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Caring for the Other

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Katalin Illes and Jennifer Wascak: Caring for the Other

New Economy, Old Traditions: Caring Entrepreneurship

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Abstract

The paper asks ethical questions about the responsibilities towards refugees and offers case study and direct observation evidence of current barriers to integration that refugees and asylum seekers experience in the East of London. The potential benefits for individuals and communities who choose to take an active part in supporting the integration process are also outlined.

The researchers frame the refugee crisis as a moral choice that members of the host countries need to make individually and collectively. It will be argued that the way we think about the refugees and asylum seekers will impact on our actions and the level of responsibility we are prepared to take for their well-being.

Martin Buber (1970) suggests that “The world is twofold for man in accordance with his twofold attitude. The attitude of man is twofold in accordance with the two basic words he speaks.” (p.53.)

The basic words are the word pairs: ‘I-You’, and ‘I-It’. There is a major difference between these two attitudes. “The basic word I-You can only be spoken with one’s whole being. The basic word I-It can never be spoken with one’s whole being.” (p.54.)

When one’s attitude is ‘I-It’ the other is objectified. When the attitude is ‘I-You’ we stand in relation to the other. This clear distinction sheds some light on one’s moral agency, self-regulation or disengagement of moral agency.

Albert Bandura (2016) argues that moral agency is inhibitive and proactive. The inhibitive form stops one from behaving inhumanely and the proactive form is manifested in compassion for others and efforts to help at a personal cost. Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) suggests that human functioning is a product of the interplay between personal influences, the behaviour individuals engage in, and the environmental forces that impinge on them.

One of the researchers worked as a volunteer at a charity supporting refugees and asylum seekers in the East of London. She collected rich data through observation and semi-structured interviews. The findings suggest that there are a number of barriers to integration. These barriers cannot be overcome simply by the efforts of the refugees and asylum seekers. They need the active, willing and coordinated support of individuals from the host country, government bodies, civic organisations and charities.

When refugees are invited to an ‘I-You’ relationship and receive human to human support from individuals they have a good chance to become an integral part of civic society and contribute to the growth of the community and the economy. For this to become a norm the host country needs to take more responsibility, develop integrated approaches and act with unified moral commitment to help refugees and asylum seekers.

Key words: caring for the other; moral disengagement; ethics of care

Introduction

The number of asylum seekers and migrants entering Europe is at record levels. (Amnesty International, 2015). Though no official numbers exist, in 2015 the refugee population in the UK was estimated to be 123,000 people, with another 33,000 outstanding asylum applications waiting to be processed (Fullfact.org 2017). There is no question that the influx of such large numbers of people seeking better lives for themselves and their families creates social, economic, and political challenges to UK local councils, the Home Office, NHS, immigration courts, and Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) who struggle to provide for, process, and finance their basic needs. This paper does not attempt to explore larger policy issues of whether countries like the United Kingdom should welcome refugees or keep them out of its borders. Rather, this paper explores the moral duty and practical challenges of integrating refugees that are already here in the United Kingdom and make them productive members of their new society.

This paper is written in the immediate aftermath of the multiple deadly terrorist attacks in the United Kingdom largely committed by home grown extremists who are first or second generation immigrants. Research into the psychology of terrorism supports that immigrants who feel marginalized and experience discrimination are at greater risk for radicalisation. (Padilla, 2015.) More and more, ISIS and other terrorist organisations are focusing recruitment efforts on first and second generation immigrants who live in Western countries. As such, there are practical as well as moral reasons for identifying and breaking down barriers that prevent immigrants from attaining a sense of British identity. This paper frames the integration issue as a moral choice that must be made by individuals as well as the UK as a country. It will be argued that the way we think about the refugees and asylum seekers will impact on our actions and the level of responsibility we are prepared to take for their well-being. The paper will propose a model that personalises UK nationals' attitudes towards refugees and breaks down barriers that contribute to refugees' sense of exclusion from UK society.

One of the authors worked for a charity assisting asylum seekers and refugees in London and collected rich data that might inspire reflection and perhaps more conscious and compassionate action by individuals and communities who intend to review what it means for them to care for others. It triggered a deeper, historic reflection in the authors and raised more general questions about our responsibilities in the world. The current flow of migrants is the latest of many exoduses in human history. Have we learnt anything from the past or are we as suspicious of others as our ancestors used to be? Could philosophy and psychology help us to see the world as more interconnected and encourage us to make more responsible choices and care for the interests and wellbeing of all?

In the first part of the paper we outline the case that provides a context for the paper and give an overview of the empirical research that triggered the authors' reflections. Then we explore what responsibility and caring for the other means by discussing the dialogical philosophy of Martin Buber.

We briefly review Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory and glance at the variety of ways individuals can violate their own moral principles and still preserve self-respect and even feel good about themselves.

The final part of the paper raises some practical questions about self-knowledge, self-regulation, moral self-sanctions and how one could possibly become more caring and take more

into account the interests of others with the help of philosophy. We ponder on the developmental values of applying some of Plato's, Kant's and John Rawls's concepts for improving one's decision making and consideration for others.

The Case study

The number of asylum seekers and migrants entering the United Kingdom has reached levels not seen since World War II (Amnesty International, 2015). The influx of such large numbers of people seeking better lives for themselves and their families creates social, economic, and political challenges to UK local councils, the Home Office, immigration courts, and NGOs who struggle to provide for, process, and finance their basic needs.

The growing number of migrants also create fear among natives who feel that their jobs, life-style and culture are in danger.

In the meantime, the lives of the asylum seekers themselves are on hold. Many struggle to endure the physical and emotional turmoil of their day-to-day lives, suffer from anxiety and depression due to the chronic uncertainties of their future, and become worn down in their efforts to navigate a long and complex immigration status procedure.

This study (please find a more detailed version of the case in the appendix) is based on an extensive desk research, semi-structured interviews and observations. The research findings were analysed according to the two aspects of integration barriers that are most generally agreed upon by scholars: (1) the functional elements of integration (such as food, clothing, housing, employment); and (2) the social elements of integration (a sense of belonging in your community). It is important to note that the functional and social aspects of integration are closely dependent on one other, and they frequently overlap. Success in one of these categories is usually dependent on some level of success in the other. The successful social and functional integration of refugees necessarily requires some renegotiation of identity by both newcomers and host nations (Phillimore 2012).

Language was found as a key barrier to both elements of integration. Those who speak some English are more able to express their needs, establish new relationships and begin the process of integration into the mainstream of British society. Those who do not speak English depend on interpreters and can become totally isolated, lonely and depressed. Their hopes for acceptance and inclusion in their new society become dispelled over time, along with their desire to fight for the limited resources or personal attention that could help them learn English and develop social or professional networks with the native population. Those people are never able to leave the fringes of society and most likely develop a dependency on the state rather than seek independent existence and flourishing in their new country.

Beyond the legal and social responsibilities of designated organisations such as the Home Office, councils and NGOs we believe that citizens and civic societies could take a more active role in helping the integration of asylum seekers and refugees into society.

Our paper is aiming to raise awareness about the interconnected nature of our human existence and offer some philosophical considerations to assist the review of one's relationship to other human beings and cultivate a more caring attitude towards Others.

A Philosophical Consideration: Seeing the human essence and the divine in the other

Martin Buber (1878-1965) is known as a German-Jewish philosopher, although he considered himself as a Polish Jew (Margolin, 2013) as he was brought up by his grandparents and lived in Poland during his early years. In Poland he became a student of Hasidism, a sect of Judaism that arose in the second half of the eighteenth century in southeastern Poland. The founder of this mystical movement was Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov (1700-1760). His student Rabbi Dov Ber Mezeritch (1710? – 1772) attracted large number of young men to the movement who became deeply religious and “exalted simplicity and devotion above mere scholarship” (Friedman, 2002 p. 18). Hasidism turned the attention to the love of God and man in the present and argued that the present moment is the moment of redemption and leads to the ultimate consummation. Mystical psychology and warm life feeling were infused into religion with the emphasis on the individual soul’s progression and efforts to purify itself, help others and cleave to God. Hasidic individuality is embodied in a saying of Rabbi Zusya: ‘In the coming world, they will not ask me: “Why were you not Moses?” They will ask me: “Why were you not Zusya?”’ (Quoted in Friedman, M. 2002. pp. 20-21). It is argued that through purer and greater actions one can become a co-worker of God and work towards the redemption of the world. According to the Hasidic belief each individual is responsible for the piece of world entrusted to him (Quoted in Friedman, 2002 p. 23.). The Hasidic movement and ideology had a great impact on Buber’s views and they are visible in his anthologies of Hasidic tales and his famous book “I and Thou”.

The development of Buber’s thought started with mysticism then it evolved into existentialism and finally reached dialogical philosophy (Theunissen, 1986.). However, most of the ideas of his early writings are carried forward and integrated into his thoughts in a changed form. “Thus Buber’s existentialism retains much of his mysticism, and his dialogical philosophy in turn includes important mystical and existential elements” (Friedman, 2002. p. 29.).

Buber believes that a creative person is not the intellectual or the artist but the many-sided man in whom human happenings stream together in order to attain new developments in spirit and deed. Conflict is the essence of creativity and in a creative person the deep inner division is brought to harmony. “The creative kingdom is there where form and formation thrive, and rootedness is a mighty helper to the individual to remain therein.” (Friedman, 2002 p. 35)

Buber argues that “deep responsibility is a human response in everyday life to the signs of eternal Thou, although it is difficult for us as modern human beings to hear them” (Margolin, 2013 p. 77).

“Of course, whoever steps before the countenance has soared way beyond duty and obligation – but not because he has moved away from the world; rather because he has come truly close to it. Duties and obligations one has only towards the stranger: towards one’s intimates one is kind and loving. When man steps before the countenance, the world becomes wholly present to him for the first time in the fullness of presence, illuminated by eternity, and he can say You in one word to the being of all beings. There is no longer any tension between the world and God but only the one actuality. He is not rid of responsibility: for the pains of the finite version that explores effects he has exchanged the momentum of the infinite kind, the power of loving responsibility for the whole unexplorable course of the world, the deep inclusion in the world before the countenance of God. Ethical judgements, to be sure, he has left behind forever: ‘evil’ men are for him merely those commended to him for a deeper responsibility, those more in

need of love; but decisions he must continue to make in the depths of spontaneity unto death – calmly deciding ever again in favor of right action” (Buber, 1970 pp.156-157).

Buber’ religious beliefs are rooted in Kantian thought but he moved beyond Kant’s strict separation of traditional religious concepts and the discussions of the human mind. According to Kant one’s understanding of the world depends on how one’s consciousness is conditioned by the categories one thinks in. He argued that all our thoughts are created by human consciousness including God so God does not exist outside one’s consciousness. Buber “took the principle of relationship from Kant, but diverged from him, claiming that there are not one but two kinds of relationship between subject and object” (Margolin, 2013 p. 79).

In the beginning of I and Thou Buber states that:

“The world is twofold for man in accordance with his twofold attitude.

The attitude of man is twofold in accordance with the two basic words he speaks.

The basic words are not single words but word pairs.

One basic word is the word pair I-You.

The other basic word is the word pair I-It; but this basic word is not changed when He or She takes the place of It.

Thus the I of man is also two fold.

For the I of the basic word I-You is different from that in the basic word I-It.” (Buber, 1970 p. 53).

Buber believes that these two kinds of relationships hold true for any relationship of the self and the world including relationships with other people, with nature and the spiritual world. There is a major difference between these two attitudes. In the I-You relationship the I and the Other are both fully there as equals and whole. “The basic word I-You can only be spoken with one’s whole being. The basic word I-It can never be spoken with one’s whole being.” (Buber 1970 p.54.) The I-It relationship is based on the differentiation in the world and related to the usefulness of the relationship to the individual. The I-It relationship is what Kant described between the subject and the object. However, the I-You relationship is something rather different because through this relationship man is able to step out of himself. For Buber the “I-You” is a bridge to modern man’s concept of God.

Margolin (2013 p. 80.) offers the following quote: “When one of his students asked Buber: “What does an atheist like me do if he can’t find the Thou? If I gaze in wonder at the universe but still can’t find a Thou there?” Buber replied: “The fact that you don’t hear the Thou doesn’t mean there isn’t broadcasting. Simply that your receiver is not yet turned on.”

This means that for Buber the eternal Thou is always present, though not everyone can hear the Thou.”

In his essay “Dialogue” Buber explains his views on responsibility. For him responsibility is how one responds to the signs coming into one’s life via human beings, nature or the spiritual world. When one is too absorbed in oneself and the receiver is not turned on it is easy to miss the calls and the signs trying to enter into one’s life.

Buber claims that the meeting with God depends on the human mind. For him God is not the creation of the human mind and one’s meeting with the divine depends on the quality of one’s inner intentions, quality of thoughts and overall life in the world.

“To Buber’s mind, God is present where there is an I-Thou relationship as free as possible from the absolute control of the I-It relationship that analyzes and divides reality into its components.” (Margolin, 2013 p.83.)

Levinas (1967) criticized Buber for suggesting that responsibility is a dialogue. He argued that dialogical philosophy was too narrow and was limited to the familiar. Buber defended his position and claimed that the ‘I-Thou’ relationship is particularly meaningful and powerful when strangers or even enemies can find the shared human essence and divine presence in each other.

In the more and more fragmented and alienated world Martin Buber’s thoughts and profound statements are a rich source for reflection and discussion. When one’s attitude is ‘I-It’ the other is objectified. When the attitude is ‘I-You’ we stand in relation to the other. This clear distinction sheds some light on one’s moral agency, self-regulation or disengagement of moral agency. These are the concepts that we explore in the next part of the paper by discussing Albert Bandura’s research on social cognitive theory and moral disengagement.

Moral Disengagement – Why do we disregard the Other?

Albert Bandura (2016) challenges the theories suggesting that human behaviour resides with the individual or with the environment. He rejects all unidirectional causation and proposes a three-way interactive and dynamic connection. He argues that moral agency is either inhibitive or proactive. The inhibitive form stops one from behaving inhumanely and “the proactive form, grounded in a humanitarian ethic, is manifested in compassion for the plight of others and efforts to further their well-being often at a personal cost.” (Rorty, 1993 quoted in Bandura, 2016 p. 1-2.). In his seminal work, the ‘social cognitive theory’ he argues for a triadic codetermination and suggests that human functioning is a product of interplay of personal influences, the behaviours individuals engage in and the environmental forces that impact on them (Bandura, 1986).

The personal determinants include biological factors, competencies, belief systems, values, goals, attitudes, emotional states and self-conceptions. These factors influence how one perceives the environment and how one acts in it. (Bandura, 2016).

The second contributor is the actual behaviour that can take physical, social or emotional forms. Behaviour can alter the environmental conditions and individuals can trigger stereotypical reactions from the social environment regardless of what they do or say based on their gender, race, age, ethnicity and physical characteristics.

The third contributor is the environmental influences. Social cognitive theory makes a distinction between imposed, selected and created environments. The imposed environment impinges on individuals whether they like it or not. Although one cannot control such an environment one can decide how to respond or react to it. In Bandura’s view the environment is mainly a potentiality and “does not come into being until it is selected and actualized by the actions that people take” (Bandura, 2016 p.7.). Different people interact with the same environment in different ways. Some take advantage of the enabling and positive aspects of the environment others get entangled in the aversive and debilitating aspects of the same environment.

People also select and create their environments. It is particularly true in the age of technological advancements when social networks and virtual, online environments become more and more part of one's daily life and reality.

Bandura argues that efficacy beliefs also shape people's expectations. Efficacy beliefs determine how people view opportunities and challenges. Individuals with low self-efficacy beliefs are easily convinced of possible negative outcomes and they quite quickly give up trying. Resilient belief on the other hand is a highly adaptive resource both in change and self-development. Bandura warns that agentic capabilities do not come with a built in moral awareness or value system and wrongdoers can have high efficacy and cause a lot of harm.

Theories of human agency focus primarily on the individual, however, Bandura distinguishes between individual, proxy and collective agencies. Moral disengagement operates on all three levels of agency. Individuals tend to "sanitize or sanctify detrimental activities that are within their sphere of control and shift the responsibility for the activities elsewhere in the chain of command." (Bandura, 2016. p. 13.) Proxy agency is often used by organisations to shield themselves from controversial agencies they promote. These proxy agencies are often pretend to be a grass-root voice of the public.

There is no universally accepted moral law or code of conduct. Most moral theories focus on the cognitive aspects of moral behaviour. However, very little research had been done to understand how moral standards are converted to moral conduct. Bandura's research offers many illustrations and rich examples of the irregularities between one's proclaimed moral standards and actions. Moral mandates are often overridden by emotions, social pressure or different kinds of incentives.

Individuals self-construct their moral standards, they draw from a variety of sources, influenced by many factors and do not always practice what they preach. The same individual can follow different moral standards in different settings or in different activities not necessarily even being aware of these inconsistencies.

Bandura's overarching question is: How people do harm and live with themselves? His answer is that it happens through moral, social and economic justification by cognitively reconstructing morality and creating a "just cause" where the end justifies the means (Bandura, 2016).

Language is a powerful tool and systematically used for reconstructing morality. Detrimental activities are often expressed in euphemistic terms. There is rich literature on the language of non-responsibility and sanitized language (e.g. Gambino, 1973). Professor Gerald Grow (2012) offers the following tips for good euphemistic writing: "put it in the passive voice and delete the agent of the actions; inflate the terminology that does not add meaning; build in noun strings; add a qualifier of uncertain relation to the original statement; add noun strings and terminology to the qualifier; separate related words; equivocate and obfuscate; cover your tracks and make yourself look good." (quoted in Bandura, 2016 p.54).

Advantageous comparison is another technique that is used to inflate wrong doing. Skillful framing can make the lesser evil look almost righteous. Displacement of responsibility is also a frequent practice when one is obscuring or minimizing one's role in the wrong doing. 'I only followed orders' is a classic response in that context.

One can deny, distort or disregard the harmful effects of one's acts and victims can be dehumanized to justify wrong doing. This latter approach is particularly powerful since hurting or disregarding the needs of another human being with the same basic needs as one's own is rather difficult. Recognizing similarities between ourselves and the other triggers compassion and empathy.

Psychological research emphasizes that the worst can be brought out of good people when other individuals are dehumanized. Research also suggests that when conflicts and 'enemies' are humanized then one tends to develop compassion and empathy towards them.

Discussion

After months of media report on the influx of refugees and asylum seekers into the Southern European countries and their journeys mostly on foot towards the North triggered some discussions. Politicians skillfully tried to explain why the responsibility belongs to the other European countries and not to the UK. Many people and NGOs have been working to help refugees all along and see them as worth of compassion and help. One day the image of a little dead boy appeared across the news channels and immediately turned the migrants and asylum seekers into suffering human beings who deserve compassion, justice and help. This photo is an example of a means to raise the consciousness of regular individuals, and making them relate-able as fellow human beings, rather than just categories of "Others" to whom mainstream society could not otherwise connect. Donations started to pour in and the number of volunteers offering help to refugees increased. This example confirms the proactive moral agency and the powerfulness of humanizing 'the other' that Bandura talks about. Sadly the news value of the little boy faded rather fast and most of our country went back to its normal behaviour and continued to be disengaged from the human suffering of the refugees by blocking out the issue totally, passing the blame onto the government and agencies (after all it is their job to sort this out), reconstructing morality (we have a hard life ourselves with Brexit and other uncertainties why should we take responsibility for the wellbeing of strangers?), creating advantageous comparisons (the UK gives more aid money to the world than anyone else so we have already done our bit).

Our case study research has found that volunteers who got to know the migrants and asylum seekers as individual human beings and took responsibility for helping them to settle and develop some roots in British society were rewarded by establishing enriched and soul nourishing relationships. By treating the Other as an equal and offering help and support in a respectful way, by expecting nothing in return simply standing in an I-Thou relationship offered a rich reward for the helpers as well as the refugees.

How could we consciously encourage the language and behaviour of humanization? How could we become more self-observant and catch ourselves before we miss an opportunity to move into an 'I-Thou' relationship?

Nathan Harter (2017) offers three different philosophical perspectives to improve one's self knowledge, develop a higher degree of presence and vigilance, and monitor one's moral conduct and ethical behaviour. Harter makes these suggestions for leaders, however, we believe that these three reflective exercises could benefit us all. They are particularly interesting because rather than going inside ourselves for self-knowledge one is invited to take an external, broader perspective of oneself.

Plato: what if you are anonymous?

In Plato's Republic (1968, Book II. 359d-360b) one of the stories is about an ancestor of Gyges, a shepherd who discovers a special ring that enables him to disappear whenever he wants to. Glaucon (the story-teller) claims that by using the ring Gyges seduces the queen, displace the king and gains fortune and power for himself. Glaucon challenges Socrates "And who in the same situation would not do likewise?" Glaucon believes that under the same conditions even the most virtuous person would follow his or her desires. This gives Socrates an opportunity to explore the nature of virtue that persists whether you are detected by others or not. He asks Glaucon: Is your virtue only depends on fear of detection?

This is a question that has relevance to all who care to reflect on it. Are we hiding our authentic self and pretend to be someone else than who we really are?

If we were anonymous and nobody would judge or scrutinize our behaviour would we act and behave differently? By being honest with ourselves while reflecting on this question we might learn something new about ourselves. One would hope that even when we are anonymous we must not evade the scrutiny of ourselves.

Kant: everyone's viewpoint needed to be considered

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was an enlightenment philosopher. He was committed to rationality as the highest capacity human beings could achieve. Kant was interested in moral judgement, aesthetic judgement, and practical judgement. He argued that in each judgement one needs to consider as many points of views as possible beyond one's own. He taught the principle of reciprocity and argued that one needs to imagine how the other person feels in a given situation. His work Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals (1785 [1997]) asserts the possibility of an absolute moral law, as contained within his idea of 'categorical imperative'. According to Kant one should only act in a way that would be acceptable for all human beings to act given identical circumstances. How would we make decisions if we followed Kant's philosophy and agreed that there was absolute right and absolute wrong and there were no exceptions to the categorical imperative of the universal moral law?

The practical take away of Kant's view is that before making a decision one needs to take a birds eyes view of the situation and consider it rationally and impartially from all possible perspectives.

John Rawls: what if you might be anyone?

John Rawls (1921-2002) was and American moral and political philosopher. His book A Theory of Justice (1971) is considered to be one of the most important contributions to political philosophy in the 20th century. The starting point of his argument is that "the most reasonable principles of justice are those everyone would accept and agree to from a fair position"(Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, 1995 pp. 774-75).

Rawls argued that we need a 'veil of ignorance' to overcome "the specific contingencies which put men at odds and tempt them to exploit social and natural circumstances to their own advantage (Rawls, 1971. p. 136). Rawls suggest that people need to be put into an 'original position' where they can design an acceptable form of agreement for living together or doing business. In this 'original position' the participants "do not know how the various alternatives will affect their own particular case [and] they are obliged to evaluate principles solely on the basis of general consideration" (Rawls, 1971 p. 137).

Behind the veil of ignorance participants know certain things about the world but they do not know their role when the contract is implemented. They have no idea what their place in society will be. Rawls considered his proposition a thought experiment, an act of imagination and was aware that it was not a real life possibility. However, as an experiment it is valuable because “if a knowledge of particulars is allowed, then the outcome is biased by arbitrary contingencies” (Rawls, 1971 p.141.).

It is a good exercise to drop our status or other features of identity and imagine what it would be like to be somebody else. A migrant perhaps or a traumatised asylum seeker who lost everything in the home country and trying to find refuge in a strange land where he/she understands little and humiliated a lot.

Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to offer a case study research and by discussing the specifics of the case raise general questions about our individual and collective responsibilities to care about the well-being of others.

Martin Buber’s works offers philosophical underpinning to our case of human relationships and responsibility. For Buber relation is reciprocity and “we live in the currents of universal reciprocity” (Buber, 1970 p. 67).

If relationships are so vital why is it that there is so much moral disengagement in the world? We tried to find some answers to this question through the work of Albert Bandura and his social cognitive theory. Bandura argues that moral agency is either inhibitive or proactive and we have a choice most of the time whether to respond, be engaged positively and supportively or morally disengage.

We have found that being more self-aware helps one to appreciate that:

“There are three spheres in which the world of relation arises.

The first: life with nature. Here the relation vibrates in the dark and remains below language. The creatures stir across from us, but they are unable to come to us, and the You we say to them sticks to the threshold of language.

The second: life with men. Here the relation is manifest and enters language. We can give and receive the You.

The third: life with spiritual beings. Here the relation is wrapped in a cloud but reveals itself, it lacks but creates language. We hear no You and yet feel addressed; we answer – creating, thinking, acting: with our being we speak the basic word, unable to say You with our mouth.

But how can we incorporate into the world of the basic word what lies outside language?

In every sphere, through everything that becomes present to us, we gaze toward the train of the eternal You; in each we perceive a breath of it; in every You we address the eternal You, in every sphere according to its manner “(Buber, 1970 pp.56-57.).

In the discussion part of the paper we offered three possible reflections for enhancing self-knowledge. With the help of Plato, Kant and Rawls we can try to imagine what it would be like, how we would behave and how we would make decisions if we were anonymous, if we were identical to everyone else or if we could be anyone including the poorest and most marginalized in society.

Raising self and collective awareness about our responsibilities for other human beings, nature and the planet requires ongoing efforts both from individuals and communities.

However we believe it is the best investment one can consciously make into the well-being of the self and present and future generations.

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Appendix

Case study

I. Introduction/Background

The number of asylum seekers and migrants entering the United Kingdom has reached levels not seen since World War II (Amnesty International, 2015). The influx of such large numbers of people seeking better lives for themselves and their families creates social, economic, and political challenges to UK local councils, the Home Office, immigration courts, and NGOs who struggle to provide for, process, and finance their basic needs. In the meantime, the lives of the asylum seekers themselves are on hold. Many struggle to endure the physical and emotional turmoil of their day-to-day lives, suffer from anxiety and depression due to the chronic uncertainties of their future, and become worn down in their efforts to navigate a long and complex immigration status procedure.

II. Research Methodology & Limitations

Refugee integration has direct and substantial impacts on the UK's business, economic, governmental, political, and social spheres. Existing research can be divided into three categories: law and policy; fear, uncertainty, and isolation; and concepts of integration.

Through a series of semi-structured interviews and direct observation of refugees served by a small NGO in East London, the authors identified and explored barriers that impact refugees' abilities to integrate into UK society in terms of social connections, education, employment, training, and general feelings of being accepted and connected to their communities. The observations and interviews took place between May 2016 – December 2016, and included refugees and asylum seekers from all corners of the globe. The objective was to use the information gleaned to (1) gain a better understanding of the barriers and issues faced by asylum seekers and refugees; (2) utilize the information to help RCO's, policy makers, and government officials gain a better understanding of these challenges.

Integration is an extensive process that takes years if not decades to fully assess and evaluate. Semi-structured interviews do not allow the monitoring of experiences and feelings of asylum seekers and refugees at various stages of the integration process, which could have served to test some of the research conclusions. A second and very significant research limitation was the limited number of people who created the basis for the research and conclusions. The small number of research subjects prevented identification and exploration of integration barrier themes that could have been specific to people of certain ethnic origins, or gender, for example. Finally, the research methodology was limited by whatever information the interviewees felt comfortable sharing with the researcher, and their abilities to share their experiences and feelings it within the confines of the English language.

The research subjects included both refugees and asylum seekers. Though asylum seekers and refugees are distinct legal classifications, the overriding challenges and integration barriers they experience are largely the same, particularly in terms of social integration. For this reason the authors utilized the experiences of both asylum seekers and refugees for this research.

III. Analysis and Discussion

Integration is a multi-faceted, non-linear process that is difficult to identify, quantify, and evaluate. The research findings were analysed according to the two aspects of integration barriers that are most generally agreed upon by scholars: (1) the functional elements of integration (such as food, clothing, housing, employment); and (2) the social elements of integration (a sense of belonging in your community). It is important to note, however, that the functional and social aspects of integration are closely dependent on one other, and they frequently overlap. Success in one of these categories is usually dependent on some level of success in the other.

a. Functional Integration Barriers

Functional integration (housing, health care, financial income, etc.) is the critical foundation without which deeper levels of social integration does not occur. The primary functional integration barrier identified through the research was the ability to speak, read, and understand the English language. Three of the four individuals interviewed struggled significantly to communicate in English, which obviously hindered their abilities to make their needs and experiences known. The scope and significance of the language barrier was also evident in larger numbers through direct observations of refugees and asylum seekers seeking to obtain basic services provided by the NGO and from the multitudes of clients and/or potential clients who contacted the organisation via telephone. Non-English speaking users of the food bank, though sometimes accompanied by a friend or acquaintance with English-speaking abilities, were less-effective in making their functional needs known to NGO workers. Clothing and food assistance needs were less likely to be identified and addressed when clients did not speak English. As a result, the abilities of NGO workers to attempt to understand and address their needs was inefficient, inaccurately assessed, or inadequately addressed, consuming impractical and unrealistic blocks of time.

Shame or frustration at not being able to communicate in English also contributed to self-imposed isolation by refugees or asylum seekers, who reported they or their family members would sometimes be afraid to leave the house, ask for help, or to try make friends and connections in their communities. English language also serves as a barrier to housing. Several weeks after our interview, one interviewee received refugee status and the associated right to financial housing assistance from the UK government. He told me that he had been looking for weeks and weeks but that nobody would rent him a room because he did not speak English. He said: “Why I need to speak English to live in flat? What I do? Talk to walls?” Like NGO’s, Landlords likely find it more difficult and time consuming to negotiate a lease agreement with a tenant who does not speak English. The process is also time consuming and frustrating for the asylum seeker.

The nature of asylum seeker housing, in shared accommodation with other asylum seekers, was also identified as a significant integration challenge, with all interviewees expressing frustration with their living situations. In each case but one, the frustration was not with the condition of the accommodation, but rather the fact that they were forced to flat share with refugees of other nationalities. (The other having no permanent accommodation whatsoever.) A Syrian made clear his desire to live with and learn among British nationals, and attempted to explain why he found it difficult to share a flat with a Pakistani and Iraqi:

Pakistani speak Pakistani. Iraq speak Iraq. But different than me. Food different. Everything different. Pakistani eat food with hand. No fork. No spoon. Everything different. ... I cannot understand Pakistani people. How am I to understand British people?

This sentiment highlights the unmet desire of an asylum seeker to culturally integrate with the white or majority-ethnic UK community, as opposed to being housed with people of other nationalities. UK housing policy is directly tied to immigration status, however, so the bridging of native and asylum seeking populations through shared housing accommodation is not possible (Kissoon, 2010).

The inability to work or go to school was also cited as a major source of stress. Applicants for asylum in the UK do not have the right to work or go to school until and unless they are granted refugee status. The inability of asylum seekers to work or go to school contributes to patterns of self-isolation. British medical reports find that two-thirds of asylum seekers in the UK are suffering from depression caused by past and current experiences including social isolation (Burnet and Peel, 2001). The connection between joblessness and loneliness was described by one asylum seeker as follows:

No good life now. Because I just stay in home. I cannot work. I cannot go to college for language. I cannot do anything. I just, I wait in my home. I feel alone.

The asylum process can take anywhere from a few months to several years to complete, with an average waiting period of approximately three years (Rainbird, 2014). In the meantime, applicants feel like their lives are needlessly being left on hold while they could be working and making money to send home to their families. In the words of one asylum seeker: "For now I am between two sides. I don't really know right now where I will be because I am on the process of seeing how things are going."

Access to healthcare is also a challenge for asylum seekers and a barrier to full functional integration. Asylum seekers and refugees have the legal right to use the NHS healthcare system. However, the procedures and protocols of the NHS system are challenging for asylum seekers to navigate, especially when combined with a language barrier. Likewise, it can be difficult for asylum seekers to access much needed physical and mental health services. Often, it is the asylum process itself that induces a great deal of stress and associated health problems (Bakker, Cheung and Phillimore, 2016). In many cases, however, it is the violence, loss, and trauma experienced by asylum seekers fleeing their country of origin that is to blame. One individual I interviewed had been physically mutilated by his captors, imprisoned, tortured, and burned. His suffering, both mentally and physically, were acutely apparent. Though he had been in the UK for 7 months, he had not obtained any mental health counselling by the time of our interview. Delays or denials of physical and mental health treatment for asylum seekers and refugees in the UK can have a long term anti-integrative effect (Bakker, Cheung and Phillimore, 2016).

b. Social Integration Barriers

Social integration barriers of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK are complex and difficult to quantify. Little research has been undertaken to explore what kinds of approaches to facilitating social integration are effective (Phillimore, 2012). Likewise, social integration is

multi-faceted, non-linear, and more subjective than functional integration. The complexity of social integration is also compounded by the reality that many functional aspects of integration (housing, employment, healthcare, education) must be in place before the social integration process can even start (Phillimore, 2012).

The primary social integration barrier for asylum seekers is their immigration status, in and of itself. In addition to serving as a functional integration barrier, the limited rights and chronic sense of uncertainty felt by asylum seekers serves as a disincentive to their social integration. One scholar has described the waiting period for asylum seekers as “a kind of time exposure when time is arbitrarily wasted or simply negated; it is a testimony to one’s social insignificance” (Rainbird, 2014). Imbedded in the asylum seeker experience is a pervasive sense of uncertainty that prevents people from getting on with their lives and making attempts to adapt to a new life in the UK (Bloch, 2000). This includes a reluctance to form important social connections, learn about and adapt to British norms and practices, and otherwise establish their connection with the host country. Friendships that formed tended to be with other ethnic minorities—fellow asylum seekers or refugees, or other migrants and marginalized segments of society. It is difficult to overstate the impact of this period of uncertainty on the ability or desires of asylum seekers to attempt to culturally integrate themselves into UK society. For these reasons, some scholars suggest that the process of social integration should not even be considered until some kind of refugee status has been received (Bakker, Cheung, and Phillimore, 2016).

Other significant social integration barriers identified through the research are grief and loneliness; depression and anxiety; the loss of dignity and status; and the perception of being treated unfairly by Home Office and local government officials. Absent changes in legislation and policy, the limited rights and chronic uncertainties about the future will necessarily be a part of the asylum seeker experience in the UK. The research does suggest though that strong and persistent self-advocacy as well as the ability to intellectualize one’s experience from a larger and less personal perspective can contribute to and motivate the social integration process.

Most refugees and asylum seekers experienced psychological or physical trauma in countries of origin, and continue to grieve for lost family and friends the social integration process. In addition to grieving for their family and friends, many asylum seekers express grief at being separated from their countries and culture. Grief for an old way of life was compounded by feelings of being ignored or insignificant to the native British population, shame at not being able to speak English, and a loss of dignity and status. In the words of one Syrian, “they forget we are human.” Three of the four individuals interviewed had college degrees and had attained some level of professional status in their countries of origin. It is as though the insecurity and trauma of their forced migration experiences is exacerbated by their relatively low social status in the UK. In the words of one scholar, “arriving to safety often entails a dramatic devaluation of refugee’s human capital and social status: a flight from persecution to destitution” (Kissoon, 2010).

c. Potential Positive Integration Factors

The above factors have a negative impact on the desires or abilities of asylum seekers to advance the process of socially integrating into the UK. However, the research suggests two factors that can positively influence a person’s ability to socially integrate: strong and

persistent self-advocacy; and intellectualising one's experience through a third-party perspective.

Due to limited staff and resources, many people seeking the NGO's services had to be turned away each day. A client's ability to communicate in English, make a personal connection with member of staff, and to remain persistent without becoming discouraged certainly impacted a caseworker's decision to give time and attention to their needs. Those who were not able to speak up for themselves, either because they lacked persistence, will, and confidence to do so, or because they could not communicate effectively, were less likely to get the attention they needed. For example, thirty to fifty people would show up each Thursday morning to receive a weekly food supply from the food bank in what was almost always a crowded and chaotic atmosphere. Clients were individually called back to the pantry one at a time to collect their distribution, thereby giving them one-on-one contact with a volunteer or staff member. Some used this one-on-one contact as an opportunity to update staff about their circumstances, secure an appointment with a caseworker, or ask for additional food or services. Due to the personal nature of these requests, those that asked were more likely to receive additional time, services, and/or organizational resources than those who did not capitalize on this opportunity to assert their unique needs.

In addition, an individual's ability to cognitively process his or her experience as an asylum seeker could positively influence their ability to socially integrate. Lamrana is an asylum seeker who fled his country after being imprisoned and persecuted for speaking out against his government. Rather than seeing himself as a victim, he intellectualized his circumstances and saw himself as just one of many asylum seekers going through a flawed and difficult process. His broader perspective enabled him to distance himself emotionally, and provided mental and emotional space for him to proactively seek out opportunities to learn about UK society and start the process of social integration. In her 2014 study, Sophia Rainbird touched on the concept of how narratives can help asylum seekers intellectualise and make meaning of everyday life experiences:

In our life worlds we use our narratives to order experiences, and in doing so, we may attempt to reassure ourselves of a sense of security and certainty in the world and to create a sense of agency over events. In the case of asylum seekers, narratives promise to reinstate social unity, create a sense of conviviality and provide an opportunity to share stories.

(Rainbird, 2014). Lamrana's interview felt more like the narrative of a spokesperson or political leader of the entire asylum population in the UK. He talked about the universal nature of his challenges and pointed out the systemic inadequacies in the Home Office process. By adopting this intellectual narrative of the asylum process and his role in it, Lamrana was better able to cope with the stress of his real and immediate circumstances. It appears little research has been done on this topic but it is worthy of further research and exploration.

IV. Conclusion

Asylum seekers in London face significant challenges functionally and socially integrating into their communities and the larger UK society. The most significant integration barrier identified was the ability to speak English, which served to frustrate asylum seeker's abilities and the abilities of NGO staff and volunteers to meet their most basic functional needs such as

employment/financial income, housing, and healthcare. There is a clear need for additional English language support services in the UK for both asylum seekers and the NGO's that serve them. Another significant barrier to both functional and social integration is the UK's asylum policies and processes, which prevent applicants from obtaining employment or education throughout the extensive periods of time it takes the Home Office to make a status determination. While it is unlikely UK policy will change to allow asylum seekers to participate in the workforce, alternatives to employment such as volunteer and training programmes or formally structured community activities may help to prevent asylum seekers from socially isolating themselves from mainstream UK society and contribute to a greater sense of their inclusion and belonging in their communities. Other major barriers to integration are a perceived loss of dignity, depression, and grief associated with their experiences of their country of origin and being separated from their loved ones and family. There is some indication that the ability of asylum seekers to self-advocate and/or intellectualize their experience by adopting a third party perspective can aid the integration process. Because there appears to be no research literature on these concepts, further study is warranted. Likewise, little research has been undertaken to explore the effectiveness of *any* type of approach to refugee integration. If the UK expects to meet the financial, political, and social challenges of refugee integration, it is critical that the government and NGO's be armed with information, training, and integration tools that are actually known to work.

Authors' brief bio

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