determination and access to resources are being eroded and the core value of social justice, dignity and worth of the individual are being compromised. The current conditions of discrimination, unemployment, underemployment and increased risks of poverty that skilled immigrants face, require immediate attention in order to chart new that promote equity and social justice.

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