

RCIMI

Research Centre on Identity and Migration Issues  
University of Oradea



# Journal of Identity and Migration Studies

University of Oradea Publishing House  
Volume 2, number 2, 2008



## **JOURNAL OF IDENTITY AND MIGRATION STUDIES**

The *Journal of Identity and Migration Studies* (JIMS) is an online review published semi-annually under the auspices of the Research Centre on Identity and Migration Issues – RCIMI, from the Faculty of Political Science and Communication Sciences, University of Oradea, Romania.

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**ISSN 1843 – 5610**



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

THEMATIC ARTICLES – MIGRANTS’ INTEGRATION IN HOST SOCIETIES .....	2
Modes of Minorities’ Integration: Explaining Historical, Economic and Political Factors, <i>Andrada COSTOIU</i> .....	2
Through the Fear: A Study of Xenophobia in South Africa’s Refugee System, <i>Janet McKNIGHT</i> .....	18
Missed Opportunity: The Underutilisation of Forced Migrants in the British Economy, <i>Dieu Donné HACK-POLAY</i> .....	43
Deconstructing the Environment: The Case of Adult Immigrants to Canada Learning English, <i>Andreea CERVATIUC</i> .....	67
Representation of Refugees, Asylum-Seekers and Refugee Affairs In Hungarian Dailies, <i>Lilla VICSEK, Roland KESZI, Marcell MÁRKUS</i> .....	87
POLICY REPORTS.....	108
Labour Mobility in Nowadays Europe and Its Role in Economic Development, <i>Ioana ALBU</i> .....	108
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS .....	112

## **THEMATIC ARTICLES – MIGRANTS’ INTEGRATION IN HOST SOCIETIES**

### **Modes of Minorities’ Integration: Explaining Historical, Economic and Political Factors**

**Andrada COSTOIU**

**Abstract.** There are a great number of states in which different ethnic minorities coexist, each of them having their own culture, language and history. In some of these states, the ethnic minorities have been subjected to marginalization and acculturation, in other states the minority groups were recognized as being distinct parts of the nation and were granted equal rights of participation in the public arena. This paper attempts to explain why states opt for such different ways of integrating their minorities. It first develops a typology of minorities’ integration and then, by using the example of two nation-states that fit into each type of integration model it discusses the historical, political and economical factors that could explain each pattern of minorities’ integration.

**Key words:** *integration, ethnic minorities, multiculturalism, assimilation*

#### **Introduction**

There is a large variation in terms of how states are dealing with their ethnic minorities. There are states like United States and Canada which recognize the uniqueness and distinctiveness of their minorities. Canada for example has become a nation that is officially committed, through a wide range of governmental policies, to the preservation and enhancement of ethnic diversity. Canadians see themselves as a mosaic<sup>1</sup>. They call for the incorporation of all ethnic groups in the Canadian society via civic assimilation, without trying to override or to lower the importance of the ethnic identities. United States also respects the

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<sup>1</sup> Kivisto, Peter. 2002. **Multiculturalism in a global society**. United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishers.

ethnic cultural diversity and embraces multiculturalism, nevertheless the promotion and the protection of distinctive ethnic identities it is not a goal of the state's policies.

There are also states like France and Germany which are still reluctant and not very open in supporting their ethnic diversity. Germany for example, is not open but is rather adverse to the idea of multiculturalism. German ethnic minorities continue to suffer political, economical and social discrimination. In Germany a foreigner will always remain a foreigner if it does not have German blood. France also has an adverse attitude towards multiculturalism, but it is not similar with the German case. France, which has built its nation on the republican version of civic citizenship, is trying to override and replace its minorities' different ethnic identities with the identity of French citizen. For France the foreigner will not always be a foreigner as in the case of Germany, rather he could become a French citizen with the condition of replacing its ethnic identity with the French identity.

So why do states have such different and sometimes divergent attitudes towards their ethnic minorities? Why some states are open and willing to integrate their ethnic minorities without impeding on their identity and uniqueness while others are not willing to integrate or they would integrate their ethnic minorities only if they would give up their identity?

### **The concept of integration**

Integration is a "difficult to define" concept. Thus, prior developing on the different ways in which states "integrate" their ethnic groups and on the reasons of their different approaches, there are few important clarifications that we have to make in regards with our understanding of the "integration" concept.

First, as the literature suggests, "integration" of minorities could be understood in many ways. Over the past decades scholars equated the "integration" of ethnic minorities with the removal of the differences between the minorities and the bigger society. These scholars understood through "integration" the process of *re-homogenization* of the society in which the minorities were expected to adopt all the values of the host society, without any reciprocal

accommodation from the host state<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless the political, economical and social realities have led us to change our understanding of the integration of minorities. Nowadays, through integration we understand the process of incorporation with equal rights of all ethnic groups. These ethnic groups should be granted equal rights in all spheres of the society, without being expected to give up their diversity. This is how integration will also be understood in this paper.

Second, integration is *multidimensional*. Integration of ethnic minorities into a society takes place at every level and in every sector of society. Hence, hence we will have to take into account not only parts of the integration process, such is the political or the economical integration of the ethnic minorities, but we have to assess the integration of minorities on political, cultural, social and economical dimensions. The *political integration* should focus on assessing minorities' access to citizenship rights and also on assessing their political participation in the country where they reside. The *cultural integration* should concentrate on the way the ethnic minorities are allowed to preserve and manifest their cultural values both in the public and in the private spheres. The *social and economic dimensions* of integration should assess the social and economic equality between the minorities and the bigger society.

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<sup>2</sup> This view is mostly related with the integration of immigrants through their assimilation into the bigger society. The assimilation models have their roots in the Chicago School of Sociology, and they are mostly related with the name of one of its members, Robert Park. He argued that through a process of interaction between the immigrants and their new society, the immigrants will “move from contact to competition, from conflict to accommodation and finally to assimilation”( Barbara Heisler, “ The future of immigrant incorporation: Which models, which concepts”, *International Migration Review*, 1996, Vol. 26(2): 626) Later Gordon (1964) developed a multidimensional assimilation model. He identified seven stages in which the immigrant is moving from the cultural integration to a structural integration within the host society(Gordon, Milton. 1964 “Assimilation in American Life: The role of race, religion and national Origins”. New York.). Finally, the more recent literature is suggesting that the assimilation of newcomers is a segmented assimilation, in the sense that the immigrants get assimilated and display the characteristics of different sub-cultures. Portes (1995), for example, builds his model on the United States case. He says that the path of the assimilation of the immigrants is determined by their color and their country of origin. As a result, the white immigrants from relatively high income countries will assimilate into the white middle class, while the dark skinned immigrants coming from poorer countries will assimilate into the inner city underclass. Also, the immigrants coming from countries that have strong ethnic communities in United States will try to maintain their ethnic distinctiveness and they will integrate into their ethnic immigrant community(Portes, Alejandro. 1995. “Children of immigrants: Segmented assimilation and its determinants”, *The Economic Sociology of Immigration*.)

### Three models of minorities' integration and the historical, political and economical factors that stand behind them

There is a great variation in the ways states chose to “integrate” their minorities. Yet, we can create a typology of states’ minorities’ integration in broad terms and characteristics. Though, it is important to understand that no country fits exactly in any of these types presented here. A country can have a different attitude towards different ethnic groups and can also evolve from a way to deal with its ethnic minorities to another, starting for example with a policy of assimilation to gradually move towards a policy of pluralism.

**Table1. Three modes of integration**

Models of integration	Pluralist/Multicultural	Assimilationsist	Exclusionary/ Formal inclusion
Legal/political dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-the minorities have access and can acquire national citizenship</li> <li>- there is a support for minorities political organizations</li> <li>- the ethnic minorities participate in the political life of the country</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-the minorities have access and can acquire national citizenship</li> <li>-ignore the minority political organizations</li> <li>- discourage the political mobilization on behalf of the ethnic groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ethnic minorities’ access to citizenship is very restrictive or they do not have access to citizenship</li> <li>- ethnic group members are deprived of political rights</li> <li>- ignore the minority political mobilization</li> </ul>
Socio-economic dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- encourage the public institutions to reflect pluralism in their programs and policies</li> <li>- equal access for ethnic minorities to health care, education and housing</li> <li>- equal opportunities for the ethnic minorities in the labor market</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- school desegregation policy</li> <li>- equal access to social services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- accommodation and living conditions that increase the segregation of the ethnic groups</li> <li>- unequal access to employment, education and health care for the ethnic/racial minorities</li> </ul>
Cultural-religious dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- there is official support for the ethnic minorities to express their cultural and religious particularity</li> <li>- multicultural curriculum in schools; the state allows special education programs for ethnic minorities in languages other than the state language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- oppose the public manifestation of religious beliefs and practices</li> <li>- discourage and oppose the establishment of religious monuments (such a mosques, e.g.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-no measures or efforts to deal with the ethnic minorities special needs in schools or in any other spheres of the social</li> <li>-school segregation policies</li> </ul>

The **pluralist/multicultural** model is based on the premise that all ethnic groups should be granted equal rights in all spheres of the society, without being expected to give up their diversity. The basic ways in which the nation-states are integrating their ethnic minorities without impinging on their particularity are presented in the above table. The state gets actively involved in supporting and promoting the ethnic diversity through policies that range from ones that are accommodating the ethnic groups' specific religious and cultural needs to policies that are empowering different political ethnic organizations. Also, the ethnic minorities are active actors in the political, social and economical life of the nation-state.

As an example, two states can be defined as having multicultural/ pluralist modes of integrating their ethnic groups: Canada and Australia. United States also respects ethnic cultural diversity and embraces multiculturalism; nevertheless United States embraced the "laissez-faire" approach of multiculturalism (Castles, 2000, 139)<sup>3</sup>. In other words, United States incorporates the ethnic minorities as citizens and also tolerates the cultural differences, but the state does not assume an active role to support and promote the maintenance of ethnic cultures.

None of these states were born with a multicultural policy. Until the 1960s they all had racist policies that discriminated against the non-Europeans. In the Australian case, the state maintained an explicitly racist assimilationist policy which was making a clear distinction between the whites and the non-whites. As Kivisto argues "Australia defined itself legally and culturally as "White Australia"<sup>4</sup> and preference was given to the social and cultural absorption of the European-origin immigrants while discriminating against all the other newcomers (and Aboriginals). Similarly, Canada developed a state policy that was bifurcated along two ethnic lines: the Anglophones and the Francophone. Canada continued to ignore all the other ethnic groups until 1971, when multiculturalism was officially embraced as a policy in Canada<sup>5</sup>.

Nevertheless, three central factors led those two countries to embrace multiculturalism.

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen Castles and Alastair Davidson.2000. **Citizenship and Migration: Globalization and the Politics of Belonging**. London: Macmillan.

<sup>4</sup> See note 1.

<sup>5</sup> In 1971 the Multicultural Policy Act was adopted by the government of Pierre Elliot Trudeau through which Canada was committing herself to respect and support diversity

One important factor is determined by the needs of their capitalist economies, which in order to grow necessitated an expansion of their populations. This led to a very diverse ethnical population that proved to be impossible to manage through assimilation policies. At the beginning, Canada's population was divided between the indigenous people and the two charter groups: the British and the French. Nevertheless, as the nation began to industrialize the need for labor force became acute and the country started to receive large numbers of immigrants. Besides the British and the United States citizens, large number of Germans, Scandinavians, Poles, Greeks, Portuguese and other European immigrants arrived in Canada<sup>6</sup>. Also, beginning 1962 when Canadian immigration policy "put an end to the "white Canada" policies of the past"<sup>7</sup>, large number of immigrants originated from Asia, Caribbean and Central America flooded the country. Through the newcomers, the Canadian ethnic diversity was greatly enriched and Canada became one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world. Similar with Canada, the population became more ethnically diverse in Australia. At the beginning the majority of Australian population was constituted by the indigenous people together with the British and Irish settlers. Before the Second World War, the Australian immigration policy displayed a preference for the British immigrants, nevertheless the declining birth rate and the growing need for labor force in the manufacturing sector opened the gates for large immigrants from Eastern Europe and Asia. This represented the end of the White Australia, which now became the home of various immigrant communities. Assimilation policies through which these two countries tried to incorporate their immigrants proved to be ineffective, as the new immigrant groups turned into ethnic communities that maintained their mother tongues and took steps to protect their ethnic heritages. Instead of facing a homogenous population, both Canada and Australia were challenged now to control and manage a great collection of ethnic communities. Multiculturalism, in the sense of "civic multiculturalism", came as a solution to bring social cohesion to such an ethnically diverse population. While trying to unite all ethnic groups within their borders via civic assimilation, both Canada and Australia made room for cultural diversity. Hence, in order to become a Canadian or an Australian

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Harney. "So great a Heritage as Ours: Immigration and the survival of Canadian Polity" in **In Search of Canada**, by Stehpen Graubard(ed.), New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

<sup>7</sup> Idem 1

citizen it was no longer necessary to be culturally assimilated. Though, it was necessary to be civically assimilated, which meant that as a citizen each ethnic group member had obligations and commitments to their nation-state. Starting 1970s, both Canada and Australian governments embarked to a multicultural policy that promoted equal civic, political and cultural rights to all their citizens. Both states got actively involved to combat social disadvantage, to offer equal access to health care, education and housing for all ethnic groups and to offer them equal opportunities for participation and decision making in the political life.

The politicization of ethnicity stands as a second important factor of the emergence of multiculturalism. Though, the Australian and the Canadian cases are different. In Australia, as Castles points out, one reason for the introduction of the social policies aimed specifically at the ethnic immigrant groups, “was the realization by political parties that immigrants were making up an increasing proportion of the electorate” (Castles<sup>8</sup>, 2000, 151). These policies were first introduced by the Australian Labor Party government and than were continued by the following Australian governments. They developed a wealth of government policies concerned with welfare, education or services that recognized and supported the special needs of ethnic groups. In Canada, the multicultural policies are a reflection of a politically mobilized ethnicity. Here ethnicity was not politicized by political parties for electoral reasons, but it was politicized by an increasingly powerful Francophone community which sought to assert their political rights. The Canadian Francophone politicization of ethnicity led to an increasingly powerful nationalist movement in Quebec that pushed for the separation of this province from Canada. In an effort to diffuse the Quebecois separatism and to keep Canada together the Canadian government had to find ways to accommodate the demands aggrieved by the ethnic nationalists. At first multiculturalism started in Canada as “biculturalism”, translated in a set of policies that recognized and protected the distinctiveness of the Francophone cultural identity. Later, the Canadian government expanded its bicultural orientation into a multicultural orientation which granted equal rights in all spheres of the society for all ethnic minorities, while recognizing their cultural particularity.

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<sup>8</sup> Idem 3

The transition of Canada and Australia towards a multicultural policy was also facilitated by another factor, and that is the flexibility of their national identity.

Thus it was possible for the Australian and the Canadian states to shift the locus of defining their national identities from the racial and ethnic lines towards a national identity based on civic assimilation. Of course, one could ask how is it possible to shift from ethnicity and race as the factors of defining the national identity towards a national identity based on civic assimilation. The answer is not simple. One of the reasons for which this shift was possible was the emergence of the welfare state. As Kivisto also points out, “the introduction of social policies contributed to the creation of a national Canadian identity based on common membership and social citizenship” (Kivisto<sup>9</sup>, 2002, 90). Nevertheless, this answer does not suffice. Both these nations developed as nations of immigrants and from the beginning their process of nation-building was exposed to ethnic diversity.<sup>10</sup> Their national identity did not have time to cement around a single ethnic or racial identity and hence their national identity was not rigid and was not inherently tied to a particular ethnic or racial identity. This permitted to the states to develop a more inclusive sense of sense of peoplehood (one that was not limited to ethnicity and race) and to expand the belongingness to the nation by increasing the salience of other national identity makers, such as the civic belongingness.

At the other pole from the pluralist/multicultural model is the **exclusionary/formal inclusion model** of integrating the ethnic minorities within a nation-state. This model has been developed by the states which have a national identity based on “blood ties”, such as Germany and Japan. The membership to the German or the Japanese nation was determined by one’s lineage or bloodline. For example, anybody with a German descent is welcomed into the German nation. This explains that the citizenship right was granted to all the returning individuals with German descent that were scattered over Eastern

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<sup>9</sup> Idem 1

<sup>10</sup> In Canada for example, both the English and the French settlers came with strong ethnic heritages and they had to recognize one another their cultural differences. It is true that the British tried to blend the French into the British mainstream, though that was not possible and starting very early in the process of nation-building they had to officially recognize the cultural right for the Francophone community (e.g. the Quebec Act passes in 1774 granted linguistic and religious rights to the French majority; Kivisto, 2002, 87).

Europe and the fact that that they were also offered a generous state support for their social accommodation in the form of housing benefits, pension rights and other social benefits. Nevertheless, the same generosity was not replicated towards ethnic immigrants of different ancestries that came to reside in Germany. Towards other ethnic groups within their borders, Germany adopted an exclusionary policy that sought to prevent their incorporation into the German society. The members of those ethnic groups were denied the right to citizenship and were the subject of political, economical and social discrimination.<sup>11</sup> Similar with the German case the Japanese national identity is constructed based on *ius sanguis* (“blood ties”) as the Japanese “have historically viewed themselves as a homogenous society that is racially distinct and superior to outside ethnic groups” (Kivisto, 2002, 112). Thus, like its German counterpart, the Japanese government has ignored and marginalized the other ethnic groups.

The exclusionary models developed by these countries are centered on the political and social exclusion of their ethnic minorities, while attempting to culturally assimilate them. At the most basic level the political exclusion started with the denial of citizenship to the members of the ethnic or racial groups and the restriction of political participation of the ethnic minority groups. At the social level both states forged policies that produced unequal access to employment for the ethnic/racial minorities which gradually placed the ethnic minorities in unskilled and low-paying jobs that the Japanese or the German people avoided (Kivisto, 2002, 112&162)<sup>12</sup>. Also, their housing policy concentrated ethnic minorities in certain spatial areas, usually at the cities peripheries. The result of the political and social exclusionary policies was a segregated society, in which the ethnic minorities were viewed and treated as foreigners.

In the present times, due to long time internal pressures from the ethnic groups and also due to the pressures from international community<sup>13</sup>, Germany and Japan made efforts to reconsider their policy towards ethnic minorities. On the political realm, a new German immigration law grants the right to citizenship

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<sup>11</sup> For example, the German educational system reinforces the ethnically based differences while privileging the children of German descent

<sup>12</sup> For example, Koreans are the biggest ethnic group in Japan. Most of the Koreans rarely have good jobs and most of them work as mine or factory workers or as manufacturers and handicrafts.

<sup>13</sup> European Union has been a decisive factor in making Germany to reconsider and modify its policies on citizenship

of the immigrant children born on German soil, without asking them to give up their ethnic culture.<sup>14</sup> This new law also liberalized the naturalization policies for foreign-born immigrants. Nevertheless, naturalization in Germany is a long and complex procedure thus the naturalization rates remained very low even after the liberalization of naturalization for foreign born immigrants. Japan is more resistant to change than Germany. While now it is possible for the members of different ethnicities that reside in Japan and whose parents were born in Japan to become naturalized citizens of Japan, they can only become citizens at the expense of their ethnicity. Thus, many ethnic minorities do not wish to become naturalized. For example, Koreans in Japan make up for 85% of the Japan's resident "alien" population<sup>15</sup>. Most of the members of this ethnicity refuse to naturalize as they see as shameful giving up their culture to go through a humiliating process of assimilation which eventually will confer them citizenship. Hence, even though these countries seem to be more open in terms of offering citizenship to their ethnic minorities, their offer is very restrictive and reserved. The ethnic minorities still find themselves politically marginalized. Also, at the social and economical level the segregation of ethnic minorities is still very visible. Ethnic minorities still confront higher level of unemployment and they still tend to occupy the most unskilled sectors of the economy. Also both ethnic minorities and the Japanese and German citizens tend to increase the residential segregation, as the ethnic minorities are choosing to live in ethnic neighborhoods and the Germans and Japanese chose to move out of the mixed areas.

What is interesting is that together with their new citizenship and naturalization law which improved the ethnic immigrant minorities' access to citizenship, Germany became more culturally assimilative towards its ethnic minorities. After the new citizenship law the ethnic minorities which aspired to acquire citizenship had to show that they identify themselves with the German language and culture. Thus, it is possible that Germany is slowly moving from an exclusionary attitude towards an assimilative approach of its ethnic minorities.

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<sup>14</sup> Until the new citizenship and naturalization law, all applicants had to demonstrate an identification with the German culture; this requirement has been dropped and the applicant has to prove only that he is able to converse in German and to sign a loyalty statement to the constitution

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Strouthes. *Koreans in Japan*. World Culture Encyclopedia.

<http://www.everyculture.com/East-Southeast-Asia/Koreans-in-Japan.html>

The other model of integration of ethnic minorities is through their **assimilation** into the nation-state. This model is forged by countries like France and Belgium (Belgium is at the intersection of the political assimilationist and multicultural models, with the French community pursuing the political assimilationist French model and the Flemish community pursuing a multicultural approach). The political assimilationist model is based on the premise that all the individuals should be assimilated into the society as citizens. Thus, the inhabitants of the state have access to citizenship and through citizenship the individual enters in a direct relation with the state which cannot be mediated by any kind of groups. Once they become citizens, all individuals have the same rights and duties and there are no policy differences that target the needs of different ethnic, racial or religious backgrounds.

The reason why this model is still practiced today by certain nation-nation states is deeply rooted in their history and in the experiences with their different ethnic minorities.

France had a long history of tension between the Church and the state. The revolution of 1789 created a rupture between these two institutions and the French society became secularized. The Revolution also created the base of the French national identity, by uniting all individuals under the doctrine of “liberty, equality, fraternity”, which became the core value of the French national culture. The French Revolution ideology attempted to create equality among individuals through sameness. Throughout centuries, the French state and society have remained loyal to the French Revolution ideology which explains why their model of integrating the ethnic minorities is oriented towards removing the ethnical differences (from the public sphere) and creating homogeneity within the French society. France tries to integrate its ethnic minorities via civic assimilation; France is concentrated on the integration of the individuals and not on that of the groups. While rejecting their cultural accommodation, the access of ethnic minorities to citizenship and naturalization is not exclusionary as we have seen in other states. France offers citizenship based on both the “place of birth” and also on “blood and soil” laws and the naturalization process is much less tedious than the one we have seen in Germany. The French government has also put in place a set of social policies to help the integration of ethnic individuals into the bigger French society by improving their housing, education and employment opportunities. Nevertheless, France’s efforts of civic assimilation of its ethnic

minorities deemed to be unsuccessful. The ethnic groups clustered in ethnic ghettos where they confront high levels of unemployment (Rudolph, 2006)<sup>16</sup>. Moreover, not only the ethnic communities did not get dismantled, but in the face of a growing religious diversity of the French population the principle of secularism also got challenged. The integration of a very large Muslim population (who now forms the largest immigrant population in France) created large debates on the position of Islam in the French society. In the present times, France still pursues an assimilative policy towards its ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, the number of ethnic minorities that have retained their culture and “are openly practicing their “foreign-ness” has increased (Rudolph, 2006, 68).<sup>17</sup> Not willing to make compromises and to recognize cultural diversity, France is now trying to restrict immigration (e.g. “by redefining asylum laws to limit their applications, by expelling refugees from civil wars immediately upon the cessation of violence”; Rudolph, 2006<sup>18</sup>, 92) and also to make more difficult the stay of the noncitizens (e.g. by “denying noncitizens access to welfare”, by “moving refugees to points far from the majority of population” Rudolph<sup>19</sup>, 2006, 92).

Belgium is one federal state, but is governed by two different visions on its ethnic minorities. In the case of Belgium, the Flemish and the Francophone policy makers use different frameworks of integrating their ethnic minorities. While the Flemish government has adopted a model of integrating their ethnic minorities based on multiculturalism (in line with the Anglo-Saxon and Dutch models), the Walloon and the Brussels governments took on the French model based on assimilation. In other words, the mode of integration of the Walloon and the Brussels governments “is ethnocentric and results in assimilation and ‘homogeneity’ - a fundamental non-acceptance of diversity” (Blommaert & Verschueren, 1994<sup>20</sup>). As in France, these governments are focused on the integration of the individuals and not of that of groups. Their policies are

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<sup>16</sup> Rudolph, Joseph. 2006. **Politics and Ethnicity: A Comparative Study.** Joseph Rudolph. London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>17</sup> According to Rudolph (2006, 62) France contains now “at least five million Muslims, many of whom are beyond easy deportation because they were born or they became naturalized citizens of France”. Also, as many as 1.5 million immigrants from the 4 million immigrants exiting in France by 1990 have made the transition from foreign worker to French citizen (Rudolph, 2006, 68)

<sup>18</sup> Idem 16

<sup>19</sup> Idem 16

<sup>20</sup> Blommaert, J. and Verschueren, J. 1994. The Belgian migrant debate, *New Community* 20 (2): 227-251.

targeting the socio-economic integration of individuals while ignoring the needs that stem from the ethno-cultural differences.

### **General conclusions**

One of the first remarks that stems from the analysis presented in this paper is that nation-states developed philosophies about the way ethnic groups should be (or not be) integrated into their society that are strongly related with their historical experiences and evolution. Integration is dependent on the way the state defines its national identity and is also dependent on the state's nation-building process. For the states where the national identity was historically fused with the ethnic or racial identity (such as Germany and Japan) a more inclusive sense of nationhood is very hard to achieve. Thus these states would tend to develop exclusionary models to deal with their ethnic minorities that are centered on their political and social exclusion. At the most basic level the political exclusion is translated in the denial of citizenship to the members of the ethnic or racial groups (on the premise that citizenship can be acquired only through blood lineage) and the restriction of political participation of the ethnic minority groups. At the social level states forge policies that produce unequal access to employment, education and housing for the ethnic/racial. On the other hand, the nation-states where the national identity did not have time to cement around a single ethnic or racial identity (with a national identity that is not rigid and that is not inherently tied to a particular ethnic or racial identity) could more easily transform and expand their sense of peoplehood and belongingness to the nation to include diverse ethnicities. Usually the transformation of their notion of national identity is achieved by decreasing the salience of ethnicity and increasing the salience of civic belongingness. These nation-states are integrating their ethnic minorities without impinging on their particularity. Their governments get actively involved in supporting and promoting the ethnic diversity through policies that range from ones that are accommodating the ethnic groups' specific religious and cultural needs to policies that are empowering different political ethnic organizations. There are also nation-states that have historically created a strictly civic national identity, one in which ethnicity and other types of group identities do not have a place (such as France). Even when faced with a growing ethnic diversity, these states seem to be adamant in pursuing a civic integration of their minorities

and disregard cultural differences. Overall, by comparing these findings, I would say that the nation-states with a national identity created along the ethnic lines (I am referring here at the mono-ethnic national identities) and the nation-states with a national identity created strictly along civic lines are equally rigid towards ethnic diversity. While the states with a national identity created along the ethnic lines do not want to integrate other ethnic groups based on the reason that the nation and the state belongs only to the ones of the same blood, the nation-states with a national identity created strictly along civic lines is trying to dismantle ethnicity by putting accent on the integration of the individuals (and not of the groups) and also by forging cultural assimilation. We should also notice that the states with neither an ethnic nor a strictly civic national identity can be more integrative of different ethnic minorities (such are the examples of Canada and Australia).

Another fact that steams from this analysis is that states tend to move (even if formal) towards a less rigid versions of integration that the one they have adopted in the past. States that had assimilationist tendencies towards their ethnic minorities have moved in the present time towards multicultural policies. Such is Canada and Australia which replaced the assimilationist policies of the past with a multiculturalist mode of integration of its ethnic minorities. These states are supporting and empowering the ethnic groups through state policies that range from ones that are accommodating the ethnic groups' specific religious and cultural needs to policies that are empowering different political ethnic organizations. Also, states that refused to integrate their ethnic/racial minorities seem to have softened, even if formal, their exclusionary attitude towards their ethnic minorities. It is even possible that these states are slowly moving from an exclusionary attitude towards an assimilative approach of their ethnic minorities.

These states seem to redefine their notion of citizenship and making it more inclusionary, in order to integrate the ethnic minorities that have been long time residents of the state. In the case of Germany for example, the access to citizenship was granted only based on "blood ties". In the present times Germany adopted a new law that grants the right to citizenship to the immigrant children born on German soil. This new law also liberalized the naturalization policies for foreign-born immigrants. Together with their new citizenship and naturalization law which improved the ethnic immigrant minorities' access to citizenship, Germany became more culturally assimilative towards its ethnic minorities. After the new citizenship law the ethnic minorities which aspired to acquire citizenship

had to show that they identify themselves with the German language and culture. Thus, it is possible that Germany is slowly moving from an exclusionary attitude towards an assimilative approach of its ethnic minorities.

The “more open” integration policies seem to be a response to the crisis of the nation-states in managing their increasing ethnic diversities. On one hand, in confronting with an irreversible increasing of its ethnic diversity the state has been challenged in maintaining its national unity and had to recreate and expand the notion of belongingness and peoplehood in order to keep together or to include different ethnic groups. On another hand the state’s attitudes towards diversity has been challenged by increasing internal pressures from ethnic groups as well as by increasing international pressures from international community challenge. The movement towards more open modes of integration came also as a response to these pressures.

Nevertheless, we cannot generalize on the conclusion that that the nation-states tend to move (even if formal) towards a less rigid versions of integration. There are also states which have been adamant in the way they deal with their ethnic minorities. Instead of modifying their integration policies, these states tend to restrict the influx and the settlement of new individuals into their society by modifying their immigration and naturalization policies.

### **Limits and shortcomings**

The typology of the models of integration of the ethnic minorities presented here is characterized by few shortcomings.

First, the models of integration developed here are merely centered on states’ policies and responses towards their ethnic minority groups. They present ways in which nation-states integrate their ethnic minorities. However we do not have to understand that ethnic minorities’ integration is realized only on a one way avenue, which is from the state towards the ethnic minority groups. While the state policies and attitudes towards their ethnic minorities seem to be the most significant factor for their integration within a nation state, it is also important to acknowledge the ethnic minorities’ efforts to integrate into the bigger society. The integration of the ethnic minority groups is also dependent on their willingness and efforts to integrate. On one hand, not all ethnic minorities are willing to integrate into a nation-state. When dealing with these types of minorities even the most

open integration models would deem to be ineffective. For example the integration of the Romany communities in Romania has been promoted and facilitated through numerous governmental policies. These targeted the improvement of the education of the Romany children in special education classes, the equal access for the Romany population to employment and housing and the right of the Romany population to enhance and protect their ethnic identity. Nevertheless, these communities manifested a great unwillingness to integrate and they continue to remain insulated. The ethnic Romany population has Romanian citizenship, though they do not vote. Despite the fact that they have organized a political party (“the Party of the Roma”) to politically represent their minority, the Romany political participation is minor. Also, the Roman communities continues to deny education (and as a result they have a very high illiteracy level) and continues in practicing their traditional professions (e.g. horse trading, melting copper and other metals). On another hand, some ethnic minorities are more assertive than others and they tend to politically intervene and influence their integration process. As a result it is possible that they could get better integrated into a nation-state.

Second, the models of integration developed are centered only on the state level. Thus, these models do not allow assessing and explaining any local variations within countries (assuming that some cities or regions more opened towards their ethnic diversity than other).

## **Through the Fear: A Study of Xenophobia in South Africa's Refugee System \***

**Janet McKnight**

**Abstract.** In light of the May 2008 xenophobic attacks in Gauteng and Western Cape Provinces, this paper explains the process of refugee law in South Africa as stated in theory and as implemented in practice. Research was compiled through visits to refugee camps, townships, South African Parliament, regional prisons, judicial inspectorates, universities, and community events in and near Cape Town during June 2008. The South African Refugees Act guarantees protection to refugees and asylum seekers in conformity with international treaties and the South African Constitution. However, these rights are seldom realized due to a delay processing of asylum applications by the Department of Home Affairs, corruption in immigration enforcement, and a lack of education in civil society as to the difference between refugees and voluntary migrants. Refugees are left vulnerable to the violence of those South African citizens that believe all immigrants are illegally present to take advantage of employment and social opportunities. In an attempt to eliminate the fearfulness towards foreigners and bring the plight of refugees further to the forefront of international dialogue, general recommendations are made to the South African Government, its departments, and the citizens of South Africa.

**Keywords:** *refugee, xenophobia, South Africa*

### **Introduction**

Every story is about finding something. A long lost friend, life's purpose or, perhaps, answers. A refugee's story is about finding peace and safety. But a refugee's story in South Africa is first about finding tolerance.

The xenophobic attacks that began May 11 in Johannesburg's Alexandria township have left 62 people dead, constituting the worst violence in the country

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\* This article is a result of research and on-field experience gained by Janet McKnight, a Tulane University Law School student while interning at Projects Abroad Human Rights Office for June 2008. Moreover, the research assistance and supervision of Theodore Kamwimbi, the Projects Abroad Human Rights Office Manager, for this article is acknowledged and much appreciated.

since the end of apartheid. The United Nations Office of the Resident Coordinator for South Africa published a report on 3 June 2008, entitled “Violence Against Foreigners in South Africa,” which detailed the chronology of the events. One hundred refugee camp sites are currently housing more than 30,000 displaced people.<sup>1</sup> A disaster was declared in Johannesburg, Gauteng Province; a similar declaration has yet to be issued for the Western Cape, which plays host to the largest number of displaced persons—nearly 20,000.<sup>2</sup> On the campus of the University of the Western Cape, Professor Julia Sloth-Nielsen described the attacks that took place in Cape Town as occurring “like cannons, one after the next, each hour.”<sup>3</sup>

The attacks in the country are also the first time since 1994 that South African troops have been deployed to stop violence on the streets. The xenophobic attacks in South Africa have stirred many discussions concerning the reasons for the violence, the acceptability of the government’s response, and the need for improved immigration policies. At the heart of the issue is a question that likely dwells in the minds of many refugees in South Africa: “Is this really a place to call home?”<sup>4</sup>

The xenophobic violence stems from fear and anger by South African locals that believe their jobs, women, and resources are threatened by the arrival of foreigners. There is a rampant misconception in the country that all immigrants are “illegal aliens” and, therefore, a threat to the thriving but unstable new democracy in South Africa. It will be useful to clarify the vocabulary used in this paper in referring to various immigrant groups. An “asylum seeker” refers to a person who is in the process of applying for asylum/refugee status. The term “refugee” is meant to refer to a person who has already been granted refugee status. At times, “refugees” is also used in general terms to denote all people who have left their country of origin due to persecution or political upheaval.

Fear is at the basis of refugee law not only in theory but in definition. Based on customary international law, a refugee has the right to seek asylum in another

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, Office of the Resident Coordinator South Africa, “Violence Against Foreigners in South Africa,” Situation Report 3, 3 June 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Julia Sloth-Nielsen, interview by author, Bellville, South Africa, 5 June 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Question asked by Dr. Adekeye Adebajo, Executive Director of Centre for Conflict Resolution in the, panel discussion entitled “Xenophobia – Why now, where to next?”, organised by the Institute of Justice and Reconciliation at the University of Cape Town on 3 June 2008.

country when they have a fear of persecution. Protection for refugees in Africa is found in both the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (“UN Refugee Convention”) and the 1969 Organization of African Unity Refugee Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa (“OAU Refugee Convention”). South Africa is a signatory to both.

Domestically, refugees are entitled to protection by the South African Bill of Rights and the Refugees Act of 1998. But the extensive gap between refugee law in theory and the law as implemented in practice in South Africa unfortunately results in many refugees not experiencing the rights and protections guaranteed to them.

A woman refugee, who spoke at a Parliamentary Seminar on Migration and Xenophobia to acknowledge World Refugee Day on 20 June 2008, expressed with a deep sadness in her voice that she came to South Africa for peace and protection and instead she has found only “pain in the heart and pain in the mind.”<sup>5</sup> This woman heard South Africa was a democratic haven capable of protecting her from persecution but found that her dream was flawed. In his speech to mark Africa Day, President Thabo Mbeki acknowledged the xenophobic violence as “an absolute disgrace.”<sup>6</sup>

South Africa is still learning how to be a democracy. The plight of refugees draws attention to the issues of government corruption, cooperation among civil society, individual mindsets based on ignorance, and a society that cannot yet step away from the shadow of apartheid. Through research and firsthand observation and interviews, this paper describes the issues surrounding xenophobia, the gap between refugee law and refugee reality in the country, and the efforts that have been taken thus far to improve the situation. Lastly, the paper proposes general recommendations for South Africa to reach its potential as a true home country to those in need of protection and acceptance.

### **Issues Stemming from the Xenophobic Attacks**

#### ***Culture of Exclusion***

Xenophobia is defined as a “fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners or of anything that is strange or foreign.”<sup>7</sup> Out of this false impression of the unknown

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<sup>5</sup> Portfolio Committee on Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs and South African Migration Project, Parliamentary Seminar and Migration and Xenophobia, South African Parliament, Cape Town, 20, June 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Thabo Mbeki, *Africa Day speech*, South African Parliament, 25 May 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Merriam-Webster, 11th ed., s.v. “Xenophobia.”

and unfamiliar, immigrants to South Africa are often called *makwerekwere* or *amagrigamba*, derogatory taunts meant to cast intimidation and hate towards foreigners.<sup>8</sup> South Africa has long been the host of other African immigrants, many of them refugees. Mozambicans in the 1980s, Nigerians in the early 1990s and those from Angola, Somalia, Rwandan, Burundi, Congo and Democratic Republic of the Congo in the late 1990s, have all made their way to the Rainbow Nation in hopes of safety. In recent months, the immigration numbers have included many Zimbabweans fleeing the political turned humanitarian crisis. But why South Africa?

In the 1990s, the political shift to democracy in South Africa and the relatively developed economy, coupled with civil wars and political instability in other African countries, led to an influx of migration. Because of the vast increase in the number of refugees and the feared impact on the economic structure of the country, South Africa has focused less on refugee protection and more on containment, expulsion, and denial of rights. If exclusion is not successful, the focus becomes deportation or forced repatriation, even if it is not yet safe for someone to return to their country of origin.

This culture of fear and exclusion has spread beyond national boundaries as the violence has reached not only foreigners but South Africans as well. Of the 62 people who have died in the attacks this year, 21 were South African citizens—as confirmed by Government communications head Themba Maseko.<sup>9</sup> If a person has a slightly different skin color or is heard speaking a different language they may be a target of violence. Some local South African languages are also widely spoken by people of bordering countries, such as Shangan in Mozambique, thus leading to cases where a local is thought to be a foreigner and, therefore, seen as a threat.<sup>10</sup>

Immigration in South Africa has always included a racial component. With the National Party coming to power in 1948, the community of white South Africans was encouraged to reinforce the white minority. But currently, it seems that the hatred against foreigners is replacing the divide between white and black South Africans. Author Antoine Bouillon writes that black South Africans are just coming out of oppression and have much to learn; that apartheid taught them that Africa is just South Africa.<sup>11</sup> This isolation of the country during apartheid has resulted in a closed society.

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<sup>8</sup> Dickson Jere “Zim exiles face new fear and loathing in SA,” *AFP: Johannesburg*, 14 May 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Sapa, “21 SA citizens died in xenophobic violence: GOVT,” *The Citizen*, 12 June 2008. Available at <http://www.citizen.co.za/index/article.aspx?pDesc=68216,1,22>.

<sup>10</sup> “Locals Killed in S Africa Attacks,” *BBC*, 12 June 2008. Available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7450799.stm>.

<sup>11</sup> Alan Morris and Antoine Bouillon, eds., *African Immigration to South Africa: Francophone migration of the 1990s*, (Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2001),135.

### ***Relationship between Government and Civil Society***

The South African Immigration Act (“Immigration Act”) states that “immigration control is performed within the highest applicable standards of human rights protection.”<sup>12</sup> The Immigration Act mandates a shared effort between Government and civil society to decrease xenophobia and ensure correct implementation of immigration procedures.<sup>13</sup> This is evidenced by including representatives from civil society on the teams that proposed refugee policies in the Green Paper and, later the Draft White Paper.<sup>14</sup> However, a strong divide between Government and the community has bred an atmosphere of non-cooperation. People in South African communities believe they must take their own actions against migrants in lieu of insufficient response from President Mbeki, the Department of Home Affairs (“DHA”), and other government offices. Finding cooperation with community leaders at the legislative and implementation stages of lawmaking is necessary if the South African Parliament is to enforce immigration and refugee policy at the community level.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Misconception between Refugees and Illegal Foreigners***

Some immigrants are illegally present in South Africa and searching for jobs rather than refugee status. And some casual labor, such as gardening and construction, is being hired out to foreign nationals who are willing to complete the job for a cheaper wage. But in this controversy comes the misconception between immigrants, illegal aliens, and refugees.

Many locals believe all immigrants came to South Africa to take advantage of the country’s new democracy and relative economic and political stability compared to other African countries. It is seen as a purely opportunistic move on the part of foreigners to “steal” the scarce resources only recently made available to black South Africans since the introduction of equality. Some believe that the country has reached its full capacity and that there is no room for the benefits that immigrants can provide. Immigrants who arrive from other countries in Africa may have more education and will attain the jobs that South Africans feel are owed to the local population post-apartheid. The truth is that many refugees barely escaped with their lives and

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<sup>12</sup> South African Immigration Act, sec. 1.

<sup>13</sup> South African Immigration Act, sec. m.

<sup>14</sup> Draft Refugee White Paper submitted by the White Paper for Refugee Affairs Task Team: (Gazette 18988, Notice 1122), vol. 396, Pretoria, 19 j:[19 June 1998].

<sup>15</sup> South African Immigration Act, sec. 2(b).

are simply trying to acclimate into South African society, which includes earning an income to support any family they have left after running so far from home.

Another challenge to the misconception of asylum seekers is the increasing presence of economic refugees, for which there is no international protection. It is estimated that there are three million Zimbabwe exiles in South Africa, most of which are considered economic migrants because the international community has been hesitant to declare the situation in Zimbabwe a political crisis.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, Zimbabwe immigrants that are not granted refugee status are vulnerable to attacks from South African citizens. When the South African Government refuses to recognize people from Zimbabwe as political refugees this only fuels the belief in the townships that foreigners came to South Africa to compete for employment.

### ***Influencing the Minds of Individuals***

Somehow the minds of those in the poorer and most violent-ridden communities must be reached. But how do you change someone's mind? One challenge is getting close enough in these communities to educate people about their fears. The other challenge is convincing someone that the reason they are angry is because they are fearful. A commissioner for the South African Human Rights Commission ("SAHRC") Zonke Majodina argues, one of the functions of the DHA, according to Section 29(2)(e) of the South African Immigration Bill, is to educate communities and civil society on the rights of refugees, foreigners, and illegal foreigners, as well as to conduct activities to prevent xenophobia.<sup>17</sup> The Government has failed to promote such education and cooperation.

In addition to the various standards for human rights that South Africa has pledged to uphold in its international agreements and in its Constitution, there is another motive for ending the violence: Xenophobic attacks will not serve the purpose of the perpetrators because they are built on a flawed philosophy.

Following the end of apartheid, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission ("Commission") was established to allow perpetrators of crimes during apartheid to apply for amnesty. Commission Chair Archbishop Desmond Tutu explained that the purpose of the Commission was to discover truth, start to heal, and learn what to avoid in the future.<sup>18</sup> At the Commission meeting for the death of American Amy Biehl, one of her murderers

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<sup>16</sup> Dickson Jere "Zim exiles face new fear and loathing in SA," *AFP: Johannesburg*, 14 May 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Zonke Majodina, "The immigration bill from a human rights perspective," 72.

<sup>18</sup> *Long Night's Journey Into Day - South Africa's Search for Truth and Reconciliation*, dir. Deborah Hoffman and Frances Reid, 94 min., Reid-Hoffman Productions, 2000, videocassette.

explained “if we had been living reasonably we would not have killed her.”<sup>19</sup> A Commission member responded by asking him how he could possibly believe that killing a person would bring about any of his objectives. In comparison to the perpetrators of the recent xenophobic attacks, the justification for murder may be similar—that they are not “living reasonably.” Many people in the townships where the attacks occurred feel more oppressed than they did during apartheid. Many are without jobs or adequate food. But even if this is a justification for being angry, murdering immigrants does not result in fulfilling the deterrence objective of the violence.

Foreigners will not stop entering South Africa and competing with locals for jobs because many are refugees who have no other choice. So again here lies the challenge of explaining to oppressed South Africans that their problems are not solved by channeling their fear of the perceived threat of foreigners into violent reactions.

When a person encounters something new or different it takes great courage to want to understand it rather than to fear it. As Susan Brown mentions in the article “Money and Morality,” when speaking of economic development, “confidence is an essential element for growth.”<sup>20</sup> This idea works the same with social and cultural development. People must have the confidence to successfully grow within their situations. What the people of South Africa need right now is the confidence and the courage to start understanding what they fear.

### **Refugee Law in South Africa** ***The Refugees Act of 1998***

In its international agreements, South Africa has conceded to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention, and the 1948 UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights.<sup>21</sup> The UN Refugee Convention protects those fleeing their country due to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, national origin, political opinion or membership in a particular social group.<sup>22</sup> The OAU Refugee Convention broadened the definition to include those refugees whose political rights are violated or threatened.<sup>23</sup>

In its domestic efforts to acknowledge and protect refugees, the South African Refugees Act (“Refugees Act”) was passed in 1998, and finally implemented on April 1,

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Susan Brown, “Money and Morality: Transformation Audit,” *Institute for Justice and Reconciliation* (2006): xii.

<sup>21</sup> South African Refugees Act, sec. 6(1).

<sup>22</sup> 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees.

<sup>23</sup> The OAU was replaced by the African Union in July 2002.

2000.<sup>24</sup> According to the Refugees Act, a person cannot be refused entry into the country or be forced to leave if:

(a) owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted by reason of his or her race, tribe, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group, is outside the country of his or her nationality and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country, or, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his or her former habitual residence is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it; or

(b) owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing or disrupting public order in either a part or the whole of his or her country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his or her place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge elsewhere; or

(c) is a dependant of a person contemplated in paragraph (a) or (b).<sup>25</sup>

Section 27 of the Refugees Act states that refugees and asylum seekers enjoy full legal protection under the provisions of the Bill of Rights under Chapter 2 of the South African Constitution, which means they are entitled to the same rights as citizens (except the right to vote or be elected to office).<sup>26</sup> A refugee is also entitled to freedom from arbitrary detentions and arrests and may not experience an unwarranted detention for more than 30 days.<sup>27</sup> The right to remain, to pursue an identity document, interview for a travel document, seek employment and study, and to receive basic health services and primary education is also, in theory, guaranteed to refugees in South Africa.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Asylum Process***

The process of applying for refugee status in South Africa begins with the DHA. An immigration officer at the border will issue a 14-day temporary permit to an asylum seeker upon entry into the country, within which time the asylum seeker must without delay file an application in person to a Refugee Receiving Officer at one of the five Refugee Reception Offices—Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town,

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<sup>24</sup> Before the implementation of the Refugees Act, the only legal instrument dealing with the law of refugees in South Africa was the apartheid-era Aliens Control Act of 1991.

<sup>25</sup> South African Refugees Act, sec. 3.

<sup>26</sup> South African Refugees Act, sec. 27.

<sup>27</sup> South African Refugees Act, sec. 29(1).

<sup>28</sup> South African Refugees Act, sec. 27.

Durban, and Port Elizabeth.<sup>29</sup> If the person does not reach an office before the expiration of the 14-day permit they are deemed an illegal immigrant and subject to arrest and deportation.<sup>30</sup>

When an asylum application is filed, a Refugee Receiving Officer gives the applicant an asylum seeker permit, which must be renewed every three months and allows the applicant to temporarily stay in the country and to pursue work or study. After two interviews, a Refugee Status Determination Officer makes a decision on whether to grant a refugee status or reject the application as fraudulent or unfounded. The officer can also choose to refer any questions of law or fraudulent applications to the Standing Committee for Refugee Affairs.<sup>31</sup> Any appeals as to unfounded applications are reviewed by the Refugee Appeal Board.<sup>32</sup>

If asylum is granted to the applicant, they receive a refugee status for a period of two years and must actively renew the status within three months of its expiry to obtain a second status lasting a four-year period. After five years of continuous residence and *recognized* refugee status in South Africa, a refugee may apply for indefinite refugee status.<sup>33</sup> Five years after attaining permanent residence, a refugee may apply for naturalization to become a South African citizen.

## **Refugee Reality**

### ***Documentation and Detention***

There are approximately 50,000 applications for asylum each year in South Africa.<sup>34</sup> The South African Immigration Act states in its preamble that “temporary and permanent residence permits are issued as expeditiously as possible.”<sup>35</sup> In addition, the preamble states “the needs and aspirations of the age of globalization” are to be respected by the policies set out by the Act.<sup>36</sup> The UN High Commissioner on Refugees (“UNHCR”) also consistently notes the need for asylum

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<sup>29</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Living on the Margins: Inadequate protection for refugees and asylum seekers in Johannesburg* (New York: Human Rights Watch, November 2005), Vol. 17, No. 15(A).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> South African Refugees Act, sec.24 (3)(b).

<sup>32</sup> South African Refugees Act 24(c)(3).

<sup>33</sup> South African Refugees Act, sec.27(c).

<sup>34</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Global Appeal* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2008-2009).

<sup>35</sup> South African Immigration Act, section (a).

<sup>36</sup> South African Immigration Act, section (d).

seekers to experience “efficient, expeditious and fair” process of their applications and claims.<sup>37</sup> In reality, asylum seekers wait in line for weeks and sometimes months outside a reception office.

Refugees want to exercise their right to work in South Africa so they can one day go back to their country of origin and “make [South Africa] proud of offering us those opportunities,” says one refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.<sup>38</sup> Although both refugees and asylum seekers have the right to work and study, many employers refuse to hire them and schools are more reluctant to accept foreign students. Employers express hesitation at hiring a refugee because if their status papers expire and are not renewed the employer will have to retrain another worker for the job. Even if a refugee has legitimate status papers, they are often unable to open bank accounts without also possessing a passport or the green South African identity card issued to citizens. Many of them encounter the barrier: “Where is your green ID?”<sup>39</sup> It may be easier to get a passport if the refugee has studied in South Africa but to study would require loans and a refugee cannot open a bank account to get a loan without first having the passport. When hearing refugees’ stories, this vicious cycle of bureaucracy becomes obvious and disheartening.

Those who are granted refugee status are eligible to apply for an identity document and to interview for a travel document issued jointly by the UNHCR and the DHA. The DHA’s delay in issuing these documents has resulted in the unwarranted arrest and detention of refugees, who are sent to the immigration section of prisons. Any immigrant that is to be deported is detained in Lindela Repatriation Center near Johannesburg. Fourteen refugees from the Youngsfield refugee camp were arbitrarily arrested for intimidation in June 2008, and held in Pollsmoor Prison in Cape Town for twelve days. When they asked police to explain what “intimidation” they had committed, the officers had no answers, instead they responded by kicking the refugees and taking their wallets and watches.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Living on the Margins: Inadequate protection for refugees and asylum seekers in Johannesburg* (New York: Human Rights Watch, November 2005), Vol. 17, No. 15(A).

<sup>38</sup> Shirley Gunn and Mary-Magdelene Tal, eds., *Torn Apart: Thirteen refugee tell their stories* (Cape Town: Human Rights Media Centre, 2003).

<sup>39</sup> Shirley Gunn and Mary-Magdelene Tal, eds., *Torn Apart: Thirteen refugees tell their stories* (Cape Town: Human Rights Media Centre, 2003), 62.

<sup>40</sup> Statement made in the Youngsfield refugee camp by the group leader of detained refugees, during a visit to the camp by Projects Abroad Human Rights Office interns.

It is the duty of the Judicial Inspectorate to give the prisoners an opportunity to file complaints about the conditions of the prison or the treatment of prisoners. But it is difficult to get an accurate picture of how refugees are treated by other prisoners because the cruelty that occurs when the doors shut and the prison closes for the night are things that “ought not to be reported,” said an official at the Office of the Inspecting Judge in Cape Town on 12 June 2008.<sup>41</sup> Foreigners fear that if they complain of treatment by other prisoners there will be repercussions in the form of gang violence, due to refugees often being integrated into the general prison population rather than being kept in the immigration section of the prison.

Another problem occurs when refugees are released from prison and risk being rearrested due to expired paperwork. These types of problems surrounding refugees fall outside of the statutory mandate of the Judicial Inspectorate; however, the organization makes attempts to refer these cases to the DHA. On the issue of xenophobia, Bertie Fritz, Regional Director, Office of the Inspecting Judge, explains, “Today it’s about drugs. Tomorrow it’s about fundamentalism. It’s always about the ‘other’.”<sup>42</sup> Somehow, South Africa has become obsessed with anger toward others. Whether on the streets of Cape Town or during arbitrary stints of detention in prisons, refugees have experienced the violence and intimidation connected with being grouped as “foreigners”—as the “other.”

### ***Refugee Camps and Displacement Challenges***

As opposed to other migrants, many refugees see South Africa as only a temporary refuge before returning to their country of origin once it becomes safe again. There is often no intention to permanently integrate into society. Many refugees come to South Africa because they have been told of its reputation as a land of democracy and tolerance. Unfortunately, they often find a country of terror much like the one from which they fled.

Many refugees would rather return home after experiencing the frustration of the asylum process in South Africa and the violence at the hands of locals. However, repatriation becomes impossible as their funds have depleted in the process of getting to safety, or because the government has not declared it safe to return to their country of origin. Refugees are stuck trying to find safety in between

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<sup>41</sup> The Office of the Judicial Inspectorate monitors many of the prison and rehabilitation centers in the Eastern and Western Cape provinces.

<sup>42</sup> Bertie Fritz, interview by author, Cape Town, 12 June 2008.

the borders. For those refugees whose protection cannot be guaranteed in South Africa, the UNHCR has adopted some durable solution procedures including resettlement to another country, relocation within South Africa, voluntary repatriation and family reunification.<sup>43</sup> However, high levels of xenophobia or low levels of employment are not grounds for resettlement.

Approximately 100 refugee camps are currently in operation in South Africa, including Soetwater on the Cape of Good Hope, housing nearly 3,500 displaced people.<sup>44</sup> The Youngsfield camp in Cape Town is home to 1,800 refugees from 13 countries. Disaster Risk Management officials try to keep families and nationalities within the same tents, which are provided for by the military, the City of Cape Town and community non-profit organizations. Youngsfield, which went into operation on 23 May 2008, at the request of the mayor of Cape Town, is the only refugee camp in the country that is located on a military base.

On 9 June 2008, Cape Town's High Court ruled that community centers must be opened by the city to accommodate the people displaced following the xenophobic attacks.<sup>45</sup> There is a belief that moving the immigrants would only deepen the tensions between the displaced and local South Africans.<sup>46</sup> However, there is also the undeniable fact that the current living conditions are unacceptable with the camps being so poorly built that wind effortlessly blows the tents to the ground during winter storms.

Refugees in the camps are surviving but "not living," as one woman community leader in Youngsfield described.<sup>47</sup> Children are not getting enough to eat and refugees are given only cold water for showers, incorrect medications and dog blankets to sleep in at night. Refugees are free to leave the camp during the day to go to school or work, facing the intimidation of the violent community that awaits them. Many refugees from Somalia located at the Soetwater refugee camp told human rights activists that they were violently kicked out of Gugulethu Township when they tried to collect their belongings. Two of them, while showing their scars, explained how they survived the shootings from angry local South Africans who are not prepared to welcome into the community any foreigner from other African countries.

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<sup>43</sup> Lawyers for Human Rights, *Refugee Information Guide and Directory of Services*, (South Africa: Lawyers for Human Rights).

<sup>44</sup> Clare Nullis, "Cape Town to fight court order to move the displaced," *Miami Herald*, 10 June 2008.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Statement made in the Youngsfield refugee camp during a visit to the camp by Projects Abroad Human Rights Office interns.

One Rwandan refugee in Youngsfield explained that she leaves the camp during the day to pursue her studies at the University of the Western Cape. Although she has been in South Africa for six years, she was granted asylum status just one year ago. She explained that there is a small sense of security within the walls of the refugee camps but that she has not felt safe in all her time in South Africa. “Xenophobia did not start a month ago with the attacks,” she said.

A South African Defense Force lieutenant at Youngsfield explained that many Somalis in the camp went on a hunger strike in June to reinforce their dissatisfaction with not being relocated to a third country, such as Australia or Canada.<sup>48</sup> Some refugees may not realize that resettlement can take years to complete and is only granted to roughly one percent of the refugees in the world.<sup>49</sup> Getting refugees a definite status and integrating them into society should be one of the main objectives as opposed to continued stay in the interim camps or a move to community centers, which would also be a temporary fix to the growing crisis.

A conversation overheard between two young girls in Youngsfield decisively illustrates the plight of refugees in South Africa.

—I can’t go home to Burundi. They are fighting there.

—I can’t wait to go home!

—You can’t. They are fighting in Somalia, too.

—I don’t care. I want to see my grandfather and grandmother again.

—Well, I can’t go back. But I can’t stay in South Africa. I don’t know where we will go from here.

### ***Corruption***

In theory, the road from asylum seeker to South African citizen should take ten years, as explained in the previous section on the asylum process. However, ill-informed applicants and ill-trained law enforcement, combined with the lack of a centralized processing system, delay the progress of legitimate refugees finding a safe haven. The process of attaining refugee status is free of charge, again, in theory. The reality is that bribes are prevalent and difficult to avoid.

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<sup>48</sup> Statement made in the Youngsfield refugee camp during a visit to the camp by Projects Abroad Human Rights Office interns.

<sup>49</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2007 Global Trends: Refugees, Asylum-seekers, Returnees, Internally Displaced and Stateless Persons (Geneva: UNHCR, June 2008).

A group of refugees once informed Human Rights Watch that they paid ZAR400 just to be allowed to enter the office to file their application.<sup>50</sup> Many asylum seekers are given fraudulent paperwork by officials in return for under-the-table cash, therefore, leaving the refugee without their money, their eligibility for asylum (because they have now violated South African law), and without legitimate documentation. The refugee may not be able to recognize that their paperwork is improper until they are arrested and detained.

Some refugees allege that government officials not only solicit bribes and distribute fraudulent papers but they also support criminals in the victimization of foreigners. One Somali refugee in the Youngsfield refugee camp described that when his shop was robbed, the cops ignored his complaint and told him to leave the country.<sup>51</sup> He already lost his wife and children in his escape from Somalia. After the demolishing of his shop, he lost all the property he owned—worth ZAR400,000.

If the DHA can efficiently issue documents and better train immigration and police officers to recognize and honor refugee papers, then refugees will be able to work, open bank accounts to take out loans for housing and continued studies. This efficiency and transparency will help refugees integrate into their new communities by giving them a legitimized status and erasing the need of locals to fear them. Many refugees have already lost all that they care about—family and friends—at the hands of a treacherous journey to South Africa. If the government can lessen the ring of corruption, refugees will not lose all the rest that they have—money saved or businesses built—at the hands of the country they risked everything to reach.

### **Efforts to Improve the Plight of Refugees** ***DHA and the Refugees Amendment Bill***

The DHA is currently attempting to make the refugee process more efficient by proposing amendments to the Refugees Act of 1998. The Refugees Amendment Bill (“the Bill”) was passed in the National Assembly after being presented to and finalized by the Parliament's Portfolio Committee on Home

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<sup>50</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Living on the Margins: Inadequate protection for refugees and asylum seekers in Johannesburg* (New York: Human Rights Watch, November 2005), Vol. 17, No. 15(A)

<sup>51</sup> Statement made in the Youngsfield refugee camp during a visit to the camp by Projects Abroad Human Rights Office interns.

Affairs on 3 June 2008.<sup>52</sup> On June 17, discussion of the Bill began in the National Council of Provinces (“NCOP”) with a briefing presented by the DHA to the Select Committee on Social Services.<sup>53</sup> If passed in the NCOP, the Bill would be sent back to the National Assembly for review of any NCOP amendments and further acceptance by the Assembly before being sent forward for Presidential approval.

The specific changes provided for in the Bill seek to amend definitions, such as adding “gender” as a ground for well-founded fear of persecution, bringing the Act in alignment with the UN Refugee Convention.<sup>54</sup> The Bill also provides for the dissolution of the Standing Committee for Refugee Affairs and the Refugee Appeal Board, and the establishment of a Refugee Appeals Authority and to provide for clearer obligations and rights of asylum seekers. Adv. Deon Erasmus, Chief Director of Legal Services for the DHA, explained that this change streamlines the process because many of the functions performed by the Standing Committee, such as unfounded applications, are already performed by DHA Legal Services.<sup>55</sup> A main critique of the Refugee Appeals Authority is that it could not be a fully independent body since its members and chairperson are to be appointed by the Ministry of the DHA.

The Bill further amends the Refugees Act so that people can apply for asylum at any Refugee Reception Office and that refugees can appeal a decision at any Magistrate Court rather than only in the High Court.<sup>56</sup> Both of these changes would quicken the process by which applications and appeals are filed and processed. Previously, only the Minister of the Department could withdraw an application for asylum but the amendments would allow for the Director-General to also withdraw applications.

Another improvement proposed by the Bill is to replace the maroon-colored refugee identification cards with green documents that more closely resemble the South African identity cards. The current cards are often not accepted by police, banking institutions or employers. Making refugee identity cards more consistent with South African documents should decrease any confusion as to

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<sup>52</sup> Refugees Amendment Bill (B 11B-2008) [database online]; available at <http://www.pmg.org.za/bill/20080604-refugees-amendment-bill-b11a-2008> (accessed 7 July 2008).

<sup>53</sup> Department of Home Affairs briefing to Select Committee on Social Services, Refugees Amendment Bill, South African Parliament, Cape Town, 17 June 2008.

<sup>54</sup> Department of Home Affairs briefing to Select Committee on Social Services, Refugees Amendment Bill, South African Parliament, Cape Town, 17 June 2008.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

refugees' rights in society. The new cards would still include a bar code that will clearly indicate the cardholder's status as that of a refugee and not a citizen.

In order to regularize the status of displaced refugees and asylum seekers in the camps, the DHA initiated issuance of identity cards in the Youngsfield refugee camp on 8 July 2008.<sup>57</sup> Military personnel in the camp indicated the identity cards would be used to determine who was legitimately a member of Youngsfield camp. But nothing on the card (other than the "Place of Issue" section) indicates a refugees' membership in the particular camp. The identity cards also showed an expiry date of 8 January 2009, leading many refugees to feel they were being coerced into obtaining identity cards to negate the documentation of those who had status beyond the immediate next six months.<sup>58</sup>

The DHA admits to its inefficiency resulting in backlogged applications and that this accumulation of pending paperwork leaves many asylum seekers in jeopardy of unlawful arrest, detention and deportation.<sup>59</sup> In addition to the pending Bill, the DHA also implemented a Turnaround Task Team in November 2003.<sup>60</sup> The Team has already decreased the processing time for issuing an identity card from an average of six months to an average of two and a half months.<sup>61</sup> In addition, the Refugee Backlog Project has successfully processed approximately 111,000 backlogged applications.<sup>62</sup>

### ***Tales from a Township***

As of 28 May 2008, it is estimated that 600 people have been arrested in connection with xenophobic attacks and 13,000 immigrants have moved from their homes in search of safety within police stations, city centers and churches.<sup>63</sup> Sifiso Mbuyisa, director for social dialogue and human rights in the Office of Premier Ebrahim Rasool, described the three-pronged process of strengthening

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<sup>57</sup> Information compiled during a monitoring of the Youngsfield refugee camp in Cape Town on 8 July 2008.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> South Africa Department of Home Affairs, *Refugee Backlog Project* [database online]; available at: [http://www.home-affairs.gov.za/refugee\\_project.asp](http://www.home-affairs.gov.za/refugee_project.asp).

<sup>60</sup> Vivian Warby, "Home Affairs speeds up services," *SouthAfrica.info*, 11 June 2008.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> South Africa Department of Home Affairs, *Refugee Backlog Project* [database online]; available at: [http://www.home-affairs.gov.za/refugee\\_project.asp](http://www.home-affairs.gov.za/refugee_project.asp).

<sup>63</sup> Yazeed Kamaldien, "Immigration and locals begin mediation," *Southern Mail*, 28 May 2008.

communities in the wake of these attacks.<sup>64</sup> The process begins with stabilizing the situation and preventing further violence. Second, relief and support from nongovernmental organizations provide foreigners with the ability to return to their homes in their South African communities. Lastly, community leaders are brought together to initiate conflict resolution. Mediation is used to calm the simmering tensions among the community, but Mbuyisa urges that street committees be reformed to work in conjunction with the police.<sup>65</sup>

An example of this community leadership and cooperation is found in the relatively small township of Zwelihle (population 60,000), 115 kilometers southeast of Cape Town. Willie Komphela, a preacher at a Bantu Church in the township, said the Somalis, Zimbabweans and Angolans that have fled the township following recent vandalizing of their homes and death threats on their shop windows will only come back when the community makes them feel safe. Komphela believes that “we are all human beings” and the people in Zwelihle must realize that foreigners are not present only for themselves but to help the local infrastructure by opening shops that provide jobs for South Africans who would otherwise be unemployed.

Despite the harsh realities of xenophobia that have reached Zwelihle, the response of the community is rooted in positive energy. The night of the discovery of the death threats, community leaders called an emergency meeting with police and the Premier of the Western Cape office to discuss the threats and to distribute pamphlets condemning the criminal acts.<sup>66</sup> A group of South Africans also joined to help the foreigners in Zwelihle patch up their homes and shops.<sup>67</sup>

### ***Responding to the Larger Causes Behind Migration***

Programs, such as the Reformulation of Refugee Law Project under James Hathaway, which emphasizes repatriation of refugees, have been criticized for not grappling with the causes behind the initial displacement of people.<sup>68</sup> Attempts to decrease the cause of migration will have to have a broader reach than just refugee law reform. The political instability, tribal and civil wars, and starvation are just some of the

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Lianda Beyers Cronje, “Death threats to foreigners,” *Hermanus Times*, 6 June 2008.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Southern African Migration Project, Migration Policy Brief No. 7, sec. 4.7.

larger issues that must be tackled by the international community and individual African countries.

It is an ongoing and long term goal for South Africa to help create stability on the continent and cure the causes of migration but, in the meantime, African refugees need a more imminent solution. What the South African Government can do is shift the focus of its immigration policy back to one of protection rather than exclusion, and promote understand rather than fear of immigrants and foreigners.

### ***Dialogue on World Refugee Day, June 20, 2008***

In light of the events surrounding migrants in South Africa and the presence of World Refugee Day on June 20, 2008, the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs, in conjunction with the South African Migration Project, conducted a public seminar on xenophobia.

Minister of Home Affairs Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula reminded South Africans that intolerance should not be payback for the years South Africans spent in exile during apartheid.<sup>69</sup> The general trend in migration policy is to see migrants as a security risk and an economic burden on the host country. Mapisa-Nqakula expressed that protecting refugees is not about charity but humanity, and that a more empowering migration policy would be one focused on inclusion and recognition of the skills that migrants bring to South Africa.

Another speaker, Judith Cohen, Deputy Director, Parliamentary Liaison and Legislation Monitoring, SAHRC, noted that never before in history had such a large number of non-nationals become displaced. SAHRC has found that the few Government representatives in the refugee camps tend to prefer police action rather than conflict resolution to deal with problems. SAHRC has recommended closure of the camps and voluntary integration of refugees into society on a more stable basis. The organization has also urged the government to place a six month moratorium on all arrests and deportations of undocumented migrants; however, the Government refused to honor this request.

It will take a long time for the South African view of foreigners to become one of curiosity and acceptance rather than fear and exclusion. But it can be done through civil education, leadership and dialogue. As evidenced by the seminar held on World Refugee Day, the tragic violence has at least encouraged the dialogue to begin.

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<sup>69</sup> Portfolio Committee on Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs and South African Migration Project, Parliamentary Seminar and Migration and Xenophobia, South African Parliament, Cape Town, 20, June 2008.

## Recommendations

A positive thought in the area of refugee law is that South Africa seems willing to incorporate international conventions on refugees into its domestic policy. One of the main concerns for improving the immigration system and avoiding similar outbreaks of violence in the future is that the effects of refugee legislation “have not cascaded down to the grassroots level where refugees share a livelihood with South Africans.”<sup>70</sup> Immigration reform and correct implementation of new policies must be done amid a public in dire need of civil education. This change within the community—within individual mindsets—is the true test of an emergent nation.

The first step in the process of creating a more tolerant nation is reforming the legal framework around which the refugee system operates. The DHA needs to continue to improve its administrative procedures to make them more efficient. The Refugees Amendment Bill, pending approval by the NCOP, is a good start to streamlining the application and appeals process. Administrative improvements are vitally linked to the decrease in the xenophobic culture in South Africa. If refugees are less vulnerable to misconceptions in the minds of local citizens and police, then there will be more room for understanding of what displaced people have endured and their reasons for being in the country. It will become more apparent that refugees and those still enduring the slow and stressful process of applying for refugee status are as anxious to contribute to South African society as South Africans are.

Secondly, there should be more dialogue among the international community to consider giving protection to economic refugees. As in the case with Zimbabwe, there are thousands of people that have not necessarily been persecuted by their government but are, nonetheless, fighting to survive due to the economic plight caused by the political bloodshed following the 29 March 2008 presidential election. Because the situation in Zimbabwe has not been deemed a political crisis, and due to the lack of protection for economic migrants, South Africa has deported approximately 17,000 Zimbabweans back across the border in the past few months without violating their international duty of *non-refoulement*—a duty on States not to return a person to a country where they will more likely than not be persecuted.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Legal Resources Foundation, *A Reference Guide to Refugee Law and Issues in Southern Africa* (Zambia: Legal Resources Foundation, 2002).

<sup>71</sup> Justine Gerardy, ‘SA Defies UN on Refugees,’ *Cape Argus*, 12 July 2008.

The UN Refugee Convention provides only a “basic minimum standard” of refugee protection, which means member States are at liberty to provide further protection to asylum seekers than is found in the Convention definition.<sup>72</sup> South Africa could possibly protect Zimbabweans under section 3(b) of the Refugees Act, if it interpreted the actions following the presidential elections as “events seriously disturbing or disrupting public order” in Zimbabwe.<sup>73</sup> Alternatively, Human Rights Watch (“HRW”) has recently urged South Africa to mandate a temporary immigration exemption status for all Zimbabweans, as a way of allowing entry, regularizing status, ending deportations, and granting the right to work to all Zimbabweans by bypassing the asylum process.<sup>74</sup> This temporary automatic grant of exemption to Zimbabwean immigrants could help ease the immediate tension in the region. But for a more stable future of migration concerning refugees, the addition of economic struggle to the list of legitimate grounds for refugee status should be seriously considered. This amendment to international standards would be consistent with the true purpose of protecting refugees rather than creating definitional exclusions.

Thirdly, civil education in the communities and townships will help to dispel fear and promote trust. Certainly, South Africans can learn to make the distinction between illegal immigrants and refugees. This will be especially clear once governmental departments do their part to confirm refugees’ status through more efficient paperwork procedures. There also needs to be more cooperation between the Government and community leaders so civilians do not feel they have to take the law into their own hands. South African people should not see immigration in terms of population numbers or statistics on race, religion, tribe or country of origin. These numbers are dangerous if viewed without the accompanying education to explain what they mean. Instead, immigration should be presented to the South African people in terms of the benefits that immigrants and refugees are able to provide to their new community. Educating people in the townships and communities about the advantages of immigration will start to slowly dim the angry light in which immigration is viewed.

South Africa has the most stable economy in Africa and one of the most liberal Constitutions in the world with respect to human rights. Valuing the skills that refugees and asylum seekers bring to the country and allowing them to

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<sup>72</sup> 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

<sup>73</sup> South African Refugees Act, sec. 3(b).

<sup>74</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Neighbors in Need: Zimbabweans Seeking Refuge in South Africa* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2008), 117-18.

rightfully seek employment and studies without encountering a violent barrier will improve the economic infrastructure for all South Africans. The process of teaching tolerance will be slow and not every mind will be changed, but education is the key to unlocking the ignorance that creates the fear.

Fourthly, refugees and asylum seekers need to be well informed of the asylum process so they will not engage in bribes and unknowingly help foster corrupt practices. If immigrants know what constitutes illegal activity they can choose not to engage in it. This refusal to submit to the prevalent environment of corruption will decrease the demand for bribes and it will save an asylum seeker from having his or her refugee status not granted or later revoked due to unintentional participation in illegal activity. A suggestion made by HRW is to post signs in Refugee Reception Offices in many different home languages of refugees so that they will be more informed as to what the application process entails.<sup>75</sup>

For refugees' part, they have the responsibility to become aware of their obligations as refugees and to respect the laws of South Africa, including not engaging in bribes in the asylum process. They must also make their best attempt to gain the trust of their new communities and to keep confidence in the South African Government and volunteer organizations that are striving to improve their situation. SAHRC conducts sessions at various camp sites to inform refugees of their rights as foreign non-nationals. In these meetings, refugees are encouraged to trust the Government as much as possible in order to have candid dialogue with officials who inquire about their circumstances and needs.

Fifthly, a certain amount of discipline must be injected into the Government at all levels. Police officers must be better trained to recognize asylum seeker permits and refugee status papers so they will not wrongly arrest or detain refugees. Officers also need to be punished for any bribes or other illegal acts they solicit. The DHA's Turnaround Strategy, in conjunction with the National Intelligence Agency, is aimed at educating DHA officials and dealing with those caught initiating or accepting bribes.<sup>76</sup>

For the upper tier of Government, including the President, Parliament and elected officials, it is their responsibility to make South Africa *want* to be a country

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<sup>75</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Living on the Margins: Inadequate protection for refugees and asylum seekers in Johannesburg* (New York: Human Rights Watch, November 2005), Vol. 17, No. 15(A).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

that treats its foreigners well, whether or not those immigrants will ever be repatriated to their countries of origin. The Government cannot be acquiescent in the inefficient process of filing asylum applications simply because they do not want to deal with the refugees once they become a responsibility of the State. Government must set the example in being inclusive to those in need of protection. The South African Constitution is too welcoming to humanity for the Government not to respect the rights guaranteed to everyone within South Africa and it is Government's duty to enforce these rights.

Lastly, there needs to be a gradual and overall shift in South Africa's isolated and exclusive culture. To accomplish this, there needs to be a move away from apartheid once and for all. There has been much discussion linking apartheid to the recent violence. But we must find another reason. In this respect, former South African President, Frederick Willem De Klerk argued that the heritage of apartheid was not to blame for the "unacceptable" xenophobic attacks, but rather high unemployment amongst black South Africans and crime.<sup>77</sup> Post-apartheid socioeconomic struggles may help explain the closed society that foreigners encounter in South Africa, but they are no justification for the violence. The advantage for South Africa in dealing with these issues is that the Government is no longer based on racial divisions. Author Alan Morris explains that the apartheid Government was a form of "total racism," whereas the current Government exhibits only "political racism," in which race and ethnicity become central issues but are not a piece of conscious policy.<sup>78</sup>

Similar to the post-Civil Rights era in the United States, the social fabric in South Africa is not perfect. It has only been fourteen years since the end of apartheid and it will take time for the ultimate benefits of a desegregated society to become realized. South Africans need to take advantage of their democratic Government and start seeing the end of apartheid as giving them equal opportunity, even if the price of that equality is integration of different races and nationalities. If South Africans connect their every breath somehow to apartheid or the ending of that era then they will live in it forever.

As evidenced by a passionate debate during a panel discussion at the University of Cape Town on 3 June 2008, it is clear that part of letting go of lingering apartheid tensions will be for South Africans to agree on whether all apologies and other reparations have been fully paid to neighboring African

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<sup>77</sup> "Apartheid 'not root of SA riots'," *BBC*, 30 May 2008.

<sup>78</sup> Alan Morris and Antoine Bouillon, eds., *African Immigration to South Africa: Francophone migration of the 1990s*, (Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2001), 87.

countries for the help in ending segregation or whether there is even compensation owed at all.<sup>79</sup> When the Government and academic and community leaders can decide where the past ends they will be able to move forward. Treating refugees with compassion will show the world that South Africa can be an embracing country with the ability to move beyond its tragic and discriminatory past.

### **Conclusion**

Although it is understandable to ask someone what country they came from, refugees feel dejected when they are constantly questioned about when they are “going back.” The idea of full integration within South African society can put both foreigners and locals on edge. Asylum seekers who cannot obtain protection or those who obtain refugee status but are still turned away by employers may be forced to resort to criminal acts, strengthening the stereotype that all immigrants are linked to an increase in crime rates. But a true understanding of the refugee story is still missing. And the connections that can be weaved together in the system of government and civil society cooperation have not been fully seized. Asylum seekers and refugees do not migrate by choice and are not motivated by a desire to steal jobs and engage in drugs and crime. They come to South Africa to find safety and peace, at least temporarily.

With strong leadership, administrative and legal reforms, South Africa can become the democratic haven of safety that has captured the dreams and hopes of so many. This vision of erasing xenophobia in the country will take a long time to accomplish. It may take even longer for the Government to commit itself to ending corruption or for the international community to strengthen refugee law to adapt to current humanitarian crises. But if South Africa can promote a culture of civil education, with the support of Government and humanitarian organization, the country will eventually find its way through the fear. In a South Africa that more closely resembles its reputation as a land of hope and democracy, citizens will not have to be angry towards foreigners and refugees from neighboring African countries will be able to find their long-awaited tolerance.

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<sup>79</sup> Institute of Justice and Reconciliation, panel discussion, “Xenophobia – Why now, where to next?” University of Cape Town, 3 June 2008.

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## **Missed Opportunity: The Underutilisation of Forced Migrants in the British Economy**

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**Abstract.** This paper looks at the work experiences of forced migrants in the country of origin and the host country. The article builds on interviews with forced migrants from three nationalities, Congo (DRC), Kosovo and Somalia to contrast their experience of work in the labour market in the United Kingdom. The research found that the place the migrants occupy in the host labour market is not often commensurate with their qualifications and professional baggage from the country of origin. The forced migrants often landed in menial, unskilled or semi-skilled jobs. Ethnicity or racial origin had little impact on the degree of success in the host labour market. However the article concludes that the professional demise of the forced migrants is not only a loss to them but the host economy might be missing out on valuable human resources, given the high skills that the migrants harbour.

**Keywords:** *forced migrants, refugee, host country, labour market, employment, economy, culture*

### **Introduction and background**

The debate surrounding forced migrants has been high on the British political, economic and social agenda in the past two decades. With the influx of thousands of people fleeing upheavals, questions have arisen and fed the debate about the capacity of the host countries to absorb them and the impact of such influx on the British economy. Many, particularly in the media and political milieus, have argued the detrimental effect on the economy and race relations. Some have suggested that refugees are a cost to the host nations labelling their contribution as miniscule which causes the migrants to be a burden. However, as research increases in this area, other authors have come to question the validity of these arguments (Block, 2002; Hack-Polay, 2000, 2006; Refugee Council, 2002).

From the perspective of forced migrants, the world of work in the host country can be a tough jungle, often difficult to penetrate, to move through it and to survive it. Anthias & Yuval-Davis (1995:13) argue that the “structural disadvantage of groups” in the labour market could be explained by several factors including, class, race, gender, education and training as well as the length of stay in Britain. All these factors are particularly important in connection with the study of refugees’ and migrants’ place in the labour market. Anthias & Yuval-Davis (1995) for instance argue that refugees and people from the colonies and the New Commonwealth have been predominantly used as cheap labour in Britain and Western Europe. Essentially, their position in the West is that they do not meet the criteria for being part of the national collectivity. The use of Africans and people from the former colonies in an inferior capacity in European labour markets has been sustained for many decades.

Castles & Kosack (1973), Phizacklea & Miles (1980), Miles (1984, 1989), Banton (1987), Gilroy (1987) have widely investigated the plight of immigrants (voluntary migrants) and refugees (forced migrants) in Europe in the past three decades. Within the perspective of economic exploitation of immigrants under capitalism, Castles & Kosack (1973:5) have provided an explanation of the massive use of migrant labour. They assert that migrants are used as cheap labour in order to “keep wages down and profits up”. The position is part of the overall view that immigrants, probably more significantly black and forced migrants, are perceived as inferior and treated consequently with some slavery and colonial stigmas. However, voicing that immigrants are ‘enslaved’ and exploited in twenty-first century Britain may contrast with current policy ensuring a minimum wage to all workers. The minimum wage regulation was hailed as a breakthrough to equality in the British labour market. However, recent statistics from the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) show that the average wage of minority workers is still lower than that of their white counterparts and the level of unemployment among minorities is much higher. The CRE (2006) highlights that in 2002, the unemployment rate for ethnic minorities was double that of their white counterparts (respectively 8 and 4 per cent). Lin (1986) and Anthias & Yuval-Davis (1995:82) argue that “minorities have suffered most from the growth of unemployment” in the past few decades in the UK. This disadvantage experienced by minorities may be further exacerbated when the minorities are refugees.

Given the employment opportunities of the last two decades in many developed countries and notably in the UK, it is interesting and surprising to note that the literature is consistent in acknowledging a certain disadvantage faced by forced migrants in the host country's labour market (Block, 2002; British Refugee Council, 2002; Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1995, etc.) Some of the factors traditionally associated with such disadvantage include racism (Block, 2002; Castles & Kosack, 1973), perceived 'irrelevance' of previous qualifications (Hack-Polay, 2000; Home Office, 1995; Marshall, 1992; Clark, 1992), language (Block, 2002; Home office, 1995), cultural barriers, lack of information about opportunities, gender (Delphy & Leonard, 1992). The labour market is not the sole social area where immigrants, refugees and minorities are seriously disadvantaged. Similar inequalities are seen in education where ethnic minority pupils and students face more exclusion and underachievement in schools. Other fields include welfare and housing and the overall social mobility within the wider society. A look at social mobility and housing is likely to greatly inform the debate on racism as affecting immigrants, refugees and minorities in Britain. However, the analysis of these fields requires specific researches which are outside the scope of the present work.

This paper is placed within the wider perspective of labour market studies; it argues that refugees can make a substantial contribution to the host economy and society. The research has found evidence that forced migrants harbour a wealth of knowledge and skills which benefit the national economy. The research's main contributions lie at two levels: first it has formulated a typology of forced migrant job search strategies which have not often attracted much literature; second, the research has looked in-depth into some of the critical issues affecting forced migrants' entry and participation into the labour market. The paper concludes that forced migrants are human resources that are often under-utilised. They could be a source of global competitive advantage for the host country and business organisations if the migrants' skills are adequately audited and a reasonable level of cultural support is made available.

After a discussion of the methodology and related issues, the paper presents and analyses the findings in relation to the following: work in the country of origin, employment in the host country, routes to entering employment and factors affecting employment in exile.

## **Methodology**

The aim of the research is to examine the match or mismatch of the refugees' past learning and professional experiences in the country of origin and those in the host country. A qualitative methodology was used with in-depth interviews with 30 forced migrants from Congo (DRC), Kosovo and Somalia. The interviews explored such critical issues as academic and professional qualifications obtained in native country, the work experience prior to fleeing, search for work and employment status in the host country and types of work and obstacles to entry to the host labour market. The chosen fields were the the London boroughs of Croydon, Greenwich and Lewisham. The choice of location was due to availability and concentration of the target nationalities in the areas identified. The choice of the three nationalities was motivated by the interest in contrasting three possibly different perspectives regarding economic and social life in exile in view to establish whether factors such as race and country of origin have an important impact on socio-economic promotion in the new country.

The final number of participants was arrived at through a snowball sampling effect. This meant that a small number of participants were contacted through local forced migrant community organisations and they, in turn, led the researcher to other refugees who were likely to meet the selection criteria. As the initial respondents led the researcher to others, the difficulties in trying to find suitable participants and to arrange interview time and location were minimised. In-depth interviews allowed participants freedom to provide detailed accounts of their stories and expand on particular aspects. The approach was interesting for studying the experiences of forced migrants, whose story is many-folds, e.g. endurance of inhumane circumstances relating to torture, imprisonment in the native country and integration issues in the host country, etc. The interview attempted to capture the essence of their life history, particularly in relation to their re-entering employment and economic life in Britain. The non-homogeneity of the sample from a racial point of view has been deliberate in order to compare and contrast the experiences of refugees from different ethnic backgrounds, the Kosovans (Europeans) and the Somalis and Congolese (Africans). The analysis considers the forced migrants' work experiences in the host and native countries and assesses the extent to which forced migrants are given or not the opportunity

to contribute professionally, how they enter the labour market in the UK, and how the new society responds to their aspirations.

## FINDING AND ANALYSIS

### Work in country of origin

The majority of the respondents have experienced in the UK what Lin (1986) described as “status inconsistency”. Only two of the refugees now occupy jobs that are higher than what they did in the country of origin. It is therefore understandable why the vast majority felt a sense of lower status and loss in exile. Table 1 shows the types of jobs the refugees once held before becoming exiles.

**Table 1 Job category of the refugees in the native country**

Type of jobs	Nationalities			Total
	Congolese	Kosovans	Somalis	
Managerial	2	1	1	4
Teaching	2	2	1	5
Clerical/administrative	5	3	3	11
Students	1	1	3	5
Unemployed	0	3	2	5

Table 1 indicates that nearly 67 per cent of the refugees were in employment in their country of origin, with 30 per cent being in jobs regarded as high status in those countries, e.g. managerial, teaching and to some extent administrative. Most of the respondents came from an urban background, which could explain the relatively high employment rate; in less developed countries most jobs are concentrated in urban areas. However, this trend is reversed in the UK where 63 per cent were in employment but with only 10 per cent in jobs similar to those held in the native country.

In the absence of reliable literature on employment mobility in the countries of the refugees studied in this research, our findings can not attempt any form of generalisation and will therefore apply to the sample. To establish some forms of generalisation further studies needs to be undertaken in the countries concerned but this is out of the reach of the present research given the time and financial constraints. The present analysis is, thus, typically a case study of the nationalities involved although some loose reference is made to some general

employment data in the three countries, Congo, Kosovo and Somalia. Majid (2005:7), in an International Labour Organisation (ILO) paper, acknowledges that though some broad data may be available in the context of employment in developing countries "much of this information is partial and incomplete, and constitutes an unbalanced panel of data".

Employment mobility in the country of origin does not appear to have been common. More often the refugees had stayed in one type of occupation since graduating or leaving school. In the interviews, the respondents did not mention that they had done a catalogue of jobs, but usually only one type of job during their life back in the country they originated from. "I was a government civil servant", a Somali refugee said; "I was a teacher", a Kosovan refugee proudly pointed out and a Congolese said he was a labourer. Given the economic difficulties in the three countries, it is difficult to imagine that there were a multitude of jobs for grab in the labour market. The assumption that the refugees may have only worked in the profession or trade mentioned by them could therefore be highly probable. In fact, Majid (2005:10) further argues, in relation to employment mobility that "the process of labour transfer does not show up in economy wide patterns in employment types".

The economic climate in Somalia is one of chaos where having a job at all, however low status it may be, is considered to be a privilege that the majority of citizens cannot afford. CIA (2006) points out that "Somalia's economic fortunes are driven by its deep political divisions" and much of the surviving parts of the country's economy lies mainly in agriculture. In Congo, the war in the past ten years or more has hindered the already deeply fragile and declining economy. Copson (2001), in the case of Congo, argues that "long troubled by economic decline and political stagnation, seemed to be entering a new era" of further decline when in 1997 troops of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL) took over the political power. With many schools closed as a result of the war, one of the major professions in the country seemed to be in great decline leaving an incalculable number of people out of work and hope. Both local government and private sector employments are suffering decline because of the assault by rebel and government forces and the withdrawal of many foreign companies.

Henriette, a former Congolese secondary school teacher, reported:

I've been a secondary school teacher since graduating. But I didn't have a job two months prior to fleeing because my secondary school's been burnt down. I hoped

my state of unemployment wouldn't be durable but that was protracted because of the fierce fighting and political upheaval at the time.

In Kosovo, the situation could not be much different. Being part of a segregated community, the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, this part of the former Yugoslavia, found it extremely hard to get into employment, particularly in government and local government where institutions were dominated by the Serbs. The economic climate itself did not help the Albanian cause; with unemployment nearing 40 per cent, the Serbs were given priority as asserted by Robert who helped at his parents' farm since he left high school with his A level three years prior to fleeing the deadly conflict. Robert pointed out that:

I enjoyed working at the farm in the end. I was with my family and that was enjoyable. In Kosovo, it's not easy to get a job, especially when you live in a small town. If you go to Pristina, it is also very hard because there are many people looking for a job there. If you don't know anybody you can't do anything. As I couldn't go to university, I worked at the farm after leaving college.

In total, the economic situation and the disorderly social and political scenes lead to the assumption that many of the refugees had remained for some time in the occupation they quoted to the researcher. An overwhelming majority had never changed jobs or move horizontally or vertically within the same occupation. They could however be credited with long years of experience in the professional area they embraced.

### **Typology of routes into employment in the UK**

In our sample the entry to employment of refugees in the UK was diverse. While some were introduced to their first job by friends and other acquaintances, others went to employment through training and only a handful accessed their first job following ordinary job search exercises on their own, such as completing application forms and attending interviews. This section examines this variety of routes into employment taken by the refugees interviewed.

Models of methods used by refugees to find jobs are not well documented in academic literature. However, empirical studies including findings by the Peabody Trust (1999) point to a culture of job introduction by friends and relatives. If refugees are to be seen as a racialised group as Anthias & Yuval-Davis (1995) have argued, then a Dual Labour Market theory would be a consistent framework

for understanding refugees' place in the British labour market. In fact, from the perspective of Dual Labour Market theory, male white workers have priority in the primary labour market which "is characterised by stability, strong trade union representation, higher wages and good working condition" (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1995:72); but the secondary labour market will recruit essentially female and black workers; here employment conditions are the opposite of what is available to those in the primary labour market. Marxists such as Edwards (1975) have argued that employers "consciously exploit race" to arrive at a desired degree of workforce control. Whatever the argument is, it is widely accepted in the literature that there is a high degree of differentiation in employment and this is to a large extent founded on race and gender. From this perspective, forced migrants will struggle to enter the job markets and to move up. The following sections highlight how the respondents entered the employment market in exile and the place that they occupied at the time of the interviews.

#### *Entry through networks of acquaintances*

In all three communities researched, participants had a friend or a relative who informed them of a possible opening in their place of work. Eleven of the nineteen participants who declared an occupation found their first job using the 'friends' route. Finding jobs this way confirms the crucial importance of networks as they can be essential for the integration process but as Robinson (1993) found networks could also be crucial for finding employment opportunities and Bloch (2002) describes finding employment through contacts and friends as one of the key job search techniques employed by the refugees she studied in the London Borough of Newham. The respondents in the present research have had similar experiences and Abdul, a Somali refugee reported that

My friend told me to come with him one day to see his supervisor. The friend said that they always needed people and if they (the employer) liked me they might take me on. I went with my friend one afternoon. The supervisor asked me if I was interested in clearing some boxes for two hours. I worked really fast to please him. At the end of the task he offered me to come back the next day. That's how I started.

Abdul's experience was not isolated. Other refugees reported getting their first appointment via such a route. However, it is clear that the sort of employment

in which the respondents landed was often unskilled and manual such as cleaning, packing, factory and catering work. Paul, a Kosovan refugee pointed out that

It was easy to get a job on a building site because they were always short of staff as many people left often without notice. Once, I thought I'd kill the boredom by going with my cousin to see what he does at work. My cousin's boss asked if I was looking for work. My cousin answered yes and I was offered to start on the spot. The job was hard; I thought I'd not finish the day. But the next morning I got myself together and went back.

From the experience of the participants, it may appear as though unskilled and manual employment attracts predominantly refugees and minorities. Other studies go in the same sense and provide some hints that help to understand the issues. Anthias & Yuval-Davis's (1995) perspective is that refugees are racialised and therefore face exclusion from full participation in British society. Castles *et al.* (1984) and Solomos & Back (1996) have similar opinion; they reveal that minorities often remain in the manual manufacturing sector where they are represented principally in shift work in factories, textile and foundries. For refugees landing in the unskilled or semi-skilled sector was partly due to the low level language abilities in the first years of exile. Many of these jobs require minimum language abilities, if any. Marshall (1992:18) suggests that language was one of the most serious barriers to refugee employment. In the case of the refugee participants, there was evidence of a link between language and the type of initial employment obtained in exile.

### *The training route*

A number of refugees accessed their first job in exile by taking up training which had a work experience element. Six or 32 per cent of the nineteen employed respondents used the 'training route' to access employment for the first time in exile. In general, the respondents accessed training after obtaining information from the refugee assisting organisation that they frequented, e.g. the Refugee Council, local community organisations, etc. While the majority found out about training and education this way, about one quarter received training information through friends who were already attending an institution. The training route offered the advantage of the refugee being introduced to an employer by a training institution or a college. Such a provider usually works in partnership with a bank of employers who are willing to take trainees. Without such introduction it would be

very difficult for the individual refugee to penetrate the environment of the company. As Charlotte, a Congolese refugee explained

I attended an IT training course with a refugee organisation in West London. The organisation found me work placement with a small company. My English was average but I was really competent at computers. After my placement, I was offered to stay for three months and they employed me.

Hamidi, a Somali refugee had a similar story. He got a work experience placement through his college. The employer pledged to take him back after he completes his training. Hamidi was offered a position as a care worker on completion of his course. The respondent was very thankful to those who showed so much willingness to assist him when he explained:

I thank my friend who took me to Greenwich College. The College was very supportive in training and sending me to this job experience. Now the employer is very kind because they want to keep me. I think I'm lucky and I thank God. If all these people didn't help me, I won't be here.

The training route had a triple function. First, it was an opportunity for the refugees to gain or improve their English language abilities. It was also about learning about a specific occupational area and furthermore was an opportunity for the refugee, novice to the UK work environment, to gain valuable experience and a reference. Often the courses combined English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) with a professional area, e.g. information technology (IT), health and social care, bookkeeping, etc. In Charlotte's case, she studied ESOL with IT while Hamidi learned English with the National Vocational Qualification in health and social care. The training route to employment while secure to a certain extent, does not remove the spectre of the unskilled or semi-skilled. The British Refugee Council (1990: 11) has found that in the case of refugee women, for instance, despite training and qualifications the refugees are confined in temporary, poorly-paid part-time domestic employment.

#### *Individual job search route*

Individual refugees sometimes engaged in job search activities by following the route that experience UK job seekers would use. This can be referred to as the conventional route or the expert route and three of the employed refugees exploited this opportunity. This involves the refugee putting themselves forward

for jobs in the employment market like anyone else. For instance, they may call for an application forms, send a curriculum vitae, visit employment agencies. The individual route was the preferred route for three refugees, including the two who had some competence in the language of the host country prior to leaving. However, competence in English language alone was not sufficient to raise the confidence the participants showed in attempting to “go it alone”. Other factors such as advice from welfare and employment services and tips from friends and professionals were also enabling and powerful agents. Such courageous entrance into the unknown labour market was a privilege affordable only to a fortunate few like the Somali who was educated in higher education in the UK and another who completed some higher education in Somalia and had done some significant study of English language in the native country. Abdul describes how he went about getting a job:

As soon as got the right to work, I started sending my CVs to different companies. Many of applications I made were not successful. I was rarely called for an interview. Many CVs I sent were never acknowledged. I wondered what was going on despite my qualifications and experience. It took more than a year to find my first job. I was delighted.

The different approaches to entering the world of work in exile had varying degrees of success. However, the ‘friends’ options and the training route appeared to be effective in pushing the refugees into jobs however low status those jobs were. The individual job search or conventional route seemed slower and more disappointing but the refugees who pursued it and persevered had more rewarding professional or skilled employment.

### **Employment in the host country**

A Home Office (1995) research into refugee education and employment showed that over a third of the 263 participants interviewed were university graduates and had occupied senior professional positions in the country of origin. Marshall (1995) also found that well over half of the refugees he worked with were professionals in their native country and only six per cent were unskilled workers. Ordinarily, past high professional status and education and training count as assets in one’s future development but in the case of the refugees studied in the present research these did not seem to have had much impact. However, those who were

unemployed in exile represented 10 per cent, with a further 28 per cent undeclared occupations. The comparison shows that fewer of the refugees were in employment in the UK and fewer of those employed had jobs that met their expectations.

The fortune of refugees in employment in exile varies. Many of the participants hoped that they would be able to reconstruct broken lives in the new country. Entering employment is part of this reconstruction enterprise. However, the process was not always smooth. Many of the respondents were actively looking for work and this keenness to find work fits in with liberal perspectives which see work as a source of freedom and self-realisation. Blauner (1964) argues that only a change in means of production, including technology, is sufficient to sustain work as a fulfilling activity in industrial societies. This perspective is rejected by Marxists who believe that work, predominantly in capitalist societies, is alienating because human labour has become a commodity rather than work per se and therefore fulfilling and freedom broker. However, for the refugees in this research, Blauner's (1964) view seems to translate their preoccupation: find work to rediscover a sense of self-worth and re-enter the social arena. In fact, finding employment to occupy oneself as part of the healing process has been another heart breaking venture for a large number of the respondents. This justifies the plurality of strategies used in the search for work as described earlier. Whether they had trained or not, in a large number of cases, the refugees landed in employment that was much below their qualifications, capabilities and aspirations. The metaphor of the world of work resembling a 'tough jungle', mentioned at the start of the section, is enlightening in this respect.

The Civis Trust (2002) has catalogued some of the most common jobs that refugees find themselves in, e.g. security guards, care support work, cleaning, etc., if they are fortunate enough to find work at all. Many research studies including British Refugee Council (1990), Citizens Advice Bureau (1993) found evidence that unemployment among refugees nears 70 per cent. The Civis Trust (2002:28) found that many refugee job applicants "have had hundreds of job applications rejected for fairly menial jobs". The respondents in the present research have not escaped the harshness of the tough British labour market jungle. The majority of the respondents have found work in such areas as described by the Civis Trust and have come to persuade themselves that such was their natural fate; the most effective route for surmounting unemployment and barriers to employment has

been through peer assistance, i.e. ‘friends taking friends to work’ as argued earlier. The tone of resignation has been well expressed particularly through metaphors translating an idea of sentence. Metaphors such as “exile is like a prison; exile is like hell; exile is like a downfall, etc.” were formulated by at least one respondent in all the three communities researched, i.e. Somalis, Congolese and Kosovans. Table 2 describes some of the jobs respondents were doing at the time of the interviews:

**Table 2 Employment in the host country**

No. of respondents	Occupation
2	Office (managerial or senior officer)
1	Teaching
5	Driving
5	Security/ Office (clerical)
6	Cleaning/factory
3	Unemployed
8	Not declared

Table 2 shows that 90 percent of the respondents were in low status jobs which are often manual. Mengesha (1995:4) explains that refugees are the most marginalised group within the community; they live in poor quality accommodation, are unemployed or underemployed, with no proper employment training and as a result find themselves in a poor state of health”. There may therefore be an interconnection between employment, housing and health. The perceived less favourable employment situation of refugees has a number of serious implications which range from social marginalisation to risks to psychological and physical health. However, it is not always evident that the refugees themselves are conscious of what others may see as poor housing or poor health. A Kosovan refugee who lives with a number of other in the same flat in Croydon sees this as normal and reported that:

I’m lucky to be living with many other countrymen and women (six people in the two bedroom-flat) in the same house. We live like a family like back home. We spend time together and help each other in everything. It’s cheaper too.

From other perspective, these may be seen as overcrowded accommodation. But for these refugees, this is culturally acceptable to live as a

family and benefit from the network locally available. The financial advantage of such promiscuity is not arguable, given the levels and types of jobs that the respondents find themselves in. From a Marxist perspective (Marx, 1970), these refugees are viewed as a “class in itself” because the members have low class consciousness, or rather low consciousness, of the perceived substandard nature of their living conditions. They are a social entity within which individuals share the same cultural heritage and values which become a foundation of life in the host country.

Table 2 and other studies (e.g. Castles & Kosack, 1973; Clark, 1992; Marshall, 1992; Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1995) show that jobs that migrants take up are not often commensurate with their qualifications, experiences and status prior to migrating. Many of the refugees had respectably high status jobs in the native country. Teaching, civil service, army and private sector managerial positions were some of the most common occupations of the respondents in their countries of origin. However, a small number were in occupations that they did not perceive as employment back home, e.g. farming. Another category were in higher education which was perceived as a high status situation in the three countries examined, given that higher education was almost synonymous of future high employment. For many this professional misfortune was in many respects metaphorically comparable to nostalgia, fall or starting from scratch.

### **Social realities affecting employment in the host country**

This section examines the socio-cultural factors that shape the employment of forced migrants in the host country. It highlights the significance of factors such as language, racism and ideological constructions as well as the complexity of the labour market. The research reveals that the combination of these factors tend to shape or define the place forced migrants occupy in the host country’s labour market.

#### *Language*

The study has revealed an association between the level of proficiency in the language of the asylum country and the refugees’ occupation. Table 3 shows the language proficiency of the respondents. Marshall (1992) has described the language issue as one of the key barriers to refugee employment. In his research, he found that two thirds of the clients he interviewed did not have English as their first language. The

researcher has attempted to classify on the speaking abilities which were established based on the discussions with the participants. The classification is based on a typology developed by the Department for Education & Science (DfES) in the UK.

**Table 3 Language proficiency of the participants**

Lang. Level	DfES description (speaking ability)	No. respon- dents	Job types linked to language level
Level 2	Listen & respond to spoken language, including extended information and narratives. Speak to communicate with detailed information. Engage in discussion with 1 or more people in a variety of different situations making clear and effective contributions	16	- Professional (3) - Semi-skilled (5) - Unskilled (2) - Unemployed (2) - Undeclared (4)
Level 1	Listen & respond to spoken language, incl. information & narratives and follows instructions of varying length. Speak to communicate information, ideas & opinions adapting speech & content. Engage in discussion with 1 or more people in familiar & unfamiliar situations making clear/relevant contributions	9	- Semi-skilled (3) - Unskilled (2) - Unemployed (1) - Undeclared (3)
Entry 3	Listen & respond to spoken language incl. straightforward information and narratives. Speak to communicate information, feelings & opinions in familiar topics using appropriate formality. Engage in discussion with 1 or more people in familiar situations, making relevant points.	3	- Semi-skilled (2) - Undeclared (1)
Entry 2	Listen & respond to spoken language incl. straightforward information & short narratives. Speak to communicate information, feelings & opinions on familiar topics. Engage in discussion with 1 or more people in familiar situations.	2	- Unskilled (2)
Entry 1	Listen & respond to spoken language incl. simple narratives, statements, questions & single-step instructions. Speak to communicate basic information, feelings & opinions on familiar topics. Engage in discussion with people in familiar situations about familiar topics.	0	N/A

The choice of first jobs, in particular, is strongly motivated by the language abilities of the refugees. Those with no English or very little competence usually entered completely the unskilled world of the factory or cleaning which are all considered to be low status employment. Earlier the case of two Somali refugees was reported when they explained their reason for landing in unskilled work. The respondents plainly put that they had no choice but take up employment in the sector because there “you did not need to speak English”. People would just show the respondents what to do, often by gestures and the training was completed. For instance, the experiences of Abdul, a Somali respondent and Paul, a Kosovan are enlightening. Abdul was asked if he would like to clear boxes for two hours and that became a permanent employment for him; Paul accompanied his cousin on a building site just to kill boredom and he got started in a job on the spot. Unskilled work was not often too difficult to land, which leads one to establish a connection between such employment and research finding by Castles & Kosack (1973:5) who see migrants, given the subaltern role they fulfil, as a reserve army of labour (as termed by Anthias & Yuval Davis’s (1995:67) being required in order “to keep wages down”. From this perspective, migrants are seen as a capitalist tool of production and profit. Refugees as forced migrants do not escape this logic of exploitation and in many instances, their plight has been said to be less desirable than that of the voluntary migrants. Nikolinakos (1975) goes further to qualify the migrant labour force as a “sub-proletariat” that divides the working class.

The search for work in the unskilled sector transcends conventional job search methods in a developed country like Britain. Friends are encouraged to bring friends to fill vacancies; in other words refugees are encouraged to bring other refugees to nourish the number of unskilled workers in the low status jobs. The most eligible are those who cannot speak the language of the new country and are therefore not aspiring for ‘unreasonable’ positions in the employment market. The underemployment of refugees here confirms the assertion that language is a powerful tool of communication and one of the primary engines for socialisation. Anthias & Yuval-Davis (1995:4) argue that the inclusion or exclusion of particular social groups depends of a number of parameters of which language is a fundamental one. These parameters, including language, help to define the boundaries as to who belongs and who does not.

## *Racism*

Brennan & McGeevoer (1990:93) argue that “employment opportunities are limited for refugees as a result of the lack of consistent implementation of equal opportunities policies”. This is close to what is described in the UK in the Sir McPherson report in 2003 as ‘institutional racism’ whereby organisations fail to take the necessary steps to address racial imbalances in the workforce, contributing to deny opportunities to minority groups. Racial discrimination plays an important part in keeping refugees in unskilled low status work. This has been well documented (Hack-Polay, 2006; Block, 2002; Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1995). Typically in this research, fewer respondents have described experiences of direct racism in their work place. However, the fear of the spectrum of racism has confined to silence and strict obedience in employment and in the workplace. Many agree that they rarely ask any questions regarding employment rights, promotion or conditions of work. Henriette, a Congolese refugee expressed the general fear and perception in the following terms:

You do your job and go home. You never know what will happen to you tomorrow if you talk too much. I heard that some black workers were dismissed because they spoke out about discrimination.

Does such fear of the spectrum of racism in employment exemplify the metaphors of “exile as happiness and sadness” and “exile as a strange place”? In many respect it could be interpreted as such. In fact, while the refugees interviewed were quite happy to be earning their living in honesty, they were also saddened that because of their status, their languages accents or their ethnic origins, they were denied opportunities that others saw as legitimate and a lifetime achievement. There is no doubt that asylum in such circumstances would seem for some exiles as “nostalgia”, particularly for the civil servant, the teacher, the high status officer back home. In fact, what racism does to the mind of those affected is to generate a sense of inferiority and loss of self-esteem. Vietnamese refugee children interviewed by Finlay & Reynolds (1987) describe themselves as hopeless in front of situation when others denied them their humanity. One of the interviewees explained that “they call you animal and ask you what you have come to do here”. When growing up, if the damage to the mind is not unlearned the young adult carries it throughout their lives in most areas of social life including

employment because racism could be a mode of “exclusion, inferiorization, subordination and exploitation” (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1995:2).

### *Socio-cultural boundaries*

Social cultural boundaries here are understood as behaviours or social and cultural practices that the forced migrants bring with them into the host society, which contrast with those of the new milieu and could help identify the newcomers as outsiders. These may include religious beliefs, national dress, language, social behaviours (e.g. address and greetings), employment practices, etc. The refugees in this research sometimes had to abandon part of self culturally and embrace new ways. That’s part of the adaptation process. This is a painful sacrifice but it’s about survival. The example of a Kosovan who consumed culturally unacceptable food en route for Britain shows the degree to which one has to reinvent self when faced up with new realities. Those who desperately do not want to sacrifice self, beliefs and cultural and religious values learned in the old society suffer isolation and great disadvantage because there are not always services that take account of such differences.

The unemployment of refugee women is largely influenced by cultural boundaries. ‘Women should stay at home’, such is the norm in many native refugee societies and this message is carried with them into exile. Dependant wives that come to join spouses are entangled in this cultural enigma which does not always fit the requirements of the receiving societies. Women are therefore trapped between the need to adapt to new social and cultural realities and the need to comply with minority social orders often enforced through social control. This is particularly the case in the Kosovan and Somali communities. A Kosovan woman voiced that she came to accept that women should look after the home and the children and the man should be the bread winner; “such was the social division of labour back home and I don’t know why this should not be replicated here if we are together”. This confirms a statement by a Kosovan interviewee who warned the researcher about the cultural conservatism of male Kosovans towards female members of their community. The Congolese women were more liberal. Not only more of them agreed to individual interviews than other communities, but there were also more of them in employment than their Kosovan and Somali counterparts. Marshall (1996) explains how in some cultures it is inconceivable that

women sit in the same vicinities as men, which prevents a large number of women from participating in education, training and employment.

However, the effects of cultural antagonism between the old and new cultures do not only affect women. Male respondents also were faced with dilemmas. While training for instance, three Somali refugees had to resign themselves to accept to train with women, particularly non-Muslims. Sam, a Somali refugee who converted to Christianity found it difficult to accommodate the situation at first. He said:

I was embarrassed because a girl sat next to me on the first lesson. This isn't usual in my culture. Later the lecturer saw my embarrassment and we discussed the issue. Although I continued the class, I didn't understand the significance of having mixed classes until I married an English woman.

The clash of cultures continued in the workplace for male respondents from Somalia and Kosovo. Musa, a Somali who works in a factory also found it peculiar to perform the same role as women. He recalls that:

I was shy among all these ladies with whom I was sticking labels on the products. As I was slower than the female colleagues, the supervisor asked me if I wanted to try another job in the factory. I trained in forklift driving which I thought was more of a male job.

In most cases the refugees managed to overcome cultural barriers and continue their learning, training or employment. But in some instances, the cultural boundary was so stark that the respondent gave up his work and sought alternative employment. Idriss who was sent by an employment agency to work with sausages told the researcher that because of his religion, Islam, he could not work with pork. On the first day of employment when he realised that the meat being handled was pork, he asked to leave. Idriss took some considerable time before finding another job because of his cultural requirements. The experiences of the refugees show that it takes time to undo or considerably alter the original cultures which were engraved in the conscience. Cultural transformation came only with the need for survival.

#### *Employment culture in the host country*

A further cultural barrier relates to the complexity of the British labour market and employment culture. The vast majority of the respondents, actually all

but the two participants that engaged in the conventional job search exercise, did not know how to go about finding a job in the UK. The respondents were puzzled about the ways in which they could enter the job market in the country of exile. This sharply contrasts with the knowledge and practices they were familiar with in their countries of origin. In countries where the respondents came from (Somalia, Congo, Kosovo), success in the job market depended upon connections, acquaintances and other networks they could exploit. But in exile, they did not know many people and networks, particularly those that were influential enough to push them into 'desirable' jobs. The lack of such familiar sources could explain why many refugees are confined to under-employment or unemployment. Research found that "the lack of references, networking and work experience in the UK was a considerable barrier to employment" (Civis Trust, 2002:82). The terror of not making it in the employment market was almost unanimous among the participants. As Jean, a Congolese refugee, pointed out:

When I started looking for a job, I had no clue about where to start. Later I heard that I could approach employment agencies. But I didn't know what they were and where to find them. In Congo, we don't have much of those agencies. When I qualified, the government gave me the job in the regions. That's it. To come to a bigger city, relatives who knew people at the top helped me.

Jean's experience is not singular. Kosovan respondents and Somali refugees evoked similar experiences. This sort of experiences of the job market has not sharpened the job search abilities of the refugees to find their way round in the highly competitive employment market in the UK. In most cases, the jobs were allocated to the refugees in their own country as opposed to searching for the job in the UK. The respondents needed lots of training in job search within UK employment culture as well as advice and guidance. However, as it could be seen with the Kosovans predominantly, many of the refugees interviewed chose to remain attached to employment cultures that they were familiar with in their countries of origin. It has been shown earlier that a substantial number of them got their first job through friends or by being introduced to employers by their training institutions whose impact has been instrumental in the refugees securing their first jobs. Research by the Peabody Trust (1999:82) found that the most common method for refugees to find jobs was "through friends". Only a handful took the conventional way to apply for jobs by themselves.

Within British employment culture, a key area holding many respondents back was the procedure. In the UK, most companies have their own applications which are often lengthy. The non-expert found it extremely disconcerting. A Kosovan refugee told the researcher:

I got an application form for a clerical job. It had loads of pages. It asked for references from previous employers and other qualifications like GCSE. I didn't understand. I thought I could never do this. I asked friends for help to get work in their restaurant. And I was introduced to the chef who took me on.

The unfamiliarity of refugees with UK employment culture with regards to application forms and curriculum vitae has been well documented. The metaphors of "exile as a strange place", "exile as a new beginning", formulated by the participants illustrate the idea that the refugees felt lost in an alien employment culture. 'Strange' is a strong qualification when referring to a place because it encapsulates the meaning of unwelcome-ness, fear and gloom. The phrase 'new beginning' in the second metaphor illustrates the start of a new process with its uncertainties though it could represent hope and present some opportunities. Marshall (1992) who spent many years in career guidance with refugees argues that finding work in the UK for refugees represents a completely new venture that they learn the hard way. With complex forms to fill and confusing employment legislation that restricts the right to work for refugees (Civis Trust, 2002), many refugees abandon the socialisation process vis-à-vis the employment field. For the many who do not make it to the standards meeting their expectations, asylum could be viewed as a 'downfall'.

### **Summary and conclusions**

The research found that the professional status of the refugees in the host country contrasts with that once held in the native country. In exile the refugees were mostly in unskilled or semi-skilled employment while prior to becoming refugees they held professional positions. Most respondent would use networks and acquaintances to find jobs, with the second most used route into employment being through training although a small proportion among the respondents would make individual effort to secure jobs. Although the respondents' unemployment rate (33 per cent) is an improved figure on the usually quoted 70 per cent, the job types are similar to those reported in previous research, e.g. Marshall, 1992. The

respondents' employment prospects were affected by social realities such as language, racism, socio-cultural boundaries and employment cultures in the host society.

Not finding a job was part of numerous constraints of exile over which the forced migrants had little control. Language, cultural barriers, racism and lack of the helping networks usually played against them. The refugees would like exile to offer them the opportunity to contribute to social, economic and cultural life in the new country and pay back the hospitality that the host nation would have given them. Tabori (1972:3) argues that "exiles have made an important and lasting contribution to whatever country was willing to receive them". The British Refugee Council (2002), in its *Credit to the nation*, argues that many great world citizens such as Karl Marx and Albert Einstein were refugees.

The refugees with higher educational and professional backgrounds were aided in the psychological and social healing by their experiences as they perceived them as credentials on which they could build; however, for a number of them these became false hopes and further alienation as the refugees encountered difficulties reinventing their professional and social statuses. In general, the study shows that past positive social experiences such high social status and level of education in the country of origin help promote better integration in exile. Integration is also affected by the exiles' cultural heritage, e.g. religious, the view of gender. For instance, the research has revealed greater educational and employment participation for Congolese women than their Kosovan and Somali counterparts.

An important contribution of the study has been to identify a typology of job search strategies by forced migrants and consider the correlation between such strategies and their maintenance in lower employment. The migrants used three principal strategies to enter the labour market: through acquaintances, training and personal action. The research suggests that the existence of this typology could help explain why refugees stay in subaltern employment; as they enter the job market through acquaintances who usually work at the lower end themselves, the obvious consequence is that the new entrant will land in similar occupation. Similarly, those taking the training route and personal action, are faced with racism which may go unnoticed as language issues are often used as an alibi for rejecting the forced migrant's claim to reasonable employment commensurate with their

qualifications and experiences. In addition, the complexities of the host labour market contribute to marginalise them further.

The research found that the refugees' strong educational and professional backgrounds should militate in their favour and represent an advantage for the British economy. More dynamic and constructive resettlement programmes such as those of the Indochinese in the USA, Canada and Australia in the 1970s and 1980s (Robinson, 2000) would help remove some of the 'hell' and empower the exile to live a dignified and productive life. The UNHCR Commissioner referring to resettled Indochinese refugees after the exodus of the 1980s, observes that at present "most of the refugees who were admitted to countries such as the USA, Canada, Australia and France have now become fully fledged citizens of their adopted countries" (in Robinson, 2000:vii), thus making use of valuable human resources. With expansion of the European Union to Eastern Europe, more and more organisations are seeing the added benefits of using migrant labour.

Considering the tremendous economic and cultural contributions of forced migrants to host nations, countries receiving people in need of protection could be sitting on human gold mines only waiting to be exploited. Widening this recruitment drive to forced migrants could provide companies with renewed labour force in times of skill shortage and an ageing population. In addition, employers could tap into this wealth of experience, especially international companies whose staff recruitment criteria encapsulate significant emphasis on cultural awareness. In effect, most of the forced migrants in the research spoke more than one language and understood more than one culture and could be suitable match for some positions often requiring expatriates. With large numbers of nationalities among migrants in the UK, one may not need an expert eye to arrive to the conclusion that the world has come to Britain to help it sustain its place in the global village (Hack-Polay, 2006).

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## **Deconstructing the Environment: The Case of Adult Immigrants to Canada Learning English**

**Andreea CERVATIUC**

**Abstract.** This article identifies and deconstructs the ways in which professionally successful adult immigrants to Canada chose to interact with and reshape different environments in order to foster their English learning process. The sample for this study was selected to be representative of the “brain gain” immigration wave to Canada of the last two decades. All 20 participants belong to the same category of highly-educated (17+ years of education), independent immigrants who came to Canada as young adults. The data collection process consisted of a series of three interviews with each participant. The data were analyzed following the principles of the grounded theory method. Several qualitative themes associated with learning English as an adult immigrant in various types of environments in Canada (instructed environments, ‘manipulated’ naturalistic environments, and unaltered naturalistic environments) emerged from the interviews with the participants. The themes are critically explored and special emphasis is laid on the ways in which participants overcame difficulties inherent in the environmental factors that were not readily structured to offer immigrants opportunities to learn and practice English.

**Keywords:** *immigrants, Canada, English learning process*

### **Introduction**

Canada’s Immigration policy of the last two decades has been designed to attract young skilled immigrants from a variety of professions, based on the premise that immigration is a key strategy for ensuring economic growth in Canada. Canada’s proportion of foreign-born people has reached the highest level in 75 years. In 2006, they accounted for approximately one in five (19.8%) of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2006). However, research indicates that immigrants are not integrating into the Canadian economy as readily as had been predicted (Duffy, 2000). Statistics Canada’s (2003) Second Wave of the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada found that out of the principal applicants in the skilled worker category, between the ages of 25 and 44, only 48% found a job in their intended occupation. Moreover, nearly a fifth of recent immigrants are in chronic low income. In 2006, the national unemployment rate for immigrants who

had been in the country for less than 5 years was 11.5%, more than double the rate of 4.9% for the Canadian-born population (Statistics Canada, 2005).

One of the key barriers to the social and professional integration of immigrants is insufficient proficiency in English. Research findings indicate that high English proficiency has a positive effect on immigrant earnings and employment type in Canada (Chiswick & Miller, 1988; Boyd, 1990; DeSilva, 1997), while low English skills correlate with low income (Pendakur & Pendakur, 1997). Many highly educated immigrants living in Canada who do not speak English well drive taxi cabs and deliver pizza. For them that life in Canada falls short of its promises (Mazumdar, 2004).

Recent research on adult rates of second language acquisition (Watt & Lake, 2004) indicates that the second language acquisition of most adult immigrants slows down and plateaus or fossilizes at an intermediate level of proficiency. In order to access and be successful in various professional occupations such as engineering, medicine, and accounting, an advanced level of English is necessary. It is intriguing why only some adult immigrants become highly proficient in English and achieve their professional goals. Even if the environmental resources available to all immigrants may be similar, individuals may choose to use them in different ways. The current study inquires into how adult immigrants to Canada took advantage of or shaped their environment in order to improve their English proficiency to a level that would allow them to practice as professionals.

### **Research Perspectives on the Role of the Environment in Second Language Acquisition**

Over three decades ago, Hymes (1972, p. xix) emphasized the importance of the environment in acquiring a second language, considering that the key to understanding language in context is to start with the context, as opposed to the language, but constantly relate the two. Second language acquisition researchers generally agree that the more exposure to the target language second language learners experience, the more proficient they will become. The field has seen two differing views on the role of the environment: one that overemphasizes psycho-linguistic factors (Long, 1997) at the expense of socio-linguistic variables and another that takes into account external factors (Firth & Wagner, 1997; Crookes, 1997) in addition to psycho-linguistic elements.

Several classifications of second learning environments have been proposed. The distinction between *natural or informal second environments* and

*formal classroom environments* is widely recognized in second language acquisition research:

The distinction between the two is usually stated as a set of contrasting conditions. In natural second language learning, the language is being used for communication, but in the formal situation, it is used only to teach. In natural second language learning, the learner is surrounded by fluent speakers of the target language, but in the formal classroom, only the teacher (if anyone) is fluent (Spolsky, 1989, p. 171).

Batstone (2002) distinguishes between *communicative contexts*, in which learners use the second language as a tool or means for exchanging information and accomplishing social tasks and *learning contexts*, in which input and learner output are fashioned with the assistance of a teacher. Platt and Brooks (1994, p. 507) argue that learners construct different meanings out of the same environment that offers comprehensible input. They also question the validity of the term *acquisition-rich environment* (Ellis, 1990), which assumes that contexts that provide opportunities for learning can be rich and a priori (Krashen, 1982) and claim that learning environments are not ontological realities, but are constructed by the speech activities learners produce. Proponents of the *ecological view* in both first language and second language acquisition on view language as inseparable from the speakers and their social networks (Leather & van Dam, 2003) and presume the non-existence of context-free language acquisition.

Norton's (2000) longitudinal study of five immigrant women in Canada offers a comparative account of participants' experiences with getting access to social networks in order to practice English and gain communicative competence. Norton's view is that it is erroneous to presume that responsibility for creating opportunities to practice the target language lies exclusively with second language learners, since their interactions with native speakers are already structured and often determined by inequitable relations of power. The author suggests that native speakers are more likely to avoid interactions with non-native speakers, rather than provide them with input and help them negotiate meaning in the target language. Norton challenges the view of naturalistic language learning as an ideal process, in which immigrants are immersed in an optimum second language environment and surrounded by supportive native speakers who interact with non-native speakers in an egalitarian and accepting manner. Under these circumstances, the language learners in her study became introverted, sensitive to rejection, and took less language risks. As a result, they did not manage to acquire a high level of English proficiency. Previous research has generally on immigrants

who felt marginalized and were relatively unsuccessful in learning English and gaining meaningful employment.

The current study gives voice to successful adult immigrants to Canada who have achieved their professional goals and acquired a high level of English proficiency. How did they use the environment in order to foster their second language acquisition? Research to date offers few insights into this question.

### **Research Question**

The orienting question that guided this research study was:

*What are some ways in which successful adult immigrants to Canada chose to interact with and reshape different environments in order to foster their second language acquisition and acquire high English proficiency?*

### **Participants**

The sample of this study consisted of 20 adult highly-proficient non-native speakers, who arrived in Canada after the age of 18 and who are academically or professionally successful. The age upon arrival ranged between 18 and 39 years old, with a group average of 28.95 years and the length of residence in Canada ranged between 5 and 37 years, with a group average of 11.55 years.

Research subjects were selected through theoretical sampling, a common procedure in qualitative research, according to which the subjects are selected based on how likely they are to contribute to the development of an emerging theory (Seale, 2004). The sample for this study was selected to be representative of the “brain gain” immigration wave to Canada of the last two decades. All participants belong to the same category of highly-educated (17+ years), independent immigrants who came to Canada as young adults. The sample included ten professional occupations in Canada (accountant, college instructor, computer professional, data analyst, engineer, geologist, interior designer, network specialist, architect, and technical sales representative) and thirteen first languages (Albanian, Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Hungarian, Malayan, Marathi, Polish, Punjabi, Romanian, Serbian, Spanish, and Urdu) spoken by participants.

The researcher approached 12 organizations in a large city in Canada (educational institutions and companies that employ internationally-educated professionals) that were likely to know or employ adult English non-native speakers

and that would invite them to participate in this study on behalf of the researcher. The intermediaries at these organizations passed along the invitation to participate in this research study to adult immigrants who were perceived to have exceptional command of English, had come to Canada after the age of 18, had acquired high English proficiency as adults, and were professionals practicing in their field. Potential participants were given the contact information for the researcher and they were encouraged to follow through on the invitation at their earliest convenience.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The data collection process consisted of a series of three interviews with each participant. Open-ended and flexible questions were asked in all interviews (Appendix A). A significant amount of time was spent with each participant. The third interview was scheduled to explore in-depth aspects that emerged in the first and second ones. Interviews were audio-taped and then transcribed for data analysis. Participants were given the option to use their own name or a pseudonym. They were also asked to complete a background information questionnaire (Appendix B) to gather demographic information.

The data were analyzed following the principles of the grounded theory method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The process of data analysis was concomitant with the process of data gathering and began immediately after the first day in the field. Through the constant comparison method, three levels of codes were generated. Level I codes, also called *in vivo* or substantive codes, were the exact words that participants used in interviews. Level II codes resulted from comparing and condensing Level I codes. Similar Level I codes or items with shared characteristics fell into the same category. Finally, Level III codes were generated by integrating categories and their properties and raising the data to a higher level of abstraction to generate major themes.

### **Findings**

For the purpose of this study, *instructed environments*, in which language learning is facilitated by a teacher or tutor, are distinguished from *naturalistic environments*, in which language acquisition occurs naturally. A further distinction is made between '*manipulated*' *naturalistic environments* and *unaltered naturalistic environments* in order to emphasize the presence or absence of

learners' involvement in adjusting the conditions of their natural environment. A *manipulated naturalistic environment* was adjusted or molded by second learners to accelerate their language acquisition process.

Table 1 summarizes the qualitative themes associated with learning English as an adult immigrant in various types of environments in Canada, which emerged from the interviews with the participants.

**Table 1: Qualitative themes associated with learning English in different types of environments in Canada**

Type of Environment	Qualitative Themes
<b>Instructed environments</b>	Enrolling in university or college courses
	Hiring a private tutor
<b>'Manipulated' naturalistic environments</b>	Manipulating or co-creating the every-day environment
	Combining a pragmatic and a learning purpose into the same object
<b>Unaltered naturalistic environments</b>	Seeking social interaction with English native speakers
	Cultivating extroversion/outgoingness
	Taking risks in speaking English
	Second language immersion
	Securing employment that requires a high level of communicative competence
	Seeking communication with English native-speaking co-workers

### ***Learning English in Instructed Environments***

Two themes emerged as associated with English acquisition in instructed environments: enrolling in university or college courses and hiring a private tutor. Even if the majority of participants immigrated after they had completed post secondary studies in their native countries, most of them undertook some form of education in Canada.

Participants viewed education as an investment in their second language development, which would give them greater access to the “symbolic and material resources” (Norton, 2000) of their new country. In terms of financial investment, they either used their life-time savings or obtained student loans to pay tuition. All

informants were highly-educated people with an appreciation of the gains in socio-linguistic and economic power that extra-schooling could bring.

Relations of power in society operate both at the macro level of institutions and the micro level of everyday encounters (Foucault, 1980) and immigrants who cannot speak the second language well often feel “powerless” and have limited access to the symbolic and material resources of their new country. In this light, participants’ investment in high-level education can be regarded a strategy for gaining access to more equitable power and resources in their adoptive society.

### *1. Enrolling in university or college courses*

By taking high-level courses in their area of expertise, participants accomplished two goals: they upgraded their professional competence and improved their lexical knowledge. Post-secondary education was generally perceived as an eye-opening experience, leading to the realization that the way to keep up with native speakers peers was to put more effort into conscious learning.

Post-secondary school constitutes a perfect English learning environment, because it stimulates the growth of the context-reduced and cognitively-demanding language needed for academic tasks, but it also offers opportunities to practice the context-embedded, idiomatic, and natural language of ‘here and now’ (Cummins, 1996), because immigrants have an opportunity to communicate with their Canadian-born peers on lived experiences, exchange opinions, and share their views.

Post-secondary education requires extensive reading and participants put extra-time every day into studying the new words and relied on their ability to understand the overall meaning, resorting to background knowledge and underlying proficiency in spite of not knowing all the words in academic texts.

Extensive reading offers enough exposure to a large number of running words in a variety of texts to ensure that even infrequent words reoccur to provide the repetition necessary for lexical acquisition to take place. Intentional vocabulary learning from reading was repeatedly emphasized as essential for long-term lexical retention.

Participant: When I studied for the Engineering Ethics exam, I really improved my English. The first time when I read the book, it was really hard for me, but when I read it the second and the third time and I wrote down all the new words, it became easier. This is something that I usually do: I write down the

new words on yellow stickers that I keep in the book and, from time to time, I go through and read some of those words, and try to remember them and use them in sentences.

Participants mentioned various approaches they took to make the new words salient and easy to remember such as colorful stickers, vocabulary notebooks, and highlighters. The key aspect is that all these visual props were intentionally used to ensure better lexical acquisition.

Highly proficient second language speakers may have learned at least part of the low-frequency words they know not only because they read extensively in a field that interested them, but also because they developed and used a consistent protocol for intentional vocabulary learning from reading. They paid attention to the unknown words in a text, took the time to find their meanings, used visual props as self-made scaffolds to help them internalize and remember those words, and reviewed them at a later time.

## *2. Hiring a private tutor*

A way of creating a semi-instructed English learning environment was to hire an English native speaker as private tutor or a non-native speaker with native-like English proficiency and a Canadian background. The relationship learner-tutor was perceived as being one of total trust and openness, with a high percentage of time spent together speaking English, simulating real-life situations, or solving language problems. The tutor acted as a bridge between learners and the target culture and language, providing a sheltered environment that makes the transition between instructed-language learning and naturalistic second language acquisition.

Participant: I had a private tutor for everything like reading, writing, speaking, and listening and I asked her to help me out. In the beginning, I asked her to help me review the grammar and writing, but after a while we just talked in English, we communicated a lot. She is from my country, but she has native-like proficiency and she has been in Canada for a long time... So in the past 5 years, I have improved a lot. I feel quite comfortable to talk about everything.

Most participants found their tutors by putting ads in the newspaper or finding available ones through university bulletin boards. Most tutors were Canadian-born graduate students who were willing to offer informal English training to supplement their income. Many learners saw great benefits for

improving their English proficiency in having a native speaker who acted as a friend and tutor:

Participant: I have a Canadian friend who is also my English tutor. I feel that my English has improved so much thanks to the opportunity of interacting with her and getting feedback.

Other participants mentioned the importance of establishing a trust-based relationship with a native speaker, who could correct their mistakes, without being judgmental:

Participant: I do have one Canadian friend who is my tutor and she corrects me when I make mistakes and I am not afraid of trying out new expressions and words when I am with her. I feel very comfortable with that friend, I don't feel threatened or embarrassed, and it's important to establish a level of trust.

Norton (2000) emphasizes that often adult immigrants to Canada do not get enough opportunities to practice the target language because of inequitable relations of power between native speakers and non-native speakers. In her imaginary example, Madame Rivest employs immigrant Saliha as a maid and in this way she controls both her access to material resources (wages) and to symbolic resources (opportunities to practice the second language).

The situation reported by the participants in this study was exactly the opposite: by hiring native speakers as tutors, they controlled access to material resources, as they put themselves in the position of employers, as well access to symbolic resources, as they created opportunities to practice English, by making native speakers speak and listen to them. Participants obtained the funds to pay for tutoring either by doing manual jobs initially or by using part of the savings they brought to Canada. None of the participants was wealthy in their country of origin, but they all worked as professionals and acquired some material capital, which they spent during their settlement process in Canada. Investing in specialized education and tutoring was seen as worthier than acquiring material goods.

The majority of participants emphasized that continuing their education in Canada in a formal learning environment (graduate education) or an informal one (tutor-mediated) played a major role in traveling the distance from intermediate to advanced English proficiency.

### ***Acquiring English in 'Manipulated' Naturalistic Environments***

Two themes emerged as associated with English acquisition in 'manipulated' naturalistic environments: manipulating or co-creating the every-day environment and combining a pragmatic, and a learning purpose into the same object or symbol.

#### ***1. Manipulating or co-creating the everyday environment***

A recurrent view among participants is that they felt in charge of their English learning process as creators or co-creators of their environment. Most people were aware of how they learn best and took an active role in shaping an effective learning environment in their own home. For some people, it meant displaying the subtitles while watching TV programs in English:

Participant: I created an environment that helped our family tremendously. For all the TV programs that had subtitles, I kept the subtitles so I was learning visually and listening at the same time and, by this correlation, I was stimulating two ways of learning in the cortex.

Other participants found that watching TV without showing subtitles sharpened their listening comprehension ability and helped them pick words aurally:

Participant: In my case the best way was to watch movies without subtitles and listen to the radio.

An awareness of their natural learning predispositions helped most learners create an environment tailored to their needs. Most participants made a constant effort to create the optimum conditions for second language lexical acquisition to take place. That meant readjusting or calibrating the environmental conditions to better serve their purpose. What worked for them at a certain point in their learning journey may have become useless or redundant or even harmful at a later point, so constant and thorough re-evaluation of their progress was necessary in order to reap the highest rewards.

#### ***2. Combining a pragmatic and a learning purpose into the same object***

Another reported way of maximizing the learning impact of everyday situations was to combine two purposes into the same object or symbol. Besides

telling the day and the time, a wall calendar was used as a systematic vocabulary learning device, because it offered an explanation, an example, and sometimes a picture of the targeted word. Some participants took a pro-active approach to vocabulary acquisition and purchased calendars with infrequent words. They learned at least a few new words every day, just by repeatedly looking at the calendar, while doing something else around the house.

Most participants emphasized that, after their arrival in Canada, they couldn't afford the luxury of putting their life on hold, waiting for their English vocabulary to improve. They still needed to make a living or complete various tasks, while acquiring vocabulary. An effective way of accomplishing both goals was to create visuals and display them prominently, in a space that was used for work. Some of them put colorful notes with the word meanings on the fridge or desk and repeated them while doing house chores or completing work tasks.

The keys to manipulating the natural environment to optimally respond to evolving learning needs are awareness and ingenuity. All participants revealed an awareness of their learning predispositions and commented on their efforts to adjust the physical environment to match their natural tendencies.

### ***Acquiring English in Unaltered Naturalistic Environments***

Six themes emerged as associated with English acquisition in unaltered naturalistic environments: seeking social interaction with native speakers, cultivating extroversion/outgoingness, taking risks in speaking English, second language immersion, securing employment that requires a high level of communicative competence and seeking communication with native speaking co-workers

#### ***1. Seeking social interaction with native speakers***

Social interaction in every-day life English-speaking environments was regarded by most participants as essential for improving communicative proficiency. In order to acquire high communicative competence, non-native speakers need to be exposed to a variety of social situations where they can use English to accomplish tasks.

The findings of this study concur with those of Norton's in that non-native speakers who do not speak the target language well are not easily and naturally provided with opportunities to practice the second language. Participants did not

feel that they were automatically surrounded by supportive native speakers who interacted with them in an egalitarian and accepting manner. Native speakers were more likely to avoid interactions with non-native speakers, rather than provide them with input and help them negotiate meaning in the target language.

Participants in the current study went to great lengths to encounter opportunities to practice English in natural environments. They proved to be extremely ingenious and daring in their approaches and realized that it was important to find ways to make native speakers talk to them. Opportunities to practice the target language were not easily available, but all 20 participants in this study eventually discovered them by finding interlocutors in places such as: coffee shops, malls, playgrounds, children's schools, bookstores, neighbors, and sports clubs.

Participant: I tried to use all opportunities that everyday life offered and make them into language learning opportunities, and I think that in most social environments, there is something one can learn. So I learned to pay attention when people were having conversations on the bus or C-train, or I would start conversations myself when taking my kid to the playground, or going to the gym, or running into my neighbours. I invited my neighbours to dinner many times so we could speak English.

Participant: To learn the language, you have to talk to people... When you go to a coffee shop or to a bookstore, start talking to someone. Some people help when they see that you are trying to pick their language. Go to the mall, wherever, start talking to anybody, it doesn't hurt. What can happen? They are not going to punish you if you make a mistake.

As in the above excerpts, some native speakers were helpful and considered non-native speakers worthy interlocutors who made an effort to learn an additional language. To imply that all native speakers avoid interactions with non-native speakers would be stereotyping.

All participants took charge of their language learning process and were resourceful and perseverant in finding everyday-life environments where they could acquire English in a naturalistic way. They showed great human agency in their efforts to get access to opportunities to practice the target language with native speakers in everyday-life situations.

## 2. *Cultivating extroversion/outgoingness*

The participants who were not naturally outgoing or extroverted realized that they could compensate for their personality style through their attitude, by

getting out of their comfort zone, overcoming avoidance and fear, and welcoming social interaction in English:

Participant: In the beginning, the first few years, I was so afraid to speak...When I was in the playground with my child and somebody came by and started to speak, that was like the signal for me to go home, because I was so ashamed. I wanted to sound perfect, I wanted to speak the same way I spoke my first language and I knew my English wasn't at the same level, it wasn't as good as I wanted it to be, so I was running away, but now I'm not scared anymore.

Most interviewees considered themselves more extrovert than introvert and most of them defined their personality using words such as outgoing, outspoken, talkative, and friendly:

Participant: I am outgoing, I reach out, like I meet people on the bus and talk to them. I am comfortable talking to people from everywhere: Canada, India, everybody, and I find interesting topics. So in the past 5 years, I have improved a lot. Now, I feel quite comfortable to talk about everything.

Extroversion was not an innate characteristic of all participants. Some immigrants defined themselves as naturally outgoing and outspoken, while others cultivated an outgoing behaviour in order to improve their English.

Instead of becoming introverted and sensitive to rejection, participants cultivated outgoingness and extroversion, in spite of being at times rejected or ignored. They adopted an "extroverted persona" that allowed them to be someone other than themselves and understood that this consciously deployed manoeuvre would advance their English.

### *3. Taking risks in speaking English*

Another characteristic that most participants considered as an important factor for developing high communicative ability in a second language is the ability to take risks in speaking English in natural environments. Without experimenting with the new words in various contexts, it is virtually impossible to gain high English proficiency. Several participants emphasized that in order to learn how to use the words properly, one needs to take risks in conversations and overcome the fear of making mistakes. Moreover, one needs to be resilient, tenacious, and courageous, make a conscious effort not to get discouraged by jokes about one's language mistakes, and believe that things will get better.

Participant: Don't be afraid to make mistakes, just go out and speak. If you don't know something, just ask, and ask people to correct you, don't hide like I did for a few years, but now I'm not hiding any more. Like what can happen, if you make a mistake?

For some participants, risk-taking implied avoiding isolation in a sheltered first language environment and getting involved in various social situations that require frequent second language use to accomplish communicative tasks. For other participants, risk taking meant experimenting with word uses and becoming comfortable when ridiculed by native speakers for making mistakes or using awkward lexical combinations. The highly proficient second language speakers interviewed went through an experimental phase, in which they made a conscious effort to be proactive and learned to accept or disregard jokes and ridicule.

Participant: Oh, another piece of advice, take risks and use the words, even if you're not sure of what they mean. People may make fun of you or joke. That happened to me many times. It happened, but you just have to be persistent, I guess, and continue to take risks. My English has improved a lot because I took so many risks in using words.

From the perspective of many participants, shedding one's inhibitions, developing a relatively 'thick skin', and risking the possibility of making mistakes is the only way high oral proficiency can be achieved and this requires perseverance and persistence.

The data of this study corroborate Ely's (1986) research findings that risk-taking has a positive impact on second language proficiency, as these learners try out or practice words or expressions they are not completely sure of. In contrast, the findings are inconsistent with the research claim that successful second language learners are moderate or calculated risk-takers who only experiment with words or expressions they have learned (Beebe, 1983), as they do not want to be the target of ridicule. The successful second language speakers interviewed for this study reported that their approach was to keep taking risks in spite of being occasionally ridiculed for imprecise lexical use.

#### *4. Second language immersion*

An important aspect that came up in the interviews is the awareness that, in order to be successful, one really has to switch mental gears and get to enjoy

'doing things in English', not only to make a living, but actually to live at least part of their private life immersed in a naturalistic English-speaking environment:

Participant: The most important thing would be English immersion. Do not live isolated in your first language environment. If you have only friends who speak your first language, then your chances of improving your English are quite slim. Try to speak English every day at least for a few hours, not only at work, and read the news, listen to the radio, watch TV, do something that you really like, find a hobby, but do it in English.

Most participants acknowledged that it was not enough to use the language for pragmatic or job-related purposes, but that it was essential to be 'in the language', even in one's leisure time:

Participant: One has to be in the language as they say ... Now I am really in the language, as I have lots of Canadian friends and my children have Canadian friends.

Participants felt that the more advanced their second language proficiency level became, the more access they gained to English native-speaking interlocutors and friends willing to communicate with them in English.

The majority of participants did not go to the extreme of giving up their first language at home, but stated that they used English for at least 75% of their time. As an average, they reported that they were immersed in English for at least eight hours a day for their job or studies. In addition, they also reported using English for other non-job-related activities for at least one-two hours a day.

##### *5. Securing employment that requires a high level of communicative competence*

In the last decade, many companies across Canada and particularly Alberta have been hiring more immigrants with lower English proficiency than before, due to the booming economy and workforce shortage. The strong market demands determined many employers to hire internationally-educated professionals with strong technical expertise, but relatively low English proficiency. Many participants in this study secured employment for which they did not have sufficient language proficiency in the beginning. They were hired for their professional knowledge and given the opportunity to improve their English on the job. A recurrent attitude expressed in the interviews was the willingness to learn, the desire to overcome obstacles, and the courage to place themselves in challenging work situations:

Participant: One of the best things I've done to improve my English was to take a technical sales job where I was forced to present and describe my products, find new words and new tricks to sell the products. I made my livelihood by using the language.

A recurrent verb that speaks volumes about the impact of the work environment on second language proficiency gains is 'forced'. Many participants found themselves 'forced' to improve their language in order to meet the challenging expectations of a job that required a high level of communicative competence and a lot of interaction. Instead of despairing or admitting that the communicative demands were too high for their language abilities, they took the challenge and used the work environment as a powerful motivator and an opportunity to improve their language.

Many participants noted that the best thing they did to improve their English was to 'jump into the deep end of the pool', by deliberately putting themselves into a work environment where they did not comprehend enough and were not able to communicate effectively in the beginning. They constantly compensated for their low English skills, by putting in many extra hours to complete the tasks, understand the work requirements, and look up the words they did not know. As a result, they experienced a steep second language learning curve in the first two years of their employment.

#### *6. Seeking communication with English native-speaking co-workers*

Work interactions with English native-speaking co-workers were viewed as a sure way of improving one's communicative ability:

Participant: Interacting with highly responsible native-speaking professionals in different capacities helped me improve my English. I benefited from a high level of interaction with very qualified and, most of the time, native professionals.

The opposite of the above scenario was also mentioned in the interviews. A job that requires very little and stereotypical verbal interaction was perceived as more likely to hinder rather than facilitate the development of adequate English proficiency:

Participant: If you sit in an office and all you do is work on a computer, not interfacing with anybody, of course you're not going to learn anything. Behind the computer you are not going to learn to communicate, as you have to interact with people... I know smart people who have been here for ten years and still haven't improved their English because they have job behind a computer, in a cubicle ...

Participant: Improving your English depends on the nature of your job. If you have a job as a designer and you just speak for 5 minutes with your supervisor every day, using the same vocabulary, getting the same instructions every day, you are not going to improve your English.

One of the conditions for verbal communication to take place is that interlocutors regard each other as worthy to speak and listen (Bourdieu, 1977, Norton, 2000). Participants in this study managed to command the attention of their listeners and impose reception in order to be regarded by native speakers as worthy to speak. Interestingly, it was not the quality of their language, but their human experiences and perceptions that commanded the attention of their native-speaking interlocutors.

Participant: The first year I came to Canada, I worked in a warehouse. My English improved a lot, because I used to initiate discussions and come up with interesting topics to make native speakers talk to me...

Participant: I used to tell my Canadian co-workers all kinds of stories about my life in my native country and they were curious to find out more. My English wasn't very good but my stories were captivating. Then they opened up and told me stories about their lives and I learnt a lot about Canadian culture and way of living.

Participants' perceptions of their second language acquisition in the workplace emphasize the importance of human agency, resourcefulness, and willpower in claiming their right to learn and speak the target language and in asserting their life experiences, knowledge, and cultural capital as worthy of being shared.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Both instructed and naturalistic second language acquisition in everyday-life environments and workplaces were perceived to advance lexical development and language proficiency gains. Participants invested in continuing their education as a strategy for gaining access to symbolic and material resources in their adoptive society. They were very creative and meta-cognitively aware in adjusting the natural environment to optimally respond to their evolving learning needs. Opportunities to practice English in natural environments were not easily available to them, but they were ingenious and daring in their approaches and realized that it was important to find ways to talk to native speakers.

They cultivated extroversion in spite of being at times rejected or ignored and kept taking risks in using English regardless of being occasionally ridiculed for imprecise lexical use. All participants felt that they finally managed to impose reception and make native speakers consider them worthy interlocutors. They gradually earned the status of competent second language speakers and asserted their life experiences, perceptions, and knowledge as worthy of being shared.

The highly proficient second language learners who participated in this study possess an innate awareness of how to make the most of the situational factors available to them, which settings to choose and immerse in (classrooms, naturalistic settings, or work environments). In addition, they are endowed with the tenacity to consistently activate the combination of factors that they have discovered to be beneficial, while remaining open to new insights and opportunities and recalibrating their approaches to adjust to their evolving language levels.

The three underlying psychological forces that participants have used to activate a unique combination of situational factors are *awareness* of the available resources, *ingenuity* in gaining access to them, and *tenacity* to consistently employ them in order to advance from intermediate to high second language proficiency.

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#### APPENDIX A: Sample Interview Questions

1. What is your current in Canada job? What was your occupation prior to immigrating to Canada?
2. How long have been working as a professional in Canada?
3. How would you describe your current level of English as compared to when you first came to Canada?
4. Why do you think you were able to improve your English up to an advanced level?
5. What are the environmental factors to which you attribute your success in acquiring high English proficiency?
6. How did you take advantage or shape the environment to improve your English?
7. How did you encounter opportunities to practice and improve your English?



8. How did you encounter opportunities to practice and improve your English?

**APPENDIX B: Background Information Questionnaire**

1. Your Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Date \_\_\_\_\_
3. Age \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Gender \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Mother tongue \_\_\_\_\_
6. Language(s) you speak at home \_\_\_\_\_
7. Highest level of education attained: \_\_\_\_\_
8. Occupation in Canada: \_\_\_\_\_
9. Occupation in your home country \_\_\_\_\_
10. How long did you study English before you came to Canada? \_\_\_\_\_
11. How long have you been in Canada? \_\_\_\_\_
12. How old were you when you arrived in Canada? \_\_\_\_\_
13. Do you speak other languages? (Circle one) Yes No
14. How many hours a day do you use English? \_\_\_\_\_

## **Representation of Refugees, Asylum-Seekers and Refugee Affairs In Hungarian Dailies**

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**Abstract.** How does the press in Hungary write about refugees, asylum-seekers and refugee affairs? We sought to answer this question. Articles appearing in 2005 and 2006 in two leading national Hungarian dailies were examined with quantitative content analysis. The results show that the articles analyzed often treat refugee affairs as an “official” political matter. The high proportion of legislation and political positions conveys the image that refugee affairs are a state or intergovernmental matter, an “official”, legal, political issue rather than for example a humanitarian question. Most of the articles published in both papers write about problems and conflicts in connection with refugee affairs. The negative media image has different significance for different topics. We argue that the question of refugee affairs is a topic where the image shown by the media is of great relevance: the media can be a more important source of information on this subject than personal contacts.

**Keywords:** *refugee, asylum seeker, refugee affairs, Hungary, press, media analysis, content analysis*

The concept of international migration attracts special attention not only from the social sciences. Demography, cultural anthropology, economics, jurisprudence and their related disciplines, as well as the approaches arising from the combination of these sciences are all producing a mass of theories and research on the subject. There is no uniform, comprehensive theory of international migration, instead a predominance of middle-range theories is found in this area. These largely arose independently of each other, some of them as an answer to specific empirical research problems. “However, the patterns and trends appearing in immigration indicate that we cannot draw on the tools of any one single discipline for an understanding of the present

migration process or concentrate our analysis on only a single level" (Massey et. al. 2001:9).

Within the broad topic of migration, our 2005-2006 research project focused on the question of Hungarian refugee affairs. The different research blocks applied different social scientific approaches (economics, sociology, psychology, jurisprudence) and consequently also used differing methods. As a result, our research can be regarded as interdisciplinary. An element of the research project was a press analysis. It examined how refugee affairs, refugees and asylum-seekers are represented in the Hungarian press <sup>1</sup>. We present the results of the media analysis in this article.

We stress two closely related characteristics of the role played by Hungary in international migration – from the viewpoint of our theme – which underline the justification for our analysis. One is the high level even by international comparison of xenophobia present in Hungarian society, a fact long known to sociologists (Czene 2002; Enyedi, Fábíán & Sík 2004), and the other, a fact known to both demographers and experts dealing with refugee affairs, is that Hungary is a transit country for asylum seekers which partly explains why the number of asylum seekers and refugees in the country is low in comparison, for example, to countries of Western Europe. Because of the low proportion within the Hungarian population of persons involved in refugee affairs, the media are the main source of information for the general public on refugee affairs. In this way the existing high level of xenophobia and the low level of personal social interactions with refugees both confirm the importance of getting to know the image of refugee affairs in the Hungarian press.

In the course of the media analysis we examined two leading national Hungarian dailies (*Népszabadság*, *Magyar Nemzet*). Our analysis examined what image the articles appearing in the dailies convey of the question. Articles

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<sup>1</sup> The research on "Independently-with equal opportunities" was conducted under the "N.E.E.D.S. Network, Education, Employment, (Anti)Discrimination, Socialisation" EQUAL Program in the implementation stage of the "Support for the social and labour market integration of asylum seekers" action. It was co-ordinated by the KROLIFY Opinion and Organisation Research Institute. The authors wish to express their gratitude to Judit Pál who selected the articles and Petra Arnold who helped in the elaboration of code commands and the final selection of articles and also made valuable observations on the analysis. Thanks are also due to Brigitta Font who participated in the elaboration of earlier versions of the analysis and to András Kováts and Zoltán Klenner for useful comments on earlier versions of this article.

appearing in the course of 2005 and 2006 formed the basis of our investigation. We used the method of quantitative content analysis to examine the articles<sup>2</sup>.

### **The representation of refugee affairs in the media**

A great deal of research has been carried out on the media and on its representation of minorities. For the most part the various Hungarian and foreign studies have reached similar conclusions: the media usually present minorities in a stereotyped way and in connection with negative topics (Vicsek, 1997; Terestyéni, 2004; Ligeti, 2007; Hargreaves, 1995; van Dijk, 1991; Finney & Robinson, 2007). Moreover, the coverage of minorities can be linked mainly to a few topics, such as immigration, crime, cultural differences and ethnic/race relations (Finney – Robinson 2007).

Less research has been done specifically in connection with the topic of migration and refugee affairs, and most of what has been done is the work of British and American researchers. Foreign investigations have found that in most cases the media present immigration and the existence of asylum as a problem or something threatening the host country. As a result the key themes are restricting the rights of immigrants, the burden on the welfare state and the dishonesty of the migrants. Bach found that the media focus more on conflicts than on ethnic harmony; and they rarely obtain information from members of the ethnic minorities. The British media often use certain words and expressions – generally having a negative connotation – in connection with asylum seekers, such as flood, wave, bogus, cheat (Finney – Robinson 2007, Tait et al. 2004). Typically British reports on asylum seekers do not mention why the asylum seekers go to the United Kingdom or the circumstances in which they travel and live, and rarely allow persons involved in refugee affairs to speak for themselves (Philo - Beattie 1999, Finney – Robinson 2007).

At the same time some researchers have shown that there are papers which paint a more positive picture of persons involved in refugee affairs, writing about them in the first person plural and regarding them as part of the local community. Finney and Robinson (2007) compared the refugee image in two

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<sup>2</sup> The present article contains part of the results of our quantitative content analysis. We also performed qualitative text analysis, but the results of that analysis are not presented in this article.

British local papers and found that one presents a more positive picture of refugees, interviews them more often and treats them as part of the community. Other research projects also found that a more balanced treatment is more likely to be found among the local papers with more precise reports about refugees, while the national dailies tend to use more hostile language. Nevertheless many local papers also paint a largely negative picture of refugees and asylum seekers (Speers 2001).

One of the modes of treatment found in the dailies is to present the topic of refugee affairs as an official matter. An analysis examining Welsh media in 2000, for example, found that the Welsh media used a less hostile tone than the British national press in articles on refugees and asylum seekers, but approached topics related to them as “official” matters. Refugees and asylum seekers are treated as figures: financial costs, statistics. There are very few articles about why people seek asylum. As a result asylum seekers are given little opportunity to express their opinions or tell their own stories (Speers 2001). Another factor potentially influencing the representation of refugee affairs in the press is whether an article appears in a political paper or a tabloid, in what region of the given country, in a liberal or conservative paper (Van Gorp 2005).

A research project prepared and conducted by the Kurt Lewin Foundation and three foreign research institutes examined the representation in the media of minorities, immigrants and refugees in four countries. The print and visual media in Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary over a period of one month in 2006 were examined, largely using the methods of qualitative content analysis. Although articles on immigrants and refugees made up only a tiny proportion of the research material because the media dealt mainly with the topic of minorities, we nevertheless consider it relevant to present here a few of their findings. The investigation of the print press revealed a striking difference between the press organs of Hungary and of the three other countries. In the latter three countries the dividing line was between the tabloid press and the quality papers, while in Hungary it lies between the left-wing and the right-wing press. They found that the Hungarian right-wing daily *Magyar Nemzet* prints articles reflecting a strong preconception, mainly regarding Gypsies but also on other minorities. A good example of this is that it declared the lack of civilisation among the Gypsies to be the cause of the incident in Olaszliszka, referred to the

Slovaks by the derogatory term “tót” and to the Germans in Hungary as “sváb”, as though to evoke nostalgia for the Hungary of the pre-war years (Ligeti 2007).

Éva Kovács and Borbála Kriza (2004) examined the press representation in three different years – 1945, 1990 and 2000 – using quantitative methods. They analysed the articles on foreigners and minorities appearing in six Hungarian papers (both weeklies and dailies). They found that the papers devoted insignificant attention to the question of refugees, especially in the years 1990 and 2000<sup>3</sup>.

## **The research**

### ***Methodology of the research***

We analysed all articles from the print versions of *Népszabadság* and *Magyar Nemzet* between January 1, 2005 and December 31, 2006<sup>4</sup>, that met the following three criteria:

1. The article included one of the expressions from refugee affairs or migration affairs from the list compiled by us<sup>5</sup>;
2. Its content is connected to the question of refugee affairs<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Although, unlike the Kurt Lewin Foundation they examined the press material of a whole year not just a month, they took samples from the issues published. As a result, the number of articles in the sample dealing specifically with refugees is very small, especially for the years 1990 and 2000.

<sup>4</sup> The selection was made on the basis of search words – in the online database of *Magyar Nemzet*, and in the *Népszabadság* (not online) database that can only be used on the spot. We then selected articles that appeared in the print versions of the two papers.

<sup>5</sup> The migration affairs expressions were included among the search words because it happened in many cases that the author used a migration affairs expression when, in fact, he/she actually meant a person involved in refugee affairs, for example, calling asylum seekers illegal immigrants. This same inappropriate or imprecise use of expressions also characterises everyday speech. If terms from migration affairs had not been included among the search words, articles concerning the theme of refugee affairs but referring to persons in refugee affairs with migration affairs or other expressions would not have been included in the population studied and so the validity of the research would have been reduced.

<sup>6</sup> Articles with a content that placed them in the focus of the research formed the object of the analysis. Articles not touching on the theme but containing one of the above refugee affairs or migrant affairs expressions as an adjective or phrase, such as “People practically fled from Pest at the weekend”, “The shopping centre is a real refuge”, etc. were not included in the population examined. Nor did we include articles about persons who fled from the

3. It discusses refugee affairs in more than one sentence.

In Hungary an imprecise use of concepts related to refugee affairs can be observed in common usage. In this article we use the legal meaning of the concepts; in the course of the investigation we defined the main concepts used in the investigation on the basis of the Hungarian legislation (Act No. CXXXIX of 1997 on Asylum, Government Decree No. 172/2001. (IX. 26.), Kalmár 2001)<sup>7</sup>.

Applying the above criteria, we found 149 articles; these formed the object of the analysis. The data were analysed by quantitative content analysis (Krippendorf 1995). The papers analysed are two major national Hungarian dailies. *Népszabadság* is generally more left wing in its political orientation, while *Magyar Nemzet* is a right-wing, conservative paper.

### ***Results of the Research***

#### *Number of articles and their distribution over time*

A total of 149 articles in the two papers touched on the subject of refugee affairs. We estimated that in the period concerned a total of roughly 130,000 articles appeared in the newspapers examined. It can be seen that only a tiny percentage of the articles dealt with the question of refugee affairs. This can be explained in part by the narrow definition of the theme: we included in the analysis only those articles that touched on the theme in more than one sentence and we took the legal concept of refugee affairs as our basis (the number of publications examined would have been greater if we had included among the articles analysed, for example those dealing with persons fleeing from natural catastrophes)<sup>8</sup>. Partly it is also obviously due to the fact that the number of articles which appeared on the topic of refugee affairs is very small in both papers: in 2005 and 2006 only a few articles touched on the theme of

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given country because of a natural catastrophe (or stayed in the country in camps set up for them).

<sup>7</sup> For the process of the refugee affairs procedure, see, [http://www.bmbah.hu/ugyintezes\\_eljarasrend.php?id=30](http://www.bmbah.hu/ugyintezes_eljarasrend.php?id=30), accessed on March 16, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> The choice of a narrow theme – using the legal meaning of refugee affairs – for the present research was determined by the aims of the broader EQUAL project within the frames of which our investigation was carried out.

refugee affairs. If we compare the percentage of the articles with the results of other research projects, we find that it is typical not only in Hungary but also in other countries that only a tiny percentage touch on the subject (Tait et al, 2004; Speers, 2001). Of the two daily papers examined, Népszabadság published more articles on the subject than Magyar Nemzet, and more articles appeared in 2005 than in 2006.

**Table 1: Number of articles dealing with refugee affairs in the two dailies in 2005 and 2006**

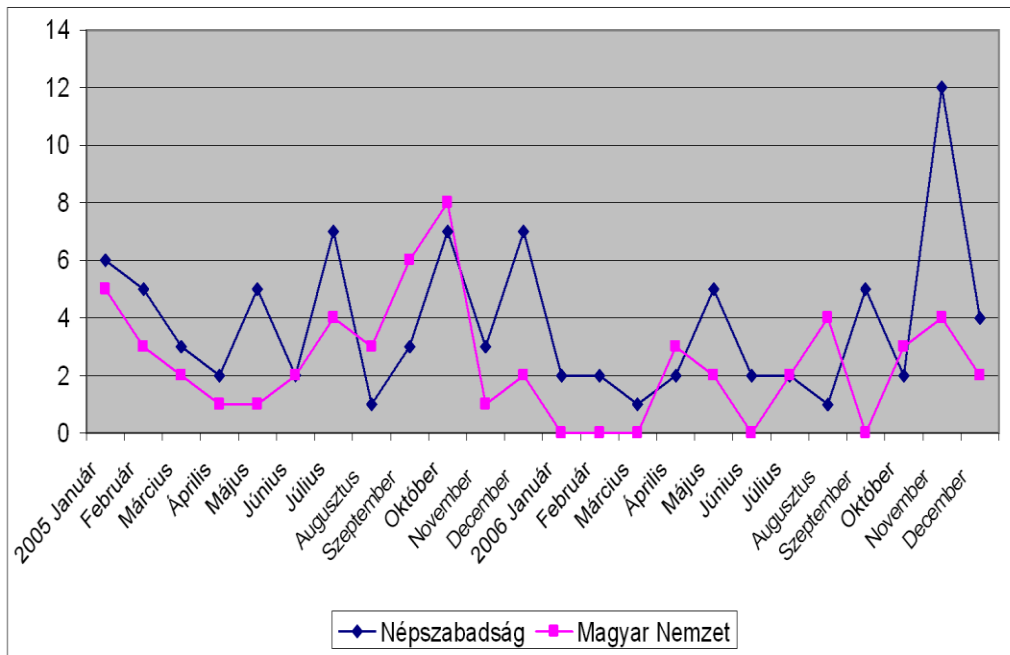
	Year of publication				Total	
	2005		2006		Number of articles	%
	Number of articles	% (N=89)	Number of articles	% (N=60)		
<b>Magyar Nemzet</b>	38	42.7%	20	33.3%	58	38.9%
<b>Népszabadság</b>	51	57.3%	40	66.7%	91	61.1%
<b>Total</b>	89	100.0%	60	100.0%	149	100.0%

The distribution of the articles – shown in the diagram below – is related to various events covered in the press. In January 2005 a new centre for the reception of foreign minors was opened in Nagykanizsa and the question of stricter immigration laws arose in the run-up to the elections in Great Britain. In July the revolution in Uzbekistan broke out. When Uzbek refugees “filled” the refugee camps in neighbouring Kyrgyzia, they were transported to Romania. Also in July large numbers of Roma from Slovakia sought asylum in the Czech Republic. Many articles appeared in October when the struggles around the two Spanish cities in Africa, Melilla és Ceuta, were the most embittered. Asylum-seekers “attacked” the high walls around the two cities to submit their applications for asylum in territory under European jurisdiction.

In 2006 two main themes dominated the Hungarian print press in connection with refugee affairs. One was the anniversary of the 1956 revolution; a number of articles appeared in connection with Hungarian refugees at that time. Another major theme was the travel to Sweden by Roma families from Baranya and Tolna Counties. They took economy flights to Malmö in Sweden to submit applications for asylum. Népszabadság discussed the

exodus of Roma families to Sweden in far more articles than Magyar Nemzet. In contrast the latter paper carried more articles than Népszabadság in the autumn months on refugee affairs in connection with the 1956 revolution in Hungary.

**Figure 1: Monthly distribution of the articles (frequencies)**



*General characteristics of the content of the articles*

The second table shows the countries appearing in the articles on refugee affairs in the two papers. It can be seen that in both cases a substantial percentage of the articles write about Hungary and the EU member countries.

Around a quarter of the articles in both papers mention Hungary as country of destination. Hungary also figured in the news as a country of origin; most of the articles in this category dealt with the exodus of Romas to Sweden and with the 1956 refugees. The most frequently mentioned countries of destination are EU member countries other than Hungary (there are 86 such articles in the newspapers).

Table 2: Countries discussed in the articles

	Newspaper			
	Magyar Nemzet		Népszabadság	
	Number of articles	% <sup>9</sup> (N=58)	Number of articles	% (N=91)
The article writes (also) in general, not (only) specifically	3	5.2%	6	6.6%
Writes (also) about the EU situation in general, not (only) about the situation in specifically	10	17.2%	9	9.9%
Hungary as... country of origin	9	15.5%	18	19.8%
transit country	2	3.4%	6	6.6%
destination	13	22.4%	22	24.2%
EU country / country of origin	1	1.7%	1	1.1%
countries transit country	2	3.4%	4	4.4%
except destination	33	56.9%	53	58.2%
Hungary as... Non-EU country of origin	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
developed transit country	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
country as... destination	6	10.3%	13	14.3%
Non-EU country of origin	8	13.8%	19	20.9%
developing transit country	0	0.0%	2	2.2%
country as ... destination	0	0.0%	5	5.5%

We examined the themes that appear in the articles.

Taking into account all the themes, law and politics appear most frequently in the articles on refugee affairs, followed by crime/deviant behaviour. These are followed by the labour market, and questions of financial situation/aid.

<sup>9</sup> Several countries may have appeared in the articles and in more than one way. For this reason, the figures given in the percentage column add up to more than 100%.

Laws, regulations and political positions on refugee affairs occur as a theme in more than half of the articles (in 80), indicating that to a considerable extent journalists regard questions touching on refugees and asylum-seekers to be legal, political, “official” themes. This result is in line with the finding of an earlier research analysing the contents of Welsh newspapers.

That investigation also found that the media treat questions related to refugees and asylum-seekers as “official” affairs (Speers, 2001). These articles discussed the activities of political parties and touched on questions concerning the immigration policy of different countries or the EU (efforts to make changes/amendments, generally with restrictions), and intergovernmental talks on refugee affairs.

There were frequent references to different laws and regulations. Specifically the authors mentioned the Geneva convention (the criteria for obtaining refugee status) and the Dublin agreement (which states that the refugee affairs procedure must be conducted in the EU member state where the asylum-seeker first applied for refugee status). The other references to regulations were made in general terms (for example, “under the regulations in force”<sup>10</sup>).

The theme of crime/deviant behaviour occurred with a very high (38%) incidence. A considerable part of the coverage falling in this category was about the asylum-seekers rushing on Melilla and Ceuta, the two Spanish cities in Africa, the soldiers attacking them with rubber bullets and their expulsion in buses. Some reports wrote about local disturbances that broke out either between local residents and immigrants or between two different ethnic groups.

The high incidence of the themes of crime and deviance is in line with the results of British research by Tait et al., where expressions such as “horde”, “rabble” clearly referring to deviant behaviour were frequently found in articles on refugee affairs (Tait et al, 2004). A comparison of Magyar Nemzet and Népszabadság shows that the conservative Magyar Nemzet more often touches on the question of deviant behaviour in connection with the theme of refugee affairs.

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<sup>10</sup> Esélyprogram menekülteknek [Chance programme for refugees], Népszabadság, April 9, 2005. p. 7.

**Table 3: Themes occurring in the articles**

	Newspaper				Total	
	Magyar Nemzet		Népszabadság		Number of articles	% (N=149)
	Number of articles	% <sup>11</sup> (N=58)	Number of articles	% (N=91)		
Law, politics	31	53.4%	49	53.8%	80	53.7%
Crime, deviant behaviour	25	43.1%	30	33.0%	55	36.9%
Labour market situation, economic activity	12	20.7%	22	24.2%	34	22.8%
Financial situation, support, aid	10	17.2%	23	25.3%	33	22.1%
Demography, population	8	13.8%	16	17.6%	24	16.1%
Situation of receiving station, hostel, refugee camp	7	12.1%	15	16.5%	22	14.8%
Individual case, life history	4	6.9%	16	17.6%	20	13.4%
Relations formed with host society, integration	5	8.6%	14	15.4%	19	12.8%
Catastrophe, scandal	6	10.3%	4	4.4%	10	6.7%
School, education, courses	3	5.2%	11	12.1%	14	9.4%
Housing affairs, homeless affairs	5	8.6%	4	4.4%	9	6.0%
Health status	3	5.2%	6	6.6%	9	6.0%
Art, culture, book	5	8.6%	2	2.2%	7	4.7%

<sup>11</sup> Several themes may appear in individual articles. For this reason the percentage figures given in the table add up to more than 100%.

The themes of labour market situation and financial situation/aid appear somewhat less frequently, in around one quarter of the articles. These themes are present with much greater emphasis in articles published in 2006 than in 2005 (while barely 8% of the articles wrote about the labour market situation in 2005, in 2006 45% discussed the labour market situation; just over 10% of the articles in 2005 touched on the financial situation compared to 40% in 2006). These themes appeared frequently in the 2006 articles on the Roma families who migrated to Sweden as the writers often mentioned that the family members concerned submitted their applications for asylum status in Sweden because they could not find work in Hungary. Another frequent theme in these articles was that people receiving social aid could live on a higher standard in Sweden than in Hungary.

We were able to classify 85% of the articles analysed into our typology containing different points in time (we were able to determine the time dimension to which the article referred in a higher proportion of articles in Magyar Nemzet than in the case of Népszabadság). The present dimension dominates in the writings in both papers (115 articles deal with the present). Some of the references to the past contain recent data on the number of persons seeking and obtaining asylum in the different EU member states. Also placed in this time dimension are articles on the life history of one or more persons involved in refugee affairs. A considerable proportion of the writings also dealing with the past touched on the question of refugee affairs in connection with the 1956 revolution. The presentation of life histories was more typical of Népszabadság, while discussion of 1956 was found more in Magyar Nemzet. Articles on the future most often deal with changes in the EU's immigration policy or restrictions in the regulations applying to refugee affairs or foreign nationals in the different member countries, or plans for such restrictions.

**Table 4: The time dimension appearing in articles in the two newspapers**

	Newspaper				Total	
	Magyar Nemzet		Népszabadság		Number of articles	(N=149)
	Number of articles	(N=58) <sup>12</sup>	Number of articles	(N=91)		
<b>Can be determined</b>	52	89.7%	74	81.3%	126	84.6%
<b>Past (&lt;2005)</b>	18	31.0%	28	30.8%	46	30.9%
<b>Present (2005-2006)</b>	44	75.9%	71	78.0%	115	77.2%
<b>Future (&gt;2006)</b>	8	13.8%	8	8.8%	16	10.7%

<sup>12</sup> Several time dimensions may appear in individual articles. For this reason the percentage figures given in the table add up to more than 100%.

### *Social attitudes, proposed solutions*

The attitude of government policy towards refugee affairs could be determined in more than two thirds of the articles on refugee affairs. This attitude was hostile in slightly more than half (75 articles) of all the publications (149 articles), while a tolerant government policy appeared in one fifth (29 articles). Within the articles where the government attitude could be determined (104 in all), close to two thirds showed a negative attitude. The attitude of civil society (organisations, local residents, general public opinion) towards refugee affairs figures in only a smaller proportion of the articles. This could be found in slightly more than a quarter (40) of the articles. Close to three quarters of these reported on a negative attitude, while inclusive attitudes figured in close to half<sup>13</sup>. In the case of inclusive attitudes most of the articles were about social organisations, while hostile attitudes were linked to local residents and to societies as a whole. There was no substantial difference between the two newspapers examined as regards the frequency of inclusive and hostile attitudes.

**Table 5: Attitudes appearing in the articles on refugee affairs**

Attitude	Attitude could be determined		Inclusive, tolerant		Indifferent		Judgmental, hostile	
	Number of articles	% (N=149)	Number of articles	% (N=149)	Number of articles	% (N=149)	Number of articles	% (N=149)
Government policy/policies <sup>14</sup>	104	69.8%	29	19.5%	15	10.1%	75	50.3%
Civil society (civil organisations, local residents, general public opinion)	40	26.8%	18	12.1%	1	0.7%	29	19.5%

<sup>13</sup> Inclusive, tolerant: If the journalists or the persons they interviewed expressed a positive view of government policy or civil society on refugee affairs.

Hostile, prejudiced: If the journalists or the persons they interviewed expressed a hostile view of government policy or civil society on refugee affairs.

<sup>14</sup> One article may contain the government and civil society attitudes of several countries.

We examined the proposals contained in the articles concerning ways of handling the problems related to refugee affairs<sup>15</sup>. The adoption of stricter laws is mentioned in 14% of the articles, while close to one tenth contain proposals for the expulsion of persons involved in refugee affairs. Only one article mentions the possibility of milder legislation. There is no mention in any of the articles of more financial support and only three contain a proposal for a greater role to be taken by the state. Eight articles mention that increasing the number of programmes designed to assist integration could represent a solution for the problems of refugee affairs. The table below shows that in both papers only a few articles offered proposals for the solution of the problems of refugee affairs. In both papers there are more articles proposing expulsion and stricter legislation as a solution than there are proposals for solutions reflecting a positive attitude towards refugees (milder legislation, greater role for the state or support, integration). A higher proportion of solutions representing a positive attitude is found in Népszabadság than in Magyar Nemzet. Solutions representing a negative attitude appear with more emphasis in Magyar Nemzet.

**Table 6: Proposed solutions appearing in the papers**

	Newspaper				Total	
	Magyar Nemzet		Népszabadság		Number of articles	% (N=149)
	Number of articles	% (N=58)	Number of articles	% (N=91)		
<b>Mentions a proposed</b>	18	31.0%	21	23.1%	39	26.2%
<b>Stricter laws, regulations</b>	10	17.2%	11	12.1%	21	14.1%
<b>Expulsion</b>	7	12.1%	7	7.7%	14	9.4%
<b>Milder laws, regulations</b>	0	0.0%	1	1.1%	1	0.7%
<b>Greater role for the state</b>	0	0.0%	3	3.3%	3	2.0%
<b>Greater financial support</b>	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>More programmes helping integration</b>	3	5.2%	5	5.5%	8	5.4%

<sup>15</sup> We examined only what proposed solution appeared in the article – not whether the author agrees with the proposal.

<sup>16</sup> It is important to take into account when interpreting the table that an article may contain more than one proposed solution.

*General characteristics of persons involved in refugee affairs in the articles*

The origin of persons involved in refugee affairs<sup>17</sup> is specified in more than half of the articles. The nationality is mentioned more frequently in Népszabadság than in Magyar Nemzet<sup>18</sup>.

The majority of persons in refugee affairs figuring in the articles are of European origin (56 articles deal with persons in refugee affairs originating from Europe). Among European persons in refugee affairs the articles write mainly about Hungarians. These results can be attributed to the fact that the articles appearing in 2006 paid special attention to the exodus of Roma families from Hungary to Sweden. The articles on Hungarian persons in refugee affairs deal mainly with these people, although there are also writings on refugees in 1956, as well as on ethnic Hungarians who are not of Hungarian nationality (who came from Vojvodina, for example, to seek asylum in Hungary)<sup>19</sup>.

**Table 7: Origin of persons involved in refugee affairs<sup>20</sup>**

	Newspaper				Total	
	Magyar Nemzet		Népszabadság		Number of articles mentioning given origin	(N=149)
	Number of articles mentioning given origin	(N=58)	Number of articles mentioning given origin	(N=91)		
<b>Asia</b>	11	19.0%	29	31.9%	40	26.8%
<b>Europe</b>	20	34.5%	36	39.6%	56	37.6%
<b>America</b>	2	3.4%	3	3.3%	5	3.4%
<b>Africa</b>	20	34.5%	27	29.7%	47	31.5%

<sup>17</sup> We refer here to people in the following categories as persons involved in refugee affairs: asylum-seeker, refugee, unaccompanied minor, person received in another country, "menedékes" (a legal category in refugee affairs in Hungary only. It is related to a temporary protected status).

<sup>18</sup> This proportion is close to 67% of the articles in Népszabadság and close to 45% of those in Magyar Nemzet. For the articles taken together: 57.0%.

<sup>19</sup> Because in many articles it was not clear whether they were writing about a person's nationality or ethnicity, we made no distinction between these code categories. In the special case where both a person's nationality and ethnicity were clearly specified in an article and the two were not identical, we classified the article under both headings (for example, an article on Hungarians from Transylvania was classified in both the Hungarian and Romanian categories).

<sup>20</sup> It is important to take into account when interpreting the two tables on origin firstly that more than one ethnicity/nationality may be mentioned in an article and secondly that there were articles where only the continent was given as place of origin.

**Table 8: Origin (nationality, ethnicity) of European persons involved in refugee affairs**

	Newspaper				Total	
	Magyar Nemzet		Népszabadság		Number of articles mentioning given origin	(N=149)
	Number of articles mentioning given origin	(N=58)	Number of articles mentioning given origin	(N=91)		
<b>Slovak</b>	4	6.9%	1	1.1%	5	3.4%
<b>Hungarian</b>	14	24.1%	21	23.1%	35	23.5%
<b>Romanian</b>	6	10.3%	4	4.4%	10	6.7%
<b>Serb</b>	4	6.9%	7	7.7%	11	7.4%
<b>Serb-Montenegrin</b>	0	0.0%	2	2.2%	2	1.3%
<b>Ukrainian</b>	0	0.0%	4	4.4%	4	2.7%
<b>Other European</b>	2	3.4%	11	12.1%	13	8.7%

Often the articles make no mention of the personal characteristics other than origin of refugees and asylum-seekers. Among the characteristics we examined the authors most frequently wrote about the status the asylum-seekers obtained: this appeared in four-tenths of the articles. Where the articles report on the status obtained by persons involved in refugee affairs, in the majority of cases they write about refusal and expulsion (37 articles).

Among the personal characteristics, the reason for flight is mentioned in fewer than one fifth of the articles. According to the newspaper articles in most cases people become persecuted in their own country because of their political convictions (14 articles), but armed conflicts and civil wars<sup>21</sup> also frequently appear as reasons for flight (12 articles). The gender and age of persons involved in refugee affairs are generally mentioned in around a quarter of the articles. Men figure in slightly more articles (30) than women (27). Adults figure in more articles (33) than children or minor refugees and asylum-seekers (21). If it is possible at all to determine the financial situation of persons involved in refugee affairs from the articles, it can be classified in the “rather bad” category (this is mentioned in 17 articles). Only eight articles refer to the educational qualifications of persons in refugee affairs and in these cases more emphasis is placed on the low level of schooling.

<sup>21</sup> Armed conflict does not figure in the Geneva Convention (as a basis for granting refugee status), we include it among the causes listed because of the definition of “menedékes”.

The statuses obtained by persons involved in refugee affairs can be terminated in various ways: by renunciation, withdrawal or expiry. One of the articles reported on voluntary return to the home country and two mentioned expired status/permit.

**Table 9: General characteristics of persons involved in refugee affairs**

		Number of articles	%(N=149)
gender	<b>Mentioned</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>25.5%</b>
	men	30	20.1%
	women	27	18.1%
age	<b>Mentioned</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>23.5%</b>
	children, minors	21	14.1%
	adults	33	22.1%
educational qualifications	<b>Mentioned</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5.4%</b>
	maximum primary	6	4.0%
	secondary	2	1.3%
financial situation	tertiary	3	2.0%
	<b>Mentioned</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>13.4%</b>
	bad	17	11.4%
Reason(s) for leaving home?	good	7	4.7%
	<b>Mentioned</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>19.5%</b>
	racial	4	2.7%
	religious	1	0.7%
	ethnic identity	1	0.7%
	political conviction	14	9.4%
Status obtained by persons applying for asylum	armed conflict, civil war	12	8.1%
	<b>mentioned</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>36.2%</b>
	received status	5	3.4%
	refugee status	11	7.4%
	in process	13	8.7%
How was refugee status terminated?	rejected and/or expelled	37	24.8%
	<b>mentioned</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2.0%</b>
	at times by renunciation	1	0.7%
	at times by withdrawal/expiry	2	1.3%

One of the points considered in our analysis was whether the articles give voice to the person involved in refugee affairs. As we showed in the overview of the literature, it rarely happens that the persons directly involved are allowed to speak for themselves (Speers, 2001). In our material we found that while in 2005 the articles contained only very few personal reports by persons involved in refugee affairs (in 3.5% of the articles), in 2006 the situation improved: they were given a voice in 15% of the articles. The difference between the two years can be attributed to the fact that in 2005 there was more emphasis on events outside Hungary in which foreigners involved in refugee affairs were mentioned. In contrast, in 2006 many articles dealt with Roma asylum-seekers, among others travelling from Hungary to Sweden, and in many cases the persons directly involved expressed their views in the articles about them – mainly in *Népszabadság*.

### **Discussion**

The theme of law and politics arose most frequently in the articles on refugee affairs in the two papers in 2005 and 2006. The high proportion of references to regulations and political positions conveys the picture that refugee affairs are a state and intergovernmental issue, an “official”, legal and political question rather than a humanitarian one. If the emphasis had been placed on humanitarian considerations, the articles could have written, among others, about the reasons why the persons involved in refugee affairs left their country. However, this form of presentation occurred only rarely in the papers. The high representation of the theme of politics and law is only partly explained by the profile of the papers examined. Our finding that refugee affairs typically appear in the papers examined as an official, political question is in line with the results of press image analyses carried out in several other countries.

Another important characteristic of the articles is that negative news predominate. Most of the articles concerned in both newspapers write about problems and conflicts in connection with refugee affairs. The question of refugee affairs is often linked to a negative topic: it is presented in connection with crime/deviant behaviour. Few articles write about positive developments. As we have shown, foreign research projects examining the media image of minorities, refugees and asylum-seekers also found that these groups are often presented in a negative light.



What can be the relevance of the fact that the media shows a negative picture of refugee affairs? Nowadays approaches assuming a minimal influence of the media are popular (Bajomi-Lázár 2006, Katz-Blumer-Gurevitch 1974, Petts et al 2001). It seems to us that some of these greatly underestimate the significance of the media influence and attribute too much power to the recipients in the process of interpreting media information. Although we accept the position that the interpretation of media information is an active process, for us this does not necessarily mean that the media have no influence or that their influence is only negligible. It is a fact that in certain cases this influence can be enormous. The media are capable of setting off mass hysteria or even ethnic conflict, as happened in Los Angeles in the early 1990s.

Several arguments can be put forward in support of the relevance of the media image with respect to the topic of refugee affairs. In the case of refugee affairs the media can be a more important source of information for many people than personal contacts, especially if there are relatively few persons involved in refugee affairs in the given country (Hartmann and Husband 1974 – cited in Finney - Peach 2004). The media also play an exceptional role as an information source in connection with refugee affairs because people receive negative information about members of minorities differently from news not about minorities (Csepeli et al, 1993). The importance of the media's role is also confirmed by the research which found that there is a connection between reports and attacks on refugees and asylum seekers. The investigation found that there was an increase in the number of such attacks when articles appeared in the press reporting on harassments but not condemning them (Esser and Brosius, 1996 – cited in Tait et al, 2004). The media play an especially big role in arousing 'moral panic' in such issues as crime or asylum (Coe et al, 2004). According to Cohen, one of the objects of moral panic today are refugees and asylum seekers. He explains this by the fact that reports on them speak about hostility and rejection; or they treat refugee affairs as a political issue: the successive British governments not only take the lead in the general hatred – thereby legitimising hostility – but they also speak about it in the sensation-seeking style of the tabloid papers (Cohen 2002 – cited in Finney - Peach 2004). A number of other authors also reached the conclusion that the media have a substantial impact in racial and ethnic issues (Miller – Philo 1999, Van Dijk 1991).

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## POLICY REPORTS

### Labour Mobility in Nowadays Europe and Its Role in Economic Development

Ioana ALBU

**Abstract:** “Worker mobility is a key instrument for an efficiently functioning single market and is essential for allowing more people to find better employment, a key objective of the Lisbon Strategy”, as it is stipulated by the Communication from the Commission to the EP, the Council, the ECOSOC and CoR in Mobility, an instrument for more and better jobs: The European Job Mobility Action Plan (2007-2010). Job mobility has been significantly affected by technological change, by changes in education patterns, and by structural unemployment. The mobility of labour force in EU member states is hardly moving. ‘Creating jobs to people’\* has been the focus of attention and debate within politicians, economists, experts in the field and policy-makers in the EU of 27, in order to contribute to a more even economic development at the level of regions, given the disparities between poorer regions of Europe and richer ones. Overcoming barriers, such as the cultural and language barrier, in the way of the free movement of people and especially the work force and creating an improved standard of living, diminishing income differences and regional differences in Europe does pose a real challenge for the EU of 27.

**Keywords:** *labour mobility, regional disparities, balanced economic development, migration flows, barriers to the free movement of persons*

*The European Job Mobility Action Plan (2007-2010) represents a further, important step in a long line of initiatives to promote mobility, based on the ‘lessons’ from the 2002 Action Plan and the 2006 European Year of Workers’ Mobility. It shows that all recent challenges posed by the global economy, aging population in Europe and a constantly changing labour market demand much greater levels of mobility.*

The EU enlargement in the last two waves of accession, 2004 and 2007 increased both the opportunities for workers to find a job, and for employers to find workers, creating a ‘large potential labour force to cope with the challenges of ageing and globalisation’. Workers need to be more mobile both between jobs, and between regions and Member States, according to the above cited document.

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\* The present study is based on a report delivered by the president of EIB in 2007

The European Union by its founding treaties (The Maastricht Treaty), right from its beginnings, has vised *balanced economic development across its regions*. Nevertheless, the gap between the poor regions of Europe and the rich ones poses important matters, such as the extent to which the differences in the standards of living should be reduced at the level of these regions. What would the 'right' level of disparities be and the 'correct' speed of convergence, is one of the main issues to be addressed by specialists in the field (*P. Maystadt*). Taking into study other developed countries to compare economic disparities would enable the assessment of whether there has been any convergence in regional disparities in Europe.

The present study refers to the Western Europe Member States, the 15 that first created the Union, since the gap between the Western Europe member states and the new accession countries (i.e. former communist countries mostly) is still prominent. Historically speaking, back in the '60's disparities among themselves were about twice as large as those between the American states. Disparities were felt also in terms of income; in this respect they have halved (expressed in Euros). The purchasing power across Europe's regions has presented itself the same as the above ones. As to income convergence in Western Europe, a first stage was the one in which real incomes came closer together followed by a convergence of prices, alternating in the following decade with a decline in the purchasing power. The following period until the '90s, the income disparities came down by about 40% (according to the source quoted). Later on, the period since the mid-'90s that has witnessed two major events: the introduction of the Euro and falling inflation, wherein the convergence referred to made visible progress little by little.

The EU is seen as a confederation of states under a supra-national structure; the average population of whose Western member states (15) being of about 25 million people. Poorer EU countries tend to outgrow richer ones. Regional disparities in the EU may persist over time, taking into account the fact that the convergence trend in the EU (at the level of country) is reflected in the regions. Income disparities in Western Europe are still substantial at the same level. All the matters above consist an issue of concern for politicians, policymakers and economists referring to economic growth and regional cohesion.

The EU of 27 looks different in what concerns the disparities in terms of wealth. It also is a well-known fact that there are temporary increases in national disparities, as the poorer member states grow faster than the richer ones. The convergence process of the 10 new member states and the latest two in 2007 can

be considered over the short period 2003-2005 only (according to P. Maystadt]. These new member states, former communist countries, for all progress that has been made with the creation of new markets, improved production capacity, modernized industry are still confronted with a slow catch up process with the EU western member states. The fact that regional disparities in Europe are larger might be conducive to the idea that EU's regional policies are not properly working, but this is not by all means the case, since without support mechanisms such as structural funds, their effectiveness is not easily observable. With the expending process of globalization worldwide, accompanied by technical change, the production structures are being reshaped and the entire manufacturing, finance, banking and business domains facing an increased and rapid growth. Peripheral regions, nevertheless, develop less dynamically.

Supporting the development of poorer regions is a matter of concern of both EU member states governments and the EU institutions. 90% of the structural funds, according to the latest statistics, have been allocated to the member countries in order for these to improve production in less developed regions. Referring to income convergence, taking the model of developed countries, its main driving force consists in internal migration in association with other factors (e.g. common language, housing prospects, education and children education).

In the EU, according to experts in the field, labour is still not mobile enough, despite the large numbers of particularly Eastern European new member states, such as Poland, Romania, Hungary and lately Turkey in view of its accession); the reason being partly cultural barriers and language barriers that are not easy to be removed. The migrant workers are confronted with the challenge of losing long term benefits versus moving to another country and being entitled to increased incomes and social benefits. However, as it is shown in the Action Plan 2007-2010 '*worker mobility still remains rather restricted by a number of barriers. Aside from an uncertainty over the advantages of being mobile, individuals face a number of hurdles to their movement. These can range from legal and administrative obstacles, housing costs and availability, employment of spouses and partners, portability of pensions, linguistic barriers, and issues on the acceptance of qualifications in other Member States*'.

As a brief conclusion, one might say that reducing regional differences in terms of income, wealth and unemployment, the experts envisage that by diminishing the labour force and mobility in depressed areas of the EU and

increasing it in flourishing regions would make a difference in the aim of an even economic development across Europe.

Labour mobility data have contributed immeasurably to our understanding of individuals' labor market activities, especially when it comes to analyzing job mobility and wage growth. Without the ability to "see" workers move from employer to employer, we would know very little about why workers separate from their employers, how often separations occur, and how job mobility affects earnings. Analyses of these issues have revealed labor markets to be far more dynamic than was previously realized. A related issue of long-standing concern is the effect of job *immobility* on wage growth. Human capital models predict that wages rise with job seniority when workers "stabilize" themselves in a particular job and invest in specific skills and the workplace. Longitudinal data have proved to be essential for assessing the merits of theoretical models and identifying the effect of tenure on wages.

*Worker mobility in the EU remains relatively low*, although statistics on mobility flows on the underlying motivations need improvement. Worker mobility should be viewed as a means to create employment and to help individual personal development in the 27 EU Member States. The ability to move from one job, from one region or country to another is considered crucial for solving Europe's employment problem. Worker mobility requires not only readiness on the side of workers, but also adapted social security schemes, dedicated training and responsible employers.

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