



**SEEKING REFUGE:
FAITH-BASED APPROACHES
TO FORCED MIGRATION**

Poverty and Peacemaking II
March 3–4, 2017 at Princeton University

Refugees and Resistance

Stacy Mann, Princeton University (Moderator)
Saulo Padilla, Mennonite Central Committee
Dan-el Padilla Peralta, Princeton University
Karol Ruiz, Wind of the Spirit Immigration Resource Center
Fatima Shama, Fresh Air Fund
Becca Keener, Princeton University (Student Rapporteur)

Saulo Padilla began the discussion by telling the story of his family’s journey from Guatemala to Canada. He emphasized the hospitality of the Mennonite church to his family and many others who emigrated from Guatemala and El Salvador. “As the son of a refugee, an immigrant, with very few opportunities, but now I have a Master’s degree, and I blame it on the church,” he said. One of Mr. Padilla’s latest projects involves quilting. Emphasizing the interconnectedness of suffering, his quilt connects the history of persecuted Mennonites to the story of immigrants today. Padilla is dedicated to expanding the views of individuals and communities to recognize these points of similarity. He does this in several ways, which include reading and teaching from the Bible through the lens of an immigrant and taking people to the Mexico/U.S. border to interact with migrants first hand.

Next, Professor Dan-el Padilla-Peralta shared about his life as an undocumented immigrant. Now, he has situated himself at “the intersection of conversations about the responsibility we have to educate people about geopolitical interventions and the need to reckon with the effects.” One important aspect of his work in this area is to emphasize the intersectional nature of identities affected by structural violence. As a cautionary tale, Padilla-Peralta gave the example of Bartolome de Las Casas, who is well known for insisting on freedom for Indians, but who also excused the enslavement of African laborers. He emphasized that we cannot just “identify those groups who we feel best placed to advocate for.” Referencing Marcus Aurelius’ *Meditations*, Padilla-Peralta asked if it was necessary to “detach from affairs of the heart” in order to avoid disappointment in undertaking acts of resistance.

Karol Ruiz spoke next about her own story of fleeing the civil war in Colombia with her family, and how, despite the life-threatening circumstances at home, their situation did not make them eligible for refugee status in the US. She expressed gratitude for the many people who “broke laws to find refuge” for her as an undocumented immigrant, while she was hospitalized for depression. Now at Wind of the Spirit, Ruiz engages in advocacy for legislation regarding fourth amendment protections, municipal IDs, and local law enforcement resistance against federal ICE demands. Of Wind of the Spirit, she said: “our work is our prayer; our march is our faith; our existence is our resistance.”



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Fatima Shama shared about her family’s migration from Brazil and about her experiences growing up in a dual-faith home, as her mother is a Brazilian Catholic and father is a Palestinian Muslim. After serving as an interpreter for her parents and watching them struggle growing up, Shama dedicated her life to helping people like them. As Commissioner of Immigrant Affairs, her job was to make life better for immigrants in New York City. Shama said, “immigration is a federal issue, but immigrants are a local issue.” At the Fresh Air Fund, Shama is dedicated to bridging differences between people and a “commitment to pay it forward” because she is a “beneficiary of what America can do for immigrants.”

After a fruitful discussion, we reflected on the takeaways. We should start local with our action and reframe resistance to be about more than just illegality. We must make connections between different forms of oppression, so we can engage in intersectional advocacy. We must continue to speak truth to power and take risks in resistance. We need to share the stories of migrants to make the immigrant experience common. Finally, in resistance, practice makes permanent.