Refugee Integration: Emerging Trends and Remaining Agendas

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This paper uses the foundation of the conceptual framework proposed by Ager and Strang (2004a, 2008) to reflect on the focus and findings of papers in this special issue on refugee integration and other recent work. Arguing that 'mid-level theory' of the sort presented in the framework provides a strong basis for structuring academic debate and dialogue with practitioners and policymakers, we identify four key issues that although of some current interest warrant further attention. First, we consider recent evidence from Europe and elsewhere on how prevailing notions of nationhood and citizenship determine understandings of integration, and argue that this powerfully shapes the social space available to refugees with regard to 'belonging'. Second, we note the wide adoption of concepts of social capital in framing components of social connection in the context of integration, but suggest greater attention is paid to the manner in which bonds, bridges and links establish forms of reciprocity and trust in social relations. Third, we examine the notion that integration is a 'two way' process, and suggest how this might be expanded to embrace the multiplicity and fluidity of social meaning and identity. Fourth, we reflect on Hobfoll's (1998) work on 'resource acquisition spirals' as a basis for effectively conceptualizing the dynamic interplay between factors mapped by the framework in shaping trajectories of integration.

Keywords: refugee, integration, perspectives, framework, citizenship, rights, belonging, social connection

Introduction

I can say that I'm well integrated into this society…Speaking about adaptation, it's up to us refugees to adapt and integrate. For this, it's necessary to

master a language and integrate into the social life (Peruvian man, aged 50, refugee in Luxemburg, in Mestheneos *et al.* 1999: 65).

...integration means the ability to participate to the extent that a person needs and wishes in all of the major components of society, without having to relinquish his or her own cultural identity (Interdepartmental Working Group on the Integration of Refugees in Ireland 2001: 9).

You say, 'integration'...for me it is my life before—in Colombia, and the fighting and the violence, and now my life here in Italy. But then I go back to Colombia to visit, and who am I? How can I integrate the different parts of my life? (Colombian woman, aged about 40, refugee in Italy, speaking at the 'IntegraRef' Final Conference, Rome, March 2008).

Despite—or perhaps because of—contention regarding the term, integration is a central concept in debates over the rights, settlement and adjustment of refugees. Our work in developing a framework to operationalize processes of integration (Ager and Strang 2004a, 2004b, 2008) was, notwithstanding aspirations for broader relevance, framed by the particularities of public debate regarding refugee policy in the UK in the early years of this century. We therefore welcome the opportunity provided by this collection of papers on the theme of refugee integration to reflect upon aspects of that formulation that we consider have been reinforced by subsequent work, including that presented here, as well as concerns that we believe have yet to be fully explored in studies of migrant experience.

We seek here to articulate two fundamental contentions. First, we suggest that there is some evidence that the framework has supported engaged and critical discussion, which in some instances has usefully highlighted the bases for radically different understandings of the goals, nature and meanings of integration. Such debate is, in our view, of critical importance in ensuring an inclusive dialogue with respect to a concept of such wide technical, political and public usage in connection with issues of immigration and refugee settlement. Second, we suggest that there remain core implications of our characterization of refugee integration that have not been fully explored or considered, and which warrant further attention given their implications for policy, practice and study. We elaborate these contentions with respect to four discrete issues: the relationship between 'belonging' and rights and values; the role of social capital in integration processes; the notion of integration as a 'two-way process'; and the dynamic interrelationship of factors shaping integration processes. We precede such consideration, however, with a reflection on the role of frameworks in structuring analysis of such issues.

The Role of 'Mid-level Theory'

In the course of the peer review process for our 2008 paper, one reviewer referred to the presented framework as 'mid-level theory'. We were unsure if

a pejorative tone was intended, but fully recognized the characterization. The framework draws on elements of social theory (with respect to social capital and rights, for example), but in presenting a normative, simplified structure is an explicit attempt to bridge between such theorization and local programmatic practice. Such attempts risk both oversimplification of complex and contested theory and obfuscation of programmatic processes in quasi-theoretical terms. However, they alternatively promise illumination of key local processes through accessible use of core theoretical insights.

Overall, we welcome the debates of the current collection—and other utilization of the framework in conceptualizing policy and practice regarding refugee integration—as evidence that the framework has achieved the latter rather more than the former. This is not to deny challenges to the theoretical bases of proposed domains evident in the papers of McPherson and Vrecer in the current collection, for example. Rather, we see the structuring of such challenges—in a manner with clear implication for local refugee practice—as a major goal of 'mid-level theory'. It is not helpful for those working in the field to choose between theoretical formulations with high-level policy implications and local practice reports articulated without relevant theorization. Learning advances when the two are brought together in some form of accommodation of theory and practice accessible to researchers and practitioners alike (Lavis *et al.* 2008).

In this regard, one of the more memorable moments of the validation process for the proposed framework involved elaboration of the concepts of social bonds, bridges and links with refugee community organizations in Islington. This involved an exercise where organizations were asked to place 'post-it' notes on a projected image of the framework in the domains that they considered their work most significantly impacted. The exercise fostered the realization amongst those present that, while clearly serving to strengthen bonding social capital within refugee groups (through ties of gender, religious affiliation or regional proximity), their organizations were also potentially potent vehicles for bridging between ethnic communities and thus promoting wider social connection. This is an example of just the sort of service development 'product' targeted by the framework. While critique and elaboration of the theorization of integration processes is a key goal of the field of refugee studies, so too are means of making the insights of theory accessible to local actors and policy makers.

We also consider that 'mid-level theory' has a contribution to structuring discussion with policy makers and in policy analysis. In this volume, Valenta and Bunar's comparative analysis of integration policy in Norway and Sweden with respect to selected domains of our proposed framework indicates the potential for such analyses and their accessibility to public discussion (crucial given the power of political debate and public consciousness over refugee policy indicated by their analysis). In an analogous exercise to the one noted above, the framework was used, for instance, to identify the

comparative focus of a range of projects across Europe in the course of a consultation on integration (EC 2005).

Although these two examples reflect the capacity of the framework to act as 'theory' to accommodate practice and policy discussions, as noted earlier, theories also critically provide formulations that focus intellectual challenges and research leading to their revision or reformulation. In the sections that follow we address four key issues where we think the papers of the current special issue—or other recent work—point to such areas of elaboration and enquiry.

Rights, Values and Understandings of 'Belonging'

In our 2008 paper (Ager and Strang 2008) we argued, drawing on the work of Faist (1995), Saggar (1995), Favell (1998) and Duke *et al.* (1999) that 'Rights and Citizenship' are foundational to understandings of refugee integration. We suggested that 'notions of nationhood, citizenship and rights will vary across settings, but in all cases such ideas are fundamental to understanding the principles and practice of integration in that situation' (p 11). In this sense, our use of the term 'integration' allows for multiple interpretations of the construct, reflecting prevailing cultural and political sensibilities.

We recognize that in some contexts 'integration' may be synonymous with 'assimilation' (McPherson, this volume), but contest that this is inevitable. There have been a number of recent attempts to rethink and revitalize the concept of 'assimilation' in the context of US immigration policy, for example. Some of these attempts (e.g. Alba and Nee 2003; Kivisto 2005) seek to re-assert assimilation as a means by which ethnic groups both maintain distinctive identities and commit to the civic goals of the state. Such accounts acknowledge the role of local, proximal circumstances and structural, distal ones in determining settlement processes in an analogous manner to those considered in our proposed model of integration (Ager and Strang 2008). In the context of the USA, however, race, major inequalities in wealth distribution, a contested role for the state and, increasingly, transnationalism are all significant influences on the terms of social cohesion. In such circumstances 'incorporation' and 'the mainstream' remain central ideas, driving a very distinctive understanding of the processes and outcomes of integration within US society (Waldinger 2003; Portes 2005; and note later discussion here on assimilation in relation to the work of Vertovec 2004 and Berry 1991; Donà and Berry 1999).

In recent years in Europe there has been a shift away from treating refugees as a distinct category for integration measures, and towards establishing pathways to citizenship that include selection and the fulfilment of requirements. This reflects very real changes in demographic, political and economic pressures as Europe adjusts to enlarged European Community boundaries

and increased privileges for citizens to travel and work within those boundaries (see Zetter *et al.* 2002 for an overview of refugee integration policy and practice in European countries). This challenges nations to assert their identity and yet also simultaneously to welcome and accommodate outsiders (Soysal 1994) in an environment of increasing economic constraint (Schierup *et al.* 2006). In the UK the narrative of 'social cohesion' has become dominant (Cantle 2005) and the rights of a refugee to asylum (Geneva Convention 1951) subsumed in a drive to select as citizens only those suitable to be part of the ideal 'British' society.

Noting such distinct approaches, we are—in line with Castles *et al.* (2001)—interested in the factors that distinguish the ways in which the concept of integration is operationalized in different contexts, and the influences on their emergence and impact. A number of papers in this volume address this theme, examining how ideas about nationhood are reflected in integration policy across the UK (da Lomba; Mulvey), Australia (McPherson), Slovenia (Vrecer), Sweden and Norway (Valenta and Bunar). In the UK over the past five years discussion of national identity has become more explicit in the policy and rhetoric surrounding refugee integration. The bulge in numbers seeking asylum in the early part of the decade, along with evidence of racial tension in some parts of the country, led policy makers and commentators to re-examine 'Britishness' (Crick 2006). In doing so, as Mulvey points out, the 'otherness' of refugees is emphasized. For example Cantle (2005) links social cohesion with language use in the home. The implication that 'Britishness' can be (at least partly) defined by the use of English as a mother tongue immediately puts those who do not speak English in the home in the category of 'other'. McPherson observes that in Australian discourse, 'otherness' is seen as any characteristic that fails to match up to the 'perfection' of the model Australian character. Perhaps this is akin to the British affection for 'preserving the British way of life'? We can see that an assimilation view of integration underpins these examples—where to belong means to be the same, to share a set of qualities that define the group (in this case, the nation).

As several writers in this volume have pointed out (e.g. McPherson; Mulvey; da Lomba) to define migrants (economic or forced) as 'other' immediately locates them as the 'problem'. We have seen the emergence in various contexts of citizenship courses, which McPherson argues, 'set about defining who "we" are in terms of "them"' (p. **554**). The aim of a citizenship course is to familiarize the newcomer with aspects of 'us' that we assume are different from 'them'. This is a 'problematization' of the immigrant, not just the refugee, but takes a more extreme form where people making claims for asylum are kept in detention whilst their cases are being heard (Mulvey this volume; Losi and Strang 2008). Such treatment reflects not only an assumption of 'otherness', but also an implication of criminality. In this case, the 'others' are assumed to be untrustworthy until proven innocent. In his

analysis of the UK policy framework, Mulvey suggests that degrees of 'unwantedness' can be discerned. For example asylum seekers are allocated lower levels of financial support than that provided through the national income support system (already deemed to be the minimum necessary to prevent poverty). He suggests that this reflects a distinction between those who are *deserving* of the nation's support—citizens—and those *undeserving*— people seeking asylum. This spectrum of 'wantedness' is reflected in the immigration regulations and support measures available to immigrants. Students and people with professional skills emerge as most wanted. Refugees have much less preferential treatment, but are eligible for some support and have the right to work. Finally, according to such an analysis, asylum seekers are the least wanted in the UK.

This notion of 'degrees of unwantedness' can also be discerned within a longitudinal perspective on policy. Refugee integration policy has been rapidly evolving in many countries over the past decade. Valenta and Bunar, for example, report how in the 1990s Sweden introduced the status of 'temporary protection' in response to large numbers of applicants from Bosnia and Kosovo. A similar change was made in other European countries during the 1990s (including the UK, Germany, Slovenia, and Italy), suggesting that whilst the need for protection was recognized, migrants from former Yugoslavia were not wanted as permanent members of other European countries. Vrecer suggests that the Slovenian government were driven by a desire to break ties with their Soviet based connections and considered that embracing large numbers of their former Yugoslav neighbours as citizens would impede their aspiration to look towards Europe for their future identity.

Throughout these examples we see that assumptions about what it means to belong to a nation shape understandings of integration. However, we should be wary of presuming that this provides us with a picture of some tacit collective understanding shared by those who 'belong'. Whilst policy no doubt does reflect some shared understandings, it is also used instrumentally to influence understandings. Vrecer's analysis clearly illustrates this in the case of Slovenia. In a similar vein, Valenta and Bunar suggest that Sweden's original very egalitarian refugee policy of 1975 (including refugees fully in their own generous welfare state for citizens) was powerfully driven by seeking to define the nation as welcoming and inclusive to other European countries.

These examples, embedded in particular historic, demographic and political contexts, alert us to looking not only at notions of belonging that are *reflected* in legal frameworks of rights and citizenship, but also at the *impact* that rights and citizenship have on understandings of belonging, and on the process of integration itself. In our own study we reported that refugees themselves see equal rights as foundational to being viewed as equals by established citizens (Ager and Strang 2008). Would we be right to assume that the prevailing rights framework does indeed influence public attitudes to refugees and asylum seekers? One recent analysis of European Social Survey

data tentatively concludes that local experiences of living together have more impact on attitudes than state policy (Masso 2009). However, generally we would agree with da Lomba that the impact of legal status frameworks on the process of integration continues to be a relatively neglected area in the literature. In the UK there has been an explicit assertion by policy makers that seemingly generous conditions such as benefits and rights to work for asylum seekers act as a 'pull factor' drawing in refugees to the country. However, as Mulvey notes, such assertions remain unproven. Indeed, it seems more plausible that policy, emphasizing limitation and control, undermines integration by communicating a negative message to the public that refugees are damaging to society. This negativity in turn powerfully conflicts with policy aimed to promote the integration of those who are granted refugee status. Such conflict is acknowledged by Valenta and Bunar who point out that Swedish policy communicates similar mixed messages. They suggest that whilst extensive state sponsored language training is provided (problematizing migrants), perhaps what is needed is to strengthen anti-discrimination and equal opportunities training for the established citizens (problematizing the established community).

Finally, our original work and several of these subsequent papers draw on the experiences of refugees to assert that integration (whatever form it takes) starts from the very first moment of arrival in a new country. It is a process shaped considerably by the intentions and aspirations of refugees themselves, whatever their formal status in the country in which they seek refuge. In Islington and Pollokshaws we found much evidence of refugees' strong motivation to 'belong' to UK society (Ager and Strang 2004b). Similar evidence is presented in this volume (Smyth and Kum; Lewis; Vrecer). However, in a more recent study comparing integration in several different European countries (Losi and Strang 2008), we identified significant variation in refugees' aspirations. For example many refugees saw their arrival in Italy not as their final destination, but as the 'gateway to Europe' (*ibid.*). An even more extreme example was found in Malta, where many refugees arrive unintentionally when their boats are blown off course. They find themselves in detention in Malta for years, and have no intention of staying in Malta once they are free to move. In this context, neither the Maltese nor the refugees aspire towards integration (*ibid.*).

There is still, therefore, much to be explored regarding the relationship between the frameworks of rights and the process of integration. The evidence suggests that policy makers ignore such connection at their peril. People do not safely wait 'in limbo' until a host nation decides whether or not to accept them—the processes of integration or alienation inexorably begin. Vrecer observes how individual refugees suffer psychological damage when they are unable to recover from the losses of their past because the insecurity of their present prevents them from forming attachments and looking towards a positive future. The effectiveness of integration is influenced by experiences from the moment of arrival in a new country. In discussing

current UK policy, da Lomba points out that while policy rhetoric suggests that integration is viewed as a process, the actuality is closer to awarding citizenship on the basis of successful integration. Refugees seeking citizenship are required to jump through the same hoops as any other aspiring immigrant. In these terms the right to citizenship is 'earned' by demonstrating cultural knowledge and language proficiency, and the process can be speeded up by additionally demonstrating commitment through voluntary work. Such policy ignores the fact that having secure status is, in itself, instrumental in enabling integration, emphasizing once more the foundational place of policy on 'rights and citizenship' on refugee integration outcomes and 'belonging'.

The Role of Social Capital in Integration Processes

The centrality of social connection in understanding refugee integration is well established in both policy and academic literature (Beirens *et al.* 2007; Korac 2005). The 'Indicators of Integration' framework (Ager and Strang 2004a) applied Putnam's social capital formulation to distinguish between three crucial forms of social connection: social 'bonds', 'bridges' and 'links' (Putnam 2000). This application has since been widely developed in refugee integration discourse.

In the practice context, the clarity and simplicity of the formulation seems to resonate with the everyday challenges of supporting asylum seekers and refugees. For example, we are particularly aware of the work of the Scottish Refugee Council with individual refugees and their families, building community, providing services and leading in advocacy. Since their collaboration in our original study, they have used the distinctions of 'bonds', 'bridges' and 'links' to structure their strategic action planning in relation to community development. They report that these constructs provide a very effective communication tool with communities, colleagues and partner organizations (IIHD 2006).

This formulation of differing aspects of social capital has also gained wide access within relevant academic discourse (Atfield *et al.* 2007; Losi and Strang 2008; Smets and ten Kate 2008; Spicer 2008; Smyth and Kum this volume; McPherson this volume). With it has come both confirmation and critique, elucidating the complexity beneath Putnam's constructs and also raising challenges to the model. The establishing of 'bonding' relationships emerges as a critical priority in the experiences of refugees, and in particular for many refugees it is of primary urgency to be united with close family members. For example, in our own more recent fieldwork with refugees in Europe, service providers in Germany reported that refugees (with a different legal status than their relatives) would often move to poorer quality accommodation in order to be with their family (Losi and Strang 2008). Many refugees in Malta were very distressed because they were unsure of the fate of their family members, and made it clear that they could not begin to think about integration until they knew that their families were safe. In our work in

Islington we recorded the comments of one refugee who pointed out that he didn't know how he would ever find a wife without contact with his parents to arrange his marriage (Ager and Strang 2004b). Clearly 'the family' whilst being a part of the wider 'bonded' group, has unique saliency in human relationships and thus in integration. Further understanding of the role played by family—nuanced by cultural and generational variations—would support more targeted and effective policy.

A study focused on refugees in London and Birmingham has looked at the specific contribution to the integration process made by 'bonded' social networks (Atfield *et al.* 2007). It is suggested that these provide resources in three key areas: information and material resources; emotional resources which enhance confidence, and finally capacity building resources. The authors argue that the value derived from networks also shifts over time, with the emphasis moving from the material to the emotional. The value of co-ethnic communities in providing access to resources and information is widely recognized, and much local service provision is focused on supporting the building of these connections (Griffiths *et al.* 2005; Spicer 2008). The emotional value of providing a 'ready-made' sense of belonging and the personal confidence that this supports is also acknowledged (Losi and Strang 2008; Spicer 2008; Vrecer this volume). However, there is also occasional recognition that not all aspects of co-ethnic bonding capital are positive. A clear example appears in the literature on refugees' access to health services, including the paper in this volume (Newbold and McKeary). Whilst family and friends can provide crucial language translation and cultural mediation, the lack of confidentiality and impartiality associated with reliance on family members (often children) is clearly problematic. Additionally, we found evidence that there are situations where refugees do not feel happy to mix with members of their own ethnic group, for example where there are conflicting political factions (Ager and Strang 2004b). In this volume, Lewis's analysis of social events includes an intriguing example of a refugee distancing himself from other (more rural) subsections of his own ethnic community. More analysis of the internal dynamics of bonded relationships would throw light on these issues. In particular, Putnam's original formulation outlines the mediating role of exchange and reciprocity within 'social bonds'. Further work is needed to understand more fully both the obligations as well as the benefits of social bonds for refugee integration.

In the majority of studies reported above, the primacy of social bonds is not generally disputed but there is some challenge of the assumption that these will *necessarily* be best formed within co-ethnic groups. It seems that whilst generally co-ethnic groups will be the most likely context for refugees to begin to make close connections, this is not essential. In the UK, the introduction in 1999 of a 'dispersal' policy meant that asylum seekers began to be sent to different locations around the country, often where there was little history of inward migration, and so no pre-existing co-ethnic groups to join. Several UK writers report on the consequences of this policy.

Griffiths *et al.*'s study of Refugee Community Organizations (RCOs) in the UK observes that at this time RCOs were widely seen, by policy makers at least, as the ideal infrastructure through which to deliver government support to dispersed refugee communities (2005). However this role put RCOs right at the heart of the conflict within the migration–asylum nexus. It led to an uncomfortable ambiguity between representing the best interests of the refugee community and representing government policy on the control of immigration. As a result, the evidence suggested that informal networks continued to be more effective in creating bonds. Other studies have suggested that whilst dispersed refugees found it more difficult to form social bonds locally, they ultimately have done so—often through the shared values of a common religious faith or through geographical proximity (Ager and Strang 2004a, 2004b; Spicer 2008; Hynes 2009). In Scotland, for example, this has been evident through the emergence of vociferous campaigns, led by established members of the local community, to protect particular refugees against deportation. Service providers contributing to our study in Malta observed that refugees will form close bonded relationships if they are forced to live in a particular place for a long time. Moreover they argued that after these bonds have been formed, it is inhumane to force them to move on again (Losi and Strang 2008).

Our 2008 formulation of the concept of integration asserted that integration depends on the complementary development of 'social bridges' as well as 'bonds' in order to avoid the emergence of separate, very bonded but disconnected communities (referred to as 'silos' in Cantle 2005). As such it has sometimes been taken to favour an 'assimilationist' view of refugee settlement processes (McPherson this volume). However, our structuring consideration of social connection with respect to differing forms of social capital—bridging, linking and, critically, bonding—was very much an attempt to assert that strengthened connection with pre-existing communities (so-called 'host' communities) need not be at the expense of the strong ties that bind co-ethnic and other forms of indigenous identification. This reflects recent analysis by Vertovec (2004) and very much followed the example of Berry's taxonomy of acculturation processes (Berry 1991; Donà and Berry 1999) which distinguished integration from assimilation (and the additional strategies of marginalization and separation) on the basis of the balance of social connection from country-of-origin and country-of-residence sources.

In fact the evidence of studies outlining the importance of bonds as a source of emotional support, self esteem and confidence (Losi and Strang 2008; Spicer 2008; Vrecer this volume) underpins the claim that strong bonding capital supports the development of bridging capital. Spicer's (2008) study on neighbourhoods brings this out most clearly. His analysis focuses on refugees' experiences of particular neighbourhoods (the particular potency of the neighbourhood for refugees is also confirmed by Atfield *et al.* 2007), in suggesting that some neighbourhoods are experienced as 'including' and others as 'excluding'. The 'excluding' neighbourhood is one where local people are

seen to be unfriendly and where there are few or no residents from co-ethnic communities. In this situation refugees lack the confidence to build up language skills and local knowledge; instead they grow increasingly fearful and isolated. This sheds light on findings that simple forms of friendliness (smiling, saying 'hello' in the street) have a significant impact on refugees' sense of safety and security (Ager and Strang 2008; Threadgold and Court 2005), and also their health (Newbold and McKeary this volume). As Lewis (this volume) observes, once individuals lose confidence and become isolated, it is difficult to involve them in collective events.

Putnam (1993) emphasizes the importance of both reciprocity and trust in the development of social connection, and Colson (2003) argues that the growth of trust depends on reciprocity. It follows from this that in order to build 'bridges' between 'bonded' groups there need to be opportunities for people to meet and exchange resources in ways which are mutually beneficial. This can occur where refugees and the established community are able to share their everyday lives, for example at the school or the local shops. However there are multiple factors, many of which are structurally embedded in legal frameworks (Griffiths *et al.* 2005) which exclude refugees, and particularly asylum seekers, from frequenting the same spaces as other neighbours (poverty, no right to work and lack of language skills), and necessitate a proactive strategy to create spaces for meeting and exchange. The particular challenge is to involve members of the established community for whom 'integration' may not be a pressing concern. For example in this volume Lewis reflects on two refugee community events and acknowledges their tendency to attract people who are already committed to supporting integration. A recent innovative initiative in the Netherlands uses the model of 'Local Exchange and Trading Systems' (LETS) to encourage reciprocal interaction (Smets and ten Kate 2008). Based on a system of bartering for goods and services it allows asylum seekers (not eligible for formal employment) to work and exchange value with the established community. The authors suggest that whilst some locals participate out of 'sympathy' or 'idealism' others are 'pragmatic' and are attracted by the genuine opportunity for mutual benefit. This appears to offer a valuable way forward to build trusting relationships by enabling refugees and others to participate in relationships on equal terms.

Hynes (2009) suggests that in a sense there is a 'virtuous cycle' whereby widened social networks allow the development of trust in institutions and governance. Several papers in this collection address linkage issues around access to services (Smyth and Kum; Newbold and McKeary). However, social linkage also implies broader community and political participation. We noted earlier how an *immigration* policy driven by an imperative to limit the number of people coming into a country can undermine attempts to project a message of welcome through *integration* policies. In the UK recent integration policy is increasingly emphasizing a value of 'active citizenship', suggesting that applicants for citizenship should demonstrate their commitment by participating in community activities (Mulvey this volume).

Indeed, this would be a value shared by many service providers who seek to support Refugee Community Organizations and involved refugees in decision-making bodies (Threadgold and Court 2005). The question is raised, however, as to just how much—and what form of—participation is welcome (Mulvey this volume). For example, would active participation in campaigns against the detention of asylum seekers enhance an individual's application for citizenship?

Integration as a Two-way Process

For over a decade the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) has been a leading advocate in emphasizing the reciprocal nature of refugee integration, seeing it as a process that is 'dynamic and two-way: it places demands on both receiving societies and the individuals and/or the communities concerned' (ECRE 1999: 29).

In particular ECRE has specified that from the refugee perspective, integration requires a preparedness to adapt one's lifestyle, and from the host society, a willingness to adapt institutions. They have argued that integration is multi-dimensional, involving the conditions to participate in society, actual participation in society and a perception of acceptance in the host society (ECRE 1999). This principle has subsequently become well established in the literature (Castles *et al*. 2001; Threadgold and Court 2005).

Yet, as writers such as Griffiths and Korac have observed, much analysis has been undertaken from a policy perspective, rather than acknowledging refugees themselves as primary social actors in making a 'home' in their new environment (Griffiths *et al*. 2005; Korac 2009). This collection of papers provides a number of studies which access the topic through the refugees' own perspectives (Lewis; McPherson; Smyth and Kum; Vrecer), making an important contribution to our understanding of how refugees themselves approach this 'two-way' process. For example, there is confirmation of the assertion that integration begins, for the refugee, on reaching the place that he or she considers as the destination. Refugees recount how their experiences have affected their progress in learning about a country and its language, and participation in its collective life. These accounts start from arrival in the country rather than acquisition of legal status. Conversely—though it is seldom noted—we found in our more recent European study that attempts to 'integrate' refugees are seriously undermined if the refugees themselves do not intend to stay (Losi and Strang 2008). However, a clear message comes through that once refugees judge that they have reached their destination society they are strongly motivated to contribute, and to avoid dependence. Smyth and Kum elaborate this in the case of refugee teachers: 'I want to bring my contribution to this country through teaching' (p. **512**), pointing out that to make a contribution is important for regaining a sense of identity and self esteem. Lewis observes that the cultural activities organized by refugee community groups are generally evidence of proactive reaching out to make

connections with the established community. We welcome McPherson's call for more research that approaches integration from refugees' perspectives, recognizing the 'value of marginal accounts in contesting dominant discourse' (Foucault 1980, cited in McPherson). Even more fundamentally, we would assert that in researching a social process it is essential to seek to understand that process from the perspectives of the key actors.

Following the ECRE (1999) formulation, it is the responsibility of the 'host' society to create the conditions to enable integration. Much attention has been focused on what these conditions need to be, and our own framework outlined domains within which we should look to identify appropriate conditions. Mulvey highlights the language used in recent UK policy documents that talk about a 'deal' with refugees, implying such two-way exchange. We have discussed the foundational role played by an appropriate framework of rights and access to citizenship. Clearly this is the responsibility of the state. In addition it is recognized that legal rights alone are not sufficient, further support being required to enable refugees to access those rights (Valenta and Bunar). This support can be provided in the form of interventions that equip refugees to adapt (language and cultural knowledge training, skills (re)training; support in making social connection), thus enhancing the human capital of the refugees. In addition, it is argued by authors in this collection that support should also be provided in the form of interventions to encourage the established population to adapt. This may include cultural education (Smyth and Kum; Newbold and McKeary), and anti-discrimination awareness-raising (Valenta and Bunar; da Lomba; Mulvey). Threadgold and Court (2005) reflect this analysis in four key cross-cutting themes in their recommendations to the Welsh Assembly for refugee integration policy: combating poverty; providing language and cultural knowledge support to institutions and refugees; educating the receiving community on the context and implications of refugee status and integration; and combating negative public attitudes.

The notion of a 'two-way' process, however, does bring with it the inherent danger of an implicit assumption that integration concerns the relationship between two distinct, but homogenous groups: the established population and the incomers. In the pursuit of equality and consistency, policy can ignore regional differences, as with the European Commission's efforts to harmonize integration policy across Europe (EC 2007), or the UK policy to disperse asylum seekers across the country (ICAR 2004). Yet it is at the local level that much of the 'work' of the integration process has to take place. In Germany service providers have suggested that local policy frameworks for integration are much more developed than national policy frameworks. Differences in legal status become irrelevant at local level where the concerns are to build relationships and community (Losi and Strang 2008). Similarly, we have seen significant differences in the UK between national policy developed by the Westminster parliament and policy developed by the devolved Scottish parliament. In Scotland, where there is an ageing population and

concerns over the declining size of the workforce, every effort has been made to encourage immigration and welcome refugees and asylum seekers. At the very local level, groups of protesters from the established population have sprung up to protect asylum seekers and their families from deportation.

Of course there is likewise no homogeneity within a locality. Our original fieldwork challenged the assumption that there is (Ager and Strang 2004b). It became apparent in Pollokshaws in Glasgow, for example, that whilst progress was being made in building relationships between the asylum seeker families and older members of the established community, there was another whole group of people living locally—young people perceived to have serious social problems—with whom neither the older 'locals' nor asylum seekers had good relationships. This demonstrates the dangers of isolating the 'problem' of asylum seekers and refugees, and supports an argument for addressing refugee integration in the context of social cohesion.

With da Lomba, we suggest that the way forward is to see integration as multi-dimensional, not just in the sense implied by ECRE (involving many levels of support and adjustment). Integration is multi-dimensional in the sense that it involves the forming of relationships across people with multiple and overlapping identities. Both Lewis and Vrecer elaborate integration as a process of negotiating new identities. For example Lewis argues that it makes no sense to define a refugee community event as belonging to either 'here' or 'there'; it is in fact a space where new identities are forged. In this context, members of a co-ethnic community will often play a mediating role, introducing new refugees to unfamiliar cultural norms. They are able to do this because they themselves have developed new meanings that draw on the cultures of both 'here' and 'there'.

The Council of Europe stated in 1998 that '(Integration is)...a two way process (whereby) immigrants change society at the same time as they integrate into it' (Council of Europe, cited in ECRE 1998: 13). We would argue that this reflexivity should be seen in the wider context of the ongoing evolution of the overlapping identities and meanings that characterize even established communities as people respond to their changing context over time. Given that change is a normal part of community, it is perhaps pertinent to reflect on why such change can be so contentious in the context of refugee integration. We suggest two facets that merit further exploration. Vrecer points out that for the individual refugee, too rapid a change of identity can be damaging. Mental health problems can result as the person struggles to deal with the grief of the past without a secure future on which to base new attachments. It seems too that communities struggle if things are changing very quickly and there is a sense of losing an established identity before new meanings are negotiated. Additionally, further consideration of 'community' will inform this discourse. Whilst we are arguing that social cohesion does not require 'sameness', we nevertheless need to understand the dynamics of sameness and difference in this context. The Oxford English Dictionary definition of community combines locality, shared values, shared interests

and shared purpose. This poses the challenging question: Is there a minimum requirement of shared values and shared purposes to support integration? In the UK the introduction of citizenship courses followed by tests reflects an attempt to define the minimum necessary shared territory in terms of historical, cultural and civic knowledge (Home Office 2010). However, it has been shown that members of families living in the UK for generations have been unable to answer many of the questions, suggesting the elusiveness of such 'sharedness'.

The Dynamics of Integration

Our framework was influenced by commitment to two very different types of understanding: one focused on outcomes and indicators; the other much more focused on processes and the inter-relationships between domains. The former was very much the principal 'driver' of the initial work, with funding from the UK Home Office explicitly seeking to develop 'Indicators of Integration' (Ager and Strang 2004a). However, our community-based studies in Pollokshaws in Glasgow and Islington in London (Ager and Strang 2004b) were influential in shaping awareness of not only *what* constituted integration at the local level, but *how* such outcomes were facilitated (or undermined).

Thematic constructions of processes typically indicate pathways of causality, with distal and more proximal influences on targeted outcomes. The complex inter-relationship of the factors mapped within the framework, however, signalled such a structural 'flow' to be an inappropriate characteristic of the framework. There are no directional 'arrows' in the formulation. However, the labelling of group domains hints at such interdependencies. Rights and citizenship are signalled as a 'foundation'; language and cultural knowledge and safety and stability as 'facilitators'; various forms of social capital as providing 'social connection'; and finally, reinforcing bi-directionality, factors such as employment, housing, education and health are noted as both 'markers and means' of integration. The nature of such dynamics is, however, poorly understood.

The current set of papers provide numerous illustrations of such dynamic interconnection, ranging from the cultural and social factors influencing access to healthcare in Canada (Newbold and McKeary), through the interaction of community stability, access to housing and employment opportunities in Sweden and Norway (Valenta and Bunar), and the impact of uncertainty over settlement rights and status on employment and retraining amongst refugee teachers in Scotland (Smyth and Kum), to the association of social bonds and bridges to cultural knowledge amongst Kurdish communities and their neighbours in the UK (Lewis).

Given its origins in seeking to develop understandings of community processes in circumstances of economic and social stress, Hobfoll's (1998) conceptualization of 'resource acquisition spirals' and 'resource loss spirals'

appears useful in linking such observations into an accessible framework (Ager and Ager 2010). Hobfoll contends that in terms of resource mobilization, 'resources beget resources'. The domains of the refugee integration framework can be seen, in these terms, as reservoirs of resource from which refugees may draw and invest in securing other resources. Such resource investment—when sufficient fluidity of action and linkage is enabled—establish 'resource acquisition spirals' which lead to social, economic and political progression for the community. With resource loss and/or constraints in the investment and deployment of existing resources, however, spirals of resource loss can alternatively be created. This prompts an approach to community development that seeks to maximize acquisition spirals and minimize spirals of loss, after the fashion that we have elaborated elsewhere (Ager *et al.* 2005).

Phillimore and Goodson (2008) in their critique of our proposed indicators of integration (Ager and Strang 2004a) in the context of refugee settlement in the city of Birmingham urge active consideration of such relationships and cycles. They suggest that the flow from one domain to another is so crucial to integration processes that measures of such dynamics are required to inform strategy and impact. The resource acquisition 'spiral' connecting access to employment with language acquisition, social connection and choice through access to economic resources (Harrell-Bond 1996) is perhaps the best established of such patterns. There is a clear need to identify other potential pathways of resource acquisition, as well as circumstances that risk resource loss (such as instability of living conditions reducing effective access to healthcare, Newbold and McKeary this volume). Although many of these pathways will be of general relevance to migrant settlement patterns, those pertinent to the unique legal and experiential circumstances of asylum seekers and refugees will be of especial importance.

Conclusions

Integration remains a central concept in approaches to refugee settlement, though its basis, form and character vary widely across settings. Our framework appears to have had some utility in focusing discussion on principles and domains that shape both the local experience of integration, and its articulation in policy. Within each domain of the framework—and, in particular, in the dynamic relationship between such domains—there is the opportunity to elaborate on mechanisms and determinants of refugee integration, which many papers in the current issue have addressed. There remain, however, key agendas for further study and consideration if we are to move towards a more consolidated and nuanced understanding of integration processes and outcomes and the factors that shape them.

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