

UNIVERSIDAD DE SALAMANCA
FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA
DEPARTAMENTO DE FILOLOGÍA INGLESA



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CAMPUS DE EXCELENCIA INTERNACIONAL

TESIS DOCTORAL

**FRAMING THE REFUGEE EXPERIENCE: A STUDY ON
THE REPRESENTATION OF RESILIENCE IN
CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN REFUGEE NARRATIVES**

Sara Casco Solís

Directora: Ana María Fraile Marcos

SALAMANCA

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Tesis Doctoral para optar al título de Doctor presentada por
Sara Casco Solís bajo la dirección de la Dra. Ana María Fraile Marcos

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines different types of resilience in three contemporary Canadian refugee narratives: Lawrence Hill's *The Illegal* (2015), Sharon Bala's *The Boat People* (2018) and Madeleine Thien's *Dogs at the Perimeter* (2011). More specifically, it aims to outline the main factors involved in the resilience-building process of the forcibly displaced as well as the principal elements and literary techniques used by Canadian authors to represent different modes of resilience in their narratives. Moreover, this study explores the capacity of refugees to subvert the hegemonic discourse that victimizes and relegates them to the margins of society. It also interrogates the current use of resilience in neoliberal discourses as a tool to subtly exert power over the most vulnerable. In doing so, this project attempts to underscore the potential of the aesthetic in the process of reconsidering and reorienting hegemonic Western notions of resilience. My argument is that these narratives make a case for the potential of refugee fiction to expose, interrogate and subvert the paradoxes and frictions underlying the concept of resilience in the context of forced migration. Thus, by reading refugee fiction through the lens of resilience thinking, the present study attempts to prove the political potential of refugee narratives as tools for enhancing social and cultural transformation. Likewise, this study argues in favor of the humanitarian agency that contemporary Canadian refugee fiction may entail in an age of instability and insecurity.

Chapter One provides a socio-historical contextualization of the refugee regime that addresses the social and political paradigms that define refugees as well as the ambiguities and structural incongruences of the international refugee regime. It also offers a brief contextualization of Canadian refugee policies, thus highlighting the paradoxical position of a country that prides itself on hospitality and humanitarian tradition, but whose immigration policies have been constrained by state policies. Chapter Two establishes

the theoretical framework that will be used for the analysis of the three Canadian refugee narratives that comprise this dissertation. It offers a preliminary sketch of the main theories that constitute the two strands of resilience thinking, around which this research is organized. Chapter Three analyzes Lawrence Hill's *The Illegal* through the lens of psycho-social resilience in order to explore the main individual and social factors involved in the resilience-building process developed by different characters. Chapter Four contests the alignment between the notions of resilience and neoliberalism in Sharon Bala's *The Boat People*. This chapter assesses the ways in which resilience thinking permeates security responses to unprecedented refugee crises and problematizes the interconnected notions of resilience, optimism and happiness. Chapter Five ponders the role of memory and the past in the resilience-building process of the forcibly displaced in Madeleine Thien's *Dogs at the Perimeter*. It probes into the role of trauma in refugee narratives and elaborates on the inextricable interrelation between the notions of resilience and trauma. The conclusion draws together the main results of the above-mentioned chapters, attesting to the dynamic nature of resilience as a social process in which individuals interact with the social and ecological systems surrounding them in order to adapt, survive, renew and thrive in the face of adversity.

RESUMEN

Este estudio examina diferentes tipos de resiliencia y su representación en tres narrativas canadienses contemporáneas sobre refugiados. Más concretamente, esta tesis doctoral pretende señalar los principales factores que intervienen en el proceso de construcción de la resiliencia de los sujetos obligados a huir de su país de origen, así como los principales elementos y recursos literarios utilizados por los autores canadienses para representar diferentes tipos de resiliencia en sus obras. Para ello, se analizan tres novelas canadienses sobre refugiados que han recibido una atención crítica reducida: *The Illegal* (2015) de Lawrence Hill, *The Boat People* (2018) de Sharon Bala y *Dogs at the Perimeter* (2011) de Madeleine Thien. A través del estudio de estas obras, se examina la capacidad de los refugiados para subvertir los discursos hegemónicos que los victimizan y relegan a los márgenes de la sociedad. Además, se interroga el uso actual de la resiliencia dentro de las políticas neoliberales como herramienta para controlar sutilmente a los más vulnerables.

Para ofrecer un análisis más detallado, se establece un diálogo entre las premisas de la teoría de la resiliencia y otros paradigmas sociales y teóricos, como los estudios que abordan las nociones de vulnerabilidad, trauma, hospitalidad, seguridad nacional, justicia social y los estudios humanitarios. El estudio de estas novelas a través de esta aproximación interdisciplinar nos permite desvelar las incongruencias que subyacen al concepto de resiliencia en la actualidad. Además, este estudio intenta demostrar el potencial de las narrativas de refugiados como herramienta para conseguir una transformación social y cultural, así como la agencia humanitaria que la ficción canadiense contemporánea sobre refugiados puede suponer en una época de cambios, inestabilidad e inseguridad.

El primer capítulo ofrece una contextualización socio-histórica del régimen de refugiados y aborda los paradigmas sociales y políticos que definen al refugiado, así como

las asimetrías e incongruencias estructurales del régimen internacional de refugiados. También se ofrece una breve contextualización de las políticas de refugiados en Canadá, destacando así la paradójica posición de un país que se enorgullece de su tradición humanitaria, pero cuyas políticas de inmigración se han visto limitadas por las políticas estatales. El segundo capítulo aborda los estudios críticos que se utilizarán para el análisis de las narrativas canadienses sobre refugiados que componen este estudio. En este capítulo se proporciona una revisión de las principales teorías que constituyen las dos vertientes del pensamiento de la resiliencia en torno a las que se organiza este estudio.

El tercer capítulo analiza la novela de Lawrence Hill, *The Illegal*, a través del prisma de la resiliencia psico-social y explora los principales factores individuales y sociales que intervienen en el proceso de construcción de la resiliencia desarrollado por diferentes personajes de la novela. El cuarto capítulo cuestiona la relación entre el discurso de la resiliencia y la ideología neoliberal, mediante el análisis de *The Boat People* de Sharon Bala. Este capítulo evalúa la noción de resiliencia y su uso dentro de las políticas de seguridad, preparación y respuesta ante una crisis de refugiados y, por consiguiente, problematiza la interconexión entre las nociones de resiliencia, optimismo y felicidad. En el quinto capítulo, se reflexiona sobre el papel de la memoria y el pasado en el proceso de desarrollo de la resiliencia en los refugiados, a través del análisis de *Dogs at the Perimeter* de Madeleine Thien. Se investiga el papel del trauma en los relatos de refugiados y se ahonda en el estudio de la relación intrínseca entre los conceptos de trauma y resiliencia. Finalmente, la conclusión de la presente tesis doctoral reúne los principales resultados de los capítulos previamente mencionados y subraya la naturaleza dinámica de la resiliencia como proceso social en el que los individuos interactúan con los sistemas sociales y ecológicos que los rodean, con el fin de adaptarse, sobrevivir y prosperar ante la adversidad.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1951 Convention	1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees
1967 Protocol	1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees
HCR	High Commissioner for Refugees
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNRRA	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency
IRO	International Refugee Organization
IRPA	Immigration and Refugee Protection Act
OAU	Organization of African Unity

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Literature changes the world of readers and writers, but literature does not change the world until people get out of their chairs, go out in the world, and do something to transform the conditions of which the literature speaks.

—Viet Thanh Nguyen, *The Displaced: Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives*

INTRODUCTION

Art that invites us to bear witness to injustice goes beyond moving us to identify with and help a specific individual, and prepares us to take responsibility for preventing future occurrences.

—Anne E. Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*

July 2021 saw the seventieth anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention, a historic event that commemorated the establishment of the human rights of the forcibly displaced and that reminded the world of the necessity to continue working together on the problem of forced migration. Months later, in February 2022, the world was dismayed by the large number of Ukrainian refugees forced to cross borders into European countries seeking refuge and protection from the Russian invasion. Faces of despair, fear and uncertainty touched many people deeply around the globe, prompting them into action to try to help resolve this new humanitarian crisis, while shunning the idea of borders separating countries, and ideologies, cultures and religions dividing the world. Resulting from overlapping conflicts in the world that cause millions of displaced and refugeeed people, hospitality appears as a key narrative permeating the global perception of reality at this time in history. It seems that, especially in Europe, the 2022 refugee crisis has brought the problem of forced displacement into sharp relief, resulting in the reconsideration of our moral obligations and responsibilities towards the forcibly displaced.

While commendable, the exceptional humanitarian response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis in the West also underlines the unequal treatment and the insensitivity shown to many other refugees, especially those from the Middle East or Africa, who are often defined in terms of illegality and criminality, considered a threat to the host country and excluded from the common realm. This paradigm condemns many refugees to an invisible form of life, barring them from society. The title of this project, *Framing the Refugee Experience*, draws attention to this challenging political scenario that constrains refugees and asylum seekers in our contemporary world. Although this study attempts to define and represent the refugee experience, it is important to clarify, however, the value attached to the term *framing* within the framework of refugee narratives. Besides entailing the idea of shaping and constructing, the term *framing* also implies the act of “contriv[ing] the evidence against (an innocent person) so that a verdict of guilty is assured” and “devis[ing] (something, such as a criminal charge) falsely” (“Frame,” *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*).

Since refugees are considered a direct threat to national security, their narratives are often misjudged or even manipulated for political purposes. In turn, they are subject to arbitrary distinctions even before arriving in a new country because, as Sara Ahmed contends, “they are read as the cause of an injury to the national body” (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 47). The persistence of a political rhetoric of fear transforming refugees into a threat to the nation and its citizens only brings about anxieties, indifference and rejection towards refugees and asylum seekers. In this context, turning our gaze away from the problem of the stranger *Other* only aggravates the situation. Rather, individuals living in first-world countries must seek occasions, as Zygmunt Bauman eloquently states, “to come into a close and increasingly intimate contact with them—hopefully

resulting in a fusion of horizons, instead of their induced and contrived, yet self-exacerbating, *fission*” (*Strangers at Our Door* 18; emphasis in original).

In this context, Canada emerges as one of the major refugee resettlement countries in the world, basing its sense of national identity on a metanarrative that privileges the humanitarian ethos of compassion for those who must flee their places of origin to keep alive. The country was awarded the Nansen Medal in 1986 for its continued support and protection of displaced people throughout history. Generations of refugees hailing from different parts of the world, especially from Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America, have benefited from the support, asylum and protection offered by Canada. Nonetheless, “Canada’s humanitarianism relies on policies of sovereign exception, which ‘can be deployed to include as well as to exclude’” (Fraile-Marcos, “The Refugee” 106) and Canadian refugee policy also contains ambiguities and structural incongruences that are ethically questionable.

In the midst of global challenges and continuous risks, the discourse of resilience has acquired a new resonance, becoming popular in the face of risks for human and ecological systems. The present work adopts the lens of resilience-thinking to look at Canadian narratives that feature refugees and asylum seekers and engage in significant ways in creating a consciousness of the humanitarian obligations and responsibilities of both nation states and their citizens toward asylum seekers. In this context, resilience emerges as a double-edged sword: on the one hand, a positive and desirable response for refugees to deal with the obstacles they encounter, while, on the other, a manipulative strategy used by nation-states to strengthen national security in the face of refugee arrivals. This reveals the ambivalent and versatile nature of a concept that may be unethically appropriated or manipulated, and whose connotations and nuances are brought to light throughout this dissertation.

In order to offer a deep understanding of the concept, the present work tackles the study of resilience according to the twofold epistemological approaches advanced by Marc Welsh: psycho-social resilience and social-ecological resilience. While the first approach is rooted in psychological disciplines that place the emphasis on the individual capacity of human beings to adapt and thrive in the aftermath of acute stress, trauma and adversity, the second approach refers to the adaptive capacities of interconnected and interdependent social and ecological systems. These two main strands of resilience thinking are undoubtedly convergent, since resilience should be conceived as a dynamic and social process in which individuals interact with the social and ecological systems that surround them.

In neoliberal contexts, resilience-thinking has become a form of governance that, appealing to a “new ethics of responsibility,” encourages individuals to adapt and cope with dangers and risks that cannot be solved by individuals themselves (Evans and Reid, *Resilient Life* 6). Such a neoliberal take on resilience has recently been used as a strategy of emergency to deal with unprecedented refugee crises. Critical scholars such as Jonathan Joseph, Philippe Bourbeau, Brad Evans and Julian Reid, to mention but a few, have questioned this use of resilience as a security response to mass migration. For them, the discourse of resilience has been strategically incorporated as a mechanism of control and surveillance that marginalizes those who apparently pose a threat to national order in order to maintain the status quo. Seen in this light, resilience becomes a national value that justifies particular forms of governance that keep vulnerable individuals, in this particular case refugees, under continued subjugation.

In keeping with this understanding, Sarah Bracke introduces the concept of *subaltern resilience* in order to explain the position of those whose resilience is fetishized and exploited by neoliberal policies. In her own words, “the resilience of the wretched of

the earth is arguably fetishized by the economic and political institutions that bear great responsibility for the contemporary conditions of precarity that are (designed to be) met with resilience” (“Bouncing Back” 60). In this way, refugees are encouraged or even convinced of the necessity of becoming resilient; they are required to adapt to their challenging living conditions as the only solution to achieve prosperity and happiness in a new country. Resilience therefore becomes a prerequisite to wellbeing, happiness, prosperity and acceptance; a social ideal that turns out to be what Lauren Berlant calls “cruel optimism” (24). In other words, resilience, in the context of forced migration may function as a dangerous promise that shuts down alternative practices to overcome and optimize the conditions threatening refugees’ survival.

The hegemonic use of resilience as a strategy of emergency preparedness undoubtedly promotes a socially stratified system that leaves no space for social transformation. This skeptical orientation of the term has given rise to substantial critiques that question neoliberal uses of resilience and its consequences on vulnerable subjects in our contemporary world. Despite the value of this critique, the present study attempts to demonstrate the importance of integrating different nuances and connotations of the term, since resilience, as Susie O’Brien notes, is “something that we cannot not want” (qtd. in Fraile-Marcos, “Introduction” 17). It should not be understood in binary terms as either a positive mechanism developed by individuals to cope, adapt and thrive under adversity, or as a negative and conservative response to promote social differences and injustices. Rather, resilience must be considered a dynamic process that engages with the social, cultural and political contexts in which it is developed.

This project draws on resilience theory and its different approaches in order to examine cultural and literary representations of resilience in contemporary Canadian refugee fiction. The working hypothesis underlying this project is that cultural and literary

texts are potential tools in the process of expanding the resilience paradigm towards a dynamic process that is deeply influenced by both individual and contextual factors. Rather than intending to widen the critical scope, this study applies the analytical approach of resilience to the topic of forced displacement and its representation in Canadian literature. The premises of resilience theory are put in dialogue with other major social and theoretical paradigms, including vulnerability, trauma, hospitality, national security, social justice and humanitarian studies, thus providing the present study with an interdisciplinary framework. By reading refugee fiction through this critical lens, this dissertation attempts to prove the political potential of refugee narratives as tools for enhancing social and cultural transformation and the humanitarian agency that contemporary Canadian refugee fiction may entail in an age of instability and insecurity. Ultimately, this study attempts to further expand on the existing body of scholarship on resilience in the field of literary studies, where this notion has not yet received sufficient attention.

Critical close reading and narratology are the principal methods of enquiry used to examine and interrogate different modes of resilience and its literary representation in three twenty-first-century Canadian refugee narratives: *The Illegal* (2015), *The Boat People* (2018) and *Dogs at the Perimeter* (2011), written by Lawrence Hill, Sharon Bala and Madeleine Thien, respectively. In their works of fiction, these three contemporary Canadian authors bring to the fore the ethical, political and social reality of the forcibly displaced. It is worth highlighting that Hill, Bala and Thien are not refugees; however, they share a common commitment to give a voice to this marginalized group of people and to cultivate a nuanced and critical understanding of the experiences of the real-life refugees. In addition, their family backgrounds bring them closer to the experience of the

diaspora and underscore their willingness (and necessity) to foster a much-needed debate around the ethics of forced displacement.

Hill was born in Newmarket, Ontario, to a black father and a white mother who moved from Washington, D.C. to Canada as a result of racial segregation in the US, where they were involved in the human rights movement. Hill's parents created the first human rights commission in Canada to protect black citizens against racial, religious and sexual discrimination. His parents' personal and social commitment certainly influences Hill, who demonstrates in his writings his personal concern with issues of race, identity, ethnicity and (non-)belonging. In his 2015 novel *The Illegal*, whose publication coincided with the Syrian refugee crisis, the Canadian author attempts to disclose for his readers the hidden reality of many refugees who are forced to cross national borders in order to seek refuge and protection in a new country, where they are sometimes rejected, stigmatized and criminalized.

Bala was born in Dubai to Sri Lankan parents who decided to move to the Middle East and then on to Canada before the Sri Lankan Civil War broke out in 1983. In her numerous talks and writings, Bala always shows her gratitude for the welcome Canadian society gave her family at a time when the situation in her country of origin was very unstable. Nevertheless, she is aware of the arduous conditions under which many refugees are forced to live and how they are treated when arriving in a new country. The Canadian author recognizes that regulatory policies of migration are very unstable and that, although the international refugee regime protects refugees when they are outside their home states, there are other issues that the regime does not take into account when handling them. Each country implements its own policies and mechanisms of exclusion following particular (political) interests that are not contemplated by the international refugee regime. This urgent concern underwrites Bala's 2018 novel *The Boat People*, in

which she fictionalizes a real-life event involving a cargo ship carrying almost five hundred Sri Lankan asylum seekers, who are imprisoned as soon as they arrive in Canada.

Thien was born in Vancouver to a Chinese-Malaysian father and a mother from Hong Kong. The sense of in-betweenness that gripped her parents in Canada struck a deep chord with her and led her to raise awareness of the common feelings of loneliness, fragmentation and (non-)belonging as well as the inter-generational conflicts that follow refugees and migrants after they flee their countries. In *Dogs at the Perimeter*, Thien offers a fictional account of a historical Cambodian genocide that marked the lives of many Cambodian people who were forced to escape from Cambodia in search of refuge and protection. In her novel, Thien attempts to disclose the role of memory and the past in the present lives of refugees by focusing on the haunting effects of war, loss and displacement. In doing so, the Canadian author highlights the importance of refugee traumas in the process of building a form of collective resilience and of reconfiguring the collective memory of a country.

Together, Hill, Bala and Thien show an outstanding sensitivity on the topic of forced migration and the political, social and ethical problems it involves. Their novels are well-documented, since all three authors carried out research and documentation work prior to writing their fictional books. Both Bala and Thien have travelled to the different countries in which their novels are set in order to offer a truthful account of the real situation they portray in their works. For his part, Hill has travelled around the world and his work as a volunteer in Africa expanded his understanding of the African diaspora and the connections between Africa and Canada. These authors' personal engagement with their subject matter allows them to not only give refugees' voices a microphone, as Bala puts it (*The Boat People* 333), but to create an empathic and emotional bond between

readers and characters that evolves into a sort of “empathic unsettlement” leading to understanding and even to social transformation (LaCapra, *Writing History* 78).

Given its currency in the global world, the importance of analyzing the topic of forced migration from a critical and humanistic perspective is now more evident than ever. Although the popularity of this topic has resulted in an ever-growing body of refugee narratives, the selection of the three novels by Hill, Bala and Thien responds to the objectives of conducting an in-depth textual analysis of these quality texts from the lens of resilience, an analytical perspective that has not yet being applied to their study despite the centrality of resilience in their narratives. Taken together, these three narratives are cohesively organized in order to disclose and articulate a detailed picture of the refugee experience, for each of them portrays different stages in the lives of the forcibly displaced.

The study begins with the examination of *The Illegal*, a novel which, in broad terms, portrays the moment when refugees are forced to flee their home countries and must survive in precarious conditions in a new country due to their undocumented status. It then continues with a critical reading of *The Boat People*, which discloses how refugees and asylum seekers are sometimes criminalized and sent to detention centers upon arrival in a country, where they are categorized and treated as criminals who need to be ordered and managed. Finally, this project concludes by disclosing the effects of war trauma on the lives of refugees, their personal struggles to either forget or remember a cultural trauma that may be omitted from official discourses and their ability to build up resilience, as portrayed by Thien in *Dogs at the Perimeter*. These three narratives allow us to draw a physical, emotional and spiritual map of the different realities experienced by refugees, cultivating then a nuanced understanding of the complex yet unknown reality of the forcibly displaced.

Apart from engaging with current debates on the topic of forced displacement, the varied yet interrelated themes represented in the selected novels and the different cultural and historical contexts within which these narratives are framed also allow us to explore the complexities of resilience thinking and the factors involved in the resilience-building process of the forcibly displaced. Thus, the critical analysis conducted in this study attempts to accomplish four specific goals: first, to bridge the gap between resilience and refugee studies in the humanities; second, to analyze different modes of resilience in refugee narratives that bring to light ethical, political and aesthetic concerns around forced migration; third, to highlight the interaction between individual psychological factors and social, cultural, political and ecological environments in the resilience-building process of the forcibly displaced, and finally, to explore the formal and structural aspects of refugee narratives to aesthetically represent different types of resilience.

In order to achieve these goals, the present study is divided into five chapters, which are organized as follows. Chapter One articulates a historical contextualization of the refugee regime, outlining the different organizations established in the aftermath of the two World Wars, when the problem of forced displacement started to gain global attention. Special attention is paid to the 1951 Refugee Convention, which is the cornerstone of international refugee protection as it contains a legal definition of the refugee concept and a number of rights and obligations that states should provide to protect and assist such individuals. This contextualization allows us to both describe the social and political paradigms that define refugees and to address the ambiguities and structural incongruences of the international refugee regime, which shifts between the humanitarianism that defines the regime and the discourse on national security that has become a priority for nation-states to maintain the status quo. Finally, this chapter delves into the important yet paradoxical role that refugee camps and detention centers play in

humanitarian crises. Building on relevant studies developed by philosophers, sociologists and anthropologists, this chapter discusses the experience of many asylum seekers and refugees who are forced to remain stuck in such places for long periods of time, since camps and detention centers are becoming a *de facto* durable solution to the mass movements of refugees.

Chapter Two develops the theoretical framework that will be used for the analysis of the three Canadian refugee narratives composing the main corpus of this study. Drawing on the works on resilience in the fields of natural and social sciences, this chapter offers a preliminary sketch of the main theories that constitute the two strands of resilience thinking. It first traces the evolution of the concept of resilience from a narrow model mainly focused on the understanding of psychological resilience as a personality trait to a contemporary conceptualization of the term as a social process that varies among individuals. To expand on this, this chapter addresses the interrelation between resilience and trauma by examining the significance of resilience discourse in the process of giving meaning to the incoherent and meaningless in the aftermath of traumatic wounding. In a similar vein, emphasis is placed on the reconsideration of the traditional opposition between vulnerability and resilience so as to understand vulnerability as a characteristic that helps individuals and, in this case, refugees to build up resilience.

The second section of this chapter focuses on the conceptual axe of social-ecological resilience and offers a critical review of the way resilience permeates security responses to human and ecological crises. Drawing on the insightful criticism developed by scholars such as Sarah Bracke, Brad Evans and Julian Reid, among others, this chapter comments upon the alignment of resilience with neoliberalism and how this affects refugees and asylum seekers in our contemporary world. In an attempt to move beyond hegemonic Western thinking of resilience, this chapter also draws on recent works in the

field of literary studies by scholars such as Ana María Fraile-Marcos, Michael Basseler and Susie O'Brien that emphasize the potential of narratives and the influence of social and cultural contexts on resilience-building processes. Following these theoretical approaches, this chapter sets the basis for the critical evaluation that follows in the three subsequent chapters, where contemporary fictional representations of the experiences of refugees are critically examined through the lens of resilience thinking.

Chapter Three reads Hill's *The Illegal* through the lens of psycho-social resilience. It offers a critical examination of the strategies of resilience developed by the main character to survive and ultimately thrive in a xenophobic country that promotes bordering practices that place refugees in a liminal position of abjection and marginalization. It first provides an examination of the main social and political practices that exacerbate the vulnerability of Hill's main character in the new country. Then, it offers an evaluation of the individual and social factors involved in the positive psychological functioning of the protagonist, paying special attention to the emotion of fear, its paradoxical nature and its effects in the process of survival. In doing so, this chapter sets a dialogue between affect theory and psychological resilience in the context of forced migration, and deconstructs preconceived binaries such as vulnerability and resilience, arguing that inherent vulnerability becomes essential to build up resilience. In keeping with the understanding of resilience as a social process, this chapter focuses on the emotional attachments built by and among Hill's vulnerable characters in order to demonstrate that resilience results from the combination of individual strength and social relationality. Finally, this chapter concludes with an affirmative view of resilience that goes beyond survival and onwards to full citizenship and integration, highlighting humanity's inherent dependence and need for social support as part of the resilience-building process.

Chapter Four provides a critical examination of the alignment between the notions of resilience and neoliberalism through the analysis of Bala's *The Boat People*. It aims to bring to light the irregularities and incongruences of the international refugee regime and the Canadian state strategy to control the arrival of Sri Lankan asylum seekers in the country. Drawing on Philippe Bourbeau's typology of resilience, this chapter highlights the national discourses rooted in fear and the mechanisms of exclusion used by the state to protect national borders and to promote social cohesion. Subsequent sections of this chapter analyze the cruel effects that neoliberal policies of control have on asylum seekers by placing in dialogic interaction the concepts of resilience, optimism and happiness. More specifically, these sections focus on the representation of cruel optimism as a negative side-effect of neoliberal understandings of resilience in the modern world. The detention center where Bala's fictional asylum seekers remain when arriving in British Columbia proves to be a model setting for exemplifying the problems that resilience may present in neoliberal circles. Finally, this chapter underlines the agency of refugees and asylum seekers through its portrayal of characters whose vulnerability enables them to build up resilience in the face of adversity and to assert their political agency.

Finally, Chapter Five ponders the role of memory and the past in the resilience-building process of the forcibly displaced through the analysis of Thien's *Dogs at the Perimeter*. This chapter draws on postcolonial theories of trauma that challenge a pathologizing and individualist approach already developed by early trauma theorists, putting instead the emphasis on the possibility of healing, resilience and transformation in the aftermath of trauma. In her novel, Thien underscores the collective dimension of historical trauma by juxtaposing different geographies as well as different epistemological tools of healing that went unconsidered by the pioneering theorists of trauma. Through the analysis of this novel, this chapter tries to deconstruct universal

definitions of trauma that deny the experiences of those who are categorized as *Others* and that do not contemplate resilience as a response to trauma. Furthermore, this chapter explores different forms of creative resilience in Thien's novel that allow the main character to reinvent herself in order to cope with the suffering, absence and chaos surrounding her. Finally, Chapter Five highlights the trope of haunting as an alternative form of historical remembering that contributes to the reconsideration of historical and cultural trauma and allows survivors to generate resilience and healing. In short, this chapter demonstrates that trauma must be understood as a mobilizing force that turns refugees into agentic subjects, who are able to contribute with their stories to the re-shaping of cultural memory.

These three analytical chapters share a common section focused on the potential of writing and storytelling as a means to promote individual and collective resilience. This can be read in parallel with the personal commitment of these three authors when writing their fictional works, as their narratives serve as a form of resilience and resistance against the dominant forces that wittingly or unwittingly silence and marginalize refugees. Hill, Bala and Thien wish to promote a responsive ethics that incites readers to rethink and reconsider their role as human beings in an interconnected world where everyone deserves care and attention. Moreover, these authors further underline the understanding of resilience as a social process by juxtaposing different geographies and temporalities, moving beyond Canada to Vietnam, Japan, Cambodia and Sri Lanka, and combining voices of the past, the present and the future. Even more, the global character of the main topic discussed in this project is underlined by Hill, who recognizes that his invented setting is inspired by different real-world places.

All in all, these three contemporary Canadian authors bring to the fore the ethical, political and social reality of many refugees, offering in their fictional narratives a more

hospitable and unconstrained space than the one usually found in the real world. The analysis carried out in this project attempts to prove the important role of literary texts in exposing, interrogating and subverting the paradoxes and frictions underlying the concept of resilience and its importance in the context of forced migration. In this sense, as this project hopes to demonstrate, refugee narratives become a catalyst, or even better, a form of collective resilience that enhances and fosters empathy, understanding, and social and political transformation. They can be considered a powerful source to highlight the dynamic nature of resilience and to enhance a form of creative resilience as opposed to a subaltern form of resilience that is required of those who occupy an inferior position in society. Seen in this light, it could be stated that the role of refugee fiction resonates with Anne E. Kaplan's words opening this introduction: "art that invites us to bear witness to injustice goes beyond moving us to identify with and help a specific individual, and prepares us to take responsibility for preventing future occurrences" (23). This study therefore intends to ponder how contemporary novels from Canada address urgent social concerns, opening up a space for discussion, interrogation and contestation of received notions about refugees and resilience, thus providing a better understanding and critical insight into contemporary global tensions.

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