

Brenda Phiona Umwali

Research report

The intersection between misogyny and xenophobia: Immigrant women stay at the margin of their new societies.

“We had no choice but to pay them off or they would rape, beat, and kill us.” Dekka, who is part of the Oromo ethnic group from Ethiopia, talks about her experience as an African immigrant woman in Kenya¹.

Xenophobia is a intersectional issue with distinct dimensions pertaining to race and gender. The Oromo women that immigrated to Canada feel like their hearts were sawed into two, one part back home and the other in Canada. Yet both parts are broken.

In this review I will be talking about the experiences of Oromo women (the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia) who were lucky to survive the domestic violence coupled with misogyny and even luckier to survive xenophobic attacks and its injustices. I will also talk about the employment rates of foreign-born women in comparison to foreign-born men, native-born women, and native-born men. Furthermore, using data analyzed by the Community Initiatives for Visiting

¹ *View of the Resettlement Experiences of Oromo Women Who Entered Canada as Refugees*, <https://refuge.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/refuge/article/view/40652/36717>.

“Oromia.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 24 Aug. 2022, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oromia>.

Immigrants in Confinement I will also highlight sexual assault and harassment that immigrant women in detention centers face and how this problem has not been addressed.

Research questions:

1. Is xenophobia gendered?

Research aims:

1. Identify the convergence between misogyny and xenophobia
2. Inform the public about the multiple oppressions immigrant women face as a collective due to the interlocking forces of gender, migration, and race among others.

Background

- A history of xenophobia by George Makari. (History of the problem in question)

When did humans start thinking that it was irrational to fear strangers?

Xenophobia as a term was coined in the 19th century in Europe as a pathology to hate strangers growing around the notion that foreigners are subhuman².

Xenophobia which comes from the word xenophilia, meaning sympathy for the stranger, is the fear of strangers. In order to understand the magnitude of the struggles of intersectionality that

² Makari, George. *Of Fear and Strangers a History of Xenophobia*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2021.

black women and women of color face, we must understand the world in terms of intersectionality to avoid erasing the experience of women of color.

Methods

1. Secondary data analysis

Themes: The themes that will be recurring in this project are immigration, the body, patriarchy, race, feminism, sexuality, gender, intersection multiplicity and education.

Abstract

1. Normative expectations about gender may fuel xenophobic hate against women.
2. Employment and education of immigrant women's development.
3. Intersectional multiplicity (how multiple forms of oppression interact with one another in diverse complex ways)

The interlocking forces of racial, class, and gender oppression are ones we cannot ignore.

Kimberlé Crenshaw is renowned for shaping the concept of intersectionality as one that is supposed to bring attention to the issues that black women face because they don't fit society's

norm of “black” people and “women”³. This understanding brings attention to how different people face multiple forms of oppression and how these oppressions all have a middle ground.

Oromo women experience discrimination as women and as foreigners in Canada and coming from an unstable environment and landing in a more insecure place for them was not the most welcoming experience⁴. Even for some of the refugees that never lived in refugee camps.

For example, Deka, one of the six Oromo women interviewed by Biftu Yousuf and Nicole S. Berry for their research on ‘The Resettlement Experiences of Oromo Women Who Entered Canada as Refugees’, lived in Kenya before moving to Canada and recalled her experience in Kenya:

“We left [for] Nairobi to save our lives.... But even in Kenya, the situation was very bad. For female refugees particularly, the police would stop us and demand money from us. Because we don’t have a [refugee] status and we stayed there as refugees [seeking asylum] illegally, we had no choice but to pay them off or they would rape, beat, and kill us.” When Biftu Yousuf and Nicole S. Berry were carrying out this research, their intention was to understand the gender-based challenges women face during the process of immigration and resettlement. They discovered that the Oromo women were living in fear and this was what they were running away

³ “Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, More than Two Decades Later.” *Columbia Law School*, <https://www.law.columbia.edu/news/archive/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality-more-two-decades-later>.

⁴ *View of the Resettlement Experiences of Oromo Women Who Entered Canada as Refugees*, <https://refuge.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/refuge/article/view/40652/36717>.

from and looking for a better life⁵. This was particularly interesting because our culture is rooted in deep patriarchal traditions that still to this day influence our collective understanding of women's place in society, gender, sexuality, and the political, social and economic institutions put in place to safeguard this structure.

Yousuf and Berry continue to tell us how the refugees that lacked formal education, which was almost all of them, could not find a rewarding job. But this was not their only barrier, Oromo women that were mothers would usually stay home and take care of their children and the fact that they were refugees was not welcomed positively in the job market⁶.

Furthermore, even with the competitive job market, Oromo women were expected to get in the workforce as soon as possible. Rinas, a 22-year-old who spent one year in Canada says, "I [was told that I] needed to look for work because work will not come looking for me; and to look for work at various places and in the newspapers...that Canada is not a big deal so don't take it as if it is abigdeal. That Canada may be for me or it may not...and they told us that there are problems in Canada." This was particularly challenging for Rinas and other women going through what she was going through because it takes a lot more to adapt to an environment than just being physically present. On the same note of intersectionality, rich immigrant women who were privately funded had a different experience from immigrant women that were funded by the government and class plays a big role. Women that fell under this intersection were challenged living as immigrant women and being economically challenged as well.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ *View of the Resettlement Experiences of Oromo Women Who Entered Canada as Refugees*, <https://refuge.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/refuge/article/view/40652/36717>.

Therefore, including social economic class as another force that is problematic to the development of immigrant women is important to highlight. This is exactly why I situated my research in the intersectionality context, viewing immigrant women's experiences in the lenses of class, race, and gender.

Statistics and findings:

A bachelor's or higher degree is held by more than one in four immigrant women in the US (27.9%), compared to 30.0 percent of women who were born in the country. Immigrant women from India (71.8%), the Philippines (51.4%), and Korea (46.1%) are the most likely to have a bachelor's degree or higher among the ten countries that send the most female immigrants—Mexico, the Philippines, China, India, Vietnam, Korea, El Salvador, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Canada (IWPR 2015a). However, some immigrant women with college degrees discover that their credentials are not acknowledged in this nation and that they can only obtain low-skilled, low-paying positions⁷.

While a sizable portion of immigrant women hold bachelor's degrees, three out of ten (29.6%) have only completed high school. Women from Mexico and El Salvador are most likely to have less than a high school certificate among the ten largest sending nations (57.3 and 52.7 percent,

⁷ “The Impact of Immigrant Women on America's Labor Force.” *American Immigration Council*, 15 June 2017, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/impact-immigrant-women-americas-labor-force>.

respectively). The immigrants with the lowest rates of not having a high school diploma are women from Canada and the Philippines (8.6 and 9.4 percent)⁸.

Compared to American-born women, immigrant women are more likely to be poor (19.7 percent compared with 14.7 percent). Immigrant women from the Dominican Republic (30.3%), Mexico (30.0%), Cuba (22.6%), and El Salvador (20.8%) have the greatest rates of poverty among the ten major exporting nations. The lowest rates of poverty are among immigrant women from India (5.7%), the Philippines (6.9%), and Canada (11.1%)⁹.

Compared to women born in the United States, immigrants had a much lower likelihood of having health insurance (66.3 percent of immigrant women aged 18–64 compared with 84.6 percent of U.S.-born women of the same age range). A federal regulation that prohibits many immigrants from participating in means-tested benefit programs like Medicaid during their first five years of legal status is one of the many obstacles that newcomers must overcome in order to obtain basic health coverage (Broder and Blazer 2011; National Immigration Law Center 2014). 2 States may waive the five-year waiting period for children and expectant women who are lawfully residing in the United States in Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). As of January 2015, this option encompassed to some extent otherwise eligible immigrant children in 27 states and the District of Columbia and otherwise eligible pregnant women in 22 states and the District of Columbia (Kaiser Family Foundation 2015b)¹⁰.

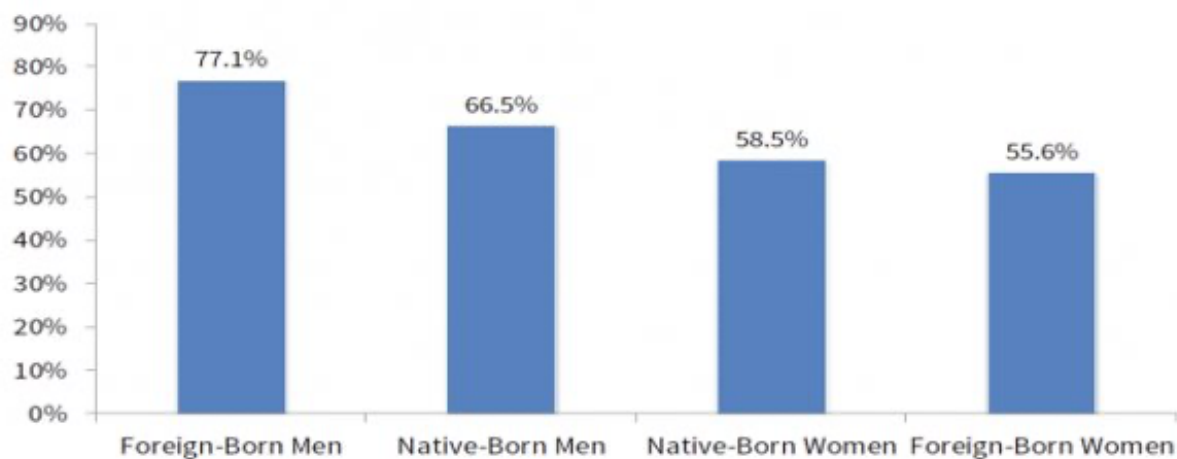
⁸ Ibid

⁹ “The Impact of Immigrant Women on America's Labor Force.” *American Immigration Council*, 15 June 2017, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/impact-immigrant-women-americas-labor-force>.

¹⁰ Ibid

Additionally, immigrants who are prohibited from receiving Medicaid for five years are allowed to get commercial insurance through the insurance exchanges and receive subsidies under the Affordable Care Act (Hasstedt 2013)¹¹.

Employment rate of foreign-born women compared foreign-born men, native-born men and native -born women¹².



Source: <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/impact-immigrant-women-americas-labor-force>

Immigrant women have a much lower likelihood to get jobs than immigrant men that are as qualified.

According to the chart above, 55.6 percent of foreign-born women are in the labor force compared to 77.1 percent of foreign-born men.

¹¹ "The Impact of Immigrant Women on America's Labor Force." *American Immigration Council*, 15 June 2017, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/impact-immigrant-women-americas-labor-force>.

¹² <https://statusofwomendata.org/immigrant-women/>

One explanation for these numbers is education access. A bachelor's or higher degree is held by more than one in four immigrant women in the US (27.9%) compared to 30.0 percent of women who were born in the country¹³.

Assumptions from the chart:

One of the interesting facts about the findings displayed on the chart above, is the increase in the labor force participation of foreign-born men (which is 77.1%) compared to native-born men who are at 66.5%. One of the assumptions for this could be that native-born men have job preferences because of the good education background guidance received that foreign-born men could not have access to. Therefore, foreign-born men tend to do any type of jobs ranging from the ones that require a lot of skills and higher education degrees to ones that do not.

It is interesting but not surprising that the percentage of foreign-born men, native-born men, and native-born women is higher than the percentage of foreign-born women because of the intersectionality between misogyny and xenophobia. Foreign-born women will face injustices because they are women and again because they are foreigners. This greatly affects the growth of foreign born women in the workforce.

Additionally, native-born men and women accumulate generational wealth and have family support because they are a place, they call home. Being at home comes with its advantages, therefore, this gives native-born men and women an advantage of having huge

¹³ "Immigrant Women." *Women in the States*, 15 Apr. 2015, <https://statusofwomendata.org/immigrant-women/>.

family support as well as generational wealth over foreign-born women in terms of building wealth. For example, foreign-born women would find it harder to get a loan to start up a business or invest in their education to prepare for the job market.

Sexual abuse and harassment

Immigrations and customs enforcement offices are put in place to protect immigrants and provide a smooth transition into their new societies. However, between the years of 2010-2016, the data analyzed by the Community Initiatives for Visiting Immigrants in Confinement shows that there have been 33,126 complaints about sexual abuse and only 570 investigations leaving about 32,556 unattended. “A lot of the girls there had problems like this. Most of them don’t even end up complaining or saying anything about it because they are scared of retaliation. Since my complaint, nothing has happened. It is like they want to keep me quiet.” Rossana Santos was put in confinement for 11 days after she filled a complaint about being sexually harassed by a corrections officer in immigrant detention¹⁴. Furthermore, what agency do immigrant women have over their bodies? Immigrant women are continuously dehumanized by authorities that were put in place to protect them. They are taking control over their bodies and has instilled some type of fear in these young girls and women that has been added on the badges they carry around as victims of sexual assault, as women and as immigrants.

Discussion:

¹⁴ “Sexual Assault.” *Freedom for Immigrants*, <https://www.freedomforimmigrants.org/sexual-assault>.

1. The findings of this research indicate that there are barriers to upward mobility for refugee women due to the intersections of country origin and gender.
2. As the concept of intersectionality plays a crucial role, we must understand that the social class the Oromo women held determined their experience as refugees.
3. Preparing the incoming refugees about the challenges they will face would be one way of making their resettlement better.

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