Asylum Seekers/Refugees' Orientations to Belonging, Identity & Integration into Britishness: Perceptions of the role of the mainstream and community press

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Abstract

This article considers asylum seekers/refugees' perceptions of the negative asylum coverage that dominates mainstream press, as counter-posed to primarily positive representations in community newspapers. It explores how these perceptions, in different ways, contribute to asylum seekers/refugees' fragility of national belonging, national identity and ability to integrate into the UK. The paper argues that while much of the coverage has questioned ethnic minority migrants' ability to belong and integrate into an 'imagined' British national and cultural community, it incidentally strengthens asylum seekers/refugees' transnational identities. The article suggests that in addition to a 'policymaking/structuralist' paradigm in understanding the 'inclusion-exclusion' that asylum seekers/refugees experience in the UK, the agency of news media as a powerful institution ought to be given due prominence. The article will add to calls for a victim centred approach to analysing forced migrants' narratives that prioritises their views, while not precluding critical viewpoints.

Keywords: belonging, identity, integration, asylum seekers/refugees, community newspapers, Britishness

Introduction

> If a society or an institution [the media] or someone thinks of you negatively, and you want to be absorbed or integrate into society, you can't integrate easily, you can't feel comfortable… Well, if you live in the same country [the UK] and they [the UK media] are pointing fingers at you, so you really feel as if you don't belong. You are really not wanted. It is depressing and I have no sense of belonging to Scotland or the UK (Boyce, 41-50yrs, Female, African)

The above excerpt captures many asylum seekers/refugees' concerns about their treatment by parts of the UK press and about the ways in which this treatment contributes to the ways their feeling of belonging and identity intersect with their ability to integrate into an 'imagined' Britishness. This media role in asylum seekers/refugees' experiences of social processes and their overarching relationship have not been systematically studied in Scotland (see for instance Stewart & Mulvey, 2010; Ager & Strang, 2008; Levesley, 2008; Barclay et al., 2003).

For example, a study conducted by Barclay et al (2003, p. 8-10) found that service providers and asylum seekers/refugees felt that hostile media coverage generated public hostility, racism and alienation that might hinder integration and good community relations. The study also found that community actors criticised the mainstream press for negatively reporting on asylum, while praising community newspapers[1] for their positive coverage (Barclay et al., 2003, p. 76). However, the study has gaps that the present discussion aims to address. Firstly, it was not intended to explore the ways in which media's role in asylum seekers/refugees' ability to integrate may be intersected with a sense of belonging and identity with the UK as host society. Secondly, the analysis only focused on the role of mainstream media in asylum seekers/refugees' resettlement (isolation and integration), and did not set out to investigate the role of community press.

Community press is used here to refer to newspapers that primarily circulate in a specific area, normally in neighbourhoods of a city or town. Community newspapers subsist on relatively low budgets and are normally free or relatively cheap to buy. By contrast, mainstream press has a wider readership, frequently beyond a particular geographical location that could be regional, citywide and nationwide, and may have even an international reach. Within the UK state context, this type of press tends to reflect the prevailing current of news reporting and has an inclination to frame issues in relation to national importance. In the UK, some local newspapers belong to this category, and therefore differ from community newspapers. By contradistinction to the local press that follows the mainstream model, community newspapers have local input, meaning they primarily focus on reporting local issues and providing information about local services, institutions and activities that affect the lives of local residents. In addition, volunteers and amateur journalists upon whom community newspapers mainly depended for its operation usually provide the 'local input'. Unlike community newspapers, the provision of information on local services is peripheral to mainstream press' *raison d'etre.* This distinction between mainstream press and its constitutive local newspapers from community press recognises that these boundaries are fluid, nuanced and contingent upon the legal and regulatory context under which they operate. These conceptions of mainstream local and community press may therefore vary between countries.

A recent study by Stewart and Mulvey (2010) provided useful insights on asylum seekers/refugees' opinions about integration, motivations to become British citizen, and about Britishness and Scottishness. They found that asylum seekers/refugees in Scotland with and without British citizenship face stigma, racism and structural inequalities due to government policies and public hostility (Stewart & Mulvey, 2010, p. 69).

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[1] I interpreted Barclay et al categorisation of local newspapers to be synonymous with community newspapers based on my own conception of the latter.

The study hinted at a media dynamic in asylum seekers/refugees´ability to become British citizens, integrate and identify with the mainstream (2010, p.34). Yet, they also missed an opportunity to explore this angle in detail that asylum seekers/refugees alluded to in their accounts.

It is important to elicit the opinions of asylum seekers/refugees about news media including the community press that can interfere with their orientations to these processes. Perhaps the only media focused research in the UK to adduce a relationship between media treatment of the asylum issue and asylum seekers/refugees' belonging, identity forming and integration into host society was conducted among England-based asylum seekers/refugees (Smart et al., 2007; Finney, 2005; ICAR, 2004; Buchanan & Grillo, 2003). Like the Scotland-based ones, these studies, which will be briefly reviewed below, only analysed the role of mainstream press and did not explore the role of community newspapers. Thus, the role of community press in asylum seekers/refugees' belonging and identity forming and its intersections with their ability to integrate into the host society or an 'imagined' Britishness have been poorly understood.

Another justification for the present research is that policymakers, community groups and refugee networks have directed efforts towards promoting positive images in UK news media reporting of asylum (Smart et al., 2007; Barclay et al., 2003; Bowes et al., 2009). Any finding on the positive role that community newspapers would play in this respect has a potential to contribute towards this goal. To date it seems there is minimal empirical studies (and certainly not in Scotland), conducted on asylum seekers/refugees' views about the role of community newspapers in their orientations to social processes of citizenship.

This article analyses interviewees' perceptions of media's role in the way they experience the intersection of belonging, identity and integration. First, it explores how, in addition to government policies, sections of UK media play a role in asylum seekers/refugees' fragility of national belonging and national identity with the UK and their ability to integrate (Sales, 2007, p. 5). Secondly, it suggests that asylum seekers/refugees continue to experience trauma in unconventional ways in the contemporary western state (see Pupavac, 2008). Thirdly, such coverage and attendant public hostility strengthens some asylum seekers/refugees' feeling of national belonging and national identity with their homelands. In this sense, while much of the coverage has questioned ethnic minorities' ability to inculcate a feeling of belonging and integrate into a British national and cultural imaginary (Khan, 2012a, b), it incidentally serves as a driver for asylum seekers/refugees' transnational identities. While acknowledging the precariousness of claiming media influence, the article calls for an approach on media influence that prioritises the beliefs and meanings constructed among and by migrants and refugees. This approach, the article argues, should be realist and prioritise the common sense views of victim narratives, while not precluding a critical analysis by theorists.

The rest of the paper is laid out as follows. The following section explains how belonging, identity and integration are operationalized and why they are constitutive. It considers the rationale for exploring a

media dynamic to these processes. The third section provides the research context. In the fourth section, interviewees' perceptions of the role played by the mainstream press in their belonging and identity forming and integration into an 'imagined' Britishness are explored. This is followed by an exploration of the role of the community press. The last section provides interpretation of asylum seekers/refugees' experiences of integration.

Belonging, identity & integration: the 'media-policy' nexus

This article operationalizes the concept of integration to incorporate the social inclusion of asylum seekers/refugees in local and national service delivery (Nagel & Staeheli, 2008). Richmond (2002) argues that social inclusion for asylum seekers/refugees is about being able to participate in service provision and socially interact with local residents in their neighbourhoods and the public at large (2002, p. 41). Integration encapsulates social processes and relations that impinge on asylum seekers/refugees' ability to access social welfare and participation in the cultural, social, economic and political life of their local community and the polity (Nagel & Staeheli, 2008; Cheong et al., 2007; Gillespie, 2007). As others have argued, these social processes of integration in multicultural polities relate to belonging and identification with a collectivity that could be linked with an 'imagined' identity, place, locality, neighbourhood or social institution (Phillips & Berman, 2003, p. 347; Ager & Strang, 2004).

In recent times, the overarching relationship between an individual's sense of belonging and identity, on the one hand, and ability to integrate into Britishness, on the other, has been embodied in New Labour's 'active citizenship'. Under what has been described as a 'responsibilization' agenda, New Labour introduced 'integrationist' and social cohesion policies to facilitate belonging, identity forming and integration into Britishness among migrants, particularly asylum seekers/refugees (Turner, 2006, p. 615; Waite, 2012; Tyler, 2010; McGhee, 2009). For example, the 'citizenship classes, tests and oath' policy required migrants to demonstrate knowledge of English and British cultural values and history as indices of integration before being granted British citizenship (Khan, 2012*a;* Home Office, 2001a, 2005; Waite, 2012, p. 353; McGhee, 2009, p. 45). Fortier argued that the policy prioritises cultural 'bridging' over 'bonding' because it would yield more favourable attitudes and feelings among immigrants towards the White majority's preference of British cultural values and sense of community at the expense of connecting to transnational identities (2010, p. 26).

The integration and cohesion policies have therefore been derided as being 'neo-assimilationist' rather than 'multiculturalist' in intention. The policies are 'neo-assimilationist' because they are intended to promote an imagined community of 'Britishness' with common values and a specific cultural mind-set or behaviour

among a culturally diverse citizenry that is skewed in favour of the majority White population (Fortier, 2010; Tyler, 2010; Waite, 2012). Thus, they have been often criticised as a retreat from multiculturalism (Fortier, 2010; Nagel & Staeheli, 2008, p. 6; Gillespie, 2007, p. 276). The policies are also criticised for assuming that migrants will inculcate a feeling of belonging and integrate into an 'imagined' cultural and national polity by having knowledge of English; in this framework, experiencing structural inequalities that perpetuate their exclusion and alienation become irrelevant (Fortier, 2010; Tyler, 2010; Waite, 2012). Integration is therefore contingent upon migrants' demonstration of a feeling of belonging to and identification with British cultural values.

Scholarly critique is also weighted towards a media dynamic to asylum seekers/refugees' ability to identify with and integrate into an 'imagined' cultural and national community (Gillespie, 2007; Speers, 2001). For instance, three Home Office commissioned research projects undertaken by ICAR in 2003/04 in two London boroughs and a subsequent study by Smart et al. (2007) in 2005/06, found that while generally there was a reduction in hostile coverage of asylum, some coverage contained hostile and potentially inflammatory language and inaccuracies (Smart et al., 2007; ICAR, 2004). These studies concluded that these depictions exacerbated the public hostility and stigma among asylum seekers/refugees (Home Office, 2001b; ICAR, 2004, p. 90). The hostility and stigma, in turn, was found to hinder asylum seekers/refugees' exclusion from the life of their neighbourhoods and service provision, ability to integrate and good community relations (Home Office, 2005; Barclay et al., 2003; Buchannan & Grillo, 2003, p. 19; ICAR, 2004). There is also consensus among these studies that the stigmatisation hinders asylum seekers/refugees' sense of belonging to their locality, their constructions of social and self-identities and ability to integrate (see also Speers, 2001; Kofman, 2005; Lister et al., 2007; Sales, 2007; Dwyer, 2008). This led to calls from civic society, politicians and news media for journalists to play a more responsible role in the coverage of asylum seekers/refugees (Home Office, 2001b; ICAR, 2004).

Media reporting of asylum in the past decades raises serious questions about the role of the press in asylum seekers/refugees' fragility of belonging, identity and integration into an 'imagined' Britishness (Kofman, 2005; Lister et al., 2007; Sales, 2007; Dwyer, 2008). The above concerns generated the hypothesis that the predominance of a hostile media treatment of asylum seekers/refugees would influence their ability to inculcate a feeling of belonging and integrate into an 'imagined' Britishness and polity (Kofman, 2005; Gillespie 2007). This is based on the assumption that, given that asylum seekers/refugees are 'subjects' of media stories and social concern, their orientations to social processes of belonging, identity and integration, cannot be understood in isolation of their high visibility in UK media over the last two decades – 1990/2000 (EUMC, 2002). Understanding the way asylum seekers/refugees (as aspiring UK citizens and media consumers) experience feelings of national belonging, national identity and integration

into the UK, and the role played by media communication in this process, would improve our knowledge of what makes integration possible for them in the UK as a multicultural democracy (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2006, p. 298).

The interviews & analytical strategy

The data used in this article was generated during my PhD. The study explored the intersection of asylum seekers/refugees, UK media and social processes of citizenship, meaning belonging, identity and participation or inclusion. *Table 1* is a summary of the socio-demographic profile of the 23 interviewees.

Table 1: List of Interviewees

Interviewee	Nationality	Gender	Family Status	Locale	Religion
Sha	Iraqi	Male	Parent, married	Glasgow	Muslim
Ma	Somali	Female	Parent, married	Edinburgh	Muslim
Nie	Zambian	Female	Single-parent	Glasgow	Christian
Seth	Cameroonian	Male	Parent, married	Glasgow	Christian
Alto	Chilean	Male	Parent, married	Edinburgh	Christian
Hama	Somali	Female	Parent, married	Edinburgh	Muslim
Jahi	Somali	Female	Parent, married	Edinburgh	Muslim
Boyce	Malawian	Female	Single-parent	Edinburgh	Christian
Leo	Rwandan	Male	Parent, co-habiting	Edinburgh	Christian
Dora	DRC	Female	Single-parent	Glasgow	Christian
Beth	Sierra Leonean	Female	Non-parent	Edinburgh	Christian
Rial	Colombian	Male	Non-parent	Edinburgh	Christian
Marie	Algerian	Female	Parent, married	Glasgow	Muslim
Hael	Zimbabwean	Male	Single-parent	Glasgow	Christian
Elli	Burundi	Male	Parent, married	Edinburgh	Christian
Romi	Nigerian	Female	Single-parent	Glasgow	Christian
Rahim	Pakistani	Male	Non-parent	Glasgow	Muslim
Tam	Rwandan	Male	Parent, married	Edinburgh	Christian
Fiso	Zimbabwean	Female	Single-parent	Glasgow	Christian
Taja	Eritrean	Male	Parent, married	Glasgow	Muslim
Ybi	DRC	Male	Parent, co-habiting	Glasgow	Christian
Tara	Zimbabwean	Female	Single-parent	Glasgow	Christian
Seti	Sierra Leonean	Male	Non-parent	Edinburgh	Muslim

The ascribing of socio-categories of Muslim, Christian, single parent, married or cohabiting was by self-identification. A key factor for choosing Glasgow is that it is the only city in Scotland to participate in the UK government's dispersal programme in 2000. It has since become the largest dispersal location in the UK (Bowes et al., 2009, p. 29). Edinburgh was selected for practical reasons. I was living there and had social networks that enable me to recruit interviewees thereby allowed me to overcome some of the most

common difficulties associated with researching hidden communities such as asylum seekers/refugees (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003). Doing fieldwork in Edinburgh also minimised financial and time constraints.

Except for the Chilean participant who came to the UK in the early 1970's, all other interviewees sought asylum between 1997 and 2005. All but one interviewee were educated to at least higher education level. A majority (18) had professional qualifications. The cohort should not be perceived as favouring the educated and empowered who could easily integrate. It reflected the general trend in the professional and educational profile of asylum seekers/refugees in Scotland (see for instance Charlaff *et al.,* 2004; Sim & Bowes, 2007, p. 737).

A 'saturation' strategy was employed that made it possible to undertake as many interviews as possible until no new information was yielded. 'Convenience' and non-random sampling that combined snowballing and an opportunistic recruitment method was employed (Doheny, 2007, p. 411). Interviewees were offered confidentiality and anonymity and were given pseudonyms in this paper.

Measures were taken to guard against compromising interviewees' responses, given that I shared some of the same socio-demographic characteristics with them, by being a refugee myself. Such measures included adopting an open mind to interviewees' responses and refraining from influencing such responses as much as possible (Kezar, 2005). Feedback from interviewees was elicited where necessary to crosscheck the accuracy of their responses (Arthur & Nazroo, 2003). Interviews were supplemented by note taking to provide contextual information, which informed the analysis (Arthur & Nazroo, 2003; Silverman, 2002). For example, paying attention to context enabled a deeper understanding of why interviewees were keen to talk about the influence of negative media coverage, particularly its dominance in mainstream press over a more positive reporting in community newspapers, and its influence on their feelings of belonging, identity and integration. My 'insider' status made interviewees "talk in depth" because they perceived me as "familiar with and sympathetic to their world" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 76). Interviews were conducted at times suitable for interviewees in order to increase participation rates and to respond to cultural sensitivities. Interviewees were selected on the basis that they can communicate in English. All interviews were voice recorded and accompanied by field notes that recorded contextual information that would be useful in the analysis.

The data for the larger PhD study was gathered through semi-structured, face-to-face individual interviews that used a checklist interview and conversation format. The discussions focused on experiences of living in Britain: expectations, roles and responsibilities of being a citizen; engagement with news media and its representations of the asylum issue; and perceptions of the impact of media coverage on a sense of belonging to and identity with their homelands, the UK, England, Scotland, community or any other place (Khan, 2012a, p. 3-4). For this article, the data was analysed for interviewee-parents' beliefs and opinions

about variation in news coverage between mainstream and community newspapers and their relationship to the fragility of their belonging, identity and integration. Two questions with specific focus on news media were asked: *Does UK media coverage of asylum seekers/refugees contribute to or hinder their feeling of belonging to and identity with the UK and homeland? If so, in what ways?*

Mainstream press: belonging, identity & integration

To contextualise interviewees' experiences with media's role in orientating them to belonging, identity and integration into British society, I will briefly review media depictions of asylum seekers/refugees during the past two decades (see Khan, 2012*a,* for a detailed discussion of UK media treatment of asylum seekers/refugees). Most of the studies on media treatment of asylum seekers/refugees conducted between 1990 and 2000 in the UK found pejorative depictions. Such depictions include asylum-seeking migration as 'illegitimate', motivated by welfare and economic considerations, the scapegoat for emerging social and political problems in the UK, and that there was an asylum 'influx' (Clark 1998; Kaye, 2001; Clark & Campbell, 2000). In addition, asylum seekers/refugees were depicted in 'inferior' cultural identities and as posing a threat to an 'imagined' Britishness, national security and social cohesion (Clark & Campbell, 2000, p. 42; Turner, 2006, p. 615; Gillespie 2007). These studies found certain discursive strategies to be commonplace in the asylum stories. These include labels such as 'invasion', 'deluge', 'handouts', 'bogus', 'economic migrant', 'exodus', 'flood' , 'gold diggers', welfare 'fraud', 'scam' and 'spongers' (Clark & Campbell, 2000, p. 30; Kaye, 2001, p. 61). Kaye (2001, p. 64). Clark and Campbell (2000, p. 41) concluded that the vitriolic language directed at asylum seekers displayed overt and covert racism and xenophobia by journalists, selective and exaggerated use of statistics and sources or 'numbers game'. The anti-asylum reporting was prevalent in the right wing press and amount to 'othering' of asylum seeker/refugees as 'folk devils' and aimed to reconstruct British national identity (Stratham, 2001, p. 409; Erjavec, 2003).

Interviewees' testimonies mainly reflect the above analysis of a dominance of anti-asylum stories over positive ones. The majority of interviewees said that negative media coverage fuelled racism and public hostility against asylum seekers/refugees, which contributed to their stigmatisation and social isolation. Many interviewees recounted their experiences of being victims of racist attitudes and attacks from local residents, children and the public. They recounted the public's including residents in their neighbourhoods' mimicking of anti-asylum phrases in newspapers such as: "go back to your country" (Seth, 41-50yrs, Male, African); "why are you here, bogus asylum seekers" (Fiso, 41-50yrs, Female, African); and "asylum seekers are swamping us, raping us, flooding us" (Tam, 31-40yrs, Male, African). This is to suggest a link between the prejudicial media coverage and hostility against asylum seekers/refugees:

"Media concentrate on all the negative things. For instance, a person who has never, like, interacted with an asylum seeker, if we are to go to Princes Street and meet one person and say: 'Excuse me. Do you know that I am an asylum seeker?' He would say: 'um.. What?!' Why is that person so scared? Well, it is what they have heard. The media has published these things: these people [asylum seekers] are bad. These people are vampires, these people are like evil people, these people are like, you know, junkies**...**" (Hael, 31-40yrs, Male, African)

"The negative coverage even affects certain employers who are afraid to employ asylum seekers who are even entitled to work. Because when they see all these things, their perception is influenced. Equally, children in schools sometimes are having very difficult times, because other children have read things or seen the TV and sometimes things are being thrown at them: 'Go back to your country. Why are you here? Bogus asylum seeker', and things like that. You know some of these things come from kids who have heard it from parents who have read it in the press and things like that." (Tam, 31-40yrs, Male, African).

Tam's narrative reveals widespread concern among the cohort that media hostility could exclude and alienate asylum seeker/refugee parents and their children from the mainstream. Many consider participation in the labour market as crucial for being 'good role models for their kids' (Seth, 41-50yrs, Male, African). Parents being in employment and their children undergoing schooling are opportunities for families to socially interact and build social bonds with indigenes, which they claim would facilitate their integration. Some interviewees expressed the view that negative media asylum stories made them to disown the refugee identity (Khan, 2012*a*, p. 9; Gillespie, 2007). It made them "lie" (Boyce, 41-50yrs, Female, African) about their asylum seeker/refugee identity, and disown the asylum seeker/refugee 'label'.

"I think it affects honesty. It makes people lie. Because if I met somebody in the street and [they] said are you an asylum seeker?, I would say no! So the representation stigmatises you." (Hael, 31-40yrs, Male, African)

"No, no, nobody would like to do that – identify themselves as an asylum seeker or refugee, no. Simply because of that negativity. If a society or an institution or someone thinks of you negatively, and you want to be absorbed, integrate into society, you can't integrate easily, you can't feel comfortable." (Leo, 31-40yrs, Male, African)

Many interviewees said it made them feel "not welcomed", "not accepted", and "not wanted" (Elli, 31-40yrs, Male, African) in their locality and the UK. Interviewees felt stigmatised to identify themselves as asylum seekers or refugees "even to colleagues at work and to their neighbours" (Elli, 31-40yrs, Male, African). The stigma or feeling "ashamed to socially interact" (Tam, 31-40yrs, Male, African) also extended beyond their immediate families, relatives and friends. Interviewees said that the stigma and social isolation made them

"feel ashamed to go outside their doors, [and they] don't want to make friends" (Beth, 21-30yrs, Female, African). One can therefore expect that the resulting isolation would pose difficulty for refugee families' attempts at social 'bridging' beyond their ethnic enclaves, a key aim of the government's integrationist policies such as the compulsory learning of English. These stories resonate with findings of Stewart & Mulvey (2010), which suggest that asylum seekers/refugees' in Scotland would shed the refugee label and identity due to prejudice and negative treatment by the public and UK government policies. The majority view was that residents' anti-asylum attitude that was directed at them hinders their ability to have a sense of belonging and identity with the UK and to integrate.

Shedding the refugee label or identity, however, does not imply having a feeling of belonging to the UK or identification with Britishness. The public hostility that is blamed on negative coverage strengthened some interviewees' feeling of national belonging to and national identity with their homelands:

> "Do I feel 100% British citizen or do I keep my own [Rwandan] identity? I can't [feel British]. I don't see myself as a UK citizen and I don't feel accepted." (Leo, 31-40yrs, Male, African)

In unpicking, the above stories recounted thus far, some issues that are pertinent to the literature and UK government policies on migrants' orientations to feelings of belonging, identity forming and integration should be borne in mind. Firstly, these comments correspond to theoretical accounts that some parts of news media depict asylum seekers/refugees in ways that others have referred to as 'folk devils', meaning being a cause for social malaise and concern (Khan 2012*a*, *b;* Tyler, 2006; Erjavec, 2003). Secondly, interviewees felt that their British interlocutors are questioning their right to be in the UK as asylum seekers. In this case, it implies that even interviewees with legal residency, such as Boyce and Elli, felt that some parts of UK media influence public ignorance of asylum seekers/refugees' right to seek asylum in the UK, and that local residents constantly reminded them of their outsider status and identity. By so doing, interviewees felt that some parts of UK media are complicit in influencing public perception of who belong or should be (or not be) in the UK and should be entitled or not entitled to its magnanimity and British Citizenship or national identity. Thirdly**,** it might be that perceptions of public mimicking of anti-asylum discourse exemplify media agency in British readers' construction of asylum seekers/refugees in demeaning ways that might cause public hostility, stigmatisation and alienation of asylum seekers/refugees and their families (Lynn & Lea, 2003; Ferguson &Walters, 2005; Haynes et al., 2009; Khan, 2012*b*).

One can be critical of interviewees' opinion as misplaced for a number of reasons. While an individual has a right to seek asylum under international humanitarian law, states equally have a right under the Refugee Convention to refuse someone's claim to asylum. In addition, these reported accounts of public anti-asylum discourse and hostility might have been influenced by other sources. This is because interviewees claimed that anti-asylum policies and vexatious political debates of an asylum 'influx' were also culprits. For example,

interviewees expressed the view that policies that prescribed 'dispersal', 'vouchers' and 'detentions' for asylum seekers/refugees stigmatised them both individually and collectively. It is therefore plausible that residents' anti-asylum views are reflecting political discourse of an asylum 'influx'. In this regard, another interpretation might be that journalists, as members of the local community and polity, are reflecting widespread political and public sentiments. Hostile media treatment of asylum seekers/refugees is therefore a function of political reporting. Nevertheless, by so doing, some journalists reinforce anti-asylum stereotypes.

There is another way that stigma, isolation and public hostility that is partly blamed on hostile media treatment impinged on their experiences of belonging, identity and integration: it compounded their psychosocial problems. 'Psychosocial problems' is used here to refer to the emotional trauma, stigma, feeling of fear, social alienation and isolation that asylum seekers/refugees suffer (Reesp, 2003; Kirmayer, 2003; Tyler, 2006; Pupavac, 2008). Interviewees said that media coverage made them "feel awkward", "feel distress" (Romi, 31-40yrs, Female, African), "sorry that [asylum seekers/refugees] are here", "fed up" (Marie, 31-40yrs, Female, African), "put [them] off as a person", and "demoralised" and "even affects [their] mental health" (Dora, 21-30yrs, Female, African). It also generated a feeling of insecurity and suspicion among asylum seekers/refugees:

> "You know, the media make us sorry that we are here. We are fed up. Yes they break us, they demoralise us. And when I am in the bus and I read a bad article about us and see someone else, local people they are reading the same newspaper, I feel very shy: "Oh! They are reading and looking at me now. What do they think about me now? Because as always they are seeing we are like animals…" (Marie, 31-40yrs, Female, African)

While the above suspicion of a media influence in some public hostile behaviour might be debatable, it at least suggests complicity of hostile coverage in compounding some asylum seekers/refugees' psychosocial trauma caused by political persecution in homelands. It is therefore not surprising that Fiso felt as if "[they] ran away from one problem to come and face another" and only to "even end up in hospital". This would suggest that asylum-seeking migrants´ psychosocial trauma in the host countries continues to be a social reality (see Pupavac, 2008), and perceived by interviewees to be perpetrated by media´s pejorative "distortions and scaremongering" (Hael, 31-40yrs, Male, African). Interviewees' perceptions are also insightful in providing a window on the way media hostility can invoke fear among asylum seekers/refugees. While Tyler has noted that the configuring of asylum seekers/refugees in much of the media with 'grotesque qualities' can invoke fear, anger and disquiet among native or 'host' communities (Tyler 2006, p. 199), there is more to be learned about the psychosocial impact of these representations on asylum seekers/refugees. My work will add knowledge that such 'grotesque' depictions affect asylum

seekers/refugees in a similar way to British citizens. It also sheds light on how news media might compound asylum seekers/refugees' psychosocial afflictions in ways similar to UK government's anti-asylum migration and citizenship policies (Tyler, 2006). For example, Boyce spoke of the stigma she felt in disclosing to her children that she was an asylum seeker:

> "Now I tried to watch news with my kids and debate the [asylum] issue. For example, it took my children a long time to tell them that we are asylum seekers, to try to protect them, and debate the asylum issue and try to explain the asylum situation. And they would say: 'No! Mum, we are not asylum seekers. We don't look like asylum seekers'… So, I have to act as a commentator whilst watching the news." (Boyce, 41-50yrs, Female, African)

While Boyce's story reveals that negative coverage is a source for stigma and intergenerational tension among refugee families, it presents opportunities for parents to debate and explain asylum to their children. Her story also suggests that the younger generation could be victims of media hostility by making them to construct asylum seekers in liminal social identities. Boyce, therefore, considers it her parental responsibility to ensure that her children are protected from potential stigma of being asylum seekers. Parenthood is also about helping their children to understand the asylum issue and to learn about the family's asylum seeker background at a time parents thought most appropriate to do so.

This finding of perceptions of a media dynamic to asylum seekers/refugees' psychosocial problems should be accorded prominence in the analysis of the relevance of social inclusion or exclusion in migrant integration and formation of national belonging and national identity. Interviewees' narratives resonate with Sales' (2007) observation that UK government policies subject asylum-seeking migrants to both formal and informal exclusion. For Sales (2007), formal exclusion refers to the ineligibility of asylum-seeking migrants from accessing certain forms of benefits. It also entails the structural inequalities and restrictions on political participation that are imposed by the state on asylum seekers/refugees (Sales, 2007, p. 181). Informal exclusion, on the other hand, refers to processes such as the impact of poverty or poor language skills that migrants' experience that hinders their ability to access services (Sales, 2007, p. 181). However, interviewees' narratives suggest that Sales' policymaking/structuralist paradigm [2] to understanding the inclusion-exclusion that asylum seekers experience in the polity could be better understood if we focus on interviewees' beliefs of a media dynamic to their exclusion.

Indeed, all interviewees said anti-asylum policies mainly contributed to asylum seekers/refugees' exclusion from welfare and economic activity including participation in the labour market (Barclay e al., 2003; Ager & Strang, 2004; Bowes et al., 2009; Stewart & Mulvey, 2010). Interviewees also claimed that the impact of such policies on their psychosocial wellbeing was similar to that of media hostility. These hinder their ability

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[2] My words.

to develop identification with the UK, which makes integration difficult, as argued by other studies reviewed earlier. Given these perceptions, one can argue that media become another major culprit of social exclusion and should be central to the analysis of asylum seekers/refugees' inclusion-exclusion from welfare services. My work will also support calls by Georgiou (2013) for policy in cultural and political representation spheres to prioritise the experiences of some minority groups to understand how their ability to develop a sense of exclusion and alienation is impinged by dominant media narratives.

It is worth highlighting that focusing on interviewees' experiences of negative coverage does not mean that interviewees did not experience any asylum-friendly coverage in mainstream press. Indeed, interviewees spoke of positive coverage in some of them, even though the unanimous view was that this was far exceeded by the negative coverage. As my analysis of major UK mainstream newspapers over a six month period (between October 2007 and March 2008; see Khan 2012b) found, much of the favourable coverage of asylum seekers/refugees was mainly on human-interest stories such as children asylum seekers. Interviewees' accounts of favourable coverage in mainstream media is beyond the scope of this paper which focuses on interviewees' perceptions on what they see as dominant and hegemonic trends in media coverage.

Community press: belonging, identity & integration

The majority of interviewees felt that community newspapers positively reported about asylum seekers/refugees in contrast to much of the negative reporting in the mainstream press. This is partly because community newspapers were more likely to publish their opinions:

> "We have the *Pollok Post* … [and it has] done an excellent work in terms of the issues about asylum seekers and refugees. You can see yourself even in the front page. It is about asylum seekers and refugees doing things in the community. Em, even half a page allocated to us about what we do in terms of personal stories which also helped to raise awareness and educate the local community… You know what you write influences the way people   behave…" (Seth, 41-50yrs, Male, African)

> "Yes, in Nashwood we have one [community newspaper]. It is good. It gives you good news about the tenants; about housing, about everything, about repairs, they [journalists] ask you about the housing, and they report about it, if you have problem. It's good. It's every month." (Taja, 51-60yrs, Male, African)

One way to interpret these opinions is that interviewees felt that the favourable reporting was because journalists were local residents and socially interacting with asylum seekers/refugees in the community. Journalists therefore consider asylum seekers/refugees as valuable members of the locality. These

newspapers also provided valuable information about local services for asylum seekers/refugees, which were crucial for their participation in service provision and social inclusion. In addition, community newspapers fit into asylum seeker/refugees' view of journalism as an institution for informing and educating citizens about socio-political issues including asylum and providing a voice for marginalised groups. As one interviewee put it: "There are [asylum seekers] who, like myself, are willing to take on this [mainstream media] and challenge them" (Leo, 31-40yrs, Male, African). However, they have not been given the opportunity to do so. Many said they were therefore deprived of their 'voice' in articulating a refugee perspective in the mainstream press.

The above excerpts also illustrate that asylum seekers/refugees' social and cultural initiatives generated a lot of positive publicity in the community newspapers. The feeling was that publicity enabled cultural learning of ethnic minority cultures, which would enable a "two-way" kind of integration. Interviewees' felt that "[integration] is not a one-way process" (Seth, 41-50yrs, Male, African), but one of "cultural exchange" (Nie, 31-40yrs, Female, African) between asylum seekers/refugees and British citizens. Another interviewee explained further about her view on this kind of integration in this exchange:

> **Interviewer:** *Are you saying that integration is not about knowing the ways of the British people, but giving them [the British people] an opportunity for them to know you [asylum seekers/refugees]?*
>
> **Interviewee**: "Of course. This thing [integration] is two way, not one way. If I learn to know them [British culture], the more closely they get to me. They want to know more about me. Where I come from, how I came to here, what is the reason, which make me to come all the way from Africa to Britain, you know." (Nie, 31-40yrs, Female, African)

In this case, integration is about asylum seekers/refugees learning and acquiring the culture of the host society, and about indigenous population learning about and accepting their cultures (Kiwan, 2008). In this context, identity forming is a function of integrating into both the UK dominant culture and minority cultures of migrants. This would imply that even though ethnic minority migrants would subscribe to a British culture, they embody multiple cultural identities (Gillespie, 2007; Byrne, 2007; Fortier, 2010). As Seth, one of the interviewees above said, the positive reporting in *The Pollok Post* played a part in "the welcoming" and friendly interaction he experienced in Pollok. This made him to develop a feeling of belonging and identification with his neighbourhood. He said that this feeling of localised belonging and identity would engender asylum seekers/refugees' participation in local service delivery, which is key for integration. This person's experiences make a linkage between social interaction, community participation and migrants' belonging, identity and integration into their locality. As stated above, some parents blamed

the pejorative coverage for 'making certain employers afraid to employ asylum seekers' (Tam, 31-40yrs, Male, African).

Many interviewees expressed the view that being unemployed makes it difficult for many asylum seekers/refugees to be good role models for their children. Seth argues that most families perceived this to be a key responsibility of parenthood, given that asylum seekers/refugees are housed in deprived estates. Positive coverage of their cultural events in the community press is seen as an opportunity for their children to learn about their homeland cultures. In this sense, community newspapers function as cultural transmission sites for the younger generation of asylum seekers/refugees. As I discussed elsewhere, cultural transmission is considered as a parental duty that many refugee families take seriously (Khan 2012*a, c*). Interviewees' opinions would raise serious questions about which kind of integration, at local or national level, should be prioritised by policymakers (Kiwan, 2008; Stewart & Mulvey, 2010). Interviewee's experience will strengthen calls for localised belonging, identity and integration to be prioritised over belonging, identity and integration to a British national and cultural imaginary (Levesley, 2008, Kiwan, 2008, p. 23). For Seth and other migrants, integration is a learning process of interaction and networking with their neighbours and having knowledge of the local community where they resided (Kiwan, 2008).

Interviewees' experiences correspond to those of community actors in Glasgow that Barclay et al. (2003, p. 76) found to be critical of parts of the mainstream press for negatively reporting on asylum while offering praise for community newspapers' positive reporting (Bowes et al., 2009; Sim & Bowes, 2007). It is plausible to conclude that journalists consider it their responsibility to avoid inflammatory coverage that would likely generate community tensions (Finney & Robinson, 2008). It also suggests that the community press is likely to show flexibility to cover asylum seekers/refugees' 'voices' and activities much more than the mainstream press. It therefore confronts the previous critique that interviewees' mimicking of local residents' hostile media narratives is a reflection of public attitudes.

The *a priori* assumption that media hostility implies that journalists anticipate or respond to views and reactions of their local readership might be simplistic. From interviewees' accounts, local residents articulated pejorative asylum discourse and behaviour that did not resonate with those of community newspapers in their midst. It can therefore be expected that, given the opinions of interviewees of favourable coverage in community newspapers, journalists ought not reproduce, communicate and re-circulate pejorative asylum stories even where their readers or local residents hold such opinions. It is another reminder of the precariousness of apportioning blame on news media for influencing their readers and its capacity for reinforcing their beliefs and attitudes. This area would benefit from further research with a view to develop an understanding on how living within or in proximity to a neighbourhood hosting asylum seekers/refugees impinge on journalists' reporting of the asylum issue.

Another plausible explanation for the favourable treatment of asylum seekers/refugees by community newspapers might be that such coverage is not driven by financial motives and circulation figures as claimed by this cohort to be the case with the mainstream press (see for instance, Khan, 2012b, p. 75). This is partly because community newspapers, in contrast to mainstream ones such as local newspapers, mainly rely on funding from local authorities. Nonetheless, the positive coverage is particularly significant because, as others have noted (Barclay et al., 2003, Bowes et al., 2009), policymakers, community groups and refugee networks have directed efforts towards promoting positive images in the mainstream press' reporting of asylum. Any positive role that community newspapers would play in this respect has a potential to contribute towards this goal. It could therefore be hypothesised that community newspapers could act as facilitators of good community relations and asylum seekers/refugees feeling of belonging to and identity to their neighbourhoods. I did not undertake an analysis of the content of these community newspapers to test for interviewees' opinions as I did with the mainstream press. This gap needs to be filled by another study.

Discussion: Insights for mediated belonging, identity and integration

There is no marked difference in interviewees' mediated belonging, identity and integration in relation to their socio-demographic background. This would explain why the discussion has not drawn attention to the asylum status, gender, ethnic, cultural and age backgrounds of interviewees. However, attention needs to be drawn to Muslim interviewees' views because media and political discourses represent Muslim asylum seekers/refugees as the cultural 'other' that are incapable of integrating and identifying with British national and cultural values (Kofman, 2005, p. 461; Home Office, 2005; Modood & Ahmad, 2007, p. 188). For example, as Table 1 shows, Sha (61-70yrs), Marie (31-40yrs), and Taja (51-60yrs) are Muslims and their views resonated with Nie (31-40yrs), Leo (31-40yrs), Elli (31-40yrs), and Hael (31-40yrs), who claimed to be Christians. Marie (31-40yrs), a Muslim mum said she allowed her daughter to participate in 'some Easter activities' in her local Church because she does not 'like to restrict her and to teach her to be able to make the difference between the religions'. It suggests that some Muslim families are supportive of a 'two-way' form of integration.

The religious categorisation of cohort is relevant insofar as to caution that fears expressed about Muslim asylum-seeking migrants to be incapable of belonging and integrating into British identity is simplistic. Following Jones (2006) and Marvin & Ingle (1999), interviewees' beliefs reminded us that a powerful institution such as the media can influence public attitude to others (such as asylum seekers/refugees) that could indirectly contribute to their identification with the polity (also Hoxsey, 2011). It could be

hypothesised that having a sense of belonging to, and identifying with a place (locality or the UK) may be contingent upon the attitude, behaviour and beliefs of British citizens towards migrants (Khan, 2012*a*). It might also be hypothesised that pejorative reporting contributes to the fragility of migrants' formation of British national identity, while facilitating an attachment and identification with the national identity of their homelands.

UK media coverage therefore amounts to a paradox: while the coverage has been associated with promoting ethnic minorities' belonging to, and integration into a British national and cultural imaginary, it incidentally serves as a driver for asylum seekers/refugees' attachment to transnational identities (Khan, 2012 *b, c*). Nonetheless, interviewees' response was affirmative when asked if they would like to integrate and to be granted British Citizenship. This means that migrants can accept the legal status of Citizenship and its inherent Nationality and British national identity, but might not have a feeling of belonging to the UK. These hypotheses would benefit from further empirical investigation in order to develop an understanding of the linkage between minority groups' alienation and media narratives of identity and Citizenship (Georgiou, 2013).

The current analysis did not test for the veracity of interviewees' perceptions (for a detailed analysis, see Khan, 2012b). It does not make claims of media causality, and it recognises that findings relating to media influence should be received with caution (Wood & King, 2001, p. 3). This paper's sub-text is to instigate debate about the historical reticence in citizenship and cultural studies in accounting for media influence in the ways marginalised groups experience citizenship social processes. This approach is no less morally and ethically tenable than officialdom or media elites' mistrust and disbelief of refugees' testimonies of persecution that led them to seek asylum. Interviewees' eagerness to share their insight on how their ability to integrate is being hindered by much of the negative coverage indicates that this is an issue of socio-political significance to them. They offer us a window into what makes feeling of belonging, identity and integration into the host society possible or farfetched for forced migrants (Silverstone & Georgiou, 2005).

As Silverstone & Georgiou observed, we should, at least, entertain the idea that other powerful institutions of society are complicit in forced migrants' orientations to social processes of citizenship (2005, p. 929). In addition, this is how victims of media hostility perceived their social world. As Hart (2007) argued, media's social construction influence the way that media consumers perceive "their world regardless of their lack of inherent validity" (2007, p. 3). A rethink is needed in our approach to understanding victim narratives no matter whether such accounts are common sense views, contradictory or unpalatable to established epistemological positions of researching media influence on migrants' 'lived' experiences of social processes. It is also significant for research to focus on the relationship between media consumption and orientations

to belonging, identity and integration among different age groups and generations. This will help us understand the generational differences in the reception of negative media representations among migrant families and its role in the exclusion and alienation of migrant children.

What then can we extrapolate from these experiences of media coverage to inform migrants' integration? Firstly, interviewees' experiences suggest that negative reporting would not prevent them from socialising or participating in some service provision and employment (see Khan, 2012a). Neither does it make them resign to be victims of psychosocial trauma and alienation. Participation in education and volunteering, as this cohort claimed, suggest some kind of integration. In this sense, for most asylum seekers/refugees, integration is not only an on going process, but undertaken on their own volition. This suggests that integration should not be judged on the ability to pass citizenship classes. As the interviewee who claimed to be 'non-literate' said, through social interaction with British citizens she has learned about British cultural values. Integration policies should therefore prioritise migrants' knowledge of and participation in the life of the locality where they reside. In this regard, having localised knowledge rather than focusing on British history prescribed in citizenship classes, should be the litmus test for deciding whether migrants are or have integrated.

Secondly, interviewees perceived integration as an "on-going two-way process of cultural exchange" between majority and minority groups. Interviewees also inhabit multiple forms of identities and belongings, including to their homelands. Host nations and migrants' homeland identities can therefore coexist. This suggests that integration into host nations' cultural identity is possible, and that fears that migrants' transnational identities are a barrier to integrating into host nation's identity are misplaced. It should therefore be expected that the 'neo-assimilationist' approach to integration, especially under New Labour's 'active' citizenship agenda is counterproductive. A form of integration that promotes the diverse ethnic, cultural and national values and identities would endure (Khan, 2012b).

Thirdly, the current policy of 'earned citizenship' that grant British citizenship to migrants upon demonstrating that they have integrated is probably counterproductive (McGhee, 2009). Granting British citizenship to migrants cannot achieve integration; neither would they make them feel 'British'. Given that the hostile media coverage plays a role in interviewees' fragility of belonging, identity and integration, feeling British might also be contingent upon social interactions and emotional bonds that migrants form with British citizens as well as being included in service provision. The structural inequalities that migrants face are engendered not only by hostile policies, but also by media coverage. For example, it has been noted above that interviewees' raised concern that negative depictions could make asylum seekers/refugees susceptible to discrimination in the labour market. This suspicion suggests that interviewees, as policymakers, regarded participation in employment as crucial for integration. If this

perception of media's role in asylum seekers/refugees' marginalisation and exclusion remains unaddressed by political elites, it would render migrant integration as illusory.

This begs the question: is it possible for migrants to integrate into social, political and economic life of the host society and its 'imagined' national and cultural community without having a sense of belonging and identification? It has emerged from interviewees' stories that these social processes might not necessarily be mutually inclusive. This is because it might be that participating on their own volition in education, employment and social life of the host society is for pragmatic and practical reasons of survival. These everyday human actions sustain families and their parental relationships with their children. These forms of participation are indices of integration (Ager & Strang, 2004). Yet, migrants might not have a sense of belonging and identity with Britishness because of media hostility and anti-asylum policies. Integration might not after all refer to a mainstream national imaginary but, as interviewees said, it might be highly localised, as are their identities in relation to communities they are residing. This is another reason why integration policies should not be expected to prioritise allegiance or loyalty to mainstream Britishness, a national identity that continues to be at best contingent or at worse opaque (Waite, 2012; Fortier, 2010; McGhee, 2009).

Conclusion

This paper has explored the hypothesis that mainstream and community newspapers' treatment of the asylum issue influences the ways asylum seekers/refugees experience the overarching relationship of belonging, identity and integration in the British society. It has argued that in addition to government policies, a dominance of negative coverage plays a role in asylum seekers/refugees' fragility of belonging to and identifying with the UK and the ability to integrate (Sales, 2007, p. 5).

One key finding is that the negative media coverage questioning ethnic minorities' belonging and identification with a British national and cultural imaginary (Khan, 2012*a*, *b*), serves as a driver for asylum seekers/refugees strengthening their transnational identities. On the contrary, community newspapers' positive asylum coverage is perceived to orientate asylum seekers/refugees into having a sense of belonging to their locality, advancing their integration. Localised identities of host society can therefore coexist with migrants' transnational identities.

While the article acknowledges the precariousness of claims of media influence, it calls for a repositioning from the historical reticence in the approach to analysing media influence to one that prioritises the beliefs and experiences of forced migrants. More importantly, migrants' experiences should underpin policymaking

and theorising on inclusion and integration. This victim centred approach is possible within a critical analysis of forced migrants' testimonies.

The article has provided thoughts on how to facilitate migrant integration. In this regard, it has called for an integration policy that prioritises migrants' demonstration of localised forms of belonging and identities rather than large-scale demonstration of national affiliation. It has also called for a 'multiculturalist' rather than a 'neo-assimilationist' approach to integration and for policymakers to recognise that migrant integration is illusory if perceptions of a media influence to structural inequalities, psychosocial trauma and exclusion remains unaddressed. There should also be a recognition that integration cannot be achieved through acquisition of knowledge of English and British cultural values and history or by British citizenship alone without alleviating the inequality and exclusion that migrants face on a daily basis. It is hoped that this paper underlines the need for policymaking in both the cultural and political representation spheres to draw from interviewees' experiences of marginalisation, exclusion and alienation in relation to media narratives (Georgiou, 2012).

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