

Acceptance, adaptation and adoption: the key to colombian refugees in New Zealand overcoming barriers of belonging

Acceptación, Adaptación y Adopción: La clave para los Refugiados Colombianos en Nueva Zelanda Superando las Barreras de Pertenencia

Aceitação, adaptação e adoção: a chave para os refugiados colombianos na nova zelândia, ultrapassando as barreiras de pertença

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Alfredo José López Severiche

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0783-5521>

Alfredo José López Severiche is a PhD in social sciences and public policy. He also holds a bachelor's degree in computer science and a specialization in information technology. Alfredo holds a Master's degree in international communication and a master's degree in international development. alsLopez1@hotmail.com.

Abstract

Introduction: This article examines the barriers of integration that Colombian refugees confront in New Zealand, including culture shock, lack of English, unemployment, discrimination, relationship with others and issues of identity. It argues for a three-pronged framework of acceptance, adaptation and adoption in facilitating integration. Thirteen Colombian refugees resettled from Ecuador took part in this research, who came to New Zealand between 2007 and 2014. **Objective:** This research seeks to explore the barriers that impact the integration of Colombian refugees in New Zealand. Also, to fill this gap in the literature by providing new knowledge on the subject already described. **Methodology:** The qualitative methodological approach of this study is an ethnographic collection of oral stories. Oral history interviews, a focus group and personal diaries were used as data collection methods. **Results:** The findings of this study show that Colombian refugees face challenges that put at risk their integration into New Zealand's society, the main challenges faced by them are culture shock, lack of English, unemployment, discrimination, relationship with others and issues of identity. **Conclusion:** Despite the challenges already mentioned, the development of qualities such as acceptance, adaptation and adoption has contributed to overcoming these barriers and achieving their integration in New Zealand.

Keywords: Colombian refugees; Integration; Resettlement; Belonging.

Resumen

Introducción: Este artículo examina las barreras de integración que enfrentan los refugiados colombianos en Nueva Zelanda, incluido el choque cultural, la falta de inglés, el desempleo, la discriminación, la relación con los demás y los problemas de identidad. Aboga por un marco triple de aceptación, adaptación y adopción para facilitar la integración. En esta investigación participaron trece refugiados colombianos reasentados desde Ecuador, quienes llegaron a Nueva Zelanda entre 2007 y 2014. **Objetivo:** Esta investigación busca explorar las barreras que impactan la integración de los refugiados colombianos en Nueva Zelanda. Además, llenar el vacío en la literatura aportando nuevos conocimientos sobre el tema ya descrito. **Metodología:** El enfoque metodológico cualitativo de este estudio es una recopilación etnográfica de relatos orales. Se utilizaron entrevistas de historia oral, un grupo focal y diarios personales como métodos de recolección de datos. **Resultados:** Los hallazgos de este estudio muestran que los refugiados colombianos enfrentan desafíos que ponen en riesgo su integración en la sociedad neozelandesa, los principales desafíos que enfrentan son el choque cultural, falta de inglés, desempleo, discriminación, relación con los demás y problemas de identidad. **Conclusión:** A pesar de los desafíos ya mencionados, el desarrollo de cualidades como la aceptación, adaptación y adopción ha contribuido a superar estas barreras y lograr su integración en Nueva Zelanda.

Palabras clave: Refugiados Colombianos; Integración; Reasentamiento; Pertenencia.

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Resumo

Introdução: Este artigo examina os obstáculos à integração enfrentados pelos refugiados colombianos na Nova Zelândia, incluindo choque cultural, falta de inglês, desemprego, discriminação, relacionada com outros e questões de identidade. Defende um quadro de aceitação, adaptação e adoção em três vertentes para facilitar a integração. Esta investigação envolveu treze refugiados colombianos reinstalados do Equador que chegaram à Nova Zelândia entre 2007 e 2014. **Objetivo:** Esta investigação procura explorar as barreiras que têm impacto na integração dos refugiados colombianos na Nova Zelândia. Além disso, para preencher uma lacuna na literatura, contribuindo com novos conhecimentos sobre o tema já descrito. **Metodologia:** A abordagem metodológica qualitativa deste estudo é uma coleção etnográfica de histórias orais. Foram utilizadas entrevistas de história oral, um grupo focal e diários pessoais como métodos de recolha de dados. Resultados: As conclusões deste estudo mostram que os refugiados colombianos enfrentam desafios que comprometem a sua integração na sociedade da Nova Zelândia, sendo os principais desafios que enfrentam o choque cultural, a falta de inglês, o desemprego, a discriminação, a relação com os outros e questões de identidade. **Conclusão:** Apesar dos desafios acima mencionados, o desenvolvimento de qualidades como a aceitação, adaptação e adoção contribuíram para ultrapassar estas barreiras e alcançar a integração na Nova Zelândia.

Palavras-chave: Refugiados Colombianos; Integração; Reinstalação; Pertença.

INTRODUCTION

During the last 60 years, Colombia has had a continuous armed conflict between guerrilla groups and the national army (Bermudez, 2013; Carreño, 2012; Gárate, 2014; Giraldo Forero, 2005; Gottwald, 2004; Gottwald & Rodríguez, 2016; Guglielmelli, 2011). The guerrilla groups, drawing on Marxist and Leninist ideologies, seek to implement in Colombia a communist government that helps poor and marginalized people to overcome their extreme poverty (Cosoy, 2016; Jaramillo et al., 2004). The government of Colombia, on the other hand, is a democratic republic that seeks to promote neoliberalism, free-market capitalism, privatization and austerity. This armed conflict has resulted in the death of thousands of Colombians; thousands of others have been kidnapped and tortured (Jaramillo, 2008; López-López et al., 2013; Schussler, 2009; Shedlin et al., 2016).

In addition, almost eight million Colombians have been displaced from their lands because of the violence in the country, and almost half a million of them have been forced to flee to neighbouring countries in search of international protection (ACNUR, 2016; Paz in Motion, 2016; Reyes, 2013). The South American country of Ecuador, is the country where the majority of Colombians have fled in search of international protection (Gottwald, 2004; Jaramillo, 2008). It is estimated that since 2012, around 100,000 Colombians are in that country in refugee status (ACNUR, e Instituto de la Ciudad, 2014). The living conditions of these refugees in Ecuador are not the best; in fact, they face all kinds of discrimination, economic problems, relationship issues with other Colombians and identity problems, which makes integration very difficult. For this reason, UNHCR uses resettlement to a third country, as a durable solution for some of these Colombian refugees in Ecuador (López, 2018; Shedlin et al., 2016; UNHCR, 2011).

New Zealand, is one of the countries where more than 1000 Colombian refugees have been resettled from Ecuador. Once in New Zealand, Colombian refugees are resettled in Hamilton, Wellington, Nelson and Invercargill. In the community, Colombian refugees find that their socio-economic situation improves, compared to previous experiences in Ecuador and Colombia. They do, however, continue to face barriers that complicate their successful integration into the country and their sense of belonging (López, 2018).

RESULTS

Challenges faced by Colombian refugees in Ecuador and New Zealand that affect their sense of belonging

Culture shock

Culture shock has been one of the challenges that Colombian refugees encounter in both Ecuador and New Zealand. Culture shock is a psychological impact that foreigners face when they have to live in a culture totally different from theirs (Pedersen, 1995). Although Colombia and Ecuador have similar cultural aspects such as the Spanish language, food and music, it is not easy for Colombian refugees to quickly adapt to the Ecuadorian culture (López, 2018). Upon arriving in Ecuador, Colombian refugees find the country very different from their own. In fact, some Colombians think that Ecuador is inferior economically to Colombia, especially with its lower salaries. Therefore, the first impression of Colombian refugees towards Ecuador is not the best (Foley, 2012; López, 2018).

Ramona a 20-year-old (at the time of the interview), Colombian woman, who lived in Ecuador as a refu-



gee for five years. Upon arriving in Ecuador in 2006, she began experiencing the symptoms of culture shock:

My impressions were that it was a very strange country, because I did not know it and this was the first time I was there. Also, people's accent was very different and their culture. I did not really know where I was standing' (López, 2018, p. 85). She added: 'Ecuadorian culture is so dissimilar, also their accent notably differs from ours. In fact, some words that are commonly used in Colombia are offensive to them. So, this was a very complicated situation'.

After arriving in New Zealand in 2011, Ramona likewise experienced culture shock and fear due to uncertainty with respect to expectations in the new country:

We were also a bit scared because we were unsure of what expectations to hold about the new country. For example, the UNHCR had told us very nice things about the country, but in Ecuador told me that it was dangerous because we could get separate from family members. Then, speculations from my friends in Ecuador caused us to arrive very afraid to New Zealand ... language was the most difficult for me, same than food.

Usually, when Colombian refugees resettled from Ecuador arrive in New Zealand, they find New Zealand very beautiful, a country with amazing landscapes and kind and polite people. These Colombians enter the country with high expectations of employment, social security and above all, to live in peace. However, once settled in the community, they face the harsh reality of living in a foreign country. It is then that they discover that daily living in New Zealand is problematic because they have to struggle with culture shock, which often affects their mental health, mood and sense of belonging. Indeed, some Colombians have to visit a doctor and to receive treatment to overcome those health issues. This is reflected in the words of Sara, a 38-year-old Colombian refugee who resettled in New Zealand in 2012:

I miss my culture; I would like people here was more open-minded. That in the afternoons people sit in front of their houses and greet neighbours who pass along the street while children playing on the pathway. But here on the street where I live, I do not know the names of my neighbours, and when they pass in front of me, they pretend they do not see me and do not greet me (López, 2018, p. 110).

As shown above, there is no doubt that culture shock is a barrier that affects the sense of belonging of Colombian refugees in Ecuador and New Zealand. The cultural shock that Colombian refugees face in New Zealand, is similar to that experienced by other refugee groups in the country. Colombians are affected by the loneliness and coldness of people in New Zealand. Colombians are accustomed to listening to music at high volume, they like to be surrounded by many friends, they speak loudly, they are extroverted, too emotional and they show their feelings in public. While in New Zealand, these things are totally different, and this cultural change affects the mood of the Colombians in New Zealand.

Lack of English

Different studies show that lack of English is a big barrier for almost all refugees resettled in New Zealand (Department of Internal Affairs, 2013; Ho, et al., 2003; Hoffmann, 2016; Nash et al., 2004; Sánchez, 2016). For Colombians, their mother tongue is Spanish, so when they are resettled in New Zealand, they spend six weeks at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre learning basic English and general information about life in the new country. They also need interpreters to be able to communicate with the staff there. However,



the interpreters in the Refugee Resettlement Centre are available only occasionally and most of the time refugees lack an interpreter who can speak on their behalf, especially during the weekends.

Before travelling to New Zealand, they also receive basic information from the UNHCR in Ecuador about life in New Zealand. Such information, however, is too limited and does not include English language classes. For this reason, some Colombian refugees resettled in New Zealand, have expressed their dissatisfaction with the limited information and preparation, they received in Ecuador before travelling to New Zealand. A large number of these refugees, convey that they would have liked the UNHCR to have better prepared and informed them before arrival in New Zealand. For instance, Alekos, a 56-year-old Colombian refugee who arrived in 2011, says:

I thought it would be easy to find a job as soon as I arrived in the country, and that was my expectation. In Ecuador, I was not told the truth, about how hard it is to get employment here without knowing English. We should have received better preparation in Ecuador before coming here.

Once settled in their new communities, Colombian refugees in New Zealand begin to experience troubles directly related to a lack of English. For instance, Rebeca, a 50-year-old Colombian refugee, reckons that the lack of English has been the biggest challenge she has had to face during her life in New Zealand. For her, learning English has been extremely difficult. After studying English for seven years, her level of English is just elementary and this makes it difficult for her to hold a conversation with people in New Zealand. In addition, Rebecca has struggled to communicate with her case manager at Work and Income's office, as she has to be accompanied by an interpreter who can speak on her behalf. Likewise, when she receives letters from the government, she has to request support from an English speaker (her eldest daughter and son-in-law), who can read and translate the letters, so she can understand these.

Not being able to speak English correctly, makes Rebecca feel frustrated and depressed. This is because she understands that being able to speak English correctly is an important requirement to get a job and integrate into New Zealand society. In addition, although she feels herself to be a Kiwi and she loves New Zealand, not understanding English makes Rebecca feel sometimes like a foreigner and that she does not belong to the country. Rebecca affirms that learning English is too hard for her, and this is stopping her from learning the language.

Similarly, Alekos states that the lack of English was the biggest barrier to integrate in New Zealand. When he arrived in 2011, he realized that learning English was not easy for him. He began to develop an apathy for learning English, and it bothered him that people spoke to him in a language that he could not understand. Alekos felt angry to be in New Zealand and wished he could return to Ecuador, where he lived as a refugee in the company of his wife and children for more than 10 years. Yet Alekos, had come to New Zealand because his wife and children had asked him to accept the offer made by the New Zealand government, as they felt New Zealand offered the family the possibility of enjoying a better quality of life. That is why once in New Zealand, Alekos felt depressed:

I was so bored in this country that I was planning to return, not to Colombia but to Ecuador. Many times, I walked the streets crying with sadness because I wanted to go back to Ecuador, I was depressed in this country because it was not my culture, it was a very silent country, a country that felt very empty, yet I said to my wife that I wanted to work to raise money and return to Ecuador.



Mateo, a 26 years old Colombian refugee, says that the lack of English was a great barrier for him being able to get a job. The culture of the country also made him realise that things in New Zealand were totally different, including ignorance of how the socioeconomic system of New Zealand worked. Mateo says that the lack of English and not understanding how things worked, led him to economic and legal problems in the country. His loneliness also made Mateo feel like a stranger in the country, sad and depressed for almost five years. Eventually, Mateo managed to learn English and obtained a job in the boat making industry. Now that he is married to a New Zealander, and has two children, he speaks English and feels like a Kiwi and at home.

Unemployment

Before arriving in New Zealand, Colombian refugees had high expectations of employment. Chiefly, they imagined that once in the country, they could quickly get a job and that their lack of prowess in the English language would not be an impediment to achieving their goals. In fact, they believed that they could learn English while working. Then, once in the country, Colombian refugees discovered that things were not as they thought, and that getting a job in New Zealand is almost impossible without English language skills, qualifications and work experience in the country. This situation has created much frustration among the Colombian refugees.

Henry, for instance, is a 65-year-old refugee who arrived in New Zealand in 2008 eager to work in any available job. Over the years, however, Henry could not get a full paying job in the country, causing immense frustration:

I suffered disappointment because I did not get a job quickly, and things were not as I expected. It was a totally different culture. I had thought that here it would be easy to get a job as it happens in the United States, but it was not that easy here ... it was not easy.

For Henry, it was very disappointing that for more than seven years, he could not get a job in New Zealand, a situation that was diametrically opposite to his previous experience in the United States in 2015 when, a week after arrival, he got a well- paying job. The United States of America is a larger country than New Zealand; that country has many industries and it is easier to get a job over there (Nash et al., 2004).

As with Henry, the majority of Colombian refugees in New Zealand are unemployed. Many attribute their lack of advanced English language skills, as an excuse for employers not to hire refugees. Research conducted by the Ministry of Social Development (2008), shows that many refugees in New Zealand are not hired because they do not speak English with a Kiwi accent. Unemployment means that some Colombians disagree with New Zealand bringing more refugees to the country, as they reckon that New Zealand is not ready to integrate new people into working life. Henry, for example, says that New Zealand should

Firstly, integrate all unemployed refugees in the country into working life and then bring in other refugees (López, 2018).

Notably, for Colombian refugees, it is very disappointing to be unemployed and have to live with the social welfare provided by the government, as they are people accustomed to working hard and earning a living. In fact, Colombia and Ecuador have a fiscal policy that excludes social assistance from the government, unlike New Zealand's social development system. As such, they have had experience of earning an income and living independent of the government's support, through informal trades, such as vendors and selling



assorted goods on the streets, and on public transport. These types of jobs are not allowed in New Zealand, so these refugees have been forced to remain living under government welfare. Still, they dream of being able to become self-sufficient, and earn their own money.

In view of the above, the Colombian refugees state that before coming to New Zealand, neither the UNHCR nor the New Zealand government, informed them that upon arriving in the country, they would have to face unemployment for several years. In this sense, Colombian refugees in New Zealand feel that they were not told the full story of how things really are in New Zealand, and they feel misled. They would have preferred that before agreeing to come to the country, they would have been informed of the truth about the lack of employment faced by refugees in New Zealand.

Discrimination

Much research has been conducted on discrimination faced by refugees in New Zealand (Beaglehole, 1988; Butcher et al., 2006; Department of Labour, 2004; Treen, 2013; Ministry of Social Development, 2008; López, 2018; Revell, 2012). Colombian refugees, are among those who have been victims of discrimination in New Zealand. For example, Sara, the 38-year-old Colombian refugee already described, says that she has been discriminated against by several people because she is a refugee. According to Sara, a New Zealand man told her that since she was a refugee, she would not have the chance to excel in the country, and that she was doomed to failure without the option of becoming a successful person. According to this man, refugees bring with them many traumas, and mental problems that prevent them from achieving social, and professional success in the country.

These words negatively affected Sara's mood, but she decided not to internalise these remarks. Through this experience, however, Sara was able to discover that discrimination against refugees in New Zealand is a reality that she cannot ignore. In addition, Sara affirms that many people in New Zealand think that refugees are uneducated, less intelligent, inferior, and an economic burden for the country.

Likewise, Magdalena, a 22-year-old refugee woman, has had to face racial discrimination at school in New Zealand. She states that her schoolmates used to call her monkey, and nigger. In view of this, she decided to speak with the principal of the school, but this only made the situation bearable for a while, since her schoolmates continued to hurl derogatory terms at her. This situation made Magdalena feel out of place and she constantly thought that she did not belong to New Zealand. A similar experience was faced by Sara's son. On one occasion this young high school student, and his mother were approached by the school career advisor who told them:

Mrs Sara, your son told me that when he finished school, he wanted to go to university and study veterinary medicine, but I would like to advise him to think about studying something easier. I say this because you both are born in the Third World. So, your son is a Third World citizen. Thus, he does not have the intellectual abilities to study veterinary medicine, much less to finish that career successfully. Veterinary is a career for people who are born here in New Zealand or in any country of the First World, but your child has no chance to become a veterinarian here. So, I ask you to desist from the idea of studying veterinary medicine or any other university career. Your son should better study a trade such as carpentry, plumber or builder's certificate. I mean a very short course.

The stories of Magdalena, Sara and other refugees show that discrimination faced by refugees in New



Zealand emerges from various quarters, including from people with positions of authority such as employers, public officials, police officers, teachers and lecturers. For example, in the case of the career advisor of the school where Sara's son was studying, it can be seen that this man did not accept the young student as part of the New Zealand society but rather as part of the third world. However, at the moment (2019), Sara's son is finishing his Bachelor of Engineering Technology in Mechanical Engineering, at the Auckland University of Technology.

If the same act of discrimination had come from a neighbour of Sara's, it would not have caused the same impact on her son, as when emerging from someone in a respected position such as career advisor. Similarly, Sara recalls that during a law class, the lecturer said that it was a pity that slavery no longer exists because she would like to have a black slave to do everything she wanted. For this reason, there is no doubt that these discriminatory acts could seriously affect the sense of belonging of these refugees in New Zealand.

Colombian refugees, have not only faced discrimination in New Zealand but have also experienced many discriminatory acts in Ecuador, a country of peace and tranquillity, to where they have escaped from the Colombian war in search of protection. Refugees are among three types of Colombians who tend to go to Ecuador: tourists; the protagonists of the Colombian armed conflict; and the civilian victims of this conflict (asylum seekers and refugees). In other words, among these three groups, are people who are dedicated to committing criminal acts in Ecuador. Colombians are therefore accused of disturbing the peace of Ecuador by committing all kinds of crimes and murders. This, in turn, has created fear among Ecuadorians towards Colombians who are seen as dangerous, murderers, drug traffickers and criminals.

This is the main reason why Colombians are discriminated against in Ecuador. In fact, Arturo, a 60-year-old Colombian refugee living in New Zealand, remembers that when he lived in Ecuador he was discriminated against because he was Colombian. On one occasion, an Ecuadorian told Arturo that he hated Colombians because a Colombian had murdered his son. It is common that in Ecuador Colombians face various types of discrimination such as verbal attacks, not being hired to perform certain jobs, and some shopkeepers refuse to sell their products to Colombians. When I lived in Ecuador as a refugee, I experienced these types of discrimination. The story of Claudia, a 42-year-old refugee who now lives in New Zealand, illustrates this:

So when I got Ecuador, I started to feel cold in my heart and to experience loneliness. People also looked at me very strange, as if I had committed a crime or something like that. Many times, I tried to socialise with the Ecuadorians, but once they heard my Colombian accent, they paid no attention and refused to talk to me. Even many times in the stores, they did not want to sell me, the grocer simply told me that the product I was requesting was out of stock, so I would tell the grocer that the product was there, in front of my eyes and that therefore, there was a product in stock. But the shopkeeper finally refused to sell me any goods because I was Colombian.

The majority of Colombian refugees resettled in New Zealand, state that when they lived in Ecuador, they were discriminated against because they were Colombians. When the Ecuadorians heard their Colombian accent, they discriminated against them and referred to them in coarse terms such as drug traffickers, thieves, murderers, criminals, prostitutes, among others. Certainly, discrimination made it hard for Colombians to find employment in Ecuador. In fact, according to the participants some job classified advertisements used to state: 'employees are needed, but non-Colombians please. Under those circumstances, the situation of Colombian refugees in Ecuador is not the best. For this reason, more than 1,000 Colombian refugees have been resettled in New Zealand to enjoy better living conditions, and although it is true that



their socio-economic conditions have improved a lot in New Zealand, they are still victims of social, racial and labour discrimination (López, 2018; Sánchez, 2016).

Relationship with others

Despite difficulties with the English language, this has not been a real barrier for some Colombians to establish friendships or romantic relationships in New Zealand. Arturo, for instance, states his English is very basic but this has not been an impediment for making friends in the country. Indeed, Arturo claims to have had 15 girlfriends during five years living in the country:

Although I speak English at 30%, I do not think my language deficiency is an obstacle in the country. I attend all my matters without help of an interpreter, I go to the doctor, to WINZ, and I go to all my appointments. In fact, I have been able to have 15 girlfriends in this country. Of course, at first, I did not understand much when my girlfriends sent me a text message, so I had to look at a dictionary, so I could understand what they were saying, but this has helped me learn more English and with these very limited English that I have, I handle every day in the country.

It is evident that in the case of Arturo, the lack of advanced English language skills has not been an impediment to socialising with people in the country. On the other hand, when asked about his relationship with other Colombian refugees, Arturo replied that he does not have many Colombian friends, and that he does not get along very well with the Colombian community. According to Arturo, the reason for not socializing a lot with Colombians is that they are very gossipy, intrusive and envious. For this reason, according to Arturo, he prefers to greet them from a distance only and not to be close with them.

Other Colombian refugees in New Zealand recount that they initially enjoyed a good relationship with other Colombians, but they no longer have as much friendship among themselves as before. Sara states that the reason for this distancing could be due to personality and behaviour problems that have arisen among the members of the Colombian community. But it is perhaps also due to what Arturo calls an envious and gossipy community. As has been noted, Colombian refugees in New Zealand are not very close to each other and many of them have only a few Colombian friends. Others prefer to have friends with other nationalities while there are also those who are isolated in their homes without socializing with anyone. These refugees have turned their place into a branch of Colombia, where they speak Spanish, watch Colombian television programs on the Internet, eat Colombian meals and live as if they were in Colombia.

This makes them totally disconnected from New Zealand society, ignoring the current affairs of the country where they live. This is the case for Ramona, the 20-year-old refugee girl already mentioned. She claims she has not adapted because she does not socialize with others and prefers not to spend time learning about the news of the country:

I feel that I am not totally adapted to the culture of this country. I also do not understand certain laws here. Law is very different than Colombia and Ecuador. Also, as I look at the internet a lot, I do not have much time to watch the country's news on television. So, I am not very aware of what is happening in New Zealand and this makes me feel that I am not fully adapted to the country. Nor do I understand how the country's system works.

Such self-imposed isolation is puzzling as these refugees claim that in Colombia, they socialised a lot



with friends and relatives. It seems then that they do not socialize much with each other elsewhere because of circumstances in Ecuador and New Zealand. The key explanation for such distancing may be that Colombians prefer to avoid socializing with compatriots who were combatants of the Colombian armed conflict, some of whom may be among the Colombian refugee cohort. Some may have also committed all kinds of human rights violations against the civilian population in Colombia. The problem is that, among a group of refugees, nobody knows who in that group was a participant in the Colombian war, and that is why some prefer to avoid contact with everyone. Perhaps this attitude, adopted by many Colombian refugees in New Zealand, is a form of protection they use to feel safe.

However, it is also true that the lack of friends in the country is a barrier that affects their sense of belonging.

Issues of identity

According to Stuart Hall (1993), “cultural identity is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time history and culture” (p. 225). This is the case for Colombian refugees in New Zealand as some of them have adopted the Kiwi identity as their own while still maintaining a sense of being Colombian. Henry, for example, says that he feels both Colombian and Kiwi; he states that normally when he is in New Zealand, he identifies himself mainly as a Colombian, but when he has been in the United States and in Colombia, he identifies himself as a Kiwi.

In addition, Henry says that he is proud of being a New Zealand citizen, and that it hurts him to see how in New Zealand there are people who do not take care of the environment and throw papers and trash on the streets. He says that New Zealand is a very nice country and people have to try to keep it clean and beautiful. From the words of Henry, we may notice an attachment for New Zealand and for its environmental well-being. This could then confirm that in the case of Henry it is evident that he has adopted a hybrid identity and that of course, he has been able to overcome the aforementioned barriers that may endanger the sense of belonging. Henry recognizes that New Zealand is not a perfect country, but he still feels affection for it and feels part of it (López, 2018).

Other Colombian refugees in New Zealand share the same feeling as Henry, as they have also adopted the Kiwi identity and feel part of the country. They recognize that they are facing certain difficulties but these issues do not prevent them from developing and growing love for New Zealand every day. In addition, they feel very grateful for all the good things that New Zealand has done for them. For instance, they greatly appreciate the fact that New Zealand’s government paid the air tickets to bring them to the country, because this does not happen with other resettlement countries.

For example, the Government of Canada, lends money for air tickets and medical examinations to the refugees, who will be resettled there and the refugees must pay this money back to the Canadian government after settling there (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2014). Other Colombian refugees also feel love for Ecuador because this country opened its doors to them when they fled from Colombia, and gave them the opportunity to be recognized as refugees. Even some of them have a sense of Ecuadorian identity. They also express love for their country of origin, Colombia.



On the other hand, not all Colombian refugees feel a sense of New Zealand identity. This is the case of Marina, a 50-year-old Colombian refugee who arrived in New Zealand in 2012. She says the following about New Zealand:

This is a country that does not give one the opportunity to progress, here they want to have one at the lowest level, here they bring one deceived, one here has no future really, the future of one here is to be exploited by the system until one can no longer give more. And then when one cannot give more, they are told to take medication until one dies. This is the life I see in this country (López, 2018, p. 129).

Similarly, Mariana says she does not feel happy in New Zealand and that she would buy a ticket to return to Colombia if she had the financial resources. It is evident then that Mariana has not been able to overcome the barriers that affect the sense of belonging. For that reason, she only feels Colombian and says that she is only passing through New Zealand. She also says that she does not feel love for New Zealand and its culture.

OBJECTIVES

This research seeks to explore the barriers that impact the integration of Colombian refugees in New Zealand. The review of the literature has identified a huge gap in studies of Colombian refugees in New Zealand. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap in the literature by providing new knowledge on the subject. This is the first study conducted in

New Zealand about Colombian refugees and their resettlement experiences. Thus, this research shows ways on how to improve the integration of refugees in New Zealand.

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative methodological approach of this study is an ethnographic collection of oral stories. In this study, 13 oral history interviews were conducted with Colombian refugees. This research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee (UREC) of Unitec Institute of Technology New Zealand on 13 June 2017. Also, a focus group with four participants was used. A third data collection method employed in this research were personal diaries written by the participants. The participants shared their resettlement stories in Spanish, their mother tongue, and later these stories were translated into English. Thematic analysis was used after data collection.

CONCLUSION

Acceptance, adaptation and adoption may overcome barriers of belonging

As previously described, culture shock, lack of English, unemployment, discrimination, and lack of friends are barriers that threaten the sense of belonging of Colombian refugees in New Zealand (López, 2018). Nevertheless, the development of qualities such as acceptance, adaptation and adoption can contribute to overcoming these barriers (UNHCR, 2011). It is understandable that refugees have to flee their countries of origin for fear of losing their lives in the armed conflicts their countries face. Specifically, they do not choose to live in a foreign country, but rather they are forced to do so (López, 2018; UNHCR, 2011).

Under those circumstances, it is normal that some refugees do not feel happy in the country of refuge



and feel the desire of returning to their countries of origin (López, 2018; Shedlin et al., 2016; UNHCR, 2011). However, since for many of them it is not feasible or recommended to return to their homelands, it is advisable that they remain in the country of asylum and resettlement (UNHCR, 2011). When it is analysed that the best option is to stay abroad, the refugee could begin to resign himself/herself and think that they should strive to rebuild his life in the country that has received them hospitably (López, 2018; Shedlin et al., 2016; UNHCR, 2011). The resignation to this inescapable fact then leads the refugee to the acceptance of living in that country (López, 2018).

Over time, the person comes to feel love for the country that welcomed them, and in turn, they accept this country as their own (López, 2018; Shedlin et al., 2016; UNHCR, 2011). This is precisely what Henry, Sara, Rebeca, Mateo and other Colombian refugees have done in order to accept New Zealand as their home. Others like Mariana refuse to accept the reality that New Zealand is their current home. She continues to dream about living in Colombia, but if she resigned herself to rebuilding her life in New Zealand, she perhaps may accept New Zealand as her home. Given these points, acceptance of their new resettlement country is one of the key ways to achieve a sense of belonging (López, 2018; Shedlin et al., 2016; UNHCR, 2011).

After a refugee chooses to adapt to New Zealand it helps them accept the country as their home. Obviously, this takes time and some take more time than others (López, 2018; Shedlin et al., 2016; UNHCR, 2011). Adapting means that the person modifies their way of thinking and acting in order to be able to adapt, adjust and fit into the local society (López, 2018). In other words, the person becomes accustomed to the local culture, routine and general aspects that happen in the country. The case of Arturo illustrates this point very well. Although his English is very elementary, Arturo has adjusted and accommodated to the New Zealand culture to the point that he has had 15 girlfriends in the country.

Therefore, it is not strange that he claims to feel totally adapted to the culture of the country. Also, Rebeca states that not knowing English fluently is not an obstacle for having Kiwi friends. Thus, she enjoys the friendship of some Kiwis and has adapted to enjoy leisure time with these friends. As a result, Rebecca says: 'I feel from here, but I do not say that I am from this country when they ask me where I am from, I say that I am Colombian, but I also feel like a Kiwi.'

It is evident that in the case of Arturo, Rebeca and other Colombian refugees, adaptation to the New Zealand system has almost automatically led them to the third step, which is adoption of their new country (López, 2018; Shedlin et al., 2016; UNHCR, 2011). For this reason, they have adopted New Zealand as their own country, so they feel and affirm it. That is why it can be argued that acceptance, adaptation and adoption are the key for the Colombian refugees in New Zealand to overcome the barriers of belonging (López, 2018; Shedlin et al., 2016; UNHCR, 2011).



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