Can there be such a thing as a good asylum system?

Proceedings of a national workshop held in Leeds on 18th October 2008

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Introduction

Max Farrar, Professor for Community Engagement, Leeds Metropolitan University (until 2009)

"Could there ever be a good system for responding to requests for asylum?" That's the question Peter Richardson asked me when we met in early 2008 to talk about organising a conference. Peter was, and is, the manager of Leeds Asylum Seekers Support Network. Peter was aware that Leeds Metropolitan University did some work with refugees and asylum seekers. Our Community Partnerships & Volunteering office organised our refugee mentoring scheme, and helped find non-perishable foods and toiletries for destitute asylum seekers in Leeds supported by Positive Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers. At the time I managed that office and I thought that we should be making a contribution to thinking about the principles and policies that controlled the lives of those who seek refuge in the UK. We knew that Louise Waite and Debbie Phillips in the Geography Department at the University of Leeds were also interested in these things so we asked them to join us in organising the conference we were proposing.

I'm pretty sure, after years of grinding away in all kinds of committees, that you only enjoy organising things when you are working with people you like, doing something you believe to be worthwhile. If only we could do this all the time. So it was a pleasure thinking through the ideas behind this conference and plodding through the corridors of the university to make the necessary arrangements. We agreed very quickly that we wanted to put this difficult question to a wide variety of people – those who work in asylum and refugee support, people who campaign on these issues, refugees and asylum seekers themselves,

political activists and last, but not least, academics. We knew that a good lunch and a low registration fee were essential. We wanted art as well as workshops, dialogue as well as lectures (but only two of those). We put out the appeal for papers and had the usual small panic when we weren't immediately flooded. But then the papers, and some art, did come in, as did a flood of registrations.

These proceedings cover the workshop presentations and one of the lectures (Philippe Legrain – whose work you can find at http://www.philippelegrain.com/ did not submit his speech); it includes some of the photos we displayed taken by the asylum seekers that Ala Sirreyeh is working with; and it includes two poems submitted by Peter Campion. Obviously, this report can't capture the liveliness of the debate and the enjoyment this disparate group of people had in coming together to think, talk and to support each other in the ongoing campaign for justice for asylum seekers and refugees.

Many thanks to Cara McCosh (Community Partnerships & Volunteering) for her administrative prowess, to the volunteers who helped on the day, to Taste by Design for the catering (http://www. tastebydesign.co.uk/) and to my fellow organisers, Peter Richardson, Dr Debbie Phillips and Dr Lou Waite.

D.A.Phillips@leeds.ac.uk
Peter@lassn.org.uk
L.Waite@leeds.ac.uk
maximfarrar@googlemail.com

Zrinka Bralo

Presentation to the national workshop: 'Can there be a good asylum system?'

(Zrinca Bralo is Executive Director of Migrant and Refugee Communities Forum in London, and was a Commissioner on the Independent Asylum Commission.) Zrinka.Bralo@mrcf.org.uk

When I was invited to join the Independent Asylum Commission in October 2006, I had some reservations. I have been involved with a number of initiatives that have reviewed the asylum system, produced helpful reports and recommendations, but failed to capture the imagination of people who work on these issues and to engage those with power to change the system for the better. I also had concerns about how such a diverse group of Commissioners would get along together and achieve agreement on the best way forward. I worried about how my opinions as a refugee and an advocate would sit with those of people who have a different experience and understanding of the asylum system. I knew that there are some very controversial issues, such as deportation, that many people struggle with. How far would I have to compromise some of my political views? There were so many unknowns in it for me to deliberate, so I focused on what I knew. I knew that the situation for asylum seekers was getting progressively worse despite the ample evidence of the erosion of refugee rights produced by many respectable organisations. I knew that the government was not listening to the evidence and the arguments that these respectable organisations were making. I knew that in the last ten years every subsequent act of parliament had further stripped asylum seekers of their basic rights and humanity. The government had even brought back the voucher scheme having abandoned it once several years ago. I knew that something had to change and that something different needed to be done to change the tone and participants in this conversation in order to make the government take notice. I understood that the only way forward was old fashioned democracy. The government clearly wouldn't listen to asylum seekers and their advocates, but they might, just might listen to what the citizens in this country had to say about how their government, on their behalf treats this group of people. The citizens who work hard, obey the law, pay their taxes and every now and then exercise their right to vote. And this is one of the things that puts the 'great' into Britain - the power of civil society.

Although I did not know very much about the Citizens Organising Foundation, I knew about the power of British citizens, who in their living rooms created world wide movements such as Amnesty International, because they care. True, Amnesty did not eradicate torture around the world, but it made it unacceptable. Everywhere around the world. One step at a time. So I reasoned that if a group of people from different religious, class, educational, political and professional backgrounds were willing to spend their time for the next two years, that it was probably safe to conclude they would all make an effort to make the change for the better. So I decided to pack away my own assumptions, political opinions, class and educational background and give my time and knowledge in good faith and let the evidence speak for itself.

I also had doubts about how useful or detrimental my presence might be for the Commission. How beneficial would it be for the Commission to have a refugee and an outspoken advocate participating in the process? Would some doubting tabloid undermine the work of the Commission because it included me? Would some of my fellow advocates hold me responsible if the Commission did not fulfil their expectations?

But as soon as the Commission started its work all my worries and doubts disappeared. Although all the Commissioners brought their views and experiences to the table, the Commission's brief was to conduct an enquiry. To listen, to gather evidence and engage form a clean slate. And so we did.

Established in October 2006, The Independent Asylum Commission (IAC) was the result of an inquiry carried out two years earlier by South London Citizens into the treatment of immigration applicants in Lunar House, the headquarters of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (as it was then called). The inquiry came out of the experience of Rev Ian Knowles, RC Borough Dean of Croydon, who contacted the Lunar House in an attempt to help trace lost documents for one of his parishioners. It soon transpired that many of his parishioners as well as other members of South

London Citizens shared the experience of poor treatment, lack of information and lost documents at the Lunar House and they decided to do something about it. And that something was Citizens' enquiry into the workings of the IND in Croydon.

In 2005 they published the report *A Humane Service for Global Citizens* which contained recommendations for improvements of systems in the Lunar House. The report was well received by Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND), who have since implemented a number of its recommendations and continue to liaise with a monitoring group. The report's final recommendation was that there should be an independent citizens' enquiry into the implementation of national policies on asylum. This work was taken forward under the wider umbrella of the Citizens Organising Foundation that runs other successful campaigns such as Strangers into Citizens and London Living Wage.

12 Commissioners were appointed to conduct a nationwide enquiry into the workings of the asylum system in the UK. The Commission's Independent Inquiry was structured around 3 Questions:

1. How do we decide who needs sanctuary?

2. How do we treat people seeking sanctuary?

3. What happens when we refuse people sanctuary?

The IAC embarked on a listening and evidence-gathering journey around the UK. The Commission:

• held seven themed public hearings across the country;

• held a special hearing in Belfast;

• held seven closed evidence sessions at Westminster Abbey (around 30 experts, MPs, civil servants, including three former Home Secretaries and Migration Watch gave evidence in closed sessions).

• commissioned the Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees (ICAR) to produce comprehensive thematic briefings on all aspects of the UK asylum system;

• received over 180 written submissions to the call for evidence;

• received over a hundred video submissions;

• held key stakeholder interviews on public attitudes to asylum in eight locations across the UK;

• held focus groups in eight locations across the UK;

• held the CITIZENS SPEAK consultation asking for the public's views on sanctuary in the UK;

• held over 50 People's Commissions across the UK to recommend the values and principles that should underpin UK asylum policy;

• publicised the work through HUMAN RIGHTS TV – all public hearings and testimonies recorded and posted unedited on www.humanrights.com

CITIZENS SPEAK consultation received:

• 44 emails from the general public,

• 14 letters from Daily Express readers,

• Six letters from Independent readers;

• 19,187 hits and 225 responses to four videos posted on www.friction.tv;

• 520 citizens – as diverse as Young Farmers in Herefordshire, students at Magdalen College in Oxford, elderly people in rural Somerset, and trainee air hostesses in the South Wales valleys taking part in over 50 'People's Commissions' across every Government Office region in Great Britain.

Public Attitudes Research Project

The Commissioners decided to commission some research into public attitudes on asylum to help them understand the response to the CITIZENS SPEAK consultation. Using the most advanced research in this area, IAC sought better to understand what influenced public attitudes:

• Over 40 interviews with key stakeholders in eight locations across the UK, asking local community representatives, media and authorities what affected attitudes to asylum in their area;

• 16 focus groups in eight locations across the UK found out about attitudes to asylum and sanctuary from a diverse range of local people split by age and social class;

• An opinion poll tested attitudes to sanctuary and asylum nationally.

In its Interim Findings Report *Fit for Purpose Yet?* covered by 75 different media outlets around the UK The Commission recorded:

• 97 findings;

• 109 concerns;

The Commission offered these to the public as well as to the now new UK Borders Agency (UKBA) and produced three Recommendations Reports that include:

• Five Basic Principles for reform and improvement

of the UK asylum system; with

• 172 Detailed Recommendations

All of our witnesses, experts, refugees and citizens agreed on two things:

1. That it is important to preserve the proud British tradition of provision of sanctuary to those in need of it; and

2. That the system we have now is not adequate and needs to be improved.

Five principles for rebuilding public confidence in the asylum system:

1) *People fleeing persecution should be able to find sanctuary in safe countries like the UK.* This principle must be the foundation of UK's asylum policy. This was considered the most important value by over 85% of People's Commissions. There was consensus in all 16 focus groups that the UK should provide sanctuary to those fleeing persecution. No private or public witness to the Commission questioned this fundamental commitment. Even pressure groups who believe the asylum system is too generous agree with this principle.

2) *The UK should have an effective system for controlling our border that lets those seeking sanctuary in, as well as keeping irregular migrants out.*

   Securing the UK's border was seen as a high priority by some and as an important principle by almost all People's Commissions. However, most accepted the principle that letting some people who do not require sanctuary into the country was a price worth paying for allowing those who needed sanctuary to reach the UK.

3) *The UK should have a fair and effective decision-making body that takes pride in giving sanctuary to those who need it and denies it to those who do not.*

   A decision-making body that is fair, effective, under control and makes sound decisions is important for rebuilding public confidence in the asylum system. The Commission identified public concern about inconsistency of decisions – some are interpreted as too soft and others as unduly harsh.

4) *People seeking sanctuary should be treated fairly and humanely, have access to essential support and public services, and should make a contribution to the UK if they are able.* There was consensus that people seeking sanctuary should have access to

essential support and services until their claim has been resolved – all of the focus groups and all but one of the People's Commissions recommended this as a key principle. However, there were strong concerns expressed in the CITIZENS SPEAK consultation about perceived preferential treatment for asylum seekers in the allocation of housing, goods and public services. There was a strong consensus in the Public Attitudes Research Project that no-one, regardless of status, should get 'something for nothing'. Those seeking sanctuary should be expected to make some contribution through work if they are able.

5) *Once a decision has been made, the UK should act swiftly, effectively and in a controlled way – either to assist integration or to effect a swift, safe and sustainable return for those who have had a fair hearing and have been refused sanctuary.*

   One of the strongest messages to emerge from the CITIZENS SPEAK consultation was that hospitality is being abused by those who do not require sanctuary. The Public Attitudes Project found that the public are concerned that people 'disappear' if they are denied sanctuary, and cannot believe that the government does not have an effective system which ensures that refused asylum seekers leave the UK. Many participants in the focus groups were alarmed that the government should cut off support and give up control of asylum seekers by failing to ensure swift return or to monitor their presence in the UK.

IAC Reports and Recommendations:

1. Saving sanctuary recommendations - 48 recommendations

The Commission produced eight recommendations to improve access to the asylum system for those seeking sanctuary and to encourage a 'protection culture' among decision-makers.

For example, one recommendation was that audio-recording of the substantive interview be implemented as a matter of urgency and a transcribed version of this made available as a matter of course to asylum seekers and their legal representatives. In a claim involving details of sexual violence applicants should be asked whether they wish the hearing to be conducted specifically by a woman or a man and a specific request should normally be accommodated.

21 recommendations related to improvements of the quality of decision-making.

19 recommendations aimed to ensure that the asylum system is not so adversarial or heavily weighted against the asylum seeker, focusing particularly on early access to legal advice and representation for asylum seekers, use of expert reports, the fast-track process and improving public understanding of the way decisions are made.

2. Safe return - 'New Deal for Safe and Sure Returns' - 32 recommendations

Key Recommendations:

• Improve the rate of voluntary return

• Make returns procedures more humane and transparent avoid, 'dawn raids', detention of children.

• End the destitution of refused asylum seekers, destitution is opposed by 61% of the public, and should end. Also end use of vouchers for Section 4 (hard case) and allow asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers to work.

IAC polling found that 48% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that 'if an asylum seeker has their claim refused but cannot return home through no fault of their own, they should be allowed to work on a temporary basis', against 38% who disagreed. Given the positive public attitudes towards permission to work for those who cannot be removed, this kind of limited approach would help rather than hinder trust in the system.

3. Deserving dignity – 92 recommendations

Key findings

• Those who seek sanctuary in the UK deserve to be treated with a dignity over which mere administrative convenience must never prevail; particularly in the treatment of those who are detained, or women, children, torture survivors, those with health needs, and LGBT asylum seekers;

• Responsibility for the fair and humane treatment of people who seek sanctuary in the UK lies with the UK Border Agency, but also with politicians, the media, and every individual citizen.

Key recommendations:

Review the use of detention, find alternatives, and improve safeguards.

• Basic safeguards that exist in the criminal justice system should be applied to detention of asylum seekers;

• Length of detention should be limited, clearly defined, documented and justified and subject to judicial oversight. Full written reasons for detention should be given, demonstrating how the applicant's individual circumstances fulfil the detention criteria, bail hearings should be automatic;

• Civic inspection of detention centres, conditions and contractors should be carried out twice a year through random unannounced visits and their findings made public.

• The Human Rights Act should apply to private contractors involved in the detention estate in the same way as it does for the private care sector.

Allow asylum seekers to support themselves – 51% of the public believe that asylum seekers should be able to work while their claim is being processed.

Treat children as children – there should be no detention of children, age disputed young people, pregnant women, those with psychiatric disorders and torture survivors and that families should not be split up by one member being detained.

Ensure the dignity of women, torture survivors, those with health needs and LGBT asylum seekers

What next for IAC?

IAC formally handed over its reports and recommendations to the Citizens Organizing Foundation (COF) at the London Citizens meeting in November 2008. The Commission's work is now over but the new the campaign CITIZENS for Sanctuary is set up by the COF to make those recommendations a reality. After securing resources and recruiting staff, the *'Ten Ways for Citizens to Save Sanctuary'* booklet will be produced by the CITIZENS for Sanctuary campaign to help ordinary citizens, leaders of CITIZEN member organisations and community groups, and all people of goodwill to begin the transformation of how we treat people seeking sanctuary. The booklet will identify ten of the Independent Asylum Commission's key findings, proposed solutions and suggested actions for individuals and groups at the local and national levels. More info on http://www.citizensforsanctuary.org.uk/

On a Personal Note

I am proud to have had the opportunity to take part in the work of the Commission. In the past fifteen

years, ever since I fled war-torn Sarajevo, I have worked with asylum seekers and refugees and often struggled to make sense of the fast-changing, and at times draconian, asylum policies and procedures.

Over the past two years I've had the privilege and responsibility to hear all those who had something to say about the asylum system, policy and experience. The Commission went out of its way to engage with voices that are not normally considered in the debate about asylum, and to hear views that were considered controversial and challenging by some. It was an amazing journey. Difficult at times, mostly due to the traumatic experiences that asylum seekers told us about, of trauma back at home and here in the UK. But at other times it was very inspiring to hear stories of survival and solidarity, especially when we met and heard from communities around the country supporting asylum seekers and standing up for social justice.

Publishing four reports in less than five months was not easy as we had to cover so many different aspects of the protection system as it is now and how it should be. However, the Commissioners reported on the gathered evidence and in that sense our task was clear and straightforward. The evidence speaks for itself. The Commission also engaged with the UK Borders Agency while it was in the process of changing over the past two years. This has perhaps hindered the process of engagement, but the commitment is there to cooperate on both sides.

It is this dialogue with the government that gives the Commission's work its unique quality. The changes required to improve the protection system are many and it will take a long time to achieve the level of protection that would reassure me that the system is fair. For years the government responded by harsh administrative measures and ignored advocates as well as refugees in their pleas for fairness in what appeared to be an attempt to respond to xenophobic agenda. The Commission provided evidence that the tabloids do not represent the majority of decent, hardworking, fair-minded citizens. It is the citizens who have provided the evidence of this failure to protect the most vulnerable and it is the citizens who are now demanding change. They are demanding for asylum seekers to be treated with fairness and dignity, to be welcomed into our communities and to safeguard the centuries old British tradition of sanctuary.

Our work as is now over, but the work for citizens is just beginning. In response to different communities around the country, a Citizens for Sanctuary campaign is now being set up to continue the work of implementing the Commissions recommendations and I would like to invite and encourage all of those with interest in justice and social change to join their efforts in this campaign. It may look too overwhelming to tackle the entire system all at once, and you might disagree with many of the Commission's conclusions and recommendations, but you can pick and chose those that are relevant to your community and reflect your values and beliefs, even if it just one – such as right to work, or access to education – and you can work on it and campaign for it using Commission's work, evidence and recommendations to make your task of providing sanctuary just a little bit easier.

A Humane Service for Global Citizens

http://www.londoncitizens.org.uk/immigration/Lunar%20House%20Final.pdf

Independent Asylum Commission http://www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk/

Citizens for Sanctuary http://www.citizensforsanctuary.org.uk/

Gary Craig and Hannah Lewis

Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Migrants in Yorkshire and the Humber – a Literature Review 1999-2007

(Professor Gary Craig and Dr Hannah Lewis work at the Centre for Research in Social Inclusion and Social Justice, University of Hull.)

g.craig@hull.ac.uk or hannahjlewis@gmail.com

Background and aims:

• Commissioned by Yorkshire Futures

Aims:

• Bring together current knowledge and highlight gaps

• Summarise recommendations from research

• A guide for future regional research agenda

Scope:

• Asylum seekers, refugees and 'new' migrants

• Literature in Yorkshire and the Humber (Y&H), 1999-2008

• National studies with Y&H findings

Summary of key statistics:

• 30,000 asylum seekers dispersed to Y&H

• 15,000 refugees

• Numbers dropping continuously since 2004

• % spread across dispersal areas in Y&H has remained the same

• Total of 115 nationalities (+ stateless/unknown)

• Top five countries include Iran, Afghanistan, Zimbabwe. Differences between singles (e.g. Iraq, Eritrea) and families (e.g. Congo, Pakistan).

Overview of literature:

• Most literature published 1999-2005, reflecting dispersal as a new policy

• Latterly, focus has shifted to integration, skills, identity and belonging; and to destitution of refused asylum seekers, problems with Section 4 support and New Asylum Model

• Mixture of policy (asylum system, housing); sociology (qualitative, issues of identity); and voluntary sector

Key themes:

• Housing and asylum support

• Health and mental health

• Education

• Children and young people

• Employment and skills

• Police, safety

• Integration

Housing & asylum support:

• Housing and asylum support systems strongly shape asylum seekers' experiences

• Housing workers combine a supportive role with surveillance controls

• The house: central site of social engagement, and a place of exclusion and isolation

• Change of status creates anxiety and uncertainty (refugee homelessness)

Health

• Asylum seekers vulnerable to poor health due to precarious status in UK and past trauma

• Mental health issues: specialised services created

• Communicable diseases: TB screening, prevalence of HIV/ AIDS

• Interpreting and translation key to service provision

• Refused asylum seekers and destitution: deterioration in physical and mental health, issues with access/ eligibility

Education/ children & young people

Children:

• Need for language/ teaching assistants

• Impact uneven: patterns of asylum dispersal

- Refugee children have increased diversity, and sometimes improved attainment levels
- Playground is important site of mixing and integration for children and parents

Adult:
- Reduction in provision of English classes
- Difficulties gaining recognition for existing qualifications

Employment
- Asylum seekers no longer have permission to work: waste of skills, talents; and disempowering
- Refugees: high under/unemployment
- Barriers to employment:
    - Language
    - Health problems and deskilling
    - Employer attitudes
    - Qualifications not recognised
- Need for training for young people without past experience, as well as help for skilled refugees to get appropriate employment

Police and safety:
- Lack of evidence on crimes/ victims, but asylum seekers more likely to be victims
- Racism, tensions, discrimination a prominent theme
- Impacts on police include their role in Immigration Control: may detain for immigration reasons
- Lindholme: removal facility in this region, insufficient separation from 'parent prison'

Integration:
- Not a one-off decision: different identities claimed in various spaces/ places
- Volunteering provides a chance for asylum seekers to integrate
- Racism and discrimination a barrier
- Refugee Community Organisations (RCO) have an important, under-resourced role
- Role of religion and worship/ churches
- New integration strategy for Y&H launched soon

Research gaps:
- Experiences of asylum seekers outside Leeds, Sheffield
- Children, young adults, older refugees, families, separated children

- Women, gendered perspectives
- Reasons for, prevalence and consequences of experiences of racism/ discrimination for refugees and 'local' people
- Informal social networks, informal influences on integration and their relationship with formal services, organisations
- Gateway refugees: differences between reception package and 'spontaneous' refugees
- Lessons learned from eight years of dispersal, and impact of New Asylum Model

Summary of recommendations:
- Promote rights and recognise needs of asylum seekers and refugees in existing policy provisions
- Consult refugees on their needs and proposed changes in practice/ policy
- RCOs need funding and recognition of their key support role, and inclusion in decision-making structures
- Recognise and understand differences: heterogeneous group
- Improve information for employers on skills of refugees and value of diversity
- Risk of funding/ attention being drawn to migrant workers: need to keep a focus on asylum and refugees
- Remember that 'new' migrants include Roma from EU
- Continuing need for myth-busting and information to separate needs/ issues of asylum from general/ labour migration

Dissemination:
- Publication of this research
- Good Asylum workshop
- Migration Impacts Group
- Launch with new Y&H integration strategy in January 2009

The report is now published and is titled:

Lewis, H., Craig, G., Adamson, S. & Wilkinson, M. (2008) *Refugees, Asylum seekers and Migrants in Yorkshire and Humber, 1999-2008. A Review of Literature for Yorkshire Futures,* Leeds, Yorkshire Futures.

It is available on-line at:
http://www.yorkshirefutures.com/news/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants-yorkshire-and-humber-1999-2008

Lorraine Pannett

'Like Other People': Some Approaches to Good Asylum

(Lorraine is PhD Student in the School of Languages, Linguistics and Cultures, University of Manchester.)
Lorraine.Pannett@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

This reflection on 'good asylum' draws on research 'conversations' and participant observation with asylum seekers and refugees about their experiences of making new lives in Manchester. The conversations raised concerns about 'bad asylum', but 'good asylum' within a frame of reference of human rights was explicit or implicit in what many people said. Iris Marion Young's conceptualisations of oppression as 'the institutional constraint on self-development' and domination as 'the institutional constraint on self-determination' (1990: 37) offer one way of thinking through 'bad asylum'. However, in this paper I ground my discussion of the oppressions and dominations of 'bad asylum' in the experiences of asylum seekers (and refugees reflecting on their experiences of the asylum process).

Because of the mandates of the voluntary organisations which were my main entry points, with English as the language used for the conversations, the people I encountered tended to be 'activist' in voluntary work, political organisations, their own campaigns to stay, and/or well educated in their countries of origin. Several said that the UK should have immigration rules, but that those rules should be clearer, fairer, less subject to delay, racism and caprice in their application. Many expressed clear ideas of human rights and what constitutes fair and equal treatment. Human rights are not only to do with UN Conventions – often unenforceable – but also with human dignity and recognition of what is common and what is different. The desire for fair and equal treatment is a desire to lead lives described by one asylum seeker as 'the same as other people'.

I feel a tension between two ethical positions: first, a need and desire to work in solidarity with asylum seekers to improve things in the here and now (what is doable in a liberal framework); second, a belief in more radical deconstructions and critiques that point towards a different future (but are less detailed about the way that future might be formed). For the moment, I leave open the différends (Lyotard, 2007) I have noted, hoping that the tension between the theoretical and the everyday will be productive.

In this paper, I consider three problematic aspects of asylum (the right to work; legal procedures; making a new life in Manchester) and whether and how they might be turned into good – or better - asylum. I then reflect on the spaces and possibilities created by voluntary organisations that demonstrate some of the features of good asylum.

Top of the list of changes nearly everyone would like to see is the right to work. Permission to work was ended in 2002 on the grounds that it was a discretionary right that was no longer needed because claims were being determined more quickly. That claim is contradicted by the Home Office's current justification that:

managed economic migration is a valuable source of skills and labour for the UK economy... It is important to maintain the distinction between economic migration and asylum. Allowing failed asylum seekers to work would also be likely to encourage asylum applications from those without a well founded fear of persecution, thus slowing down the processing of applications made by genuine refugees and compromising the integrity of our asylum system.

(Letter from UKBA to Tony Lloyd MP, 7 August 2008, in response to a letter from me about destitution and the right to work)

The distinction between asylum seekers and economic migrants ('forced' and 'unforced' migrants) is a troublesome distinction which privileges political rights over economic rights and segregates the rights of citizens, migrants and asylum seekers.

Participants perceived the benefits of the right to work as: better financial support; improved mental health; funding for higher education for family members; social inclusion; contributing to the national economy. The effects of negative experiences during the period of the asylum process (which may not easily be thrown off if leave to remain is granted) have been recognised by the UNHCR:

factors such as homelessness, life in a reception or detention centre, isolation and separation from family, restrictions on the right to work, dependency on in-kind benefits, and the stigma often associated with being an asylum seeker can have lasting and debilitating effects

on asylum-seekers, compelling them to conduct their lives on the margins of society

(UNHCR, 2007: 3).

The UNHCR Note identifies what refugees perceive as five "key obstacles" to integration. These are:

difficulties due to lack of knowledge of local languages and differing cultures;

discrimination and unreceptive attitudes towards foreigners;

lack of understanding within host societies of the specific situation of refugees;

psychological impact of protracted inactivity during asylum procedures;

limited access to rights for people with subsidiary protection. (ibid: 2)

The UNHCR takes the view that reception policies and practices should be 'guided by the potential longer-term outcomes of the process' (ibid: 3), but current policies and practices in the UK flow from the dichotomy of rights associated with citizens and non-citizens. Human rights are guaranteed by the nation-state; when the nation-state fails to protect its citizens, or is itself responsible for oppression, and people leave their country of citizenship for asylum elsewhere, their rights remain precarious.

One of the precarious rights is the right to work (one aspect of being 'like other people'). The job-hunting experiences of people with leave to remain expose the precarity of the right to work. Refugees share with migrants the likelihood that they will be forced to accept work below the status of their qualifications and experience. People differ on their views about this:

"I encourage people to work, anywhere. They will set a good example for their children",

said one person who came in the 1990s and is now a citizen.

So, the right to work hangs by precarious threads:

Language ability – but there is insufficient access (supply, cost, time, childcare) to ESOL classes

Recognition of qualifications – qualifications may not be recognised and people may have to take further courses if they have the means to do so

(Re)training – see above

(Continuity of) work experience – (cv with no gaps)

'Racial' prejudice

Length of time in the UK (five years' residence is required for criminal records checks, required for

some professions and some voluntary work)

Availability of work.

As people with leave to remain have found, the right to work is an empty right without:

A just distribution of educational and other resources

Effective measures to promote cultural understanding and combat racism.

The conflation of asylum seekers, economic migrants, 'illegal migrants' and social security 'scroungers' blunts solidarity while sharpening representations of 'foreigners' as coming to take 'our' jobs, 'our' housing, 'our' hospital beds and a disproportionate share of 'our' social welfare benefits. With the blaming of the stereotyped illegal, scrounging, asylum-seeking, job-stealing migrant, the unemployed are divided and forced into competition. As long as this representation goes unchallenged in politics, in the media, in institutions and on the streets, the right to work is rhetoric.

One organisation that stands out for its work in building bridges between asylum seekers and work (whether they are able to remain or are returned) is Reache (based at Salford Royal Hospital). Reache helps asylum seekers with a medical background through English lessons and medical training. There is a similar organisation for asylum seekers who were teachers. 'Good asylum' would create those bridges to a variety of employment and development opportunities.

Refusal of the right to work is only one way in which policies and structures hamper livability. The following are further examples highlighted by my research:

Lack of knowledge of procedures

Unsympathetic and uncomprehending administrators and managers in the asylum system, social services and elsewhere

Culture of disbelief

Lack of adequate translation services

Delays, loss of documents, lost correspondence after asylum seekers have been moved

Absence, incompetence or inadequacy of legal representation leading to lack of 'parity of arms'

The 50/50 rule practised by lawyers

Adversarial procedures in hearings

Doctors' reports difficult to obtain or not believed

The threat of return (refoulement) to countries with poor human rights records by means of Memoranda of Understanding.

Difficulties with bureaucracy are common amongst the more settled population, but asylum seekers encounter specific abuse and lack of cultural understanding from some service providers: 'Why don't you go home?'; 'You found your way here, you can find your way there'; giving maps, without further explanation, to people who may be unused to having to find their way by means of complicated city maps.

As a former human resources manager, I would say that: (a) that there should be ways to raise issues of concern without breaching confidentiality (asylum seekers are often afraid to complain); (b) abusive treatment demonstrates an acute training need that exceeds the institutions employing service providers. Effective 'training' would need to address widespread social understandings and practices as well as policies and rules. As the Independent Asylum Commission commented: 'Efforts must be made to promote tolerance and neighbourliness towards those seeking sanctuary and assist integration at local level' (Saving Sanctuary, 2008: 1). A good framework for asylum would contest the notion that it is only migrants who need to adapt.

Service providers need to show more cultural awareness and more 'care': as one participant who helps members of her community as a translator said about doctors, 'they should consider, they should care'. Perhaps effective 'training' might come from asylum seekers and refugees as experts in their own needs rather than from professionals (a kind of 'reverse mentoring' which is practised in some organisations). Some of the points they make about the ways they would like to be treated are expressed in documents such as the Manchester Refugee Support Network 'Charter' and the Women Asylum Seekers Together (WAST) 'Basic Principles'.

Asylum seekers live under huge stresses and strains: the fear of being 'lifted' at night or when they go to sign on or as a result of missing an appointment because they could not find the way; the sealing of letter boxes for fear of what will come through them from the Home Office or neighbours; nightmares about the past, the present and the future. Asylum seekers learn to negotiate regular humiliations as they learn, for example, which Post Office counter clerks to avoid and which are pleasant. While the mental and the physical effects of these stresses require recognition, 'treatment' is more difficult to achieve while the causes remain unremedied.

I have touched on a very few examples of bad asylum, and have not discussed detention and destitution. Only one of my participants mentioned detention and that in passing. On another occasion I was working with a group and someone mentioned that she had been

detained with her children for ten days. As she spoke she turned her face away (tears were in her eyes). Sometimes a withholding silence is accompanied by an eloquence of bodily affect. There are organisations supporting destitute asylum seekers with food, accommodation and other needs. But can fundamental human rights such the right to food and to shelter be rights if they depend on citizenship or charity? What entitlements follow from rights, and who is to guarantee or be responsible for those rights?

A few people spoke of satisfaction with their accommodation; others spoke of arriving in areas of boarded up housing, being lodged with people they were uncertain of or would not have chosen to live with, in areas they were uncertain of. While asylum seekers are not alone in being subject to inadequate accommodation, what is unusual is the frequency and apparent arbitrariness with which they can be moved: people spoke of being moved repeatedly (the most I heard of was 15 times in 8 years). This 'churn' (Mackenzie and Forde, 2007: 15) disrupts already disrupted lives and connections made in a new place: moving necessitates paperwork (registration with GPs etc has to be changed); new schools, churches, shops and routes may have to be found; post may go astray; new friends have to be made. McCollum (1990) refers to 'the trauma of moving', and argues for the importance of making friends, informally and through 'structured affinity groups' (1990, 287). Culturally-aware service providers are not enough, especially if the boundaries between providers and clients are strictly maintained. Care and friendship are important routes to more livable lives for asylum seekers.

Case owners vary in their helpfulness at settling people in. Some asylum seekers are more confident (often because of their knowledge of English) about getting to know their way around:

I just wondered what the neighbourhood was like. But erm something to do with my character, someone who always wants to venture and make connections with the people around and really look at the positive side of things.

People spoke of problems in relation to the quality and maintenance of housing, responses to burglaries and vandalism and moving new asylum seekers into places from which others had been moved because of racist incidents. The policy of privatising public services and running them for profit lessens accountability and disempowers people, not least by fragmenting the provision of services and increasing the number of agencies asylum seekers have to contact, often at some distance from their homes. The negative effect of

privatisation is seen in the provision of vouchers, and the consequences of such provision. Poor quality housing is not a problem for asylum seekers alone. Neither is the perceived dilatory response of the Police to the reporting of incidents. However, the responses given to asylum seekers deepen the cloud of uncertainty within which they have to make their lives. They are unsure whether the lack of response is caused by personal racism, bureaucratic inefficiency or institutional racism.

Racist verbal or physical abuse is also encountered on the streets. One man described receiving abuse since his wife joined him because she wears traditional clothing: she asks him to lock her in the house when he goes out. Some people dwelt more than others on racist incidents; some felt that racism was the least of their troubles (at that moment). While Greater Manchester Police have set up diversity units and cite lowered figures for hate crime in some areas, they have to gain the trust of asylum seekers who may have reasons to fear and mistrust authority figures.

Some support organisations can, in David Harvey's phrase, be 'spaces of hope'. One man spoke in terms of 'help and experience'; his confidence began to come back through volunteering; over time he moved from client to management committee: 'which is where I was and where I am now'. A woman said that her organisation gave her 'courage'. Someone said that his organisation was important for friends and activities: training, fact-finding, campaigning and volunteering and interpreting activities gave him the opportunity to meet a variety of public figures and to have 'access everywhere around Manchester'. Asylum seekers value service providers who recognise their personhood as well as their 'injury':

But when we went through the training...this gives me the confidence that - and gives me some kind of protection that there are people here that really sit and listen to what you have to say and turn your life around.

The spaces of hope that some asylum seeker support organisations offer are:

• Spaces of organisational and interpersonal solidarity and friendship

• Spaces where asylum seekers' and refugees' personhood is recognised, appreciated and cared for, and their voices listened to and heard

• Spaces of collective decision-making and empowerment (in which there is no exclusion of asylum seekers as non-citizens)

• Spaces of activity

• Spaces of development and social capital creating bridges to work and wider social networks (people feel that the training offered not only benefits them but enables them to support their communities).

In terms of relationships and practices, some refugee organisations show what some features of good asylum might look like, contrasting with the practices of some government agencies (and providers to whom they have outsourced services).

Personal actions and small-scale interventions can have beneficial effects. Small successes that undo regular humiliations are important (for example, reporting monthly instead of weekly). But, if we want to change as well as understand the asylum system, I don't think that we can get away from more far-reaching critique of the connections between 'personal troubles' and 'public issues' (Mills, 2000: 8). Some refugee organisations offer not only resistant 'spaces of hope' but glimpses of different forms of social organisation that go beyond 'good asylum'.

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The Interpreter

Shyly she enters the consulting room,
he follows, nodding recognition to the doctor.
This uneasy, unspeaking trio,
drawn together by their need to communicate.
Their chairs spaced in an equilateral triangle,
faces open, attentive, intent on listening,
she pours out her troubles in a flood of unintelligible speech
which he renders empathically into English.
The doctor nods, and gently prompts,
so, carefully, he probes her story,
delicately interrupting to pass it on
to put the doctor in the picture.
His partnership with the clinician is precise,
he anticipates the questions, knows the game,
no mere conduit, more a colleague,
another ear, another voice, a fellow soul.

Peter Campion, 27th November 2007
p.d.campion@hull.ac.uk

Ala Sirriyeh

Using Photography to Explore Experiences of 'Home' and 'Belonging' Among Young Refugee Women

(Ala is a PhD student at the University of Leeds.) alasirriyeh@hotmail.com

Summary

The photographs on display are a selection from those taken as part of a qualitative PhD research study exploring young women's (aged 16-25) conceptions and experiences of home and belonging in the context of their migration to the UK as refugees and their transition to adulthood.

The women were given disposable cameras to take photographs of places and things which made them feel at home and those which did not and also places and things which made them feel happy and those which did not. We then met up to do an informal interview where we discussed the photographs and their experiences of moving to, and living in, the UK. The fieldwork took place between September 2007 and October 2008.

Research with refugees has largely focussed on either children or adults, often failing to highlight the particular age and gender related experiences of those young people in their late teens and early 20s. Some topics discussed in this study include: setting up and managing households in the UK, experiences of education and employment, experiences of the asylum process, managing changing support networks and entitlements in the transition to adulthood, the nature of transitions to adulthood in the UK compared to countries of origin, definitions of 'home', the availability and nature of access to family and community narratives of the country of origin; and the young women's agency and negotiation of gendered cultural expectations from those in the 'host' communities, their families and their own ethnic or religious communities.

Participants:
- 24 young women in Leeds and Huddersfield

- Aged 16-25

- Asylum seekers and refugees

- Those who were here with and without families

- In UK between two months and six years

- Somalia, Ertirea, China, Iraq, Turkey, Ghana, Guinea, Pakistan, Congo, Cameroon

- 14 respondents from organisations working with refugees

Visual sociology

Visual sociology was originally used to document issues considered to be missing from the sociological agenda and aimed to expose social problems with a view to change (Harper 1998: 28). Visual methods, and photo-elicitation in particular, have been utilised in studies with migrant populations (in particular migrant children), young people, and studies exploring people's interaction with urban environments (Bagnoli 2004; Clark-Ibanez 2004; Gauntlett & Holzwarth 2006; Gold 2004; John et al. 2002; Knowles 2006; Radley et al. 2005; Rasmussen 2004; Rishbeth & Finney; Westerby 2005).

O' Neill has argued that visual mediums have immediacy, intimacy and emotional expression that is not always present in text. She argues that the immediacy of visual material brings the subject alive and gives it the capacity to reach a wider audience (O'Neill 2002:70). It is possible to fit a lot of things in one image that could take a large amount of text to say the same thing or may not be possible to phrase to mean the same thing

Discussions of the utilisation of visual methods in social research often address its usefulness as a practical tool for research (Clark-Ibanez 2004; Gauntlett & Holzwarth 2006). Clark- Ibanez (ibid) and Schwarzt (1989) state that images may not contain new information but may trigger meaning or memories for the interviewees which may not otherwise have come to light in the interview. Clark-Ibanez (2004:1512) also notes that photographs act as a medium of communication between researcher and participant to help researchers ask and expand their questions and interviewees explain and illustrate their answers. Meanwhile, Gauntlett and Holzwarth (2006:84) write that, 'it's a different way in, and engages the brain in a different way, drawing a different kind of response'. They have also noted that, 'most language-based studies capture and preserve those instant responses

as 'data'', while creative methods such as photography give the participants time to be reflexive in their responses (ibid).

Due to the nature of the subject being studied, its political and social context and the identities of the research group involved, this method seemed appropriate for the theoretical approach and topic area of the current research study.

Some researchers have noted similar patterns, events and formats in refugee interview narratives. A number of possibilities may explain this situation. Hunt notes, 'asylum seekers, to some extent are used to telling their stories because of what is expected in asylum interviews' (Hunt 2008: 284). It could be that the way, and order in which, questions are asked in asylum interviews may encourage 'stories' to be told in a certain way. Applicants may then have to repeat their 'story' several times to other agencies they encounter during their asylum process. I found that through the use of the photographs we entered the 'story' at different points and from different angles and this also meant that at this session we often began by talking about their feelings or opinions about certain places and topics, including things which might not seem 'important' or 'factual' enough to be included in interviews they had previously had at various agencies. We began the interview by sitting and looking through photographs together and 'chatting' about these which helped to set the tone of the interview and allowed us to build rapport. Usually this format led into the interview, although sometimes there seemed to be change once interview started into answering questions more formally. The photographs also had an influence on the interview topics and subjects I had not considered could be included.

It can be argued that the use of photography through the method described facilitated some greater involvement by the research participants. Firstly, it was felt that photography enabled a more inclusive approach because, as mentioned above, the young people brought new topics into the interview agenda. The photographs not only introduced certain topics but also highlighted particular interests interviewees might have in topics already identified. For example, if a number of their photographs were on a particular theme.

There was also the opportunity for a form of participation that was more balanced in terms of the young people's opportunity to reflect, and their awareness before the interview of the topics that might be discussed. The researcher will normally have had this opportunity by conducting a literature review beforehand and reflecting on the topic yet often almost immediate answers are expected from

participants (Gauntlett & Holwarth 2006). In this case by going away and taking the photographs the participants had a chance to consider the topic of the research before the interview.

The use of photographs allowed for a sharing of some of the research data at the time of the interview as the young people kept a copy of their photographs. Research participants were not kept waiting until analysis and publication of findings took place. It was perhaps particularly useful in this research setting given that due to their lack of stable immigration status, access to the participants was not guaranteed beyond the short term.

Initial Findings:

1. 'Home' as a process

Home seems to be a constantly evolving process and quite a fragmented concept. Some of the women felt that there was conflict between elements of 'home' where one could be achieved at the expense of the other (e.g. safety at the expense of maintaining family connection). Their narratives of settlement in the UK did not follow straight forward linear pattern as they often felt that they went back and forth between feeling like they belonged and then not. This had parallels with the way transition to adulthood was also experienced going back and forth between adolescence and adulthood in different areas of their life. Some were aware that they changed their prioritisation of what was the most important aspect of home to them, sometimes from day to day or week to week. This was often triggered by particular events but was also the result of the uncertainty they felt in the asylum process.

The women had heterogeneous reasons for claiming asylum and separation between war and violence. Many young women in the study had fled their country of origin due to political, ethnic or religious persecution. However, their experiences of this varied considerably. Some had been victims of gender based violence, such as rape, during the conflict, some had been targeted due to their own individual political activities, others had fled ethnic violence which had destroyed their whole village, some had been at risk due to their parents political activities and had fled with their parents or arrived in the UK through family reunification schemes. Therefore their experience of conflict, experiences leading up to their migration and the migration journey itself varied a lot.

In addition to the variation in their experiences of political, ethnic or religious persecution some young women had also fled for reasons not included in the Geneva Convention, in particular gender based

persecution such as domestic violence or sexual violence. As Bloch 2000 and Dumper 2002 note these reasons are not often recognised in international and national asylum systems. For example, Naina and Amira had both fled with their mothers and siblings from situations of domestic violence in Pakistan.

The range of motivations for claiming asylum and experiences of the asylum process did appear to affect the young women's relationship to and feelings toward their country of origin and there was some contrast in the degree to which different women felt about country of origin in terms of idea of 'home'. For some it had been a happy home destroyed by conflict while for other women it was members of their own families (people who might in more nostalgic notions of 'home' be seen as part of their 'home') rather than strangers or even members of their communities who they were fleeing from.

2. Family and Social Networks

Women living here in families all stated how important it is to them to have their families with them and families were included in their descriptions of home. All took photos of family members if they had them here. The birth of siblings or their own children was often seen as a symbol of starting again for some. There were lots of photographs of babies or younger siblings. One participant took 27 photographs of her baby as she said all her activities at the moment were based around the family home, or in family based social network.

A number of women talked of becoming closer to their families because of the experiences they had been through and some spoke of being able to confide in their mothers in particular. Others were also drawn into this family based social network but felt it more as a responsibility and felt a sense of frustration. Some conflict appeared for some young women when they began looking outwards of the family again for their social networks. Clash between responsibilities to family and wanting to live on their own independently. This was not necessarily the often reported 'cultural clashes' of young women becoming 'westernised' but was also centred around feeling they had to support their parents. The way in which the young people were located in the spectrum from adolescent to adult varied between different areas of their lives and social networks. The need for participants in this study to perform different roles in different parts of their life was quite apparent. For example, those who were in education (especially those in school) described quite a 'normal' teenage social life and interests. However, at home they often had different roles which they felt some of their peers were not experiencing including; being a confidante and caring, supporting roles in

household. Naina (Pakistan, aged 16) said,

"My older sister she don't go out at all. She stays at home and my younger brother is only 13 so he doesn't know what stuff to get and baby sister is only 5. But that is the thing that gets to me the most is that I do so much for my family and it never seems to be appreciated. They always say you never done this and that and I think 'I done hell of a lot for you and I've missed my school and gone to appointments with you' and it's never good enough. The age of 16 and the amount of things I've been through."

Charmaine (Iraq, aged 16) seemed to quite successfully integrate school friendship groups with their cultural codes by formulating their own rules to adapt to the situation.

"Charmaine: There is a Kurdish saying that, 'the reputation of the family lies in the hands of the girl'. Me and my sister follow the rules because we don't want people to talk. People won't talk as much if they see my brother with a girl and that. For a guy it's alright.

Ala: So would people in your community know about it if you were hanging round with boys?

Charmaine: Even just as friends people would talk so I don't do it. Obviously I have friends at college who are boys and who I talk to but you can't really.

Ala: What would you do if you are out and your friends who are not Kurdish talk to boys?

Charmaine: That would be awkward. They have boys who are friends so I step away a bit. Not because I don't want to mix with you people but because of other people talking really."

Esrin (Kurdish Syrian, aged 20) lived with her mother and younger siblings. She said her family were not religious and did not feel she had many cultural restrictions from them in terms of her social conduct. However, she felt that the some people in the Kurdish community might disapprove of some parts of her life, although she didn't specify what. She said she did not restrict her behaviour but instead compartmentalised her social circles so she met with Kurdish friends separately from English friends.

Relationship with own ethnic communities

A number of the women discussed their relationship with their own ethnic communities in the UK. Helen (Eritrea, aged 25) said, "You know if you go anywhere you have your country people if something happens they can help you because they have the same culture, the same language. They can understand". Amira (Pakistan, aged 19) liked living in an area with a large Pakistani community but felt uncomfortable with the 'nosiness' she experienced.

Opportunity to mix with 'local' peers

Those who went to mainstream schools, and those who had attended mixed social activities with local young people (not many), said they asked friends they made here to explain certain social situations or get advice from them on how to behave. One participant talked a lot about the importance of her friendship with another girl in this aspect. Those who arrived in the UK over the age of 16 were usually unable to access full-time school education. Most attended further education colleges and those many were in ESOL programmes here. Jasmine (China, aged 18) and Amira (Pakistan, aged 19) said that this gave them little opportunity to meet English people, which they wanted to do.

Key person

Most named one key person who was instrumental in introducing them to activities or groups, which helped them to set up social networks. Meeting this person was usually described as a key turning point in their life seems in the UK. There was often a reliance on initial contacts with people from their own ethnic communities at first and this was very much down to chance meetings rather than anything.

Being seen to have friends

Two of the participants spoke of the importance of being seen to have friends in the UK and how this made them feel more secure in their neighbourhoods.

Amira (Pakistan, aged 19) said, "my mum's friend came here no one knows she is not my relative. Everyone here now knows…everyone thought she is my mum. Her sister and her daughters are my cousins. Because we said if anyone asks she is my cousin because it is more helpful because they know we have few relatives here if they know we don't have any relatives here and we are asylum seekers they will push you down."

3. Transition to adulthood

The concept of 'adulthood', like 'home', seemed to be a changing definition rather than the fixed list of tick boxes. It wasn't just that the young women were delayed in reaching certain markers of adulthood but also that these markers as such were altered. To some extent this seemed to be influenced by the choices, which were available to them. While all the participants mentioned transition points such as finishing their education and starting a family there was uncertainty for many as to how and when these events might take place. Some of the women in this situation in particular emphasised personal development qualities such as learning to live independently or being emotionally mature.

When telling stories of life in their country of origin, it was noticeable that all the young people told stories of their childhood. Their memories and narratives were of childhood homes and experiences and seemed to be different to the way in which identity development of migrant young people, who have relationships to parents/older generation, is reported. Young people who have traveled with their parents may have memories shared with them, learn about the cultures of the country of although this may be through new and changing interpretations of this culture (Buitelaar 2002: 468). They may also have opportunities to visit their country of origin if they are not forced migrants. In comparison 'families' for a number of the young people in this study, who were separated from their parents and siblings, were their friendship groups and they seemed to lack intergenerational relationships and access to older adult memories of their country of origin.

4. Choice about location and housing

As asylum seekers they young women had no choice as to the city or house they lived in. Esrin and Naina described waiting to for their names to appear on a list in their hostel in London to find out which city they would be living in as asylum seekers. Naina said her family had initially been told they were going to Glasgow but their name didn't appear on the list and the next day they were on a list for Leeds. Most of the women had also been moved a number of times during the asylum process. Charmaine (Iraq, aged 16) took this photograph of a house saying that stability was an important element of being able to create a home.

Through the Choice Based Letting Scheme in Leeds those who had refugee status had some influence over the kind of housing they lived in but at times their ideas of suitable housing differed from the housing office. For example, one mother was bidding for flats in tower blocks as she felt safer here with 'more walls' between her and the street. However, these flats were not seen to be suitable for a woman with a baby.

Helen (Ertirea, aged 25). 'This is the block of flats. I like because I used to live like this in my country and I miss this way. I like this style'.

Some of those who were sharing or had shared in the past found it difficult living with other tenants they had been allocated with who had different lifestyles to themselves or who they did not get along with.

5. Safety

When defining 'home' they all stated that it was somewhere where it could be possible for them to feel safe. For some of them this place did not exist at the moment in their country of origin or in the UK. Therefore 'home' appeared to be not just a geographical location but also a temporal one located both in the past and future, or at least a particular past and future which was constructed within their particular memory narratives and imagining of the future. These young people exhibited nostalgia for a remembered home in the past that did not exist any more for them and were dreaming of a potential new home but some were unable to construct it at present.

The young people specified challenges to their feelings of safety coming from two sources, firstly, the risk of their asylum claim failing and the temporary nature of their homes here and, secondly, fear of crime in their area of residence. As well as worrying about their asylum claims and the affect this had on their housing and security, some young people had the additional concern that leave to remain, if given, often ends when they reach 18 years old (Dennis 2002; Stanley 2001).

References

Please contact the author directly by emailing alasirriyeh@hotmail.com

Tom Viita

Campaigning on Permission to Work for Asylum Seekers

(Tom is Regional Campaigns Officer for the Refugee Council)

tom.viita@refugeecouncil.org.uk

The Trades Union Congress, the Refugee Council, and many partners across the UK are campaigning for asylum seekers to be given permission to work while they are in this country.

In 1986, in response to long waiting times for asylum claims, Margaret Thatcher and Home Secretary Douglas Hurd created a policy that gave asylum seekers permission to seek work and support themselves if their asylum claims were delayed by more than six months. For fifteens years this policy stood, until 2002 when Tony Blair and Home Secretary David Blunkett reversed it – asylum seekers were no longer permitted to seek work at all. At that time, the average waiting time for an asylum claim was 13 months.

When the many problems in the asylum system are discussed in the refugee community, again and again the conversation comes back to the same points: "Why can't we work? Why can't we support ourselves? We are denied even that dignity." Permission to seek paid work is a solution to many of problems – including destitution, voucher support, community cohesion, compliance with the authorities, access to services – and there are strong arguments in its favour.

The vast majority of asylum seekers were economically active before having to come to the UK (80% NIACE (2005)), including many self employed. They often come from cultures with a strong work ethic and a commitment to being self-supporting; few of their countries have any welfare state. Furthermore, research shows that asylum seekers are more skilled than the average UK population: 54% are educated to Level 3 (A-level) or above (NIACE, 2005). There are over 1000 in the UK teachers who are refugees, and many academics, nurses and doctors too.

For those who wait a long time for their asylum claims to be processed, they lose their skills through idleness; they often lose their self-esteem and dignity; they fall behind in the labour market such that if they are given leave to remain they have huge barriers to overcome; they struggle to integrate into local communities or improve their language ability, and are therefore criticised as "scroungers" and portrayed as a "problem population". If they return

to their home countries, they have fewer chances to support themselves in their own country. Destitution is also a strong push into the shadow economy in which people are exploited, underpaid, denied their rights, and criminalised by the government.

This policy runs counter to the "Welfare to Work" culture shared by all parties, and directly contradicts the community cohesion agenda promoted by the Labour government. It also makes no economic sense: tax payers support able-bodied people who want to work, and asylum seekers are prevented from contributing to society or paying taxes. Further down the line, those with refugee status receive costly support to help them back into work, which means the government is paying for its own harshness; and the huge cost incurred by local services because of widespread destitution is unsustainable and increasing.

Most strikingly, surveys show that a majority of the British public support the statement that asylum seekers should work and contribute to society. It was even possible to obtain cross-party support from MPs that this was reasonable. (ORB 2007; Something for Something, Refugee Council 2008, unpublished)

The government's political inertia stems from the fear of being seen as "soft" by giving any concessions to asylum seekers – yet the public would support such a move with the suitable spin. However, their primary argument is that allowing work will become a "pull factor" and increase asylum applications. This is repeatedly stated, despite Home Office and DWP research in 2002 which found no evidence for such a "pull", and made clear that economic factors played little or no part in the motivations of asylum seekers to flee to the UK. The Refugee Council is commissioning further research in order to finally refute the "pull factor" argument.

Furthermore UKBA recognises that work results in people integrating into local communities, and claims that this makes them more difficult to remove if they are refused leave to remain. However, the Independent Asylum Commission (2008) and the Joseph Rowntree Destitution Enquiries (2006, 2008) both called for permission to work to be restored. Far

from inhibiting removals and encouraging misuse of the system, having permission to work would increase compliance with the immigration authorities and increase trust in the system as a whole.

The Let Them Work campaign pioneered by the TUC and the Refugee Council is working to build support among trade unionists concerned about workers rights, with the CBI about the effect on business and the economy, and with refugee communities to get their voices heard on this issue. The EU's moves towards a common asylum policy are also supportive of access to the labour market. By raising awareness about this reality and increasing the visible show of support, the more detailed economic case can be made to policymakers and present them the political incentive to move on this issue.

For more information, go to:
www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/letthemwork

References

Please contact the author directly by emailing
tom.viita@refugeecouncil.org.uk

Hannah Lewis

Destitution among Refused Asylum Seekers. How Can the Situation Be Changed and What Are the Barriers?

Hannah is a researcher who has undertaken two studies for the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust Inquiry into Destitution Among Refused Asylum Seekers. This presentation offers personal views. hannahjlewis@gmail.com

This presentation was prepared independently, and benefits from insights gained from my involvement in the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust Inquiry into Destitution Among Refused Asylum Seekers, 2006-2007 and 'Destitution in Leeds' research undertaken for the Inquiry. The presentation also draws on work completed to prepare for a forthcoming article in Critical Social Policy, and draws on approaches from the Anthropology of Policy (e.g. Shore and Wright, 1997) that suggests that policy may be views as a hegemonic discourse.

Summary of findings from 2006 and 2008 Leeds destitution surveys:

The survey was undertaken by five agencies in Leeds over four weeks: East Leeds Health for All, Health Access Team, Positive Action for Refugees, Refugee Council, St Vincent Support Centre

2006
- 101 individuals + 17 dependents; 251 visits
- 84% refused asylum seekers, including 19% awaiting Section 4 support; five individuals processed through New Asylum Model

2008
- 266 individuals + 65 dependents; 551 visits
- 75% refused asylum seekers, including 27% awaiting Section 4 support
- 19% asylum seekers (New Asylum Model has worsened destitution within the system)

It has been estimated that there are at least 1,350 refused asylum seekers in Leeds (Leeds City Council).

The Inquiry worked with five Commissioners:

Kate Adie OBE (chair)

Julian Baggini

Courtenay Griffiths QC

Bill Kilgallon OBE

Sayeeda Warsi

The JRCT Inquiry approach aimed to create change. The Commissioners were prominent figures from outside the migration sector. A non-adversarial approach was taken to the Home Office who were included in the Inquiry through interviews, meetings, and a pre-publication briefing. Philosopher Julian Baggini undertook a 'thought experiment' to seek a moral response to the issue from angling club, Bangladeshi women's group, student nurses, lecturers, sixth form students and school teachers. The Inquiry produced a report in the language of the Commissioners, which promoted the idea that 'no one gains from the current state of affairs' (Adie). What was the response to inquiry? Responses from the Home Office included blocking press coverage on the launch day, an effective brick wall to the recommendations, while restating their steadfast position (Section 4 is available/ refused asylum seekers are people who should be removed/ to change this and offer support would be a burden on the tax payer).

The Home Office position has not always been clear. The response to Independent Asylum Commission published later for the first time clearly states the Home Office case:

'We do not consider that it is right to ask the UK taxpayer to continue to fund those who choose to remain here when they have no grounds to stay and it is open to them to return to a home country that has been found safe for them to live in. A change to this policy would create a disincentive to departure for unsuccessful asylum seekers and a 'pull' factor for those who want to come to the UK for economic reasons, compromising the integrity of our asylum system and slowing down the asylum application process for others.' (Hobson et al., 2008:12-13)

Destination: a policy problem:

The destitution of refused asylum seekers is a key policy problem of our time. It is a pressing problem:

For wider society:

- undermining human rights

- normalizing maltreatment

- increasing poverty in neighborhoods with high deprivation.

For the government:

- large irregular population undermines attempts for control

- driving illegal and exploitative employment

- diplomatic relations with other countries

- tarnishing presentation of well-managed migration.

At least 200,000 people refused asylum, and all of their family members within and outside the UK, are affected .

Changing policy:

The Present political-historical moment blocks positive change (Okely, 1997). In this context, all efforts to alter the terms of the debate matter. Perspectives from the anthropology of policy have asked 'why do some views lack power?'. As Apthorpe suggest, 'style can be as menacingly powerful as substance'. An idealist clear style is better for policy than a plain realist style (Apthorpe, 1997). It is also pointed out that policy actions limited by previous commitments, which seems a particularly apt point in considering the stance on immigration policy in the UK. These approaches advocate the need to study the language of power.

What might be the solutions?

1. Maintain the status quo

This is the preferred Home Office response:

- Refused asylum seekers can apply for Section 4 support (if they agree to mandatory sign up for 'voluntary' return)

- They can go back to their country of origin

- Asylum seekers, charities and faith bodies support destitute people preventing widespread street homelessness, death and other more visible impacts on society/ local authorities/ the government

How this could work to solve destitution

- Case resolution is reducing stock of legacy cases

- Improvement of conditions in 'unreturnable' countries

- Increasing funding and efficiency of forced returns

2. Make improvements to the existing system:

- Gap between asylum support and Section 4 still a problem

- Improve the New Asylum Model: people entitled to support not getting it

- Support local agencies

- UKBA and Social Services must work together to avoid destitution of children

- Clarify and improve referral for support under 'Destitution Plus' for people with No Recourse to Public Funds (needs in addition to those

Two groups: Legacy cases (pre2007) New Asylum Model

UNCRC & protection of children's rights: leave for families & separated children

Chipping away by using different arguments and answers for different blocks of the RAS population

Length of the time in UK: residency if here 5+ years

Article 3: inhuman and degrading treatment (Joint Council on Human Rights)

Country of origin: limited leave/HP for 'unreturnables

arising from destitution)

• Improve how information about voluntary return is given to asylum seekers

3. Give a revocable license to work to asylum seekers

• License to work until return can be arranged

• Conditional on clean criminal record

• Requirement to stay in touch with authorities

• No Recourse to Public Funds

• Making a tax contribution, and using skills to facilitate return

• Cost effective

Barriers:

1. Political sensitivity of all issues of migration and immigration controls.

2. Emotive, polarised debate, but opposing sides actually share common ground (Baggini, Guardian, Jul 24 2008).

3. Lack of good understanding of idea of economic 'magnet'

   - Potential of economic improvement does encourage migration

   - Complexity of migration: asylum seekers are on the migration spectrum and experiences/ threat of persecution does not deny other factors

   - Experiences of returnees.

4. Whole asylum system rationalized by notions of separating asylum from 'economic' migration, and of 'changing behaviour' of those beyond our shores.

References

Please contact the author directly by emailing hannahjlewis@gmail.com

Asylum

"A well-founded fear of persecution"
is the accepted grounds for asylum,
whether for race, religion, nationality,
social group or political opinion:
all are recognised grounds for asylum.
They fled from home and community,
left relatives, wives and children;
came to Britain by ways indescribable:
first incarcerated in centres of detention,
then dispersed, overnight, to Hull.
Isolated, introspective, xenophobic Hull,
ill-prepared to host hundreds from Kosovo
and Kurds who spoke Kurdish Sorani,
strange language that none understood
save the few who had learned to interpret.
Interpreters, themselves refugees,
bringing meaning, communicate sense,
absorbing their clients' confusion,
they translate, as an impartial channel,
enabling the medical process.
"Post-traumatic stress disorder"
describes so well what they have suffered:
memories of war, and threat of persecution,
nightmares and flashbacks, avoidance of triggers,
lack of emotions, real fear of death.
For health you need safety: protecting
these people is working for health.
How can we refuse to offer asylum
to these whose well-founded fear of persecution,
aggravates their mental and physical scars?

Peter Campion,
27/01/05 revised April 2005, January 2006 and April 2008

p.d.campion@hull.ac.uk

Jonathan Darling

Creating the Hospitable City: Exploring Sheffield as a 'City of Sanctuary'.

Jonathan Darling[1] is in the Department of Geography, Durham University, Science Laboratories.
j.m.darling@durham.ac.uk

Abstract

In September 2007, the city of Sheffield officially declared itself to be the UK's first 'City of Sanctuary', a gesture which sought to instil a spirit of 'welcome and hospitality towards asylum seekers and refugees'. This paper seeks to examine how Sheffield has redefined itself as a welcoming city, what actions were undertaken in order to gain support for this movement, and whether this declaration represents a vision of 'good' urban asylum. The paper opens by considering what being a 'city of sanctuary' means, how this status is defined and what responsibilities are seen to be placed upon a city once it declares itself to be a refuge. From here the paper discusses the ways in which this vision was actualized in Sheffield, through an array of events, meetings, and grass-roots activities which sought to alter attitudes towards asylum in the city. Finally, the paper asks whether such a declaration, and the wider network of 'cities of sanctuary' now emerging, does offer an account of a positive, progressive, politics of asylum by considering some of the exclusions and contests which have faced the movement, arguing that the ideas of a 'good city' and 'good asylum' articulated here must themselves be open to challenge and engagement from those who are welcomed.

Introduction

In September 2007, the city of Sheffield was officially declared the UK's first 'City of Sanctuary' as Sheffield City Council signed a declaration of support for the initiative, and the national City of Sanctuary network agreed that the city had met the demands of becoming a 'City of Sanctuary'. In bestowing this status upon the city the national City of Sanctuary network were recognising a movement for cultural change in the city, one born there and which has now spread to a network of other towns and cities across the UK. In this paper, I want to briefly consider the work of the City of Sanctuary organisation from its starting points in Sheffield to address three central questions, firstly, what this vision of an urban refuge amounts to for the city, secondly, how support for this ideal was gathered in Sheffield, and finally, what a network of 'cities of sanctuary' might mean for an account of 'good asylum'. In doing this, I draw upon a period of ethnographic fieldwork in Sheffield focused on considering the spatial and political negotiations of asylum seekers and refugees in the city and how ideas of 'welcome' came to be played out in everyday life.[2] Here however I shall focus upon the practical dimensions of the City of Sanctuary movement and how it has sought to regain and reinvigorate the idea of practicing, and promoting, sanctuary as part of the culture of British towns and cities. I begin then by considering what a 'city of sanctuary' might look like in this context.

Envisioning a City of Sanctuary

The Sheffield City of Sanctuary movement officially began in 2005 and described itself as;

'[A] movement to build a culture of hospitality for asylum-seekers and refugees in Sheffield. We are working to make Sheffield a city that takes pride in the welcome it offers to people in need of safety, and that enables asylum-seekers and refugees to contribute fully to the life of our communities' (City of Sanctuary 2008a).

Over the course of the next two years the movement deployed a series of grass roots activities and events in order to promote the cause of, and gain support for, asylum seekers within the city. These included enlisting the support of local churches, businesses and organisations to sign declarations of support for the movement, and to display 'welcome signs' on their premises, organising a series of intercultural events such as dances, dinners and music evenings to encourage interaction between asylum seekers and the 'host' community, establishing a weekly blogging workshop for asylum seekers so that they could present their views of Sheffield to the city, and lobbying the council through links with other organisations which advocated for asylum rights within Sheffield.

City of Sanctuary was not simply another asylum charity which targeted greater rights for asylum seekers and refugees within Sheffield however. It certainly did this,

but it also attempted to do more than this, to argue for a different form of identity within the city. The movement sought to reimagine and represent the identity of Sheffield as a welcoming place, it sought to make people think again, and think differently, about asylum. Craig, one of the movements founders, highlighted this in our interview, stating that;

'I think that it's very difficult to influence national policy and legislation with regard to asylum seekers because of the enormous political forces against asylum seekers and the media and so on. But at a local level I think perhaps there's more leverage to try to influence local organisations, local community groups, the local authority and local media to have a slightly different agenda and to see it as part of their identity as a city. So that's really the aim of City of Sanctuary, to try to create a mainstream movement in support of asylum seekers' (Craig interview, 2006).

The idea of becoming a city of sanctuary therefore had a dual orientation and purpose, to both alter the way in which asylum seekers were responded to within Sheffield, to inculcate welcome as a virtue of place, and to use this 'sanctuary' status as a tool to approach wider political discourses on asylum which cast the issue as a threat to national identity and spatial integrity (see Kushner 2003; Morley 2000; Tyler 2006).

This dual focus comes to the fore when we consider the movements' three core principles. Firstly, that this is a mainstream movement wherein 'local groups work to build coalitions of organisations from all sectors…which make a public commitment to welcome and include refugees and people seeking sanctuary in their usual activities' (City of Sanctuary 2008b). Secondly, there is a commitment to forming relationships between asylum seekers and local people through events and activities. As such 'City of Sanctuary seeks to influence the political debate on sanctuary indirectly through cultural change' (ibid). Finally, the movement presents hospitality as a positive cultural value, through encouraging 'communities to take pride in offering a place of safety for people whose lives are threatened, and celebrating their contribution to our towns and cities' (ibid).

These principles suggest that it was of central importance that this be seen as a grassroots, community organised movement. The model used was that of the fair-trade foundation and their attempts to create 'Fairtrade towns' (Fairtrade Foundation 2002). However, Craig was quick to point out to me that they wanted to be more participative than this fair-trade example, to give people a greater sense of ownership over the notion of a sanctuary itself. Creating a City of Sanctuary was therefore about creating an idea of welcome in Sheffield which individuals could feel some ownership over, such that Sheffield became

identified as welcoming and Sheffielders were happy to present themselves as such. As Craig told me 'the point is that people across the city take this idea on and are motivated to live it out in different ways, from attitudes right down to everyday conversations' (Craig interview, 2008). A City of Sanctuary meant creating a culture of welcome which both infused daily life in the city and which developed a sense of belonging and ownership to residents of Sheffield itself, a sense of pride around this idea (see Malpass et al. 2007). I want to now look at how this was achieved by following the second and third principles of the movement, in doing so I focus firstly on the celebration of asylum seekers contributions to the city as a source of pride, and secondly, on the way such cultural change was used to indirectly effect political changes and create an awareness of wider responsibilities for the city.

Celebrating Contributions

The first of these orientations arises from the movements third principle of celebrating the contributions which asylum seekers and refugees make to the city at present and in the future. This meant showing not only how Sheffield has been a refuge in the past, through its involvement in Gateway Protection Programme and exceptional cases such as the Kosovo refugee crisis, but also how it has benefited from this role. This was achieved in a number of ways. Firstly, a series of images were commissioned for postcards which visually highlighted the 'convivial culture' (Gilroy 2004) of the city, presenting common places in Sheffield, the Peace Gardens and the Castle Market, as spaces where people from diverse backgrounds come together, and presenting a vibrant image of the city as a place of intercultural exchange achieved through the negotiation of everyday life (Amin 2002; Laurier and Philo 2006; Sandercock 2003). Secondly, a number of beermats where produced and distributed around the city which both questioned commonly held myths around asylum, and highlighted the contribution which asylum seekers and refugees may make to the city. In particular, the text used here often highlighted the contributions of asylum seekers and refugees to the city and to the UK in general, asking in one case;

'Can you imagine a life without fish and chips? Imagine a UK that hasn't benefited from other cultures. People escaping war and persecution in their home countries bring us their language, skills, food, art and learning. Refugees gave us fish and chips, the Mini, the Muppets and Thunderbirds' (City of Sanctuary 2006).

Through aligning asylum seekers and refugees with these common and respected cultural commodities within Britain, this beermat not only forces Sheffield's residents to rethink their views on asylum seekers and their potential contributions to the UK, but also

begins to ask questions of how these seemingly 'British' cultural artefacts are in fact hybrid creations. Illustrating how new cultural forms are created preceisly through exchange and diversity.

Finally, the City of Sanctuary movement was involved, along with the council and other charities, in pushing forward the agenda of a city wide 'Refugee Week' as a means of celebrating both the contribution refugees have made to Sheffield, and the role the city has played as a refuge. In particular, the slogan of the 2007 'Refugee Week'; "Ever wanted to travel the world, but not quite got round to leaving Sheffield? Refugee Week is the festival for you!" (Sheffield City Council 2007a), highlights the way in which the creation of Sheffield's identity here is construction partly around the contributions of asylum seekers and refugees in the city. Here, diverse spaces and experiences are brought together in Sheffield through the contributions of asylum seekers and their connections to other places.

Awareness raising measures such as this acted to recast Sheffield as a city made in and through its connections to asylum seekers and the conflicts which continue to create them. City of Sanctuary sought to highlight the contributions which asylum seekers had made to Sheffield and how, through these, welcome and hospitality could be seen as not only positive moral virtues, but also holding important practical benefits for the city. Sheffield was, from this perspective, presented as a better place, a more vibrant, mixed and culturally diverse place, due to the contributions and connections made by refugees and asylum seekers.

Responsible Connections

City of Sanctuary also had a second orientation in trying to build a culture of welcome, arising from their second principle of indirectly affecting political change, this represented an attempt to link this local cultural change to wider asylum debates. Presenting Sheffield as a city benefiting from the contributions made by asylum seekers allowed City of Sanctuary to argue that Sheffield was also intimately tied into wider networks of deportation, human trafficking, far flung conflicts and government decisions. Sheffield was a NASS dispersal recipient, a participant in the UNHCR Gateway Protection Programme and a trail area for the Sunrise Project. The implication of creating a City of Sanctuary, as a culture of welcome within the city, was therefore also its ability to take a stance in relation to these wider issues. For example, when I asked Craig how he thought becoming a 'city of sanctuary' would benefit Sheffield, he highlighted how the city could come to influence wider networks of discussion, arguing that;

'I think it would benefit in a number of ways, I think it would benefit the city in terms of its sense of self

image and pride and its identity because I think something like that a lot of people could be actually supportive of the idea and it can give a sense of real, you know, pride in the city... and then I think the benefits really are national potentially because other cities could see that Sheffield is leading the way on this and it could be an incentive to them to try to work towards that model or in that direction as well, and in that way potentially it could influence the sort of the national debate and discourse around asylum' (Craig interview, 2006).

The cultural change being promoted in Sheffield was therefore one also directed outwards. City of Sanctuary sought to promote ownership over the city as a refuge in the minds of its residents, as a vision they could get behind. Yet, also like fair-trade campaigns, it was hoped that this cultural change would extend into other areas of life, so that people might begin to rethink how they were connected to wider debates on asylum nationally and internationally. We gain a sense of this orientation in an account given by Lynn, a City of Sanctuary volunteer;

'I think the big challenge for a City of Sanctuary and for other organisations is to break the barriers...it is about taking on the struggle of real globalisation, the world is on the move, the world is an incredibly troubled place and we are part of the world and that which is happening here in this city belongs to that story' (Lynn interview, 2007).

One of the central aims of the City of Sanctuary movement was therefore to build a critical mass of support behind the idea of promoting sanctuary as an urban ideal, as something both citizens and cities could promote. The movement in Sheffield was two-fold as I have suggested, to firstly alter attitudes in the city, to show how refuge has been, and can be, positive for the city, and secondly, to suggest that valuing sanctuary and welcome has implications beyond the city, implications for how we think about and respond to asylum more generally. In this sense it reflected what Dorren Massey (2007) has termed a 'politics beyond place', in which places and local politics take responsibility for the connections and relations that sustain them.

Such a politics has now become an extensive, networked, one, as the movement has spread to eight other cities.[3] In each of these cases, the City of Sanctuary committee have emphasised the importance of making this a local, community based movement, responding to the ideas and concerns of the local situation.[4] Each of these approaches is slightly different, based around a central model of what a City of Sanctuary would look like, and the aim here is to establish a network of towns and cities which promote the ideal of welcoming asylum

seekers as part of the identity of that particular town or city. Through the work of the national coordinator, a network of sanctuary coordinates places where cultures of hospitality are being worked upon and provides them with links and advice on how to go about this task. Thus while the general orientation of the movement remains the same, centred around its three core principles and suggestions for action, there is considerable freedom for local groups to define and claim ownership over their own sense of sanctuary, this is partly in recognition of the fact that the politics and context of each town and city will differ, and partly a move to give as much ownership over the notion of a local politics of sanctuary as possible. While these approaches differ then, the centrality of developing a mobilised support for sanctuary itself, across the UK, remains as a key aim for the movement.

Effecting Political Change as a City of Sanctuary

This is not to suggest however, that the City of Sanctuary movement would be successful everywhere. Crucially there needs to be both a groundswell of local support for the movement and some political opportunities to make this vision a reality, as Malpass et al. (2007) similarly found of the movement for 'Fairtrade towns'. It is in the negotiations with the politics of the city that one issue for City of Sanctuary is raised, that of how it relates to political institutions and groups in Sheffield. Thus, after the initial decision by Sheffield City Council to declare itself a city of sanctuary and associated press coverage, very little action was taken by the council to promote this status. Craig and others believed this to be due to the council waiting to see if a backlash might occur on the issue. Following this hiatus, the Sheffield group are attempting to influence political debate in the city through establishing a City of Sanctuary manifesto. The manifesto itself was finalised in March 2008 after a consultation meeting with local NGO's, asylum seekers and supporters, and presents a series of areas on which the council is expected to take some action, to be called to account for its claim to be a 'city of sanctuary'. These eight areas of work for the city were community, health, employment, access to services, education, children, housing and destitution and the more general issue of promoting solidarity within the city between asylum seekers and local residents. At present the Sheffield group is attempting to gain the support of the city council for the manifesto itself, and to develop such local support that the council feel compelled to accept the principles and challenges this document poses.

The Sheffield manifesto therefore represented a practical application of that cultural change which City of Sanctuary were attempting to enact. However, as the experiences of the Sheffield group show, this was a slow process, and one of the key issues the City of Sanctuary committee found in their work was its labour intensive nature. Addressing peoples attitudes and culture is a slow, hard, slog, and as many other organisations which work with asylum seekers and refugees are aware, those individuals who volunteer for such projects are often overwhelmed by demands from other areas, campaigns and issues (Sontag 2004). In this sense, negotiating the difficult and at times thankless aspects of City of Sanctuary's work was a central challenge to the movement in Sheffield, and, alongside the difficulties of engaging with local politics itself, these are ongoing challenges which the movement is attempting to tackle with an acknowledgement that there is always more that can be done to promote an ideal of sanctuary in the UK. From this key idea of slow cultural change then I want to draw together some of the strands of this paper to conclude by thinking about the possible nature of a 'good asylum' model, and how cities of sanctuary might fit within this.

Sanctuary and 'Good Asylum'.

In preparing this paper, I returned to Sheffield to talk with two of the City of Sanctuary committee about their current work. One of the things they suggested to me was that at present there exists a brief political and cultural opportunity for progressive thinking on asylum. While the government's methods of reducing asylum applications and dispersals may be questionable, their result is that there exists a space in which to promote ideals of welcome and sanctuary more readily now than at times of perceived crisis when we have seen calls for 'tough measures' and 'secure borders' at their loudest. Craig argued that the central importance of the present was in establishing, across these towns and cities, a baseline of valuing sanctuary and welcome, so that when asylum applications again increased in the future, the issue of asylum itself might be approached from a different perspective.

With this opportunity in mind, the City of Sanctuary movement for me represents one dimension in considering a 'good' or 'better' approach to asylum. Certainly such an approach is not exhausted through promoting sanctuary itself, but rather City of Sanctuary forms part of that wider context of movements and organisations which challenge current asylum policies. This movement may not appear to present a practical case of altering asylum conditions or policies for the better, this was never its remit, however, I think we should see this movement as laying some of the ground work for renewed attempts to offer progressive views

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[3]At present there are City of Sanctuary groups established in Bradford, Coventry, Leicester, London, Norwich, Nottingham, Oxford, Sheffield and Swansea.

[4]Ideas and action plans for new cities are available on the City of Sanctuary website at www.cityofsanctuary.com

on asylum. In the UK there are at present a range of practical concerns over asylum policies, summed up in part by the Independent Asylum Commission's recent recommendations (2008a, 2008b, 2008c) on the asylum system, concerns with improving housing and accommodation, extending the right to work, reducing the use of detention and tackling asylum destitution. For me a model of 'good asylum' would involve addressing all of these things and more. Yet I also think that we should not lose sight of the fact that these are policies built upon outlooks, public opinions and public culture. For this reason, among others, I think that any notion of 'good asylum' should contain a local outlook of valuing and owning a sense of hospitality and sanctuary and a local politics responsive to that ethos (see Derrida 2001). For in creating such a local political outlook, one which both values sanctuary as a virtue and acknowledges the responsibilities which arise from being part of a larger asylum system, this model might begin to address some of the attitudes and opinions which currently drive asylum policy and practice.

To conclude, the City of Sanctuary committee defined 'good asylum' as 'a culture in which communities recognise the value of sanctuary', and recently the Independent Asylum Commission (2008a) have also recommended that sanctuary be promoted as a public political and moral good, arguing that there is 'a profound disconnection in the public mind between the sanctuary they want the UK to provide and their perception of the asylum system' (ibid, p.6). They recommend that 'immediate action is taken to win hearts and minds and long term public support for sanctuary' (ibid, p.1), and note that the City of Sanctuary movement might offer one local means of achieving this aim. What I want to take from the work of City of Sanctuary is therefore that good asylum must be based, first and foremost, upon valuing the very idea of sanctuary itself, for while this notion has become vilified and criminalised through notions of bogus asylum seekers and terror threats, the City of Sanctuary movement point to an opportunity to reclaim sanctuary as a virtue of cities across the UK. This is an opportunity to reclaim a value that stands at the heart of any idea of 'good asylum'. It is an opportunity we cannot afford to miss.

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[5]The City of Sanctuary manifesto for Sheffield can be found at www.cityofsanctuary.com/sheffield-manifesto.

Mette Wiggen

Asylum, Security and the Extreme Right in Europe: The Case of Scandinavia

(Mette Wiggen works at the University of Leeds) M.Wiggen@leeds.ac.uk

On July 18th 2008 a 16 year asylum seeker was shot in his sleep at Hvalstad reception centre in Norway. The shot was fired from the neighbourhood with a hunting rifle. This crime was committed on Vidkun Quisling's birthday. Vidkun Quisling was the Gestapo government's prime minister during the German occupation 1940-1945. The police immediately linked the shooting to extreme right wing groups or individuals. They also gave a statement saying it was targeted at the asylum centre, not at an individual (Dagsavisen 19/7/2008, NRK TV July 18 2008). The town's mayor drew different conclusions, and emphasised how the local community was becoming unhappy with the asylum centre in its midst, and that its existence needed to be reconsidered. (Budstikka, 19/07/2008).

The attack in Norway is an example picked from many similar racist attacks in Europe in the last couple of years; in Italy there were violent attacks on Roma people in the summer of 2008, after a Roma camp near Naples was burned to the ground. Prime Minister Berlusconi responded by demanding that all Roma People should be fingerprinted, and ethnicity recorded. (Amnesty International 2008).

The trend of open violence against asylum seekers runs alongside growing support of extreme rightwing groups and political parties throughout Europe, and is being left largely unchallenged by main stream political parties. In fact, main stream parties have adopted many extreme right views and introduced measures to keep immigrants out. Few politicians dare to challenge the all party consensus and alleged public demand for 'tough' policies on asylum. There is not only a demonization, distrust and criminalisation of asylum seekers but an increasing 'dangerisation' of them (Albrecht 2002 quoted in Bauman 2004:56). The 'war on terror' has made life for asylum seekers even more inhumane. Politicians across Europe have for a decade pandered to an increasingly anti-immigrant xenophobic press. Increasingly right wing politicians in Labour parties have adopted right wing views and set the agenda on new restrictions for asylum

seekers in particular. Across Europe governments have introduced targets on numbers of asylum seekers and tougher measures to keep 'them' out (Bauman 2004: 34). Governments' efforts to reach targets put asylum seekers in danger; sending asylum seekers back to first country of arrival often leads to that country sending them back to their country of origin. Use of detention is increasing and it contravenes the Geneva Convention (UNHCR 2008)

This paper argues that mainstream political parties have accepted the rhetoric from the extreme right and pander to the anti immigration rhetoric in the press in their asylum policies. It will use the case of Norway which sees itself as a world peace keeper and a champion for human rights to highlight how intolerant political parties and the electorate are in relation to asylum seekers. It will do so by linking development in Norway to main trends and changes in Europe and other Scandinavian countries.

The increasingly hostile perception of immigrants must be linked to the Schengen Agreement of 1994-95, with two EU treaties related to cross border legal arrangements and abolition of systematic cross-border controls for nationals from participating countries. With the Schengen Agreement came changes to immigration policy away from humanitarian and human rights concerns, towards concerns about security. Since then there has been an increase in criminalisation of migrants in general and of asylum seekers in particular. The Schengen Agreement led to more restrictions on movement for non EU or EAA residents than ever before during peacetime (Moses 2005). Jonathon Moses likens the fate of migrants today with freed slaves in Lombard in the ninth century. Slaves were taken to a crossroads free to go wherever they liked. 'While the world may be formally freed from the onus of slavery, today's downtrodden do not enjoy access to an open crossroad, nor a life where they may wish' (2006: 195).

In 1995, methods used in war zones to prevent internal displacement were introduced in Europe and in 1999 the EU High Level Working Group on

immigration and asylum began to discuss ways to prevent migration from regions they thought might have surplus terrorist migrants (Duffield 2007).

Controlling migrants' movements is done by dispersal, detention and deportation (Schuster 2003). In detention centres people who have no criminal conviction are locked up like prisoners and children are deprived of education. Detention excludes asylum seekers from the criminal law system, and reduces asylum seekers without documents to a 'bare life' existence (Agamben 1998) where they have no political or legal rights. Erstwhile UK Prime Minister Tony Blair even suggested 'transit processing centres' and 'regional protection zones' (Blair 2003) where asylum seekers could be vetted and kept as a far away from Europe as possible.

Since 1995 alongside the single European market there have been big increases in inequality across Europe and an increasing alienation between public and political leadership. In particular this has angered the poor who increasingly feel politicians do not care about them and blame immigrants for taking resources that they feel are meant for nationals, the ones who have earned it (Marsdal 2008).

The electorate suffers from loss of job security, loss of pensions and increased means testing of welfare services whilst politicians have continued to answer with more deregulation and trust in the market. The support for discrimination of asylum seekers must be seen in this context. Many governments grant lower benefits for asylum seekers and refugees than for nationals and a refusal of welfare services to failed asylum seekers is increasingly the norm in Europe (European Council on Refugees and Exiles, country reports 2008).

Increased means testing and therefore more barriers to access welfare has been a trend in different European welfare regimes for about 15 years. Equal access to welfare is government policy in Norway and asylum seekers are entitled to the same amount of welfare and benefits as anybody else, but there is no support for failed asylum seekers. In Denmark which has a conservative coalition government supported by the far right 'Dansk Folkeparti' allow asylum seekers half of what Danish nationals get in social security.

In Norway pressure from the far right is gathering strength, and it is most likely that the country will have a coalition government with the far right 'Fremskrittpartiet', the Progress Party after the next general election in 2009. The Progress Party has weathered much criticism for many of its views and proposals. The party's programme stated that local councils should have public votes to decide on

settlement of asylum seekers and other immigrants (Partiprogram 2005-2009 Fremskrittspartiet). The party is now trying to rid itself from the extreme image, much like the Front National in France and in this way hoping to become more attractive to potential coalition partners. On top of the party's agenda, as its sister parties in Europe, is to deal with the 'problem' with immigration.

In Norway pressure from the extreme right is gathering strength, and the party aims at a position as one of the governing parties in a conservative coalition government after the general election in October 2009. The Progress Party has weathered much criticism for many of its views and proposals. The party's programme stated that local councils should have public votes to decide on settlement of asylum seekers and other immigrants (Partiprogram 2005-2009 Fremskrittspartiet). On the top of the party's agenda is to deal with the 'problem' with immigration. The party is using official figures to support their claim that there is a crisis of asylum, using the increase of 200% asylum seekers from some countries as an indication of a wave of asylum seekers coming to Norway. The numbers are taken from the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration who reported that 141 Afghans, 246 Serbs and 142 Somalis arrived in the first quarter of 2007 and that for these three groups only; there had been an increase of over 200 % in the first quarter of 2007 in relation to 2006.

The Progress Party has with the help of the media managed to take a lead in a very negative national debate about immigration and integration in general. There are in fact very few refugees in Norway; in September 2007 the total figure was 125 149 individuals out of a total population of Norway 4.7 million, but for the electorate who are worried about sharing their welfare the figures seem to pose a problem. The Progress Party has been very successful in capitalising on welfare chauvinistic sentiments in the Norwegian public and the party is not being challenged by other mainstream parties who are keeping a low profile a year before the next general election.

Norway passed a new immigration law in October 2008 and one of many effects the change in the law will have is that it will become more difficult to gain asylum. Norway has used a policy of dispersal to the regions where the state depends on local authorities' goodwill. The initial cost of receiving asylum seekers has to be met by local authorities and a result is that local authorities increasingly refuse to take new asylum seekers and the state is powerless to force them to. Most recently this has been the case in Ullensaker and Ðrnes councils, where the UDI has 'given up trying to persuade

them any more' (Oddvin Forbord, UDI, 24/6/08). Os municipality is another local council that has refused to accept any more asylum seekers or refugees. Initially the Progress Party mayor's argument in Os was that the costs would be too high, research has shown that the municipality would be better off economically (support from the state and income tax and labour generated by established refugees), but the local council still refuses to budge (Mjelva and Linde Holo 2004). Other municipalities follow suit, like in the case of Askøy where the council also refused to accept a previously agreed number of a hundred individuals for 2009, they argued they lacked resources (Veland 2008). The newspaper blogs on this issue are interesting; most people who blog, agree with the councils' decisions. Bloggers say refusing refugees is sound economic planning, many often continue to say that this has nothing to do with racism but that there are so many things to spend money on 'here' ; schools, health etc. Very few seem to be clear on the difference between migrant workers and refugees, and treat protection of refugees as an option or a charitable act they 'unfortunately' cannot support, rather than a humanitarian issue of global responsibility and an international obligation Norway has signed up to.

It is clear that the electorate in one of the most prosperous countries and equal societies in the world is unhappy about the prospect of sharing resources and that there is little understanding of the reasons asylum seekers go there. Asylum seekers are entitled to the same benefits as anybody else, which in international comparison is generous, but the amount is low and leave people who depend on them excluded from activities most Norwegians take for granted; like skiing and school trips for children. There is a lot of controversy around amount given and it has been reported that some groups of refugees often perceive the welfare system as controlling and rigid, patronising and humiliating (Fangen 2008). It is difficult to navigate through the system for anybody, not least if you are new to the country and do not speak the language. Users might also have unrealistically high expectations. Access is a problem and a universal trend in European welfare states where it is becoming more difficult and bureaucratic to claim welfare benefits one is legally entitled to (Steinmo 1993). Most find it hard to claim, partly because the system is so difficult to navigate and partly because they are too proud to ask for hand outs from the state. The use of means testing is increasing in Norway and has been introduced for previously universal benefits. The state is emphasising cost saving mechanism and more resources are put into

checking, controlling and clamping down on fraud as is the trend everywhere.

It is problematic that refugees have difficulties obtaining benefits, but it is also a problem that the public and politicians only see them as a burden, there is very little discourse about what refugees can do or what they would like to do.

Many Norwegian politicians and organisations fail to see refugees and non white immigrants as agents in their own right and are ignore refugees' interests when it comes to how to contribute to society and in voicing their needs. The public, most politicians and white feminists alike are obsessed with supporting especially women refugees and children from violent and dominant men. A relatively new wave of racism where refugee men are being demonised and women treated as victims have taken root and this is where the debate about the veil as an obstacle to freedom fits in (Utrop. no 2008, Qureshi 2007). The veil is still seen as a very important political issue in Norway whilst refugees and other immigrants would like to move on to more important issues. Antoinette Botti from the Norwegian Pan-African Women's association has highlighted what she sees as widespread discrimination and an exclusion of immigrant women highlighted in a law that demands at least 40% representation of each gender on the board of directors in any company. Botti (interview 27/6/2008) argues that this law applies for native Norwegian women only, and that it should be extended to encourage immigrant women to access organisations, societies, trade and industry. Both Botti and Anita Rathore (interview 26/6/2008) from OMOD (Organisation Against Public Discrimination) stress that there is an inbuilt racism in Norwegian society that excludes immigrants and women in particular. This is another area where the far right Progress Party have managed to draw attention to themselves; now as defenders of women's rights and welfare. The party's focus is on violent men, and they are particularly concerned about Muslim women who they see as needing protection both from Islam and their husbands. Violence against women and genital mutilation of Muslim women are real problems, but the Progress Party has turned this around and seems to be fighting the impact of sexual violence with a policy of racism. Miriam Ticktin (2008) has observed the same scenario in France.

It is in the context laid out above that the rise and support of the far right must be recognised, in Scandianvia and in the rest of Europe. Politicians and the press in Norway stress that the number of asylum seekers have increased dramatically in 2008. The minister for employment and immigration conceded in a debate in the parliament in May 2008 (Bang 2008)

that refugees are probably coming to Norway because they 'know' Norway is a soft touch. The question to ask should be why so few are going to Norway, if everybody knows how superior welfare provision is there. Restricting immigration by setting targets on intake of asylum seekers and speed up deportations are as much the norm in Norway as in any other European country.

European governments are not challenging Extreme Right parties. There are many reasons for support to extreme right parties and it is too simple to blame it on immigration alone, but it can be explained when this is mixed up with xenophobia, welfare chauvinism and politicians' lack of interest in the poorest and in the working class (Eatwell 2003). Xenophobia is normally worse in areas where there has been little immigration, Norway fits in well with this argument; 'fear of the unknown' and welfare chauvinism and working class discontent can be seen as the main explanations to far right support in the case of Norway, where Progress Party needs to be seen as less extreme than parties furthest to the right in other European Party systems, because the party did not grow out of a fascist movement.

In Sweden the far right is virtually nonexistent, and conditions for receiving asylum are better than in Denmark and Norway where the political far right is much stronger. In Sweden even refused asylum seekers are entitled to benefits and access to health care. To achieve good asylum, respect for the Geneva convention could be a start and human rights for all must be taken for granted. As long as the extreme right is allowed to 'rule the roost' in Europe this is unlikely to happen in the unforeseeable future.

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Pip Tyler

Positive Lessons from Canada and Zambia: Possible Applications for the UK[7]

Pip Tyler is a Winston Churchill Fellow 2007 and was working for the National Migration Co-ordinating Team, based at Leeds City Council, at the time of her trip. She now works at the Yorkshire & Humber Regional Migration Partnership and is also a PhD student in the Department of Politics, University of Sheffield. pip.tyler@tiscali.co.uk

You don't need to know much about immigration to know that it is a contentious issue. Newspaper headlines are clear evidence of this. The September 2007 MORI Political Survey identified 'race/asylum' as the most important issue to the electorate – ahead of usual vote-winners such as crime, the NHS, defence, education and housing.[8]

There are two significant and unconstructive consequences of these strongly-held views on immigration. Firstly, media and public responses appear to be the principal considerations when government sets immigration policy, overshadowing issues of justice and protection. Secondly, negative perceptions about refugees and asylum seekers can often result in the proliferation of myths and poor relationships between the host community and vulnerable newcomers to the UK.

Almost every country in the world has grappled with similar difficulties in responding to refugees. There are over 140 signatories to the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees,[9] which gives some common ground for comparing states. Canada and Zambia are selected here for closer examination due to their relatively positive international reputations for their response to refugees. If both of these very different states are successful at providing sanctuary for large numbers of refugees, and if they share similarities in their approaches, then it is conceivable that these similarities can be applied to other contexts. This paper considers three key questions:

• How do Canada and Zambia manage to ensure that immigration is not a political 'problem'?

• What can other states learn from their approaches to asylum?

• How can we apply these lessons to UK immigration policy and to our own communities?

A deserved reputation?
Refugees in Canada and Zambia

Canada and Zambia may seem very unrelated. Clearly they are very different in terms of culture, population and geographic size, history, economic power and international status. Yet Canada and Zambia both accept high numbers and proportions of refugees, and enjoy international recognition for good relationships between refugees and the host community.

Zambia, for example, is known for being a peaceful country that has successfully supported refugees from all over southern Africa. Despite a lack of economic prosperity, in 2004 Zambia was hosting 15 refugees per 1000 of its population - whereas the UK was hosting 5 per 1000 population.[10] The Zambia Initiative Programme (ZIP) is a recent model of 'local integration'[11] that is being considered for replication in other places such as Chad and Sudan.

The people of Canada won the UNHCR Nansen Award for outstanding services in supporting refugee causes in 1986; no other nation has ever been granted this award. Canada is well known for taking large numbers of refugees for resettlement - in 2006 it took 10 700 resettlement refugees, behind only the USA and Australia (the UK took 380).[12]

These examples are good indicators of Canada and Zambia's successes in responding to both refugees and host community needs. The following sections consider both countries in more detail, outlining key features of their asylum processes and clues to the public opinion that influences them.

Does 'the world need more Canada'?[13]

Asylum process and support

One of the most significant differences in asylum processes between Canada and the UK is that

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[7]A longer version of this paper is available as a report of a Winston Churchill travel award at: www.wcmt.org.uk/reports/178_1.pdf.

[8]Ipsos-MORI (October 2007) September 2007 Political Survey. www.ipsos-mori.com/.

[9]Over 140 states have signed either the Convention, the 1967 Protocol or both, as of October 2008. See www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b73b0d63.pdf for details.

asylum claims are decided by an independent panel, the Immigration and Refugee Board. Adult and child 'refugee claimants'[14] follow an identical asylum process, which may help to explain why there does not appear to be a problem with determining age as there is in the UK.[15]

Support arrangements for refugee claimants also differ. Canada does not have a dispersal system as the UK does; instead, refugee claimants live (and work) in the place where they arrive and make their asylum claim. There is no parallel system of entitlements - refugee claimants and ordinary Canadians access the same welfare system, which has stifled the development of myths and tension regarding favourable entitlements for one group over the other.

The voluntary sector in Canada operates with a collective national voice in relations with the government regarding asylum policy and practice. The Canadian Council for Refugees[16] campaigns on a wide range of policy issues on behalf of this group, whereas in the UK non-governmental organisations tend to lobby independently of one another.

It would be naïve to suggest that Canada operates a perfect system. Behind the image of a country that embraces refugees there are, inevitably, issues that are less easy to reconcile, and campaigners in both Canada and the UK voice similar concerns. For example, Canada has a limited appeals system while the UK has recently announced plans to limit appeals to the higher courts. Campaigners are concerned with the return of refugee claimants to the US border they crossed to reach Canada, while in the UK asylum seekers can be removed to the EU country they first entered under the Dublin II Convention.

Public opinion and support

Canadians seem content to let non-governmental organisations lead the debate with government over asylum issues. Asylum rarely makes newspaper headlines at all; a database search for 2006-7 highlighted a host of sympathetic items on refugees but only 45 stories nationally using the phrase

'asylum seeker' - headlines included 'the case of this asylum seekers wasn't so simple' and 'asylum bids blocked at US border'.

Positive relations between refugees and Canadians are demonstrated through private resettlement initiatives. Resettlement involves relocating selected refugees from their first country of asylum to another country, usually due to safety concerns. Canada operates two types of resettlement; one arranged by government (similar to the Gateway Protection Programme in the UK), the other privately arranged by individuals or groups. This latter approach involves the sponsoring community financially supporting a refugee for a year, which clearly accelerates the process of integration.

Another example of positive public opinion is the open existence of services aimed at newcomers to the country. One example is the Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS)[17] programme found in hundreds of schools throughout Ontario. The programme is open to all newcomers to Canada, working with parents and students in order to enable them to compete with their peers. Applications of SWIS have been considered in other fields such as colleges and hospitals, and rollout of the programme has encouraged expansion of library services to include collections in different languages, citizenship information, English language discussion groups, keyboards with alternative character sets, and 'story times' in other languages.[18]

In Canada, difference is not seen as a 'problem' to be solved but a feature of society to be celebrated; this is clear by use of neutral terminology such as 'newcomer' and 'refugee claimant'. Immigrants retain their allegiance to their ethnic background without pressure to adopt a single 'Canadian' identity; this is exemplified by Vancouver City's Mission Statement which aspires 'to create a great city of communities'. Rural Canada struggles to attain the levels of immigration that it hopes for - the Canadian Immigrant quotes one official asking: 'Where are the immigrants? We need them desperately, but don't get more than

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[10]UNHCR (2006) The State of the World's Refugees: Human Displacement in the New Millennium. OUP: Oxford.

[11]The UNHCR has traditionally promoted three long-term 'durable solutions' to the refugee problem. These are: local integration, repatriation and resettlement.

[12]Ibid.

[13]'The World Needs More Canada' is a widely used slogan in Canadian society. For example, it is used by a leading bookshop chain to promote Canadian literature.

[14]The Canadian equivalent to 'asylum seeker' i.e. someone who arrives in the country to make a claim for protection.

[15]Age dispute cases in the UK form a significant proportion of applications from those claiming to be children. It is often claimed by the authorities that adults present themselves as children in order to receive more favourable treatment.

[16]Canadian Council for Refugees' website is available at: www.ccrweb.ca/.

[17]For more information about SWIS, see: http://atwork.settlement.org/ATWORK/PSR/swis.asp.

[18]For more details on libraries and multiculturalism, see the report of another Winston Churchill Fellow: Helen Carpenter (2007) The role of public libraries in multicultural relationships. www.welcometoyourlibrary.org.uk/listDocuments.asp?page_id=70 or www.wcmt.org.uk/reports/194_1.pdf

a handful'.[19] Immigrants are frequently represented in public art and monuments and are an integral part of the history of the country. The view of integration contrasts with to the pressure upon immigrants in the UK to (effectively) assimilate, as is clear by debates which focus upon English language and skills gaps.

This celebration of the immigrant presence encourages participation in national debates concerning identity and multiculturalism. The Chinese are one of the oldest immigrant groups to Canada; the Chinese Cultural Centre museum in Vancouver tells of a host of restrictions that impinged upon their freedom until the later 20th century. In recent years, they have been able to tell their stories through writing,[20] and projects such as the Chinese Pioneer Family Project. First generation Canadians in Ottawa retell their experiences in dramatic form through the Broken English Theatre company, which aims 'to provide audiences with New Canadians' perceptions of identity and belonging'.[21] Participation in these debates shows Canada's progression past discrimination, and even mere tolerance, to inclusion of all types of newcomers to its shores.

Zambia – 'where it is all happening'[22]

Arrangements for refugee support

The asylum process in Zambia is radically different to western systems; almost all those claiming asylum at the Zambian border are admitted and accepted as refugees – which again means 'asylum seeker' is not really used. This startling entrance policy even extends to those who are suspected of having been involved in conflict.

However, Zambia is even more restrictive than the UK in its residence policies for refugees. Refugees must reside in one of a handful of designated settlements in rural border areas. With no route to Zambian citizenship, refugees are expected to stay in a settlement indefinitely or until they voluntarily repatriate. In some cases, refugees have been trained in vocational skills in order to prepare them for rebuilding their countries. Angolans repatriating in early 2007 for example, were given tuition in skills such as IT, vehicle maintenance, tailoring and carpentry.

Being a relatively poor country, ongoing

state support for refugees is limited beyond accommodation in the settlements, although some international relief is provided through the World Food Programme and others. Refugees are encouraged to become self-sufficient, either growing their own food or trading locally.

While interaction between refugees and local Zambians is inevitably limited due to restricted movement, there is some trade, a significant number of Zambians even live in the refugee settlements, and refugees are permitted to travel for specific reasons such as accessing health services and schools.

The public response

Inevitably (as in both Canada and the UK) the presence of refugees has caused some tensions locally; some have brought arms, disease or damaging practices with them to Zambia. Nevertheless, there are four key indicators of positive public opinion regarding refugees.

Having gained independence comparatively early in 1964, Zambia offered protection for many fleeing regional civil conflict; political leaders endorsed this approach proudly, which encouraged refugee flows. Local people have followed this lead, despite suffering as a consequence. These actions have culminated in a collective national pride and compassion. This history of protection is kept alive in popular memory, and is retold for example, in the national Museum of Zambia as an important part of Zambia's political history.

A second clue to the potential for positive relations between hosts and refugees is found in the origins of the Meheba refugee settlement. This is located in the north western Copperbelt region and is huge, at one time hosting over 47 000 refugees.[23] Meheba overlaps the borders of three local chiefdoms: Mumena, Mukumbi and Matebo. When Meheba was being set up in 1971 the three local chiefs consented to portions of their land being used for the refugee settlement for no apparent incentive. The local chiefs today continue to demonstrate interest in the refugees and in the political developments surrounding them, which serves to reassure local Zambians and also provides further protection for the refugees. One of the most surprising aspects of the host community welcome to refugees has been the acceptance of those who may

[19]Canadian Immigrant (June 2007) www.thecanadianimmigrant.com.

[20]See, for example, Chiang H (2006) Chinese Islanders: Making a Home in the New World. Island Studies Press: Charlottetown.

[21]For background information, see www.brokenenglishtheatre.com.

[22]A welcome sign to the town of Solwezi, the main town near the Meheba refugee settlement, bears this message.

[23]A number of studies describe the settlement and its background, such as Powles J (2002) Home and Homelessness: The Life History of Susanna Mwana-uta, an Angolan Refugee. Journal of Refugee Studies Vol15(1), pp81-101.

have been directly involved in conflict. Before large-scale repatriation to Angola was a possibility, plans were even devised to settle former combatants in a remote village in the border region.

The third indicator of public opinion lies in a government-initiated local integration project, the Zambia Initiative Programme (ZIP), which has been building positive relationships between refugees and the rural host community since 2003. ZIP projects are based in two refugee settlements and their surrounding villages and towns. Agriculture, education and health are the dominant themes of the projects which are often undertaken in partnership with other organisations. The projects themselves are determined by local beneficiaries, sometimes formalised as 'Local Development Committees', and the projects serve both populations. Where possible, local Zambians and refugees have been employed to deliver the ZIP projects, such as making bricks or laying roads.

Finally, there are indications of good refugee-host relations apparently arising with little direct intervention, and host communities are beginning to benefit in unforeseen ways. Different nationalities have brought new skills to Zambia, and have been passing these on. The good quality bricks and roof tiles made by refugees for ZIP projects are being replicated in Zambian homes, and Rwandan expertise in rice-growing has ensured that the North West region has become a regional exporter rather than importer of rice, even supplying the World Food Programme. The town of Nangweshi is suffering the effects of refugee repatriation, and now has a labour shortage which is being partially filled by refugees from another region.

Zambia is a pertinent and even shaming example to the West of how one of the most impoverished nations finds capacity to provide sanctuary and dignity to refugees.

Common threads between Canada and Zambia

The common themes arising in both Canada and Zambia that could be emulated by other refugee-hosting countries include the following:

1. Host community involvement

Both Canada and Zambia are reaping the benefits of involving the host community in refugee initiatives; such as private resettlement or local development projects. It is possible to identify some instances of local involvement in the UK, including the mentoring element of the national Refugee Integration and

Employment Service launched in 2008. However, there are other possibilities. Mainstream services and projects could be planned with both refugees and hosts as intended beneficiaries, and funders could make host involvement a prerequisite in grant applications. A form of private resettlement could increase the UK's small number of resettled refugees at minimal public cost.

2. A proud national history and positive discourse about immigrants

Political leaders in Zambia have openly expressed strong support for refugees for over four decades; this has infiltrated the national consciousness and is supported locally by chiefs in refugee settlement areas. Ordinary Canadians are proud of their 'multicultural' reputation. Immigrants and their descendants have managed to achieve powerful positions in society, and therefore society's view is not patronising or hostile, but proud. National debates about identity do not focus on difference, and mainstream political parties resist using immigration as an election issue. In the UK debates tend to centre around 'British values' and the contribution that immigrants can make to society. These discussions are much less inclusive of our newcomers, and the experiences of Zambia and Canada have much to teach us in this respect.

3. Identical support systems for refugees and locals

There are no work restrictions upon immigrants in both Canada and Zambia, and as far as possible, refugees access the same systems of support as ordinary citizens. This means that many of the tensions and myths existing in the UK regarding entitlements of different groups (and the need to counteract them) do not arise. Additionally, immigrants have a wealth of knowledge and experiences from which host communities could learn, such as language skills[24]. Giving asylum seekers the dignity to be able to use their skills could have a multitude of beneficial effects for both themselves and the UK population.

4. Reduced public fear about immigration

Unlike the UK, in neither Canada nor Zambia does immigration feature on the list of issues that people are most worried about, or will vote for. The lack of a formal asylum process in Zambia, and different terminology in Canada means that there is no obsessive divide between 'refugees' and 'asylum seekers' as there is in the UK, with its connotations of deserving and undeserving (respectively). In the

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[24]Only recently did OFSTED highlight the need to offer a wider range of 'community languages' in schools. See OFSTED (2008) Every Language Matters. www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070030

UK, we could reconsider the terminology we use to describe migration and groups of migrants, as a start to reducing fears about 'otherness'.

Conclusion

This paper has identified some examples of where Canada and Zambia have managed to anticipate or defuse the strains between refugees and their host communities, and where they have employed similar strategies. These similarities exist despite huge differences in the histories, cultures, economy and politics of both countries. This has to give hope that the UK too can learn from these integration efforts and replicate their successes.

2009 is a pertinent time for the UK to reconsider its approach to asylum and refugees, with continued regionalisation of the UK Border Agency and an imminent simplification and consolidation Bill that will include asylum support provisions. Careful application of the four common elements outlined above could result in net benefits for both refugees and the UK population that hosts them.

Acknowledgements

Nick Gill
The Grumpy Policeman

(Nick Gill works at Lancaster University) n.m.gill@lancaster.ac.uk

Have you ever seen a policeman get really grumpy? Maybe you've seen one lose their rag the other side of a picket line, or get on their high horse about the amount of work policeman are asked to do? If you imagine the situations in which policeman are often called into action, they are invariably in the midst of dynamic and violent struggles, holding up a line, forming a barrier or performing a search. Policemen are very often the vehicle through which the law and the state are executed. They are the bearers of bad tidings, they make sure we are behaving ourselves and consequently we often hide from them, or we know people who hide from them. They are, in short, the incarnation of the state and their anger or grumpiness is often associated with the difficulties of performing this function.

I have seen a grumpy policeman. In fact, I have interviewed one. In many ways my PhD was quite normal, insofar as anything as diverse and strange as a PhD can be normal. I was ideologically driven (quite normal in research, despite the pressure to abandon your principles!) and I was frustrated about the treatment of immigrants in the UK. I interviewed about 35 people over the course of a year (also quite normal), and spent a year or so writing the findings into a thesis and a few academic articles and papers. Of course, for me, the process was anything but normal, as it was the first time I had ever really been in contact with any of the actors that I was writing about. It took me to the places where asylum seekers were hiding during daylight hours for fear of being deported, it took me deep into the heart of the immigration and nationality directorate, it took me to rural idylls where white lower middle class people made depressingly predictable decisions about the immigration status of asylum claimants without ever meeting them or ever hearing their cases, except in the form of a little blue sheet upon which the tragedies and distresses of a life time were squeezed and re-counted. My PhD took me deep into the heart of activist circles where breaking the law in support of a good cause was a normal and laudable action.

One place that my PhD took me was a police station. This was, again, quite an un-remarkable looking interview. It was located quite close to where I was studying in Bristol. I had cycled to the station and met the guys behind the front desk whilst still thinking about the first year class I had taught that day. Most of the time, the journey to an interview

is my chance to think and mentally prepare for the interview that was about to occur, so this interview was, I suppose, unusual because it was so routine, so close to my day-to-day life that I was in danger of over-looking its importance.

The policeman I was interviewing had other ideas. What the routine-ness of the interview achieved was a sort of proximity to the interview, so that it has taken me fully twelve months to realise the significance of what this grumpy police man was telling me.

On the surface he was not a particularly grumpy chap. He joked about students and proper jobs (this is par for the course when doing a PhD), and I made the terrible mistake of telling him that my mother was transcribing some interviews for me, so he teased me quite mercilessly about the typical reliance of students upon their Mums. In fact, throughout the interview the policeman maintained a jovial attitude, often turning to the policeman next to him to make some sideways remark about the dodgy student-ness of my attire. Again, this joviality, like the proximity of the interview to my everyday life, might have served to mask the seriousness with which the policeman was taking the interview and the frustration and anger he was attempting to impart.

If we think about grumpy policemen, if we try to visualise one, we would normally call to mind someone who is grumpy about the non-conformity of society to the policies and laws of the state, because this produces work for the police in terms of bringing non-conformists into line. Certainly from my experiences with radical pro-asylum groups in Bristol I had learnt to expect, not necessarily first hand but through the myths and fables passed down through the activist grapevine, that policemen were often extremely conservative. I would hear stories about the tendency towards sadism among detention centre guards, for example, and stories about the pernickety nature of police enforcement when it came to immigration and, especially to immigration paperwork. I consequently expected to hear this policeman railing about the number of asylum seekers on Bristol's streets, about their willingness to disregard laws and about the difficulties of policing such an un-compliant and transitory group of people.

The fact that I did not hear such a tale has made me think twice about the nature of the state, the nature of agency and the assumptions that activists bring to their

field. This policeman was grumpy, very grumpy, but not about the difficulties that asylum seekers presented to him. Rather, this man was deeply disaffected about the challenges and difficulties that asylum seekers themselves face in the city of Bristol. Over more than two hours, he poured out a list of injustices and inconsistencies that asylum seekers face, including the fact that they are over-policed and are expected to carry out too much paperwork, the fact that they are overly vulnerable and liable to be deported to countries that should not be seen as ready to accept deportees, the fact that immigrant communities are starving on our streets and the fact that the government (whoever that might be) was turning a blind eye to a humanitarian crisis in our midst. In colourful and excited language, this policeman got so grumpy during the interview that he spilt his coffee, sputtered all over the Dictaphone, swore copiously (my mother, who is of a delicate disposition, had to edit out the highlights) and indulged in an impressive degree of table thumping. In describing the complexity and hopelessness of the attempt to police immigration in the UK, the incredulous officer outlined the poverty and material difficulties that asylum seekers experience:

When the IND have made the decision that they've been refused asylum and their benefits are stopped they're booted, they're kicked out of their housing. But immigration aren't there to send them back! So what happens is that when the time comes for them to return, immigration haven't got a clue where they are. They just can't find them because they're sofa surfing. That's living in people's coffee shops. I see them in the coffee shop and they're bloody starving.

This is certainly not what I had expected. Weren't police officers supposed to be the ones who steal into asylum seekers' bedrooms and pounce on them in the middle of the night? Was the British bobby, and this is certainly what this policeman looked like, a dead-cert in terms of their Daily Mail readership and general xenophobia? Not at all, as it turns out. What emerged through the course of the interview was the fact that this police officer was actually conducting himself like a die-hard pro-asylum activist would if he or she were given the sort of power and influence that he had been afforded. Far from implementing the immigration policies of the state, this officer has actually taken risks in order to thwart the state and its deportation of immigrants on a number of occasions. When I asked him about the closeness with which he worked with the immigration enforcement teams in the Bristol area, he outlined his suspicion of the teams.

NG: Have you ever taken on an informative role for the immigration service?

Source: I'm not the immigration service. I'll speak to the immigration service, I mean I'm quite frank with the immigration service about what I do. But I wouldn't promote anybody being arrested, I wouldn't facilitate the arrest of somebody unless it was something serious, I mean if they were a suspect in an investigation. When I speak to them I don't say 'did you know so and so is now living here?'.

Our grumpy policeman was also evidently willing to put the needs of asylum seekers before his own job security and certainly before the target driven requirements of the immigration enforcement teams

If immigration suddenly decided they were going to go on a swoop and arrest a lot of [national group] I'll ring up [name] and say 'you should be aware of this', not because I'm tipping him off, em, but because it will have a significant impact within that community.

Slowly then, as the interview unfolded, I got the impression of an officer who was at the cutting edge of helping and protecting the asylum seekers in his jurisdiction. He was acting in support of them despite the risks this entailed to his job and despite the costs to the state. Here was evidence not only of the agency of state actors within their institutional remits, but also of the example of a police officer who knew what he believed in and was willing to swim against the tide in order to position himself so as to be able to act effectively on those beliefs. This grumpy policeman, I learnt, was, to my great surprise, on the side of the undocumented and marginalized migrant.

As is so often the way with research interviews, it was only after I had exited the police station that I realized that the questions I had asked him were some of the most important of my PhD. What I asked should be taken as a clear warning to all activists who, like me, made the common sense assumption that someone working within the state actually worked for the state and in the service of its objectives. I asked our grumpy policeman friend how closely he worked with other activist group in the city of Bristol and he responded in the following way:

Source: I've spoken to people, some of them have a fair bit of distrust about police because they don't understand where we're coming from. I mean I can't say its surprises me. They think you're the police and you just want to arrest asylum seekers.

NG: Do you think that attitude is going to be helpful for them in pursuing the rights of asylum seekers?

Source: No, not at all. I don't really get the opportunity to go out and find out what they're doing because they've got their conceptions,

preconceptions about what we're about.

NG: Would you be open to, I don't know, somebody getting in touch with you from there and saying how can we work together?

Source: Well yeah. I can't actively, politically take part in demonstrations

NG: Is that because of the fact that you're a police officer?

Source: Yeah yeah. But having said that, I'd be quite happy to speak to someone and say look, are you aware that this has happened [elsewhere in the country]? And the same should apply here. That sort of information stops here because I don't know where it should go. Perhaps if I had a contact there, I could ring up and say perhaps you could do something with it. But in their wildest dreams they couldn't imagine police officers would be that way inclined. It's a bit of a shame really, it evokes enormous emotion, I've got different information sources obviously that may be of use to them.

Here then, we see a second source of frustration for the grumpy policeman I interviewed. Not only is he angry at the treatment of asylum seekers, but he is also angry at this own exclusion from activist networks that would allow him to be a more effective advocate of their rights. Here, although I did not realise it at the time, was an informer, a whistleblower who, to his own frustration, has been spurned by precisely the activist organisations that could have benefitted most from his knowledge and the information to which he was party.

So what did this experience tell me about the state? There are at least three morals to this story. First of all, as quite a few commentators suggest, the state is not a monolithic structure that exerts power without relying on people. In the language that is being used at the moment in academia, this means that the state is an 'everyday' entity, something that is being 'performed' all the time and never totally settled or completely determined. This is a source of great hope and encouragement, because if we can get the right people into the right places, then perhaps we can actually get the state to do what is right. Second, the episode taught me a lot about presumptions. I had assumed that, because this police officer had worked for the state in some capacity, that he was therefore liable to hold a particular set of views. I had, in fact, set this policeman up as 'the enemy' when in fact he was more than sympathetic to my views and was actually doing a lot more than I was to carry them forward. Third then, it taught me something about the way that activists, like myself, view the state. There is a grave danger in seeing the state as a structure that is similar throughout, and state actors as all being of an identical, law-abiding and law-enforcing mindset. The notion of the state, and the importance of our resistance to it in the fight to support asylum seekers, very nearly blinded me to the work that this policeman did and the possibilities that he offered for enhanced resistance.

Of course, it might be suggested that this policeman was the exception and that so many other police officers would not have the courage or the insight to act in the ways that he did. Yet the benefits that he offers to activist networks, in terms of information alone, indicates that it is not necessary for every, most or even a significant proportion of police officer to think in a similar way to our grumpy friend. What is more important is that the one or two exceptions who did think sympathetically about asylum seekers and their situations are able to access the activist networks that they can productively contribute towards precisely because their information is so valuable. A degree of openness to state actors, at the risk of having our assumptions about the state itself over-turned, therefore seems appropriate.

As my research progressed more and more supposedly 'state' actors revealed themselves to have aspirations toward fairer treatment of asylum seekers, from judges and detention centre managers to senior IND policy makers. Perhaps it was my sampling strategy or the fact that cynical anti-immigration advocates simply wouldn't be interviewed but, in the final analysis, the fact that my research was not representative of the broader population of state actors may not have been a bad thing. If I demonstrated that a minority were willing to speak out and speak to me, then this same minority would, presumably, also get involved in activism if they had the chance. As long as the remainder stay silent (and even if they don't, but engage in with our work, perhaps from a hostile point of view but nevertheless through dialogue) then the discovery of this small but strategically placed band of people was an important finding. Disturbing our notions of the state and how it is executed is the lasting legacy that this grumpy policeman leaves me.

Notes:

If you would like to read more about this research project, a paper entitled 'Presentational State Power: Temporal and Spatial Influences over Asylum Sector Decision Makers' is published in the journal Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers. (April 2009).