

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. respondents	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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