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Civic and ethno belonging among recent refugees to Australia

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Abstract

Australia offers some of the best government-funded settlement services in the world to refugees who come through its official resettlement program. These services cater to their material, medical and, to some extent, their social needs. However services cannot provide a sense of belonging to people uprooted from their homelands and transplanted to a culturally and geographically distant place. Or can they? This paper explores the facets of belonging identified inductively from a corpus of data from qualitative interviews with 77 refugees living in Western Australia. Thematically, these map clearly onto civic and ethno conceptualisations of the nation-state and belonging within it. While refugees assert their civic belonging in terms of access to services and rights available to refugees and to Australians more broadly, their sense of ethno belonging is much more ambivalent, due to experiences with the mainstream population. Implications in regard to the concept of the nation-state, and for processes of integration and social inclusion, are considered.

Keywords: refugees, Australia, belonging, integration, civic and ethno nationalism, cosmopolitan, post-national

Introduction

Australia accepts around 20,000 UNHCR approved refugees annually, and is ranked third in the world in terms of its resettlement commitment in raw numbers, and first in terms of per capita intake (UNHCR 2013; UNHCR 2010). For some decades it has offered settlement services based on principles of equity and multiculturalism. These services provide both material and social-emotional support and are seen as among the best in the world (UNHCR, 2009).

The goal of these services is to assist refugees to settle successfully. Settlement is usually equated with integration, specifically attaining “a degree of self-sufficiency, to participate in the social and economic life of the community and to retain what might be described...as a degree of personal identity and integrity” (Goodwin-Gill 1990: 38). Successful settlement offers the ability to participate fully in economic, social, cultural and political activities (Valtonen 2004: 86). Ager and Strang developed a model of refugee integration that identifies ten domains, represented in an inverse triangle with four layers. They argue the more material aspects of settlement (the top layer), which often act as markers of integration while simultaneously being the means of achieving it, namely employment, housing, education and health, rely upon social connections, namely social bonds (connection within group), bridges (connections between groups), and links (with structures of the state), which are facilitated by language, cultural knowledge, safety and stability (the middle layers) (Ager and Strang 2008: 166-191). The whole, Ager and Strang argue, is built upon a foundation of rights and citizenship.

Definitions of settlement and integration often do not acknowledge explicitly that it requires the development of a sense of belonging, or emotional connection to the nation state and its people, nor do they recognise the challenges of ensuring a sense of belonging is developed among refugees who may be quite different culturally from the majority population of the countries in which they find themselves. Indeed, these definitions rely on a mostly ‘civic’ version of the nation state, and ‘belonging’ to it, as opposed to an ‘ethno’ version. These are the two major paradigms within which the nation has been conceptualised. The nation was historically conceived as a collective of individuals ‘belonging’ together on the basis of a shared language, culture, traditions and history (Gellner 1996), that necessitated an organic connection between compatriots, an ethno/cultural nationalism. It is a community of fate. It has been increasingly argued, however, that civic nationalism, i.e. commitment to a common destiny and government through shared civic

institutions, can just as adequately serve as the foundation of cohesive nation-states, and may be a more appropriate model in a globalized world (Kaufmann and Zimmer 2004; Pearson 2000; Brown 1999; Smith 1991). This is the 'community of choice' model. Habermas (1994:128), one proponent, argues migration has produced such diversely populated nation-states that they can no longer rely on common ties of ethnicity, shared history or shared values for cohesion. Instead, commitment to a single political culture and 'procedures for the legitimate enactment of laws and ...exercise of power' (1994:135) should form the basis of national identity (see also Giddens 1985). More recently still, the relevance of either form of national belonging has been challenged with arguments about postnationalism and the cosmopolitan perspective. These arguments suggest that processes of globalization are gradually eliminating the need for any form of state-level belonging whatsoever (Beck 2006; Hedetoft and Hjort 2002). It has been suggested this is particularly the case for refugees who, having been forced to break their connection with their geographical and imagined homeland, are less in need of a sense of national belonging (Pollock et al 2000; Haggis and Schech 2010).

In the Australian context, support for ethno-nationalism and criticism of civic nationalism has been voiced by Betts and Birrell (2007) who distinguish between patriotic and proceduralist orientations to the nation. The proceduralist approach, equivalent to the civic approach, sees membership of the nation-state 'not as a sign of belonging to a distinct people with their own history, memories, evolved culture, and sense of facing a common future. Rather such membership [involves] adherence to laws and procedures rather than... patriotism and loyalty' (Betts and Birrell 2007:50). Members need simply be tolerant and law-abiding. Betts argues this rather limited and shallow perspective is actually held by very few Australians – only a few 'interested' parties such as cosmopolitan academics and ethnic advocates (see Johnson 2007:196). Betts and Birrell (2007:47) suggest that, in contrast, most Australians espouse a 'patriotic' or 'ethno' version of national belonging which places a high value on the affective connection between compatriots, seeing it as:

a union of people who have something like a family feeling for each other, in the sense that they acknowledge strong bonds with their fellow Australians and thus a compassionate interest in their compatriots' well-being...[and] deep feelings of attachment to their native land.

The use of the word 'native' here provides a clear indicator of Betts' and Birrell's presumptions about what defines 'Australian' – they take an ethno definition of membership that presumes shared birthplace, heritage and culture, as given.

Whether the distinction between ethno-patriotic nationalism and civic-proceduralist nationalism can be maintained in light of empirical evidence has been challenged, with research in Australia suggesting that emotional connection to the nation-state among migrants is linked to the valuing of civic rights and responsibilities (Fozdar and Spittles 2010); and others arguing that a more nuanced categorisation of types of belonging is needed.¹ Indeed, more generally, Wodak et al (2009) argue that the very notion of 'civic' versus 'ethno' nationalism (they use the German terms *Staatsnation* and *Kulturnation*) is an idealized abstraction.

If *Staatsnation* and *Kulturnation* are mutually exclusive concepts, they cannot adequately account for the national processes of identification in a particular nation-state. Discourses of national identity constructed by residents of any given state will always contain or imply both cultural and political elements (Wodak et al, 2009:5).

¹ For instance, Jones (2000) identified four ideal types of Australian identity, using an inductive procedure. These are dogmatic nativist; literal nativist; civic nationalist; and moderate pluralist. On the other hand, Pakulski and Tranter (2000) suggest 'ethno-national', 'civic' and 'denizen' are the three most common orientations to the nation-state. However, a majority of writers use the standard ethno vs civic distinction.

This theory provides the lens through which to understand the sense of belonging among settling refugees in Australia in terms of their relation to the nation-state and its people. After reviewing the political and policy situation, this paper offers evidence that while refugees assert their civic belonging due to their access to the services and rights available to all Australians and specifically to themselves as refugees, they also recognise the importance of a sense of ethno-national belonging. However, for them this is somewhat aspirational, framed as something they hope to achieve at some point in the future and dependent upon a variety of factors, most notably acceptance by the mainstream population. Both forms of belonging appear to have an affective component. Implications in regard to the concept of the nation-state, and for processes of integration and social inclusion, are considered.

Background: the Australian context

Australia has a complex relationship with questions of identity and diversity. While it has the highest proportion of overseas-born people in the Western world (around one in four), and despite three decades of multiculturalism policies which encouraged positivity towards diversity, it was built on a mono-cultural White Australia Policy that excluded non-white migrants until the early 1970s, and remains relatively Eurocentric in outlook and identity (Jupp 2007; Hage, 1998). Research consistently shows vague support for its growing diversity, but migration generally, and specific multicultural policies, are viewed with suspicion (Markus 2012; Moran 2005:208; Goot and Watson 1995; Bean 2002)².

As has been mapped in many countries (see Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010), the last decade or two has seen a retreat from the multiculturalism of the late twentieth century, with xenophobic tendencies being inflamed in Australia by a conservative government (Tate 2009; Tilbury 2007; Jupp 2007; Joppke 2004). Concerns were raised about the possible loss of the Euro-Christian national character, and its implications for social cohesion, shared values and national identity. The first decade of the century saw the conservative federal government express unease that the growing proportion of increasingly diverse migrants could make for an unstable polity. This resulted in a number of policies and widespread political rhetoric that sought to build ethno-nationalism based on a more traditional, homogenous version of Australia than had been encouraged in the 1980s and 90s, during its multicultural heyday (Tate 2009; Jupp 2007; Moran 2005; Fozdar and Spittles 2009).

The effect on migrants, particularly visibly different migrants and refugees, has been a degree of ambivalence about whether they belong in Australia, due to a perception that they are not welcomed by the majority mainstream population. Negativity towards refugees particularly is widespread, with up to 75% of the population seeing refugees as a threat (Markus 2012; Power 2010; RCOA 2008). This is partly due to the population equating refugees and asylum seekers who arrive by boat, against whom there is a great deal of negativity. The flip side of this is that refugees see racism as a problem in Australia, producing a sense of exclusion (Hatoss 2012; Correa-Velez et al 2010; RCOA 2009; Dhanji 2009; Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2007; Tilbury et al 2004; Iredale et al 1996).

But migrants' sense of belonging is also, necessarily, related to their experience of movement and separation from home and family which can result in a feeling of being torn between belonging to two or more places, or not belonging anywhere (Rapport and Dawson 1998). As Falicov (2005:399) asks: "If home is where the heart is, and one's heart is with one's family, language, and country, what happens when your family, language and culture occupy two different worlds?". Hedetoft and Hjort (2002:ix) have noted that the English word 'belonging' is a compound of *being* and *longing*, combining the political and cultural ordering principles of the nation state (the civic and ethno

² Two thirds of Australians support multiculturalism, with three quarters seeing migrants as making Australia open to new ideas and cultures. However only 16% support minorities maintaining their distinct traditions, or government providing funding to preserve these (see Goot and Watson 2005:185-186).

versions described above). Unlike the native born, who are both existentially and emotionally within the nation-state to which they belong, migrants may *be* in one place, but *long* for another.

For refugees in particular these factors, displacement from 'home' and emplacement in a somewhat hostile environment, combine to produce a rupture point that can challenge their sense of who they are and their place in the world. Giddens (1993) emphasises the importance of re-establishing what he calls 'ontological security', a secure sense of oneself and one's place, after such ruptures. Ontological security is based on a taken-for-granted knowledge of what to expect and how to 'be' in the world. Much of it is therefore culturally specific. For refugees, re-establishing a sense of belonging is an important part of re-establishing ontological security (Fozdar, 2012).

To assist UNHCR-approved refugees to regain a measure of ontological security, the Australian government funds a range of services dedicated to assisting with settlement and integration. Initial settlement assistance is extensive and includes free English language tuition, and dedicated settlement services for the first six to twelve months of settlement. This program provides reception and assistance on arrival; information and referrals and housing services. It also provides cultural orientation and short-term torture and trauma counselling. After twelve months of intensive support, humanitarian entrants can access a series of ad hoc programs that provide immigration assistance, housing, and community group funding.

Services for refugees tend to focus on material and psychological aspects of settlement, but some also target belonging and integration. However, research suggests that refugees do not settle as easily as other migrants. In the Australian context language; education; value-differences; employment; family issues including family violence, inter-generational conflict, changing gender roles and child rearing practices; discrimination; unrealistic expectations; knowledge of and access to services; housing; and health and mental health issues have been identified as challenges (Fozdar and Hartley 2012; Hugo 2011; RCOA 2010; Nunn 2010; Pittaway et al 2009; Fozdar 2009; Fisher 2009; Dhanji 2009; Fozdar and Torezani 2008; Tilbury 2007; Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2007; Richardson et al 2004; Richardson et al 2002; Waxman 1998). In addition, as noted, refugees must overcome the racism that still permeates Australian society (Tilbury and Colic-Peisker 2006; Forrest and Dunn 2006; Noble 2005; Klocker and Dunn 2003; Majka 1997).

While there is a growing body of literature detailing these challenges, little research exists indicating how refugees to Australia understand and experience belonging – the sense of connection refugees feel in relation to their new country and its people – and how it both influences and is influenced by the factors identified above. A recent article, promisingly entitled 'Longing to Belong', focuses on refugee youth and their sense of well-being, rather than belonging per se (Correa-Velez et al 2010). The authors found that the well-being of refugee youth in Australia is strongly associated with indicators of belonging (social inclusion), particularly subjective social status within the broader Australian community, perceived discrimination and bullying. Not surprisingly, being socially valued affects well-being positively, and being excluded, for instance through accent, ethnicity, religion, colour or being identified as a refugee, has a negative impact. The ability to participate and make a contribution was found to be particularly important for young refugees' sense of belonging. In a study of identity among 14 South Sudanese refugees living in a regional Australian town, Hatoss (2012) found a strong desire to belong thwarted by being positioned as outsiders by mainstream Australians. Such findings help explain why it has been reported that 90 per cent of Sudanese refugees in Australia 'want to go home' - this being touted as evidence that they do not feel they belong in Australia, due to racism or cultural difference (ABC 2012). A recent comprehensive report into refugee settlement in Australia by Hugo (2011) did not look at belonging specifically, but offered evidence of high levels of social participation by refugees both within ethnic communities and with the wider community, and generally high levels of satisfaction with life in Australia despite various barriers to participation.

Given the lack of research into refugees' sense of belonging, together with the apparent tension between the level of official government support in terms of service provision, but widespread negativity among the general population and in government rhetoric, it is useful to explore the extent to which refugees see themselves as 'belonging' within an Australian context.

Methodology³

The research was undertaken in 2011 as part of a larger study of refugee settlement. The broader study included interviews with humanitarian entrants, focus groups with service providers and a Photovoice exercise. The data analysed for this paper are taken from interviews with 77 humanitarian entrants who had been in Australia for one – two years, or two – four years. The research sought the views of a wide range of individuals who represent the proportions of humanitarian entrants from different communities settling in Western Australia. The range of source countries/ethnicities of participants included Burundi, Congo (Democratic Republic), Ethiopia, Eritrea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan (Dinka), Sudan (Bari, Zandi, Baki), Burma (Chin), Burma (Karen), Sri Lanka, Afghanistan (Hazara, Tajik), Iran, Iraq, and Palestine/Jordan. Participants ranged in age from youth to elderly; and 36 were male and 41 female. The diversity among participants is acknowledged, in terms of countries of origin, cultures, experiences of work, education and family, existing networks, visa categories, and so on. For this paper we are focusing on a phenomenon that was evident across the data as a whole.

One-on-one interviews were undertaken by bilingual interviewers. Interviews were audio recorded and subsequently bilingual assistants translated them into English. The interview schedule included questions relating to refugees' experiences of education, training, employment, English lessons, health, belonging, integration, citizenship and social networks. Network maps were also completed.

Analysis of the data was undertaken inductively by two researchers independently coding a sample of transcripts for major themes. Categories were compared, re-examined and refined with the aim of maximizing both internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. All transcripts were then imported into the qualitative data analysis programme QSR NVivo 11 using these codes. Relationships between the categories were then examined.

Results

The focus of this paper is the ways in which refugees articulate their sense of belonging. It reports two key findings: that refugees living in Western Australia predominantly express a sense of civic belonging rather than ethno belonging; and that a desire to belong in a broader sense (related to ethno-belonging and more obviously affective, but also based in ascription) is expressed as an aspiration that refugees hope to achieve at some point in the future. These aspects of belonging are not mutually exclusive but connected in subtle ways.

The excerpts quoted below were offered mainly in response to two questions – 'do you feel you belong here in Australia' and 'do you think that white Australian people feel that you belong here'⁴.

³ This research was funded by Lotterywest and undertaken in collaboration with the Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre, Western Australia. The assistance of 12 bilingual assistants is gratefully acknowledged, as is time spent at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity. ARC Future Fellowship FT100100432 has supported the first author in the preparation of this paper.

⁴ The wording of this question was somewhat controversial, particularly among the 'industry/community partners' on the project, due to the explicit identification of Whiteness. The concern was with both the naming of Whiteness and the perceived implication that exclusion or inclusion was the sole responsibility of 'White's. Australia is predominantly a 'White' country - The CIA Factbook (2012) states that "ethnic groups" in Australia consist of: "white 92%, Asian 7%, aboriginal and other 1%". While such a classification is highly problematic it does indicate that by far the largest proportion of the population, including migrants, are 'White'. The history

To give the reader a general sense of flavor of responses, a quantitative analysis of the qualitative results indicates that when asked about their personal sense of belonging, 50 of the participants responded generally positively, 21 in the negative, and 6 offered no response. Of these 11 responses were ambivalent, including both positive and negative aspects. On the other hand, when asked whether the majority population feels they belong, 41 responded generally positively, 27 in the negative, and 9 offered no response. However many gave mixed or highly qualified responses. Only 23 were unqualified in their positive response. Thus participants generally felt that they belong in Australia, but are far less certain that the rest of the population agrees.

Belonging

Participants who had been in Australia for a number of years, and even some of those who had been in Australia a very short period of time, stated that they “hundred percent” belong. Many told stories of kindness shown to them in personal acts by neighbours and others, producing a sense of acceptance and inclusion from mainstream Australians. Far more frequently, however, belonging was identified as resulting from having access to rights and services. Even for those who felt they did not really belong in other senses, their right to receive services like other Australians was offered as evidence of belonging. Participants contrasted this access to services with their experiences in other countries of transition or of origin, noting their gratitude and appreciation.

The following quotes illustrate the ways in which, despite an initial negative response to the question based on a personal perception that they do not belong, the right to access services and ‘assistance as a citizen’ provides something like an objective proof of belonging. The right to education, health care, employment, citizenship, social security, as well as freedom and dignity, are identified in the quotes below. Gratitude for the services provided by the government, and indeed protection by the government, is expressed. This assistance is the foundation for an expectation of a positive future.

Interviewer: Do you think you belong here in Australia?

Respondent: Not really because I do not understand Australian people ...in terms of communication as I can't express in front of them and let myself be understood.

Interviewer: Where do you belong/do not belong?

Respondent: I know that I belong to Australia, because I receive all assistance as a citizen.

(Male, Congo, 3 years and 5 months in Australia)

Interviewer: Do you feel you belong here in Australia?

Respondent: I don't feel welcome here sometimes, even though I wanted to be one of the Australians. But I'm hoping one day, I will feel Australia is my home too.

Interviewer: Do you think that there is anything that could make you feel more like you belong here? If yes, what?

of colonisation and the White Australia Policy ensured that the population is predominantly ‘White’, and the political, economic and social structures privilege Whiteness. Whiteness studies researchers have argued that the commonest axis around which exclusion occurs in Australia is race based – specifically White and non-White (Moreton-Robinson 2005). Hage’s (1998) argument that Australia is fundamentally a ‘White nation’ formed the rationale for the wording of this question. More simply, however, alternative framings were problematic – for example leaving out ‘White’, i.e. ‘do you think that Australian people feel you belong here’, implies the refugees are not themselves Australian; and replacing ‘White’ with ‘mainstream’ may have led to confusion among a population with low levels of literacy. None of respondents balked at the question in any way, indicating the terminology was not problematic to them.

Respondent: I belong here because the security here is good, I don't have to worry about anything. I'm getting the services that are normally needed to have progress, such as education, health. I can grow to what I wanted, and my dreams can be true.

(Male, Sudan (Dinka), 1 year in Australia)

Interviewer: Do you feel you belong here in Australia?

Respondent: Of course, I believe that I belong here in Australia. Looking at the assistance and friendly manner in which the Australian Government and people has rendered migrants from refugee background, Australia has become not only my home but the home of many others. We are sure of receiving our citizenship pretty soon after the completion of four years of permanent residency in Australia.

(Male, Liberia (Mandingo) 3.6 years in Australia)

Interviewer: Do you feel you belong here in Australia?

Respondent: It is a very complicated question to answer. We got refuge to this country because of the persecutions and many other sufferings and difficulties that we faced in our own country. I could not get a proper job, my wife and I and our children were deprived of getting higher education. All these obstacles and hardships in our daily life in Iran affected us a lot. I love Australia and I think I belong to this country as this government is providing a good education and a lot of opportunities for my children. We have freedom in our daily life and we have dignity to live as a human being.

(Male, Iran (Arian) 1.1 years in Australia)

Interviewer: Do you feel you belong here in Australia

Respondent: Yes, I belong here in Australia. Because we are no longer live in Burma, so we have to follow the rule and live as they make the rule for the country. Therefore we are belonging here in Australia.

(Female, Myanmar (Karen) 2.1 years in Australia)

Interviewer: Do you feel that you belong to Australia and the area you live in?

Respondent: I want to tell you something regarding the support you get from Australia. I feel that I belong to Australia because I have the same support that the Australian people get from the government such as the social security, Medicare etc... Also when I compare what Australia offered us with some wealthy Arab countries, I really feel that I belong to this country.

(Female, Iraq, 4 years in Australia)

Some felt they had not yet achieved certain perceived markers of civic belonging, but expected to at some point in the future. Thus, this Iraqi man suggests that once he has found employment and can actively participate in civil society, then he will have 'reached Australia'.

Interviewer: What issues can make you feel you are belonging here?

Respondent: When I feel the similar status like I did in my native country, which means I must have work and income and be active with society and have a clear goal and approach to my future. At that time I will feel I reached Australia.

(Male, Iraq, 1 year and 8 months in Australia)

Those who had achieved these markers felt their belonging was evident in their civic contributions to their adopted society such as abiding by the law, working, and paying taxes rather than receiving welfare (known in Australia as Centrelink). This was offered as proof of their belonging.

Interviewer: Okay, next let us discuss about identity and sense of belonging. You have come to Australia. Do you feel that you belong to this place, that you are part of this society?"

Respondent: Yes, I do. We have come here now and don't want to give any trouble to the government. We are working, earning our living, paying tax and also paying to Centrelink. I don't want to take money from Centrelink. We have come here and they are taking good care of us - we have no complaint.

(Male, Sri Lanka, 1 year in Australia)

The fact that they had been allowed to come to Australia, and to remain in Australia, to 'be' here, was enough evidence of belonging for some. For others, citizenship, the technical legal definer of national membership, was seen a marker of belonging, whether already achieved or aspired to (see also Haggis and Schech 2010).

Some of these extracts are notable for their linking of a civic conception of the nation-state and belonging within it, with an affective response - access to services and rights and the positive future these offer engenders warm feelings among participants. Australia is spoken of as 'home', and as 'loved'. However, such statements of affective connection were more common among the smaller proportion of participants who saw their belonging in more 'ethno' terms, as being evidenced in the connections they had to other Australians, and their experiences of kindness and friendship.

Un-belonging

When participants responded negatively to the question about whether they belong in Australia, a few related feelings of not belonging to a lack of access to services i.e. to structural exclusion. Much more frequently, however, un-belonging had to do with a sense of social exclusion. The lingering effects of the White Australia Policy were specifically identified by participants as producing an environment where they felt excluded. This was particularly notable among the African-origin participants, and some from the Middle East. Participants told stories of everyday experiences of exclusion that made them aware that they were not seen as belonging by the mainstream population. As the following quotes illustrate, while access to services was seen as something that theoretically should provide the basis for belonging, because it can 'make dreams come true', an affective sense of connection is unavailable due to a perceptions of exclusion by the wider society in everyday interactions due to colour difference, cultural differences and the lack of a sense of welcome. Thus while participants aspire to ethno-national belonging, it has not yet been achieved.

Interviewer: Do you feel that you belong to Australia and the area you live in?

Respondent: Actually I can't doubt that Australia is a very convenient country and we have very good support from the government but I really have some concerns about the way of treating us. I feel like most of Australian people are racist; they judge you just because of your colour.

(Male, Ethiopia, 1.6 years in Australia)

Interviewer: Where do you feel you belong - to Australia, your local area, somewhere else or a combination of places or nowhere?

Respondent: I feel like I'm still belonging to South Sudan. I wanted to belong here, but sometimes; I don't feel welcome in the society.

Interviewer: Can you tell me what you mean by not feel welcome here?

Respondent: Yeah, I was perceived not in a welcoming way. Sometimes, you don't get what you need.

Interviewer: Do you think that there is anything that could make you feel more like you belong here? If yes, what?

Respondent: Things such as education and health make me feel like I belong here. I can achieve what I want, and my dreams can be true here as well. However, the society won't accept me.

Interviewer: Do you think that white Australian people feel you belong here?

Respondent: No, not all.

Interviewer: Can you talk a little about that, why you think you're not being considered by white Australians as one of them?

Respondent: Ok, yeah, the first thing most of the white Australians ask of me is "where are you from"? To me, this suggests that, I don't feel welcome here. Sometimes, if I answered that, "I'm from here", they further asked "where are you from originally". To me, that doesn't matter; I'm Australian and I live here. No need to ask further where I came from.

(Female, Sudan (Dinka), 4 years in Australia)

The tendency of Australians to ask 'where are you from' was noted by a number of participants who generally saw this as signalling that they were not accepted as 'belonging' to Australia (see Hatoss 2012 for a discussion of the positioning and category work that this question does in relation to Sudanese refugees). While refugees consider that their *being* here should suffice as evidence of belonging, the mainstream population offers a constant reminder that they are not part of the taken-for-granted landscape of Australia.

Visible difference was seen as the cause of un-belonging among some respondents. When asked 'do white Australians feel you belong here' a large proportion of the African sample responded with statements such as 'no, not at all'. Some went so far as to say they felt they were seen as 'like an animal'.

Interviewer: Do you think that white Australian people feel you belong here?

Respondent: I don't think the white Australian people, they don't want to communicate with us, they don't like us to be in Australia - example in my work place in Kmart where I was working, they see me like I am not part of them, they see me like an animal. In TAFE they segregate "this is Africans". ...they think we are not part of them; they don't want us, the Africans, to be here.

(Female, Sudan, 2 years in Australia)

For others the sense of exclusion was more subtle – while other Australians were friendly in a distant manner, some participants felt that they were not truly accepted as 'real' Australians, feeling there was a degree of segregation in the way the population interacted, and that they are considered only 'guests', not members. This was particularly the case for those from Middle Eastern backgrounds.

Interviewer: Do you feel you belong here in Australia?

Respondent: No, I do not feel that sense of belonging to Australia at present.

Interviewer: Do you think that white Australian people feel you belong here?

Respondent: Yes. Of course all Australians treat us very friendly but I think they do not accept us as real Australians. They try hard not to show it. But I believe this segregation exists.

(Female, Iran, 1 year in Australia)

Interviewer: Do you think that white Australian people feel you belong here?

Respondent: Australians never treat us badly but they rarely accept us as their own people.

(Female, Iran, 3 years and 7 months in Australia)

Interviewer: Do you have any relationships with white Australians? Have you found difficulties to meet Australian people?

Respondent: Actually not strong relationship only "hi", "bye" and "see you!" Because Australian people don't want to create any deep relationships with migrants and they just consider us as guests in Australia.

(Female, Iraq, 3 years in Australia)

For some of these participants it was not outright racism but a more subtle sense that different cultural norms meant that real connection with mainstream Australians was difficult, producing only shallow relationships. These included different perspectives on the use of alcohol and familial relationships, and different rules of courtesy and hospitality. Once again the lack of welcome is noted, but also a perception of avoidance by the mainstream. Yet there was still an expectation by many that this would eventually be resolved "by passing of time".

Interviewer: Are there things that you do or would like to do in Australia that you would consider part of integration but that may not fit with how the term 'integration' is commonly used?

Respondent: It is the problem of connection with Australians. I personally have this problem of connecting with them. Maybe this has to do with me, but in reality I do not think that is just me. For example in our culture we just go and visit people anytime and find reason to talk when we wanted to, but I have found it very difficult to do this with Australians. They get very tired being with us after half an hour and they cannot bear it anymore. I think it is a cultural problem which should be solved, maybe by passing of time

(Male, Afghanistan, 1 year and 4 months in Australia)

Interviewer: Do you think that white Australian people feel you belong here?

Respondent: Australian people are kind people but I think it is only cultural conflicts, because different perspectives make our life different from their life, such as raising children, no alcohol, we don't acknowledge boyfriend and girlfriend relationships.

(Female, Iraq, 3 years in Australia)

Interviewer: Do you think that white Australian people feel you belong here?

Respondent: Some of them yes, but I always feel that I am strange from this society. Also the Australian people don't do anything to make you feel that you belong to Australia. Instead of that, they are trying to avoid you sometimes. Also they don't welcome people to their house.

(Female, Iraq, 4 years in Australia)

These extracts are notable for their clear articulation of social and cultural barriers to integration. These range from outright racism to much more subtle experiences of exclusion due to cultural difference and the lack of a sense of welcome and acceptance by the mainstream population. These serve as a barrier to refugees seeing themselves as belonging – evident in the way 'Australians' are referred to in almost every extract as a category which does not include the speaker. All extracts identify instances of everyday interaction where instead of welcome and engagement at a level of closeness that might generate a sense of ethno-belonging, participants have been met with responses that are limited, constrained, and that engage with them as outsiders.

Improving integration: initiatives for improving civic and ethno belonging

Responses to questions about how the government could improve integration also revolved around civic and ethno belonging. The responses were almost universally of two types: suggestions for programs designed to improve services or make them more accessible; or suggestions for programs designed to improve interaction between refugees and mainstream Australians. Once again, responses were generally framed within statements of gratitude for services and programs currently provided. While the question did lend itself to a focus on government services, it is interesting that responses clearly reproduced the two aspects of national belonging.

On the civic side, recommendations related to rights associated with education and training, health, employment, a liveable income, access to information, affordable housing, policing/justice issues, transport issues (obtaining drivers' licences), migration (family reunion), access to citizenship and providing social activities for youth.

On the ethno side, to ensure greater social and emotional integration participants recommended programs to encourage mutual trust and friendship and to reduce racial and cultural tensions in the wider Australian community, such as through a family mentoring scheme and policy level initiatives to recognise and respect different cultures. Some suggested that Australians needed to be educated about why the government accepts refugees and the value they bring to the country, as well as broader provision of cultural awareness and anti-racism training to the general population to improve attitudes towards refugees and about cultural difference more generally. Others suggested that anti-racism education of students, teachers, real estate agents, and potential employers specifically, was necessary.

Conclusion

Evidence has been provided that refugees tend to experience belonging in relation to their access to rights and services, implying that their relationship to the nation-state is seen in civic or procedural terms. However there is also a strong desire to belong in a more emotional and culturally meaningful way, a desire which is blocked, according to the refugee participants' accounts, by experiences of exclusion by the mainstream population and cultural differences. As a result, their ethno-belonging is aspirational, something to be achieved over time.

The findings imply two things: first that both ethno and civic belonging are perceived as important to refugees in Australia; and second, the nation-state itself remains an important parameter of belonging for refugees, challenging the suggestion that a post-national orientation may be more likely among refugees. Each of these is discussed briefly below.

What has been called the 'Janus-faced' nature of the nation (Bhabha 1990:1) does not constitute an either/or orientation to belonging based in exclusively civic or ethno conceptualisations. Refugees clearly adopt a civic, politically based conceptualisation of the nation state, and belonging to it, which allows them to claim some legitimacy in their adopted homeland (see Habermas 1994; Giddens 1993, 1985; Smith 1991; Geertz 1963). The nation-state, in this conceptualisation, is seen as a politico-legal system, where technical entitlement is what distinguishes membership and belonging. It is striking that refugees, in response to a question about belonging, should focus on this technical right to services. While it is possible that this is partly due to the context of the questioning (a researcher asking about their settlement experience more broadly and how it could be improved), it is more likely that this response is related to a number of other contextual factors. One is the value of an assertion of belonging in a context where community negativity towards refugees results from a generalised negativity towards asylum seekers who are seen as illegitimate interlopers (and who are not entitled to such services). This is supported by Haggis and Schech's (2010) finding that refugees who came to Australia as asylum seekers are less likely to experience a sense of welcome,

inclusion and belonging. An assertion of the right to services by UNHCR approved refugees legitimises belonging. This effect is also likely to be related to the current context where the retreat from multiculturalism, which has seen a devaluing of diversity (Joppke 2004; Jupp 2007), appears to have had a negative effect on opportunities for the re-establishment of a sense of ontological security among refugees. Their assertion of civic belonging may be one way of challenging the sense of exclusion they feel from the wider community. One's right to access services signals one's membership of the nation-state and is therefore a reasonable foundation for one's claims to belong. Another possible reason for this sense of civic belonging is that the participants' main experiences in these early years of settlement have been with the state and the services it provides, giving them a sense that this is what belonging in a modern democratic state is all about (quite different, in most cases, from their experiences in countries of origin or transition).

However evidence has also been provided indicating that refugees also strongly desire an emotional ethno/cultural connection to the nation state, a sense of belonging beyond the purely technical. This challenges the suggestion by Haggis and Schech (2010), and Pollock et al (2000) that refugees' focus is more global. A sense of connection beyond their own ethnic communities is desired – they want to feel Australian and to feel that other Australians feel they belong. It is possible this desire may be strengthened by the ethno-nationalism of the wider population, as per the argument of Betts and Birrell (2007), which sees belonging in ethno-national terms. Thus, returning to Ager and Strang (2008), the social bonds that exist within refugees' own communities, and the social links with state structures that provide the services, while important in providing some sense of belonging, are not enough. Intimate, emotional connections with the wider population are the goal.

The evidence provided suggests that the 'being' and 'longing' of belonging (Hedetoft and Hjort 2002:ix) is clearly divided in refugees' discourses– their 'being' in Australia provides access to services and rights that are unequivocal and that are seen as concrete evidence of their belonging, in one sense; but emotional connection and social and cultural inclusion remain something that is longed for, and that is denied, at least in part, by the larger population. Rather than longing for their countries of origin, refugees in Australia appear to be longing to belong to their adopted country.

Returning to Ager and Strang's upside-down triangle model of the different domains of settlement, participants recognised their entitlement to assistance with the more material aspects of settlement (employment, housing, education and health), and their foundation in rights and citizenship which sit at the apex (fulcrum) of the triangle. However it is the mid-level domains, i.e. social bridges, and bonds, facilitated by language, cultural knowledge, safety and stability (Ager and Strang 2008: 170), that they hope at some point in the future to build.

This suggests that countries that accept refugees, such as Australia, may need, in addition to the provision of settlement services that provide for material integration, to focus on ways of encouraging a sense of belonging within the wider community. There are a range of forums in which this must play out. In the political sphere, Australia's leadership needs to publicly endorse humanitarian entrants in much more positive ways than it has in the past. At the grassroots level, education and engagement opportunities need to be expanded, building on existing goodwill. This would necessarily involve encouraging mainstream Australians to recognise the fact of Australia's diversity, as well as its value. These two changes would go a significant way to engaging with refugees' desire to belong in a broader sense.

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