

The Integration of Refugees: **Towards a Fresh Approach**

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Abstract

Integration is an important concept in refugee studies. It is a long established concept, but contested. Ager and Strang (2008) construct a framework of integration, which includes a number of spheres through which refugees progress, in an attempt to establish a universal definition of integration. However, there appears to be limitations to this approach; they generalise and objectify the concept of integration whilst separating it from political, social and economic factors. Interviews with a refugee and three people who work with refugees, have emphasised the significance of political, economic, and social factors, of place, and the value of taking an inter-subjective view with a life course approach, for understanding the integration of refugees in Britain. The study concludes, that Ager and Strang's (2008) approach is limited in omitting these factors and objectifying the experience, rather than encompassing the rich, subjective experience of refugees.

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Introduction

In the study of refugee populations and their experiences, the concept of integration has a long and contested history. Ager and Strang's (2008) framework of integration represents an attempt to establish a universal definition of the term with the aim of ending debates over its meaning and the spheres in which integration takes place. The aim of this study is to investigate the concept of integration through the lens of Ager & Strang's (2008) framework and to try to offer a purposeful critique and development of a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of integration.

The concept of integration is itself important since it can be seen as a necessary feature of a peaceful society. Ager and Strang's (2008) framework brings together a set of spheres that are seen as integral to refugees' attainment of integration, where achieving success in these spheres is seen as the process through which refugees need to progress, and is a model which directs government policy and interventions. However, in so doing there is a sense that Ager and Strang have tended to generalise and objectify the concept and have in addition separated it from notions of political, social and economic influences. It seems possible therefore that Ager and Strang's

approach may serve to undervalue and invalidate the diverse experiences of refugees themselves and as a result may have limited value in developing most effective ways of welcoming refugees into a safe environment where they will be free to live their lives.

In exploring these issues and tensions, this study seeks to advance a more subjective understanding of the concept of integration, by taking a life-course approach. The qualitative methods of enquiry used in this study are therefore highly appropriate to allow complex and inter-related data on refugees experiences to be gathered. In-depth semi-structured interviews with key informants – one refugee and three participants who's professional work is to support refugees – have the intention of capturing insights and new understandings of the concept and experience of integration among refugees in Britain.

It should be noted that throughout the study the term 'refugee' will be used to denote both refugees that are seeking asylum and those who have been granted asylum.

Literature Review

Definitions of integration

The origins of the concept of 'Integration' began with the American functionalist solution to the Hobbesian problem of moral relativism. In drawing upon the ideas of Weber and Durkheim, Talcott Parsons documented the need for 'value integration' to overcome conflicts and differences within society (Favell, 1998: 3). The Chicago School then popularised the term, the focus at this time being on the notion of *assimilation*. The assimilationist idea is exemplified in Gordon's (1964) study of assimilation in American society. It propagated a 'melting pot' theory, whereby different cultures fuse together through intermarriage; ultimately creating one defined American culture. However, as the right to maintain cultural and religious identity has been established, these notions of assimilation have become less politically acceptable (Ager and Strang, 2008: 175).

The British interpretation of 'integration' does not consider assimilation. The concept on 'integration' has been seen in terms of managing interactions between majority and minority groups to maintain public order, favouring

multiculturalism over assimilation (Favell, 1998: 2, 4). This approach was outlined in 1968 by Roy Jenkins, the then British Home Secretary, when he stated that integration should be seen “not as a flattening process of uniformity, but as cultural diversity, coupled with equal opportunity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance” (Rex, 1996:134). Since a number of significant race riots throughout the last three decades and the recent concerns over Muslim extremism, multiculturalism has come under attack and there is increasing debate over what characteristics define the nation, with the notion of citizenship coming to the fore (Ager and Strang 2008:174).

Interestingly, Mestheneos and Ioannidi, (2002) found that, when asked for preference over how this concept should be understood, refugees shared in Roy Jenkins’ perspective of integration, as a positive notion associated with equality. But refugees were negative about the concept was when integration was understood as Gordon’s (1964) process of assimilation.

Aside from the debates over how the concept of integration should apply to society and social policy, there have also been debates over what ‘integration’ actually means.

Vermeulen and Penninx (1994) and also Dagevos (2001) divide the concept of integration into two parts. The first of these, Structural Integration, describes any participation in social institutions. This is separate from the second part, Socio-Cultural Integration, which describes the social contacts people make and their cultural adaptations to society. Likewise, Veenman

(1995) identifies these two aspects, but argues that the attitudes of those who are to integrate should also be considered.

Peters (1993) defines integration along different lines, arguing that there are functional, moral and expressive elements. The functional element describes the extent to which people are able to participate fully and equally in major societal institutions. The moral element refers to the extent to which they are able to participate fully in society without risk to their integrity and the extent of conformity and adaptation to legal and social standards. The expressive element describes the extent to which people can develop individual and shared identities.

Although the concept of integration has long been discussed, it is only since 2000 that the integration of refugee and asylum seeking groups have been on the government agenda, and it is only since this time that research on the integration of refugee and asylum seeking groups has come to the fore.

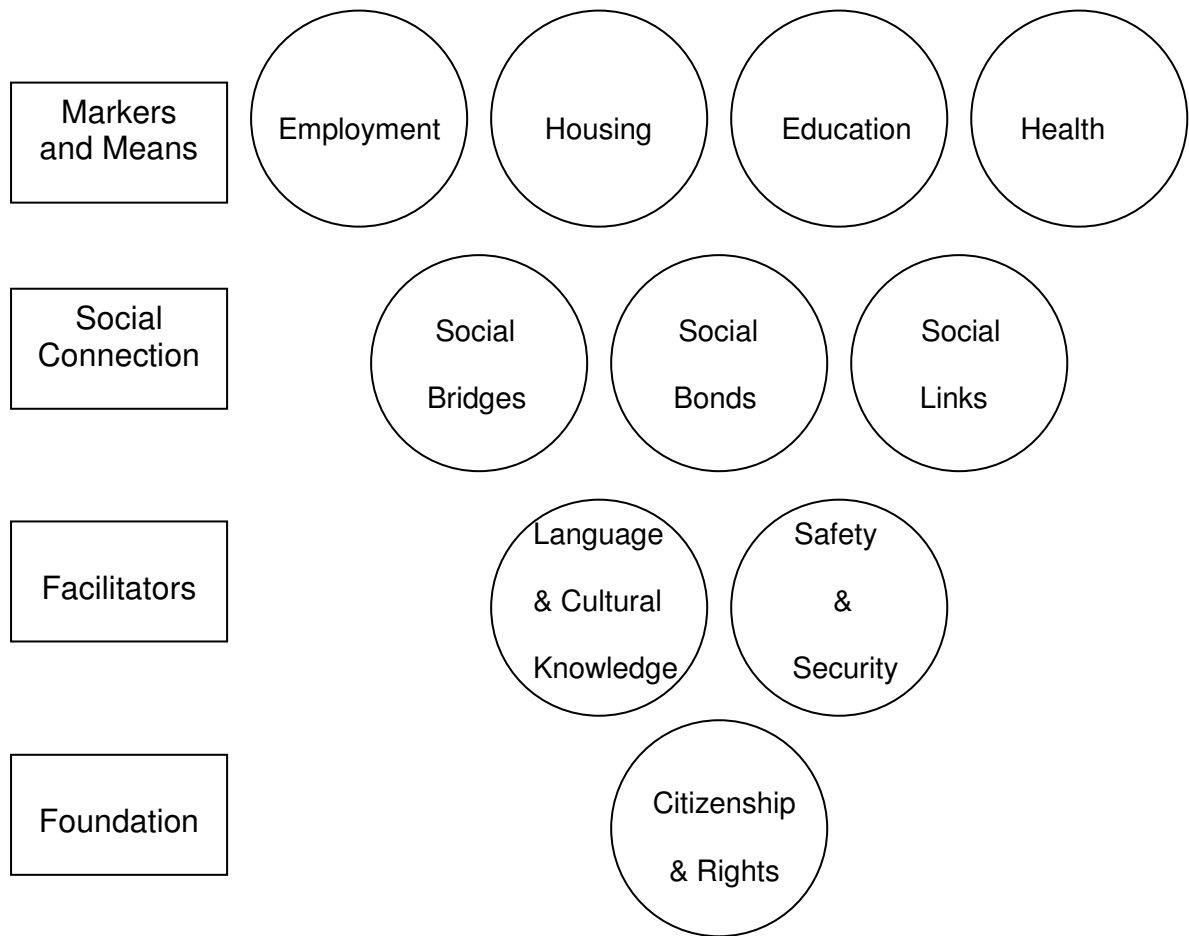
There have also been discussions over the spheres in which integration may take place. Engbersen (2003) argues that there are many spheres, which should all be taken into account, because although each has a different scope, every one is significant in some way. He argues that there are seven spheres: law, politics, employment, housing, education, culture, and religion. Peter's (1993) argues that there are undersides to many spheres, such as illegal trade and illegal social systems. Engbersen (2001s) calls these 'bastard' spheres, taking on Hughes' notion of 'bastard institutions', which

cater for needs that are not considered legitimate such as, irregular lotteries, prostitution, black markets, organised crime, for example. Hughes (1994) argues that “they should be looked at as orders of things in which we can see the process going on, the same social processes perhaps, that are to be found in the legitimate institutions” (Hughes, 1994:193-194).

Sackmann et al. (2003) state that there are tensions between these spheres. These tensions have prompted debate over the perceived importance of each sphere. For example, Van Doorn (1989) argues that acquiring the host language is the most important factor sphere to concentrate on to promote successful integration, whereas Doborwlsky and Lister (2006) discuss citizenship as the fundamental factor.

With so many debates surrounding this concept, Robinson (1998:118) states, ‘integration’ is difficult to ascertain; the term is “individualized, contested and contextual”. Ager and Strang (2008:167) describe it as “a word used by many but understood differently by most”. The framework developed by Ager and Strang (2008) is a “‘middle-range’ theory, seeking to provide a coherent conceptual structure for considering, from a normative perspective, what constitutes the key components of integration” (ibid). These authors attempt to create a definition to end the debate over key aspects of integration. Ager and Strang’s framework is depicted in Figure1 below.

Figure 1



Foundation

Citizenship and Rights

Ager and Strang identify Citizenship and Rights as the foundation for successful integration. While acknowledging that ideas surrounding

'citizenship' differ between nations and "shape the way that a concept such as integration is approached", Ager and Strang (2008:173-174) defend that each variation "of nationhood and citizenship shape[s] core understandings of the rights accorded, and responsibilities expected, of refugees". Therefore, "in all cases such ideas are fundamental to understanding the principles and practice of integration in that situation" (Ager and Strang, 2008: 175, 176). Citizenship and rights are the foundations of Ager and Strang's framework because they provide the principles and practice of integration and are "the basis for full and equal engagement within society" (Ager and Strang, 2008:176-177).

The emphasis Ager and Strang (2008) place on 'citizenship and rights' is echoed by other theorists. They cite Favell (1998), who supports their stance by stating, with reference to T. H. Marshall's *Citizenship and Social Class*, that integration is progressed by "expanding rights and membership" (Favell, 1998:98). Favell (1998:99) continues that Marshall's notion of citizenship "has enabled the flourishing of ethnic minorities and assures the certain sense of community and social order." Favell's (1998) support for Ager and Strang's case that citizenship be considered the foundation of integration is twofold. Firstly, he argues that it enables refugees to become members of the society, with equal rights, and secondly, because citizenship encourages social cohesion on a wider societal level.

Duke et al. (1999) make an important contribution to Ager and Strang's case that full and equal citizenship is essential to integration. They argue, that

refugees' early experiences on arrival are dominated by a sense of loss, it is therefore important that "successful resettlement programmes allow them to find a place in the new society". They imply that citizenship and rights are of fundamental importance to obtaining this sense of 'place', which is important to resettlement.

Facilitators

Language and Cultural Knowledge, and Safety and Security

Ager and Strang (2008) identify 'facilitators' to integration as "language and cultural knowledge" and "safety and security", but these can also act as barriers to effective integration if they are not fulfilled.

Having the ability to speak the language of the host community is central to integration, according to Ager and Strang (2008), because it allows effective communication with the host community, employers, and services. Ager and Strang (2008) also point to the importance of cultural knowledge of national and local procedures and also non-refugees knowledge of refugees' cultural background and circumstances. There is also a need to understand the cultural expectations in their new neighbourhood, for example, family practices. Within Ager and Strang's (2008) 'two-way' understanding of integration, the authors argue that both the refugees themselves and the host communities should meet language barriers and cultural differences in order to secure the successful integration of refugees.

Ager and Strang (2008:183-184) also include a safety and security element as important for facilitating integration because “Refugees often indicated that if they did not feel physically safe in an area they could not feel integrated”.

Social Connection

Social Bridges

‘Social bridges’ is a term used by Ager and Strang (2008) to mean the relationships between refugees and the host communities. The authors particularly point to the ‘friendliness’ of neighbours as an important factor in integration. Within the social bridges relationships, a number of shared activities were pointed to that demonstrate integration. These two themes represent two levels of integration with the host communities. The former emphasises the need for “a lack of conflict and sense of acceptance” whereas the latter denotes “more intensive involvement” (Ager and Strang, 2008: 180).

Social Bonds

Ager and Strang’s (2008) framework encompasses the importance of family networks because it allows people to share in cultural practices and maintain familiar relationships which help people feel settled. Similarly, connections with like-ethnic groups were also seen to contribute towards integration. Ager and Strang (2008) point to Bieser (1993) who reports that refugees who do not have social connections with like-ethnic groups, are at greater risk of depression than people who are connected to a like-ethnic group.

Social Links

Social links is the term used to describe the connections between the individual and state structures. Ager and Strang (2008) acknowledge that these links may become strained due to language difficulties and because of refugees' unfamiliarity with the surroundings. These factors create barriers to effective integration and equality of access to these services. This reinforces their idea that language and cultural knowledge are important facilitators in the process of integration.

Markers and Means

Ager and Strang (2008) identify 'Markers and Means' of integration, as Employment, Housing, Education, and Health. These domains facilitate integration and can also be used as measurements of successful integration.

Employment

Ager and Strang (2008:170) point to six key benefits of employment for integration. Namely, it promotes economic independence; encourages planning for the future; allows refugees to meet members of the host community; can provide opportunities to develop language skills; restores self-esteem and encourages self-reliance. Work opportunities are therefore essential for the successful integration of refugees.

Ager and Strang (2008) identify some difficulties in the area of employment. Many employers do not recognise refugees' qualifications and previous work

experience and many refugees have difficulty producing proof of their qualifications. Many refugees are in a state of under employment, working at a level below their education and potential. Ager and Strang (2008) argue that access to vocational training and further education are important for successful integration because they can increase the potential for employment.

Housing

Ager and Strang (2008) argue that housing affects refugees' physical and emotional well-being and the degree to which they feel at home. They developed indicators of housing which measured size, quality of facilities, financial security of tenancies and ownership. Despite developing these indicators, Ager and Strang (2008:171) note that their respondents focused on the "social and cultural impacts of housing... local residents and refugees each valued the continuity of relationships associated with being 'settled' in an area over time."

Education

Ager and Strang (2008) note that, in the long term, education provides skills that will enable people to become active members of society and in the short term, schools are the key places for refugee children to meet members of the local community. Schools are key for establishing relationships that support integration and therefore integrating into the school is vital, however, Ager and Strang also identify a number of barriers to this. Firstly, there is insufficient support for learning English and where there is support, it is usually in the

form of special classes. This limits the opportunity for mixing with local children. Refugees also experience isolation and exclusion; Ager and Strang identify particular problems with bullying, racism and difficulties making friends. They also argue that information regarding subject choices and the effects these choices have on career plans is limited. Ager and Strang deem these factors as hampering any possibilities of schooling facilitating integration.

Health

The extent to which refugees are able to access healthcare facilities demonstrates a level of integration into key state services. Ager and Strang (2008) identify certain specific barriers to successful integration, such as differing cultural perceptions of healthcare and language difficulties, which may occur in communication with professionals and also with regards to health information.

Limitations of Ager and Strang's (2008) Framework

Ager and Strang's (2008) framework is a useful collation of factors indicative of successful integration. The authors conclude, "Our aim is that debate may be more effectively focused by having frameworks, such as that presented here" (Ager and Strang, 2008:186). However, this framework has its limitations. Firstly, the authors separate Social, Political, and Economic factors from what constitutes successful Integration. Secondly, Ager and

Strang's (2008) overall aim of objectifying successful integration, inevitably overlooks the understandings of individuals involved. And thirdly, the concept of integration is presented as process that is separate from the rest of people's lives; the framework does not consider refugees' lives as a whole. These three limitations manifest themselves via several further problems, each of which are discussed in turn.

The Importance of Political, Social and Economic factors.

Ager and Strang (2008:167) state that they do "not seek comprehensively to map political, social, economic, and institutional factors influencing the process of integration itself". However, this approach overlooks the vital connections between successful integration and political, social and economic factors.

Volosinov argues, "reality is fundamentally affected by the socioeconomic position... of those who experience it" (Moran and Butler 2001:61). Although Ager and Strang (2008) seek to define integration by what their participants say about it, in separating integration from political, social and economic factors, Ager and Strang (2008) undermine the very concept they seek to define.

Political, social and economic factors clearly affect successful integration. What is puzzling about Ager and Strang's (2008) stance is that they directly link government policies on citizenship and the concept of integration. They argue that each nation state has a different notion of citizenship, and this

therefore defines the foundation of what integration actually is. They link the political with successful integration only in so far as they are positive about laws that grant citizenship and rights. Ager and Strang (2008) do not address the negative impact of citizenship laws and rhetoric, yet an understanding of this is vital because these things actively impede refugees' integration.

Although it is widely acknowledged that in theory 'Citizenship' brings with it equality and rights, this is not the case in reality. Ager and Strang's (2008) faith in governments' citizenship policies has served to ignore the inequality and hardships faced by refugees due to government policies. Their focus on the importance of determining refugees' rights and responsibilities, through citizenship, overlooks the vast disparities between government rhetoric and the realities of life for refugees.

In their analysis of the New Labour's discourses on Citizenship and Social Exclusion, Dobrowolsky and Lister (2006:150) argue, "narrow notions of citizenship become interlaced with moral undertones". The notion of a citizen is a good worker, a good consumer, and a good neighbour (Lawson and Leighton, 2004).

The 2001 White Paper, *Secure Borders, Safe Haven*, is seen by Lewis and Neal (2005:451) as attempting to 'reconfigure the contours of belonging through the frame of integration'. Indeed, Wolfe and Klausen (2000) argue that 'Citizenship' is set with regards to the boundaries that exclude non-members. Outsiders are excluded in order to create a shared understanding

of citizenship among members. This can be seen clearly in New Labour's approach to tackling social exclusion; the exclusion of UK-born groups is addressed, but the exclusion of refugees and asylum seekers is ignored. New Labour's policies are such that, "social inclusion and social cohesion are championed, but frameworks continue to be drawn up that encourage exclusion" (Dobrowolsky and Lister, 2006:150). Refugees and asylum seekers are disregarded in "the most vivid example of racialization and one of the most blatant cases of exclusion in Britain" (Dobrowolsky and Lister, 2006:165).

Another consequence of Ager and Strang's (2008) relegation of the political, social and economic is that factors such as Poverty and Racism, which are of central importance to integration, are barely addressed in the framework.

During the asylum process, refugees experience extreme poverty because government policies limit welfare benefit entitlements and do not allow asylum seekers to have paid employment. Layton-Henry (2001:132) notes that asylum seekers' appeal and legal aid rights have been reduced and applicants are now often held in detention centres. Measures of the *Immigration and Asylum Act of 1999* took away means tested benefits including Jobseeker's allowance, Income support, Child benefit and Disability Allowance and gave asylum seekers vouchers instead of cash to be exchanged in selected supermarkets.

Statistics in a report commissioned by Oxfam and the Refugee Council (2002) highlight the severity of the situation, and show how this poverty has a negative impact on refugees' integration. This report stated: Of the organisations this report surveyed, 85% of the organisations reported that their clients experienced hunger, 100% stated their clients could not afford to buy food for special dietary requirements like diabetes, 87% stated that asylum seekers were unable to travel to important interviews and appointments, 85% said that their asylum seekers were not able to stay in touch with family or friends and 90% of these organisations reported that asylum seekers experienced loneliness and isolation, 90% of organisations stated that their clients were unable to pay for their children's bus fare to school, 80% said that their asylum seekers were not able to maintain good health, 70% of organisations said that mothers who are unable to breastfeed cannot afford formula milk for their babies. Unless refugees are able to stay healthy, travel, remain in contact with friends and family, and send their children to school, it is incredibly unlikely that successful integration is possible.

Racism is not discussed by Ager and Strang (2008). However, with so much evidence of racism in the lives of refugees the framework should state that a life free from discrimination, such as racism, is important for successful integration. Kundnani (2001) argues that the racism experienced by refugees is twofold: State racism and racism on the ground. He argues that, "The apparatus of state racism against asylum seekers being constructed across Europe is generating complementary popular racism on the ground" through a

combination of generating suspicion, and formulating deterrents that give the impression that refugees are bogus and untrustworthy (Kundnani, 2001:43). Racism towards asylum seekers particularly has gone unchallenged according to Kundnani (2001) and this has created 'common sense racism' which serves to justify and protect the "bureaucratic terror of the asylum system" (Kundnani, 2001:43). This 'common sense racism', is likely to effect the day-to-day relations between refugees and their host community.

Forms of racism in the media have been widely documented. Philo and Beattie (1999) observed that reports on immigration by the UK media used the terms denoting natural disasters, presenting Britain as the victim of 'floods', and having to cope with 'tidal waves' of immigrants. It has also been widely observed that the terms and definitions describing all immigrants are misused in ways that depict refugees and economic migrants negatively. Philo and Beattie (1999) also observed that the terms 'immigrants' and 'illegal immigrants' were used interchangeably and Lynn and Lea (2003) argue the term 'asylum seeker' is used to also mean 'bogus asylum seeker', and coverage of genuine refugees are scarce in the media.

While it is likely that such representation impacts on how asylum seekers view their own identities, other evidence suggests that the hostility towards refugees in the media has a profound effect on social bridges between refugees and host communities. Of primary importance is that media reports provide many with their 'facts' (Van Dijk, 2000) and therefore as Dobrowolsky and Lister (2006:169) note, "sensational media reports stoke xenophobic and

reactionary fires". One means of illustrating the increase in xenophobia is the increase in support for the British National Party, who won their first seat in London on 3rd May 2008 with 130,714 votes.

Wells and Watson (2005) have documented that anti-refugee and asylum seeker attitudes have a negative effect on social connection, and in particular social bridges. The 'politics of resentment' of shopkeepers in a London neighbourhood attributes their loss of economic prosperity and sense of community partly to the expansion of corporate capital, but asylum seekers are also scapegoated with the view, "they get everything because we get nothing" (Wells and Watson, 2005:261). One shop owner said, "If your English... you get left out. People get off the boat and get thousands straight away" (Wells and Watson, 2005:272). These shopkeepers believe that they have been "abandoned by local and national politicians who direct economic resources to 'asylum seekers'" (Wells and Watson, 2005:266). The authors argue that the shopkeepers are highly influential in perpetuating anti-asylum seeker discourse because they "have long-standing ties with the area and may literally provide a place for the production and circulation of racialised notions of who does and does not belong in the locale" (Wells and Watson, 2005:264).

The impact of the views of individuals in the local community on the inclusion and integration of refugees cannot be underestimated. Informal social networks provide support, both on a practical and emotional level. Friends can offer assistance in accessing social welfare services, interpretation and

financial support, and also can help develop confidence, self-esteem, and reduce feelings of isolation and depression (Boswell 2001; Burnett and Peel 2001; Morrow 2003; Sales 2002; Zetter and Pearl 2000).

Such xenophobia may also influence the experiences of refugees as they come into contact with people who work in local and national services, and in the workplace. It is therefore possible that the social bridges and social links in Ager and Strang's framework are in fact linked. Negative feeling in one could relate to negative feeling in another.

Spicer (2008:493) argues that these negative attitudes reflect the levels of integration and inclusion experienced by refugees and asylum seekers. He points to differences however, in the experiences of this exclusion between these two groups. For example, the exclusion of refugees seeking asylum, is much more acute than that experienced by those granted permission to remain in the UK because their rights (entitlements to welfare services and their ability to determine where they live) are increasingly undermined by government policy. This situation, he argues is compounded by the public's negative attitude towards refugees and asylum seekers that is reproduced in the media.

The objectifying of an inter-subjective concept

The second limitation of Ager and Strang's (2008) framework is that it seeks to objectify the concept of integration and this is may not be an effective way of understanding the process of integration within the lives of refugees. Instead, individual perceptions of integration may provide greater insights into the lives of refugees. As Weber argues, "it is the task of sociology to reduce... concepts to 'understandable' action, that is, without exception, to the actions of participating *individual men*" [*emphasis added*] (Gerth and Wright Mills, 1991:55).

Ager and Strang (2008) gathered the viewpoints of 29 refugees, and implied that these opinions correspond to what other refugees perceive integration to mean. However, subjective viewpoints are impossible to generalise and Ager and Strang's (2008) attempt to do so treats refugees as one hegemonic group, overlooking the vast array of cultures, experiences and expectations within groups of people who are refugees. Ager and Strang (2008) overlook subjective the experiences of refugees and disregard them as unimportant to the experience of integration.

Models of integration that comprise of 'categorical markers' or a 'once-for-all typology of people', such as Ager and Strang's (2008), create an account of social reality that is actually 'tidier than life', according to Wallman (1986). Ager and Strang (2008) as other models alike, fail to explore the question of 'whether, when and how far the actor identifies with those who share the same categorical status is never proposed. (Wallman,1986:233-4). Montgomery argues that how refugees feel about their experiences is just as

important an indicator of integration, as objective indicators such as employment, income and socio-economic mobility (Montgomery,1996). Ager and Strang (2008) fail to explore these subjective indicators and thus do not create a comprehensive account of the experience of integration.

Similarly Korac (2003) identified subjective factors that affect integration. "Personal satisfaction and assessment of integration success goes beyond simple, measurable, indicators, such as individual occupational mobility or economic status". It includes subjective factors, like the quality and strength of social links with the established community for example (Korac, 2003:63). These factors cannot be calculated and measured, nor can they be objectified to fit into some kind of framework. Ager and Strang's (2008) attempt to objectify all aspects of the experience of integration serves to overlook these vital subjective elements.

Wallman (1979) argues that a social boundary has two kinds of meaning, structural or organizational and subjective. In the case of refugees, although objectively, once refugees are granted citizenship status they are the same as other members of society, inequality remains. Objective accounts of integration fail to explain this. Wallman suggests that a social boundary concerns the organization of society *as well as* the organization of experience, "both the difference and the *sense* of difference count" (Wallman, 1979: 7)

Since attempts to objectify the concept of integration have resulted in 'top down' definitions of integration (Korac,2003). In order to understand what

integration means to refugees themselves, a new approach would be more valuable. A life course approach would be better suited to the study of successful and unsuccessful integration, since this allows a greater understanding of how integration sits in the wider context of peoples' lives.

A life course approach

Since Ager and Strang (2008) deem 'citizenship and rights' as the foundation on which all integration must take place they imply that discussions of integration should start once refugees are granted citizenship status. By beginning at this point, they present integration as a concept separate to refugees' pasts and so they overlook refugee's prior experiences, both in their home country, and during the asylum process. This severely limits the framework's ability to represent successful integration because as Elder (1994:5) put it, "The later years... cannot be understood in depth without knowledge to the prior life course". These sentiments are specifically relevant to studies of refugees as Castles (2007:352) argues, "since international migration, by definition, involves the crossing of national borders," he states, "one could argue that it has always been necessary to take an international perspective". Since refugees' experiences in their home country are the reason why they have arrived in the UK, it seems logical that these experiences are significant enough to influence refugees' lives here.

There are a variety of implications of refugees' experiences in their home country for integration. Logically speaking, past experiences can affect every aspect of Ager and Strang's framework. Past experiences, especially if these

were traumatic could affect people's health and their education and employment in their home country. People's health, will affect refugees' ability to form social bridges, social bonds and social links and could affect individuals' capability of learning the host communities language and a bit about their culture and mental health problems are could affect how safe and secure individuals feel. Previous employment history is likely to affect current employment options, and the employment refugees are able to undertake, could affect the standard of housing people can afford. Previous educational attainment is also likely to influence refugees' employment opportunities, and their ability to learn the host community's language and culture and could also affect children's integration into school. Past experiences also play a vital role in whether or not refugees are granted citizenship status. When these factors are considered, together with a consideration of cultural factors, the concept of integration shifts from an objective understanding, to an understanding that the process of integration is an inter-subjective, multi-dynamic process.

Some of these themes are now explored in more detail.

Ager and Strang's framework explores the issue of health by focusing singularly on refugees access and use of healthcare services. It almost completely overlooks the importance of good health to successful integration, with the only reference being, "good health was widely seen as an important resource for active engagement" (Ager and Strang 2008:172). It is important however, that this is explored further because evidence suggests that the health of refugees declines within their first few years in the UK

(Popadopoulos et al. 2004:69). Popadopoulos et al's (2004:61) participants noted that in itself, "adapting to British culture was... a cause of stress, depression and poor health".

Stress levels are incredibly important to integration. Berry and Kim (1988) link integration to stress levels, arguing that the highest levels of stress correspond to lowest levels of integration. High levels of stress relate to poor mental and physical health, which in turn affect aspects of refugees integration.

Trauma has obvious impacts on individuals' mental and physical health. Interestingly, Hauff and Vaglum (1993) argue that war trauma also has an affect on refugee's integration into the labour market. This is because of the effects of poor mental health on people's ability to work, but also because war trauma was found to influence people's motivation. They found that refugees who had experienced war trauma to seek immediate economic security and goal attainment, rather than risking economic insecurity by enrolling in further education for example.

Ager and Strang do not take culture and refugees' practices in their home countries into account. Ill health and its remedies are culturally specific. Papadopoulos et al. (2004:68) note that the understanding of mental health problems among Ethiopian refugees differs from that of the western medical model, for example some participants attributed 'madness' to supernatural forces. In cases of 'madness', drinking and bathing in holy water and prayer

are the cures as opposed to psychiatric treatment. While Ager and Strang's framework of integration mentions cultural perceptions of health care delivery in areas such as these, an understanding requires that we ask whether full integration into the western health service is desirable. Perhaps attention should be paid to incorporation; incorporation of other cultural values and practices into the health service, rather than emphasising that people should integrate into the western medical model and practice.

Ager and Strang themselves note that many employers do not recognise refugees' qualifications and previous work experience and many refugees have difficulty producing proof of their qualifications. Many refugees are in a state of under employment, working at a level below their education and potential.

Ager and Strang focus purely on refugees who have been granted citizenship and situate 'citizenship and rights' at the foundation of the framework, as the basis on which all other aspects of integration must take place. However, through living in, and interacting with the community around them, attending school and making links with other social services, refugees may start the process of integration before they are granted citizenship status. They are likely to acquire knowledge of British language and culture, they will fulfil Ager and Strang's 'Markers and Means' level of integration (apart from the employment aspect), and through interacting with resident communities they may be making social connections across all three categories. By placing 'citizenship and rights' as the foundation of integration, Ager and Strang

undermine the experiences of asylum seeking refugees and over-simplify the process of integration.

Despite Ager and Strang's arguments about the importance of family networks and connections with like-ethnic groups, there is some evidence that these social links are declining. Collyer (2005:714) states that "solidarity is generally now much weaker... New measures of post-entry control have increased the level of support required by new migrants and prolonged the level of time for which that support may be required... support is now much less forthcoming". An understanding of refugees lives as a whole, during the asylum process, when they are in need of the support from friends, and also once they are in a position to offer support to friends and acquaintances on arrival would help explain, as Collyer does, peoples' dilemmas. This would further an understanding of the integration process.

Ager and Strang focus on the importance of cultural bonds but it may be possible that social bonds based on other likenesses are very important to integration. Kuntsman (2009) exemplifies this point argues that for gay immigrants in Israel, anti-homophobic organising was seen as important for establishing a home and belonging in Israel. Kuntsman (2009:134) further argues, "most of migration research addressed national and ethnic collectives as exclusively heterosexual." Ager and Strang, like others, overlook disparities between individual refugees such as sexuality, health, wealth, etc. This is another example of where a life course approach could provide greater understanding because it allows the exploration of all aspects of people's

lives, which can lead to a greater understanding of people's motivations on a wider level.

Kuntsman's (2009) study highlights the importance of taking a life course approach – he got to know his participants and this resulted in him finding that social bonds based on sexuality were more important for this group, than their cultural bonds.

This research aims to explore how these three factors, the political, social, and economic; the life course; and the inter-subjective nature of integration may add greater clarity to understanding refugees' experiences and aims to offer a purposeful critique and development of a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of integration.

Research Method

Aims of the Study

Three aims of this study were identified:

- 1) To investigate whether integration is linked to political, social and economic factors.
- 2) To explore the possibility that a life-course approach would lead to a greater understanding of refugees' integration.
- 3) To examine whether integration is as objective as Ager and Strang (2008) deem it to be.

The nature of this research lends itself to an interpretive approach and qualitative methods if enquiry and analysis were used, which allowed the in-depth exploration of participants' thoughts and experiences.

Study Sample

Participants

It was decided that collecting data predominantly from people who work with refugees would be beneficial to this research. From their knowledge and expertise, they drew upon both examples of refugees' experiences and general themes and issues that arise for the refugees they have come into contact with. In this way, knowledge of refugees' experiences is passed from the refugees themselves, to the interviewees and then to the researcher.

There are limitations with this approach. As knowledge is relayed, it is probable that the participants used different words and phrases to describe these experiences and this, to a small extent could undermine the validity of this information. Overall, the approach enriched the data with the benefit of professional expertise that has been generated during years of experience of working in the system with refugee groups. This expertise is invaluable to this research and such knowledge would have been difficult, to acquire by simply interviewing refugees themselves. It is also unlikely that I would have been able to obtain a sample of refugees large enough to generate the diversity of examples and experiences that the participants who worked with refugees were able to share. Even if it was possible to obtain this sample, time restrictions and financial limitations would have made research on this scale impossible.

A refugee also agreed to take part in the study. Information gathered from this participant was used alongside the information given by other participants. Importantly, this information helped to verify the perceptions of the other participants, who were not refugees themselves and provided a first hand account of a refugee's experience of integration.

Recruitment

Snowball sampling was the predominant method for recruiting a sample of participants to take part in this research. This technique was adopted for several reasons. Firstly, and most importantly, "the target sample members

are involved in some kind of network with others who share the characteristics of interest”, and this situation, is ideally suited to Snowball sampling (Arber, 2001:63). For the purposes of this research, focus was on obtaining a sample from a very specific group of people: refugees and people who work with refugees and therefore snowball sampling was necessary in order to obtain a sample from this group of people. Secondly, it is important to establish trust between researchers and participants; a trust in that the research aims would not seek to undermine the work of the individuals who work with refugees, and the refugee themselves. As “the snowballing technique involves personal recommendations that vouch for the legitimacy of the researcher” this technique allowed for this trust to be established (Arber, 2001:63). Finally, it was difficult to obtain a list of possible participants from within this specific group of people to use as an appropriate sampling frame and this drastically limited the sampling options.

Contact was made, with people who knew others who worked with refugees. From these initial contacts, each found one person who worked with refugees who were willing to participate. One of these contacts was able to get in touch with two more willing participants. The overall sample participants comprised of one male refugee seeking asylum and three people who work with refugees.

The main limitation for this sampling technique is that it did not provide a large sample, and some critics may argue that this therefore reduces its representativeness, and the reliability of the findings. However, the size of the

sample is of little importance to the aims of this study. As Arber (2001:61) puts it, “where the researcher’s aim is to generate theory and a wider understanding of social processes or social actions, the representativeness of the sample may be of less importance and the best sampling strategy is often focused of judgemental sampling”

Furthermore, as Korac (2003:54) notes, a small sample is enough to be “*demonstrative* of the complexity of the process of integration and of the problems of how to facilitate it”.

A ‘Theoretical Sampling’ technique was used alongside snowball sampling. It is a technique developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), whereby once ‘theoretical saturation’ was reached, the sampling stopped. This was an efficient method, an important consideration given the time constraints and still allowed evidence to be gathered that demonstrates the complexity of integration.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather qualitative data (see appendix 1 and 2). The flexibility of this approach allowed the participants to guide the discussions to some extent, whilst also covering the themes and questions that are important for investigating the research questions. Although this method does not allow for strict replication of the data collection process, it was absolutely invaluable since it helped to uncover themes, which were not considered prior to the interviews. These themes, which will be explored in

the next chapter, make up a fundamental aspect of the findings; really highlighting how idyllic this method was for these research aims.

This style of interviewing has been deemed a useful method for interviewing people who are refugees. Korac (2003) argues, "Qualitative interviewing is an important way of learning from refugees because it permits fuller expression of their experiences in their own terms". He further states that such interview style is necessary for gaining subjective insights into integration. Also, Robinson (1998: 122) argues, that this method is a useful one for studying integration, "since integration is individualized, contested and contextual it requires qualitative methodologies which allow the voices of respondents to be heard in an unadulterated form".

The interview schedule for the Refugee (appendix 2) was different to that used with the rest of the sample. This is so that a life course approach could be taken during this interview, where as such an approach would have been inappropriate during the interviews with participants who were not refugees. A Life History method was undertaken, where during the interview, the refugee was asked to create a time line of his life. As Faraday and Plummer (1979:776) note, this documents "the inner experience of individuals, how they interpret, understand, and define the world around them". This is a really valuable approach. "Its unambiguous emphasis on the point of view of the life in question and a clear commitment to the processual aspects of social life, showing how events unfold and interrelate in people's lives" (Bryman, 2001:316) was useful in testing the utility of a life course approach for understanding the integration of refugees. Themes that may influence

integration, both in Ager and Strang's (2008) framework, were also discussed so that the concept of integration could be understood further.

The Analysis

All four interviews were tape-recorded using a Dictaphone. Due to time restrictions and financial limitations, the tapes were not fully transcribed; instead an alternative analysis was undertaken. The recordings of the interviews were listened to and then written down in note form. When key issues arose, these sections were noted down word for word, so that these quotes could be used in the write-up. The limitation of this method is that because some sections of the interview were not transcribed fully, an analysis of these notes alone would not be based on the actual phrases of the interviewees. However, to compensate for this the timer on the Dictaphone was started as the interview commenced, and the times were written in the margin alongside the notes at approximately 3-minute intervals. This allowed the tape to be fast-forwarded to the appropriate place should exact phrasing be required for a particular section. Once the notes were completed, thematic analysis began where different themes or hypotheses were identified, grouped, and compared. Overall, this proved an effective way of analysing that data and generating themes.

Ethical Considerations

The first ethical consideration, which is described by Bulmer (2001:49) as "a linchpin of ethical behaviour in research", was the need to gain informed consent from the interviewees. The interviewees each received an

information sheet (see appendix 3), outlining the nature of the research. The interviewer then asked them whether they were happy to continue to participate. After they consented to do so, the interview was conducted.

The anonymity of the participants was safeguarded by omitting the names of the participants throughout the write up of the research. In order to distinguish between interviewees' responses, their identities were coded. 'R' refers to the interviewee who is a refugee, and the letters 'A', 'B', and 'C' were allocated at random to the interviewees who work with refugees. Furthermore, any references to individual's identities during the interviews were not published with the findings, and the tapes of the interviews are to be destroyed on the completion of the study. The anonymity of the participant's workplaces was also ensured, so that any consequences of the findings cannot be traced to any of the organisations.

To try to ensure that interviewees did not feel obliged to answer questions that may have been distressing, the information sheet given to the interviewees prior to the interview informed the participants that they could refuse to answer any of the questions posed.

Interviewees viewpoints are valued and respected, a portrayal of this was shown during the interview itself, since the interviewer, accepted, acknowledged and supported the responses of the interviewees. Each participant will also receive a copy of this dissertation, so that they may see the enormous value of their contributions.

Findings

The interviews raised some incredibly interesting issues regarding Ager and Strang's (2008) approach to the concept of integration. This next section will document these issues before moving on to discuss the implications of the findings on more detail in the following chapter. The three major hypotheses were:

- 1) Refugees' ability to integrate is linked to political, social and economic factors.
- 2) A life course approach would lead to a greater understanding of refugees' integration.
- 3) The concept of integration is impossible to objectify.

The interviews generated evidence supporting these hypotheses and also uncovered other factors, which need to be explored when attempting to understand refugees' integration.

The importance of Political, Social and Economic Factors

Interviewees' responses demonstrated the complete interconnectedness of political, social and economic factors to integration.

Successful or unsuccessful integration is itself intertwined with political social and economic factors. It is difficult to fathom how Ager and Strang (2008) justify separating integration from political, social and economic factors since the interviews uncovered numerous connections.

Perhaps the most discussed, connection was that between poverty and integration. One of the most prominent themes, where all but one interviewee specified, was the impact of social deprivation in refugee's host communities. Two interviewees stated that refugee's relationships with the local community are an important component of successful integration, with interviewee B stating,

"It's [integration]... about people settling into the communities... building relationships with people in the community".

Ager and Strang's (2008) framework stops at this point, it fails to explore the fact that refugees who are housed in communities (as opposed to detention centres) are placed in socially deprived areas. They disregard the vital role that political, social and economic factors play in these communities and in the successful integration of refugees into them.

Three participants described the difficulties these areas posed for successful integration. Social deprivation was seen to fuel victimization. R described the discrimination that he and his family had suffered,

"they used to play football and smash our windows...it was like a nightmare because you feel you are being victimized".

During further discussion, R explained this victimization by stating,

"they didn't have any awareness of people coming into the country... it's actually a socially deprived area... so we have to understand that".

A also described the victimization experienced in socially deprived areas:

“They encounter racism because they’re placed in areas... where there are disaffected youth who are unemployed... they suffer racist abuse varying from slogans like ‘paki bastard’... being shouted at them... to stones being thrown at windows... to sheds at the bottom of the garden being set on fire... I come across all sorts of things like this”.

With these sorts of experiences in mind, it is perhaps unsurprising that interviewee C explained that many refugees do not want to be integrated into socially deprived areas.

“They don’t particularly want to be integrated, into what? Living next door to somebody who’s got a really acute drug problem? No. They don’t want to be integrated into that.”

A further problem these socially deprived areas pose for successful integration is that there are few services that allow refugees to get to know other members of the community. R states,

“there’s nothing really there for them, so that means there’s no community centre... there’s no... youth groups”.

While it is the *social* consequences of *economic* disadvantage that creates difficulties for integration, refugees are placed into areas as a consequence of *political* factors. C explained that before the introduction of forced dispersal, refugees...

“would go to where they wanted to go to, which would usually be a place where they knew there were family members, or friends, they knew their language was spoken, they knew there was some indication that... people like them from their kinds of communities were there, there’d be some food that they’d recognise.”

C continues,

“In 2000, that all changed... that’s very significant... what’s happened is that the policies changed so that the... avenues for relatively seamless transition have been locked”.

This evidence is testament to the fact that politics and integration is inextricably linked. Here, it’s government policies that have created these situations that make it difficult and undesirable to successfully integrate. C depicts the absurdity of the situation:

“Suddenly you think, oh, what’s going to happen if I put a small, eighteen year old, Afghan boy, into a single persons flat, on an estate where the local people have been waiting for repairs for the last five years? Lets see how well they integrate!”

It is not only the consequences of living in a poor neighbourhood, that are damaging to successful integration, but the poverty that refugees experience themselves also has a significant impact in their ability to integrate. C explains,

“It’s so foundational, it’s so fundamental for all aspects of the experience” and later reasserts, “it’s just so interconnected. It’s just absolutely *the* most important thing”.

All three interviewees, who work with refugees, described how poverty significantly affects people’s mobility, because they are reliant on public transport. This has a massive affect on people’s ability to integrate; B stated,

“It can be a barrier... to being a little more mobile”

A stated,

“they cant travel about, they’re stuck in the city”

C stated,

“your movements, your actual ability to move from a to b is so constrained”.

C also identified another affect poverty has on people's integration.

"Your ability to communicate with people... is also constrained because you don't have the money for a mobile phone, you don't have a landline...".

The situation described is one where people cannot travel, they cannot contact people easily, and in the communities in which they live they experience victimisation, and have little means of meeting members of the community if they wished. It is difficult to see where Ager and Strang's (2008) framework fits into this situation. By developing a framework that does not consider political, social, and economic factors, Ager and Strang (2008) create something that is near enough impossible for refugees to fulfil.

C connects the poverty refugees themselves experience, to the poverty in the area they live,

"...you're in an environment where the overall majority of people are also extremely poor, so it's not like you've got a ready source of bail out".

Again, this poverty was identified as a consequence of government policies, with C arguing,

"people inside the system are supposed to live on 70% of income support. Now why, if there's a scientifically calculated minimum amount that... is required for somebody to survive... why does the fact that they are seeking asylum justify reducing that by 30%?"

Other studies have also made links between refugees' poverty and government policies. Sales (2005: 446) for example, argues that asylum seekers when asylum seekers were removed from mainstream welfare

benefits they became poorer, and more visible, and thus targets for stigmatisation. Julia Ravenscroft, press officer for Refugee Action in Manchester also noted the connection, when stating, with regards to part of the *Asylum and Immigration Act 2004*, that removed support of asylum seeking families that have lost their claim for asylum, 'Parents are having to choose between homelessness... in the UK or returning to a country where they fear for their lives' (Ward and Bowcroft, 2005:14).

The interviewees agreed that the political climate, in particular the anti-asylum seeker feeling, has a massive impact on refugees' integration. Interviewee B stated that there's,

"so much hostility and people not understanding and thinking that they've just come to steal off the government".

B goes on to describe how many refugees feel they have to prove themselves against these negative stereotypes. Racism is very much connected to poverty, with nearly all the interviewees describing racism in the context of social deprivation. C furthers this argument, by not only linking social deprivation in refugees' local areas to racism, but also argues that racism is, in this case linked to the wider economic climate. They state

"you've got a situation where people who are physically different... are put into areas to live and those areas themselves are already resource poor... (and there's been no attempt to explain... the global dimension of why people are ending up on your street)... combined with the legitimacy that's being extended to salute the flag is a very very dangerous combination. When you put that inside of an environment where you've got an economic recession, you're in a kind of tinder box situation. When you put that reality... with an

ideology that says... it's OK to be racist, with an economic recession and... that's exactly the combination historically that resulted in the rise of fascism in the 1930s".

Negative media images of asylum seeking refugees were identified by all participants as adding to racism and xenophobia. Interviewee C describes how these media reports affect what people think, since refugees are not allowed to work there is little opportunity for the stereotypes generated by the media to be quashed:

“it's in practice that people get disinvested in caricatures... and the workplace is the key place to do that”

- the workplace was seen as a key place of integration. In fact, all participants saw having employment as beneficial to integration. When asked to describe an example of successful integration, parts of A and B's examples described employment as a means of meeting members of the host community and R also deemed employment to be important.

C describes, how the fact that government policy does not allow asylum seekers to work, “it's absolutely foundational and it's completely instrumental and utterly deliberate”, because, C argues, xenophobia has been legitimated by government policies. The government, with the help of the media have created an ideology, where they've “out righted the right on making racism acceptable” (interviewee C). C explains,

“It veers between ‘asylum seekers eat the queen's swans’... to ‘British jobs for British workers’... back to all Muslims are terrorists... this is all the ideology.”

The media and the government were seen to be linked, with interviewee C noting that one of the first people into ten Downing Street when Blair took power was Rupert Murdoch and also stating that journalists are finding it increasingly difficult to get coverage on the plight of refugees in the UK.

Racism was seen to be influenced by government policy, either because dispersal policies mean that refugees are “placed in areas... where... they suffer racist abuse” (interviewee A), a sentiment echoed by R and C. Or because government policies that take away refugees’ right to work reduces the places where these negative stereotypes can be squashed. And also, because the government have legitimated racism, making it...

“acceptable to talk in racist terms about the nature of the problems in society” (interviewee C).

The importance of Physical Place

The final finding of this research is the importance of physical space in understanding integration. This is a factor raised specifically by one interviewee, but physical space was discussed in some form throughout all of the interviews. Interviewee C explained,

“Whatever kind of integration may or may not be going on, it’s going on in real time and in real physical space. It’s not about a collection of abstract ideas from which we can say, ‘this person is integrated, or that person is integrated’... they have to actually be physically situated.”

Interviewees R, A, and B discussed the importance of the workplace as a physical space vital for successful integration. Other spaces that were

discussed were, schools, waiting rooms, community organisations, festivals and the street.

The importance of 'place' is a critical finding, because it is something that many theorists have not considered in relation to integration. Urry (2004:3) argues that space and place have been widely overlooked in Sociology generally. However, the concept of space, does feature in Giddens' work. He states,

“understanding how activities are distributed in time and space is fundamental to analysing encounters, and also to understanding social life in general. All interaction is situated – it occurs in a particular place and has a specific duration in time” (2006:147).

Since successful integration requires interaction, physical space should be central to any framework of integration.

Place can aid the analysis of the implications of government policies of the asylum procedure and refugees' citizenship rights generally. While government rhetoric promotes integration, government policies seek to restrict the physical place in which integration can take place. By restricting employment rights, for example refugees lose the workplace as a setting for integration. Furthermore, government policies that have reduced refugees' eligibility for some benefits altogether and that have reduced other benefits by 30%, keep refugees in a state of poverty. So, not only are refugees seeking asylum unable to interact with people in a workplace, they are also unable to partake in many leisure activities. Forced Dispersion restricts the

amount of time refugees can spend in one neighbourhood, and detention centres remove refugees from all physical places, which would enable interaction and integration with the host community.

Notions of place could frame discussions over integration because it can incorporate the political, social and economic element and it is much more conducive to an understanding of the inter-subjective nature of the concept of integration.

Taking a Life-course approach

The utility of a life course approach for studying refugees' integration was explored through two lines of enquiry. Firstly, a life course approach was undertaken during the interview with R. Secondly, the interviews with A, B and C explored the effects of different aspects of individual's lives on integration. Both approaches yielded useful results.

Using a life course approach in the form of a timeline of R's life proved extremely useful because it allowed the exploration of past and present experiences, which proved invaluable in promoting the comparison between life in Zimbabwe and life in the UK. An example of this direct comparison was made in relation to integration. R talked about cultural differences, stating that if you want to "get on" in the UK you have to move quite fast. It is therefore apparent that the culture of the home country is important to integration.

"I matured much faster... because in UK... you have to be really independent to get on in UK and you can't really rely on a lot of... I

mean you can rely on your family but they've also got commitments, whereas... in Zimbabwe, the commitments aren't that demanding, because its kind of a laid back life there, whereas here everything's like really fast, everything moves fast and if you can't keep up... you loose out".

By noting the comparison between cultures, R also notes the adaptation that had to follow in order for him to 'get on' in the UK, to not 'lose out'. These narratives and the comparisons made within them is something Ager and Strang's (2008) framework lacks. Their framework embodies what C describes as "bad science". C asks,

"How can it be good science to separate their perspectives and experiences from your exploration of what it is?"

While, Ager and Strang (2008) ask of refugees' insights to inform their work, they did not use a life course approach and so refugees' past experiences were not explored.

The Life course approach during the interview with R offered proved of huge explanatory value. Discussing educational background explained how R had the qualifications necessary to apply for degree courses, and to take up management level positions in employment. Discussing the course of R's life also uncovered the importance of support from one's family for both people's arrival and integration. In R's case, a family member already resident in the UK sponsored R and his family for a holiday visa to visit, so they were able to come to the UK in the first place. Subsequently, financial support from R's family will enable R to do a degree, which will mean he will be able to "get on" and integrate into the UK. The support of R's family also helped the integration process, because they offered advice on how to "get on", for

instance, that R had to either get a job, or got to college and study in order to be successful.

During the second phase of testing the life course approach, interviewees A, B and C repeatedly described issues and themes, which suggest that having an understanding of people's lives and experiences is vital to understanding refugees' experiences of integration.

With regards to the effect that prior experiences can have on refugees integration C stated,

“it's human to have your behaviour determined by prior experiences... to act according to what you know”.

Since integration is a process that rests entirely on people behaviour, it logically follows that an understanding of these influential experiences would generate a greater understanding of refugees' integration.

R states that the level of security people feel in their community is important because of refugees' prior experiences, they have come to find a safe place.

Other interviewees shared this idea, C explains,

“when people have survived what people have survived, what they're looking for is stability”.

R notes,

“If you don't feel safe in your community then you're better off where you came from, with people who know you”.

R also describes, the effects of coming from a country where they have not been safe, to coming to the UK and experiencing victimization. He notes,

People have been “kept captured, they've been imprisoned... then they come to this country... it's even worse because... everybody's victimizing

them... If it's happening to them there and they come here, they don't expect it to happen to them here... it really affects their settlement here because... they start thinking that, 'Oh... everywhere is like that'".

B made the same point,

"It must be hard coming from countries where they've experienced so much hostility and then coming over here, and hoping that it will be a safe place and experiencing so much hostility... when they're just trying to find a safe place".

A described how,

"If they've... had bad experiences like... torture... their human rights have been violated... we get people who have been raped, tortured etc... it's going to make them more fearful anyway, they would be in their own country... so that's going to make it harder for them to adapt to British society."

This implies, that these experiences are likely to make people fearful, not just in this country, but wherever they are. While integration has been depicted as at the forefront of refugees' lives, this suggests that this could be an inaccurate assumption.

C noted the familial aspect of integration,

"they're looking for an opportunity to develop in their lives and an opportunity to develop for their families as well, it's not just an individual pursuit. Quite often people come... with children. Or, they've come as the... child that's... got out, with the whole family scene at home".

Individual integration, as C depicts may not be the most important factor in their lives. C continues,

“do people want to integrate? Do people want to? Or do they actually want to be able to go home, because granny is there, and mother is there, and girlfriend is there”.

This comment is an extremely important one because it undermines the entire assumption that refugees should want to integrate.

The effects of government asylum policies also have relevance to the life course approach. Where Ager and Strang (2008) begin to document integration is once people have been granted citizenship, they overlook any experiences that refugees may have had during the asylum process. A life course approach is therefore useful because it does not place limitations on the time scale under discussion. A life course approach is useful in generating an understanding of how integration may be effected by the time when refugees are claiming asylum. C notes that the asylum process affects people even after they have been granted citizenship or leave to remain,

“after you’ve had years of being told you cant be a fully functioning member of society to suddenly getting told that you’re allowed to be. You’re still carrying all that with you”.

B directly noted that integration is difficult without being fully accepted by the government during the asylum process. With particular reference to the dispersal policy, B stated, that people can be integrated into the community but don’t know whether one day they’ll just have to up and leave. B continues,

“a lot of people must spend years with that insecurity and I think that must be a big barrier to integration”.

The Importance of Integration as an inter-subjective concept

Ager and Strang's (2008) framework is an attempt to objectify the process of integration. Through the interviews however, this attempt was ridiculed. C stated,

“One person's integration is another person's exclusion, one person's integration is another person's suffocation, one person's integration is another persons... just living their life, without the label thank you very much”.

While C seemed to feel most strongly about one's inability to objectify the concept of integration, A though less forceful in his depiction, shared the belief that integration may not mean the same thing to different people. Interviewee A talked about gender roles in different cultures, in particular the role of many Pakistani women in the home and described how the role of women in traditional Pakistani culture may not seem like that which could facilitate the integration Ager and Strang (2008) depict. A also states that ideas of integration “must vary from nation to nation”. In some ways, this view echoes Ager and Strang's (2008:173-174) notion that “nationhood and citizenship shape core understandings of the rights accorded, and responsibilities expected, of refugees” but A argues that it is not only the host country's perception that is important, but also the perceptions of the refugees home country. This evidence suggests that culture is of massive importance here and this is further evidence that a life course approach would be of particular value to understanding refugees' integration.

While the inter-subjective nature of integration was raised by only one interviewee, it is of such significance to this research because it brings all the components of this discussion together. Interviewee C stated,

“it’s about viewing the phenomenon through the lens, what you see is determined by the light... if you look in a mirror, your face will look quite different if your lit from that side, as opposed to if your lit from...[the other side]... So I think the refraction of reality that we see on these phenomenon’s... is a useful, and much more precise way of thinking about... the concept”.

What this suggests is, that in order to understand what is happening, the researcher has to take a step back, and acknowledge that no concept can be objective. This interpretation of reality corresponds to Volosinov’s (1986:9) argument that “any ideological product...” in this case, the concept of integration, “reflects and refracts other reality outside itself. Everything ideological possesses *meaning*: it represents, depicts or stands for something lying outside itself”. In this way, the concept of integration embodies far more than the idea of refugees becoming part of society.

The concept was seen to embody political ideals. Interviewee C identified integration as a political construct, as a relatively new concept that it has recently been brought forward - “it wasn’t there pre-9/11”. Integration as a policy objective and subsequent focus of academia has arisen due to the political climate and because of these political origins, it can be far from objective. C believes,

“You’ve got to ask, why is it on the table in the first place?”

C describes,

“the dominant meaning of integration, as in the powers that be... what they want integration to mean, is demonstrable proof of your validity as a British citizen”.

C continues to explain that to be seen to be integrated, individuals must show...

“acquiescence and agreement, with everything that the dominant... groups inside society think need to happen. So arguably, if you were dissatisfied with something that was happening – maybe in your workplace, or in your school, or... on your street - and you decided to resist that, then that could well become interpreted as an indicator of your failure to integrate”.

This idea is shared by Korac (2003:56) as he presents the similar sentiments of one of his participants.

“I do what I am told to do, and everything is going according to ‘integration’ rules that we ‘refugees’ have to follow. We didn’t have to integrate really, you see, we just had to do what we were told.” (Korac, 2003:56)

Another of Korac’s (2003:55) participants explained:

“Each and every one of us has to adjust the way they see fit, that is, you have to accept their standards, regardless of whether you like them or not. It’s a kind of indirect pressure to adjust, but it’s all-embracing, it’s present at the professional and personal level. That’s an enormous pressure.”

Korac (3003:62) further notes that refugees are required to conform to measures that are supposed to promote integration that “often do not

correspond to their needs and integration goals” because of the lack of power and ‘voice’ in the process of integration.

Notion of power is therefore a vital one in relation to integration. Integration can be seen as an oppressive tool, used by these “dominant groups” to control, in very subtle ways, how refugees behave. Through attempting to objectify the concept of integration, Ager and Strang (2008) overlook the important political undertones that have created this concept in the first place and in doing so, they uphold the dominant values in society. An understanding of these dominant values is vital if one is to understand the real implications of Ager and Strang’s (2008) notion of ‘successful integration’.

Conclusion

This research has highlighted some of the difficulties with the concept of integration itself, the way it has been reflected in government policies and the practical limitations to achieving it.

The study has also demonstrated that integrating into the host society should not be seen as the only concern refugees have. The best way of understanding refugees' integration, is to explore integration in the context of a wider process of settling which itself should be explored in the context of people's lives. Using the concept of settling, allows for a more subjective understanding of refugees' lives in the UK, and limits assumptions about whether people want to remain in the UK indefinitely or whether they want to be able to go home. A life-course approach would lead to a better understanding of refugee's lives because it allows for more in-depth understanding of individual's subjective meanings and motivations. The life-course approach is incredibly underused; Bryman, (2001:316) documents only 26 life-course studies. Although this is said very often, more research into the lives of refugees that takes on a life course approach is needed in order to gain deeper insights into the complexities of refugees' lives.

Another topic in desperate need of further research generally, and especially with regards to refugees' integration, is Physical Space. It is quite incredible that Physical Space has not been the focus of greater sociological study since it is the physical context in which all social interaction takes place. With

regards to the integration of refugees', the findings suggest that an understanding of physical place is vital if one is to understand exactly how people are to integrate, because without physical space, there can be no integration. By exploring integration through its physical context, a deeper understanding is generated as to exactly where government policies fail in their objective of integration.

Although Ager and Strang (2008) state that their attempt is not to map political, economic and institutional factors that influence integration, in taking this approach they overlook the complete interconnection of these factors. By separating the political, social and economic factors Ager and Strang (2008) cannot argue that their framework corresponds to what integration means for those involved. Furthermore, an approach that does not consider these variables is of little use because in not considering the obstacles to integration, it does not consider how to overcome them and how best to facilitate integration. It is all very well explaining what integration is, but it is only useful if the obstacles to fulfilling this definition are explored as well, so that it is clear how people can successfully integrate.

By ignoring the obstacles to integration, Ager and Strang (2008) overlook government policies that actively create political, social and economic obstacles. It is therefore of no surprise that Ager and Strang state that their framework has been used to formulate national and regional policy (Home Office 2005; Welsh Assembly Government 2006; WMSPARS 2006) because it allows integration to be discussed superficially, bypassing discussions that

would implicate government policies in promoting exclusionary practices, (for example the dispersal policy) that have been imposed in the name of integration. The framework prompts discussions that allow the real nature of this concept to be avoided.

At its outset, this research took for granted the concept of integration as an important objective for promoting social harmony and the peaceful coexistence of a diversity of cultures. However, as the research progressed, it became more and more difficult to view the concept of integration in this positive light. The concept now seems ethnocentric, a political construct enacted through top-down measures that has served to segregate refugees rather than integrate them. The very notion of integration itself gives the perception that one culture or society is superior to another and the people of the lesser culture should be helped to integrate into ours.

While acknowledging the negative impacts of ghettoization, and admiring the aim of the concept of integration that seeks to avoid these disadvantages, the dispersal policies that seeks to avoid these disadvantages by placing refugees in areas where there are few ethnic minority groups, has only served to increase antagonism, and disallows the support the former communities provided newcomers.

The fact that the concept of integration has been brought to the fore by the government since 9/11 is significant here. It cannot be seen as a coincidence that these 'integration' measures, which serve to isolate new members of

society who may not share 'British values', have arisen at a time when the 'War On Terror' aims to divide and persecute those who do not share 'western values' on the international level.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Interview Schedule – Workers

- Defining Integration

Whats your understanding of the word integration in the context of refugees settling in this country?

Write down their definition

Do you consider integration a positive concept, a negative concept, or both positive and negative?

- Aspects of Integration

Can you describe an example of where you think a refugee, has successfully integrated?

Tick off aspects of framework and their definition

Summarise the themes (from the framework and their definition) that they come up with.

Which do you think the most significant aspect?

Which was the least significant aspect?

Can you describe an example of where you think a refugee, has struggled with integration?

Tick off aspects of framework and their definition

*Summarise the themes (from the framework and their definition)
that they come up with*

Which was the most significant aspect?

Which was the least significant aspect?

How common are these examples? How do they sit with your wider case load?

- “Really common”

- “Some differences” – how are these different?

• Follow up questions...

Do you think peoples experiences before coming to the UK impact of integration?

Do you think ill health has an affect of integration?

Dou you think Poverty impacts upon integration?

Does not being able to work and claim some welfare benefits, whilst seeking impact upon integration? (Ask about before and after asylum status granted).

Do you think the legal processing of the asylum procedure affect integration

Do you think wider government policies affect integration?

Do you think Racism affects integration?

Do you think negative comments in the media affect integration?

Do you think integration is a culturally relative concept?

- Conclusion

We've discussed issues around integration and you've described some examples and so on, I just want to check out...

Whether you think the concept of integration is useful in understanding the challenges that refugees face?

Appendix 2

Interview Schedule - Refugee

Task

- Can you draw a timeline of your life experiences?

Go through each experience...

- *"Can you tell me a little more about this?"*

- I'm particularly interested in this time... if you can think back, what were your concerns on your arrival into the UK?
- Do they remain concerns?

Sheet

- People have claimed that these things are important factors that help people to settle into life in the UK. Which of these are relevant to your experiences?

- *Can you tell me a little about this factor etc etc...*

• *How has this helped/hindered the settling process?*

- Which of these factors do you think are most important and which are the least important?

Concluding question

- To what extent do you feel integrated?

Appendix 3

Information Sheet

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview. The interview is not a test, it merely intends to explore your thoughts and experiences of issues surrounding the integration of refugees in the UK.

The data gathered today will remain anonymous. To ensure anonymity your name and personal information will not be recorded, and the audiotapes recorded during this interview will be destroyed.

During the course of the interview, you will be asked to describe cases of successful and unsuccessful integration. To ensure the anonymity of the subjects in these cases, you are not required to divulge any information that may make the subjects identifiable. If identifiable information is recorded, it will not be included in any part of the project.

You may stop the interview at any time, and may refuse to answer any of the questions.

