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Gratitude and hospitality: Tamil refugee employment in London and the conditional nature of integration

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Abstract

Refugees are often one of the most economically and socially excluded groups in host countries. The policy of integration attempts to address different elements of exclusion yet relatively little research has considered what integration means to the refugees themselves. This paper explores one key area for supporting integration: employment. Understandings of integration are advanced by exploring how a group of 26 Tamil refugees and 19 people who worked with refugees in the UK perceived an underlying rhetoric of anticipated gratitude within the policies around refugees. These perspectives are theorised within a framework of hospitality. The participants believed that refugees were expected to be grateful to the host society, and subsequently felt a debt for what the host society had given them: safety and education. However, they also identified frustration towards the host society where they felt marginalised or discrimination. It is possible to analyse employment as both an opportunity to give back, and something for which to be grateful. However, gratitude may not necessarily be felt towards the host society. If employment is found through the ethnic community, gratitude is likely to be concentrated there, rather than the wider society. For the refugee participants in this research, asylum is a debt which can rarely be fully repaid, leaving them to seek acceptance and respect beyond the tolerance they are offered.

Key words: integration, refugees, gratitude, employment, Tamils

So you [...] try to give back to the country, because this country has given you so, so much to you. Give it back [...] you get integrated in that way (Mangai).

In Western Europe, where refugees are potentially financially supported by the welfare state, governments expect them to “act like true refugees ... grateful” (Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont, 1987: 15). The notion of gratitude has been implicit in previous refugee studies research, even if the concept has not been explored in detail (Beiser, 1987; Chaulia, 2003; Lavik *et al.*, 1996). *Mangai*, in the quote above, demonstrates this common perspective that refugees should be grateful to their host countries and consequently wish to give back. What is significant here is that *Mangai* contends that gratitude contributes to the process of integration. This paper analyses refugee perceptions of integration through the notion of gratitude as understood within a framework of hospitality. The novel application of this theoretical perspective to the experiences of refugees develops the research field by exploring the reciprocal relationship between the host country and the refugee.

It is generally accepted that societies need to provide refugees with more than the right to stay and financial support (ECRE, 2011). Different governments have recognised that the integration of refugees is in the interests of both the host population and refugees themselves (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011; Home Office, 2005; US Department of State, 2011). In the UK, the Home Office (2005: 5) defines integration as “the process that takes place when refugees are empowered to achieve their full potential as members of British society, to contribute to the community and to become fully able to exercise the rights and responsibilities they share with other residents.” Here integration partly occurs when refugees are empowered to contribute to the wider community. Yet the expectation that refugees *should* contribute is not explored. This paper analyses the inherent power relations within discourses around refugee integration and, through this, contributes to contemporary

debates around the concept (Ager and Strang, 2008). Through insights into the perspectives of a group of Tamil refugees on the asymmetric power relations involved within integration, this paper seeks to advance understanding of integration policy in the UK by critically reflecting upon the nature of gratitude and hospitality and their role in the process of refugee integration.

This paper explores what gratitude meant to the participants in terms of what the host society had given them: safety and education. This is followed by an analysis of the specific example of refugee employment as a way in which refugees may be expected to ‘give back’ and contribute to society. Employment is the focus of this paper as it is considered to be core to the process of integration (Home Office 2005; Ager & Strang 2008). Employment may enable individuals to achieve economic independence and self-reliance: no longer having to rely on family, friends or state support. Furthermore it offers the chance to meet and interact with members of the wider host society enabling individuals to create bonds beyond their refugee or ethnic communities. In the UK this is particularly important in supporting refugees to develop English language skills. Finally, gaining meaningful employment, particularly after an extensive period of being outside the formal labour market¹, offers the opportunity to restore an individual’s self-esteem. Getting refugees into work “is one of the most important aspects of the process of integration” (Crawley and Sriskandarajah cited in Bloch 2004: 5). This benefits the host society as well as the individual.

Employment is not only a way that the refugee can benefit financially and socially by having work, but also how they can be giving back to the country through, for example, paying taxes. Many of the negative public perceptions of refugees (and other immigrants) relate to

¹ Since 2002 asylum seekers have not been allowed to work in the UK whilst their claims are being processed.

the belief that they are over reliant on the welfare state (Miller 2008). The host society perceives them to be granted various rights and support and so assumes corresponding obligations. The significance of employment from the perspective of both the refugee and the host society makes it a key element from which to critically analyse integration.

The next section explores the relationship between integration, citizenship and the notion of gratitude. This is followed by outlining the methods used in the research. The paper then examines the rhetoric of hospitality from the perspective of a group of Tamil refugees and explores what gratitude to a country entails. The final section explores integration through employment as both something for which to be grateful and a way of contributing to society.

Integration, gratitude and hospitality and integration

The meaning of integration has been vigorously debated. In 2000, with the Home Office publication of *Full and Equal Citizens* (Home Office, 2000), UK policy adapted the multicultural agenda moving towards a position whereby refugees were expected to adopt aspects of the new society, whilst retaining their own cultural identity (Zetter *et al.* 2002). Integration is characterised in the literature as the process of creating and securing new social networks within the host country (Ager & Strang 2008; ECRE 2011; Korać 2001; Zetter *et al.* 2002). Ager & Strang (2008) provide a conceptual framework for understanding integration. Their ‘mid-level theory’ (Strang & Ager 2010) identifies the core domains of integration: foundation (rights and citizenship), facilitators (language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability), social connection (social bridges, social bonds, social links) and markers and means (employment, housing, education, health). These domains suggest a degree of involvement with society illustrating the need for change and effort on the part of both the refugee and the host community.

However, the policies around integration in the early years of the century (Home Office, 2000; 2005) were problematic as integration meant different things to different stakeholders. For example Ager and Strang (2004: 3) found that refugee perceptions of integration varied from “not having any trouble” through “mixing” in the community to “belonging”. Furthermore, the extent to which integration policies have displaced or supported multiculturalism policies has been debated (see Modood 2007, Howson 2009 and Kymlicka 2011 who discuss integration within the context of multiculturalism). Significantly, it has been argued that for integration to be possible citizenship is often emphasised as the end goal (Ager & Strang 2008).

In the UK between 1997 and 2010 New Labour built upon Conservative refugee policies. In October 2008, Phil Woolas, then the UK Immigration Minister, discussed plans for a “carrot-and-stick approach to ensure migrants go on a ‘journey towards citizenship’. They will have a choice to ‘earn citizenship’ or go home” (BBC, 2008: 1). Although refugees without citizenship would not be deported, the message was clear: the government thought they *ought* to work towards citizenship. Such policies of earned citizenship are symptomatic of an increasingly neo-assimilationist policy environment around the citizenship, integration and belonging of migrants (Kofman, 2005; Tyler, 2010). However, legal citizenship does not necessarily encourage integration. Firstly, legal citizenship/naturalisation may not result in integration as individuals who have citizenship may view it merely as a practicality – for example, assisting them to travel to different countries, what Mavroudi (2008) has termed ‘pragmatic citizenship’. Secondly, citizenship in a new country may not be desired, as refugees did not necessarily want to leave their country of origin in the first place, and may hope to return. Thirdly, as White (1999: 43) argues “feelings of gratitude of a certain kind are centrally important to being a citizen in a democratic society.” Citizenship is anticipated

in a particular way, focused around civic contribution and participation (White 2003). Consequently, from the participant's perspective citizenship, and thus integration, requires a response from the refugee. This anticipation of a response can be seen as expectations of gratitude. Refugees may not feel grateful to their host society despite the provisions made for them. However, it is this feeling of gratitude which may encourage people to want to contribute to that society.

Gratitude

Gratitude in this context implies indebtedness to the host country. Gratitude is defined as a "readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness" (Thomas, 1996: 593). Given that this research focuses upon Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka where the majority of Tamils are Hindu (estimates suggest 80%) (Refworld 2012), it is important to consider what gratitude means within Hinduism. There are two elements to a Hindu interpretation of gratitude: 1) you must be grateful for everything you receive; but 2) you must not expect any gratitude from others (Mysorekar, 2002). Expressions of gratitude are a complex combination of feelings and attitudes where individuals demonstrate their belief that the donor acted with their interests in mind (White, 1999). In the context of asylum, this means that the refugee appreciates the refuge they have been given and wishes to give back to their host. For example, Korać (2001: 105) found that refugees voted at local and national elections as they "considered it their duty or an expression of gratitude towards the country or political party that accepted them." Yet gratitude also implies that the refugee is indebted to the host for their benevolence. Lavik *et al.* (1996) found that the host country expected refugees to behave in a particular way. Where they challenged such expectations, the host population perceived that they were demonstrating their ingratitude.

The host acts as adjudicator defining hospitality as a project oriented towards their self-benefit ... [there is] a danger in losing sight of these differences in the face of the celebration of minorities as an asset and,

instead, it becomes all too apparent that minorities are caught in a position of continued indebtedness (Chan, 2005: 21-22).

This debt develops an interdependence between the refugee and the host country. Kant (1780/1979) stresses that people should avoid a sense of indebtedness, as although the beneficiary may repay their benefactor, they can never be on completely level terms. Hindu teachings reiterate this point: “the good deed that is done not in return, but in the first instance is more precious than anything is in this world or beyond. Nothing can repay that act” (Mysorekar, 2002: no page). From this perspective, for most refugees, asylum is a debt which can rarely be fully repaid.

White (1999: 47) argues for an alternative view of gratitude which allows for situations, as with friendships, in which people offer support or gifts to others, and in “accepting such help and recognising the goodwill of the giver the beneficiary is benefiting the giver. And for this the benefactor too can be grateful, thus creating a beneficent circle of gratitude.” White (1999) acknowledges that some people, such as those who have experienced prejudice, or the homeless, may feel they have very little, or nothing for which to feel gratitude, and are therefore excluded from the beneficent circle. Yet, this notion of gratitude can be seen as strengthening mutual bonds, offering the opportunity for mutual caring and concern. Within the refugee community this beneficent form of gratitude may be possible, strengthening bonds between refugees and the community. Yet refugees are largely excluded from this circle in the host society on account of negative public attitudes towards them (Schweitzer *et al.* 2005). To develop similar connections between the host community and refugees requires recognition (Dikeç, 2002). Without this, refugees remain in a situation of indebtedness rather than mutual benefit.

Hospitality

Fuglerud (1999) argues people seek asylum when they have no other option available.

However, the figure of the refugee, or the stranger, becomes problematic to the state because

the stranger is [...] someone who refuses to remain confined to the 'far away' land or go away from our own and hence [...] defies the easy expedient of spatial or temporal segregation (Bauman, 1991: 59).

The notion of supporting the stranger has rhetorical undertones in most religious scriptures, including Hinduism, whereby the stranger is given hospitality, whoever they are. The ancient Tamil scripture, Tirukural, states that "the whole purpose of earning wealth and maintaining a home is to provide hospitality to guests" (cited Melwani, 2003: 1). A guest is generally unexpected, called *atithi*, literally meaning 'without a set time' (Heart of Hinduism, 2011). In Hinduism the *atithi* is to be treated as God (Melwani, 2009). The realities of this come under question as societies have changed, becoming more fearful of the stranger in the light of increasing anti-immigration discourses, xenophobia and the increased presence of nationalist parties (Bosetti, 2011). The inability to isolate these strangers leads to policy to reduce their impact. Integration fixes structures between 'us' and 'them' whereby immigrants must meet certain thresholds in order to integrate. The 'host' society tolerates the 'deviants' who do not meet desired norms but who are attempting to adjust in pre-determined ways; if they are truly grateful then they will seek to adjust to pre-conceived norms and contribute to their host society.

Employment is one way in which refugees may contribute to society. However, it is more than an obligation as it gives people meaning and a sense of identity. Employment promotes economic independence, provides opportunities to plan for the future, offers occasions to interact with the wider host society, makes available chances to develop language skills, restores self-esteem and encourages self-reliance (Ager and Strang, 2008; Home Office, 2005). Consequently employment itself may be something for which a refugee feels grateful.

However, this is an idealised view of employment. It is important to note the extensive research demonstrating the significance of under-employment and poor working conditions which many refugees and other migrants experience (Bloch, 2002; Franz, 2003; Wills *et al.* 2010). Appropriate employment may be something for which a refugee feels grateful, inappropriate employment may not. Either way, employment offers the opportunity to give something back to the host country. Through employment refugees may attempt to justify their presence in the UK on the basis of what they can do for their host country (Chan, 2005).

Implicit within the concept of ‘host’ is the expectation that an individual will only be a host for a temporary period of time (Dikeç, 2002). A person agrees to host another due to the notion of reciprocity, whereby individuals provide hospitality to the stranger because they would expect the same if the roles were reversed. However, the rhetoric underlining assumptions of behaviour when a stranger needs support appears to be different when the stranger is also a refugee. The expectation that members of the host society could become refugees in the future is seen as unlikely when the host is situated in a democratic Western country. Refugees are unlikely to have the opportunity to repay the host’s ‘kindness’ by offering them asylum in the future. The fundamental necessity of the concept of hospitality – that the guest replaces the host in the future – is negated. Therefore if refugees cannot reciprocate the host’s generosity, they must find another way to indicate their gratitude.

Furthermore, the host society may be diverse. In the city of London refugees have the opportunity to interact with people from 270 different nationalities (Neather 2011). Indeed the 2011 census indicated that only 45% of the 8.2 million people living in the city class themselves as white Britons (Bentham 2012), although within the UK as a whole this rose to 80.5%. Despite this, previous research in other predominantly white countries such as the

US, has found that refugees had misguided notions of the ethnic and racial diversity of the country, believing that the host country has a relatively homogeneous population of white people. These perceptions were based on the media alongside family and friends (Kornfeld 2012). Given the parallels between how the US and UK media portrays ethnic minorities (Cottle 2000), it is likely that refugees may have similarly misguided notions over the ethnic and racial diversity in the UK. bell hooks (1992) argues that:

Opening a magazine or book, turning on the television set, watching a film, or looking at photographs in public spaces, we are most likely to see images of black people that reinforce and reinscribe white supremacy (cited Cottle 2000 8-9).

Representations through the media, such as these, likely influence refugee perceptions in the UK. Consequently they may also view the UK ‘host society’ to be predominantly white, especially given that the politicians and officials who develop policy around asylum in the UK are generally white. From this perspective, it is important to recognise when refugees are discussing the white host community when they are considering the wider community, as it is these perceptions which underlie refugee interpretations of hospitality or a lack thereof. Alongside this, hospitality within the host country may underlie the relationship between the refugee and their ethnic community. It is the wider ethnic community which may have supported the refugee to settle into the country. This contradicts the model of integration in which refugees are expected to give back to the host society.

Whereas previous research has explored the notion of hospitality in relation to the issues of immigration and the stranger (Bauman 1991; Dikeç 2002; Chan 2005) the concept has not been applied to individual experiences and perceptions to the same extent. The concept of hospitality offers insights into the overarching experience of refugees. However it fails to connect to the individual’s personal perspectives and experiences: the notion of gratitude provides a bridge between the individual’s views and the hospitality literature.

Method

This research is part of a wider project investigating the employment experiences of Tamil refugees in the UK (Healey 2009). Sri Lankan refugees are predominantly Tamils who have sought protection from ethnic persecution in the 19 year civil war (1983-2002) and the 2005 resumption of hostilities. Estimates vary about the overall size of the community but suggest around 200,000 Tamil refugees in Europe as a whole (Ganguly 2001). London hosts the largest population of Tamils in the UK. In-depth interviews were conducted with twenty-six male and female Tamil refugees of working age in London in 2006 (Table 1). These explored the participants' experiences of employment and the use of their skills in the UK. The refugees arrived in the UK mainly between 1997 and 2001. From initial contacts in Newham, a 'snowballing' technique was used to identify participants. The majority of these individuals were living or working within the Newham area, with a small group in Lewisham, and a few from other inner city London boroughs. The majority of the interviews were conducted in English, six of the interviewees chose to have someone translate for them; this was a local Tamil community worker who spoke fluent English. Alongside these, nineteen 'elite' contacts in London (identified by their names in italics in this paper) were also interviewed (Table 2). These were individuals who held a privileged position in the Tamil community, or worked with refugees in some context. The analytical framework of gratitude and hospitality developed over several months of reading literature around hospitality at the same time as analysing the interview transcripts. This was an iterative process of reflection and analysis to identify the extent to which the theoretical ideas were illustrated in the transcripts.

Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

The participants were illustrative of the broader Tamil refugee community. They ranged in age from their early 20s to their mid-50s. The majority of the participants were Hindu, with some practicing Christians. This is indicative of the proportions of Tamils who categorise themselves in these different religious groups in Sri Lanka (Ross and Savada, 1988). The participants were relatively highly educated with 73.1 percent having the equivalent of A-level qualifications or above in comparison to the Sri Lankan population as a whole where only 10.6 percent have such qualifications (Department of Census and Statistics, 2008). The participants were employed in a range of different ways, mostly relating to their Tamil connections. Three of the participants were self-employed, five worked in a Tamil community organisation, six people were employed within a Tamil ethnic business, five people worked with other Tamils, and seven were unemployed. Due to the small sample size of twenty-six refugee participants and nineteen elite contacts this research aims to be illustrative of the specific experiences of the participants rather than generalise as to the likely experience of all Tamil refugees living in London at the time of the research.

Hospitality as rhetoric: gratitude within integration

The problem is that either way, whichever way you look at it, either the positive or the negative sort of arguments, they both involve the defence of burden or obligation. If you happen to be that refugee or asylum seeker, no wonder you feel that, you're not here as a welcome contributor, you're someone who's here with a different degree of begrudging-ness, welcome here for one reason or another (Dakshesh).

The act of providing asylum may be understood as an act of hospitality (Hinsliff and Bright 2005). It is anticipated that the stranger, the refugee, will be grateful for any hospitality they are shown (Dikeç, 2002). However, the conditions of citizenship may define hospitality and who is 'welcome', but the prescription of such conditions also excludes and limits the

‘welcome’ itself (Venn 2002). For example, in the act of giving, the act itself negates the presence of the purity of the gift (Chan, 2005). As *Dakshesh* argues the gift of protection is negated by the perception of refugees as a burden on the host, or the requirement that they may benefit the state. Alternatively asylum may also be seen as a gift: “*it’s a new life, it’s a new thing given to you*” (*Mangai*). Refuge and the “new life” is a gift for which to be grateful. This section discusses the way in which discourses of integration were interpreted by the participants.

Refugee gratitude, expected or actual, may be two-fold: firstly for the asylum provided, and secondly for the lifestyle attained or worked towards in the host country. Within this research feelings of gratitude can be placed on a continuum on the basis of the strength of expression of gratitude and to whom it is directed. Twenty-five of the twenty-six participants expressed gratitude in one way or another. At one end of this continuum were those participants who clearly expressed gratitude towards the host country for their protection and welfare support. They considered themselves to be partially integrated, and wished to contribute to British society in some way. These respondents expressed gratitude directly towards the host society, generally on account of the support they had received in the UK (*Bhaskar*, male 30s; *Mala*, female 20s; *Khush*, male 40s; and *Ponmudi*, male 40s). For example, individuals are grateful that they have “*been given the opportunity, to set up our own businesses and come up in business life, call it as an entrepreneurial enhancement culture that has been encouraged in the UK*” (*Ponmudi*). At the opposite end of the continuum was the one participant (*Harita*, female 30s) who provided no evidence of feeling gratitude. This may be related to her low level of English and her unemployment status. However, in general the experiences of participants could be placed between these two extremes with others

expressing gratitude for their safety in the UK and more specifically gratitude towards the Tamil community.

Dikeç (2002) argues that the host sets out conditions so as to ‘control’ the guest so that the guest does not take over the host’s space. Ponmudi has addressed the host conditions in order to be accepted by the mainstream society.

I would rather be on the mainstream without all this identification and things [...] So I have acquired the British citizenship before two years, it's not like I feel the refugee status isn't good, but certainly it's you know, to change the perspective (Ponmudi).

For him this involved becoming a citizen to “change the perspective” of him from being a refugee. Yet other refugees may feel isolated from the host society as they lack the everyday tacit knowledge, for example of fluent English language (Hage 1998).

Most of the refugees they feel isolated because they don't know the language, they feel that they are not confident enough even to ask the route a white person, rather they prefer to ask the route to other community. [...] According to them the reason is – they don't understand the white person pronunciation. So that's the one reason, and then they have a perception that white people, they won't like us (Nalan).

Language enables connections to develop between refugees and the host community. The perception that the host community would be antagonistic limits such contact leading feelings of isolation to endure. For participants who have not felt welcome in the host country, but were supported by the more established members of the Tamil community when they first arrived, the nature of their gratitude may be different. For example, Kiran’s (male 30s) abilities would likely not be recognised to the same extent outside of the Tamil community. These individuals are more likely to be grateful to other Tamils, or form a part of a beneficent cycle with other Tamils.

The gift of refuge is given with “strings attached”, yet some people may still feel grateful for protection in whatever form it comes. It is more likely that notions of gratitude may emerge in response to the refuge they have received. However, where perhaps gratitude is likely to be lost, is in response to the experiences individuals have had since arriving in the UK. Bhaskar is grateful for his protection, yet he feels he has been treated badly by the immigration officials: *“Immigration may be taking a hard stance but I'm very grateful that I had something good here. I shaped my life and career here in UK”* (Bhaskar). Thomas commented that the idea of feeling safe was key to integration. This was mentioned by other interviewees whereby the lack of safety and freedom in Sri Lanka (Savita, female 20s) and *“it's the fear, basically”* (Bimala, female 30s) that prevents them from returning. By inference, it is therefore a feeling of being safe in the host country that aids in the settlement of individuals, and for which refugees are, or are expected to be, grateful. Several of the refugee participants commented on the importance of safety in one form or another. Savita concentrated on the absence of safety in Sri Lanka: *“Sri Lanka is we have not security, not freedom ...”* Mudita (male 20s) takes this point further, by recognising that by contrast the UK is safe: *“lots of problem back home so here's safe here, happy.”* The lack of safety means that individuals live in constant, but varying levels of, fear in Sri Lanka *“back home the on-going war is there, so here they don't have that, that threatening or distressed life”* (Khush); here *“we can talk to the police men”* (Trinabh, male 30s). This ability to talk safely to officialdom is for Trinabh a poignant contrast between the UK and Sri Lanka. Finally, Mala illustrated the crucial point when she stated: *“I feel protected”*. This feeling of protection may lead to feelings of gratitude. The desire to be accepted and to return the favour may make refugees more amenable to change through integration. Where individuals do not feel safe, or welcome, for example due to discrimination, then the process of integration is stalled.

Gratitude was also experienced within specific situations. This was particularly true around education. Several interviewees had moved to the UK so that their children could have an English education (Dhanya, female 40s; Chitralkha, female 40s). Their children's successful education is likely to lead to some feeling of gratitude. However, higher education was more specifically commented upon by participants. Mala was grateful that she was accepted as a refugee "*so I don't have to pay tuition*" for her university course. Without this she would not have been able to go to university as her parents could not afford the fees. Ponmudi experienced a similar situation for his Masters degree where the University of Hull allowed him to pay home student fees whilst he was still going through his asylum case. Rustam (male 20s) was also given "*help from the government [...] because when I entered University I was permanent citizen so I didn't have to pay any higher fees, all I had to pay was their student fees*". Outside of higher education, Jwalia (male 40s) was able to study his accountancy course for free because he was on job seekers' allowance. Each of these individuals has benefited from education in the UK and had financial assistance in some way. They are grateful for this to some extent, although their gratitude may be directed to the institutions that have supported them rather than the host community as a whole. Education is a particularly interesting area in terms of gratitude as it is difficult to identify where the gratitude may be directed. The Tamil community, or family members, may provide extensive encouragement, support and sometimes pressure; even if the education has been within the host community, gratitude may not be focused there. Yet the host community continues to have certain expectations of refugees.

Chan (2005) argues that migrants inevitably have some form of (unwritten) debt to pay for their stay, or at least feel that they do. Integration policy emphasises improving refugee lives by enabling them to contribute within their new society. Ponmudi believed that refugees

were welcome “*proving also that we are good citizens that have been chased out of the country and we are here for a good living*”. As long as he is a genuine refugee, and a ‘good citizen’ (conforming to expected norms and meeting integration markers) who works hard in the UK, then he believes he is showing his gratitude. Here Ponmudi illustrates how gratitude, from the perspective of the refugee, means paying back in a particular way. Parker (2000: 77) calls this a discourse of “cultural contribution”, whereby when placed upon “identifiable subjects a debt of hospitality signals the potential of repayments through the idealisation of a contributive, servile, and grateful minority as an antithesis to an indebted, unruly migrant” (Chan, 2005: 21). Such a perspective supports a discourse that associates a right to residence in the country with the exchange for capital contributions and cultural investments (Chan, 2005). Some individuals are also happy to pay such debts: “*you know it’s our duty to pay tax. I had something to say, I went to university I had a good degree so that’s a benefit that I’ve got from this country so I’m happy to repay*” (Bhaskar). Improving the utilisation of refugee skills could be read more cynically as gaining something back from the obligated refugee for the hospitable society, or justifying their acceptance within the country in the first place and “defend[ing] refugee status on account of untapped capital” (Chan, 2005: 21).

Integration through employment and ‘giving back’

The previous section explored how integration was interpreted by the participants: this section considers how the participants’ employment experiences fit within these perceptions. Employment may enable refugees to integrate and the government to harness the variety of skills and experience they bring with them (Home Office 2005). As *Dakshesh* argues:

Integration has to be, has to start with social economic integration, it has to be about allowing people to get the jobs that they should be able to get preventing discrimination in the labour – fundamentally that is about equality and equality of opportunity.

This position of socio-economic integration is a common starting point for most definitions, particularly a focus upon employment, whereby individuals have the opportunity for greater social interaction through their work to assist in other areas of integration. Integration consists of connections and transactions between refugee communities and wider communities, as Paavarasi (female 50s) demonstrates: “*if we want to put it simply, integration is socialising.*” Employment is one way in which ‘socialising’ might be established, providing refugees with spaces and opportunities for such contact.

The opportunity for refugees to partake in integration through employment is related to the refugees’ skills and abilities. *Dakshesh* related ease of integration to professionals with transferable qualifications, and English abilities, who had:

relatively little trouble integrating because they are professionals on the whole, they speak a fairly good degree of English, they have English transferable qualifications, they are au fait with the ways British society works (Dakshesh).

In contrast he recognises that someone who comes from a “*poor village in Sri Lanka, doesn’t speak a word of English, hasn’t reached school because the war started before school ... probably ends up working in a petrol station*” (*Dakshesh*) and will have greater problems integrating. The focus upon skills and background experience in an individual’s ability to integrate is significant. Skilled professionals have greater opportunities to ‘give back’ and fully integrate.

Individuals who are more skilled, **particularly in English**, have greater options in the UK. With abilities in a variety of different arenas, individuals may have the chance to utilise these skills, but only if they have the language skills to translate their abilities into their new environment. Personality also remains important; for example, in the sense of whether they have the drive and desire to achieve a particular position:

I think that I can only attribute [the utilisation of their skills] to the individual's determination, because I've seen some people practicing law [...] irrespective of the education they received from home and so on, but because they are determined they invest their time, they invest their resources, they work on accreditation (Kibru).

Some individuals have more advantages than others, or they have had the determination to take up those advantages. Ponmudi, referring to himself and Bhaskar, commented that because of their “*formal education [in the UK] ... we have been fortunate to understand and include ourselves in the main community and there are people who are still having that sort of difficulty and they don't know where to go, what to do and basic things like that.*” The chance to study in the UK enabled Ponmudi and Bhaskar to develop their English language abilities alongside providing them with opportunities to make connections with people from other communities. Employment within the wider economy, may also offer such a situation. By coincidence, or as a result of their education in the UK, Ponmudi and Bhaskar were two of four people, all educated in the UK, who expressed gratitude towards wider UK society and not just the Tamil community.

However, in terms of gratitude, a skilled professional is unlikely to remain grateful to the host country if they feel that the host society constantly places barriers to their achievement:

After an initial phase of relief and gratitude towards the host country... positive feelings were gradually replaced by frustration at the lack of opportunities to plan actively for their future (Lavik *et al.* 1996: 83).

One such area of concern was the sense that, as a refugee, they would not have the same chances as others in employment. Personal experiences of discrimination were raised, within this research, relatively infrequently. However, there was a definitive rhetoric around refugees experiencing discrimination. It was mentioned that there was perceived discrimination towards refugees: “*the moment somebody sees your name or when you put in*

an application you always have you know that somebody will see me or interpret me as a refugee, that's always there" (Kibru). This discrimination does not necessarily prevent employment, rather that the individual is then noted as a refugee, which may have certain connotations in the mind of the employer. This will likely depend upon the ethnic background of the employer. Integration through employment is only possible if refugees are accepted within the work place and believe they are treated fairly.

Alongside highly skilled Tamil refugees who may or may not experience the feeling of gratitude towards the host community, there are also those who do not feel the need to 'give back'. Paavarasi wishes to tell her fellow Tamil refugees that "*because they are living in England, you are going to have to work.*" She believes that it is only possible for them to show their gratitude and integrate, if they work. Khush also felt an obligation to give back through his work, however his focus was upon the Tamil community. Although grateful to the host society for what he has gained in the form of protection, education and therapy, he wanted to use his skills as a counsellor to support other Tamils who are experiencing difficulties in the UK. Rather than envisaging himself as the guest, in some ways Khush saw himself as the host to the new arrivals. He wished to provide future Tamils with a 'welcome' and support in the UK, particularly assisting individuals to deal with their past experiences.

In the UK Tamil refugees are hard-working and often economically integrated. However, most of the participants worked within the ethnic economy. This may be due to their inability to find employment in the mainstream economy. Alternatively it may be due to their desire to give back to the Tamil community, either to individual people who supported them and gave them work as asylum seekers, or family members who have given them a place to stay, i.e. other Tamils who have supported them psychologically, economically and

practically. So if they must 'give back' then their gratitude is often focused upon other Tamils in a cycle of beneficent gratitude. Hence, if individuals do wish to give back there is a further incentive to work within the ethnic economy.

Conclusion: gratitude and the 'integration project'

The concept of integration is a disputed and complex term. It is understood differently over time by, and within, the different groups of academics, policy makers, and refugees themselves. This paper has shown that integration is understood by the refugee and elite participants to be underlain by an expectation of gratitude. A feeling of gratitude may assist in the process of integration or it may act as a barrier. As forced migrants, refugees did not choose to leave their homes, nor did they always make the choice to come to the UK specifically (Robinson and Segrott, 2002). The lack of desire to *actually* be in the UK may limit the potential for a refugee to feel gratitude towards the host country. In this research a feeling of being grateful for the protection they have received was evident by eight of the participants, but not guaranteed. Furthermore the experiences refugees have, once in the UK, could reinforce a feeling of gratitude or retract from such a position depending on the individual's positive or negative experiences. It was also found that several of the participants expressed gratitude directed towards other Tamils rather than wider communities as it is the Tamil community which has supported them in the UK.

Gratitude endorses particular power relations between the recipient and the giver. It implies a position whereby the recipient desires to re-pay the provider for what they have received. Integration through employment plays upon such a position. For the host society, refugee employment improves the economic performance of the country by contributing to an amelioration of skill shortages, the payment of taxes, and by reducing refugee welfare

payments. For the refugee, employment offers them both financial and psychological value, and may lead the refugee to be grateful to the employer. However, as the participants predominantly worked within the ethnic economy, there are few opportunities for integration through employment to move beyond an economic contribution into other forms of integration, particularly the social element.

The concept of gratitude has provided a useful tool for analysing the notion of integration. In terms of understanding the Tamil community and refugee experiences, the concept has further illuminated significant ties within the ethnic community. It has also provided evidence of the ways in which some individuals have a stronger desire to pay back. These people are frequently those who had received more than refuge, and particularly education, from the host. The concept of gratitude enables a deeper understanding of integration for those who feel gratitude in some way, it offers the opportunity to assess critically how integration policy may be interpreted by the individuals it directly affects. Unfortunately, however, an analysis of refugee experiences using this concept of gratitude offers little towards finding potential alternative ways of supporting the integration of refugees beyond the importance of employment. It would be beneficial for future work to examine this discourse of gratitude in different international contexts with other refugee communities as this may further shed light on the effects of place and policy upon integration.

The interrelationships between integration, gratitude and employment are significant. From an official perspective, employment assists in the process of integration; gratitude towards the host community is more likely if individuals have employment (especially if that employment is in the wider society); and the chances of integration are higher if refugees feel a sense of gratitude and wish to pay back. However, for the refugee who has received protection, the

debt may continue: the refugee may never fully repay their benefactor. As a consequence, integration as a process may be unobtainable and many Tamils will consider themselves to be in a perpetual state of exile (Ramaswamy, 2005). For some, this is desirable, as it mentally preserves the possibility of a return to Sri Lanka: for others who find themselves marginalised by British society, they remain ‘to be tolerated’, and feel that they will never be fully accepted.

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Table 1: Selected refugee participants and background features

Interviewee	Age	Employment status	Length of time in UK	Skill level	English skills
<i>Bhaskar</i> (male)	Early 30s	Self-employed.	13 years	High skilled	Very high – Studied for degree in the UK
<i>Bimala</i> (female)	Early 30s	Employed full-time in community organisation.	4 years	High skilled	Very high – Taught in English at school
<i>Chitrlekha</i> (female)	Early 40s	Unemployed. Volunteers at community organisation.	8 years	High skilled	High – English education levels in the UK
<i>Dhanya</i> (female)	Mid 40s	Unemployed. Volunteers for Tamil school.	5 years	High skilled	Medium – Some English education in Sri Lanka
<i>Harita</i> (female)	Late 30s	Unemployed.	5 years	Low skilled	Low – translation for interview Understands some spoken English but lack of tuition in Sri Lanka or the UK
<i>Jwalia</i> (male)	Mid 40s	Unemployed. Studying accountancy course.	9 years	High skilled	High – Studied English in Sri Lanka
<i>Khush</i> (male)	Early 40s	Employed part-time and self-employed part-time.	11 years	High skilled	High – English tuition in Sri Lanka
<i>Kiran</i> (male)	Early 30s	Employed full-time in community organisation.	9 years	Medium skilled	High – Married to an English woman
<i>Mala</i> (female)	Early 20s	Employed part-time in Tamil shop. Studying.	9 years	High skilled	Very high – Studied degree and some schooling in UK
<i>Mudita</i> (male)	Mid 20s	Employed full-time in a factory.	12 years	Low skilled	Very low – translation for interview Lack of English education
<i>Paavarasi</i> (female)	Mid 50s	Employed full-time in Tamil solicitors.	5 years	High skilled	Very high – Taught in English at school and parents
<i>Ponmudi</i> (male)	Mid 40s	Self-employed.	9 years	High skilled	Very high – Studied for Masters degree in the UK
<i>Rustam</i> (male)	Early 20s	Employed full-time in family business.	8 years	High skilled	High – Studied degree and some schooling in the UK
<i>Savita</i> (female)	Early 20s	Employed full-time in Tamil solicitors.	1 year	High skilled	Medium – Some English education in Sri Lanka
<i>Trinabh</i> (male)	Mid 30s	Employed part-time in two businesses: a supermarket and a petrol station.	5 years	Medium skilled	Medium – Some English education in Sri Lanka

Table 2: Selected ‘elite’ participants

Elite interviewees	Organisation or position
<i>Dakshesh</i> ^T	Charity Think Tank
Kibru ^R	Tamil Community Organisation Manager
<i>Mangai</i> ^T	Tamil Community Organisation Manager
<i>Nalan</i> ^{RT}	Tamil Community Organisation
<i>Thomas</i>	Refugee Charity Organisation

^RRefugee. ^TTamil. Note: names in italics are pseudonyms.