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Asylum Seekers and Refugees in the UK: The Role of Refugee Community Organisations and Refugee Agencies in the Settlement Process

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Abstract

Using a qualitative approach, this study looks into the experiences of refugees during settlement in Britain, their perceptions and expectations of community associations and refugee agencies and the services these provide. Focused on the Colombian and the Somali refugee communities in London, the research is based on eight in-depth interviews with personnel from refugee organisations and 31 with refugees themselves: 16 with Colombians and 15 Somalis. One mixed-sex group discussion with Colombian refugees and two, one male and one female, with Somalis were also conducted. This was complemented with direct observation and an extensive review of the existing literature.

The research shows that English language skills, transferability of previous skills and employment experience, circumstances of flight, racism and discrimination, cultural differences between the country of origin and the UK, and availability of adequate health-care services and accommodation are key factors affecting refugee settlement.

The findings also show that word of mouth was the most common medium of gaining awareness of refugee organisations for both the Colombian and the Somali refugees, followed by printed material. Whilst the Somali refugees were generally satisfied with the organisations they had approached, the Colombians expressed a high level of dissatisfaction. The findings lead to the conclusion that refugees' socio-cultural background and the reasons behind their flight are

likely to shape both their settlement and their attitudes towards refugee organisations in the country of exile.

Whilst the research suggests that there is a long way to go before refugee organisations can satisfactorily meet the needs of refugees in Britain, it also shows a pervasive lack of feed-back systems in those organisations. The study concludes with a number of recommendations to facilitate settlement, arguing that unless the available resources are used more efficiently, the effects of current legislation will be disastrous for the refugee population.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I first became involved in working with refugees in early 1994. As a result of the opening of one of Britain's main detention centres for asylum seekers, refugee organisations across the country launched a strong campaign to criticise what they saw as the (then Conservative) government's breach of basic humanitarian principles, question the legality of the use of detention for refugees, and urge the government to stop such a procedure. It was through that campaign that I became aware of the difficult situation of refugees in Britain.

As a Spanish and Portuguese speaker, I became a volunteer with a 'visitors' group' set up by a refugee community association based near the detention centre and within reasonable access from London. The main function of the group (involving at some point nearly one hundred volunteers) was to visit refugees in detention to provide them with moral, psychological and practical support. Given the increasing need for translators and interpreters, I soon found myself also involved in casework, mainly translating conversations between asylum seekers and lawyers, doctors and other service providers. Between the end of 1994 and mid-1995 I also did this type of work for a London-based refugee agency.

During that period I was taking an MA course at Westminster University and my experience with refugees became the basis for my dissertation (Calvar 1995). Using an ethnographic approach, the study looked at the main issues faced by refugees in Britain, from

the danger of deportation to problems of adaptation. The present research builds on this work.

The refugee phenomenon in Britain is certainly not new and is important. During the second half of the current century, Britain, like many other western countries, has experienced a continuous inflow of asylum seekers. It was estimated that Germany, France, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK received approximately three quarters of all asylum applications made in Western Europe in the decade 1985-1995 (Hovy 1993 and IGC 1995, quoted in Koser 1996: 155). In 1997, this was the proportion of applications received by Germany, the Netherlands and the UK alone. In that year, over 32,000 applications (excluding dependents) were made in the UK (Home Office 1998: 2).

Concerned by the increasing number of people seeking refuge in their territories, over the past three decades western countries have taken a number of steps to restrict and discourage the growth in asylum seeking. Britain was no exception to this trend; it started to tighten up its rules on general immigration in the 1960s with the *1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act*, which was followed by other equally restrictive legislative action (see, for example, Harris 1995). In the 1990s further steps were taken to rigidify controls on immigration in general and on asylum in particular: the *1993 Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act* and the *1996 Asylum and Immigration Act*. One of the main implications of the latter is that it took away all welfare benefits from in-country applicants and appellants against a

negative decision whilst their application for asylum or appeal, respectively, is being considered.

At the time of writing, the Labour government has just published its new *Immigration and Asylum Bill* (hereafter the 'new Bill'). Currently being discussed in Parliament, the new Bill is likely to become law in October or November 1999. One of its most controversial points is that benefits will be completely withdrawn from refugees and replaced with a new national support system set up and run by the Home Office, whereby asylum seekers needing assistance would be given one no-choice offer of food and/or accommodation anywhere in the UK (Refugee Council 1999a). Such proposals will definitely worsen the already precarious situation of asylum seekers in Britain. Although the new Bill is not discussed in detail in the present study, reference to some of its proposals is made throughout this thesis.

These legal developments have become a matter of concern for organisations working with refugees, which argue that little or no attention has been directed to the short- and long-term needs of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK. Despite the scale of refugee flows into Britain, there is no permanent, central programme for the reception and settlement of refugees in this country with the exception of special, temporary programmes developed for particular groups. As in many other countries, two different types of asylum seekers can be distinguished in Britain: 'quota' or 'programme' refugees and 'non-quota' or 'spontaneous' refugees (Duke 1996b: 462). Whilst the former are admitted under a programme specifically

designed and agreed for them by the international community and are automatically granted refugee status, the latter come individually and apply for asylum once in the UK. Although a signatory to the *1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* and other conventions, Britain is not obliged to provide refuge to those seeking asylum on its territory. These legal instruments guarantee only the right to seek refuge, leaving it up to the individual state whether or not such refuge is granted (Duke 1996b: 462).

In the absence of a permanent reception and settlement structure, the needs of asylum seekers and refugees in Britain have been met by statutory services in the same way as they serve the general population, by voluntary refugee agencies and by community organisations that have developed around different refugee populations (Duke 1996a: 7). However, the *1996 Asylum and Immigration Act* has marked a clear shift in the distribution of responsibilities, placing more responsibility on local authorities and, indirectly, in the hands of voluntary organisations. Whilst local authorities have neither the expertise nor the means to deal efficiently with asylum seekers, voluntary refugee organisations have become overwhelmed by the increasing demand for their services. In such circumstances, the role of community associations[1] and refugee agencies during the settlement process has become of paramount importance, as they have now become the main bodies responsible for the well-being of refugees. Hence, an understanding

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[1] Throughout this thesis, refugee community 'organisations' are also referred to as refugee community 'associations'.

of the experiences of refugees and their perceptions of the
community associations and refugee agencies they contact during
settlement is vital to the overall success of these organisations
and, consequently, of the settlement process.

1.1   *The Need for the Research*

Successful settlement is not only beneficial to refugees themselves
but also to British society as a whole. It enables refugees to
become active members of the British community and make a positive
contribution to it. However, refugees in general and non-quota
refugees in particular face many difficulties in the UK: lack of
English language skills, unemployment, isolation, physical and
mental health problems, concern about the safety of relatives and
friends left behind. During the asylum seeking stage non-quota
refugees face certain restrictions on access to employment and
training. They must wait for six months before they can take up
employment and have to apply to the Home Office for permission to
work. Ineligible for financial assistance from statutory sources for
higher education, their access to training programmes and language
courses is also restricted. This has been compounded by the *1996
Asylum and Immigration Act* which, as mentioned above, removed asylum
seekers' rights to welfare benefits.

Exiled women are likely to face problems (see, for example, Sales
and Gregory 1996). Discrimination and, in some cases, cultural
restrictions on women's activities outside the home constitute
profound barriers for refugee women seeking to gain employment or

educational qualifications. These are often compounded by the absence of adequate child-care facilities.

Both refugee community associations and refugee agencies support and help exiles cope with the difficulties encountered during settlement. These organisations are likely to be the main link to British society for most exiles and perform important functions, including opportunities for socialisation, practical help, emotional support, cultural activities, legal advice and medical care. However, such organisations do not have adequate resources to tackle effectively the long-term needs of refugees. Many of their limitations are resource related and have been compounded by the *1996 Asylum and Immigration Act,* which has led to an increase in homelessness, destitution and poverty among the refugee population in the UK (see, for example, Duke 1996a; Refugee Council 1997d).

Sales et al (1996) argue that, in line with the general restructuring of welfare provision, the official strategy in relation to refugee support has been to place more and more of this work in the hands of voluntary organisations and to extend the use of unpaid labour (1996: 26-27). Through the *1996 Asylum and Immigration Act,* refugee community associations and refugee agencies have been forced to take on responsibility for the survival of asylum seekers, and are therefore operating under enormous pressure. Although these organisations have always had to make do with very limited resources, the current situation calls for an even more efficient management of those resources. However, without knowledge of how refugees become aware of these organisations and the extent

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to which their needs are being met by the support and services provided, refugee agencies and community associations cannot possibly know whether they are using their scarce resources in the most efficient way and, consequently, are unable to assess and/or improve their efficiency.

A great deal of research has been conducted on the resettlement of quota refugees, especially the Vietnamese (e.g., Jones 1982; Refugee Action 1983, 1987a and 1988; Mougne 1986; Gold 1992; Duke and Marshall 1995; Joly 1996), and non-quota refugees (e.g., Murphy 1995b; Hensman 1993; Carey-Wood et al 1995; Duke 1996a and 1996b; Refugee Council 1997d). However, little attention has been paid to the interaction between refugees and support organisations and the role of the latter in the adaptation process of exiles to life in their new country. Because of the significance of these organisations — especially to new arrivals — and the key role they play in the settlement of refugees in the UK, it is of paramount importance to gain knowledge of the links between these organisations and exiles. In particular, it is necessary to explore how refugees become aware of community associations and agencies, how such organisations help them cope with and overcome the problems encountered during the settlement process and, finally, the extent to which these organisations meet the needs of refugees. It is this gap in knowledge that the present research seeks to fill.

The study focuses on Colombian and Somali refugees. It was thought important to choose two groups who had been in the UK for approximately the same period of time, so that they were at a

similar stage of settlement. Both groups started coming to the UK in the 1980s and are therefore refugees of recent origin. Fleeing from two different types of conflicts, each of these refugee groups has had experiences which are likely to affect their relationship with refugee organisations and, ultimately, their settlement in Britain.

1.2 Research Objectives

The overall aim of the research is to analyse the role of refugee organisations in the settlement of exiles in the UK. This, however, cannot be successfully accomplished without a prior study of the factors affecting settlement. Recent scholarship has shown that language (e.g., Field 1985; Carey-Wood et al 1995; Calvar 1996), transferability of employment skills (e.g., Field 1985; Duke 1996b; Sales and Gregory 1998), circumstances of flight (e.g., Eastmond 1993; Joly 1996; Bustos Cortes 1997), skin colour (e.g., Field 1985; Modood 1994), cultural differences between the country of origin and the UK (e.g., Field 1985; Melzak 1992; Calvar 1995) and the speed and size of the refugee flow (Field 1985) are critical characteristics affecting the settlement of refugees in Britain. Health-care facilities (e.g., Refugee Council 1994a and 1997d; Carey-Wood et al 1995) and adequate housing (e.g., Refugee Council 1997e; Duke et al 1999) are also of paramount importance for successful settlement. Whilst some of these issues are intrinsic to the particular groups, they all are compounded by the social, legal and economic structures in the UK. For example, the British legal system does not grant aliens the same rights as those enjoyed by UK citizens and, as mentioned earlier, recent legislation has deprived in-country asylum applicants and appellants against a negative

decision of welfare benefits to which they were entitled before. The way in which the job market operates in the UK may be unfamiliar to refugees and their special characteristics may not be taken into consideration by British employers. The lack of adequate reception and settlement policy makes the settlement process even harder, as no specialist services are made available for refugees.

Building on existing work on the major difficulties encountered by refugees during settlement, the study looks at how refugee organisations help exiles cope with and overcome those problems, and how exiles perceive the services provided by such organisations. Hence, the objectives of the research are to:

1. Explore issues that affect refugee settlement. These issues form the context in which refugees' relationship with their organisations evolves;

2. Investigate how exiles become aware of refugee community associations and refugee agencies. This involves looking both at the efforts made by organisations to promote awareness of their services and at the information networks established by refugees themselves;

3. Analyse refugees' experiences and perceptions of the services and support provided by such organisations, and the extent to which such services meet their needs. This is a two-fold objective, for 'satisfaction' must also be analysed from the service provider's side; that is, the quality control or feed-back systems

implemented by refugee community organisations and refugee agencies must also be studied in order to fully understand refugees' satisfaction with the services provided.

It is hoped that the findings can be used to improve the efficiency of the various support groups and agencies working with exiles and as the basis for further work in the field of refugees and asylum seekers. The research findings will be disseminated among refugee organisations through papers and presentations.

1.3   Structure of the Thesis

Chapter Two discusses in detail the methodological approach to the study, the research strategy used and how this was implemented at each of the various stages of the research.

Chapter Three focuses on refugee movements. Starting with an overview of international migration and its causes it then focuses specifically on refugee flows, their trends, causes and reasons underlying the distribution of refugees and asylum seekers among receiving countries. After this analysis of migratory processes and refugee movements, the definition of refugee is examined by looking at the various international legal instruments dealing with this concept. The *1951 UN Convention* and *1967 UN Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees* are studied in detail along with other regional initiatives and these provide the basis for a definition of refugee to be used in the current research. The chapter ends with a critical analysis of the differences between refugees and economic migrants,

a dichotomy that has generated a great deal of controversy in recent years. ·

In *Chapter Four* the particular cases of Colombia and Somalia as refugee producing countries are analysed. A historical overview of the events leading to the current conflict situation in each of the two countries provides the basis for an understanding of some of the issues covered in subsequent chapters. Based on Home Office statistics, the trends of new arrivals from each country in the UK over recent years are studied, as are the admission rates for each group. The chapter also includes a brief description of the Colombian and the Somali refugee populations in the UK.

Chapter Five reviews the immigration and asylum policies in the UK. It starts with an overview of immigration and asylum policies in general, concentrating primarily on Europe and then moving on to the particular case of the UK. British immigration and asylum policies are critically reviewed within a historical context, paying special attention to two main pieces of legislation passed in the 1990s: the *1993 Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act* and the *1996 Asylum and Immigration Act*. These two legal instruments have dramatically tightened controls on immigration in general and on asylum in particular, and have generated much controversy among non-government organisations working with refugees. The chapter ends with a discussion on whether would-be asylum seekers are usually aware of the situation of refugees in Britain or not. Whilst recent data seem to indicate that asylum seekers are aware of current legislation, the asylum seeking procedure and the availability of welfare

benefits in Britain (e.g., Home Office 1997 and 1998; Refugee Council 1998d), the findings of the present research suggest otherwise.

In *Chapter Six* reception and settlement policies in Britain are analysed in depth. The first section contains the definition of 'settlement' to be used in the current research, which is based on the theories postulated over the past two decades by Field (1985), Gold (1992), Soysal (1994) and Brah (1996). This is followed by an overview of reception and settlement policies in the UK, paying special attention to the importance of adequate health-care facilities and housing for successful settlement. New policy proposals put forward by recent scholarship are also reviewed. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the need to enhance and strengthen co-operation between local authorities and refugee organisations.

The factors affecting refugee settlement are analysed in *Chapter Seven*. Based on Field's (1985) identification of characteristics likely to affect the settlement process of any refugee group, I argue that such characteristics can be grouped into two broad categories: those intrinsic to refugees themselves and those related to the situation in the receiving country and its policies, particularly reception and settlement policies. Each factor is analysed: language, transferability of previous skills and employment experience, the circumstances behind the flight of refugees, their skin colour, the cultural differences between the

society of origin and that of reception, and the speed of the refugee flow and the number of refugees to be resettled.

In *Chapter Eight*, both refugee community organisations and refugee agencies are examined in detail. In order to place refugee community organisations within a sociological context, the first section contains an analysis of refugee communities, the factors determining their formation, and their implications for refugees. The chapter then focuses on refugee community organisations themselves, their functions and limitations as perceived in the existing literature. Refugee agencies provide the theme for the next section. Based on the interviews with staff respondents, the chapter concludes with a discussion on the main operational differences between refugee community associations and refugee agencies.

Based on the interviews with exiles and personnel from refugee organisations, *Chapter Nine* looks into the experiences of Colombian and Somali exiles with such organisations. It starts with an analysis of exiles' awareness of refugee organisations prior to and after their arrival in the UK, followed by an assessment of the efforts made by refugee organisations themselves to promote and increase awareness among the refugee population. The next section discusses exiles' actual use of refugee organisations and their reasons for contacting or not contacting such organisations. Refugees' satisfaction with the organisations contacted is then studied, looking at the specific reasons for satisfaction and dissatisfaction within each group. Given the difference in satisfaction levels between Colombian and Somali refugees, the

section concludes with an analysis of these differences, showing that refugees' own background influences their attitudes towards refugee organisations and consequently their level of satisfaction. The last section looks at the organisations' own assessment of performance and service delivery, both from within the organisations in terms of their own feed-back systems and from the experiences of exiles themselves.

Chapter Ten analyses the role of refugee organisations in the settlement process, taking into consideration the views of both the organisations contacted and the exiles interviewed. Special attention is paid to the relationship of exiles with their own communities and organisations. Whilst the findings furthest suggest that refugees' background and circumstances of flight shape their perceptions of refugee organisations, they also show that the task of such organisations has been made very difficult by recent legislation.

The key findings from the research and its limitations are discussed in the *Conclusions*, as is the changing nature of refugee flows. The direction of British policy on reception and settlement of refugees is also analysed, paying particular attention to the new legislation and its potential implications. The chapter concludes with a set of recommendations to improve the efficiency of refugee organisations and facilitate settlement, along with some suggestions for further research.

The *Appendixes* contain a profile of each of the two refugee groups included in the study, along with the relevant material used in the fieldwork.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

2.1 Methodology

A number of research methods were employed in the implementation of the study: direct observation, semi-structured interviews and group discussions. Influenced by feminist research methodology, these methods were combined within a context of identification with those studied, allying with them and working to improve their situation.

Much has been said on the need to provide details of the methodological approach used in qualitative studies to enable the reader to assess the generalisability of the research results (e.g., Johnson 1990; Kleinman and Copp 1993; Ward Schofield 1993). In this chapter I discuss the theoretical background to the research strategy used for the study and the practical issues concerning the choice and implementation of such a strategy.

2.1.1 A Non-Ethnographic Study

Watching what people do adds a new dimension to our understanding of what they say. This is the basic principle underpinning ethnography. Although strictly speaking this is not an ethnographic study, it contains an ethnographic element insofar as it involved direct observation of refugees. Using Gold's (1958, quoted in Burgess 1993: 80) terminology, the role taken on for the research was that of 'observer-as-participant' as opposed to 'complete participant'. Whilst in the latter the observer dimension of the role is concealed with the result that covert observation is involved (see, for example, Fetterman 1989; Burgess 1993), in the former the observer

role is made public. Contact with the subjects of research is brief and reduced to specific locations and situations.

Complete participation was rejected as an option. Although I could have taken on the role of agency or community worker, or even that of volunteer, passing as a member of the refugee groups studied would have been unfeasible because of my own personal characteristics (e.g., accent and 'race'). Furthermore, from previous experience (Calvar 1995) I am aware that passing as a member of the community studied over a protracted period of time places great strain on the researcher and, had I been uncovered, the consequences would have been damaging for those researched, for me personally, and for the completion of the study. More fundamentally, the strategy of complete participation would have proved extremely limiting. Hammersley and Atkinson (1992) and Lee (1995) note that, whilst insider status often eases the entry into the research setting, the complete participant must, by definition, be involved in existing social practices in a far more rigid manner than the known researcher. Consequently, the research activity has to be carried out around such pre-existing social routines and realities. Some potentially fruitful avenues may be rendered practically impossible, insofar as the complete participant has to act in accordance with existing role expectations.

In research on sensitive topics in general and refugees in particular, participants are very unlikely to share their innermost feelings with somebody whose credentials have not been presented to them. The fact that I was introduced as a researcher by somebody

they trusted put me in a positive position in relation to the refugees, this serving as the foundation on which trust and rapport could be built.

Whilst Burgess (1993) notes that the role of observer-as-participant usually results in bias arising out of the researcher's brief contacts, this was minimised in the present study, for observation was a complement to the semi-structured interviews and the group discussions with exiles. Although direct observation was not pre-planned but casual, it was never done *'vicariously but analytically'* (Gubrium 1988: 74). Participants and other refugees were usually observed in the organisations where the interviews took place. Whilst this tended to be brief, other opportunities for observation of and interaction with refugees arose during social events organised by one of the organisations — a community association — and my activities as a volunteer with a refugee agency over Christmas in 1996.

2.1.2 Asylum Seeking as a Sensitive Topic of Research

Lee and Renzetti (1993) define sensitive topics as those which present potential costs to both research participants and researchers, costs of a psychological or emotional nature (such as guilt, shame or embarrassment) being particularly important. They note, however, that sensitivity is a contextual and cultural construction (1993: 4-6). Regarding context, topics that are not sensitive in a given situation may become so in another. In his study of routine police work in Northern Ireland, Brewer contends that *'what is sensitive changes relative to the circumstances of the*

research and the biographical experiences of the people involved'
(1993: 143). Likewise, depending on a group's culture, a topic seen
as threatening by one group may be thought innocuous by another. Lee
and Renzetti (1993) argue, however, that there are a number of areas
in which research is more likely to be threatening than in others.
One such area is where research intrudes into the private sphere or
delves into some deep personal experience (Lee and Renzetti 1993:
6). However, intrusions into the private sphere need not always be
threatening. Day (1985, quoted in Lee and Renzetti 1993: 6)
concludes that there is no fixed private sphere, for topics and
activities regarded as private also vary cross-culturally and
situationally.

Asylum seeking is a sensitive topic because of the potential threats
it poses to both the refugees who agree to disclose their
experiences and the researcher. Speaking about their experiences of
flight and exile is emotionally traumatic for refugees who, to a
greater or lesser extent, must re-live those experiences and uncover
unpleasant memories. Whilst those who have come to terms with their
ordeal and have moved forward in their lives are asked to re-open
old wounds, those still suffering severe emotional trauma may
experience heightened anxiety and misery by speaking in detail about
their situation. Likewise, listening to those accounts can put a
great deal of strain on the researcher who, unable to help and often
without access to counselling, has to deal with his or her feelings
alone.

Furthermore, the present research is sensitive both on contextual and cultural grounds. Contextually, asylum seeking has generated a great deal of controversy in the UK over recent years (see following chapters). Culturally, the ordeal of flight and exile affects all spheres of the refugee's life, and discussing such experiences is often emotionally draining for both refugees and researchers. Issues of legality and insecurity of the asylum seeker's status often compound the sensitive nature of the subject as a research topic.

2.1.3 Criticisms of the Traditional Approach

Kleinman and Copp (1993) note that social researchers share a culture dominated by the ideology of science and professionalism, according to which they are not supposed to have emotions. Since emotions *'contaminate research by impeding objectivity'*, they must be removed (Kleinman and Copp 1993: 2). This is the approach that most traditional textbooks support, including Oppenheim's (1993, but originally published in 1966). Commenting for example on the use of in-depth interviews, Oppenheim (1993) argues that these are not 'conversations' but a one-way communication process. If the interview became a two-way process of communication, *'it would lose much of its value because of the biases introduced by the interviewer'* (Oppenheim 1993: 66). He goes on to say that, in order to do their job properly, interviewers must *'"switch off" their own personality and attitudes [...] and try to be unaffected by circumstances, by their attitude to the topic or the respondent, or by personal involvement'* (1993: 66).

Research participants are therefore treated as mere 'research objects' or sources of information in traditional research. Oppenheim very confidently advises that respondents should be given only a 'vague idea' of the topic of the research (1993: 68), arguing that it is *spontaneous reactions that are wanted, not carefully thought out positions* (1993: 69). And this is not because he is referring to non-sensitive issues — he gives the example of interviews with widows about their husbands' death and funeral or cremation! According to him, *'respondents should come away with a vague feeling of pleasure at having been of help and having had an interesting conversation with an attentive professional, though preferably without a clear idea as to the exact purpose of the interview'* (Oppenheim 1993: 69). Such a statement raises a number of issues. First, it is difficult to imagine how respondents could get any 'pleasure' out of a monologue during which they give away their innermost secrets without getting anything in return. Second, it contradicts his own prescription that the interview should be a one-way communication process, not a 'conversation'. Third, such a 'distant' approach would make it difficult, if not impossible, to establish rapport with respondents and would therefore be likely to yield poor-quality data. Last but not least, it clearly breaches the guidelines on ethics in relation to informed consent widely accepted by the research community (e.g., BSA 1993).

Contrary to this view, the feminist approach advocates the use of self-disclosure and reciprocity on the part of the researcher, not only to overcome participants' inhibitions but also to place the interaction between researcher and participants on a 'more equal

footing' (Renzetti and Lee 1993: 178). Indeed, one of the most important contributions made by feminist researchers to thinking about the interview situation is the recognition that the balance of power within interviews can be shifted by giving respondents opportunities to ask questions which the researcher answers rather than parries (Phoenix 1994: 62).

Feminist researchers have therefore transformed the traditional interview method by advocating conscious partiality, a non-hierarchical relationship and an interactive research process. Through a process of self-disclosure and identification with participants, feminist research methodology aims at reducing the exploitative power balance between researcher and subject (Graham 1984, quoted in Edwards 1993: 186) and at showing solidarity between women (Oakley 1981, quoted in Edwards 1993: 186). Such an equal relationship between researcher and participant is expected to result in a deeper, more fluid communication process. The large amount of feminist research conducted so far (e.g., Edwards 1993; Finch 1993; Kennedy Bergen 1993; Glucksmann 1994; Wheeler 1994; McCarthy 1997) shows that these practices are useful for studying sensitive topics.

Although not explicitly stated as such, the principles of feminist research can also be found in non-feminist work. For example, Burgess (1993) explains how in the course of his research in an urban comprehensive school, teachers and pupils often asked him for information during the interviews. He was asked about his biography, his previous teaching experience and his views about school and

schooling. He wisely notes that, whilst having avoided such questions would have provided the 'sanitised' interview required by the traditional approach, it would have ruined his relationships with teachers and pupils (Burgess 1993: 105).

The principles of feminist methodology were applied in the present study in the sense that a process of self-disclosure and identification with participants took place. Although I am a man and half of the respondents were women, my aim was to achieve a non-hierarchical and interactive relationship in all interviews. Many refugees asked personal questions relating to my own background, such as age, nationality, religion, marital status and so on. My answers, I noticed, put them on a 'more equal footing' and, consequently, made them feel more at ease.

In a few instances, however, a non-hierarchical relationship proved difficult to achieve. These participants saw me as a 'successful' individual, a status which, given their situation as refugees, they felt they lacked and valued above all. Although I was, like them, non-British and in a sense also an exile, I was occasionally seen as having the privilege of being a European with language skills and a good education. Whilst they were curious about my background, family life and professional activity, talking about these issues with them accentuated the differences between them and me, thus reminding them of what they lacked. This made me feel very uneasy.

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2.1.4 Research on Sensitive Topics: Some Considerations

2.1.4.1 Emotional Content of Interviews

When doing research on sensitive topics, the interview can be distressing to both the respondent and the interviewer, not only during the actual interview but also afterwards. For example, in her research among survivors of marital rape, Kennedy Bergen reports that several respondents had negative reactions after the interview, such as flashbacks and nightmares (1993: 209). To overcome this disturbance of equilibrium, Edwards (1993) suggests that the researcher should share his or her own experiences with the participant, where such experiences may have some relevance. If respondents feel uncomfortable because the balance tips too far towards revelation, the researcher's own self-disclosure may help legitimise theirs, thus lessening any disturbing effects of a respondent's own disclosures on a sensitive research topic (Edwards 1993: 193-194).

Brannen (1988, quoted in Edwards 1993: 193) feels that in one-to-one situations it is easy for the researcher to be drawn into the interviewee's problems, which may lead to emotional exhaustion on the part of the interviewer. She adds that, faced with distress, researchers investigating sensitive topics may want to help but should strongly question their motives for doing so. Such feelings on the part of the interviewer, she suggests, *'often have more to do with helping the helper than those who are in need'* (Brannen 1988: 559, quoted in Lee 1993: 106). However, Lee argues that all the researcher may be able to do in such a situation is to undertake the difficult task of enduring and sharing the pain with the respondent

(1993: 106). As for respondents, the emotional effect of the interview on the researcher can last long after the actual interview. Kleinman and Copp acknowledge that the emotional involvement of research often spills into the rest of the researcher's life and, even when researchers may not live with those they study, *'sometimes it feels as if they are living inside [the researchers'] heads'* (1993: 8).

The interviews conducted with exiles for the present study put a substantial amount of emotional strain on both the respondents and myself. Whilst, on the whole, most respondents were happy to have spoken to me and were hopeful that their participation would be valuable, a few came out of the interview clearly feeling depressed. Although I was concerned about their emotional reaction after the interview, I could not follow up their development. At the end of particularly difficult interviews, I used to stay on for a while and share with the respondents my own personal experiences which I thought relevant to the issues that upset them. This made them feel better (at least temporarily), perhaps because knowing that similar problems also affected (or had affected) other people made them feel less miserable.

I personally felt emotionally drained at the end of several interviews with refugees. During the course of the research I had to hear stories that I found definitely repulsive; for example, when a participant told me about the use of dogs specially trained to rape (although, fortunately, this was not an account of a personal experience) or when another respondent explained how her little boy

had been killed in retaliation for her husband's political activities. On another occasion, a Colombian woman reminded me so much of a female relative of mine that for a few days I could not help thinking of this relative and, eventually, I had to call her to reassure myself that she was alright.

2.1.4.2 The Interview as an Opportunity to Talk

Lee notes that depth interviews on sensitive topics can often be a cathartic experience for respondents (1993: 107). Drawing upon two studies she conducted among women (a study among clergymen's wives and their relationship to their husband's work, involving 95 women, and another study of 48 women who were running and using pre-school playgrounds), Finch (1993) notes that it was common among the women she interviewed that they found depth-interviews a welcome experience, given the lack of opportunities to talk about themselves in that way in other circumstances.

Research often also offers respondents an opportunity to voice their concerns. For example, Brewer (1993) notes how RUC officers usually talked about stress and other daily problems with the (female) fieldworker. Many saw their conversations with her as a means of informing the authorities of their grievances (Brewer 1993: 139). It is not uncommon that research whose stated aim is to improve service provision may lead to a rise in expectations on the part of service users (e.g., Wheeler 1994).

The interview experience may also be beneficial to the researcher. Commenting on her research experience with working women, Glucksmann

(1994) notes that what she learned from her respondents often led her to change her own ideas and pursue new questions or some areas in greater depth. She acknowledges that what she eventually wrote up was much better thanks to her respondents' suggestions about the project and their personal testimony (1994: 13).

Given the conversational nature of a semi-structured interview, sensitivity to the participant's tone is critical when investigating sensitive topics. The respondent's shifts in tone are important cues to attitudes and feelings. The respondent may want to discuss the topic further as part of a cathartic experience or may feel pressurised into divulging innermost feelings. Whilst these situations are never easy, Fetterman (1989) warns against exploiting vulnerable individuals to secure invaluable information. On the other hand, he also notes that over-sensitivity may place unnecessary bars in the way of data collection (1989: 50).

Sensitivity to timing is also crucial in semi-structured interviews. Maintaining control of the direction of the interview is useful to ensure that the interview produces the target information in the short time allocated (Fetterman 1989: 57). However, it is often difficult to gain as much information as possible in the short time available. For example, commenting on her research on working women, Glucksmann found that there was not much more than half to three-quarters of an hour of 'prime' time, even though she considered an hour to be the maximum optimal time (1994: 162).

Many refugees interviewed in the present study seemed to lack the support they needed to come to terms with their situation in exile; hence, they welcomed the opportunity to try to make sense of their new lives in the presence of a sympathetic listener. Many felt lonely and appreciated the opportunity I gave them to talk. Occasionally, the interview turned into a cathartic conversation. This made it difficult for me to leave after the interview and induced guilt feelings about 'using' them.

I was occasionally perceived as an 'expert' — somebody who could advise them on, or better still, practically help them with their problems. This occurred particularly with the Colombian respondents, presumably because of my language affinity with them. Queries on asylum and immigration legislation, welfare benefits and housing, to name a few, were put to me in the hope that I would be able to solve their problems. Although I did have more information than they did, it was often difficult to convince them that I was not an expert. My help was limited to referring them to others who could offer professional advice, giving them addresses and/or telephone numbers.

Obtaining as much information as possible in the one hour allocated for each interview with the refugees was not easy. Although this was usually enough, I sometimes found it difficult to get back on track (without being rude) when participants started talking about things that were more significant to them than the content of the interview questions. This was particularly tricky when the subject they were talking about was personal and with a high emotional content, such as imprisonment, torture or bereavement.

2.1.4.3 Group Discussions

Group discussions (or focus groups) are occasionally used to investigate sensitive topics (e.g., Bowser and Sieber 1993; Renzetti and Lee 1993). Their main advantage is that they require active group participation, providing a forum in which participants develop and express their own ideas as well as challenging those of the researcher. Commenting on their research on AIDS prevention, Bowser and Sieber (1993) explain how their group discussions provided participants with an opportunity to make a contribution to the wider community. They describe their sessions as 'consultant focus groups' and argue that, when research participants are accepted as peers for their experience and knowledge, and given a genuine opportunity to make a positive contribution, they identify with the project and become highly motivated (Bowser and Sieber 1993: 168-169). Similarly, being accepted as consultants by a person who represents higher education and a valuable activity enhanced the self-esteem of the refugees who took part in the group discussions in the present research.

2.1.4.4 Incentives

Fetterman (1989) acknowledges the fact that researchers use a great deal of people's time and that they owe something in return. He argues however that payment is not highly recommended, for it may reinforce feelings of dependency and may also shape a person's responses or recommendations. Instead, he contends that researchers often *provide a service simply by lending a sympathetic ear to a troubled individual'* (Fetterman 1989: 134-135).

The issue of incentives is rarely discussed in research on sensitive topics (e.g., Lee 1993; Renzetti and Lee 1993). The literature on refugees is divided on this matter; whilst some openly state that no incentives were given to respondents (e.g., Carey-Wood et al 1995), others admit having resorted to such stimuli to attract participants (e.g., Refugee Council 1997d). In the present study, refugees who agreed to be interviewed or take part in the group discussions were given a £10 incentive each.

It is highly unlikely that these incentives had any effect on the research results. Although it might be argued that, attracted by the money, only the most needy volunteered to participate, this is unlikely because poverty is pervasive within the refugee population. Furthermore, it was important to show appreciation for their time and make them feel they had not been 'used' or exploited. This, rather than covering any expenses the respondents might have incurred, was the purpose of the incentives given.

2.1.5 The Researcher's Personal Characteristics

The effects of the researcher's personal characteristics, such as age, sex and race, on those researched and the data collected have been the subject of much discussion (e.g., Hammersley and Atkinson 1992; Burgess 1993; Kleinman and Copp 1993; Lee 1993; Renzetti and Lee 1993). My own 'foreignness' and the experience of having travelled and lived away from my home country put me in a privileged position to empathise with the respondents and understand many of the problems they reported. Other personal characteristics had,

however, a less positive effect on the fieldwork, particularly on my interaction with the Somalis. This was probably due to the cultural gap between them and me; a cultural gap which was much narrower in the case of the Colombians.

In general, being a man played against me in terms of gaining access to refugee organisations, and a female researcher might have been perceived by some gatekeepers as less threatening (e.g., Hammersley and Atkinson 1992). However, this was compensated to some extent by my previous experience as a volunteer with two refugee organisations, which gave me a high degree of credibility.

Because of the sharp segregation of the sexes in Somali culture, a few Somali women were reluctant to share their experiences with me — a male researcher. Although the effects of this on the research cannot be assessed (unless the study is carried out again using female interviewers), it is likely that the information disclosed by those women would have been richer had the interviews been conducted by a female researcher. This was however compensated to a certain extent by my religion. Although I was a man, the fact that I was seen as a 'Christian' (I actually come from a Catholic background) added to my 'foreigness' and enhanced my position of neutrality. Had I been a Muslim, I would have been restricted by Koranic moral rules and would not have been able to talk to the Somali women the way I did.

My age (mid-30s) was also an issue with some Somali respondents. In a culture where age is synonymous with wisdom and deserves respect,

some of the older respondents may have found it somewhat unusual, if not disrespectful, to be interviewed by a much younger individual. Yet, once again, my position as a foreigner appeared to allow me this 'indiscretion'.

2.1.6 Rapport

A central element of interviewing is being a good listener and trying to understand the perspectives of the participants. The quality of the data collected through an interview greatly depends on the researcher's rapport with the respondent (Judd et al 1991; Burgess 1993). According to Fetterman (1989), a crucial factor in the researcher's ability to establish rapport with participants is his or her sensitivity to and respect for the culture of the group under study. Such sensitivity and respect manifest themselves in the researcher's apparel, language and behaviour. Very graphically, he contends that *'wearing expensive designer clothes to conduct an informal interview with a disenfranchised and impoverished high-school student is as insensitive and inappropriate as wearing cut-off jeans and a T-shirt to conduct an interview with a chief executive officer'* (Fetterman 1989: 55).

Hammersley and Atkinson (1992) note that people in the field will seek to place the researcher within their experience, some individuals and groups having little or no knowledge of social research. They argue that, whether or not people have knowledge of social research, they are often more concerned with the kind of person the researcher is and how far he or she can be trusted than with the research itself (Hammersley and Atkinson 1992: 77-78).

Hence, the reciprocal relationship between rapport and trust. Whilst the traditional approach accepts that *'a depth interviewer has to engage in a little bit of acting from time to time'* (Oppenheim 1993: 74), Fetterman (1989) and Kleinman and Copp (1993) state that the researcher should never pretend or act, for trust can only be built upon honesty. Similarly, Hammersley and Atkinson note that it is hard to expect honesty and frankness on the part of participants and informants unless one is honest and frank about oneself (1992: 83).

Since the interviews with personnel from refugee organisations were conducted within a professional context, a business-like approach and smart appearance were required on my part. In contrast, every effort was made to establish an informal atmosphere during the interviews with refugees. Given their general fear of 'authorities' and 'officials', it was important that I was not perceived as such; hence, the need to wear more casual clothes.

To gain refugees' trust and become familiar to them, I used to take time both before and after each interview to hang around in the organisations they were affiliated with. I was also on the mailing list of one such organisation and attended some of the social events they organised. As a foreigner in Britain myself, it was generally easy to establish rapport with the refugees, who usually found it surprising and heart-warming that 'somebody out there' was genuinely interested in their problems.

Because of their past political activities back home, the Colombians were particularly suspicious of potential informers (see Chapters

Seven and Nine). However, my nationality and the fact that I also used to spend time talking and interacting with other refugee groups reassured them that I was not an informer. In order to break the ice at the beginning of the interviews with the Colombian respondents, I used to talk about their country. I had been to Colombia years before and gained some knowledge of its people and culture. My experience as a visitor had been very positive and the respondents were generally pleased to hear this.

2.1.7 Ethics

The research was conducted in accordance with the British Sociological Association's codes of ethical practice (BSA 1993). The key issues were informed consent, participants' anonymity and the potential implications of the research for the respondents and their communities.

2.1.7.1 Informed Consent

> *As far as possible sociological research should be based on the freely given informed consent of those studied. This implies a responsibility on the sociologist to explain as fully as possible, and in terms meaningful to participants, what the research is about, who is undertaking and financing it, why it is being undertaken, and how it is to be promoted.*

(BSA 1993)

> *Research participants [...] should be able to reject the use of data-gathering devices such as tape recorders [...].*

(BSA 1993)

The importance of informed consent is a recurrent theme in social research literature (e.g., Fetterman 1989; Judd et al 1991; Sieber 1993). However, informed consent is not always possible, for some populations have no idea what research means and cannot therefore relate to the researcher. For example, Brink, commenting on her anthropological work on African women's secret societies, notes that since research and researcher were not part of their worldview, those populations did not fully understand to what they were consenting (1993: 235).

Informed consent was given by all respondents in the current study. The background to the research and its objectives were explained to every respondent in detail prior to requesting their participation. Likewise, verbal permission was always requested if the interview was to be tape-recorded. This is explained in more detail later.

Obtaining consent from some Somali respondents proved, however, somewhat problematic. Unfamiliar with the concept of research, these respondents could not understand why I wanted to talk to them about their experiences. This problem was overcome by putting more emphasis than was usually necessary on the ultimate objectives of the study. These respondents seemed to be able to understand my interest in their views if they could see the potential benefits of the research.

2.1.7.2 Participants' Anonymity

> *The anonymity and privacy of those who participate in the research process should be respected. Personal information concerning research participants should be kept confidential.*
>
> (BSA 1993)

Refugees are usually concerned about the repercussions of their identity being disclosed. They are often unwilling to disclose personal information because they fear it might be passed on to the authorities in their home country or those on the other side of a war. Due to their vulnerable circumstances, refugees tend to be distrustful and suspicious of people not well known to them. Therefore, a high level of confidentiality was essential to obtain willing respondents.

In this thesis, the names of both personnel and exiles have been replaced with pseudonyms to disguise their identity and protect their anonymity. Furthermore, the names of the organisations approached for the research have been omitted. Although the refugees interviewed were asked to sign or just write down their initials on a form to acknowledge receipt of their incentives, this did not affect their anonymity in any way. Such forms were sent to the University's financial department, which provided funding for the fieldwork but was in no way connected to the research. This was explained to the respondents.

2.1.7.3 Potential Implications of the Research

> *It is incumbent upon [BSA] members to be aware of the possible consequences of their work. Whenever possible they should attempt to anticipate, and to guard against, consequences for research participants which can be predicted to be harmful.*
>
> (BSA 1993)

The ultimate objectives of the present study are (a) to improve the situation of refugees and asylum seekers in Britain, and (b) to advance the literature for other researchers. Although the interview experience was distressing for some respondents, the research, if published, would not have negative implications for the participants or their communities. If the action recommended in this thesis is taken, this is likely to have beneficial effects on the refugee population in the UK.

2.2 Methods

The research strategy chosen involved a combination of semi-structured interviews with both key personnel from refugee organisations and refugees themselves, and group discussions with refugees. This was complemented with direct observation of asylum seekers in the refugee organisations used for the research, all of which were based in the London area. The research was structured in the following stages, the last two being intertwined:

- Literature review and secondary data analysis
- Semi-structured interviews with key personnel from refugee organisations

- Semi-structured interviews with refugees

- Group discussions with refugees

- Data analysis

In this section I explain the reasons for the selection of the research tools and methods, and how these were implemented at each stage of the research.

2.2.1 Research Tools

2.2.1.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

The choice of the type of interview was shaped by the sensitivity of the subject matter and my desire to have the respondents (both personnel and refugees) express their experiences and views as openly and completely as possible, while still being able to collect comparable information.

Completely unstructured interviews would have made it difficult to focus the conversation on issues significant to the research and, hence, to collect all the necessary information in the time allocated for each interview. Furthermore, the nature and depth of the information collected from each respondent would have been different, thus making comparisons impossible. On the other hand, a fully structured interview would not have allowed respondents to freely express their views nor would have it allowed for an interactive process.

I felt therefore that semi-structured interviews would allow respondents to fully communicate their experiences whilst, at the

same time, making it possible to compare responses and put them in the context of common group views and themes. Furthermore, this type of interview would give time to both respondents and myself to develop trust and rapport.

2.2.1.2 Group Discussions

The focus groups provided an opportunity to explore in more depth and in a group situation the issues brought up by the refugees during the personal interviews. They also made it possible to gather views from a number of individuals at the same time and, consequently, increase the robustness of the data.

Although it could be argued that group discussions should have been conducted before the semi-structured interviews with refugees to conceptualise and refine the research procedure (e.g., Bowser and Sieber 1993), this was not felt necessary for two reasons. First, I had experience of working with refugees (Calvar 1995) and was therefore familiar with the main issues affecting their settlement. Second, the avenues for the research were initially explored and defined through the preliminary interviews with the key personnel from refugee organisations.

2.2.2 Literature Review

An extensive review of the existing literature was undertaken. This was an ongoing process that extended for the entire research period.

Although some work has been done on the settlement of refugees (e.g., Field 1985; Calvar 1995; Carey-Wood et al 1995) and the part

played by their community groups in the process of adaptation to the new environment (e.g., Gold 1992; Duke 1996a), nothing has yet been done specifically on the role of community organisations and refugee agencies in that process. It is worth noting the scarcity of literature on the situation of the Colombian exile community in Britain. Some work has been done on other South American exile groups (primarily among Chileans) in other countries; for example, Chilean refugees in the US (Eastmond 1993) and Chilean immigrants and refugees in Spain (Bustos Cortes 1997). However, very little research has been conducted on Colombian refugees in the UK (e.g., Refugee Council 1997f). In contrast, a number of studies have been carried out on the Somali refugee community in Britain (e.g., Fawzi El-Solh 1991; Summerfield 1993; Refugee Council 1994a; Griffiths 1997; Sales and Gregory 1998). However, most of the existing work was done prior to the implementation of the *1996 Asylum and Immigration Act*, which means that some of the findings reported in such work have to be treated with caution.

In addition to formal publications, less formal sources of printed information were also used, such as pamphlets and leaflets from refugee organisations.

2.2.3 Interviews with Key Personnel from Refugee Organisations

The first stage of the fieldwork consisted of a series of semi-structured interviews with key personnel from both refugee agencies and community associations. Due to their role within their respective organisations, these individuals were well placed to comment on the situation of asylum seekers and refugees in Britain,

the major problems encountered during settlement, the implications of recent changes in asylum and immigration legislation, and the work carried out by their organisations. A total of eight interviews were conducted between December 1996 and May 1997. The schedule used for these interviews is included in Appendix A.

Three refugee agencies and three refugee community organisations were approached and interviews conducted with key staff from each of them. These organisations were selected from the *Refugee Resources in the UK* directory published by the Refugee Council, which provides information on the types of services offered by each organisation and the refugee community or communities it deals with. The refugee agencies were selected on the basis of their importance and relevance within the refugee community (i.e., their status of central agency and/or the uniqueness of their services). The community associations were chosen on the basis of their involvement with the two refugee groups included in the study (Colombians and Somalis) and their location (i.e., based in London).

With only one exception, the first contact name within each organisation was taken from the directory and contact was made by telephone. The exception was a Somali community association, which my research supervisors had previously contacted for other work; they had established a working relationship with a (female) community worker and advised me to contact her. In the initial contact I introduced myself, explained the objectives of my research and stated my interest in speaking with that person. When requested, this was followed with a letter or fax. My experience as a volunteer

proved invaluable in making these contacts with refugee organisations.

In some cases the interview was conducted with the person with whom the first contact was made, whilst in some others referral to a second or even a third person was made by the first contact. In two instances interviews were conducted with more than one respondent from the same organisation — two interviews within one refugee agency and another two within one community organisation. This was due to the different but complementary roles of the individuals concerned. A comprehensive list of participants and the type of organisations they represent is included in Appendix E. All interviews took place at the respondents' offices and were tape-recorded with the respondents' permission.

2.2.4 Interviews with Refugees

2.2.4.1 Sampling Issues

The third and main stage of the research involved gathering information from exiles on their personal experiences during settlement in Britain. Two sampling options were considered: (a) to select respondents at random from the refugee population of either the entire country or London only, or (b) to obtain respondents from a number of different sources, recognising that the resulting sample would not be random and, although it might include diverse segments of the refugee population, it would also contain biases.

Choosing between these two approaches involved weighting the costs and benefits of each, with reference to time, effort, practicality

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and the goals of the study. In the end, the nationwide approach was rejected for a number of reasons. Since semi-structured interviews are time-consuming and require certain skills on the part of the interviewer, a team of trained interviewers would have been needed to cover the country. Furthermore, given the various languages likely to be involved in the study, interviewers would either have to be fluent in the relevant language(s) or have to be accompanied by interpreters. Given the limited resources available — both human and financial — as well as the time restrictions, conducting the study on a national basis would have not been feasible. Therefore, the scope of the study was reduced to the London area, where it is estimated that between 85 and 95 percent of the UK's refugee population resides[2].

With regard to a random selection of respondents, much has been said of the unfeasibility of random samples in research on sensitive topics (e.g., Renzetti and Lee 1993). Complete sampling frames are hardly ever available, thus making it impossible to draw a random sample or work out an estimate of sampling bias. Renzetti and Lee argue that the more sensitive or threatening the topic of investigation, the more difficult sampling is likely to be, because potential participants have greater need to hide their involvement (1993: 30). Furthermore, in large populations, small random samples

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[2] Based upon data from the Immigration and Nationality Directorate on applications for asylum received in 1983-1991, Carey-Wood et al estimate that about 85 percent of the UK's refugee population concentrates in London. This estimate excludes dependents and Vietnamese refugees (Carey-Wood et al 1995: 111). Yet, other sources quote a higher concentration of refugees in London, estimating that the city accommodates up to 95 percent of all UK's refugees (*Evening Standard*, 28 October 1997).

may not capture a sufficient number of cases that are of theoretical interest (Johnson 1990: 22).

Not only is research on refugees of a sensitive nature, as I have discussed earlier, but the target population is also a largely hidden one. The only attempt made so far at drawing a random national sample from the refugee population in the UK was by Carey-Wood et al (1995), although they acknowledge their inability to identify an adequate sampling frame. Whilst they considered the possibility of selecting a random sample from the files held by the Immigration and Nationality Department (IND), this possibility was later discarded for a number of practical reasons. Carey-Wood et al concluded that the only major route to finding prospective participants was through their community groups, and indeed this was the source of most of their sample. In order to reduce the potential bias of a single-sourced sample, a quarter of their final sample were also identified through different agencies and personal contacts (Carey-Wood et al 1995: 8).

Because of the limitations discussed above, the sampling approach adopted for the present study involved a combination of sources in a similar way to that of Carey-Wood's (1995). Although the majority of the participants were recruited through refugee organisations, personal contacts and snowballing were also used.

Based on the assumption that different refugee groups may have different experiences and perceptions of the services available, the study concentrates on two refugee communities: the Colombian and the

Somali. This approach serves two purposes: first, it reduces
potential biases and, second, provides an opportunity to explore
whether the circumstances behind refugees' flight condition their
use and perceptions of refugee organisations.

2.2.4.2 Recruitment of Respondents

For the recruitment of respondents a total of seven refugee
organisations were contacted — the six initially approached for the
interviews with key personnel plus one additional refugee agency. In
those organisations already used for the staff interviews, the
person interviewed months earlier was re-contacted. For the new
agency, a contact name was obtained from the *Refugee Resources in
the UK* directory. The initial contacts were made by telephone and,
where necessary, a follow-up letter or fax was then sent. In this
initial contact I explained my interest in speaking with refugees
using the organisation in question and, if requested, I provided a
copy of my interview schedule.

Neither of the two groups included in the study was saturated by
research yet (evidence of which is the scarcity of literature
discussed earlier), and this somewhat facilitated my access to them.
However, because of the environment of strict confidentiality in
which refugee organisations work and their general attitude towards
'outsiders', two refugee agencies refused to co-operate. These two
organisations were among the very few specialist agencies providing
counselling and psychotherapy to refugees. However, having
interviewed a counsellor from one of them in the previous stage of
the research, I found no evidence of fundamental differences between

these and the organisations that did co-operate. Furthermore, some of the exiles interviewed had used (either personally or for a relative) the services available in the other agency, so they could also provide information on the quality of such services.

In the end, therefore, I actively worked with five organisations that agreed to provide me with access to possible participants. The next step was for my sponsors to recruit participants, following the selection criteria set by me. The sponsor briefly described the study (or gave a letter of introduction prepared by me, when applicable — see Appendix D) to potential participants. Approaching refugees in this way was useful because they felt more comfortable speaking with me when they knew that my research had been approved by my sponsor. The importance of being socially sponsored by someone well known and trusted in the setting is a recurrent theme in the literature on access in ethnographic research (e.g., Fetterman 1989; Hammersley and Atkinson 1992; Burgess 1993; Kennedy Bergen 1993; Lee 1995).

Initially I intended to take age, sex, length of stay in the UK and immigration status as the key variables for the selection of respondents. However, given the size and the self-selecting nature of the sample, it would have been impossible to follow such sampling criteria. The combination of these four variables would have resulted in a number of subgroups larger than the actual sample size envisaged for each refugee group. In the end, only sex was used as a sampling variable, aiming at a 50/50 sex split within each of the two groups. The implications of reducing the selection criteria to

only sex are difficult to estimate unless the study is replicated, using such criteria, on a much larger sample.

Likewise, in order to follow the settlement process of some individuals over time, follow-up in-depth interviews with a number of respondents were envisaged. Yet, this idea was later abandoned because, due to the sensitive nature of what had been discussed in the interviews, respondents were generally unwilling to be re-contacted. Moreover, given the mobility of refugees, in many cases tracking down respondents would have been a difficult, if not impossible, task. The implication of this for the research is the lack of longitudinal data that those follow-up interviews would have yielded. These data would have provided an insight into how refugees' relationship with and usage of refugee organisations change with the passage of time.

2.2.4.3 The Final Sample

The research strategy envisaged conducting 15 semi-structured interviews with members of each refugee group. This was based on the assumption that beyond this number no new ideas would emerge, which seemed to be correct — after conducting 10 or 12 interviews with each group, it became obvious that hardly any new ideas were coming up. In the end, a total of 31 interviews were conducted with members of the two refugee communities: 15 with Somali refugees and 16 with Colombian exiles. Contact with the former was made through two Somali refugee community organisations. Whilst most of the latter were also recruited through two community associations, one was recruited through a refugee agency and three were the result of my

own personal contacts and snowballing. A profile of the sample from each group along with a comprehensive list of respondents and their backgrounds are included in Appendix F. The main differences between the two groups of respondents are discussed below.

Overall the Somali respondents were older than the Colombians. The Somali men were, on average, five years older than the Colombian men whilst the Somali women were a decade older than their Colombian counterparts.

The two groups of exiles also differed in terms of marital status. Whilst married and 'living together' respondents were the majority in the Colombian group, over half of the Somalis were either single or widowed. Family size was a further difference, the average number of children among the Colombians being nearly half that of the Somalis.

The combined effect of the differences in marital status and family size resulted in the Colombians being more likely than the Somalis to have their immediate families with them in the UK: whilst half of the Colombian refugees had both their spouses and all their children with them in Britain, this was the case for only two Somalis.

On average the Somalis had been in the UK longer than the Colombians. Overall, the former also enjoyed a more permanent immigration status. In both groups the majority of respondents were main applicants, who arrived in the UK before the *1996 Asylum and Immigration Act* and applied for asylum at their port of entry. This

meant that most of them were entitled to (and, in fact, were receiving) welfare benefits. The implications of recent legislation will be discussed in Chapter Five.

2.2.4.4 Semi-Structured Interviews with Exiles

All the interviews were conducted between October 1997 and March 1998. Although most of the interviews with the Colombian respondents were carried out in the offices of the organisations they were affiliated with, three — involving one man and two women — were conducted in a pub and the respondents' homes, respectively. Likewise, the interviews with the Somali respondents were conducted mainly in their community associations, although three men were interviewed elsewhere — two in a private house and one at the hostel where he was staying. By conducting the interviews in the organisations the respondents were affiliated with, they were given the sense of security and safety they needed to feel comfortable. Interviewing at the respondents' homes was avoided as much as possible, for I felt this could be perceived as an invasion of their privacy. Furthermore, many had experienced interrogation by their persecutors at their own home in the past.

The first few interviews with each group were tape-recorded. However, once I gained familiarity with the interview protocol and themes started coming up time and again, a tape recorder was no longer necessary for I became able to take notes throughout the interview. Permission was always requested from the respondents to tape-record the interviews, with only two women — one Colombian and one Somali — refusing permission. The Colombian woman did not grant

permission because of her fear of being reported to those on the enemy side, whilst the Somali woman did not do so because of her religious beliefs — she did not want her conversation with a man unrelated to her to be tape-recorded.

The interviews with the Colombian refugees took place in Spanish. This was not so much for the respondents' lack of English language skills as for the fact that we shared the same mother tongue. Whenever possible, the interviews with the Somali exiles were conducted in English; where the respondents' lack of English language skills made this impossible, the interviews were conducted through an interpreter — this occurred mainly with the women. The interpreters, also refugees themselves, were provided by the organisations through which the respondents were recruited and a fee was paid for this service. It was important that the interpreter was known to the respondent and of the same sex, so that privacy, confidentiality and trust could be established.

The schedule for these interviews was designed in such a way that the areas significant to the research were thoroughly covered — a copy of this schedule is included in Appendix B. The first three interviews — with two Somali women and one Colombian man — were used to test the interview schedule. Given the satisfactory results of these pilot interviews, they were included in the main sample.

Although every effort was made to conduct the interviews in a quiet environment, this was not always possible, particularly with the Somalis. Interpreters were often called upon during the interviews

to deal with other pressing matters, thus resulting in frequent interruptions. Likewise, a few Somali women brought their children with them, who every now and then demanded the undivided attention of their mothers.

2.2.5 Group Discussions with Refugees

With the information gathered through the depth interviews with key personnel and members of the two refugee communities, a schedule of questions was drawn up to provide the basis for group discussions with refugees from each of the two communities — a copy of this schedule is included in Appendix C. Three sessions were conducted: one mixed-sex group with Colombian exiles and two separate groups, one male and one female, with Somali refugees. This decision was taken because of the segregation of the sexes in Somali society (see Chapters Seven and Nine). The participants for the group discussions were recruited through a Colombian and a Somali community association, respectively, both organisations having already co-operated in the recruitment of respondents for the depth interviews. The group sessions were conducted in September 1998.

The discussion with Colombian refugees took place in Spanish for the reason given above. As for the Somali groups, whilst the discussion with the men was conducted in English, the women's group required the assistance of an interpreter. All three group discussions were tape-recorded with the participants' unanimous permission. However, out of respect for the respondents' privacy within a group situation, information on their personal backgrounds was not

collected. For this reason, in the quotations taken from the groups, respondents are referred to as 'man/woman in group discussion'.

Like the personal interviews, the group discussions were held in the offices of the organisations the participants were affiliated with. In every session care was taken over seating arrangements, so that all participants could see one another. Some of the Somali women taking part in the group discussion took their children with them; whilst this inevitably resulted in a noisy environment, it also created a comfortable atmosphere, thus facilitating interaction and discussion.

2.2.6 Data Analysis

Whilst data were analysed on an ongoing basis, a final, holistic analysis was conducted once data collection was fully completed.

Tape-recorded interviews were fully transcribed and, where notes had been taken, these were expanded. In both cases this was done by myself with the help of a wordprocessor. The result in both instances was a full, comprehensive written record of the interview content, which was then structured in themes and analysed. Given the semi-structured nature of the interviews, it was possible to compare themes both within and among groups of respondents. This was also done manually.

Verbatim quotations are extremely useful in adding credibility to a research report (Fetterman 1989: 22), and extensive use of such quotations is made throughout this thesis. These have been carefully

selected from the interview transcripts on the basis of how typical or characteristic they are of the issue, situation or event described.

Whilst validation of the results by research participants is often encouraged for qualitative research (e.g., Fetterman 1989; Hammersley and Atkinson 1992), this would not have been feasible in the present study. First, it would have been difficult (if not impossible) to re-contact participants and, second, most participants and members of the two refugee groups would have been unable to read this thesis due to their inability to speak English. However, the findings and conclusions will be discussed with relevant personnel from refugee organisations.

3.1   *International Migration: Overview*

Although international migration has been a constant feature in human history, it was only after the Second World War that international population movements began to be accorded high-level and systematic attention and governments started seeing international migration as a central political issue. After the Second World War and as the new political order settled, large-scale population movements took place around the world. In Europe, for instance, some 25 to 30 million people moved westwards. The partition of India in 1946-47 brought the resettlement of between 15 and 17 million people as Hindus moved into India and Muslims into Pakistan. Arabs fled from the Palestinian territories taken over by the newly-formed State of Israel. Masses of people fled from China to Taiwan after the victory of the Communist armies (Harris 1995: 8). The US withdrawal from Vietnam in the 1970s created a million refugees, many of them (known as the 'boat people') still in refugee camps in South-East Asia 20 years later. More recently, the collapse of the Soviet Empire brought new waves of migration, for some 50 million people (including 25 million Russians) suddenly found themselves in a foreign country (Buckley 1996: 7).

Armed conflict has not been the only cause of large-scale population movements. Post-Second World War international migration is characterised by a multiplicity of forms: political migration, labour migration, post-colonial migration and migration within common markets (Soysal 1994: 9). The economic growth of developed

countries has greatly contributed to these international migratory flows (Miles 1993; Harris 1995). According to the structural perspective, economically developed capitalist nations require a continual flow of labour to maintain economic growth. Because native-born workers may be scarce, expensive to educate or unwilling to accept low-paid, rigidly controlled or undesirable work — the so-called '3-D jobs': dirty, difficult and dangerous (Harris 1995: 165) — the necessary labour is acquired through migration, usually from less developed nations. The globalisation of business, finance, mass communication and the relative ease of international travel have also contributed to the increase in international migration (Spencer 1994b; Buckley 1996), Castles and Miller (1998) arguing that such population movements are symptomatic of modernisation and globalisation. Colonialism, industrialisation and integration into the world economy destroy traditional forms of production and social relations, and lead to the reshaping of nations and states[3]. Such fundamental societal changes lead to both economically motivated migration and politically motivated flight, and sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between the two, as the current situation of asylum seekers in Europe demonstrates (Castles and Miller 1998).

Migrations therefore are not isolated phenomena and should be seen as one facet of societal change and global development. The different forms of migration — political, labour, students or permanent settlers — all arise from these global and broader changes (Overbeek 1995; Castles and Miller 1998). Following Castles

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[3] For a discussion on the concepts of 'nation' and 'state' see Castles and Miller (1998: 39-45).

and Miller (1998), each specific migratory movement can be seen as the result of interacting macro- and micro-structures. The former refer to large-scale institutional factors, such as the political economy of the world market, inter-state relationships and the laws, structures and practices established by the states of sending and receiving countries to facilitate or to prevent migration and to control settlement. Micro-structures, on the other hand, refer to the networks, practices and beliefs of the migrants themselves; these include informal household patterns, friendship and community ties, and mutual help in economic and social matters. Macro- and micro-structures are linked at all levels with each other. Together they can be examined as facets of an overarching 'migratory process', a concept which sums up the complex set of interactions leading to international migration and influencing its course (Castles and Miller 1998: 22-28). Similarly, Overbeek (1995) contends that explanations of international migration, and particularly of the refugee movements of the 1990s, involve a variety of factors that can be classified into three main categories, namely structural or long-term, conjunctural or medium-term and short-term. According to this system of classification, rapid demographic growth and poverty are structural factors, the restructuring of the world political and economic order is a conjunctural factor, whilst armed conflicts and natural disasters can be regarded as short-term factors (Overbeek 1995: 16-17).

The upsurge in migratory movements in the post-Second World War period has increased in significance and intensity particularly during the past two decades. The rapid changes in global economic

and political relationships have had dramatic effects in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America. Economic crisis and social change in the South are generating new pressures for migration to the North. These developments have led to considerable shifts in existing migratory patterns as well as to new forms of migration. Main trends include the development of mass movements of refugees and asylum seekers generally moving from South to North but also, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union, from East to West (Castles and Miller 1998). Yet the bulk of most refugee flows still remains either within the conflict area or in its neighbouring countries, clear examples of this being the Horn of Africa, the former Yugoslavia and, more recently, the Great Lakes region in Africa. Since the early 1990s, unprecedented population movements have taken place in the territory of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). These movements, the biggest, quickest and most complex that have occurred in the region since the Second World War, have led to a total of nine million uprooted people (UNHCR 1996b: 18). Thus, the entry of the countries of Eastern Europe and the South into the international migration flows may be seen as an inevitable consequence of the increasing integration of these areas into the world economy and into global systems of international relations and cultural interchange.

The steady increase in international migration in general has become a matter of concern for Western countries who, over the past three decades, have taken a number of steps to reduce such population movements. European economies started to suspend the immigration process from the early 1970s, shortly before the onset of the

largest recession after the Second World War (Harris 1995: 107), and labour migration in Europe was formally ended in 1974 (Soysal 1994: 121). However, despite such attempts to stop migration flows, these, as mentioned earlier, have grown in volume and significance since the Second World War and most particularly since the mid-1980s. Overall, foreign populations have shown a demographic increase in spite of decreasing opportunities for work. Whilst the main source of immigration into Western Europe in the past twenty years has been family formation and reunion (Kofman and Sales 1997: 1), the international labour market for highly specialised, skilled non-manual labour has also contributed to this growth. A particular subgroup within the latter is the staff of multinational corporations who are transferred across international borders from one branch to another (Miles and Satzewich 1990: 343). In the 1990s, the increase in foreign populations has been further reinforced by an upsurge of refugees (Soysal 1994: 24). Yet, migration will continue to increase for as long as there exists a gap between the rich and the poor, class conflict and political instability in nation states (Miles 1993: 127), and it is likely to become one of the most important factors in global change (Castles and Miller 1998) and one of the big issues of the twenty-first century (Buckley 1996).

3.2   Refugee Movements

Against this background, refugee movements should be understood as a particular type of international population flow and should therefore be studied within the broader context of international migration. Yet, the specific characteristics of refugee movements

make the structural model inappropriate to explain such human flows, for these contradict the model in two ways: refugees' demographic characteristics and the legal rights to which they are entitled in the country of exile (Gold 1992: 13). Whilst ordinary migrant groups contain primarily able-bodied adults of working age, refugee groups are more likely to include people of all ages and in a variety of physical and psychological conditions. Furthermore, whilst ordinary migrants usually have to enter the labour market upon arrival, refugees can rely to a greater or lesser extent on state support and assistance from non-government organisations. These two factors make refugees, as a specific migrant category, generally more expensive than native-born labour and labour migrants, at least in the short term. Hence, the causes of refugee movements lie outside the structural model.

Excluding those caused directly by the Second World War — 21 million or so refugees scattered throughout Europe in the aftermath of the armed conflict (UNHCR 1994: 2) — large-scale refugee movements started in the mid-1970s with mass departures from Vietnam, Kampuchea and Laos. Soon afterwards, large numbers of refugees had to leave Lebanon and Afghanistan. In Africa, thousands fled from Zaire, Uganda, Namibia and South Africa. In Latin America, the suppression of democracy in countries like Chile and Argentina led to exoduses (Castles and Miller 1998). Recent data published by the UNHCR (1997a) show that in the year ending in November 1997 the total number of people who came under the UNHCR's concern was over

22 million[4], of whom over half were refugees under the *1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* or other regional conventions. In that period the number of uprooted people around the world, including those displaced within their own countries, approached 50 million; this represents one out of every 120 people on this planet (UNHCR 1997a: 30). The same statistics show that the ten largest refugee movements had their origin in the following countries:

Table 3.1: Origin of Major Refugee Populations
(Estimates as of November 1997)

Country of Origin	Refugees
Afghanistan	2,675,000
Bosnia & Herzegovina	700,000
Iraq	630,000
Liberia	480,000
Somalia	452,000
Sudan	407,000
Eritrea	328,000
Angola	300,000
Sierra Leone	280,000
Rwanda	255,000

Source: UNHCR (1997a)

According to the same source, the following were the ten main countries of asylum:

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[4] This figure includes refugees and others in a similar situation, as well as returnees and certain groups of people displaced within the borders of their own country.

Table 3.2: Main Countries of Asylum
(Estimates as of November 1997)

Country of Asylum	Refugees
Iran	2,014,000
Germany	1,266,000
Pakistan	1,200,000
United States	597,000
Federal Republic of Yugoslavia[a]	548,000
Democratic Republic of Congo (ex Zaire)	450,000
Sudan	405,000
Guinea	401,000
Ethiopia	354,000
Ivory Coast	210,000
(a) Estimates as of September 1997.	

Source: UNHCR (1997a)

These data suggest that the rapid rise in the numbers of refugees in recent years has not been confined to one or two specific regions of origin nor to one specific destination, which shows that this is a truly global process that cannot be accounted for by a single explanation (Overbeek 1995: 15-16; Koser 1996: 151). Consequently, the displacement of refugee populations from certain nations and their resettlement in others can only be understood in terms of the political and economic relations among the world's nations (Gold 1992: 230).

Looking at the source of refugee movements, there are four basic reasons why people are forced to leave their homeland, though these often overlap (Buckley 1996: 1):

- War or civil strife

- Economic pressure

- Political, ethnic or religious oppression, and

- Natural disaster

The first three causes arise from both long-term structural developments in the world economy and specific local political and economic conditions. These crises have their origin in a global market system which has produced growing inequalities of power and wealth, both within and between nations (Sales et al 1996: 1). Political, ethnic and religious persecution seem to be an almost invariable accompaniment of political and economic change in poor countries, while the intervention of external agents (e.g. colonial powers, foreign invasions and the like) often make human rights violations even worse (Castles and Miller 1998).

Evidence shows that armed conflict is the largest single cause of refugee movements, though this is not directly covered by the UN definition of refugee (Spencer 1994b: 6). Political instability, population growth and the pressures these factors generate also create refugee flows (D'Souza and Crisp 1985: 5). However, it has been argued that none of this latter group of factors on their own causes refugee movements unless they coincide with political violence, which can be directed at particular groups opposing the established regime, at ethnic or religious minorities or at unselected victims of generalised violence (Zolberg et al 1989, quoted in Joly 1996: 142-143). In this regard, it has also been argued that the nation-state itself has proved to be a poor way of organising society because of the antipathy it creates between different national groups (Buckley 1996: 1; Keely 1996: 1053-1054),

and the decay of the nation-state system over the past two decades has been perceived as a major cause of refugee movements (Harris 1995). The inability of the state to protect and provide subsistence for its people leads to the disintegration of the state into its ethnically specific components, engaged in a war of all against all for food which in turn results in a massive refugee exodus from the state (Overbeek 1995: 28).

The fourth reason for refugee flows focuses on such events as famine, floods, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, drought and other natural and environmental disasters which, although outside the international refugee definition, can produce the so-called 'environmental' or 'ecological' refugees (Richmond 1994, quoted in Joly 1996: 142). Examples of this are the people of Mauritania and Mali forced by drought to flee their countries for points south (Castles and Miller 1998), or the over 700,000 people forced to leave their homes in some CIS countries because of nuclear, industrial and agricultural installations and practices of the former USSR (UNHCR 1996c: 4,15). With a population of 253,000, the Maldive Islands in the Far East may disappear altogether due to the rising level of the sea in the area.

Finally, a new category of refugees which has emerged in recent years is that of 'sexual' refugees. These are people who are forced to leave their country because their sexual orientation or attitudes contradict or simply differ from what is regarded as the norm in their home society. Although not covered by any of the existing international legal instruments, some countries have adapted their

asylum policies to accommodate this new type of exile; for example, Canada and the US. If they act as a group, these refugees may however be included in the category of 'political' refugees.

Regarding the country of destination, Koser (1996) argues that there are three main reasons underlying the distribution of refugees and asylum seekers. The first concerns asylum policy, and countries with liberal policies are more likely to be the destination of refugee flows than those with more restrictive policies. The second refers to historical links between the country of origin and the country of destination; a colonial past, a history of labour migration or simply social and cultural links may lead people to seek refuge in a particular country. The third is geographical proximity (Koser 1996). Somali refugees in Yemen are proof of Koser's argument; Somalis go there because the *'country is nearby, some have relatives there and it has a long record of hospitality towards refugees'* (UNHCR 1998b: 22).

Unfortunately the outlook is rather grim, for there is little evidence to suggest that the number of people displaced by armed conflicts, political violence or natural or environmental disasters will decline in the near future (Gilbert 1994: 40; Buckley 1996: 15). The geographical distribution of refugees clearly maps the areas where crises of this nature are deepest: the Horn of Africa (Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda), Mozambique and Angola, the Middle East (Turkey, Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq and Iran), Central and South America, Indo-China, the Caucasus (Harris 1995: 120-121), the African Great Lakes region (Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and Tanzania)

and now Kosovo. In sum, the problem of refugees is more likely to get worse than it is to get better (Buckley 1996: 15).

3.3   Definition of Refugee: International Legal Instruments

3.3.1 The UN Convention and Protocol

The first serious attempt made by the international community to define the term 'refugee' took place after the Second World War, resulting in the *United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in July 1951 and came into force on 21 April 1954. This document (hereafter the '1951 Convention') defines a refugee as any person who:

> *As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his [sic] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself [sic] of the protection of that country.*

(United Nations 1983: 12)

The 1951 Convention was intended to consolidate previous international instruments relating to refugees and to provide a comprehensive codification of the rights of refugees at international level. Yet, the scope of the 1951 Convention was limited to those who had become refugees as a result of events occurring in Europe before 1 January 1951. Subsequent decades however demonstrated that movements of refugees were by no means confined to the Second World War and its immediate aftermath. As new refugee groups emerged, it became increasingly necessary to adapt

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the 1951 Convention in order to make it applicable to new refugee situations. With this aim, a *Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees* was approved on 31 January 1967 and entered into force on 4 October of the same year. This new document (hereafter the '1967 Protocol') made the provisions of the 1951 Convention applicable to refugees without limitation of time (until then 1 January 1951) or space (until then Europe).

While the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol remain nowadays the principal international instruments, they present a number of drawbacks. For instance, D'Souza and Crisp argue that major and outstanding constraints within the terms of both legal documents are that the individual must have crossed an international border in order to be officially recognised as a refugee and that his or her fears of persecution must be 'well founded' (D'Souza and Crisp 1985: 7). The vagueness of the term 'well founded' has allowed Western countries to turn thousands of applicants away on the grounds that their claims are unsubstantiated, thus avoiding their international humanitarian obligations. Reynolds and Finlay (1987) contend that the definition of refugee proposed by the 1951 Convention and modified by the 1967 Protocol is also not entirely satisfactory, for it does not consider either all those who seek asylum but are not granted refugee status or the families of those who are recognised as refugees. These authors even question the term 'refugee' itself and its applicability to some exile groups. Instead they propose the term 'exile', for '*not all who belong to the [exiled] community would describe themselves as refugees, or be so described by the British government*' (Reynolds and Finlay 1987: 15).

The number of people granted 'Exceptional Leave to Remain' in the UK demonstrates the narrowness of the UN definition of refugee (Spencer 1994b: 345). Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR) is granted to those who do not fall within the definition of the 1951 Convention as modified by the 1967 Protocol but who, for humanitarian reasons, cannot be refused asylum and returned to their country of origin. Similar alternative statuses also exist in other European countries; for example, 'tolerated residence' in Germany, 'humanitarian permission to remain' in Ireland, 'residence permit on humanitarian grounds' in France and Denmark, and 'residence permit on individual humanitarian concerns' in Finland (Liebaut and Hughes 1997). Spencer (1994b) contends that, since persecution is not clearly defined in the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol, states are free to interpret the refugee definition in a manner that suits them best. Consequently, states have chosen a narrow interpretation in order to restrict the number of those eligible to claim asylum. In 1997 the Human Rights Committee of Amnesty International recommended that the definition of 'persecution' should be broadened to include people fleeing not only from state harassment but also from persecution by non-state actors (UNHCR 1998a: 19). Likewise, Gilbert argues that it may be necessary to broaden the UN definition of refugee to include violation of economic, social, cultural, and civil and political rights (1994: 20).

3.3.2 *Regional Initiatives and Remaining Limitations of International Instruments*

In order to overcome some of the drawbacks of the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol, complementary international instruments have been developed in some parts of the world. Thus, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) decided as early as 1963 that a regional refugee treaty was needed to take account of the special characteristics of the situation in Africa. The resulting *1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa* (hereafter the '1969 OAU Convention') expanded the definition of refugee to people who were compelled to leave their country not only as a result of persecution but also *'owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his [sic] country of origin or nationality'* (UNHCR 1994: 5).

Likewise, the *1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees* was adopted by the Organisation of American States, joined by Mexico and Panama, to cope with the increasingly unsettled situation which developed in the region during the 1970s and 1980s. This declaration (hereafter the '1984 Cartagena Declaration') built upon the OAU definition, adding to it the additional criterion of *'massive violation of human rights'*. Although not formally binding, the 1984 Cartagena Declaration has become the basis of refugee policy in Latin America and has been incorporated into the national legislation of a number of states (UNHCR 1994: 5-6).

The extended refugee definitions of the 1969 OAU Convention and the 1984 Cartagena Declaration have brought international protection to a large number of people who may not be covered by the 1951 Convention, but who are forced to move for a complex range of reasons. These extended definitions have provided much flexibility to international action, becoming particularly important in situations of massive influx where it is generally impractical to examine individual claims for refugee status (UNHCR 1994: 6). But despite these much needed developments, the international instruments currently in place still present a number of limitations. D'Souza and Crisp (1985: 11) contend that:

1. Such instruments cannot do anything to prevent the root causes of refugee exoduses;

2. International legal instruments are primarily designed to protect and assist individuals who are out of their country of origin and apply for asylum elsewhere, thus leaving internally displaced people outside their scope;

3. International law recognises the right of a person to seek asylum but does not oblige states to provide it. Furthermore, not all states are party to the international instruments designed to protect refugees and, among those states which are, some have made reservations restricting their obligations;

4. The principal purpose of international legislation is to provide refugees with certain legal rights and access to social and

economic rights, but cannot guarantee the psycho-social welfare of the refugee nor do anything against host community hostility towards refugees;

5. International instruments are open to differing interpretations and are not ultimately enforceable.

Point (4) above is particularly relevant to this thesis and is clearly exemplified by the current situation in Britain, where the withdrawal of welfare benefits from refugees and the increasing racial hatred they experience affect their physical and psychological well-being and, ultimately, jeopardise settlement.

Furthermore, the regional conventions have introduced a new complexity in that a person recognised as a refugee in one region may not necessarily be considered one elsewhere (UNHCR 1994: 6). D'Souza and Crisp conclude that the *'protection of refugees through a body of definitive, binding and enforceable law is an ideal that is yet to be achieved'* (1985: 10-11). Likewise, focusing on Europe, Joly argues that there is a clear need for a legal instrument which defines refugees and lays down provisions for their treatment, status and rights at European level (1996: 16).

3.4   *Recognition of Refugee Status*

At this point clear distinction must be made between asylum seekers and refugees. In everyday discourse, the term 'refugee' has both a wider and a narrower meaning in relation to status than does the term 'asylum seeker'. Legally, both terms are different. An 'asylum

seeker' is, by definition, someone who seeks a safe refuge; more precisely, someone who has fled his or her country and is seeking refuge elsewhere. Also by definition, a 'refugee' is someone who has fled to another country and has been given refuge by that country; that is, an asylum seeker who has been granted asylum by the government of the country of exile. To be given refugee status, the government of the country of refuge has to satisfy itself that the person meets the definition of the 1951 Convention as modified by the 1967 Protocol, or the definition of the regional legal instrument (the 1969 OAU Convention or the 1984 Cartagena Declaration) to which the country is a signatory.

Claiming refugee status is however becoming more and more difficult and clear proof of this is the number of rejections and grants of alternative humanitarian status. D'Souza and Crisp (1985) contend that being part of a massive exodus, concentrated in space and time and 'positively' advertised by the media, increases applicants' credibility and hence their chances of being granted full refugee status. With a certain degree of irony, they also comment that refugees are more likely to be granted Convention status *'if they are poor, hungry and victims of tangible pain and/or injury'* (D'Souza and Crisp 1985: 9). This is evident among Somali and Colombian refugees in the UK, the former showing a higher rate of Convention status and ELR than the latter, partly due to the media coverage of the civil war in Somalia. Although providing no supporting evidence Koser argues that, in the face of renewed restrictions, people continue to flee from their home countries but

may not apply for asylum, thus falling out of the category of asylum seeker and into that of illegal immigrant (Koser 1996: 154).

For the purposes of the research I have taken a broad definition of refugee, that is a person who has been forced to leave his or her own country because of dramatic socio-cultural, economic, political or natural events that put his or her freedom and/or life at risk and has sought asylum elsewhere. Despite the clear legal differences discussed above between the concepts of asylum seeker and refugee, very often throughout this thesis both terms are treated as interchangeable and synonymous with 'exile', ignoring for practical purposes the broader connotations of this term.

3.5   *Refugees and Economic Migrants*

Very often asylum seekers are regarded by Western European countries as 'economic refugees', escaping from hardship in their country of origin and using claims of persecution as a way of evading immigration restrictions (D'Souza and Crisp 1985: 7). Koser notes that *'data on asylum migration have often been used in the context of media hype and political interests to portray a 'crisis' of numbers in Europe'* (1996: 151). In the UK the tabloid press has played a major role in promoting a negative image of asylum seekers as 'bogus' refugees and 'scroungers'. A national tabloid newspaper recently spoke of *'tens of thousands of bogus refugees [allowed] to settle permanently in Britain ... [all becoming] entitled to the same working rights and welfare benefits, including income support and free housing, as any other citizen'* (The Mail on Sunday, 15 March 1998). This has contributed to popular resentment and extreme-

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right campaigns against asylum seekers. There was an upsurge in racist violence in Germany in the early 1990s, racist offences in that country reaching a post-war record in 1997 (UNHCR 1998b: 26). Many other countries also reported attacks on asylum seekers and demands for tougher immigration measures are to be heard throughout Europe (Castles and Miller 1998: 89).

Whilst the distinction between economic migrants and refugees has been the subject of much debate over recent years, such a distinction has become very blurred indeed (Harris 1995: 119), for economic and political reasons are sometimes so closely interwoven that they cannot be easily separated, as in the case of Turkish migrants in the 1970s and 1980s. Overbeek (1995) argues that repressive political governments, worsening economic conditions and political violence are intimately linked, thus relegating the distinction between refugees and economic migrants to a matter of ideology. According to him, such a distinction *exists legally and politically but not in social reality*' (Overbeek 1995: 15). Whilst this is acknowledged by the UNHCR, it contends that the distinction between economic migrants and refugees is fundamental: an economic migrant enjoys the protection of his or her government whilst a refugee does not (UNHCR 1996a: 8). Refugees are people who have been forced to sever links with their home country. They cannot rely on their own governments to protect them and it is this which distinguishes refugees from other migrants (UNHCR 1991: 1).

A point often used to differentiate between economic migrants and refugees is the voluntary or involuntary character respectively of

each group's departure from their homeland (D'Souza and Crisp 1985; UNHCR 1994 and 1996a; Joly 1996; Bustos Cortes 1997). According to this view, refugees do not make a voluntary decision to leave but are forced to do so because of dramatic changes that put their freedom and/or lives at risk. D'Souza and Crisp refer to the decision made by refugees to leave their country as the 'refugee dilemma' (1985: 15): refugees do not want to leave but have to. Field (1985) and Miles (1993) however argue that, although a large proportion of refugees are 'forced migrants', among some refugee groups there is an element of choice in their migration. Since life as a refugee is hard and flight itself may be dangerous, some people may prefer to accept a degree of persecution as an alternative to flight (Field 1985: 3).

Joly argues that another difference between refugees and economic migrants is that refugee movements have a collective character, whilst economic migrants are propelled by individual hope to better their lives (Joly 1996: 149). Yet, Joly's point does not always hold true and there have been human movements in recent history that clearly contradict her argument; for example, the Irish famine victims in the mid-nineteenth century, the large groups of Italian migrants to the US in the early years of the twentieth century, and the contract labour migrants throughout Europe in the first half of the present century. Not only did the 'potato famine' victims leave Ireland in masses, but they were also regarded as refugees in their destination countries (primarily the US and the Old Commonwealth countries, i.e. Canada, Australia and to a lesser extent New Zealand).

A further distinction between refugees and immigrants lies in their ability to prepare for and accept the difficulties involved in living in a new culture. Whilst immigrants often make extensive plans before they leave for the new country, refugees have much less chance to plan for their new life, learn the language of the receiving society or collect capital (Gold 1992: 17)). This is in part related to the mentality of economic migrants and refugees, and the readiness of each group to settle and stay in the country of destination (Refugee Action 1987b). Whilst economic migrants are willing to stay in the receiving country (even though they may have the 'myth of return'), refugees often long to go back home as soon as the circumstances allow (Field 1985: 22). Thus, according to this view, the main problem for the immigrant is that of assimilation, whilst for the refugee it is precisely the contrary, that is resistance to assimilation. Quoting Esma'il Kho'i, 'there may still be Russian refugees from the Great October Revolution who are still dreaming of going back to "the good old Russia of the Tsars"' (Refugee Action 1987b: 9). This approach is however rather simplistic and seems to ignore the circumstances forcing refugees to flee from their countries. Whilst those directly involved in the events leading to their flight are likely to perceive exile as temporary and may be willing to go back home to complete their unfinished project, those forced to flee for other reasons (e.g., ethnic cleansing and religious pogroms) may give up the idea of return and see exile as more permanent (Joly 1996). Furthermore, the willingness to return may recede with the passage of time. The

implications of such attitudes towards settlement will be discussed
further in Chapter Seven.

Summary

I have argued in this chapter that international migration is not an
isolated phenomenon but the result of long-, medium- and short-term
historical processes of the world system. Although part of these
population flows, refugee movements have specific characteristics
that distinguish them from other migrant groups, both in terms of
the causes forcing them to flee and their distribution among
receiving countries. Although a number of legislative initiatives
have been developed since the Second War to protect refugees, these
measures present a number of pitfalls. Such drawbacks are the root
of many of the current problems faced by asylum seekers and refugees
in their countries of exile, which often are free to interpret
international legislation in a way that suits them best and reduces
their humanitarian obligations to a minimum.

For this study, understanding the circumstances behind the flight of refugees is of particular importance for two reasons. First, it allows to place the analysis of their experiences in the UK within a socio-cultural and historical context. Second, it helps to better understand their attitudes towards settlement in Britain. In this chapter I review the history of events leading to the spiral of violence in Colombia and Somalia and the ensuing refugee flows. Given the scarcity of formal publications on these two countries, this chapter is based mainly on information and data from refugee organisations such as the Refugee Council and Praxis, periodicals (magazines and newspapers), Amnesty International's country reports and Home Office statistics[5]. Since Lewis (1988 and 1993) was almost the only source of historical information on Somalia I could find, most of the historical background to the current conflict in this country is based on his work.

4.1 Colombia

4.1.1 Historical Background and Current Situation

The current crisis in Colombia has to be analysed within the general context of the Latin-American situation. Over the past four decades the South American continent has been immersed in a deep human rights crisis, the origins of which are to be found in both the

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[5] Towards the end of 1998 the Home Office, through its Country Information and Policy Unit, compiled country assessments for Colombia and Somalia. Such assessments were not intended for publication but would be released on the Internet, Home Office website. At the time of writing, however, such assessments were not yet available.

economic and political spheres of the states. Neo-liberal processes

of adjustment coupled with a drastic reduction of provision for

social needs have led to the extreme impoverishment of large sectors

of the population[6]. As a result, both economic and social rights of

the population have been seriously affected. This has been

compounded by processes of political violence in some states, where

extra-judicial executions, disappearances, torture and arbitrary

detention are commonplace. The armed forces are often complicit with

such violations and pressurise their governments to grant them

impunity. Since democracies in Latin America are still too weak to

subordinate military power, violence has become endemic and human

rights abuses pervasive (Praxis undated: 7).

Political violence is generally associated with the existence of an

oppressive regime that imposes its rule on the population and

restricts by all possible means political parties, groups and ideas

opposed to its policies. Although this is not the case in Colombia,

in theory a democratic country with an established electoral

process, Colombia's democracy is inhabited by terror (Zulueta 1991:

114-115). For most of the past forty years the country has been

embroiled in a civil war. Since 1958 political power has been shared

by the Liberal and Conservative parties, whose policies are very

similar but neither of which could be said to be representative of

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[6] For example, 37 percent and 45.8 percent of Argentina's and
Chile's wealth, respectively, is in the hands of a privileged 10
percent of each country's population. This distribution is even
less fair in Brazil, where 10 percent of the population enjoys
51.3 percent of the country's wealth (*Noticias Latin America*,
September 1998).

the population as a whole. Both parties have been under continuous attacks by guerrillas of different factions (Praxis undated: 12).

Political instability and economic injustice are closely associated, and there are great inequities in relation to ownership of land and wealth (Praxis undated: 12). Powerful landowners have sought to disenfranchise peasant farmers and indigenous people, resulting in considerable unrest. The gap between the rich and the poor is evident; much of the population suffer from poor working conditions and a lack of social provisions, including basic water and sewage systems (Refugee Council 1997f: 8). Poverty and social misery is visible in the streets of the cities and experienced increasingly (Praxis undated: 12). Corruption within the political system is an additional factor, fuelling protest in the form of civic movements and the growth of oppositional political parties (Refugee Council 1997f: 8).

The situation has been compounded since the mid-1970s by the lucrative drug trade, which has contributed to human rights abuses, with drug traffickers supporting paramilitary activities to protect their interests. Along with Peru, Colombia is the world's main producer of cocaine[7]. The drug mafia is estimated to employ over half a million people — the same as the number employed in manufacturing. Wealthy drug traffickers have purchased land and established companies giving them influence in the financial sector, sports, the media and the arts, as well as in rural areas (Refugee

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[7] This information was obtained from an article in a Spanish national magazine, Interview (issue 1076).

Council 1997f: 8). There is also evidence of links between the former Liberal government, led by Ernesto Samper, and the drug cartels (*Crónica Latina*, March 1998).

Most human rights violations are attributed to guerrillas and paramilitary groups, who hardly ever meet in combat and prefer to fight their war by proxy: it is believed that only five percent of their victims actually die in combat. The great majority of victims are poor farmers accused by their killers of association with some group on the other side (*The Economist*, 5 April 1997). In a conflict situation of this nature, large sections of the population must decide from whom they want to get protection, and the very fact of getting such protection somehow implies their participation in the fight. Those who take no sides in the conflict find themselves in a 'sandwich' situation, and being neutral is a luxury nobody can afford. Those who try not to adhere to any contender are faced with a dilemma that forces them to take sides: if one does not inform one side, that side assumes that one informs the opposite side, and the individual is thus dragged into the conflict with no option but to take sides to get protection from one side or the other (Zulueta 1991: 204). Hence, *'Colombians are now caught in the crossfire of violence by state forces, paramilitaries and guerrillas'* (Refugee Council 1997f: 11).

All this demonstrates that political violence, important as it is, is just one of the various forms of violence experienced by Colombian society. Those forms resulting from economic and social conflict are not only more significant quantitatively, but they also

give political meaning to the combination of the various types of violence (Camacho Guizado and Guzmán Barney 1990: 208). As a result, the number of homicides of all kinds, disappearances, kidnappings and extortion goes well beyond the level of violence that can be found in any other country not directly involved in a war, including countries with a much worse economic situation than Colombia: with higher rates of unemployment, lower economic growth, a less fair wealth distribution and less social mobility. The level of violence far exceeds that to be found in countries under the strictest military dictatorships (Zulueta 1991: 113).

With an average of over 25,000 people killed every year for the past five years, compared to some 700 people murdered in the UK, Colombia remains one of the most violent countries in the world. In recent years the level of violence has increased substantially (Refugee Council 1997f: 7). By the end of 1996, UNICEF reported that one million Colombians had been internally displaced by violence (Refugee Council 1997f: 3), a significant number for a country with 36 million people. According to figures released by Consultancy for Human Rights and Forced Displacement (CODHES), a Colombian non-government organisation, over 148,000 people were displaced during the first half of 1998 alone (Refugee Council 1998f:7). Yet the state seems to be unable to protect its people and the government's own statistics show that in 97 percent of crimes which were reported to the authorities in 1996, the perpetrators were never brought to justice (Refugee Council 1997e: 5).

Although a new constitution, introduced in 1991, led to the establishment of several organisations to protect human rights, impunity for human rights violations remains almost absolute (Refugee Council 1997f: 8). Further, members of non-government organisations and others who seek to promote respect for human rights have increasingly been subjected to threats, intimidation and attacks on their lives. Some even had to leave the country because of the lack of guarantees to carry out their legitimate activities. Officials of state agencies, such as the 'Procurador General' (Attorney General), have also been subjected to threats and intimidation as a direct result of their attempts to identify and punish state agents involved in illegal activities and/or responsible for human rights violations. Several human rights organisations have been forced to close offices in different parts of the country because of sustained threats and attacks against their members (Amnesty International 1996b: 7-8).

The election of the new Conservative President, Andres Pastrana, brought new hopes of peace. A few days after winning the elections and before taking up office on 7 August 1998, President Pastrana started peace talks with the two main guerrilla groups in the country, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN). Such a step towards negotiation with the guerrillas (who had refused to negotiate with his discredited predecessor Ernesto Samper) was viewed as a *'fresh hope that the country may be moving towards an end to the civil war'* (*The Guardian*, 11 July 1998). Further, only three days after taking power, President Pastrana's government implemented strategic changes

at the top of Colombia's military command as part of its peace
policy. Whilst the new government was seen as beginning 'its four-
year term on a solid footing' (Financial Times, 11 August 1998), the
spiral of violence reached its highest point in the month Mr.
Pastrana took office (Noticias Latin América, September 1998) and a
new terror campaign against human rights workers was carried out by
right-wing death squads in January 1999 (The Guardian, 3 February
1999).

4.1.2 Colombian Refugees in the UK

Although Britain has been a destination for Colombian immigrants for
many years, asylum seekers from that country started coming to the
UK in the early 1980s. However, there is no information on the size
of the Colombian community in Britain, its composition or
geographical distribution, with the exception of data published by
the Home Office on asylum applications, which are likely to be
underestimates.

The Refugee Council (1997f) notes that, with a million people
already internally displaced in Colombia and asylum seekers refouled
from neighbouring countries like Panama, or in danger of further
attacks in both Panama and Venezuela, more asylum seekers are
seeking sanctuary in the UK. Data published by the Home Office
(1998) confirm this. In 1997 a total of 1,330 applications for
asylum in Britain were made by Colombian nationals, as compared to a
total of 1,005 in 1996 and 525 in 1995 (see Table 4.1). This was

despite a substantial drop in the second half of 1997, after the

enforcement of visa restrictions on Colombians in May of that year[8].

Table 4.1: Asylum Applications in the UK from Colombian Nationals[a]
1990-1997

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
New Applications Received	175	140	280	380	405	525	1,005	1,330
Total Decisions Taken[b]	35 (100%)	50 (100%)	30 (100%)	95 (100%)	410 (100%)	215 (100%)	380 (100%)	425 (100%)
Total Granted Refugee Status	15 (43%)	15 (30%)	- (-)	5 (5%)	5 (1%)	- (-)	10 (3%)	20 (5%)
Total Granted ELR	15 (43%)	20 (40%)	10 (33%)	10 (11%)	15 (4%)	5 (2%)	5 (1%)	25 (6%)
Total Refused	5 (14%)	15 (30%)	20 (67%)	80 (84%)	390 (95%)	210 (98%)	365 (96%)	380 (89%)
(a) Figures rounded to the nearest 5 and percentages rounded to the nearest percent. (b) Decisions do not necessarily relate to applications made in the period.								

Source: Home Office (1998)

Despite the well-documented human rights abuses discussed earlier,

between 1990 and 1997 only 70 Colombians seeking asylum in the UK

were granted Convention status. This accounts for less than two

percent of the over 4,200 applications for asylum made by Colombian

nationals in that period, the vast majority of whom were refused

both asylum and ELR. Such a refusal rate reflects a climate of

disbelief in the Home Office, which is probably compounded by the

misconception of Colombians as 'drug dealers'. Some of the reasons

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[8] Visas were imposed on nationals from Sri Lanka in 1985, Turkey in 1989 and Bosnia in 1992, and were effective in reducing the number of applications for asylum from these countries. This is because refugees will have to get to an embassy to make an application for a visa, convince the officials that they are tourists or students with the means to support themselves and then wait for the applications to be assessed (Refugee Council 1997a: 5).

for refusing asylum applications used by the Home Office do not seem to reflect a proper appreciation of the current human rights situation in Colombia and the inadequacy of domestic protection mechanisms there. According to the Refugee Council (1997f), in other instances, perfectly plausible explanations for applicants' actions are dismissed as not being consistent with the actions of 'genuine' asylum seekers, without any evidence to support these statements (1997f: 22).

According to community workers and agency staff interviewed in the present study, the Colombian group is the largest and fastest expanding Latin American community in Britain, due primarily to the dramatic growth in the number of Colombian refugees over the past few years. Although with no formal data to support their comments, the respondents explained that the majority of the Colombians are concentrated in South London, mainly in the boroughs of Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham. There are also Colombians in Hackney and other East and North London boroughs, but these are believed to account for a small proportion of the community. As in the case of many other refugee communities, this geographical concentration is the result of exiles' willingness to cluster together, with new arrivals settling where other fellow nationals already live.

4.2   Somalia

4.2.1 Historical Background and Current Situation

With a total population of some eight million, the Somalis form a single ethnic unit in the Horn of Africa stretching from the Awash Valley in the north to beyond the Tana River in northern Kenya in

the south. For centuries they lived in an area which included parts of northern Kenya, modern-day Ethiopia and French Somaliland (now Djibouti). Although the Somali people had, traditionally, a strong sense of cultural and linguistic unity, they did not form a single political unit. They were not a state but a nation although, according to Lewis (1993), they possessed all the prerequisites for effective statehood. Structured in clans, the six major divisions of the nation (the Dir, Isaq, Darod, Hawiye, Rahanweyn and Digil clans) did not regularly act as stable or autonomous political units. They were too large and widely dispersed to do this, and lacked the necessary organisation. They were in fact themselves divided into a host of subsidiary clans and clan divisions whose members were frequently widely scattered in their nomadic movements (Lewis 1993: 25).

The colonial powers arrived in the first half of the eighteenth century. Although the clans resisted the arrival of the Italians and the British, towards the end of that century the southern regions of Somalia were administered by Italy, and the northern regions by Britain. Later on, during the 1940s and 1950s, more territory was lost in the south to Kenya and in the west to Ethiopia. During this period Italian and British protectorates were put in place over the southern and northern parts, respectively, the latter becoming known as British Somaliland. These protectorates lasted until 1960, when the colonial powers withdrew from their colonies (Refugee Council 1994a: 3). The British and Italian Protectorates became self-governing and joined each other again on 1 July 1960 to form the Somali Republic under a government formed from those then in power

in each of the two territories. Dr. Abdirashid Ali Shirmarke and Adan Abdulle Osman became, respectively, Prime Minister and President of the newly-formed Republic (Lewis 1993: 28).

The problem of satisfactorily blending the Italian and British colonial traditions was a major preoccupation during the first few years of independence. Apart from the language problem, which pervaded all spheres of activity, there were wide divergences between Italian and British practice in administration, bureaucratic procedure, accounting, law and so on (Lewis 1993: 28). These differences were not easily resolved and there was often considerable friction between British- and Italian-trained personnel. By the mid-1960s, however, a considerable degree of effective integration had in fact been achieved, both in politics and in administration. The political parties had come to accept the Somali Republic as an established fact and readjusted their alignments correspondingly (Lewis 1993: 29).

In June 1967 a new civilian government was formed. Shirmarke took over the presidency of the Republic and Mohamed Haji Ibrahim Egal, a northerner from the ex-British Protectorate, became the new Prime Minister. However, the high level of corruption, nepotism and inefficiency of the new government created a great deal of dissatisfaction among certain sectors of the armed forces, resulting in the assassination of President Shirmarke on 15 October 1969. A week later, on 21 October, the army-commander Major-General Mohamed Siyad Barre, supported by a group of army officers, took power in a military coup. General Siyad became thus the new Head of State and

President of the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC) (Lewis 1993: 31). He would remain in power for over 21 years.

The Somali Republic founded on Somali national identity was an incomplete state. It did not contain the whole nation, as three parts of it remained under foreign rule in Ethiopia, Djibouti and northern Kenya (Lewis 1993: 29). Hence, President Siyad's proclaimed tasks were initially to modernise, adopt 'scientific socialism', break the clan system and unite all the areas in which Somali people lived into 'Greater Somalia'. To this end, in 1977 the Somali army attacked the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, territory in which Somali people were living. The Ethiopian army, supported by the Cuban and the Soviet military, forced the Somalis to withdraw, severely undermining President Siyad's prestige (Refugee Council 1994a: 3).

The terrible defeat and ensuing refugee invasion (which seriously upset the existing clan demography in Somalia) quickly led to widespread public demoralisation and to an upsurge of clan antipathies, as different groups sought scapegoats to explain the catastrophe (Lewis 1993: 67). As a result, between the late 1970s and early 1980s two main guerrilla groups were formed: the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) and the Somali National Movement (SNM). The former was primarily based in the Mijerteyn (Darod) clan whilst the latter drew most of its support from the Isaq clan of central and northern Somalia. Both guerrilla groups were opposed to the Siyad regime and made their operational headquarters across the border in Ethiopia.

The destabilising pressures exerted by the SSDF and SNM led President Siyad to seek an agreement with Ethiopia, a move which was also encouraged by Somalia's Western allies (i.e., Italy, the EEC and the USA) (Lewis 1993: 68). In April 1988, President Siyad and Ethiopia's Mengistu Haile Marian signed a peace accord, normalising their relations and undertaking to stop supporting each other's dissidents. Thus, Ethiopia formally withdrew support from the SSDF and SNM. Knowledge of this agreement and fear of its consequences triggered SNM's audacious onslaught on military installations in northern Somalia, which quickly led to the all-out civil war between the regime and the Isaq clan (Lewis 1993: 69) in 1990.

Clan antagonisms had been created, encouraged and exacerbated through the entire colonial and neo-colonial period (Powell 1996: 26). This continued during Siyad's government (Lewis 1993: 75-76) and was increased during the civil war. With opposition groups competing against one another for a strike on Mogadishu, the capital, President Siyad's days were numbered. The United Somali Congress (USC), a group based in the Hawiye clan, marched into the capital in January 1991, forcing General Siyad to flee south to the protection of his Marehan sub-clan (Refugee Council 1994a: 3).

The USC split into two groups: one led by Ali Mahdi Mohamed, a prominent Abgal businessman, and the other by General Mohamed Farah Aideed, himself a former general in Siyad's army and former ambassador to India. Each was backed by a sub-group of the Hawiye clan: Ali Mahdi by the Abgal clan and General Aideed by the Habar Gidir clan (Lewis 1993: 70; Refugee Council 1994a: 3).

The Abgal clan hastily set up an interim government with Ali Mahdi as provisional president (Lewis 1993: 70-71), Mogadishu becoming thus effectively divided into two principal military zones: one controlled by the Abgal clan and the other by the Habar Gidir clan. Other smaller Hawiye groups maintained their own zones of influence, sometimes acting as neutrals, sometimes as partisan allies in the ensuing blood-bath which between November 1991 and April 1992 almost completely devastated what remained of Mogadishu after Siyad's ravages, causing death and injury to civilians on a catastrophic scale and plunging the whole area into chaos and famine (Lewis 1993: 73-74). It was this spiral of violence and its disastrous consequences that led to the arrival of UN peacekeeping forces and US and other troops in December 1992.

The combined effects of the bitter fighting, following the overthrow of Siyad's government, and a severe drought resulted in Somalia being described as one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters. By the end of 1992, the balance of the war was 350,000 deaths from starvation, over two million displaced by the war out of a population of some eight million, and some four-and-a-half million Somalis in need of emergency assistance, one million of these being refugees living mostly in neighbouring Kenya. Children accounted for a large proportion of the dead. In some parts of central and southern Somalia — the so-called 'hunger zone' — it was estimated that up to 80 percent of all children suffered from severe malnutrition. By the time the UN and Western troops reached the

interior, many children were no longer able to digest bulky foods such as maize meals, rice or beans (Refugee Council 1994a: 4).

Attempts to maintain public order have been based on various local combinations of traditional clan dispute-settlement mechanisms, new and weak regional administration structures, faction militias, and Islamic courts (Amnesty International 1997b: 2). However, the continuing conflict has been accompanied by gross human rights abuses by some of the factions, particularly General Aideed's forces. These abuses included hundreds of deliberate killings of civilians, torture and the forced displacement of defeated clans or vulnerable minority communities. Clan elders were among those deliberately killed by opposing clans and women were raped (Amnesty International 1996c: 1).

Fighting continued, especially between General Aideed's Habar Gidir clan and Ali Mahdi's Abgal clan, both leaders claiming overall government authority although neither achieved international recognition. In August 1996 General Aideed died of battle wounds and his son, Hussein Mohamed Aideed, was chosen to succeed him (Amnesty International 1997b: 1). Yet, in 1998 there was still no recognised central government and the country was a mosaic of warring enclaves (UNHCR 1998b: 22).

4.2.2 Somali Refugees in the UK

Somali migration to the UK is characterised by its complexity and the overlap of migration waves (Griffiths 1997: 9). However, as with

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the Colombians, there are no accurate data on the size, composition or geographical distribution of the Somali community in Britain.

Whilst there has been a significant Somali community in Britain for over one hundred years (Refugee Council 1994a: 1), the first Somali refugees started arriving in the UK in the early 1980s (Fawzi El-Solh 1991: 541). Their numbers have since increased steadily, with dramatic rises in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s. The highest number was registered in 1995, when a total of 3,465 applications for asylum were submitted (Home Office 1997). These increases correspond very closely to political developments and the evolution of the war in Somalia (Griffiths 1997). Data for the current decade indicate that, in terms of decisions made every year, between 87 and 94 percent received either Convention status or ELR, whilst only between 13 and six percent were refused both full refugee status and ELR (see Table 4.2). This contrasts very favourably with other refugee groups, many of which have much higher refusal rates (e.g., the Colombians), a factor which may be related to the former colonial link of Somaliland to the UK (Griffiths 1997) and the favourable media coverage of Somalia in the early days of the civil war.

Table 4.2: Asylum Applications in the UK from Somali Nationals[a]
1990-1997

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
New Applications Received	2,250	1,995	1,575	1,465	1,840	3,465	1,780	2,730
Total Decisions Taken[b]	375 (100%)	315 (100%)	2,555 (100%)	3,330. (100%)	1,730 (100%)	2,400 (100%)	3,830 (100%)	2,305 (100%)
Total Granted Refugee Status	275 (73%)	50 (16%)	25 (1%)	45 (1%)	5 (-)	10 (-)	15 (-)	985 (43%)
Total Granted ELR	75 (20%)	225 (71%)	2,210 (86%)	3,075 (92%)	1,575 (91%)	2,205 (92%)	3,580 (93%)	1,015 (44%)
Total Refused	25 (7%)	40 (13%)	320 (13%)	210 (6%)	150 (9%)	185 (8%)	235 (6%)	305 (13%)

(a) Figures rounded to the nearest 5 and percentages rounded to the nearest percent.
(b) Decisions do not necessarily relate to applications made in the period.

Source: Home Office (1998)

Hence the Somali refugee community has been one of the most important refugee groups to arrive in the UK over the past decade, the vast majority concentrating in London where the Somali refugee population was recently estimated to be in the region of 60,000 (Ditmars 1994 and 1995, quoted in Griffiths 1997: 9). The London Borough of Tower Hamlets has the largest concentration of Somalis in the UK; it is estimated that 15,000 Somalis live there, representing about ten percent of the borough's total population. Smaller communities can also be found in Brent, Sheffield, Brighton, Ealing, South East London (Refugee Council 1994a: 1-2) and North London.

Summary

A high level of general violence and social unrest has forced Colombians to flee from their country, whilst a bloody civil war in Somalia has resulted in a succession of refugee exoduses. The

different circumstances behind the flight of these two refugee groups are relevant for the study of their use of and attitudes towards refugee organisations and eventual settlement in the UK.

CHAPTER FIVE: UK IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM POLICIES

5.1 Immigration and Asylum Policies: Overview

Asylum policies cannot be understood in isolation but need to be located within the broader context of general immigration policy. Within such a broader frame, a country's asylum policy is usually defined within the parameters of both its domestic and foreign policies (Joly 1996).

Domestic policy issues include several factors which clearly determine the country's policy on immigration in general and on asylum in particular, such as the state of the country's economy, the social costs involved in accepting immigrants and refugees (including welfare benefits), and the cultural and ideological differences between the indigenous community and the immigrant and refugee communities (Joly 1996: 22-24). In this regard, non-government organisations argue that states have been deliberately refusing asylum claims and granting alternative status (such as ELR in the UK or 'humanitarian permission to remain' in Ireland) to avoid the commitment and social obligations involved in the 1951 Convention status (Joly 1996: 11). Western countries tend to use their own national interests to justify their 'anti-asylum' policies, arguing that they must protect their own populations and economies. Electoral issues are also high on the agendas of political parties as democratic governments have to satisfy their electorate, which is very often achieved at the expense of their international humanitarian obligations (D'Souza and Crisp 1985: 10). This has been particularly evident among far-right groups, which

force the issue of asylum seekers into a prominent position on the public agenda by using anti-immigration rhetoric to create and mobilise constituency (Soysal 1994: 34).

Commenting on these issues, Harris (1995) argues that immigration (and hence asylum) policies start from the monopoly position of states, which fail to consider universal interests; no country is required to justify its immigration (or asylum) policies in terms of the interests of the world, which tend to be subordinated to questions of local interests (Harris 1995: 220). But, as mentioned above, states' immigration and asylum policies are also defined within the parameters of their foreign policies. A country's policy on refugees is closely linked to whether the receiving country has a friendly or hostile relationship with the refugee producing country. It also depends on relationships with third parties and the broader international community; for example, with world powers such as the US or with neighbouring countries (Joly 1996: 28-31).

Whilst immigration and asylum policies in Western countries have become more and more restrictive since the early 1970s, little attention has been paid to the implications of such restrictive policies for the immigrant and refugee communities already settled in the country of reception. Contrary to the idea that controls are necessary for good race relations (see, for example, Layton-Henry 1992), it has been argued that a country's general immigration policy is closely related to and shapes the way its citizens treat the immigrants already settled among them (e.g., Parekh 1994). If such policy discriminates against or places disproportionately

stringent conditions on a particular group, it implies that those individuals are unwanted and should only be admitted when there is no alternative. Consequently, this may encourage the receiving population to believe that they are not acting wrongly if they treat those immigrants badly (Parekh 1994: 109).

Since the mid-1980s there has been a tendency among the member states of the European Union (EU) to co-operate in the field of immigration and asylum policy. This tendency has been officially explained by the need for a common policy after the abolition of internal border controls with the creation of the Single Market (Brochmann 1991: 185, quoted in Overbeek 1995: 30). Yet the abolition of border controls is not in itself a sufficient condition for a common policy, though this has provided the EU member state governments with a pretext to legitimise the development of 'stop policies' to reduce immigration (Overbeek 1995: 30). The 1970s ideology of no immigration and the rapidly increasing number of asylum applications lodged in the EU over the past two decades seem a more plausible explanation for the attempts to secure a common policy on immigration and asylum. The search for a common policy was mainly expressed through the development of new procedural requirements to determine refugee status, one of the most important being the concept of 'safe country' of asylum (Albuquerque 1997: 570) or 'safe third country'. This 'safe country' rule was established in the EU to prevent applications for asylum in several states simultaneously or successively. Each application for asylum must be determined by a single state and responsibility for dealing with that application will rest with that state. The objective of

such a rule is to discourage countries from allowing easy entry without bearing the costs and responsibilities of processing claims (Albuquerque 1997: 570).

The principle of the 'safe third country' is governed by two main legal instruments, the *Convention Determining the State Responsible for Examining Applications for Asylum Lodged in One of the Member States of the European Communities*, signed in Dublin in 1990 (hereafter the 'Dublin Convention'), and the *Convention Applying the Schengen Agreement of 1985 on the Gradual Abolition of Checks at their Common Borders*, signed in Schengen in 1990 (hereafter the 'Schengen Convention')[9] (Albuquerque 1997: 571). With slight variations both Conventions contain rules designed to allocate responsibilities for determining the EU member state responsible for an asylum claim, regardless of the member state in which the application for asylum was made. If the asylum seeker applies in another member state, that state has the right to send him or her to the state identified as such by the Dublin or Schengen Conventions (Albuquerque 1997: 571). In theory, though, EU member states need to have the official approval of the other member state before an asylum seeker can be returned to them for the examination of their asylum claim.

But despite these international agreements, there is evidence that EU governments have passed unwanted immigrants on to other countries

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[9] Although the Dublin Convention was signed by all EU member states, the Schengen Convention has been subscribed to only by the Benelux countries, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

within the Union. For example, in March 1998 three Kenyan asylum
seekers claimed that they were sent to Britain by Belgian police,
who allegedly put them on a *Eurostar* train to London and told them
to tear up their tickets (*The Times,* 26 March 1998). It was reported
that in the first quarter of 1998 more than 900 asylum seekers
arrived in London from Brussels without proper documents (*The
Guardian,* 31 March 1998). The controversy over the three Kenyan
refugees was followed a few days later by a row over a group of 56
Kosovan refugees sent on to London in an *Alitalia* flight by Italian
officials (*The Guardian,* 31 March 1998). According to the 'safe
third country' principle, however, this type of situation should
never happen. Such a principle has generated much controversy and
criticism, for in practice it breaches the principle of 'non-
refoulement' contained in the 1951 Convention[10]. Reports of the
European Council on Refugees and Exiles have documented that, as a
result of the 'third country' clause, asylum seekers have in fact
been sent back to the country of persecution (ECRE 1995: 6, quoted
in Albuquerque 1997: 572).

Overbeek notes that EU governments seem to be caught in a difficult
balancing act between exclusion and inclusion (1995: 33): whilst, on
the one hand, economic rationality would dictate a flexible and

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[10] The principle of 'non-refoulement' or 'prohibition of expulsion
or return' is defined in Article 33, paragraph 1, of the 1951
Convention: *'No Contracting State shall expel or return
('refouler') a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers
or territories where his [sic] life or freedom would be
threatened on account of his [sic] race, religion, nationality,
membership of a particular social group or political opinion'*
(United Nations 1983: 24).

liberal asylum policy[11], on the other, political groups (especially of the right) demand even tighter immigration policies. Although this is perhaps too simplistic a dichotomy (see, for example, Miles and Satzewich 1990), the reality is that political groups often speak louder than economic rationality, and Western governments are moving further down the path of exclusion: immigration policies have been tightened up even further with carrier sanctions, tougher visa requirements and on-the-spot screening (Overbeek 1995: 32). A by-product of such restrictive policies has been a downward harmonisation of the policies of the different EU member states, not as a result of formal agreements but as the result of 'policy competition' (van Apeldoorn 1993: 13, quoted in Overbeek 1995: 31). The objective of every state is to make itself at least as unattractive as its neighbours are, and changes in one state's legal regime provoke similar changes in others (Overbeek 1995: 31).

With regard to this last point, an EU Resolution adopted in Brussels in November 1995 has provided guidelines to harmonise EU member states' differing interpretations of the refugee definition contained in the 1951 Convention. Whilst this is in principle a positive move, it has been argued that this Resolution will allow states to use the narrowest possible definition of refugee, so that only people persecuted by state agents will be recognised as refugees. If so, such an interpretation will create an anomalous

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[11] For example, a report recently published by one of the largest financial institutions in Spain argued that, unless a more flexible immigration and asylum policy was implemented, due to the low birth rate and the longer life expectancy experienced by the Spanish population, by the year 2010 the country would lose competitiveness and the state pension system would face bankruptcy (*La Voz de Galicia*, 26 August 1998).

situation in which people fleeing from the same civil war and applying for asylum in the EU may be treated differently just because they fought on different sides of the war (Albuquerque 1997: 573). This will also have implications for refugee women, who are less likely than men to be accepted as political actors by asylum-granting authorities (Kofman and Sales 1997).

5.2 UK Immigration and Asylum Policies

British immigration policies have developed as ad-hoc responses to perceived crises. Asylum policies have been similarly reactive and Britain has no coherent refugee policy which addresses both the causes of refugee flows and the symptomatic arrival of asylum seekers to the UK (Spencer 1994b: 3). It has been argued that British immigration policy in general and asylum policy in particular have been strongly influenced by both cultural and political factors but lack a clear economic rationale (Findlay 1994: 159).

In line with other European states, Britain started to tighten up its general immigration rules in the 1960s, well before the world recession. With one of the poorest rates of economic growth in Europe, the UK was among the first countries to start closing the doors to immigration with the *1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act* (Harris 1995: 107). The doors were further closed with the new *1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act* and then tightened with the *1971 Immigration Act*, which replaced the previous two. Immigration to Britain was therefore supposedly stopped well before the world economic crisis (Harris 1995: 11). Yet, immigration has since

continued in the form of family reunion, skilled professional migration and other forms of labour migration.

Important policy developments took place during the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990). On immigration Mrs. Thatcher instinctively sympathised with Enoch Powell[12] and those on the hard right of the party, and hence favoured the most stringent controls on New Commonwealth immigration. Thus, her approach to immigration legislation re-established the Conservatives as the anti-immigration party, many of whom felt that migration was an issue that could, and should, be exploited to the electoral advantage of the party (Layton-Henry 1992).

Whilst the *1983 Nationality Act* was one of the most important features of Mrs. Thatcher's first term in office (1979-1983), the tightening of the immigration rules to bring New Commonwealth immigration to an end and to put greater pressure on illegal immigrants were other aspects of her policy (Layton-Henry 1992: 190-196). Another major issue of growing concern for the government of Mrs. Thatcher was a rise in the number of applications for political asylum, especially from Sri Lanka. In an attempt to reduce this, a visa requirement was imposed on visitors from Sri Lanka, to come into force with immediate effect. This was the first time a visa requirement had been imposed on a Commonwealth country. As it also

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[12] A British Conservative politician, (John) Enoch Powell (1912-1998) aroused a great deal of controversy in 1968 by campaigning against a ban on racial discrimination and calling for restrictions on Asian, African and West Indian immigration into Britain. Famous for his *'river of blood'* speech in April 1968, Powell unsuccessfully challenged Edward Heath for Conservative Party leadership in 1965 and 1968.

does nowadays, the tabloid press blamed the socio-economic problems at the time on the flood of immigrants and supported the government's decision (Layton-Henry 1992: 205).

The government kept up the pressure to control third world immigration and reduce asylum applications. In 1987 the *Immigration (Carrier's Liability) Act* was passed, making it an offence for airlines and shipping companies to bring people to the UK without proper documents, and requiring these companies to enforce the immigration laws and visa regulations or face a fine of £1,000 per passenger (Layton-Henry 1992: 205-206). This fine was doubled in 1991 to £2,000 per undocumented passenger[13].

In sum, the major priorities of Mrs. Thatcher's immigration policy were concerned with alleviating what she saw as popular anxieties about immigration, and increasing electoral support for the Conservatives by pursuing populist policies and protecting British culture and traditions, thereby pandering to the myth of a homogeneous society. Although there were also elements of liberal pragmatism in government policies (e.g., the decision to admit the Vietnamese refugees from Hong Kong in the early 1980s), Mrs. Thatcher was firmly opposed to positive action to aid integration or encourage multicultural diversity (Layton-Henry 1992: 210). The Conservative government legitimised the view that Britain, as a social formation not constructed through immigration, had evolved as

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[13] The new Bill includes a proposal to extend the 'carrier's liability' to all road passenger vehicles, shipping, air transport and international railway services (Refugee Council 1999a: 2).

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a homogeneous society whose specific character had to be protected from foreign elements. According to Miles, this argument leads to the conclusion that immigration is necessarily undesirable because the host community *'will "naturally" resist [the] "dilution" of their "timeless traditions and way of life"'* (1993: 10).

In the 1990s two main pieces of legislation were passed: the *1993 Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act* and the *1996 Asylum and Immigration Act.* These two legal instruments have dramatically tightened up controls on immigration in general and on asylum seekers in particular. Sales et al note that while the 1993 Act and 1996 Act are more overtly repressive than previous legislation, *'they are not outside the tradition of British immigration policy, [which] has always been based on the assumption that its primary aim is to keep people out'* (1996: 8).

The *1993 Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act* (hereafter the '1993 Act') led to a sharp increase in refusals of both asylum and ELR. It introduced new powers to fingerprint asylum applicants (which prior to the 1993 Act were only used for those charged with criminal offences) and new checks on housing applicants, requiring housing authorities *'to investigate cases where they had 'reason to believe' that the applicant [could] be an asylum seeker and to report this to the Home Office'* (Sales and Gregory 1996: 333). The 1993 Act also restricted the rights of asylum seekers to appeal against Home Office decisions, and enabled the Home Secretary to ignore applications from asylum seekers who entered the UK via a 'safe' third country and could be returned there (Sales et al 1996: 7-8).

This 'third country' clause has been a direct consequence of the Dublin Convention, to which the UK is a signatory. As discussed earlier, since the Dublin Convention only applies within the EU, in effect it means that asylum-seekers can be returned to 'third countries' outside the EU (Refugee Council 1998a: 3) and eventually to the country of persecution.

The *1996 Asylum and Immigration Act* (hereafter the '1996 Act') takes these processes of restriction even further. Introduced a year before the general election, it has been widely perceived as a cynical attempt to win votes by appealing to racist sentiments (Sales et al 1996: 8). Because of the relevance of the 1996 Act for the present research, this legislation and the implications of its provisions will be discussed separately below.

Table 5.1 below shows the effects of the UK's increasingly restrictive policies in the 1990s. Since the beginning of the decade the rate of refusals of asylum applications has increased nearly five-fold, from 17 percent in 1990 to 80 percent in 1997. Although the number of applications increased substantially in 1994 and 1995, it fell dramatically in 1996, rising again in 1997 and early 1998 (Home Office 1998: 2).

Table 5.1: UK Asylum Statistics[a] 1990-1997

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
New Applications Received	26,205	44,840	24,605	22,370	32,830	43,965	29,640	32,500
Total Decisions Taken[b]	4,025 (100%)	6,075 (100%)	34,900 (100%)	23,405 (100%)	20,990 (100%)	27,005 (100%)	38,960 (100%)	36,045 (100%)
Total Granted Refugee Status	920 (23%)	505 (8%)	1,115 (3%)	1,590 (7%)	825 (4%)	1,295 (5%)	2,240 (6%)	3,985 (11%)
Total Granted ELR	2,400 (60%)	2,190 (36%)	15,325 (44%)	11,125 (47%)	3,660 (17%)	4,410 (16%)	5,055 (13%)	3,115 (9%)
Total Refused	705 (17%)	3,380 (56%)	18,465 (53%)	10,690 (46%)	16,500 (79%)	21,300 (79%)	31,670 (81%)	28,945 (80%)

(a) Figures rounded to the nearest 5 and percentages rounded to the nearest percent.
(b) Decisions do not necessarily relate to applications made in the period.

Source: Home Office (1998)

According to the Home Office (1997), the decrease in the number of applications in 1996 was largely due to the enforcement of the 1996 Act in February of that year, which introduced severe restrictions on benefit payments to asylum seekers. This explanation is however debatable, for it assumes that would-be asylum seekers are aware of the current legislation in the country they intend to seek refuge. This point will be developed later in this chapter.

5.2.1 The 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act

The 1996 Act came into force on 5 February 1996, depriving all in-country asylum applicants and appellants against a negative decision of welfare benefits. It was estimated that by July 1996 over 10,000 asylum seekers were affected by the new legislation (Refugee Council 1997a: 1).

Under Section 10 of the 1996 Act, all asylum seekers lost access to child benefit. Under Section 11, asylum seekers' access to other benefits was also restricted. Only those who apply for asylum at their port of entry to the UK (or within two days after arrival) or those from countries designated as 'countries of upheaval' are entitled to income support, housing benefit, council tax benefit and the job seekers' allowance. However, entitlement to these benefits lasts only until the first negative decision on an asylum seeker's application is made. In effect, as mentioned above, all in-country applicants and those appealing against a negative decision are denied income support and housing benefit (Refugee Council 1996a: 3). The 1996 Act also removed the rights of immigrants to housing assistance under the homeless legislation. This applies to asylum seekers ineligible for benefits (i.e., in-country applicants and appellants against a negative decision). However, under the *1997 Housing Act*, asylum seekers who are entitled to social assistance retain the right to temporary accommodation only if they are homeless and 'in priority need'.

Both during the reading of the Bill and after the enforcement of the 1996 Act, non-government organisations (refugee agencies and refugee community organisations in particular) voiced their concerns about the implications of the new legislation. On 8 October 1996 the presiding High Court judge, Mr. Justice Collins, ruled that under the *National Assistance Act 1948* local authorities had a duty to provide at least shelter, warmth and food to asylum seekers with no

means of support[14] (Refugee Council 1997a: 1; 1997d: 5). The practical effect of this judgment is that any asylum seeker who has no entitlement to benefits can be referred to local authority social services departments for assessment under the *National Assistance Act 1948* and the *Community Care Act 1990*. The local authority then has a legal duty to provide services for that asylum seeker which ensure he or she is adequately accommodated and has access to food (Refugee Council 1997d: 6). Some local authorities also provide cash payments or vouchers in lieu of income support.

The government lodged an appeal against the High Court's decision. However, this was unsuccessful and on 17 February 1997 the Court of Appeal confirmed that, under the *National Assistance Act 1948*, local authorities have a duty to provide residential accommodation for destitute asylum seekers. This should also include food and other essentials such as travel (Refugee Council 1997b: 1). But this may soon change, for among the changes proposed in the new Bill are the removal of any remaining rights to welfare benefits for all asylum seekers and the removal of local authorities' current responsibilities to asylum seekers. Instead, the government proposes to set up a programme of 'support in kind' for asylum seekers across the country. Refugee organisations however fear that these changes will make the *'already chaotic situation even worse'* (Refugee Council 1999a: 13).

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[14] According to Section 21, paragraph 1(a) of the National Assistance Act 1948, local authorities have a duty to provide assistance to *'those in need of care and attention which is not available to them'*.

The 1996 Act has also taken the checks on applicants for welfare benefits and other services included in the previous Act even further. Commenting on this, Sales and Gregory (1996) contend that welfare and other services have increasingly been used for surveillance, with access conditional on proof of immigration status. For example, the 1996 Act makes it a criminal offence to employ a person with no immigration entitlement to work, thus requiring employers to act as 'de facto' immigration officials (Refugee Council 1995b, quoted in Sales et al 1996: 8). These internal checks — which pass responsibility for immigration issues on to agencies (private and public) whose primary concern is not immigration enforcement, e.g. social security offices, housing departments, employers, etc. — have detrimental implications for some population groups. Such measures make it difficult for some groups to realise their social and employment rights, whether they are asylum seekers or legally resident 'visible minorities', for their contact with public authorities will always expose them to excessive scrutiny (Morris 1997: 252) on the basis of their skin colour, accent or name.

The 'white list' and the 'short procedure' clauses contained in the 1996 Act have also generated much controversy. The former refers to countries regarded as 'safe' and deemed not to put their citizens or their freedom at risk. Section 1 of the 1996 Act allows the Home Secretary to designate so-called 'safe' countries in which, in his or her view, there is in general no serious risk of persecution. During the second reading of the Bill the then Home Secretary, Michael Howard, announced the first countries to be designated as

safe; these were Bulgaria, Cyprus, Ghana, India, Pakistan, Poland and Romania (Refugee Council 1996a: 1). Whilst the 'white list' will be abolished with the new Bill, a range of other reasons under which an asylum application can be immediately refused will be retained (Refugee Council 1999a: 5).

The 'short procedure' applies to the majority of both port and in-country asylum applicants. According to this procedure, asylum seekers are given their main interview as soon as possible after the asylum application has been made (Liebaut and Hughes 1997: 231) and have only 25 days to gather and submit all the information they need to support their case. This means that the majority of applicants are interviewed immediately upon arrival at their port of entry, when they are tired, confused and maybe traumatised. Most refugees, however, are unable to give a coherent and full account of why they need asylum before having rested and consulted lawyers or community organisations (Refugee Council 1997c: 1).

5.2.2 Implications of the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act

The withdrawal of benefits and limitation of rights of asylum seekers introduced by the 1996 Act became a matter of concern for some groups who argued that this would have disastrous consequences for the physical and psychological well-being and eventual settlement of refugees.

An immediate consequence of the 1996 Act is that asylum seekers no longer have the means of paying for their accommodation. Although since October 1996 Convention refugees have been able to claim

retrospective payment of benefits if they were denied these during the period awaiting the determination of their asylum application, this provision only covers Convention refugees and not applicants who are subsequently granted ELR (Liebaut and Hughes 1997: 240). This is certainly a consideration for any asylum seeker who has managed to obtain accommodation but has been building up rent arrears as a result of loss of benefits (Refugee Council 1996c: 10).

Perhaps even more important is the fact that asylum seekers who have no benefit entitlements, and are surviving on the basic support provided under the *National Assistance Act 1948*, may have acute health needs which are not being met. This has been suggested by a recent study conducted by the Refugee Council (1997d), which concludes that the precarious existence of destitute exiles adds to their already difficult situation, the effect of being forced to just exist exacerbating their already vulnerable physical and mental state (1997d: 41-42). The implications for settlement of lack of adequate health services and accommodation will be discussed in Chapter Six.

The Refugee Council's (1997d) study shows that the problems arising from the poverty of asylum seekers also have a direct negative effect on their ability to pursue legitimate claims for asylum in the UK effectively. The problems faced by the participants in their study ranged from the simple matter of not having money to pay for travel to the solicitor dealing with their case or the Home Office, to the additional difficulty of frequent address changes caused by local authorities moving participants from one bed-&-breakfast

hostel to another. In the most extreme case, that of a participant sleeping rough on the streets, this resulted in a complete loss of contact with both solicitor and Home Office (Refugee Council 1997d: 38).

The withdrawal of welfare benefits also reduces the opportunities available to asylum seekers, for example to education. Denial of income support means that they are likely to be denied access to concessionary ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) fees, as without an order book they cannot prove that they are on a low income. A clear effect of this seems to be a drop in numbers of ESOL enrolments in colleges (RTEC 1996b: 1). Similarly, asylum seekers who are not entitled to income support are no longer eligible for concessionary fees in further education for these, again, are only available to those who can present an order book as evidence of receiving benefits. As a result, the Further Education Funding Council is said to be considering the issue of low income but at present colleges can only claim funding on behalf of students who are on income support (RTEC 1996a: 6). At the time of writing this seems to be still the case.

A substantial proportion of all asylum applications are dealt with through the 'short procedure'. Over the past couple of years the use of this procedure has been expanded to make it the 'standard' procedure for most new applications (Home Office 1998). Whilst this substantially reduces the capacity of refugees to put together a strong case, the negative implications of the 'short procedure' are particularly obvious in the case of women who have been subjected to

sexual abuse. Female victims of sexual assault may be reluctant to speak about it, particularly to a male interviewer. Rape, even in the context of torture, is seen in some cultures as a failure on the part of the woman to preserve her virginity and marital dignity. Thus, discussing her experiences further increases her stress and alienation (Forbes Martin 1995: 26).

In his review of immigration and asylum policies, Randall (1994) notes that the main areas in British policy where changes are necessary are the ELR alternative status, visa requirements on refugees, carrier sanctions, the interview with immigration officials and the availability of independent advice, and the 'safe third country' clause. To this list Spencer (1994b) adds the long periods asylum seekers are forced to wait before a decision on their application is made. But Randall's and Spencer's reviews were done before the enforcement of the 1996 Act and therefore omit the dramatic negative impact of the withdrawal of benefits and the reduction of other rights. Whilst the need to restore these rights is unanimously acknowledged by all refugee organisations, the Refugee Council (1997c) also suggests that more resources need to be made available to speed up the existing system, and that asylum seekers should be allowed to consult a legal representative before their main interview in order to ensure that they are properly informed about the determination procedure (1997c: 1). Although the new Bill is likely to introduce changes in some of these areas, the end result is that it will reduce the opportunities available to refugees even further, running the 'real risk of totally excluding [them] from mainstream society' (Refugee Council 1999a: 10).

All community workers and agency personnel interviewed in the current study agreed that the 1996 Act has made it more difficult for asylum seekers to enter and stay in Britain. The withdrawal of benefits and limitations of rights were seen as having major implications, both practical and psychological, for the general refugee population. Practically, the loss of entitlement to benefits means that:

> *Refugees have to survive as they can, sometimes living on the streets or in poor accommodation and exposed therefore to health hazards. Refugees are therefore very vulnerable and have nobody to turn to for help.*

(Faduno, refugee community worker)

This has put even more pressure on refugee agencies and community organisations, which are struggling to find accommodation for those with no means of their own, that is the vast majority. But even when accommodation is found, it is often far from adequate:

> *Most [of our clients] end up living for months or even years in bed-&-breakfast accommodation and poor-quality hotels, in inhumane conditions, or accommodation which the indigenous population doesn't want; this is usually multi-occupancy accommodation in neglected areas.*

(Martin, refugee agency worker)

Poverty also curtails dramatically refugees' opportunities in all other spheres of daily life, for they cannot make use of the services and sources of help available:

> *The system itself limits the opportunities available to refugees. If they are not on benefits, they can hardly afford the public transport and this means that they cannot move around and get in touch with organisations that might be able to help them. Hence, the current policy on immigration and asylum limits what both organisations and refugees can do.*

(Ricardo, refugee community worker)

Poverty also worsens refugees' psychological problems, which cannot be effectively dealt with if their basic physical needs are not met:

> *Current legislation is inhumane because it increases the trauma experienced by refugees. By depriving refugees of basic benefits, such as language training, income support or housing, refugees cannot define themselves as individuals. They need to satisfy basic, fundamental needs to be able to see themselves as individuals and, therefore, carry on with their lives.*

(Saadia, refugee agency counsellor)

According to some respondents, refugees arrive in Britain with high expectations of safety, of a fresh start and a new future. If they are forced to live below the poverty line, such hopes fall apart and their new situation becomes an extension of what they endured in their homeland:

> *[Asylum seekers] do expect signatory countries to the UN Convention to welcome, protect and help people seeking asylum. Instead, in the UK exiles face this great bureaucratic wall. Psychologically, this is very damaging.*

(Mohad, refugee community worker)

Nevertheless, most staff respondents agreed that the worst aspect of the situation of asylum seekers in Britain is that there is no guarantee that they will be allowed to stay. Therefore, exiles live

with the uncertainty of whether they will be sent back to the situation they escaped from, which is:

> *A re-creation of the insecurity, terror and difficulties they have already been through. They cannot therefore forget what they went through in their home country.*
>
> (Saadia, refugee agency counsellor)

The 'short procedure' was the focus of much criticism. The respondents saw this clause as making the application process even harder for asylum seekers who, at the time of the interview, are unlikely to be mentally prepared to tackle an interview of this nature nor know what the legal procedures involve. Furthermore, it was reported that refugees are sometimes treated in a somewhat aggressive manner by immigration officers. One agency worker interviewed explained the implications of the 'short procedure' as follows:

> *Asylum seekers usually come out of these interviews frightened, not knowing what they said or what happened during the interview. In fact, this is not an interview but an interrogation session. And then they've got only one month [25 days] to repair all the damage they've done to themselves during the interview — because in the vast majority of cases applicants don't say anything that can help themselves [...]. In that month, the applicant must learn the system, understand what is happening and hire a lawyer. Usually the applicant ends up with a bad lawyer, whose only interest is getting the fees for the services provided; and the process usually ends up in a negative decision and the applicant being deported within two or three months. In this regard, the number of "unsubstantiated" cases has recently experienced a dramatic increase.*
>
> (Martin, refugee agency worker)

Against this background, primarily as a result of the withdrawal of benefits, the role of refugee agencies and community associations has become of paramount importance, for refugees rely much more heavily on these organisations than they did before the 1996 Act:

> *The 1996 Act has had a rather drastic effect on the role of [our agency]. [...] We started getting masses of people turning up here; they were hungry. We provided sandwiches, etc. and eventually opened up a day centre [...]. Later on we set up a night shelter to provide accommodation.*
>
> (Vicky, refugee agency worker)

Likewise, the following quote stresses the crucial role of refugee agencies and community associations:

> *Asylum seekers whose application has been refused have no entitlement to welfare benefits or any other type of aid. This means that refugees have to learn to deal with the social services themselves. And this can be extremely difficult for refugees with a limited command of English and already under much stress. So much so that some 70 percent of asylum seekers never get to the social services — they live on the support they get from their own community or on the streets.*
>
> (Martin, refugee agency worker)

When people from a particular region come to the UK seeking asylum, they tend to cluster in particular areas (e.g., Somalis in London's East End). However, before the 1996 Act, since the state provided the financial support they needed to survive — the safety net — exiles did not have to support themselves and therefore did not 'need' to live close together if they did not wish to do so; this was an 'option'. But now, since the state no longer provides this safety net, exiles must live close together to support one another,

to receive support from their own community group and associations.
Yet, community organisations and refugee agencies are clearly under-
resourced and what they can do is certainly very limited:

> *Now people come and these organisations [refugee*
> *agencies and community associations] don't have anything*
> *to give them: funds, accommodation, etc. What they can*
> *do has been much limited by recent legislation. And*
> *other refugee families cannot help new arrivals because*
> *they are on very low income themselves.*

> (Faduno, refugee community worker)

The new Bill will make it even harder for refugee communities and
organisations to provide support to their members because, depending
on the availability of accommodation, refugees may be housed
anywhere in the UK and, consequently, far from their communities.

5.3 *Refugees' Awareness of the Situation in Britain*

The immediate effect of the 1996 Act was a drop in the number of new
asylum applications from nearly 44,000 in 1995 to under 30,000 in
1996. However, it increased again to over 32,000 in 1997 (Home
Office 1997 and 1998). Although other factors such as the imposition
of visa requirements may also have contributed to these variations,
these statistics raise the issue of whether prospective asylum
seekers are aware of the situation in Britain and therefore
application numbers are deterred by the current legislation.

Official statistics seem to suggest that asylum seekers are indeed
aware of the situation and the new legislation in the UK, for the
proportion of in-country applications over total applications has
diminished significantly since the enforcement of the 1996 Act, from

58 percent in 1996 to 49 percent in 1997 (Home Office 1997 and 1998). Provisional data for the first six months of 1998 show that in-country applications decreased by a further one percent to an average of 48 percent (Refugee Council 1998d). However, the opinions of the personnel interviewed were divided on this matter. Whilst some argued that asylum seekers are usually aware of the situation in the UK before they arrive here, the majority believed otherwise. The former argued that the 1996 Act has been a deterrent for refugees seeking asylum in Britain, and saw the statistics quoted above as corroborating their view:

> *[The 1996 Act is] a way of putting people off Britain, of making people realise that from the government's viewpoint Britain is not such a soft touch. This is a defence mechanism to scare asylum seekers, to show them that not only will they have no support in this country, but at the same time that they will have no right to obtain employment or income. Consequently, with no money, income or right to gain employment, asylum seekers cannot survive.*

> (Mohad, refugee community worker)

These respondents contended that asylum seekers do gather information on the country (or countries) they plan to go to in order to make an informed decision on where to seek asylum. According to them, often would-be refugees already know somebody living in the country of destination — a relative, a friend or a friend of a friend. Hence, when asylum seekers decide to leave their country, they usually contact exiles in the country of destination to obtain first-hand information about the situation there:

> *Prospective exiles have a fairly good idea of what to
> expect in the UK, and they also know that the situation
> can be very hard if you do not apply at the port of
> entry. There was, for example, a group of Somali asylum
> seekers who knew exactly what to do. They knew
> everything. The immigration officers were actually quite
> shocked by that.*

(Mohad, refugee community worker)

Conversely, the majority of staff respondents argued that asylum

seekers are usually unaware of the situation in Britain before they

arrive in the country. They also argued that, in fact, the decision

to come to the UK may very often not be a decision at all; refugees

are fleeing upheaval and war and they may go anywhere. According to

these interviewees, new arrivals are ignorant of the welfare system,

the legal system, their rights and entitlements, or the availability

of advice on any of these issues. Due to such lack of knowledge,

newly-arrived asylum seekers do not know what to do:

> *New arrivals are totally unaware of the situation of
> refugees in this country, and those with some knowledge
> of the situation over here have only a very vague idea.
> They may know that there is some kind of system whereby
> they may get some money so that they can eat.*

(Martin, refugee agency worker)

> *Our experience tells us that [refugees] are unaware [of
> the situation in the UK]. The people who come to us are
> people who really don't know anything. There may be a
> few people who have friends or relatives who can offer
> them support when they get here, but the people we see
> are certainly people who don't know the system.*

(Masoume, refugee agency worker)

Most of the Colombian and Somali exiles interviewed were not aware

of the current situation of refugees in the UK nor did they have any

knowledge of the asylum procedures in this country or the

availability of state support. Many did not even know that they had to claim asylum and were unaware of the asylum process that had to be followed before a more permanent immigration status could be granted. Likewise, they had no prior knowledge of the benefit restrictions or the restrictions on employment.

Community workers and agency personnel further explained that, due to lack of information and their fear of not being allowed to stay, many asylum seekers do not apply for asylum at their port of entry but do so after they have been in the country for a while. But by then they also realise that, as in-country applicants, they have lost their entitlement to welfare benefits. This was the case of some of the Colombian exiles interviewed for the study.

Summary

Immigration and asylum policies in Western countries have become increasingly restrictive and Britain has been no exception to this trend. Clearly aimed at keeping people out, the 1996 Act sums up the British exclusionary approach to immigration in general and asylum seekers in particular. The new Bill seems to take the current processes of exclusion even further. The implications of the 1996 Act for the refugee population in Britain have been disastrous, and widely acknowledged and criticised by non-government organisations throughout the country. Not only does the present research confirm the negative effects of this legislation but also shows the increasing importance of refugee organisations in a situation of pervasive destitution and restricted opportunities among refugees. Contrary to the official view that asylum seekers come to the UK to

abuse its welfare system, the findings also suggest that refugees are often unaware of the situation and what is available in Britain before they arrive here.

CHAPTER SIX: RECEPTION AND SETTLEMENT POLICIES IN BRITAIN

Having examined the key characteristics of British immigration and asylum policy, I look in this chapter at reception and settlement policies in the UK. Starting with a definition of settlement, the chapter then focuses on Britain's historical reluctance to set up a permanent reception and settlement programme for refugees. Given the importance that adequate health-care facilities and housing provision have for successful settlement, these two areas are discussed separately. This is followed by a review of recent proposals for reception and settlement policies and a discussion on the need to increase co-operation between local authorities and refugee organisations.

6.1 Definition of Settlement

Several settlement theories have been postulated in the past two decades, the crucial difference between them being their individual or collective approach to settlement; that is, whether settlement is defined as an individual-level process (Field 1985; Gold 1992; Brah 1996) or as a community-level process (Soysal 1994).

According to Field (1985), settlement involves refugees obtaining the status of other members of the host community. The main objective of any settlement effort must be for refugees to obtain jobs, housing, education and other services of the same standard as those obtained by members of the receiving community. However, he also argues that, due to factors such as lack of English language skills, lack of education or relevant job skills and the trauma of

the refugee experience itself, many refugees will not achieve equality at least in the first generation (Field 1985: 11).

Following a similar line of argument, Gold (1992) contends that the major goals of settlement are economic self-sufficiency and cultural adjustment, and it is precisely in the difficulty of delivering such elusive elements of social membership by policy framers that the problems of settlement are rooted. Economic self-sufficiency is largely dependent on economic factors beyond any resettlement agency's control. Similarly, cultural adjustment, learning English, and resolving the mental trauma brought on by the refugee experience can only be achieved through the efforts of refugees themselves, expanded over protracted periods of time (Gold 1992: 143).

Having lived in four continents, Brah (1996) draws on her own experience to explain settlement and argues that a person is settled when the new place becomes 'home'. She defines 'home' as a *'discourse of locality, the place where feelings of rootedness ensue from the mundane and the unexpected of daily practice'* (1996: 4). Whilst having connotations of family, friends and social networks, 'home' is a very personal concept. It refers to *'a place with which we remain intimate even in moments of intense alienation from it'* (Brah 1996: 4).

In her study of the incorporation of guestworkers into European polities, Soysal (1994) takes a different approach. She argues that previous studies looked at settlement as an individual-level process, emphasising the demographic, social or cultural

characteristics of migrants as the major explanatory variables. However, her perspective differs from such studies on two grounds. First, Soysal looks at settlement as a macro-level process whereby the immigrant population becomes part of the polity of the host country; she refers to this process as 'incorporation', a process that takes place independently of the integration of individuals or perceptions of such integration (Soysal 1994: 30). Second, to explain incorporation she looks at the institutions of the host society, rather than at the cultural background or individual characteristics of migrants, for the ways in which migrants interact with the host society and organise their experience are significantly affected by the institutions and resources available in the host polity (Soysal 1994: 30-31).

For the purposes of the current study settlement is understood as an individual-level process, whose objectives are economic self-sufficiency and cultural adjustment (as opposed to cultural assimilation), resulting in social equality (Field 1985; Gold 1992) and the new environment becoming 'home' (Brah 1996). Such objectives can only be achieved if the problems encountered during settlement are successfully overcome: the individual must acquire an acceptable level of fluency in English, obtain adequate accommodation and gainful employment, and overcome social isolation and discrimination. Nevertheless, the settlement of the individual takes place within a community and social context, for in the process the individual remains a member of the exile community and also becomes a member of the wider society of reception. Hence, both the role of

the refugee community and the influence of the host society must also be taken into account, as suggested by Soysal (1994).

It must be noted, however, that the host society's notion of a homogeneous community, racism and exclusion all play an important role in the settlement of immigrants in general and refugees in particular. According to Miles (1993), where racism is expressed and exclusionary practices occur, immigrants and exiles are often confined to low socio-economic positions. With the crisis of capital accumulation and the restructuring of capital, racism and exclusionary practices have served to exclude a large proportion of migrants from the labour market (Miles 1993: 51) and the host society altogether, forcing them to live on the fringes of a society determined to maintain the myth of a homogeneous community (Castles and Miller 1998). This is sometimes compounded by the refugee's background and past experiences, which may further jeopardise successful settlement. Whilst non-political refugees are often willing to adjust to the receiving society and make a home in the new country, political refugees usually wish to return home to complete their societal project and are therefore more reluctant to settle in the country of exile (Joly 1996). Time, of course, plays an important role, although intra- and inter-generational differences in terms of settlement may occur. These issues will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

6.2 Reception and Settlement Policies in the UK: Overview

Soysal (1994) argues that the 'model of membership' of the country of settlement provides the frame within which new entrants to the

polity are incorporated. Although she distinguishes four membership models, the 'corporatist' and the 'liberal' approaches are of particular relevance for the present discussion.

In broad terms, she explains that in the corporatist model the pattern of incorporation is official and formal and takes place through state-sponsored intermediary organisations. In the liberal model, incorporation occurs at the societal level through local associations, with more active participation by migrants. Whilst corporatist polities incorporate new entrants as collective groups through vertically structured, formal organisations, liberal polities incorporate them as individuals into an associational structure (Soysal 1994: 40). Since in the corporatist model central government is responsible for funding and organising the structures for migrant incorporation, voluntary organisations are almost non-existent. However, polities based on the liberal model of membership rely heavily on voluntary organisations operating at the local level.

Within corporatist polities, the major fields of government policy and spending are reception services for new arrivals, specific employment projects and vocational training courses for certain categories of migrants, host-country language training for adults, mother tongue classes in the school system for migrant children, information and social services, and support for migrant organisations and cultural activities (Soysal 1994: 51). Social welfare is the exclusive responsibility of the state. In contrast, the liberal model is characterised by a weak central authority and a

loosely organised state apparatus. With no administrative organ to act as the agent of the collective interests of immigrants, the labour market is the main instrument of incorporation (Soysal 1994: 38). Since liberal polities do not provide state-sponsored formal structures through which new populations and their interests can be incorporated, private and voluntary associations proliferate. Voluntarism at the local level compensates for public functions not performed by the centralised authority and structures. Migrant associations function mainly as social service and advisory organisations, undertaking tasks not performed by the central government (Soysal 1994: 87).

Although a strong centralised state, Britain is a traditional liberal polity. Policy instruments that serve the general population are expected to benefit migrants as well and specific arrangements are in large part private and voluntary. Overall, organisational activity remains locally oriented (Soysal 1994: 102). At present, the central role in government in the reception and settlement of refugees lies in the Voluntary Service Unit (VSU) of the Home Office. VSU fosters the development of self-help through refugee organisations, and its policy is flexible and changes in response to different cultural, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds of refugees in the UK (Home Office 1987 and Renton 1993, quoted in Carey-Wood et al 1995: 14). The main recipient of VSU grant-aid is the Refugee Council, the national umbrella organisation in the UK. Some of the funds received by the Refugee Council are used to support other agencies working with refugees. Grant-aid is also provided to the Scottish Refugee Council, the Welsh Refugee Council and the three

English regional councils operating in the Midlands, the North and the North-East. The councils are involved in a wide range of activities and services for refugees, including access to employment, training, advice, housing, translation and interpretation, education and lobbying (Carey-Wood et al 1995: 14). The Refugee Arrivals Project (RAP) and the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture (hereafter the 'Medical Foundation') are also recipients of VSU grant-aid. Operating at Heathrow and Gatwick airports, RAP helps new arrivals find and secure accommodation. The Medical Foundation, a London-based central agency, is one of the very few specialist organisations providing counselling and psychotherapy to refugees.

Although Britain has a long tradition of receiving asylum seekers, it has always refused to set up a permanent programme, preferring to see refugee flows as a temporary phenomenon (Duke et al 1999). The new Bill also sees asylum seekers as temporary residents and fails to address the need for a comprehensive settlement policy. Such a reluctance to establish a permanent, central programme for the resettlement of refugees has meant that special, temporary programmes have been developed on an ad-hoc basis, such as for Chileans and Ugandan Asians in the early 1970s, Vietnamese in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and more recently Bosnian evacuees in the 1990s (Duke et al 1999)[15].

A feature common to all these programmes was their 'front end loading' approach. That is, resources and support were provided

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[15] At the time of writing, the government is considering to set up a programme for Kosovan refugees.

during the initial stages of resettlement in the expectation that less support, particularly financial, would be needed at later stages as economic self-sufficiency was attained. Hence, after refugees left the reception centres no specialist assistance was available, leaving them reliant on mainstream services. Local authorities were therefore expected to take over responsibility, although no extra funds were made available (Joly 1996; Duke et al 1999).

This policy of 'front end loading' failed, however. Refugees were officially considered resettled once accommodation had been found for them; yet, many of them experienced continuing unemployment and other problems, necessitating further support or 'post-settlement work'. Consequently, policy began to focus on 'community development' with refugees receiving support and advice from members of their own community (Joly 1996). 'Community self-help' has remained the cornerstone of British resettlement policy (Duke et al 1999).

The other key element of current resettlement policy in the UK is equal access to general state provision (Carey-Wood 1994, quoted in Sales et al 1996: 13). However, apart from the general activities of the Commission for Racial Equality, Britain does not even have a centrally defined policy instrument to ensure equality of access to state provision (Soysal 1994: 56-57); refugees (and immigrants in general) are largely taken care of in their localities. Furthermore, this principle of equal access to state provision has been increasingly eroded in the 1990s with the 1993 and 1996 Acts, which

have dramatically restricted the rights of asylum seekers to benefits and other services. While refugees and those with ELR have a formal right to equality of state services, in practice their access to these services is also limited in a number of ways. These include both individual and institutional discrimination by service providers, as well as difficulties posed by language problems and poverty (Sales et al 1996: 13).

When they arrive in the UK, asylum seekers usually have immediate needs for food, clothing and housing. Quota refugees are usually housed at first in reception centres funded by central government and managed by voluntary agencies. Asylum seekers, on the other hand, are given assistance with immediate needs such as housing, translation/interpretation and transport by specialist organisations like RAP, the Refugee Council and other refugee agencies. Referrals to these agencies may be made by the Immigration Service or friends and relatives already in the UK. Some will not require these services because they are already in contact with friends and relatives, but they may need assistance at a later stage of settlement (Carey-Wood et al 1995: 13-14).

An additional and crucial source of help during the settlement and post-settlement stages is that provided by national and local refugee community organisations. They provide invaluable practical help, information, advice and support on a wide range of issues. Carey-Wood et al (1995) argue that an important role of community organisations is to provide cultural and social activities directly linked to members' particular origins. These offer refugees the

chance to maintain their own customs and religion, talk in their own language, celebrate their traditions and exchange news from their home country (Carey-Wood et al 1995: 14). The role of refugee agencies and refugee community organisations in the settlement process will be discussed in more depth in Chapters Eight, Nine and Ten.

Some local councils and health authorities also provide special programmes to assist refugees during settlement, such as language courses, translation and advocacy services. These projects, however, receive no state funding and are threatened by increasingly stringent budgetary restrictions. The restructuring of welfare services to meet market conditions and externally imposed targets have made it difficult to sustain programmes aimed at meeting specific needs (Duke et al 1999). Whilst the 1996 Act had a severe impact on the use of public money for specialist help to refugees, recent research has shown that health-care (Refugee Council 1994a and 1997d; Carey-Wood et al 1995; Forbes Martin 1995; Duke 1996b; Joly 1996; Duke et al 1999) and adequate housing (Refugee Council 1994a and 1997e; Carey-Wood et al 1995; Duke 1996b; Joly 1996; Duke et al 1999) are crucial for successful settlement and, consequently, where policy action is most urgently needed. These two areas are discussed below.

6.3   Health-Care Services

Despite the restrictions on access to many services introduced through the 1996 Act there has been no change in asylum seekers' access to the National Health Service (NHS), which is essentially the same as for any British citizen. The only difference is that asylum seekers without benefits must obtain an exemption certificate, which is granted on the basis of a low income and provided free of charge (Liebaut and Hughes 1997: 239). However, the withdrawal of benefits through the 1996 Act has had a very negative impact on refugees' health (Refugee Council 1997d) and has made many unsure of their rights, with the result that a significant proportion of refugees are not even registered with a GP (Duke et al 1999).

Moreover, the existing services may be perceived as inappropriate by refugees themselves and, even where services are needed, refugees may be reluctant to use them because such services are neither understood nor culturally accessible (Forbes Martin 1995: 89). Several studies have revealed a lack of understanding among health professionals of issues affecting refugees' health and difficulties in the interpretation of their symptoms (e.g., Gold 1992; Carey-Wood et al 1995; Forbes Martin 1995). A recent survey of GPs working in the London Borough of Newham, which has an estimated 18,000 refugees, found that they had neither the expertise in dealing with victims of torture nor the knowledge of the resources available (Newham Refugee Centre 1996: 5, quoted in Duke et al 1999).

According to Carey-Wood et al (1995) and Duke (1996b), dealing with statutory health services who have no specialist knowledge of refugees' needs adds a further dimension to their problems and isolation. Duke (1996b) notes that very few of those refugees in Carey-Wood's sample with physical or psychological problems who did seek help with such problems went through formal channels such as doctors, hospitals and social services, relying instead on friends and members of their community groups. She argues that the role of informal sources of practical and psychological support through family members and community groups is extremely important (Duke 1996b: 473). Other studies of the resettlement of refugees and migrant groups have suggested that access to community groups or informal ethnic networks can reduce the likelihood and severity of mental illness (Murphy 1955b; Field 1985; Gold 1992).

Health problems are usually compounded by difficulty in accessing mainstream health provision, due to exiles' lack of information on means of access and lack of funds (Refugee Council 1997d: 41). This is often exacerbated by language barriers which, again, may further encourage the use of informal networks and community groups (Carey-Wood et al 1995). Quoting a survey of 360 Somali respondents in the Tower Hamlets area, the Refugee Council (1994a) contends that the extreme difficulties in getting NHS treatment for the victims of war were exacerbated by the scarcity of interpreters. This organisation notes that, even though there were unemployed doctors in the Somali refugee community, the borough had hired none of them (Refugee Council 1994a: 2). In order to overcome the language barrier, refugees may have to rely on their children to serve as translators,

although it may be very difficult for them to discuss their medical problems through their children (Forbes Martin 1995: 89).

Carey-Wood et al (1995) and Joly (1996) conclude that there are not sufficiently specialised staff and facilities to deal efficiently with the health problems of refugees, and this is an area where long-term attention is needed. However, care must be taken to develop a service adapted to the specificity of the refugee situation and the cultural characteristics of each group (Gold 1992; Joly 1996). GPs need to be more aware of the needs of refugees and to pay more attention to their treatment (Carey-Wood et al 1995: 109), and the staff involved in health-care need to have specialised training and awareness to deal with refugees and different cultures (Joly 1996: 113). It has also been suggested that targeted outreach work and increased information and education are most needed (Refugee Council 1997d: 41).

Psychological problems usually need urgent action but, unfortunately, the few specialist refugee organisations in London providing counselling and psychotherapy are overwhelmed and cannot cope with the increasing demand. Field (1985) proposes two lines of approach to the alleviation of mental health problems in refugee groups. First, the customs and institutions of the new country can be explained to refugees, a new language can be taught, and people working with refugees can be trained so that they do not ride roughshod over the customs of the refugee group. Second, the development of communities among refugee groups can be encouraged and facilitated, so that the refugee community partially recreates

the way of life in the country of origin. In principle, such measures may make the new world less threatening and more manageable, while preserving part of the old world (Field 1985: 49).

Both the Colombians and the Somalis interviewed in the present study complained that their GPs and other health professionals did not understand their situation as refugees nor their health problems. This often translated into what they perceived as lack of attention from their doctors:

> *My doctor doesn't understand my problems and therefore he doesn't pay the attention he should to my health problems. He says that I'm fine and the only thing he prescribes me is "paracetamol".*
>
> (Khadar)

Furthermore, some community workers and agency personnel suggested that the GP service in some of the deprived areas in which many refugees live is in general rather poor. In the case of refugees, this is compounded by the obvious difficulties of language, culture and, in some cases, racism. Although all the Colombian and the Somali respondents were registered with a GP, most had experienced problems with their doctors and other health professionals. Such problems ranged from communication and language difficulties to the doctors' lack of awareness of the refugee's culture and background.

Communication and language problems were by far the most common among both the Colombians and the Somalis. This had detrimental implications for the well-being of the respondents, for even if they needed to see their GP the language barrier acted as a deterrent.

The findings indicate that health facilities do not have adequate translation and interpretation capacity, and sometimes GPs are reluctant to accept refugees who cannot speak English. According to one agency worker:

> It's difficult to find a doctor who is prepared to take refugees, particularly if they don't speak English. This means that it's quite usual for refugees to go directly to the emergency service when they've got a health problem, because they haven't got a doctor — it's like they skip the whole system.
>
> (Vicky, refugee agency worker)

Some respondents had to be accompanied by friends or interpreters to overcome the language barrier and be able to communicate with their doctors. Yet, the use of translators was not always welcomed, particularly by the Colombians, for they felt very uncomfortable discussing certain health issues in the presence of an interpreter:

> My husband's got a "man's problem" and, obviously, he feels very uncomfortable talking about these things in the presence of a third person.
>
> (Vivian)

As a result, some Colombians had resorted to an Italian doctor who could speak Spanish, whom they had been referred to by fellow Colombian refugees. This doctor was actually very popular among the Colombian refugee community, the reason for such popularity being undoubtedly the fact that he could speak their own language.

Having a doctor of the opposite sex to the patient's was a further problem for the Somalis, many (particularly the women) preferring a

doctor of the same sex. Matching patient's and doctor's gender becomes all the more important when exiles come from a society based on sex division and where gender roles are clearly defined, as is the case in Somalia.

6.4   Accommodation and Housing

Finding and securing accommodation in the country of reception is a foremost priority for refugees (Carey-Wood et al 1995; Joly 1996). But, as mentioned in Chapter Five, housing opportunities have been severely curtailed by the 1996 Act. With the withdrawal of benefits, adequate accommodation has become unaffordable for many asylum seekers, who can only afford rents in derelict or unwanted areas. Thus, even when accommodation is found, it may not be suitable for the needs of the refugee and very often entire families have to live in one-bedroom flats or even bedsits. Many deficiencies were reported by the respondents in Carey-Wood's study, half of the sample saying that they would like to move to better accommodation (1995: 66). Homelessness was also a very common experience among their respondents, over a quarter having been homeless at some point since their arrival. Similar findings have been reported on the Somali refugee population. Quoting a survey of 360 respondents conducted by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets among Somali refugees in the area, the Refugee Council (1994a) notes that 88 percent of the sample lived three to a bedroom in flats which were often damp and vermin infested (1994a: 2). Although no source is quoted, this refugee agency refers to estimates that put the level of homelessness within the Somali refugee community as high as 20 percent (Refugee Council 1994a: 1). It should be noted however that,

since these studies were conducted before the 1996 Act, their findings are likely to underestimate the current situation.

On arrival, many refugees in Carey-Wood's study relied on relatives and members of their own community groups to 'put them up'. This often led to overcrowding and put pressure on the existing households, increasing levels of psychological stress in the refugee population generally (1995: 102). They conclude that the difficulties encountered by refugees in finding and securing accommodation are not particularly different from those encountered by anyone in Britain who is socio-economically disadvantaged (Carey-Wood et al 1995: 102). Yet, such a statement must be treated with caution for Carey-Wood's study was conducted prior to the enforcement of the 1996 Act. Although these authors concede that exiles' difficulties in finding accommodation are exacerbated by the lack of any history of residency in the country (Carey-Wood et al 1995: 102), other factors are also likely to compound their problems in this area. According to Duke et al (1999), language barriers make it difficult for most exiles to negotiate with housing authorities; refugees fleeing from state repression often find state officials, including housing officers, intimidating, a perception given added weight since current legislation requires housing officers to report to the Home Office on the immigration status of housing applicants; delays in processing benefit applications can lead to rent arrears and conflict with housing authorities; and the restriction of asylum seekers to temporary accommodation makes it more difficult for families to settle (Duke et al 1999).

Difficulties in securing suitable accommodation tend to have a detrimental effect on other aspects of refugees' lives such as securing employment, learning English, enrolling for educational and training courses, and settling into their new lives (Carey-Wood et al 1995; Duke et al 1999). Although current legislation has made local authority social services departments responsible for the provision of housing for refugees and asylum seekers, local authorities receive little state support for refugee settlement. Due to the shortage of housing, exiles have increasingly been accommodated in bed-&-breakfast hostels. The inadequacy and temporary nature of this type of accommodation results in additional problems, such as social isolation in terms of language and contact with members of their own national group, difficulty in adjusting to life in a strange society and lack of security over their accommodation (D'Souza and Crisp 1985: 12). In early 1997, in an attempt to reduce costs, some London local authorities such as Westminster, Newham and Hackney, were considering schemes to send asylum seekers to Liverpool, Eastbourne and Hastings, respectively (Refugee Council 1997e: 1). Proposals included in the new Bill involve spreading asylum seekers more evenly across the country to relieve the burden on some local authorities (particularly in London).

Dispersal policies have been used in the past, for example with Chilean and Vietnamese refugees (Jones 1982; Joly 1996). In his study of the reception and resettlement of Vietnamese refugees in the UK, Jones (1982) lists the most common arguments given in support of such policies. These were, in order of importance, the

need to avoid 'ghettoes' (i.e., too many refugees in one place), the belief that dispersal avoided the statutory resources being overstretched, and the assumption that dispersal would ultimately provide better chances of good integration into the host community (Jones 1982: 40). However, commenting on the same resettlement programme, Joly notes that such a policy caused much isolation and loneliness among the Vietnamese, feelings which were compounded by high levels of unemployment (1996: 106). Opposition to such proposals has been voiced increasingly loudly over recent years, on the grounds that the dispersal of a refugee group may impede the delivery of special services to those refugees (Field 1985: 40; Duke et al 1999), may make it difficult for community organisations to remain in contact with members settled in isolated areas (Field 1985: 40; Refugee Council 1997e: 1; Duke et al 1999), may make it harder for refugees to find specialist legal representation or pursue their asylum applications (Refugee Council 1997e: 1), and the notion of 'burden sharing' may imply a negative view of asylum seekers, which does not recognise the contribution they can make to their new country (Duke et al 1999). Furthermore, evidence suggests that refugees themselves are unwilling to be widely dispersed and separated from their own communities (Refuge Council 1994a; Joly 1996).

Joly (1996) concludes that dispersal policy should be replaced by one of clustering refugees in substantial groups. Suggesting that the issue of accommodation has to be looked at within the broader context of settlement, she also argues that, when selecting or accepting accommodation for refugees, the situation of the locality

and the district have to be borne in mind, paying special attention to the employment situation and the state of repairs or dereliction (Joly 1996: 114).

In order to overcome the serious problem of housing, some refugee organisations in London are exploring new options, such as 'hosting' arrangements in co-ordination with local authorities, whereby people are paid a weekly amount to take a refugee into their home. The money covers rent and living expenses and the arrangement can run for two or three months (Refugee Council 1997b: 1). Strictly speaking, though, the concept of 'hosting' accommodation is not new and was already put in practice during the Chilean refugee programme, where refugees were sent to live with British families who offered to have them for a time (Joly 1996: 97). Earlier research has shown the clear beneficial effects of placing refugees in private accommodation (e.g., Bülbring and Nagy 1955), for this acts as a catalyst for the integration of refugees into the host society.

Finding and securing accommodation was a top priority for the exiles interviewed in the present study. The importance of securing a roof over one's head was stressed by some agency and community workers, who explained that the success of the entire settlement effort depends on having an adequate place to live:

> *[Housing] is a fundamental problem. In order to settle, refugees need somewhere to stay, somewhere they can say this is "where I am". Unless one can define oneself in these terms, one cannot settle. You need to be able to identify yourself with a place, a physical location.*
>
> (Saadia, refugee agency counsellor)

Although neither the Colombians nor the Somalis had experienced homelessness in Britain, only three respondents — one Colombian and two Somalis — had stayed in the same accommodation since their arrival. All three already had relatives in the UK and moved in with them when they arrived. In contrast, all others had moved several times with an average of nearly twice for both the Colombians and the Somalis. In some cases these moves did not result in an improvement in accommodation but increased the respondents' feeling of unsettledness and uncertainty. Community workers argued that this situation is particularly unsettling for school-age children, as it often means that they have to move schools as well as homes, making for further disruption to their education and creating additional problems in developing stable relationships within the host community.

Dissatisfaction with their current accommodation was common among the Colombians and the Somalis alike. Problems of damp, dirt and unhealthy living conditions were reported by respondents from both groups. Some Somalis also complained about the unsuitability of their accommodation for the size of their families. A few respondents from both groups had also experienced racial harassment and even attacks in the areas of East London where they had been

housed. It goes without saying that the psychological consequences of living in such conditions can be very traumatic:

> *Sometimes you see accommodation that only rats could live there. Leaks, damp, dirt — that's not suitable for refugees [...]. Refugees went through very stressful situations in their home country and during their flight, and need a proper place to live. Sometimes they accommodate up to six people in one room. But refugees are not animals, they can't be put on top of one another in an unhealthy place.*
>
> (Luisa)

Most of the Colombians and the Somalis had been housed in bed-&-breakfast hostels at some point since their arrival, and most of the housing problems reported referred to this type of accommodation; these ranged from inadequacy and lack of hygiene of the accommodation to misbehaviour of fellow hostel residents.

One of the refugee community organisations contacted for the study was taking part in a hosting scheme, whereby 'hosts' were given up to £82 per week for each asylum seeker under their care plus free liability and contents insurance, if this was not already in place.

6.5   New Proposals for Reception and Settlement Policies

Asylum policy and reception and settlement policies are closely related, for the latter are likely to influence the former. Refugees are usually regarded as a 'problem', that is as being and creating problems, or as a 'minority' in need of protection (e.g., D'Souza and Crisp 1985). However, if appropriate measures are implemented to enable refugees to realise their own potential and make a positive contribution to the society of reception, they will be less likely

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to be perceived as a social burden by the host society and hence such measures will bring about a more favourable attitude towards refugees (Joly 1996: 190-191). Consequently, the best reception and settlement policy will be that which enables refugees to realise their own potential and to become independent and self-sufficient people (D'Souza and Crisp 1985: 5). Harris (1995) argues that, since the number of asylum applicants clearly exceeds the government's capacity to deal with their cases, people are forced to wait for long periods and at high cost. If asylum seekers were allowed to work whilst waiting for a decision on their application, the burden on the public purse would be relieved, the supposed resentment of the receiving society would be eased, and refugees would avoid the demoralisation of long periods of inactivity (Harris 1995: 225).

Following a similar line of argument, Spencer (1994b) contends that current British immigration policy fails to recognise the positive economic potential of refugees or to assist them to reach that potential. She argues that it is in the interests of the UK as well as of refugees that they are as productive and as little reliant on public resources as possible. Hence, priority should be given to programmes to help refugees settle successfully and make their full contribution to society (Spencer 1994b: 331). Assistance should include both English language skills and employment-related training, and regulations on family reunion should be more flexible, for it is of paramount importance to ensure that families' ability to be self-supporting is not hampered by the exclusion of an adult breadwinner (Spencer 1994b: 334). Joly (1996) notes that the settlement process of asylum seekers should start upon arrival and

not when they are granted refugee status or ELR. She contends that asylum seekers should be treated as potential refugees and should enjoy the same rights.

It has been argued that specific arrangements are needed for the settlement of refugees (Spencer 1994b; Harris 1995; Joly 1996; Refugee Council 1997g; Duke et al 1999). In a paper outlining a set of policy proposals, the Refugee Council contends that the absence of a systematic policy framework for the reception and settlement of refugees has hindered the development of integrated services, 'with the majority of asylum seekers and refugees having to "sink or swim" when arriving or settling in the UK' (Refugee Council 1997g: 1). Because of the lack of a solid reception and settlement policy, refugees experience high levels of unemployment, poor housing and health, limited access to social welfare services, social isolation and marginalisation. Further, as explained in Chapter Five, the introduction of legislative changes through the 1996 Act has made the life of refugees in the UK even harder. The Refugee Council's proposal for reception and settlement policy aims to (Refugee Council 1997g: 1-2):

- Enable asylum seekers to live in dignity while pursuing their asylum claims;

- Use the limited resources available in the most effective way. This calls for investment in the early stages of settlement to enable refugees to develop or adapt their skills, thus reducing the cost of any long-term dependency; and

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- Tackle social exclusion of refugees which not only is unfair, but also wasteful and threatening of community relations.

Similarly, Duke et al (1999) contend that in Britain an adequately funded central programme is urgently needed to support refugees through the initial phases of settlement, and to ensure that refugees are able to make as full a use as possible of their skills and experience. Reliance on voluntary labour, whatever its positive elements, cannot be a substitute for a permanent funded programme (Duke et al 1999).

Adopting a very pragmatic approach, Joly contends that the structural character of refugee movements needs to be recognised by the government and, hence, reception and settlement structures need to be put in place to cater for present and future refugee groups (Joly 1996: 190). According to Field (1985), given the long tradition of involvement of community organisations and refugee agencies in humanitarian and social work, and their vital work in refugee programmes implemented in the past, these reception and settlement structures should be managed by such organisations (1985: 12-14). Furthermore, most of the human resources — the expertise, experience and commitment — available for resettling refugees in Britain rest within non-government organisations; hence any resettlement effort has to make use of these resources (Field 1985: 52). Not only do non-government organisations provide substantial aid from their own resources, but they are also important advocates for the refugee cause (UNHCR 1994: 11). According to Joly, the main

advantage of using non-government organisations in reception and settlement programmes is the flexibility and adaptability of such organisations. However, she also argues that the great disadvantage is the low budgets on which they usually operate and, consequently, the impossibility of planning ahead (Joly 1996: 116).

Spencer (1994b) also suggests that a special unit should be set up within the Foreign Office to co-ordinate refugee policy between that Department and the Department of Trade, Ministry of Defence, Department for International Development and Home Office. If the reception and long-term needs of refugees (and immigrants in general) are to be met efficiently, co-ordination is also needed between the Home Office, the Department of the Environment, Social Security, Health, Education and Employment, and local government authorities (Spencer 1994b: 324). The Refugee Council (1997g) also proposes partnership arrangements between local authorities, other statutory service providers, refugee agencies and refugee community organisations to facilitate co-ordination, thus maximising resources and co-operation. This could take the form of multi-agency fora, which should also be responsible for co-ordinating and overseeing the implementation of action programmes designed to meet the needs of refugees and asylum seekers in a given locality (Refugee Council 1997g: 10).

Reception centres are an important element of permanent reception and settlement programmes. Based on the experience gained from the Chilean and Vietnamese refugee programmes, Joly contends that reception centres are of paramount importance in helping refugees

take stock of the situation, understand and regularise their position, receive systematic help in a number of areas (e.g., health, language, introduction to the receiving society and so on) and also in getting to know their fellow refugees (Joly 1996: 102). It is argued that the stay in a reception centre is one of the positive factors facilitating settlement and integration (Simon-Borouh et al 1992, quoted in Joly 1996: 102). In the refugee programmes studied by Joly (1996), reception centres were equipped to provide services such as medical care, basic language training, help with housing and accommodation, and advice on employment and training.

Also essential to the success of any reception and settlement programme is post-settlement work, and Joly argues that its absence may adversely affect refugees, especially in a context of unemployment and growing public hostility towards asylum seekers (Joly 1996: 14). She contends that post-settlement work must be systematised and should include language training, assistance in seeking and securing employment, and specialised medical care (Joly 1996: 111-112). She also argues that it is essential that long-term funding is available for both the agencies performing the tasks and the local authorities where refugees are settled; such funding must cover initial reception and post-settlement work (Joly 1996: 113).

Finally, the Refugee Council (1997g) contends that quality standards and minimum levels of service provision should be agreed upon and set; these should meet widely accepted criteria of welfare provision and take into consideration both the short- and long-term needs of

refugees and asylum seekers. Furthermore, a mechanism for monitoring such standards should also be put in place in accordance with national policy (Refugee Council 1997g: 4-6).

However, whatever policy initiatives the government decides to implement, these should take account of the views of refugees themselves. Policies and services cannot be developed in a vacuum but must be based on the needs and expectations of those for whom such policies and services are devised. Drawing on their own experiences and perceptions of existing services, refugees can provide policy makers with invaluable feed-back. Refugees can influence policies through their communities and associations (Joly 1996: 192) and, hence, the most constructive approach would be to encourage and welcome their participation in policy development (Refugee Council 1997g).

In sum, acknowledging the structural character of refugee movements, the need for a centrally-funded, permanent reception and settlement programme is a recurrent theme in the existing literature. The overall aim of such programme should be to enable refugees to find a place in the host society; hence, language courses and training to adapt qualifications and skills gained overseas to the British labour market should be key elements of any reception and settlement structure. For the programme to be successful, co-ordination among the relevant government departments would be needed, as would close co-operation between the refugee organisations managing the programme and local authorities. This last point is discussed below.

6.6 Co-Operation Between Local Authorities and Refugee Organisations

In the Vietnamese and Chilean programmes, refugees were looked after by refugee agencies and refugee community associations. Whilst this made such organisations appear as the only bodies responsible for those programmes, the involvement of local authorities is also crucial for the success of settlement programmes. However, in her comparative study Joly (1996) found that, on the whole, local authorities often remained unaware of refugees as residents in their locality or as a specific client group. Local authorities were ill-informed about refugees' specific characteristics and needs. Such a lack of information prevented the development of appropriate services, particularly as there exists a great diversity both among and within refugee groups which affects the process of adaptation and needs to be taken into account in the delivery of services: language, culture, socio-economic status, level of education, history and reasons for exile, and so on (Joly 1996: 122-123). The findings of Joly's research also suggest that local authorities lacked interpreting and translating services, regular contact with refugee communities, and had inadequate social services departments to deal efficiently with refugees.

These issues identified by Joly usually result in lack of awareness among the refugee population of the services provided by local authorities; and it is difficult to use a service one is not aware of, and even more difficult to make a complaint when one does not know what to expect. Hence, outreach work, translation services and welfare advice in the relevant language(s) of the refugee groups are

areas which local authorities need to pay attention to (Refugee Council 1990: 5).

Likewise, communication and co-operation between local authorities and refugee organisations is paramount if settlement is to be successful. In this regard, local authorities need to understand and value the role of refugee community organisations and refugee agencies and their contribution to the community, and should work in a way that strengthens this. Also, if the services provided by local authorities are to meet the needs of refugees, then refugee organisations must be involved in the design and delivery of such services, because they know what the needs are and how they can be best met. Without this involvement services are likely to be inadequate and inaccessible and, hence, local authorities will not be making the best use of the limited resources available (Refugee Council 1990: 10-11).

As a closing remark, however, it should be noted that local authority social services departments, which have had to bear the brunt of the 1996 Act, are operating in difficult circumstances and dealing with issues which are outside their usual areas of responsibility (Refugee Council 1997d: 41) and economic limits. It was estimated that by July 1997 local authorities were responsible for a total of 15,000 asylum seekers (Refugee Council 1997e: 1). By April 1998 London boroughs alone were supporting some 20,000 asylum seekers (Refugee Council 1998c: 5). Despite the increase in the number of people that local authorities are assisting, the compensation per asylum seeker per week received from central

government under the *1948 National Assistance Act* is often lower than their actual expenditure. For example, the government's weekly allowance per asylum seeker in July 1997 was £140; however, local authorities like Westminster in London were spending an estimated £175 per person per week (Refugee Council 1997e: 1). As London attracts between 85 and 95 percent of all the UK's refugees, the city is bearing a disproportionate load and a number of councils like Westminster, Hackney, Lambeth and Newham were facing costs of one-and-a-half million pounds each by the end of 1997 (*Evening Standard,* 28 October 1997).

Summary

As an extension of its exclusionary immigration and asylum policy, Britain has so far refused to set up a permanent reception and settlement programme for refugees. Instead, refugee resettlement has been tackled with a reactive, ad-hoc approach, which ignores both the structural character of refugee flows and the long-term needs of refugees in the country of exile. Whilst this policy relies heavily on voluntary refugee organisations, current legislation has also made local authorities responsible for the welfare of refugees. Although neither of these bodies have the necessary resources to deal efficiently with the needs of refugees, local authorities also lack the know-how. Health-care and accommodation are areas where problems are most critical, these being exacerbated by the withdrawal of benefits through the 1996 Act. Whilst it is generally acknowledged that specific arrangements are necessary for successful refugee settlement, the new Bill also fails to recognise this.

Taking responsibility away from local authorities, the new legislation will increase the burden on refugee organisations.

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CHAPTER SEVEN: FACTORS AFFECTING SETTLEMENT

The adequacy of a service cannot be evaluated without first acquiring a thorough understanding of the need(s) that service is intended to meet. Consequently, in order to assess the role of refugee organisations in the settlement process, a prior analysis of the factors affecting that process becomes necessary.

The traumas of living in danger and of the ensuing flight are shared by all refugees, and are often compounded by their experiences in the country of exile. However, each refugee group will have certain specific characteristics which will, to a greater or lesser extent, affect their settlement in the receiving country. Aware of such diversity, in his review of research literature on the resettlement of refugees Field notes that the settlement of a particular refugee group will be affected by the following set of characteristics (1985: 4):

1. Language skills

2. Transferability of skills and employment experience

3. Circumstances behind the flight of refugees

4. Skin colour

5. Culture and customs: extent of differences from the receiving society

6. A pre-existing community of the same ethnic group

7. Speed of the refugee flow

8. Total number of refugees to be resettled

He explains that, although this classification is not strictly applicable to refugee groups themselves, it is relative to the country of reception (Field 1985: 4). This suggests that the factors affecting settlement can be grouped into two broad categories: those intrinsic to refugees themselves and those resulting from the situation in the receiving country and its policies, particularly reception and settlement policies. The list shown above has been arranged according to this criterion: whilst factors 1 to 5 relate to the demographic, social and cultural characteristics of refugees themselves, items 6 to 8 also refer to the country of settlement.

The present research shows that lack of language skills, unemployment, physical and mental health problems, racism and discrimination, cultural differences from the receiving country, and inadequate accommodation have a detrimental effect on refugees' capacity to settle in the new country. It also suggests that these issues are not independent from one another but closely interrelated. Hence, when looking at the situation of refugees in the country of exile all the factors affecting their adaptation must be looked at in combination, for all are pieces of the same puzzle:

> *All these problems cannot be separated. Families and individual refugees are on very low or no income at all, they cannot find employment, they may have inadequate housing and they cannot communicate. On top of this, there may be internal conflict within the family.*

(Faduno, refugee community worker)

Policy issues relating to health-care facilities and accommodation (not included in Field's list) were discussed in Chapter Six whilst

item 6 of Field's list will be covered in Chapter Eight, where the existence of community groups and the role of refugee community organisations in the settlement process will be analysed in detail. Each of the remaining factors outlined above are discussed in this chapter. Since items 7 and 8 do not relate specifically to the two communities included in the research, they are discussed together and briefly in the last section.

7.1 *Language Skills*

Field argues that low standards of written or spoken English create difficulties for refugees in Britain (1985: 5). This has been confirmed by recent research, which shows that the acquisition of language is crucial for everyday life and satisfactory settlement (Carey-Wood et al 1995; Calvar 1996; Joly 1996; Bustos Cortes 1997).

Language skills enhance refugees' ability to realise the opportunities available to them (Carey-Wood et al 1995: 23; Duke 1996b: 467) and to interact with the host society (Calvar 1996: 22; Duke 1996b: 467). Conversely, social interaction with the host community plays a major role in the acquisition of language skills (Carey-Wood et al 1995: 24). Commenting on her experience with immigrant and refugee women, Edwards (1998) notes that in Britain language disadvantage and racism can combine to place those who do not speak English disproportionately in deprived sections of the population. They are likely to be disadvantaged in terms of educational achievement, income, employment, health and housing (Edwards 1998: 198). Consequently, inability to communicate

increases refugees' feelings of awkwardness and prevents them from integrating into the receiving society.

Evidence suggests that there exists a link between ability to speak English and employment: the better the language skills of a refugee, the more likely he/she is to gain employment at a level commensurate with his/her skills and previous experience (Brown 1984, quoted in Field 1985: 5; Carey-Wood et al 1995). I have argued elsewhere that the two major long-term problems faced by refugees are language and unemployment: it is difficult for refugees to get a suitable job until they acquire an acceptable level of English, but they lack the stimulus to learn English until in employment (Calvar 1996: 22).

Ability to learn English depends partly on whether refugees speak a language akin to it (Field 1985; Joly 1996) and on whether they are literate in their own language (Field 1985). Age is also important, younger people tending to learn the language of the host society more quickly which, in turn, facilitates settlement (Field 1985; Carey-Wood et al 1995). However, although this is true in most cases, the ability to learn a new language and settle in a foreign country depends more on the life stage of the individual and his/her educational and socio-economic background than on his/her biological age.

There also seems to be an association between language skills and sex, men tending to have better English skills (Carey-Wood et al 1995; Edwards 1998). Such sex differences are due to socio-cultural rather than to biological factors. First, they may reflect the

educational background of refugees (Carey-Wood et al 1995: 24). In many under-developed and developing countries (including refugee-producing countries) men are still more likely than women to gain access to education, particularly higher education. Second, they also result from the additional barriers women are likely to face in the acquisition of language skills. Family and domestic responsibilities, cultural restrictions on women attending classes or participating in other activities outside the home, and unavailability of adequate child care limit the opportunities for refugee women to learn English (Forbes Martin 1995; Edwards 1998). Furthermore, men may be threatened by their wives' desires to learn English and can react violently, fearing loss of control over their wives (Rockhill 1987, quoted in Edwards 1998: 198). These barriers also affect other forms of education (Forbes Martin 1995: 86) and, of course, employment. Isolation and disadvantage are the end result, refugee women becoming housebound and dependent on their husbands and children for interaction with the host society (Forbes Martin 1995: 87; Edwards 1998: 198).

A growing factor which influences exiles' capacity to learn English is the globalisation of mass communication. For instance, satellite television allows people living outside their home country to watch virtually all programmes broadcast on their local television which, although beneficial in preserving culture, may prevent them from learning the host country's language. Personnel from refugee organisations for example spoke of a Turkish community centre in East London, where refugees go and stay for hours watching Turkish television programmes.

Hall (1981, quoted in Joly 1996: 105) contends that acquisition of language skills is only one part of the broader task of learning a culture and its institutions. However, among political exiles language is sometimes more than just a cultural difference, and acquisition of the host country's language can be perceived as a betrayal of their political commitment back home. In her study of Chilean political refugees in the US, Eastmond describes how exiles perceived their host country as the *'imperialist giant'* and, using the words of a Cuban poet, referred to their new position as being *'in the belly of the Beast'* (1993: 37). Such attitudes are likely to hamper the acquisition of the local language and, ultimately, the settlement process.

Ability to communicate is all the more important when there is no established community of the same ethnic or national origin in the country of exile (Joly 1996: 103). A third of respondents in Carey-Wood's study who had used a translator or interpreter since arriving in Britain were helped by their community organisations and refugee agencies, particularly when dealing with official communications and agencies. The free and professional language services provided by refugee organisations proved essential for many respondents when dealing with the complexities of life in a strange language (Carey-Wood et al 1995: 25). Similarly, in their study of Somali refugee women in London, Sales and Gregory found that community organisations played an important role. Those with better language skills were able to use these to support other members of the community, whilst those with less English relied heavily on the

associations for help in interpreting, negotiating with officials and pursuing their claims with the Home Office (Sales and Gregory 1998: 19).

The present research supports the view that language is one of the main problems faced by refugees in the UK. The Colombians and half of the Somalis had very little or no English language skills upon arrival, since neither group had been exposed to any relevant degree to the language back home. Although most of the Colombians had studied English as part of their formal education, this had been through very basic courses taken several years before they came to the UK and their English skills when they arrived in Britain were almost non-existent. In the case of the Somalis, since the men were more likely than the women to have studied English in Somalia, they were also more likely to possess language skills upon arrival. Although in the colonial days English was the official language of instruction in Northern Somalia, in 1972 the government adopted the newly Latin-scripted Somali language as the official language. Following a literacy campaign during 1973 and 1974, Somali replaced English as the official language of instruction in 1975 (Lewisham Education and Community Services 1997: 4). Thus, Somali refugees arriving in the UK usually have very little or no English skills (Refugee Council 1994a: 2).

Most of the Colombians and the Somalis had however gained or improved their English language skills through courses taken since arriving in the UK. These courses had been provided by a range of institutions, from colleges of adult education to refugee hostels

where the respondents were staying. Among the Somalis, the women were more likely than the men to have taken English lessons in Britain. As suggested by previous research (Buijs 1993; Sales and Gregory 1998), such gender differences are likely to be the result of women's greater flexibility and willingness to adapt to their new environment.

Whilst most of the Colombians had either university education or professional qualifications, only a minority of the Somalis did so, with some having no schooling and being illiterate in their own language. As noted by Field (1985), this was an important determinant of their capacity to learn English:

> *I never went to school in Somalia, so I can't write or read in my own language. This makes everything even more difficult, for you have to start from the lowest level.*
>
> (Rahmo)

Illiteracy in their own language was sometimes combined with age, thus making learning English a daunting task:

> *I never went to school, so I never studied before. Also, now at my age [44] I find it very difficult to go to school and study a new language.*
>
> (Ardo)

For some of the Colombian and the Somali exiles acquisition of English skills was only one aspect of a broader issue, that is learning and understanding the culture of the host society:

> *People here have a different concept of life, and this starts with the language. We speak differently and understand life differently.*

(Victoria)

Further, for the Colombians language was more than just a cultural difference and, like Chilean exiles in the US (Eastmond 1993), some associated the English language with the *'US capitalist imperialism'*, against which they had fought so hard back in Colombia. In some cases this had translated into a refusal to accept the reality of exile and therefore the need to stay in the UK, which further hampered the acquisition of English language skills:

> *My problem with the [English] language was a problem of refusing to learn the language. One doesn't want to speak the language, because one wonders why one has to be here in the first place! But at the same time I tried to convince myself — "I'm living here so I have to study English. I must learn the language".*

(Luisa)

At the time of the interviews both the Colombian and the Somali men were more likely to have a good command of English than were the women, particularly older women. Most women in both groups explained that family responsibilities curtailed their access to English tuition. A Colombian single mother with two children expressed her frustration at not being able to continue her English lessons:

> *I wanted to study but I couldn't because I had two small children. I didn't have time to study and the courses were not designed for single parents.*

(Luisa)

Although among the Colombians English language skills did not seem to be related to age, there was an association between these two variables among the Somalis: most of the Somalis with good English skills at the time of the interviews were aged under 40, whilst all those with no English language skills were over 40, some being over 50. In the words of a Somali man:

> *[Being unable to speak English] made my life very difficult in the beginning. But I'm young and hence resourceful, so I've managed to survive.*
>
> (Faisal)

In contrast, the oldest Somali respondent explained that:

> *When one gets old, learning a new language is a problem.*
>
> (Amina)

Lack of English skills was a major factor in the failure of both the Colombians and the Somalis, some of them highly qualified in terms of education and previous job status, to find suitable employment. This sometimes also made life as a family more difficult. For example, some respondents from both groups commented that their inability to speak and read English prevented them from helping their children with their homework:

> *I can't help my 8-year-old daughter. I can help her a bit with maths but that's it. As a result, the poor thing has to do everything alone. She is studying and learning by herself.*
>
> (Rosa)

Most respondents had been helped by their community associations and refugee agencies to overcome the language barrier. Such organisations had provided translators and interpreters, primarily to deal with British officials and agencies. Because of their lack of English, some Colombians and Somalis had become totally dependent on others and on refugee organisations to deal with the receiving society:

> *When asylum seekers arrive in the UK they become blind, deaf and dumb. They cannot communicate and therefore don't know what to do. Language is a major problem. If one cannot communicate, one can do absolutely nothing. Therefore, refugees become totally dependent on refugee agencies and community organisations, and this usually results in a huge workload for such organisations.*

> (Ricardo, refugee community worker)

7.2   *Transferability of Skills and Employment Experience*

Field contends that transferability of previous skills and employment experience is of obvious importance for successful settlement (1985: 5). Whilst he argues that such transferability does not necessarily go hand in hand with similarity of culture (1985: 5), Stein (1979, quoted in Duke 1996b: 469) contends that there can be difficulties in the 'international mobility' of refugees' previous skills and experience because these may be specific to particular regions or cultures and may therefore not be easily transferred to the new labour market.

Language, education and social class are all related to transferability of professional skills and experience, and Field (1985) concedes that such transferability depends enormously on the

type of occupation the refugee used to have in the country of origin. At the lower end of the occupational spectrum many manual jobs performed in third world countries will not exist in the industrialised world. However, many of the less skilled manual jobs can be learned rapidly — in a few weeks or months. Most white-collar professional and managerial jobs depend heavily on linguistic ability, so that even where an employment skill is itself transferable, it will depend on acquired fluency in the language of the country of settlement, which will usually take a few years. Some in the higher occupational strata, like lawyers and civil servants, whose jobs relate closely to the socio-institutional context of the country of origin, will find many of their skills irrelevant in the new country. Other higher occupational skills, particularly those which are scientifically based such as medicine or engineering, will be readily transferable once the language of the receiving country is learned, although problems may arise in obtaining recognition for professional qualifications gained in the country of origin (Field 1985: 5). Often refugees cannot practise their profession in Britain because their overseas qualifications are not recognised. Likewise, some professional bodies have restrictive practices in terms of membership. This may be compounded by refugees' inability to provide proof of their qualifications, for certificates and diplomas may have been left behind or destroyed (Carey-Wood et al 1995: 34).

Hence, transferability of previous skills and employment experience is not the only problem faced by refugees in the labour market. In addition to language problems, their attempts to gain employment are also frequently frustrated by a variety of other reasons, including,

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discrimination, no one to give them references, lack of understanding on the part of employers regarding the refugee's immigration status and employment rights, regulations requiring citizenship or permanent residency for certain jobs, lack of information about the job market, and the cultural differences in applying for jobs (Refugee Action 1988; Marshall 1989; Carey-Wood et al 1995; Duke 1996b; Duke et al 1999).

Refugee women face additional barriers to seeking and obtaining employment. While cultural constrains on women participating in activities outside the home may be formidable in some nationality groups (Carey-Wood et al 1995: 34; Forbes Martin 1995: 87), the absence of adequate child-care facilities is a further obstacle for women seeking employment (Forbes Martin 1995: 87; Duke 1996b: 470; Refugee Council 1996b: 6). In addition, women may face the dual problem of racism and sexism in the labour market (Forbes Martin 1995: 83; Sales and Gregory 1998: 19). Needless to say, all these barriers also affect training, education and participation in general of refugee women in the receiving country.

The combination of all these factors usually results in unemployment. Extremely high rates of unemployment have been reported for the UK's refugee population as a whole (e.g., Carey-Wood et al 1995) and for specific refugee groups, such as the Vietnamese (Refugee Action 1988) and the Somalis (Refugee Council 1994a; Lewisham Education and Community Services 1997). Even if refugees are able to obtain employment, they are often under-employed, that is working in jobs below their qualification levels

and/or unrelated to their skills and past experience (Carey-Wood et al 1995: 32; Duke 1996b: 469). Although Carey-Wood's (1995) study shows evidence that such downward mobility can be rectified with time, the loss of status that a lower job implies is, like unemployment, likely to have damaging psychological effects on refugees (Fawzi El-Solh 1991; Calvar 1996; Sales and Gregory 1998).

Nevertheless, some evidence suggests that refugees are usually prepared to take any type of job (Gold 1992; Carey-Wood et al 1995), even when they are relatively well qualified (Field 1985: 29). It also suggests that women are more likely than men to apply for jobs of a lower status that are easier to obtain (Eastmond 1993; Sales and Gregory 1998), primarily women who are single parents and need to find some sort of job to finance their families (Carey-Wood et al 1995). This may be related to women's greater flexibility to adapt to changed status (Buijs 1993; Refugee Council 1996b; Sales and Gregory 1998). This however leads to under-employment which, as unemployment, is pervasive among refugee women (Refugee Council undated; Sales and Gregory 1996 and 1998).

Due to lack of opportunities available to them, refugees tend to rely on social networks within their established ethnic communities to search for employment (Refugee Action 1988; Carey-Wood et al 1995; Duke and Marshall 1995). This, however, poses the danger of refugees ending up in low-skilled and low-paid work as a result of relying exclusively on these informal networks (Duke 1996b). Although employment in this sector avoids discrimination and fosters intra-ethnic solidarity, it may also facilitate exploitation, and

workers may become as alienated economically as they would be if they were in the mainstream secondary labour market (Smith et al 1991, quoted in Duke 1996b: 471). Women are particularly likely to be involved in informal work, including 'homeworking' or small family-run businesses (Duke et al 1999). Newer refugee communities such as the Colombians and Somalis, however, lack the networks that can be used to gain information about jobs (Sales and Gregory 1996: 346), this resulting in extremely high unemployment rates (Duke et al 1999).

Refugee communities give refugees an opportunity to put their skills and experience into practice, sometimes compensating for the lack of paid employment. More than one-third of Carey-Wood's (1995) respondents had done some voluntary work for their community group since their arrival in the UK. Thus, many were using their own skills on behalf of community self-help, providing widespread cultural and welfare support essential to newer arrivals (Carey-Wood et al 1995: 33).

The present study provides additional evidence that non-transferability or recognition of previous skills and professional experience, combined with lack of language skills, makes it difficult for refugees to find suitable employment. A university graduate, Enrique was an education inspector in Colombia. Working for the Colombian Department of Education, he was responsible for the design, implementation and monitoring of school curricula. Because his job was both language dependent and specific to the Colombian socio-institutional context, Enrique found it very

difficult to gain similar employment in the UK. A refugee community
worker also gave the example of a male exile from Somalia who used
to be a director of a hospital unit in his country and was now
working in London as a security guard because his qualifications
were not recognised in Britain. According to one agency worker:

> *Even if [refugees and asylum-seekers] can speak English,*
> *they have to go through long and expensive processes to*
> *get their qualifications recognised.*
>
> (Vicky, refugee agency worker)

The findings also show that the effects of pre-flight experiences
and the asylum seeking process further curtailed the respondents'
capacity to find employment. This was often compounded by
unfamiliarity with British culture, the British labour market and
the job search methods and processes in the UK. Both the Colombian
and the Somali refugees experienced frustration in job hunting due
to these cultural differences:

> *Looking for a job in this country is a nightmare. You*
> *need to write letters, fill in application forms, get*
> *references ... Oh, I'm so fed up!*
>
> (Faisal)

The experience of unemployment was pervasive among the Colombians
and the Somalis. Only a few Colombians and just one Somali were in
paid employment, though in all cases this involved low-paid and low-
status jobs. This was despite the respondents being relatively well
qualified and having held professional occupations in their home
countries. The men, particularly in the Colombian group, were more

likely than the women to be unemployed and seeking work. Yet, the women were more likely to be caring for the home and family.

Both the Colombian and the Somali women claimed that female refugees faced additional barriers to employment as compared to men. These included family and domestic responsibilities, discrimination and cultural restrictions on women. Due to all these difficulties, the few women in employment — all Colombian — had very menial jobs (as cleaners), well below their skills and experience. In most cases, their employment was illegal.

Both the Colombian and the Somali refugees who were unemployed at the time of the interviews would have liked to work. This shows that refugees are not generally unemployed because they have unrealistic expectations or a resistance to certain types of jobs. The findings also indicate that both the Colombians and the Somalis who were in employment would have liked to have better jobs, more appropriate to their skills and qualifications:

> *When one decides to leave one's country and become an exile, one has to accept the consequences, and I accept my situation. However, I don't want to be a cleaner for the rest of my life. I know I can do better.*

> (Maria)

Such a degree of dissatisfaction was primarily due to the low-status of their jobs as compared to those they used to have in their home countries. The detrimental psychological effects of a low-grade job were evident among the respondents, whose self-confidence was seriously undermined by the menial nature of their present jobs as

compared with their previous professional occupation. A Colombian primary school teacher working part-time illegally as a cleaner explained that:

> [Low-grade employment] is very hard; it makes you feel like you are nothing, like you are dirt.
>
> (Rosa)

It was therefore not surprising to find that, for some Somali men, chewing and smoking 'qat'[16] had become a daily way out of the vicious circle of poverty and restricted opportunities. Further evidence of this is the mushrooming of 'tea rooms' in some parts of London, particularly in the East End.

Despite being mainly unemployed, the respondents in the present study were not unoccupied. Most of the Colombians and the Somalis, including those who were working, were undertaking activities in the UK other than paid employment. The majority were doing voluntary work for their local refugee community organisations. In addition to providing the respondents with an opportunity to socialise, this type of work was a substitute for the professional activity they were lacking:

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[16] 'Qat' is a mildly narcotic herb which can be smoked, chewed or drunk as a form of tea. In Somali society, 'qat' is almost exclusively used by men, although in some communities of London's East End women are beginning to adopt the habit (Griffiths 1997). The plant is common in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Yemen, and its import into Britain is legal. However, 'qat' is illegal in Ireland, the US, Canada, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland and the Middle East (excluding Yemen) (The Guardian, 2 October 1998).

> *In the beginning, it was frustrating not to be able to*
> *have the same type of professional occupation as I used*
> *to in Colombia. That's why I work with this organisation*
> *[where the interview was taking place] as a volunteer —*
> *it helps me fulfil my needs as a professional and as an*
> *individual.*

(Luisa)

7.3   *Circumstances Behind the Flight of Refugees*

Field (1985) notes that the circumstances surrounding the flight of refugees are an important determinant of their settlement patterns in the country of exile. He draws a distinction between 'acute' refugees, who flee in response to an actual situation of danger, and 'anticipatory' refugees, who flee in response to anticipated persecution (Field 1985: 6). Joly also distinguishes two broad categories of refugees based on their position in the society of origin: those who had a 'collective project' for society in their homeland and take it with them to the country of exile, and those who did not have such a collective project or have forsaken it (1996: 155-156).

The significance of these classifications for the present discussion concerns the effects that experiences prior to and during flight and the refugee's position in his/her country of origin will have on his/her capacity to settle in the new country. Field notes that acute refugees are more likely than anticipatory refugees to have personally experienced or witnessed violence, torture and rape (1985: 6). This will also make them more likely to suffer from the psychological trauma that such experiences usually cause. Quoting research conducted in the US to examine the mental health needs of refugees, Forbes Martin (1995) notes that single heads of household,

widows and single women are particularly at risk of psychological problems. Some refugee women have been raped, tortured and sexually abused and may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (Forbes Martin 1995: 85).

Women who have been sexually abused may be reluctant to talk about it because of the shame and possible rejection that might result should her family and others learn about the experience[17]. In suppressing the event, the women may be unable to fully deal with it, which can lead to intense emotional distress (Refugee Council 1996b: 6). In her anthropological work with Indian widows in Guatemala, Zur (1993) found that psychological symptoms were mostly expressed in a physical way in the form of headaches, stomach aches, back aches and general pains throughout the body. She explains that the pain women suffered in their bodies reflected the fact that they had become the repositories of painful experiences, which they had been unable to articulate because they had been silenced and also because of the impossibility of speaking about such atrocious experiences (Zur 1993: 30).

Applying Joly's (1996) classification, refugees with a collective project keep a close and intense relationship with their home country. Despite the traumatic rupture they have experienced, they are likely to perceive exile as a continuation of their societal project. Their main objective is to return home in order to

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[17] For example, in a recent press article on the abuses committed by Serb police in Kosovo, a young Kosovan man explained that *'Muslim women cannot say they have been raped [because] [t]hey cannot marry after that'* (*The Guardian,* 2 October 1998).

implement that project and exile is seen as temporary (Joly 1996: 156). And this is one of the main factors affecting settlement, for such a strong hope of return will hamper the refugee's capacity to put down roots in the country of reception (e.g., Murphy 1955a; Field 1985; Joly 1996; Bustos Cortes 1997). The settlement process does not begin until the refugee ceases to regard exile as temporary and begins to plan for a future based on his/her present environment (Murphy 1955a: 91). Although other migrant groups may also retain an attachment to home (e.g., the Irish), for 'project' refugees, forcibly removed and with a moral commitment to return, life is put on hold in exile. Over time, life may become permanently provisional, leaving the refugee in limbo if he/she is not able or willing to fully settle in the receiving country. Research among Chilean political refugees in California (Eastmond 1993) and Spain (Bustos Cortes 1997) has confirmed this argument.

Conversely, refugees with no collective project in their society of origin have turned their backs on their country and do not retain a commitment towards it, although they may be concerned with the fate of relatives and others from the same group left behind and may still have an attachment to their culture of origin and an interest in the developments back home. Return is unlikely to be an option and exile may be seen as definitive (Joly 1996: 158). This may mean a greater propensity to have a positive attitude towards the society of reception and perhaps a greater willingness to make a fresh start and to innovate (Joly 1996: 158).

Refugees with a societal project tend to display a high level of political and community organisation, which plays an instrumental role in reconstructing a community and keeping alive the project. They primarily mobilise over issues pertaining to the homeland (Joly 1996: 156). For refugees with no collective project, particularly for those who existed as a minority group prior to exile, networks and associations also play an important role in their adaptation to the receiving society. These associations, however, are likely to be involved mainly in cultural activities and in relating with the society of reception on issues connected with settlement (Joly 1996: 158-159). The implications of this will be discussed in Chapters Nine and Ten.

Regardless of whether refugees have a societal project or not, the fact that no definite plan for the future was involved in the move, combined with the regret of what was lost, may lead to a double marginalisation: both from the country of origin and from the country of reception (Eastmond 1993; Joly 1996). Whilst socio-economic opportunities and the existence of a similar group in the host society play an important role (Joly 1996: 158), time is also a crucial element for both types of refugees.

For refugees with a societal project, however, such a double marginalisation may be compounded by a negative perception of the country of exile. Eastmond (1993), for example, shows that Chilean exiles' perception of the US as their 'historical political enemy' exacerbated their situation of marginality. This suggests an association between refugees' motivation for exile, their perception

of the society of reception and their capacity to settle in the new country. If they find refuge in a nearby country with a government sympathetic to their project, they could rebuild an almost complete society of origin in exile with minimal integration into the society of reception (e.g., Palestinians in some Middle-Eastern countries). However, if the country of refuge lies far away from the country of origin and is based on a political structure that tolerates but does not strongly support the project of the refugees, the reconstruction of communities is less complete, the degree of continuity is curtailed and a greater measure of integration into the host society is enforced (Joly 1996: 157).

It should be noted, however, that the situation of exiles with and without a collective project back home may change over time as a result of a number of factors, as neither group is static (Joly 1996: 156). For example, political developments in the country of origin may motivate exiles who initially did not have any project for their home country to create one. Conversely, in the case of refugees with a collective project back home, time passing can undermine their relationship to the project if the relations of forces seem to point towards a lessened or even total lack of possibility to realise the project (Joly 1996: 157). In other cases, the socio-political situation that precipitated the project and ensuing flight may change in a direction that makes the project no longer relevant (e.g., Argentinean exiles).

The experiences prior to and during flight often compound the refugee's inability to develop relationships in the country of

exile. This is particularly relevant in the case of refugees with a societal project back home (Joly 1996), who frequently have experienced high levels of violence and persecution. Blackwell (1991) notes that the process of arrest, torture, release, flight and exile involves trauma at many levels. In so far that humans are social beings, this trauma can be understood not only as an assault on the individual person, but as an assault on the links and connections among people and the patterns of relationships through which people define themselves and give meaning to their lives (Blackwell 1991: 1). He argues that organised violence is aimed at severing the connections among people, controlling their ways of being together and relating to one another, and destroying the possibility of free dialogue and thought (1991: 3). Within networks and communities, relationships become permeated by suspicion and mistrust, so that they can no longer function as they did before (Blackwell 1991: 10). This effect of organised violence and persecution is what counsellors and psychologists working with refugees call 'suspiciousness' (Calvar 1995: 56). Common among political exiles, 'suspiciousness' is rooted in fear of betrayal, which can often be very strong towards compatriots who are not well known to the refugee. In fact, contact with fellow nationals is often avoided for fear of it leading to information being passed on to the national authorities, and to reprisals being taken against relatives and comrades left behind (Calvar 1995: 56; Duke et al 1999).

From her observation, Garcia (1994) notes that social relations among Colombians in the UK are very uneasy. Although she fails to

provide an explanation for this and suggests that it could be a subject for further research (1994: 75), her observation can be explained in terms of 'suspiciousness'. Among Colombian exiles, the suspicion of contacting fellow nationals is compounded by the various types of violence co-existing in their own country. In their study of violence in Colombia, Camacho Guizado and Guzmán Barney (1990) argue that, when fear extends to the entire population, social links break down and individuals tend to fragment their social relationships, distrust other individuals and hide their feelings and true interests; that is, individuals tend to 'look after themselves' and develop a non-solidarity mentality (1990: 215).

In addition to the immediate circumstances behind refugee flight, Field (1985) notes that broader historical considerations will also affect resettlement prospects. Many refugees flee from a persecution related to their ethnic minority status. Their experience as an ethnic minority over many years may grant their community the resilience to cope effectively with resettlement in another country, where again they will be an ethnic minority. A prominent example of this is the Jews, where persecution has engendered a preparedness to move on where necessary and the ability to make a success of their new home (Field 1985: 6). Along similar lines, Joly (1996) argues that for those refugees with no collective project who existed as a minority prior to exile, an advantage and a measure of continuity is awarded by their experience of a minority situation prior to exile (1996: 159).

In general, neither the Colombians nor the Somalis interviewed in the present study had much time to prepare their flight and, using Field's (1985) terminology, could be classified as 'acute' refugees. Only one of the Colombians, who had been taken out of the country by Amnesty International, had been informed well in advance of the plans to take her into exile. However, since she escaped from actual persecution, she was also an acute refugee.

Using Joly's (1996) classification, the Colombian respondents had a collective project for society in their home country. All but one had to flee Colombia either because of their own political activities or those of their partners or relatives. The exception, Pablo, had never been engaged in political activity but had been persecuted by a paramilitary group and it was for this reason that he (and his partner) had to leave. Unlike the Colombians, the Somali respondents did not seem to have any collective societal project back in Somalia, although they still maintained an attachment to their people and culture. None had had any political involvement in Somalia, but all had to leave due to the level of violence generated by the civil war.

All the Colombians who had been personally involved in political activity had been persecuted by the opposing political forces, the armed forces, the guerrillas or paramilitary groups. Some had also been in detention and/or tortured. By contrast, only one of those who had to leave Colombia because of their partners'/relatives' political activities had been persecuted personally. Over half of the Colombian respondents had had to go into hiding for some time

because of their own political activities or those of their partners/relatives. Unlike the Colombians, only one Somali, Rahmo, had been persecuted by opposing military forces because of her clan membership. None had ever been in detention, tortured or had to go into hiding.

The different backgrounds of the two exile groups had implications for their settlement in Britain. The Colombians' hope of being able to go back to Colombia and implement their social project made them perceive exile as temporary, whilst the Somalis were more likely to see themselves as permanently in Britain. Having been in the UK for over nine years, this Colombian woman explained that:

> *I've always wanted to go back home and this makes you feel very unsettled here, which means that you can't put down roots here or make long-term plans. I've been thinking of doing a Master in Criminology here but I've never got round to it because I've always thought that I would go back to Colombia "next month".*
>
> (Victoria)

Further, highly involved in community and political activities back home, the Colombians were more demanding of refugee organisations than the Somalis. The experiences of persecution, imprisonment and torture were also likely to have effects on the Colombian respondents that were not observed among the Somalis. Whilst all these issues will be discussed later, it is worth mentioning here the reluctance ('suspiciousness') sometimes expressed by the Colombians to contact their own community groups. A former member of a political group, one woman explained that:

> *One doesn't know whom one is talking to. I just don't want that one day somebody in Colombia gets to know where I am.*
>
> (Clara)

The circumstances of flight affected the respondents' health. The type of health problems experienced by the respondents were both physical and psychological, some reporting having some sort of disability sufficient to affect their daily lives. Whilst physical disorders ranged from regular headaches as a result of torture to back problems caused by injuries during the war, depression was by far the most common psychological dysfunction reported by Colombians and Somalis alike.

The women from both groups were more likely than the men to suffer from psychological problems. The majority of the women with psychological problems also experienced physical health problems and, as suggested by Zur (1993), the latter might be the physical manifestation of the former.

Psychological problems were particularly evident among the Colombian women who had to leave their country because of their partners' political activities. For example, Isabel, who was in the UK with her husband and daughter, had lost her eldest child just before her flight. At the age of seven, he had been kidnapped and killed by guerrillas in reprisal for her husband's trade-unionist activities. Tormented by these memories and unable to come to terms with their new situation, she blamed her husband. This seems to suggest a relationship between refugees' psychological trauma and their

ability to come to terms with exile. If the refugee has not been actively engaged in the fight but has been dragged into exile by others, then the individual is unlikely to fully understand his/her new reality and the emotional trauma is likely to be more intense. There appears to be a difference here between refugees with and without a societal project. Whilst the latter are likely to see exile as the result of overwhelming events outside their control, the former may see themselves or those closest to them as responsible for their flight, which means that blame may be put on themselves or others for the ensuing pain and misery.

7.4 *Skin Colour*

Field (1985) contends that, like other ethnic minorities who are not white, non-white refugees may experience racial discrimination in employment, housing and the provision of services. Such discrimination is likely to be attributable to skin colour rather than to mere foreign origin (Field 1985: 4-5). Yet, he seems to have a narrow view of racism, for his argument appears to be based only on a biological concept of 'race'. Although skin colour may increase the likelihood of racism and discrimination, white immigrant and refugee groups have also experienced racism and discrimination; for example, the Irish and the Jews and, more recently, refugees from the former Yugoslavia, Romanian gypsies (Romanies) and Kosovan asylum seekers.

In their compilation of sociological terms, Jary and Jary define 'discrimination' as *'the process by which members of a socially-defined group are treated unfairly because of their membership of*

that group' (1991: 166). Later they define 'racism' as *'a set of beliefs, ideologies and social processes that discriminate against others on the basis of their membership of a 'racial' group'* (1991: 517). It becomes evident from these definitions that the idea of 'race' is underlying both concepts.

The notion of 'race' originated nearly 400 years ago and began to be used in European and North American scientific writing in the late eighteenth century in order to name and explain certain phenotypical differences between human beings. Miles (1993) notes that this was the origin of the so-called 'scientific racism'. According to him, this ideology had two major implications; first, that the human species could be divided into a number of discrete biological types which determined the characteristics and behaviour of individuals, and which therefore explained the cultural variation of the human species. Second, that the 'races' of which the world's human population was composed could be ordered hierarchically, certain 'races' being regarded as biologically and culturally superior to others (Miles 1993: 59). Although discredited scientifically, this concept of 'race' remains important (Miles 1993: 47), exerting a powerful influence in everyday language and ideology (Jary and Jary 1991: 516).

It has also been argued that racism is an ideology with a historical origin in colonialism and the capitalist economic system (see, for example, Lloyd 1998). According to Miles (1993), although this position sometimes leads to the conclusion that racism is a 'white ideology' created exclusively to dominate 'blacks', the view of

racism as an ideology which developed alongside capitalism continues to have its advocates (1993: 7-8). Because capitalism inevitably generates social inequality, and so a structure of social relations that openly contradicts the principles of equality and universalism that legitimate capitalism, the ideology of racism was developed to explain the exploitation of man by man: the subordination of specific populations whose position of inequality results from the fact that their labour power is exploited by the payment of low wages (Miles 1993: 8). Sivanandan (1985, quoted in Miles 1993: 38) argues that racism is not a white problem, but a problem of an exploitative white power structure; power is not something white people are born into, but that they derive form their position in a complex 'race'/sex/class hierarchy (see also Modood 1994).

Expanding on this, Miles (1993) argues that the concepts of racialisation, racism and exclusion can be used in relation to post-Second World War migration from the 'periphery' to the 'centre' of the capitalist world economic system. This migration, determined by the process of capital accumulation, resulted in a large proportion of migrants being placed in vacant positions in the labour force. Where racism has been expressed and exclusionary practices occurred, migrants and their children have often (although not exclusively) been confined to certain economic positions within the working class, occupying semi- and unskilled manual jobs. More recently, with the crisis of capital accumulation and the restructuring of capital, racism and exclusionary practices have served to exclude a proportion of migrants and their children completely from the labour

market, locating or relocating them within the relative surplus population (Miles 1993: 51; Castles and Miller 1998).

This argument suggests a link between the ideas of 'race' and 'nation', in the sense that both are categories of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion. Both concepts identify socially constructed boundaries which separate the world's population into discrete groups which are commonly alleged to be naturally distinct. Concerning the idea of 'race', the object of signification is biological: commonly, it is a phenotypical feature (e.g., skin colour) but genetic and other less immediately visible biological phenomena (e.g., 'blood') are also signified. In the case of the idea of 'nation', the criterion is usually cultural in character (e.g., language, 'way of life'). In practice, it is often difficult to sustain this distinction because 'cultural' characteristics can be represented as 'natural' and therefore biological attributes. Hence, the ideas of 'race' and 'nation' can be overlapping categories, each functioning to define the parameters of the other (Miles 1993: 56-59).

Miles (1993) argues that the role of the state is crucial in the racialisation of migrant groups. The state polices its national borders, identifying the populations which constitute an acceptable presence and those which do not; that is, the state defines the characteristics that are considered essential to become a member of the imagined ('homogeneous') community that is called the 'nation' (Miles 1993: 135). Hence, racist stereotypes which associate migrant status with certain somatic characteristics will play an important

part in the selection of the individuals and groups whose credentials are checked in public places (Miles 1993; Morris 1997). Racist stereotypes can also be based on imagined non-somatic characteristics. For example, in her thesis on illegal Colombian migration to Britain, Garcia (1994) explains that Latin American immigrants in general and Colombians in particular are usually associated with drugs and drug trafficking. This results in more stringent immigration controls applied to them at the point of entry into the country (Garcia 1994: 47).

In their analysis of migration and racism within the capitalist context, Miles and Satzewich (1990) contend that state officials, along with the media and sections of the working class in Britain, constructed the imagined homogeneous community which constituted the English/British nation in terms of the idea of 'race'. Miles (1993) goes further to say that racism is a long-established core element of English (and British) nationalism which has been reinterpreted and reconstructed in order to make it appropriate and meaningful in the post-colonial world. The definition of England in this nationalism is, according to him, one in which to be English is to be against outsiders (Miles 1993: 71). He concludes that the idea of 'race' continues to articulate with the idea of 'nation' in order to define Englishness or Britishness (Miles 1993: 75). In this context, coloured people were defined as an 'alien race' whose presence constituted a threat to the 'British way of life' (Miles and Satzewich 1990: 350), though it is not only 'black' people who are the object of racism (Miles 1993: 149).

In her analysis of the implications of immigration policy for race relations, Spencer (1994a) argues that a government policy which discriminates against ethnic minorities at the point of entry into the UK, whilst seeking to remove discrimination against them internally, is inconsistent. The negative message of the first policy has damaged the positive impact of the second (Spencer 1994a: 319). Although Britain has been ahead of other European countries in recognising and dealing with racial inequality, Modood notes that racism remains a major barrier to social justice in the UK (1994: 17). He distinguishes between 'direct' and 'indirect' discrimination. Whilst direct discrimination depends upon stereotypes (which are always about specific groups or quasi-groups), indirect ('institutional') discrimination depends on policies and practices which disproportionately disadvantage one group compared to others. Groups whose language, religion, customs, family structures and so on are most different from the white majority norm will experience the most disadvantage and exclusion. Taken together, direct and indirect discrimination constitute 'cultural racism' (as opposed to colour racism), which is targeted at groups perceived to be assertively 'different' and not trying to 'fit in' (Modood 1994: 6). He concludes that, whilst colour racism is a constant, there are other kinds of racism at work in Britain (Modood 1994: 6).

Refugees as a group suffer from racial hatred, although Carey-Wood et al argue that the experiences of exiles in this respect are not dissimilar to those of ethnic minorities in general (1995: 105). Many respondents in their study claimed to have encountered

discrimination, verbal abuse, to have suffered threats and even attacks. The incidence of such experiences was particularly high among the Ugandans in their sample (1995: 105), though these authors do not propose any possible explanation for this. Whilst skin colour and different dress may have contributed to this, their sample also included other groups whose skin colour and dress code made them look different (e.g., Ethiopians and Somalis) and, yet, they did not seem to have experienced so much harassment. This confirms the points made so far in that racism goes beyond mere physical appearance and, hence, questions Field's (1985) theory. It also corroborates Modood's argument that racism is not unitary and therefore not all groups are discriminated against in the same way or to the same extent (1994: 6).

The rejecting attitude of some sections of the population is partly due to the misconception they have of refugees, who have been attacked by the media and by politicians. A direct consequence of such remarks is an increase in racism and xenophobia, including violent attacks on refugees. Right-wing parties have scapegoated immigrants and refugees, using them as a way of increasing support (e.g., the Conservative Party, most notoriously under Mrs. Thatcher's leadership). As a result, the situation in Britain today is such that the lives of refugees seeking asylum are at risk not merely from forcible repatriation but from more direct physical attacks. A horrific example of this took place in April 1994 in Oxford, when a Somali refugee died after a firebomb attack on the family home. Eleven other members of the family escaped but this man died four weeks after the attack due to the burns he sustained

(Calvar 1996: 24). More recently, in November 1998, a national magazine reported an attack on a Kurdish refugee family's house in Dover. When one of the girls inside ran to help her father, who was being burned with cigarette lighters by his assailants, she was kicked in the head, causing a serious fracture (*The Big Issue,* 9-15 November 1998).

Both the Colombians and the Somalis interviewed in the present study had experienced racism and discrimination at some point since their arrival in Britain, the incidence of such experiences being higher among the Somalis. Although the experiences of racism reported by the two refugee groups tended to have occurred in hostels or in the respondents' neighbourhoods, the Somalis also experienced racial harassment on public transport. Further, the attacks and harassment experienced by this group also tended to be more intense and serious than those reported by the Colombians, to the extent that some Somali respondents had to move to different neighbourhoods. Discrimination occurred in the job market, which further curtailed employment opportunities:

> *You fill in all these forms but you never get the job.*
> *If you are a foreigner you will never get a job. No*
> *matter what they say, I can't see "equal opportunities"*
> *anywhere.*

> (Manuel)

While respondents from both groups explained racial harassment and discrimination in terms of their 'foreigness', 'appearance' and exile status, 'appearance' seemed to be particularly relevant for the Somalis. In fact, the racial attacks and verbal abuse against

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some of the Somali respondents (e.g., on public transport) seemed to have been motivated by their skin colour and dress. This could be a possible explanation for the higher incidence of racist experiences among this group.

In the case of the Colombians, their perceived reputation as 'drug dealers' was a trigger for discrimination and racial hatred. Staff from community organisations and refugee agencies dealing with Colombian exiles argued that the reputation of Colombia as a drug producer is certainly affecting the Colombian community in the UK (refugees and non-refugees alike), so much so that it has become a stigma. Even the immigration authorities are suspicious of Colombian travellers and often regard them as high-risk visitors to the UK. Some respondents reported having been subjected to drug controls upon arrival at the airport, for they were thought to be carrying drugs in their bodies. One such respondent commented that:

> *We were treated as though we were criminals.*
>
> (Pedro)

The findings therefore suggest that the racial discrimination experienced by refugees is attributable not only to skin colour but also to their foreign origin, and that colour racism is just one element of cultural racism:

> *[Through our own research] we've found that one of the major issues among refugees is racial harassment. And that's not just a colour issue, because the Bosnians have had a lot of trouble in Essex for example.*
>
> (Vicky, refugee agency worker)

Some community organisation and agency staff argued that, due to lack of information, the general public tend to have a misconception of refugees as ragged and destitute individuals running away from famine and misery, and cannot relate to the kind of refugees who arrive in the UK, often from professional backgrounds. The media and politicians have played an important role in the construction of this misconception, as they have portrayed a very distorted image of refugees:

> The press has [...] been laying into asylum seekers for a good while. [The expression] "bogus asylum seekers" is something the Conservatives started and the papers picked up and now everybody says it — it's quite a standard phrase.

(Vicky, refugee agency worker)

7.5 Culture and Customs: Extent of Differences from the Receiving Society

Field notes that many refugee groups have cultures and customs which are very different from those of the receiving society, and that such differences are likely to affect settlement (1985: 4-5). Jary and Jary suggest that 'culture' can be understood 'as constituting the 'way of life' of an entire society, and this will include codes of manners, dress, language, rituals, norms of behaviour and systems of belief' (1991: 138). They later define 'custom' as 'established patterns of behaviour within a community or society. As in everyday usage, the term refers to regularised social practices, or accepted rules of behaviour, which are informally regulated and which mark off one cultural group from another' (Jary and Jary 1991: 140). It

becomes evident from these definitions that culture and customs exist within a specific community or societal context. The relationship between community and culture and customs is reciprocal: a community is the milieu in which a culture and a set of customs exist and these, in turn, make that community unique (e.g., Blackwell 1991). Since communities are not static but change over time, so do customs and culture.

Exposure to a new social environment may cause 'culture shock' in the refugee, this being defined as the *'disruption of one's normal social perspectives (own society, subculture, membership groups) as a result of confrontation with an unfamiliar or alien culture'* (Jary and Jary 1991: 140). Although Field argues that the effects of culture shock have been much overstated (1985: 5), a number of psychologists and sociologists (e.g., Blackwell 1991; Melzak 1992; Carey-Wood et al 1995; Bustos Cortes 1997) believe otherwise.

Blackwell argues that, in exile, the established patterns of social interaction on which the system of meaning and values is based are shattered and the individual faces a crisis of discontinuity. In an alien environment, the refugee may attempt to re-establish relationships with others through which rules for relating, communicating and giving meaning to life can be reconstructed (Blackwell 1991: 6). Yet, he concedes that the exile will face great difficulties in trying to establish these relationships, for in the host community the ways of relating and systems of meaning may be so different that it can be hard to find enough common understanding to begin to establish friendship or membership (Blackwell 1991: 12).

Although he suggests that difficulty will be experienced even if such relationships are established with members of the exiled community, the task will certainly be eased in this case by the sharing of a common language and culture.

Influenced by Blackwell (1991), Melzak[18] contends that cultural change can be traumatic, especially when there are only weak transitional objects to hold on to and the country of exile is one in which the refugee has lost whatever he/she needs for the maintenance of his/her self-esteem (1992: 212). She explains that refugees cope in various ways with the transition from one culture to another. Some cope by denying their history, disassociating themselves from their community and making every effort to become part of the country of exile. Others cope by keeping contact with their own community and attempting to deny their changed environment. Yet, others may find a balance between the two positions (Melzak 1992: 212). As discussed in an earlier section in this chapter, the option the refugee will take will be dictated by the reasons behind his/her flight (Joly 1996).

In earlier work on refugees and asylum seekers in the UK I note that, for the refugee, exile is like participating in a game where the rules are unclear (Calvar 1995: 74). I also comment that many refugees find it difficult to accept the British way of relating to people, the fact that they cannot just drop in on their English friends unannounced as they could in their home countries. Many

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[18] Both worked together as psychotherapists at the Medical Foundation.

African and Latin American refugees I came in contact with found it amazing that they could not immediately get to know all their neighbours and that people did not greet or talk to each other on trains, buses or in public places (Calvar 1995: 75). Problems arising from different foods, an unfamiliar climate, greater emphases on time and formality, poor living conditions, lack of community and so on were very real for the respondents in Carey-Wood's study (Carey-Wood et al 1995: 104). Similarly, Bustos Cortes comments that Chilean migrants and refugees in Spain experienced a clash between Spanish culture and their own because their patterns of behaviour and system of values were no longer valid in the new social context (1997: 206). Most respondents in his study explained that living in Spain was like being 'between two cultures' because of cultural differences between Chilean and Spanish societies. He argues that cultural clash takes place at all levels of social interaction, i.e., in daily life, at work, at school, in the use of language (Bustos Cortes 1997: 208).

Language is obviously a crucial component of culture shock and, for many refugees, exile takes place within the context of having to learn an entirely new language. Blackwell notes that, consequently, relationships with members of the host community offer little possibility of a sense of continuity and far more potential for discontinuity between the past and the present (1991: 13). Like Melzak (1992), I argue elsewhere that problems in the acquisition of the language, though considerable, seem to be overcome surprisingly quickly, but the acquisition of an understanding of the differences between cultures takes much longer (Melzak 1992: 213; Calvar 1995:

75). Although Garcia suggests that the process of adaptation to a new culture makes learning a new language even more difficult (1994: 58), I have suggested earlier in this chapter that rather the opposite occurs. Not only does language make it easier to learn about the new country, its culture and institutions but also to develop new relationships within the receiving community.

Isolation is an immediate effect of culture shock (e.g., Garcia 1994; Carey-Wood et al 1995), though this is often compounded by the refugee's sense of loss (e.g., Field 1985; Melzak 1992; Joly 1996) and guilt about those left behind. After the initial euphoria of having been allowed to enter and stay in the UK, or after being released from detention, refugees tend to become depressed because they have lost the company of their comrades or fellow detainees and are now on their own. Very often, shyness and feelings of inadequacy prevent them from contacting their neighbours or even support group members (Calvar 1995: 67). In Carey-Wood's (1995) study just over half of respondents claimed to have British friends. Their research suggests that the most prominent influence on making British friends was whether or not they had had contact with the British job market — those in employment or full-time education were more likely to have British friends than those who were not working (1995: 88-89).

Cultural differences between the home and the host society may also result in domestic conflict (e.g., Gold 1992) or may aggravate dissension originated in the home country. The Refugee Support Centre (1996), a specialist refugee agency providing counselling and psychotherapy for refugees, argues that the source of domestic

violence is in most cases the major upheaval of moving to an alien culture. Although family values are important, life in Britain (and elsewhere in the Western world) is likely to be more individualistic than in the country of origin of many refugees, where the welfare of all comes before that of the individual. Within these communities, men and women have well-defined roles. Cultural and religious values regulate inter-personal relationships and define one's position within the family and the community (Refugee Support Centre 1996: 8).

The whole process of becoming a refugee entails a readjustment of traditional roles (Refugee Council 1996b; Refugee Support Centre 1996). The more removed the culture of the receiving country is from the refugee's own culture, the more dramatic such readjustment will be. Whilst most refugee women continue to be responsible for domestic activities and can therefore fulfil their traditional role, men usually find themselves unable to work and thus fail to provide an income and support for their families (Refugee Council 1996b: 5). Such inability on the part of the man to be what he used to be or what is culturally expected of him is often manifested in an impotent anger misdirected towards himself, his wife and children, which ultimately may result in domestic violence (Refugee Council 1996b: 5; Refugee Support Centre 1996: 8).

In exile, refugees generally hold on to their traditional values. Sales and Gregory note, for instance, that Somali men may seek comfort in religion, often becoming more observant (1998: 18). Not only do traditional values give life in exile a sense of purpose,

but also provide the basis for continuity between the past and the present. Yet, the degree of attachment to (or detachment from) traditional values varies between generations, and Melzak notes that many refugee families are terrified that, in a foreign culture, their fundamental values will not be respected but altogether diluted in the next generation (1992: 212). Field (1985) and Forbes Martin (1995) comment that younger members of the family are often able to adjust to the new society more rapidly than their parents and usually act as a bridge between their parents and the new culture, assuming a role that is unknown in many traditional societies. This may result in inter-generational conflict which, as recent research has shown (e.g., Bustos Cortes 1997; Griffiths 1997; Sales and Gregory 1998), is one of the domestic problems exiled families are likely to face.

Role reversals within couples may occur as a result of women entering the labour market for the first time in their lives (e.g., Buijs 1993; Forbes Martin 1995; Duke 1996b), and changes in such roles may also be seen as a violation of traditional norms (e.g., Griffiths 1997; Sales and Gregory 1998). For example, Somali society is based on a sharp division of gender roles (e.g., Lewis 1993). Although Griffiths suggests that there is no clear-cut division between men's and women's perspectives among Somali exiles, for many of the men he interviewed had critical attitudes to traditional gender relations (1997: 19), Sales and Gregory suggest that divorce is high among Somali women in Britain, as they find more independence and feel they do not need to rely on their husbands (1998: 18). Some women in their study had found independence and

confidence in exile, and had been able to renegotiate relationships from a more powerful position (Sales and Gregory 1998: 16)[19].

Both the Colombians and the Somalis interviewed in the present study had experienced a clash between British culture and their own. Although in both groups this feeling was compounded by memories of what had been left behind and longing to return to their home countries, such a sense of loss was more pronounced among the Colombians, largely due to the societal project they had left unfinished.

The feeling of exclusion from British society was also common to both the Colombians and the Somalis. Whilst the latter in particular complained about the lack of opportunities to interact and mix with the British, respondents from both groups explained that their interaction with the host society was almost non-existent because of the cultural gap between their respective home societies and British society. These two quotations from a Colombian and a Somali respondent, respectively, express this:

> *It's everything, language, everything. You don't belong here; this is not your country.*

> (Paula)

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[19] Female circumcision (or 'female genital mutilation', FGM) is also likely to stir problems between the sexes within the exiled Somali community (e.g., Summerfield 1993; Sales and Gregory 1998). Whilst men are generally keen to maintain this tradition, many women with young daughters decide not to have them circumcised. A very complex issue, this was thought to be out of the scope of this thesis.

> *It's not that we don't want to mix with the locals; it's just that our customs are completely different to those of the locals and hence we just don't mix.*

(Abdulahi)

The clash between cultures, the sense of loss and the feeling of exclusion from British society resulted in most cases in isolation and depression. Such feelings were often compounded by lack of English language skills, lack of friends, unemployment and/or loss of professional status and, in the case of the Colombians, by their reluctance to contact fellow nationals. Feelings of isolation and depression were more evident among the older respondents. The two respondents of school age, Yusuf and Francisco, had the opportunity to learn English and familiarise themselves with British culture and institutions virtually full-time, thus increasing their capacity to socialise and overcome isolation. Although Yusuf, the youngest Somali respondent, felt very isolated in the beginning, his youth and good command of English made it easy for him to make new friends at college, where he was studying for his A-levels. Unlike older Somali respondents, most of Yusuf's friends were British. He was also the only Somali participant in (part-time) employment. Francisco, the youngest Colombian respondent, showed a similar pattern of integration into British society. After five years in the UK, he already felt settled in his new country:

> *My life is here now, I've got my friends and everything here. I would like to go back to Colombia on holidays, but not for good because I have nothing to do there any more. Life over there is very different from life here, and I'm used to living here now.*

(Francisco)

Both the Colombian and the Somali women explained that female refugees face additional problems in the UK in terms of isolation as compared to men, family responsibilities and social restrictions on women's activities outside the home being the most important. This was aggravated in the case of the Colombian women by their men's machistic attitudes. These issues were corroborated by staff from community organisations and refugee agencies, who argued that isolation is a problem particularly important among women, mainly if they have children. Because of their confinement to the house, women's opportunities for socialisation are drastically curtailed. Their isolation increases as time goes by and their self-confidence may be damaged. As a result of their isolation and loss of self-confidence, women tend to become frustrated and may even develop emotional problems:

> *Social isolation and psychological problems are commonplace [among refugees]. In this regard, men's and women's problems are completely different.*
>
> (Ricardo, refugee community worker)

Cultural differences between the home and the host society also resulted in domestic conflicts in both the Colombian and the Somali groups. Sometimes women became overdependent on their husbands or partners, making additional demands on them. Conversely, in other cases the experience of exile actually changed the gender roles in the couple, the women becoming more independent than they ever were in their home country because, for the first time, they had acquired independent income through benefits or employment.

Inter-generational conflict also occurred in both the Colombian and the Somali group. This was particularly evident among the Colombians, some complaining that their children had 'become very English'. Some agency and community workers noted that identity crises experienced by the younger generation are often a further source of inter-generational conflict. Adaptation is a long-term process and usually goes beyond the first generation. The individual is likely to experience crises during this process, to question his/her identity and to wonder where he/she actually belongs. Such identity crises may not only be experienced by the exiles themselves, but also by members of the second generation, very often resulting in inter-generational clashes:

> As the years go by and people stay here [in the UK], the children have problems because they don't feel like either one thing or the other. For example, a lot of young Chileans who were brought here by their parents when they were small children, they talk just like I do — they would appear to be totally British but they don't feel British. Yet, if they go to Chile, they are not accepted there either and they don't feel Chileans, which is probably worse [than not feeling British] actually. It is quite common for the children to have identity crises. Sometimes they lose their mother tongue because they refuse to speak it at home, which upsets their parents and so on.

(Vicky, refugee agency worker)

7.6 Speed of the Refugee Flow and Number of Refugees to be Resettled

Field (1985) contends that both the pace and the size of a refugee flow will, to a large extent, affect the settlement of refugees in the country of exile. Both factors will greatly depend on the type of situation refugees flee from. For example, whilst refugees

fleeing from an oppressive regime will usually leave in a steady trickle, those escaping from a civil war or natural disaster will leave faster and in larger groups. He notes that, whilst anticipatory refugees leave more and more rapidly as the feared event approaches, acute refugees may arrive in very large numbers over a very short period of time (Field 1985: 6-7). According to him, resettling a refugee group of any size that arrives over a short space of time will be more difficult than if the group arrived in stages. He gives three reasons in support of his argument. First, reception and settlement procedures would have to be put in place very quickly. Second, there would be no time to modify settlement policies in response to experience. And third, it would not be possible for earlier arrivals to help those who would come later (Field 1985: 7).

Regarding the size of the refugee influx, Field (1985) argues that large and small refugee groups present different settlement problems. According to him, for a large group the practical problems of resettlement will be proportionately larger and there will be more difficulty in finding employment, housing and other services, particularly if the group is concentrated in certain geographical areas. Conversely, a small group will require fewer resources to support their settlement but, especially if the group is spread around the country, it may be more difficult to provide specialist services to that group and they may lack the support of community networks which would emerge from larger concentrations of the refugee group (Field 1985: 7). Although this underlines the controversial dichotomy of dispersal versus concentration discussed

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in Chapter Six in relation to housing and accommodation, recent events seem to confirm in part Field's argument. Like other London boroughs, the borough of Brent has been struggling to accommodate the growing number of newly arrived refugees. A report prepared by Brent council in September 1998 proposed to set up tent camps in some public parks of London to house the increasing number of asylum seekers from Albania and Kosovo, whose arrival rate in the borough soared from 20 to 60 a day (*The Sunday Telegraph*, 20 September 1998) as a result of the escalating spiral of violence in their homeland.

Field concludes that, from the government's viewpoint, large groups may merit a specially designed settlement programme and funding arrangements, whilst smaller groups may escape this attention and may have to rely on assistance from refugee organisations (1985: 7). However, with the exception of temporary programmes for specific refugee groups such as the Vietnamese and the Chileans, the British government has always been reluctant to establish permanent programmes for refugees, preferring to see refugee influxes as temporary, sporadic phenomena.

Summary

A number of factors have been identified as affecting the settlement of refugees in the receiving country. Although these have been examined separately, the interrelation among such factors has become evident throughout the chapter. Whilst lack of adequate language skills makes it difficult for refugees to find employment and hampers settlement, without a job refugees may lack the stimulus to learn the language. The trauma of flight and exile, compounded by

cultural shock, often makes it even more difficult for them to get on with their lives and put down roots in the receiving country. Racism and discrimination complete the equation. All these issues are often exacerbated by, if not rooted in, the lack of adequate reception and settlement policies to help refugees 'find their feet' in the new country. Against such background, the role of refugee agencies and community organisations becomes of paramount importance.

Having suggested the importance of refugee organisations for successful settlement in previous chapters, the current chapter focuses on such organisations. Their nature and functions, as perceived by the existing literature, are examined here, looking first at community organisations and then at refugee agencies. Since refugee community associations cannot be studied in isolation but need to be located within the wider context of refugee communities, a prior overview of such communities and their formation becomes necessary. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the basic operational differences between the two types of organisations based on the interviews with staff respondents. Some of these issues will be discussed further in Chapters Nine and Ten in relation to my own findings.

8.1 Refugee Communities

8.1.1 Community Group Formation

The most common outcome of a migratory movement, whatever its initial character, is the settlement of a large proportion of migrants and the formation of community or ethnic groups in the new country. Yet, not all migrants form communities, at least in the sense of having a tangible form or a geographical location; for instance, one cannot speak meaningfully of an English community in Australia, nor an Austrian community in Germany. Whilst Gold (1992) argues that perhaps the most important basis for community formation and ethnic solidarity is to be found in the desire of refugees (or immigrants in general) to maintain cultural and social patterns

retained from the country of origin, Castles and Miller (1998) contend that communities are based not just on cultural differences but also on socio-economic differentiation (labour market segmentation and residential segregation) and discrimination (legal disadvantage and racist attitudes and behaviour). According to the latter view, community formation is not just concerned with cultural maintenance but is a strategy which emerges to cope with disadvantage, to improve life chances and to provide protection from racism and discrimination (Castles and Miller 1998). These are precisely the aims of refugee communities.

Socio-economic differentiation and discrimination provide therefore the grounds for community formation and the development of ethnic infrastructure and institutions. The most visible sign of this is the establishment of shops, cafes and organisations which cater for exiles' special needs, sometimes compensating for gaps in existing services. Social associations set up meeting places for their own groups; these often have significant cultural and political functions too. Cultural associations aim to preserve homeland languages, folklore and traditions, and often set up mother tongue or religious classes. Often their starting point is political and rooted in the country of origin, but with increasing length of stay their aims become more oriented to the situation in the country of settlement (Harris 1995; Castles and Miller 1998). This process of community formation is at the nexus of the migratory process, where transitory migrant groups metamorphose into community groups. Establishing community networks and institutions means an at least partially conscious decision to start 'placemaking' and building a

new identity. Community formation is thus linked to awareness of long-term or permanent stay in the country of destination (Castles and Miller 1998: 197-201).

Permanent settlement may however have significantly different outcomes, depending upon the actions of the state and population of the receiving country. At one extreme, openness to settlement, granting of refugee status or citizenship, and gradual acceptance of cultural diversity may allow the formation of ethnic 'communities', which can be seen as part of a multicultural society. At the other extreme, denial of the reality of settlement, denial of asylum (or the granting of alternative statuses such as ELR in the UK), refusal of citizenship and rights to settlers, and rejection of cultural diversity may lead to the formation of ethnic 'minorities', whose presence is regarded as undesirable. In the first case, immigrants and their dependents are seen as an integral part of a society which is willing to reshape its culture and identity. In the second, immigrants are excluded and marginalised, so that they live on the fringes of a society which is determined to preserve myths of a static and homogeneous identity (Castles and Miller 1998: 29). Whilst Castles and Miller's theory is universal in the sense that it can be applied to any migratory movement, it must be noted, first, that the distinction between ethnic communities and ethnic minorities may be blurred and, second, that their classification is not static, for groups that start as ethnic minorities may over time become ethnic communities (e.g., Italians in the US and Jews in Britain).

8.1.2 Factors Conditioning the Formation of Refugee Communities

Exiles' capacity to form communities is determined by a number of factors, the origins of which are to be found both in the receiving country and its reception and settlement policies, and in the refugee groups themselves and their specific characteristics.

Reception and settlement policies may sometimes curtail refugees' capacity to form communities. D'Souza and Crisp (1985) and Joly (1996) argue that the dispersal approach employed in the past (e.g., in the Chilean and Vietnamese programmes in Britain) hindered the establishment of supportive refugee communities, leaving many refugees isolated and bewildered. This problem however has gradually been resolved through a process of secondary migration into population centres such as London, Birmingham and Liverpool (D'Souza and Crisp 1985: 15).

Gold (1992) and Soysal (1994) argue that eligibility for legal residence and resettlement benefits also play an important role in reducing the need of refugee populations to form cohesive ethnic communities and organisations. Based on his research among refugees in California, Gold (1992) contends that if the state provides goods such as education, unemployment benefits, health-care and social security, then this diminishes the motive to form many kinds of groups. By giving refugees a prized political status and economic benefits, the state attenuates their motivation for participating in solidarity-fostering conflict with the dominant society. This deflection of anti-host hostility sometimes intensifies the already segmented character of these populations. As a consequence,

competition and conflict are more likely to be expressed within refugee populations than directed at outsiders in a manner that would foster group-wide solidarity (Gold 1992: 227-228).

Gold (1992) also contends that this barrier to community formation (i.e., eligibility to welfare benefits and resettlement assistance) is specific to today's refugees. While immigrants must enter the labour market upon arrival, refugees have the option of living on cash assistance for some time. Refugees can and do make use of language training, job training and other services that allow them to avoid ethnic labour markets that would foster co-ethnic dependence and further community formation (Gold 1992: 21). Furthermore, because refugees (unlike immigrants) know they cannot return home, they may be particularly determined to connect themselves to the host society (e.g., Gaertner 1955), which further hampers community formation.

Developing Gold's argument further, it could be argued that the opposite may also occur; that is, if the state does not provide such 'welfare goods', then the lack of basic elements for survival might foster community formation. Ellison points out that *'as welfare states withdraw social support in the face of increasing resource constraints, or simply fail to recognise the validity of new claims, so groups respond to the loss of services by constructing alternative forms of provision in an effort to maintain identities attached to particular communities or give life to new ones'* (1997: 712). Consequently, while cultural differences may have been a key element in the formation of refugee communities in the UK prior to

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the 1996 Act, the withdrawal of benefits has actually made socio-economic differentiation and discrimination far more important factors in the formation of such communities. In this context, however, refugee communities are more likely to develop into ethnic minorities within an exclusionary society than into ethnic communities.

Nevertheless, Gold's approach is questionable in the sense that it sees resettlement assistance as a barrier to community formation rather than as a catalyst to settlement and adaptation to the wider society. The aim of welfare benefits and resettlement assistance is to overcome, at least to some extent, refugees' socio-economic exclusion and not to eliminate their need to get together to celebrate their heritage and traditions.

Gold (1992) contends that the existence of a wide range of local agencies is another factor affecting the formation of refugee communities, for competing agencies enhance community segmentation. While refugee agencies and associations encourage solidarity by organising members of the refugee community, when viewed from a broader perspective, this solidarity appears largely local in impact. The underwriting of numerous, competitive agencies and associations often results in 'ethnic fiefdoms' that accentuate the already segmented refugee population (Gold 1992: 159-160). Hence, while the existence of refugee agencies and community organisations is likely to yield many positive effects for the refugee community, it may also discourage community-wide unification by empowering competing elements within the refugee population.

An additional factor determining the ability of refugees to form communities is their history in the country of origin, for such history sets the context of their adaptation to the receiving society (e.g., Field 1985; Gold 1992; Joly 1996). Refugees' past experiences as ethnic minorities, their religious or political training or lack of it, and their ability or inability to form associations are just some of the factors determining their capacity to form communities in the country of exile (Gold 1992). The reasons forcing refugees to flee from their country of origin and their relationship with it also have an important part to play in their resettlement, and in the quality and strength of the communities formed in exile (Joly 1996). Field (1985) also argues that the members of any particular refugee group will have diverse experiences in the country of settlement, which will further affect the formation of refugee communities. What refugees share are memories of their country of origin. The value they attach to their roots will therefore be reflected in the strength and shape of the refugee community, within which culture and customs are retained (Field 1985: 22). Consequently the experience of exile, both prior to and after departing from the country of origin, will determine refugees' ability to form communities.

Likewise, socio-cultural differences within refugee groups are a further determinant of community formation and solidarity, for ethnic, religious, class and other social differences can limit the formation of social bonds within any community (Field 1985; Duke 1996a). This is particularly evident within the Somali refugee

population, where clan consciousness increases co-operation at clan level but may hamper co-operation at community-wide level (Fawzi El-Solh 1991). Gold (1992) concludes that even those groups noted for their highly organised communities contain certain levels of diversity and conflict.

8.1.3 Benefits of Refugee Communities

Gold (1992) traced the history of the ways in which sociologists have viewed immigrant communities and found that their interpretations have radically transformed over time. Studies conducted in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s viewed the development of immigrant communities as a failure of assimilation policies and as isolating their members from mainstream society. In the 1960s and 1970s, the views of sociologists changed dramatically. Since then, immigrant communities have been generally regarded as beneficial to their members in terms of providing social support, economic and informational sources, cultural maintenance and protecting mental health (Gold 1992: 4-8). Recent scholarship supports this view of the refugee community and its role in facilitating settlement (Field 1985; Gold 1992; Buijs 1993; Soysal 1994; Carey-Wood et al 1995; Duke 1996a and 1996b; Joly 1996; Bustos Cortes 1997; Griffiths 1997).

Central to the experience of a refugee is the loss of a social world, and if that social world can be partly re-created in the shape of a strong refugee community in the country of exile, it can have considerable practical and psychological advantages for refugees (Field 1985; Bustos Cortes 1997). Similarly, Joly contends

that, in a situation where community networks have been broken and individuals have lost their power as social actors (both in the country of origin and in the country of exile), refugee communities and community associations play a central role in the reorganisation of refugees' social relations (1996: 163).

However, it is also possible to argue that if refugees are given the chance to immerse themselves in their own communities, this may hamper their adaptation to life in the receiving country and their integration into the wider society (Gold 1992; Buijs 1993; Carey-Wood et al 1995; Duke 1996b; Montgomery 1996; Sales et al 1996). Individuals may become overly dependent on their community groups, so that there is less pressure to adjust personally, to learn the language or to seek to understand the structure of local institutions. Apart from overdependence, there is also the danger that the sharing of problems and difficult experiences may generate a 'negative' culture which, unintentionally, may lead to pessimism and hopelessness and a sense of 'us and them'. Carey-Wood et al (1995) argue that such attitudes could seriously hinder the adjustment of individuals living in refugee communities. They explain that, while community groups are quite rightly a channel for voicing aggregate discontent and working for reform in favour of their members, they should also be concerned to maintain positive relations with outside groups and to encourage individual members, also, to relate positively to the outside world (Carey-Wood et al 1995: 106). Yet, other evidence tends not to support this view of a 'negative' culture and a sense of 'us and them', but that strong bonds within a refugee community seem to be quite compatible with

successful and harmonious relationships with the wider society (Field 1985; Reynolds and Finlay 1987; Soysal 1994; Joly 1996).

Although, as discussed above, a positive new approach to ethnic communities and their role has broadened sociological views of ethnic collectivism, there is the danger that problems and difficulties within these communities may be overlooked (Duke 1996a: 9). Gold cites several examples of studies that have revealed co-ethnic exploitation, labour paternalism, child and wife abuse, intra-group conflict, political intimidation, youth gangs and isolation of the elderly (1992: 8). It is also argued that ethnic communities have limitations and cannot deal with all the needs of all migrant groups (Duke 1996a: 9).

Nevertheless, the importance of community groups should not be underestimated. Research and practice have shown that refugees more than any other group need to be near their own in order to cope with their new situation (e.g., Refugee Council 1994a; Joly 1996). This appears to be what refugees themselves want, for even when a particular group of refugees is dispersed on settlement, they tend to re-migrate to form concentrated communities. This is particularly evident where a community of the same ethnic group as the arriving refugees already exists in the receiving country, as this will act as a focus around which the refugee community will form (Field 1985: 51); a clear example of this is the Somali community in London's East End.

Refugees have lost control over their lives more than any other migrant group and it is important to enable them to regain such control, and this can be achieved by, among other things, encouraging the formation of communities and promoting information on their organisations. Joly argues that, instead of reinforcing the 'powerless victim' syndrome among refugees, their involvement in the reception and settlement process should be encouraged, paying special attention to their views and promoting information on their community and associations (1996: 116). She contends that there is a place for positive action towards community formation and the creation of refugee associations in a strategy of settlement (Joly 1996: 114). This and other issues discussed in this section will be taken up in the concluding chapter, where I speculate about the likely implications of the new Bill.

8.2 Refugee Community Organisations

8.2.1 Overview

Community organisations are a by-product of community formation. Refugee community associations are set up because of the lack of appropriate services from the statutory sector or larger voluntary organisations (Refugee Council 1990: 10); Gold refers to this as 'reactive solidarity' (1992: 160). They are voluntary organisations managed by refugees themselves for those from the same background. They are therefore specific to nationality, religious or ethnic group, and may act on a local or national basis, or both (Carey-Wood et al 1995: 86). These organisations are independent, defining their own aims, priorities and activities, and are accountable to their members and the community (Refugee Council 1990: 10). They provide a

variety of services (e.g., Harris 1995), acting as brokers between the society of origin and that of reception (Carey-Wood et al 1995; Joly 1996). Several studies have pointed out the important role played by refugee community associations in the settlement process in terms of general help and assistance, as well as providing social, psychological and cultural support (Murphy 1955b; Field 1985; Gold 1992; Buijs 1993; Carey-Wood et al 1995; Joly 1996; Bustos Cortes 1997).

In Britain, some community organisations have established national networks to respond to needs in different parts of the country, whilst others have concentrated their activities in London but have contacts around the country. Whatever their main concern (e.g., social, political or religious), almost all will help new refugees 'find their feet' (Carey-Wood et al 1995: 86). Whilst Duke contends that one of the important roles of community organisations is to provide cultural and social activities directly linked to members' particular origins (1996b: 475), they are also involved in a wide range of practical activities, including seeking and securing accommodation; giving advice, help and information on asylum applications, health, social security, education, training and employment; providing translating and interpreting services; providing support and counselling; and running mother tongue classes. Apart from cultural activities and practical help, community organisations also constitute a source of advice and means of identifying resources in the wider society, providing a major link between individuals and formal service providers. Carey-Wood et al argue that this mediating role cannot be overstated, especially

given the language problems that most new arrivals have, which means that it is far easier for them to make contact with their community organisations, whose members speak their own language, than it is for them to contact formal agencies directly (1995: 106).

8.2.2 Functions of Refugee Community Organisations

Rex (1973, quoted in Joly 1996: 164) explains that the following are among the main functions of refugee community organisations:

- Defending the group's interests in conflict and bargaining with the wider society;

- Overcoming social isolation; and

- Helping individuals in the solution of personal and material problems.

With regard to the first point, refugee organisations are the direct voice of the community and usually act as advocates for individuals. Hence, they are the means for refugees to express their own views to the statutory sector, and often assist individuals to obtain the services they need and assert their rights through advice, information and support (Refugee Council 1990: 10). Duke, however, argues that refugee community groups in the UK have developed as complementary structures to fill the gaps in mainstream social, welfare and economic provision, rather than as lobby or pressure groups (1996a: 17).

Regarding the second objective, it is difficult to determine exactly the extent to which refugee associations help overcome social isolation. Although this is rarely stated either as an objective or an achievement, almost invariably all help exiles overcome social isolation (e.g., Carey-Wood et al 1995; Joly 1996). This is closely linked to the third aim, that of helping individuals overcome personal and material problems. This is perhaps the most tangible of functions fulfilled by community organisations (Joly 1996: 170). Because of their closeness to the community, refugee associations have experience and understanding of the individual's views and needs which the statutory sector may not have, and are in touch with people who may not be known to the statutory services (Refugee Council 1990: 10).

8.2.3 Limitations of Refugee Community Organisations

It has been argued that, although refugee community associations provide many important benefits to their members, they have several limitations which must be addressed if refugee resettlement is to be more successful. A review of the existing literature (Carey-Wood et al 1995; Duke 1996a; Sales et al 1996; Refugee Council 1997g; Duke et al 1999) shows that these limitations include the issues of:

- Representation
- Co-ordination
- Insecure funding and long-term aims and objectives
- Overdependence
- Setting priorities, and
- Responding to change

Regarding representation, the refugee population in the UK is diverse in terms of age, gender, class, ideology, religion, region, ethnic and national identity. There is a great danger that refugee community organisations may exclude isolated subgroups within their populations. Subgroups that are particularly at risk of being left isolated are women, single parents, the elderly and those living outside London. This may mean that those suffering particularly serious economic and social exclusion may not be getting any support during settlement (Duke 1996a: 16).

In some refugee communities women, particularly those who are single parents, are less likely than men to have contact with community organisations. This is due to a number of factors. Firstly, refugee women experience difficulty in finding suitable child care to enable them to seek assistance or participate in community events (e.g., Forbes Martin 1995; Duke et al 1999). Secondly, in some cultures, the organisation of activities is exclusively in the hands of men, with groups generally controlled and run by men, often to the exclusion of women (Duke 1996a: 16; Duke et al 1999). And finally, for some nationalities there are strong cultural constraints on women participating in activities outside the home (Forbes Martin 1995: 87; Duke 1996a: 16). In some cases, however, these barriers have been largely overcome through the formation of women's associations within some refugee groups (e.g., Somali women's organisations).

With regard to co-ordination, Duke et al (1999) found that refugee community organisations are primarily concentrated in London (96 percent) and the majority deal with a specific nationality (87 percent), having developed around the main refugee populations in the UK. According to them, this creates potential problems of duplication of activities and resources, competition for scarce funding and the possibility of newer groups being excluded. Some local authorities and refugee groups have attempted to develop structures to bring refugee groups together with varying degrees of success. The need to co-ordinate activity and resources has been recognised by both local authorities and refugee organisations (Duke et al 1999; Refugee Council 1997g). The Refugee Council argues that partnership arrangements are necessary between local authorities, other statutory service providers, refugee agencies and refugee community organisations to facilitate co-ordination, thus maximising resources and co-operation. Such arrangements could take the form of multi-agency fora (Refugee Council 1997g: 10).

Funding of community organisations is usually short-term and insecure, limiting therefore what can be achieved in their work with refugees. Funding is obtained primarily through charitable funds and 'special' statutory sources, such as the Community Programme, the Urban Programme, Section 11 Ethnic Minority Grant, European Funding and inner city funding initiatives (Duke 1996a: 16). Many existing community organisations are forced to re-apply for their funding each year; this takes up much valuable time and resources for the organisations involved, which could be used more effectively actually working with refugees. In addition, insecurity of funding

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makes it extremely difficult for the organisations to plan in the long term and, therefore, they tend to concentrate on achieving short-term aims and objectives (Carey-Wood 1994, quoted in Duke 1996a: 16).

The issue of overdependence applies to both community organisations themselves and the individuals they represent. Community organisations depend on high rates of voluntary work by members who have been in the country longer. Volunteers carry out a wide range of activities, from organising cultural events to providing child care. This type of work is an input of major economic value which, because it is not financially rewarded, very often goes unrecorded and unrecognised. Furthermore, because this work is voluntary and unpaid, it leads to high staff turnover resulting in a loss of skills and expertise for the community organisations concerned (Duke 1996a: 16).

Individual casework has been the main priority of refugee community organisations due to the urgent needs of new arrivals. Casework involves dealing with legal issues; sorting out basic needs such as benefits, housing, food and clothing; providing language services, intermediary and advocacy services in dealing with service providers, and advice and information on language courses. There is evidence that in some cases individuals who have been in the country for longer periods of time have become overly dependent on their community organisations (e.g., Carey-Wood et al 1995; Duke and Marshall 1995). This usually results in less pressure to adjust personally, to learn the language and to handle their own affairs

with British institutions, because there is someone who will handle all these matters by writing letters, interpreting replies and making contacts. There is thus a danger of community groups becoming inward-looking and of monopolising the relationships of their members, instead of empowering them to become independent (Duke 1996a: 17).

In terms of setting priorities, there is often conflict within community organisations in relation to definitions and expectations of their role from users, staff and volunteers, funders, refugee agencies and local service providers. There tend to be high expectations of what can be achieved, which very often are not realistic in terms of the resources available. Refugee community organisations tend to spread themselves too thinly and to deal with a multitude of issues simultaneously, as opposed to concentrating on a limited number of targets to avoid becoming overwhelmed and ineffective (Duke 1996a: 17).

Regarding response to changes, refugee community organisations need to be aware that both their membership and their role will change over time, thus requiring a flexible approach. In his study of Chilean migrants in Spain, Bustos Cortes found that associationism among Chileans had become very weak precisely because the existing community organisations failed to adapt to the new interests and objectives of the exile community (1997: 213).

Duke concludes that the majority of community organisations have tended to mobilise at a local rather than at a wider national level

(1996a: 17). Similarly, Gold (1992) had found that the community groups he studied in Vietnamese and Soviet Jewish settlements in California did not form large, unified networks on a community-wide basis; rather, organisation, solidarity and mobilisation were strongest at local level. However, he also argues that these refugee groups were in the early stages of formation and might eventually be united over time.

8.3 Refugee Agencies

Refugee agencies and community associations are similar in many respects. The main difference lies in the way in which these two types of organisations are set up. Whilst community organisations are formed by refugees themselves, usually by those from the same background, refugee agencies are set up by the receiving society with the aim of providing exiles with the help and support they need during settlement. Unlike community organisations, refugee agencies are not specific to nationality or ethnicity and deal with a variety of refugee groups. These organisations cover a wide range of areas where help is needed, and most specialise in particular issues, such as legal advice, accommodation, translation and interpretation, or psychotherapy and counselling. As in the case of community organisations, refugee agencies may act on a local or national basis, or both.

There are various arguments in favour of using voluntary refugee agencies to resettle refugees in Britain. The experience and expertise gained by these organisations through a long history of involvement with refugees, their additional role as pressure groups,

the low cost of the services provided and their involvement with the local community are positive elements used by advocates of refugee agencies to justify their existence and role (Field 1985: 12-13).

However, voluntary agencies dealing with refugees have also been the subject of serious criticisms. It has been argued that there is an undesirable variation in the services provided by voluntary agencies to refugees, that such agencies have failed to co-ordinate their activities either with one another or with statutory or other bodies, and that staff and volunteers are sometimes rather amateur in their approach to helping refugees (Field 1985: 13-14). Due to cultural differences, misunderstandings between refugees and agencies may also occur (Gold 1992) and the same issue may be perceived differently by refugees and agencies, which usually results in both refugees' disappointment and frustration and agencies' inefficiency.

Field (1985) claims, however, that most of the human resources — the expertise, experience and commitment — available for resettling refugees in Britain rest within voluntary refugee agencies. Yet, he also argues that the role of voluntary agencies in resettling refugees must be a transitional one, of guiding refugees to the specialist agencies responsible for delivering services to refugees among other citizens in the longer term. He gives three reasons for this argument: first, because of the necessary role of formal bodies (from schools to social services departments) in dealing with refugees; second, because of the limited resources of voluntary refugee agencies; and third, because many of the longer-term

problems of refugees are better tackled within the framework of other social policies (Field 1985: 52-53). But things have dramatically changed since Field wrote; whilst more recent work shows that mainstream services are often inadequate to meet the special needs of refugees (e.g., Carey-Wood et al 1995; Duke 1996a; Refugee Council 1997d), their access to such services has also been restricted through the 1996 Act. Duke contends that mainstream facilities should provide the base of the provision, but transitional, culturally sensitive services or programmes should be attached as complements (1996a: 18). Given the difficulties experienced by refugees in accessing mainstream services, the limitations of existing provision and the need for specialist services, the role of refugee agencies is of paramount importance.

8.4 *Basic Operational Differences Between Refugee Community Organisations and Refugee Agencies*

Through the interviews with staff respondents it became evident that, apart from the way in which refugee community associations and refugee agencies are set up, there are a number of operational differences between these two types of organisations.

Refugee agencies are usually funded primarily by statutory bodies. For example, 90 percent of RAP's funds come from the Home Office as do some 50 percent of the Refugee Council's. These grants or funds are subject to very stringent conditions and restrictions on the operations of the receiving agency. For example, in the case of RAP the Home Office (through the Voluntary Service Unit) has set a number of conditions on this agency's activities, covering a wide

spectrum of issues (e.g., RAP cannot assist anybody who has already been in the country for more than ten days). Similar restrictions have been imposed on the Refugee Council and the Refugee Legal Centre, a central agency providing free legal advice and representation for asylum seekers. These restrictions are believed to hinder the effectiveness of the agencies receiving the funds:

> *These restrictions make no sense, for refugee agencies need a certain degree of freedom to effectively carry out their activities.*
>
> (Martin, refugee agency worker)

Agencies of course are accountable to the funding bodies and must show that funds are employed in the most efficient way:

> *We must account for every penny we spend to the Home Office. It's like a tender — we must provide a service with a level of efficiency such that nobody can provide the same service any cheaper nor more efficiently [...]. The Home Office is not interested at all in the quality of the service provided to the asylum seeker, but in how cheaply that service can be provided and how many people can access that service at a given price.*
>
> (Martin, refugee agency worker)

Refugee community organisations, on the other hand, are funded by a number of entities and, although their funding is also subject to a number of conditions, they have much greater independence than refugee agencies:

> *Community organisations have, first, the sympathy of the funding body and, second, the freedom to offer a service which is not only concerned with the number of clients seen but also with the quality of that service.*
>
> (Martin, refugee agency worker)

Although the resources available to both types of organisations are limited, community associations are usually more under-resourced, with a very small number of paid workers and heavily rely on voluntary, unpaid work. This means that community organisations have almost no means to increase awareness of their services among refugees or enhance their image, nor capacity to cope with the increased demand that this would bring about. Refugee agencies, on the other hand, have more resources to increase awareness among the refugee population and position themselves as solid entities.

Hence, the profile of the organisation and the power associated with it is a further difference. Whilst large agencies (such as the Refugee Council, RAP, the Medical Foundation or the Refugee Legal Centre) have a great deal of authority that enables them to deal with statutory bodies at the same level, community organisations lack such authority. This is not to say, however, that the activities of both types of organisations are not subordinated to the decisions made by other more powerful institutions.

Refugee agencies usually provide specific and more technical services than community organisations, such as housing, legal and welfare advice and so on. Community associations do not generally have the funds to hire qualified and trained staff and rely heavily on voluntary work. Consequently, their main activity involves a less technical and more labour intensive service; for example, accompanying refugees to the DSS, helping them to register with a

GP, and the like. Volunteers are willing and able to devote a great deal of time to individuals within the community.

Refugee agencies aim to service a wide range of refugee communities. Community organisations, however, are specifically set up for a particular community and often, depending upon the size of the community, they may even cater for those members of the community settled in a particular geographical area. For example, due to its size, the Somali community is split into several local groups: the Westminster Somali Community, Waltham Forest Somali Community and so forth. At the other end of the spectrum, some Latin American community associations cater for the whole community in London.

Summary

Refugee communities are formed not only on the basis of cultural maintenance but also as a strategy to cope with socio-economic disadvantage and discrimination, this being particularly so after the 1996 Act. Whilst several factors condition the formation of such communities, a feature common to all refugee populations is the development of community associations. Acting as the main link between refugees and the host society, these organisations provide invaluable practical, cultural, social and psychological support. Yet, what they can do is somewhat curtailed by a number of limitations, including lack of representation and co-ordination, insecure funding, overdependence, priority setting and responding to change. Although subject to several criticisms, refugee agencies also play a key role during settlement, particularly in an environment where mainstream services are inadequate and refugees'

access to such services has been curtailed. Together, community associations and agencies form the support network refugees rely on in Britain. Yet, several operational differences have been identified between these two types of organisations in terms of set-up, funding, profile, services provided and client base.

Whilst the present research confirms the importance of community organisations and refugee agencies, it also shows a number of additional shortcomings. These issues are examined in the following chapters.

CHAPTER NINE: EXPERIENCES OF COLOMBIAN AND SOMALI REFUGEES WITH REFUGEE COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS AND REFUGEE AGENCIES

This chapter focuses on the experiences of the refugees interviewed, complemented when necessary with the information obtained from the staff respondents and my observation and own experience. For the discussion I depart from the idea that the settlement process is the context in which the interaction between exiles and refugee organisations occurs. Such interaction involves two consecutive stages: awareness and use. It is impossible to contact an organisation or use its services if one is not aware of that organisation. But awareness of an organisation/service does not always result in usage of that organisation's services; for a number of reasons the refugee may not need or want to use the services offered by an organisation. However, when a refugee does use a particular service, his/her level of satisfaction will be determined by how well his/her needs have been met by the service in question. Other factors, such as attachment to the organisation and that organisation's commitment to refugees, may also contribute to the exile's satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with the organisation and its services. All these issues are analysed in the present chapter.

9.1 Exiles' Awareness of Refugee Organisations

9.1.1 Awareness Prior and After Arrival in the UK

The staff from the refugee organisations approached for the study agreed, almost unanimously, that newly-arrived asylum seekers are usually unaware of the existence of refugee agencies or community organisations and the services these provide:

> *Refugees do not know what is available. They do not know which agencies to contact because they are unaware of their existence in the first place.*

(Ricardo, refugee community worker)

Where refugees do contact organisations, they are very often referred to them by somebody else and are unlikely to know exactly what refugee organisations can do or offer or which to contact. For example, one Somali exile had mistakenly been referred to the Medical Foundation by a fellow Somali refugee to get advice on her accommodation problem. According to an agency worker:

> *Those refugees who come here [to the refugee agency where the interview was taking place] usually say they've been referred to us by the Immigration Service, the police or even strangers on the street. They certainly don't have our address beforehand [...]. They don't have any idea of what [we] do either. They come here but they don't actually know whether this is part of a government organisation, a ministry or whatever.*

(Vicky, refugee agency worker)

The evidence collected from the refugees themselves confirms this:

> *[Refugees] certainly have no idea of any refugee organisation when they get here.*

(Somali man in group discussion)

Although a couple of Colombians who had been brought to Britain by Amnesty International knew of the refugee agency responsible for their reception and settlement arrangements, respondents from both groups explained that exiles generally do not know what is available in the UK until they arrive here. However, as Carey-Wood et al

(1995) found, most of the exiles interviewed had become aware of several refugee organisations since their arrival in Britain. The Colombians interviewed knew of between one and six refugee organisations each, with an average of three or four organisations. Altogether they were aware of ten refugee organisations: five community associations and five agencies. They were more aware of community organisations than of refugee agencies: whilst all mentioned at least one community association, a few did not know of any agency. On average, each Colombian was aware of two or three community organisations but only of one or two refugee agencies.

The Somalis interviewed were relatively less aware of organisations than the Colombians. Each knew of between two and four refugee organisations, with an average of two or three organisations. Altogether they were aware of 15 refugee organisations: ten community associations and five refugee agencies. Like the Colombians, they were more aware of community associations than of agencies: whilst all knew of at least one refugee community organisation, only eight were aware of refugee agencies.

It is worth noting here that the number of Somali community associations in London is far larger than that of Latin American associations. According to the *Refugee Resources in the UK* directory for 1996, in that year there were nearly three times as many Somali community associations as Latin American (approximately 35 versus 12). This may explain, at least partly, why in absolute numbers the Somalis knew of more refugee organisations and community

associations than the Colombians. Other factors affecting awareness will be discussed below.

As suggested by Carey-Wood et al (1995), among the Colombians there seemed to be an association between awareness of refugee organisations and doing voluntary work for the community: those doing voluntary work for their community were aware of more organisations than those who were not doing such work. The findings also indicate a positive relationship for the Colombians between level of fluency in English and awareness of refugee organisations, those with better English skills knowing of more organisations than those with no such language skills. This is no surprise, since fluency in English enables refugees to better realise the opportunities available to them in the UK.

However, awareness among the Somalis did not seem to be related to either doing voluntary work or English language skills, but to length of stay in the UK and sex. The longer the respondents had been in the UK, the more organisations they were likely to know. Whilst the Somali women were more aware of community associations than the men, the men knew of more refugee agencies. The net result was that altogether the Somali women knew of more organisations than their male counterparts. This may be related to the more public role of women in exile (Sales and Gregory 1998) and also perhaps to their role as mothers, which makes them more likely than men to deal with refugee organisations and other institutions.

9.1.2 Gaining Awareness of Refugee Organisations: Advertising Activities of Refugee Organisations

All the organisations contacted for the study advertised their activities in some way. Whilst in some cases advertising was confined to pamphlets and leaflets, in some others a more sophisticated approach was used and several channels were combined, from word of mouth to radio. Where advertising was minimal, this was usually due to the scarcity of funds:

> Our funds are so limited that we cannot spend much money on advertising. Consequently, we cannot have as high a profile as [other central refugee agencies] because our advertising and campaigning activities are very much limited by our funding.
>
> (Martin, refugee agency worker)

Advertising, however, was not always addressed to refugees directly, for in some instances refugee organisations themselves were the target audience for referral:

> [We do] not advertise directly to refugees. [My team], which works very closely with refugee communities, has a mailing list [...] and produces a newsletter which comes out every six weeks, and this is sent to some three hundred organisations around London. [...] Since in one way or another refugees are in contact with their own communities, indirectly they learn about [our organisation] and the services it provides.
>
> (Vicky, refugee agency worker)

It must be noted, however, that the organisations approached could hardly cope with their current workload and, consequently, did not want to advertise too heavily as they would most probably be unable to deal efficiently with the resulting increase in demand.

9.1.2.1 Word of Mouth

Because of the informal links among Colombians and the oral communication system of the Somali community, word of mouth publicity was extremely important for both the community organisations and the agencies contacted. Since they had been working with refugees for a number of years, people knew about their existence and services.

The significance of word of mouth publicity was corroborated by the experiences of the exiles themselves. Although the Colombians had become aware of refugee organisations in a number of ways, word of mouth was by far the most common. This means of communication was mentioned by all respondents without exception. The majority had been informed about refugee organisations by fellow Colombian and Latin American refugees, whilst a few had also been told about such organisations by non-refugee fellow nationals. However, the efficiency of word of mouth among Colombian refugees is somewhat curtailed by the level of suspicion pervading the Colombian exile community. The Colombians interviewed explained that, because of such 'suspiciousness', word is not passed on until trust has been established, which means that new arrivals may not get any information of what there is available from fellow nationals:

> *Sometimes you are not told about things because you are not yet a friend. Hence, you don't know what is available.*
>
> (Colombian man in group discussion)

As discussed in Chapter Seven, 'suspiciousness' is rooted in the refugee's fear of betrayal and may lead to a refusal to contact fellow nationals unknown to the individual. Such a fear is common among political refugees and in the case of Colombian exiles is exacerbated by the various types of violence existing in Colombia (Camacho Guizado and Guzmán Barney 1990: 215).

Like the Colombians, for the Somalis word of mouth — in all cases from fellow Somali refugees — was by far the most common way of gaining awareness of refugee organisations. As an oral community, there is little written communication among Somalis. Lewis contends that the years under the oppressive regime of President Siyad contributed to the importance of oral communication. With the tight control of information in a country without any effective independent media and where the state censorship was continuously at work, oral sources of news assumed great importance (Lewis 1988: 251). According to him, today it is through this medium rather than the visual one that the mass of the population can be effectively reached (Lewis 1993: 19). The following quotation shows the importance of oral communication among Somali refugees:

> I met a friend of a friend in the mosque and he told me that there was a Somali refugee organisation in the area, and that they needed some help to move some furniture around or something. I came along to help and that's how I got in touch with them. [...] Since I didn't have Somali friends and didn't go to places frequented by Somali refugees, I was unlikely to see pamphlets or any kind of written information. It is when you mix with people from Somalia that they tell you that there is a local community and advise you to go there if you need any help.
>
> (Yusuf)

9.1.2.2 Pamphlets, Leaflets and Newsletters

Pamphlets and leaflets were used by almost all the organisations approached, with the exception of a community association working primarily with Somali refugees. Initially, this organisation translated pamphlets and leaflets for distribution among the Somali community but later they realised that, given the oral character of the community, written publicity material was not efficient. Consequently, their publicity activities were primarily based on word of mouth. Two organisations also used their newsletters to advertise their services. These were sent to all the organisations and individuals on their mailing list.

Because of the level of suspicion within the Colombian community and the ensuing reluctance to contact fellow nationals, pamphlets and leaflets were of particular importance for this group in gaining awareness of both refugee agencies and community organisations. However, pamphlets and leaflets were not always translated into the language of the community in question (i.e., Spanish or Somali). Where the organisation catered for several refugee groups, as was the case of refugee agencies, pamphlets and leaflets were sometimes translated into various languages.

9.1.2.3 Press and Radio

The Latin American community press was the second most important way of gaining awareness of refugee community organisations among the Colombians. Two of the community organisations contacted, one dealing with Latin American refugees in general and the other

working primarily with Colombians, advertised their services in two newspapers for the Latin American community in London — 'Noticias Latin América' and 'Crónica Latina'. These newspapers are available free at various places frequented by Colombians and Latin Americans.

The Latin American community organisation also used a radio station broadcasting in Spanish — 'Radio Spectrum' — to promote its services. However, the fact that this medium was not mentioned by any of the Colombian respondents suggests its inefficiency in promoting awareness among this refugee group.

9.1.3 Gaining Awareness of Refugee Organisations: Networking and Referrals

Networking was used by all the organisations to increase awareness and reach new clients. Both agencies and community associations alike had contact with and received referrals from other organisations, as well as from service providers.

9.1.3.1 Organisations

The organisations contacted had links with many other refugee agencies, community associations and government and non-government organisations, so that there was an interchange of referrals:

> A regular source of referrals is the Immigration Service — they would call and tell us that they have a client who has applied for asylum [...]. Others would be referred [to us] by community organisations [...]. Police officers also refer people to us [...].
>
> (Masoume, refugee agency worker)

A source of referrals common to most agencies and community organisations was RAP, which operates at Gatwick and Heathrow airports. Given its location, RAP is usually the first point of contact for many new arrivals. Some Colombian and Somali respondents had been referred to this agency upon arrival at the airport by the Immigration Service.

A few Colombians had been referred to a particular refugee agency by Amnesty International, the humanitarian organisation which took them out of Colombia and to the UK. A woman explained that:

> [The refugee agency] made all the arrangements and the only thing I knew was that a lady called Deborah from the Human Rights Committee [of Amnesty International] would be waiting for me at the airport. I didn't know anything else.
>
> (Luisa)

9.1.3.2 Service Providers

The agencies and community organisations contacted also had links with service providers such as GPs, nurses, social workers, solicitors, tutors and lecturers in Higher Education. Through these links the organisations promoted their services, increased awareness and received referrals.

9.1.4 Gaining Awareness of Refugee Organisations: Direct Contact

A few Colombians became aware of refugee organisations through events and conferences organised by those organisations. Among the Somalis, a few were founder members of their community associations,

whilst another one became aware of his local community association because he used to live nearby.

9.2 Exiles' Use of Refugee Organisations

9.2.1 Refugee Organisations Contacted

With only one exception, all the Colombian respondents contacted refugee community associations. Likewise, all but one of those who were aware of refugee agencies contacted these. Similarly, all the Somalis aware of refugee community associations contacted at least one such organisation, whilst all but one of those aware of refugee agencies contacted these organisations.

Excluding RAP, to which some Colombian and Somali respondents were directed upon arrival at the airport, which therefore did not involve any conscious decision on their part, the Colombians contacted between one and four refugee organisations each, with an average of two or three. The Somalis also contacted between one and four refugee organisations each, but with an average of only one or two. The Somali women were more likely than the men to contact refugee organisations.

Therefore, both the Colombians and the Somalis contacted fewer refugee organisations than they knew of, this difference between awareness and usage being wider for community associations than for refugee agencies. Less than half of the Colombians contacted all the community organisations they knew of, the women being more likely than the men to contact most of the community associations they were aware of. However, most respondents contacted all the refugee

agencies they knew of, there being no difference between the two sexes.

Among the Somalis, just over half contacted all the community organisations they knew of, this proportion being higher for the men than for the women. However, all but one of those who were aware of refugee agencies contacted all the agencies they knew of. As in the case of the Colombians, there was no difference between the two sexes in terms of use of refugee agencies.

In sum, both the Colombians and the Somalis were more likely to contact the refugee agencies they knew of than their community organisations, even though language was likely to be a barrier when dealing with refugee agencies. The reasons are different for each group. Among the Colombians, their belief that refugee community organisations were inefficient coupled with their reluctance to contact fellow nationals led them to approach agencies rather than community associations. Among the Somalis, the segregation of the sexes (resulting in the women being less likely than the men to contact community organisations) and, to a much lesser extent, clan antipathies were likely to be the main reasons for the difference between awareness and use of community organisations versus refugee agencies. These issues will be discussed further later in the chapter.

9.2.2 Reasons for Contacting Refugee Organisations

Generally, the reasons leading the respondents to contact refugee organisations were common to the Colombians and the Somalis. For both groups these included, in decreasing order of importance:

1. Need for advice on various issues, such as asylum and immigration, welfare benefits, accommodation, English tuition, education and training, and employment;

2. Need for practical help with a range of matters, such as registering with a GP, dealing with solicitors and British officials, filling in forms, paying bills, and obtaining food, clothes, bedding and blankets;

3. Need for translators and interpreters to deal with British institutions and service providers;

4. Need for help with physical and psychological health problems;

5. Attendance to English courses;

6. Attendance to other educational courses on a range of subjects, such as 'Childminding', 'Health and Hygiene', 'Computing' and 'Sewing';

7. Participation in social activities and events, such as day trips, religious celebrations and cultural festivities.

One other characteristic common to both the Colombians and the Somalis who contacted community associations is that they usually ended up receiving help with more issues than the ones which precipitated the initial contact. Elena initially contacted her local community association to enrol on an English course, but later obtained help from this organisation with several other matters such as legal advice, translation and interpretation and filling in forms. Likewise, Vivian initially contacted her local organisation to take part in social activities, but later she also received advice on immigration and asylum issues and took training courses on a number of subjects.

This may be explained in terms of the characteristics of community associations. Whilst refugee agencies tend to specialise in specific areas such as legal advice or counselling, community organisations usually deal with a variety of issues, from housing to health problems. The respondents were hardly ever aware beforehand of what refugee community organisations could actually offer; hence, whilst the initial contact might have been made to obtain help with a particular matter, once the refugee knew that help could also be obtained with other issues, a fuller use of the services on offer was made. Language can be an additional explanatory factor (Carey-Wood et al 1995). Whilst refugee community associations are usually run and staffed by exiles themselves who speak the language of their clients, the staff of refugee agencies cannot always speak the refugee's mother tongue. It is, obviously, much easier to understand what there is on offer when this is explained in one's mother tongue than when it is done in a foreign language of which one's knowledge

may be minimal or non-existent at all. Further, as suggested by earlier work (Refugee Council 1990), because of their closeness to the community, refugee associations have experience and understanding of refugees' needs that other organisations may not have.

9.2.3 Reasons for Not Contacting Refugee Organisations

The reasons why some Colombians and Somalis did not contact all the organisations they were aware of were also diverse. In decreasing order of importance, they could be summarised as follows for each group:

Colombians	Somalis
1. No need to contact further organisations	1. No need to contact further organisations
2. Disillusionment with organisations	2. Segregation of the sexes
3. Personal interests within the organisations	3. Inconvenient location of the organisations
4. Fear of being reported	4. Clan differences

The most common reason in the case of both groups was the respondents' lack of any need to contact an organisation. Both the Colombians and the Somalis explained that their needs had been fully covered with the services received from the organisations they had already contacted and therefore there was no need to approach further organisations:

> *If I get my problems sorted in one place and am happy*
> *with the services, why should I go elsewhere and tell my*
> *story again?*

(Colombian man in group discussion)

> *There was no need to contact [other organisations]. I'm*
> *very happy with [my community association] and also*
> *[other organisations] are far away from where I live,*
> *and getting there involves transportation costs.*

(Ali)

Similar comments regarding distance and inconvenient location were made by other Somalis. Using the nearest organisation means that they do not have to use any type of transportation. Transport involves costs and use of the English language, which many Somali refugees cannot speak. Further, sometimes they did not even know where the organisations in question were located and were unable to ask for directions. Although the language barrier was equally a problem for the Colombians, these seemed much more 'mobile' and did travel to the organisations.

Some Colombians had not had very positive experiences with the organisations they had contacted so far, which were perceived as having little or no commitment to refugees and lacking an understanding of their problems and needs. These respondents concluded that there was not much point in approaching further organisations because *'all refugee organisations are the same'*. My observation confirms such perceptions. In a refugee agency shelter where I volunteered during Christmas 1996, one of the clients (not a Colombian) was thrown out of the premises at mid-night because he pulled out a knife during an argument with a fellow resident. That

man had nowhere to go and of course no money to pay for any kind of accommodation. Whilst the relevant disciplinary procedures were followed to *'ensure the well-being of the residents'*, the background and vulnerable situation of the man expelled were completely ignored. Staff in that organisation used to carry walky-talkies to communicate with one another within the building, again ignoring the fact that some of the residents had been subjected to tight surveillance by their persecutors in their home country and the image of people using walky-talkies might have very negative connotations for them. Most of the staff (and also volunteers) of another organisation used for the study came from homeless organisations and had therefore no knowledge of refugee issues. They treated refugees as homeless, ignoring their specific characteristics and needs.

Conflict of interests or, using the respondents' own words, *'internal politics'* within community associations were also a reason why the Colombians did not contact such organisations. Personnel of community organisations were often perceived as using their 'privileged' position for their own benefit; for example, to gain access to information, services or sources of help. This was seen as an endemic problem within Latin American and Colombian community associations and some Colombian respondents thought that the people running these organisations were, in fact, putting their own interests before those of the community. This was, according to some respondents, a reflection of Colombians' own attitudes both back home and in exile — a culture of egotism and an 'I'm-alright-Jack' attitude:

Provided that I'm okay, I don't care about you. Nobody cares about anybody else.

(Colombian woman in group discussion)

One of the Colombian community associations visited for the study had a particularly bad reputation. When I first contacted the organisation in early 1997 it was experiencing some internal problems, for apparently there were some differences between the then director of the organisation — a Chilean refugee who spent several years in exile in Colombia before seeking refuge in the UK — and the executive committee. I learnt later that the director left the organisation on bad terms with the executive committee and set up two small businesses — a travel agency and a carpentry workshop — next door to the community association in question. There were rumours among the Colombian community that this man had used his position of power within the organisation to obtain advice and funding to set up his new businesses. Although I could not investigate this further, these rumours might have been true, for earlier I had been told of a similar case of gross misconduct by a Chilean exile in charge of a refugee community association outside London. This man had set up that organisation to provide accommodation for refugees and asylum seekers. He had rented a number of properties in the private market which, in turn, he let out to refugees, pocketing the difference between the rent he was charged and the housing benefit collected from the refugees. Commenting on the Colombian community organisation in question, some respondents added that they did not regard it as representative of the Colombian refugee community.

Fear of being reported to the 'enemy' back home was another reason why some Colombians did not contact their refugee community organisations or, to a much lesser extent, refugee agencies. The man quoted below, a former community leader and human and civil rights activist, had stopped visiting a central refugee agency because he had been introduced to a group of fellow nationals of whom he had become suspicious:

> *One doesn't know whether one is talking to the guerrillas, to the paramilitaries or to the security forces; so I decided to stop going there for a while.*

(Andres)

As discussed in Chapter Seven, such fear is common among exiles who have been engaged in political activities back home. During the course of my work as a volunteer with two refugee organisations — a community association and a refugee agency — I came across several cases of Spanish and Portuguese speaking refugees who refused interpreters of their own nationality and requested my help to translate their conversations with doctors and solicitors (Calvar 1995: 56-57). In the case of Colombian exiles, this fear is compounded by the various types of violence existing in their country, making it difficult for them to *'know whom they are talking to'* or to *'distinguish the enemy from the friend'*.

As Gold (1992) found, the existence of various, sometimes competing community organisations combined with their leaders' conflicts of interests resulted in a lack of community spirit among the

Colombians. This was compounded by the reluctance of most Colombians to approach fellow nationals. Such a lack of community spirit had clear implications for the use of community associations and their efficiency:

> [Colombian] refugees treat refugee [community] organisations like supermarkets — they only contact them when they need them. And this is because there is no sense of community at all among Colombian refugees.
>
> (Victoria)

There were also specific reasons among the Somalis for not contacting refugee organisations. The Somali community in exile is based on a clear separation of the sexes and gender roles. This became evident in two of the community organisations visited for the study — a men's and a women's association. Although the men had set up an organisation to cater for the entire Somali community in the area, the women felt left out and decided to set up their own association. Even though both organisations shared the same premises (lent by the local authority), the rivalries between them were apparent. Similar findings were reported by Sales and Gregory (1998). Such segregation of the sexes was a further reason for not contacting organisations, a few Somali women explaining that they had not contacted some community associations because these were not specifically for women. They were run by men and therefore 'women would not have been given a good service'. The implications of sex separation for the organisation of the community in exile had already been suggested by Summerfield (1993). She explains how the first Somali association in London was founded (in the late 1970s) by two women and how it was taken over a few years later by the men,

forcing the women to vacate the premises they had acquired for themselves. She notes that this pattern has been repeated many times (Summerfield 1993: 95).

The war in Somalia is a war between clans and, although with much less intensity, the split of Somali society into clan factions still remains in the exiled community. Earlier research suggests that clan antipathies are more evident among men than among women. Whilst Fawzi El-Solh argues that clan consciousness has become a hindrance to a more effective organisation of the Somali community in exile (1991: 546), Summerfield speaks of a remarkable 'sisterhood' among Somali women (1993: 90). In his study, Griffiths comments that it was the women who were the more critical of traditional clan (and gender) arrangements (1997: 14). Similarly, Sales and Gregory report that Somali women tend to be more open to working with women from other clans, the women in their study being keen to reduce such clan divisions (1998: 19).

In the present study, one Somali woman had not contacted her local community organisation because she had *'some reservations about the organisation'*, for most of its members were from a clan different from her children's clan. Yet, she belonged to the same clan as the community association. Other respondents, however, argued that clan antipathies are almost non-existent in exile, refugees being able to contact any organisation they wish. In fact, in the men's and women's discussion groups held for this study there were members of different clans sitting around the table and using the same community association. The quote below is indicative of the

perceived need to overcome the differences originating in the homeland and to work together in the country of exile:

> *You've got a problem in Somalia; I've got a problem in Somalia. You are from one side; I'm from the other side. Why should we be enemies in this country [Britain]? We all are refugees here.*
>
> (Faduno, refugee community worker)

Both Colombian and Somali women explained that female refugees face additional barriers that prevent them from contacting refugee organisations, family responsibilities being common to both groups. This was compounded by the lack of adequate child-care facilities. Inability to communicate in English was also a common barrier for both Colombian and Somali women, although more accentuated among the latter. Many were unable to go anywhere (including refugee organisations) on their own. Again, family responsibilities prevented some of the women from attending English courses and learning the language, thus creating a vicious circle.

9.3 Exiles' Satisfaction with the Refugee Organisations Contacted

All respondents were asked whether they were satisfied or otherwise with the refugee organisations they had contacted. Whilst all the Somalis without exception expressed satisfaction, most Colombians were dissatisfied with some or all the organisations they had contacted.

Whilst satisfaction among the Colombians was not specially related to any type of organisation, dissatisfaction was primarily with

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community associations. Conversely, satisfaction among the Somalis was mainly with refugee community organisations.

9.3.1 Reasons for Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction

The reasons for satisfaction given by respondents from each group related to the three main areas shown below in decreasing order of importance. The reasons for dissatisfaction among the Colombians were the reverse of those for satisfaction.

Colombians	Somalis
1. Commitment to refugees and quality of services	1. Commitment to refugees and quality of services
2. Ability to communicate in Spanish, help received to overcome communication problems and quality of language courses	2. Ability to communicate in Somali
3. Moral and psychological support	3. Proximity to the respondent's home

The commitment of refugee organisations to exiles and their well-being as well as the quality of their services were the most common reasons for satisfaction both among the Colombians and the Somalis. A Colombian woman praised a refugee agency that helped her during the initial stages of settlement:

> *For the first two years I was in the care of the*
> *[refugee agency]. The [refugee agency] organised the*
> *hostels for the first eight months and then the council*
> *flat. They organised that [...] and I never had to do*
> *anything myself; everything was done for me: dealing*
> *with solicitors, housing officers, police, social*
> *services, everything. The [refugee agency] held my hand*
> *for two years.*

(Luisa)

Elena and Manuel were equally pleased with the help and services they had received from their local community association. At the time of the interviews both respondents were doing voluntary work for that organisation. Elena expressed her gratitude for the assistance received:

> *[The community organisation] has helped me very much. I*
> *used to bring my bills and the letters I received for*
> *them to translate them for me, and they did everything*
> *— they phoned people up, arranged payments, etc. They*
> *helped me with everything.*

(Elena)

Similarly, Feryel explained that she was forever indebted to her local women's community association for their help with her son, a 16 year-old boy with learning disabilities. Apparently, the local social services had decided to send the boy to a specialist centre for children with this type of problem, which meant that he would have to be separated from his mother for long periods. Feryel was very distressed by this, for her son was the only family she had in the UK, and with the help of her local Somali women's association she managed to keep her son at home. Commenting on the same women's community organisation, another woman also explained her gratitude and satisfaction:

*They've helped me with everything, health, housing,
interpreters, everything. I'm very happy with them.*

(Rahmo)

Among the Somalis, commitment and quality of service was in some
instances combined with proximity of the organisation to the
respondent's home. The following quotation is a good example of this
positive mix:

> *They [the local Somali community organisation] are
> closer to my place and are therefore more convenient.
> Also, I get a more personal treatment. [The director of
> the organisation] is brilliant, and does so much for
> everyone.*

(Ali)

Lack of commitment to refugees was, conversely, the most common
reason for dissatisfaction among Colombians. This was perceived to
be the result of the organisations' lack of understanding of the
situation of refugees in the UK and the problems they are likely to
encounter. Manuel reported a negative experience with a community
association which had appointed one of their translators (a woman)
to accompany him to the DSS. After queuing for a while at the local
DSS office, the translator said that she had another appointment and
left him on his own with a hand-written note to show to the DSS
worker at the window. That note was of no use and Manuel was told to
go back again. A new appointment was made with the same translator
but, on this occasion, she did not turn up. After waiting for over
two hours at the agreed meeting point, the respondent called the
community organisation in question to find out what was going on. He

was told that the translator was off sick but nobody had bothered to communicate this to him in advance.

According to that organisation's mission statement, its aim was to offer advice on benefits, health, housing and education to Latin American asylum seekers and refugees. Caseworkers could accompany clients to the DSS, GPs, hospitals and so on to interpret and advocate for them. Like Manuel, Clara also complained about that community association. She explained that the woman who took her call and dealt with her query made no effort whatsoever to find out the information she was after. She felt that:

> The lady didn't show any interest in my problems.
>
> (Clara)

Some Colombians argued that organisations' lack of understanding of refugees' problems and lack of commitment to exiles invariably result in inadequate services:

> [Refugee organisations] may give you solutions but don't provide the means to implement those solutions. They may tell you where to go to find what you need but they leave you alone. And because you don't know how the system works and probably don't speak the local language, you cannot do anything. All the advice they may give, if any, is therefore useless.
>
> (Andres)

Another main reason for dissatisfaction among the Colombians was lack of organisation. Some community associations approached by these respondents were reported to be very disorganised, for there

were too many conflicts of interests. The leaders of those associations were perceived as looking after their own personal interests before those of the community. This, as in the case of lack of commitment and understanding of refugees' problems in the UK, resulted in poor quality of services. I personally approached the director of one of these organisations to conduct an interview with him and gather information about the association, making several appointments over a period of nearly two months. However, he never turned up for any of the appointments nor bothered to cancel them in advance. His excuse, if any, was simply *'sorry, I completely forgot about it'*.

Favouritism was perceived as a further cause of lack of organisation. According to some respondents, favouritism was pervasive among Colombian and Latin American refugee associations, where both paid and unpaid staff tended to give priority to their friends and acquaintances over everybody else:

> *Within the Colombian refugee community everything works according to the "leverage system" — what you get and how you get it entirely depends on who you know.*

(Colombian woman in group discussion)

This is closely linked to the issue of conflict of interests which put some Colombians off contacting refugee organisations. Favouritism and conflict of interests were perceived by the respondents as further hampering the effectiveness of the organisations and resulting in mediocre services. This was compounded by the existence of various, often competing community

associations. The combination of these factors was seen as putting in danger cohesion and solidarity within the Colombian refugee community.

An important reason for satisfaction among the Colombians was the organisation's capacity to communicate in their own language. This was also the case among the Somalis, primarily among the women. It was for this reason that the Somalis were particularly satisfied with community associations, for these were more likely than refugee agencies to have Somali speaking staff.

Among the Colombians, help in overcoming communication problems and the quality of the language courses attended through refugee organisations were equally important. For example, Francisco explained that the English course provided by a local community organisation proved to be of much help, for when he started school in Britain he could already understand much of the lessons. Pablo reported that he and his spouse had obtained some English lessons through a refugee agency. Since they were not entitled to benefits, they were also not entitled to concessionary fees for ESOL or further education courses. However, that refugee agency referred them to a college of adult education where they were given two hours of English tuition a week. Although they wanted a more intensive course, they were grateful for this.

Conversely, communication barriers were a cause of dissatisfaction among the Colombians. Upon arrival, some Colombian respondents had been given pamphlets by a central agency providing details of

organisations that might be able to help them. However, since the pamphlets were in English and none of the agency workers on that shift could speak Spanish, those pamphlets were of no use to them. On the other hand, Luisa, a widow who needed counselling during the early stages of re-settlement, complained about the extensive use of interpreters by the specialist refugee agency providing the psychotherapy:

> *I was with the [refugee agency] and the therapy took place through an interpreter, and I didn't like that at all. You need privacy to talk and you don't have privacy if there is somebody in the room other than the counsellor and yourself. I don't trust the interpreter — they are supposed to abide by their confidentiality oath but I don't trust them.*

> (Luisa)

For the Colombians, the psychological and moral support received from refugee organisations was also important. Pedro's wife suffered from anxiety and depression, for she had to leave the country entirely against her will and now blamed Pedro for their situation. This had in turn resulted in marital problems. However, with the help and support received from two refugee community associations their problems were being gradually overcome. Pedro was satisfied with both organisations. Similarly, Pablo was very appreciative of the help he had received from a refugee agency. Not only were he and his wife given food and clothes, but also moral support and comfort. In difficult times the caseworkers, in particular a woman who could speak Spanish, gave him and his wife the support they needed to *'carry on fighting'*.

9.3.2 Reasons for the Difference in Satisfaction Levels

Some of the inadequacies reported by the Colombian respondents were to a certain extent a reflection of underfunding. No matter how committed organisations are, what they can do and achieve is very limited by the level of funding available to them. Likewise, the quality of the services provided, a high level of organisation and the availability of interpreters and translators directly depend on the budget on which organisations operate. Although both Colombians and Somalis were aware of this, the latter showed a more understanding attitude. Even in those cases where the Somalis did not get all the help they expected or needed, they were satisfied with the organisations contacted because they were conscious that refugee organisations do not have enough resources to cope with the increasing demand:

> *[The local Somali] community organisation doesn't have the resources to do all they want. They can meet our needs only to a certain extent.*
>
> (Yusuf)

As Gold (1992) argues, the reasons for such attitudinal differences between the two refugee groups are to be found in the circumstances of their flight and their past experiences. Unlike the Somalis, most of the Colombians had been directly or indirectly involved in political activities back in their home country. Through their participation in political groups and/or human and civil rights organisations, they had developed a sense of what could be expected from a social organisation that the Somalis did not have. Although equally aware of the scarce resources available to organisations, in

exile this resulted in the Colombians being more demanding and critical of refugee organisations than the Somalis:

> *My husband was a trade-unionist and I know what this type of organisations can do. When you go to an organisation, you expect that organisation to give you the service you are supposed to receive.*

(Colombian woman in group discussion)

9.4 Refugee Organisations' Own Assessment of Performance and Service Delivery

9.4.1 Refugee Organisations' Feed-Back Systems

Despite the cases described below, where rather informal attempts were made to assess performance and service delivery, none of the organisations contacted seemed to obtain feed-back from clients in a regular and systematic manner to assess the extent to which their needs had been met.

One community association — dealing primarily with Colombian refugees — had a self-completion questionnaire for its clients to fill out (although I asked for a copy of this questionnaire twice, it was never provided). According to the worker from this organisation, the same questionnaire was also used by other organisations with which this association had links. Refugees were invited to evaluate the services received and assess the extent to which these had satisfied their needs and met their expectations. Questionnaires were anonymous and the name of the agency or association providing the service was not to be disclosed on the form by the client. The information gathered through this system was distributed to all organisations in the network. This association

was also planning to set up a 'suggestions box', which clients could use to express and communicate their own ideas (by my second visit a year later, however, this had not yet been put into place). It is worth noting that none of the Colombian respondents who had used this community association had been asked to complete any questionnaire and that this organisation had a particularly bad reputation among the Colombian refugee community because of its lack of commitment and lack of organisation. The refugees' experiences in relation to providing feed-back to organisations will be discussed in the next section.

One Somali community organisation obtained verbal feed-back from clients. After the service had been delivered, clients were asked whether their needs and expectations had been met, how satisfied they were with the services and what changes, improvements or new services, if any, they would like to see implemented. In fact, the worker from this organisation explained that some new services and activities had started as a result of comments and suggestions received from clients.

Another community organisation — also working with Somali refugees — was structured in teams or units, each setting its own priorities and measuring its efficiency individually. However, efficiency was measured not through feed-back from clients but through staff perceptions. By comparing what staff perceived to be clients' main needs with the services provided to them, each unit assessed the extent to which those needs had been met. A worker from this organisation stressed that:

> *We try to be realistic. Instead of trying to meet every need, we concentrate on those which we think are the most important and have the resources and skills to fulfil effectively.*
>
> (Mohad, refugee community worker)

The case of this community association raises a couple of issues. First, using only staff's perceptions of what clients' main needs are to assess the adequacy of services can be misleading. Earlier research has found that staff from refugee organisations and refugees themselves may have different perceptions of the same reality (e.g., Gold 1992). Second, whilst the need to 'be realistic' was a recurring theme among agency staff and community workers, it was sometimes difficult to distinguish between realism and indifference. As discussed in previous chapters, whilst refugee organisations have always had to make do with limited resources, the 1996 Act has made their task even more difficult. And it is precisely in these circumstances that such *laissez-faire* attitude must be replaced with adequate feed-back and assessment systems.

One refugee agency used a team of interpreters (between 60 and 70 at any one time) to accompany its clients everywhere during their first days in the UK. This central agency received verbal feed-back on its services both directly — from clients — and indirectly — from interpreters — and, if this feed-back was negative, the agency tried to improve the service. However, the worker from this agency reported that the scope for improvement was very much limited by the scarce resources available.

Perhaps the most clear example of the lack of a formal feed-back system was that of a central refugee agency. Although this agency was to undergo organisational restructuring, it was at the time structured in units and it was up to each individual unit whether feed-back from clients was obtained and how. According to a worker from this organisation:

> *The [agency] has always been a somewhat fragmented organisation, though this is currently being addressed. There are several units and teams, each doing their own thing and all have their own ways of getting feed-back or not, as the case may be. And this is something that is being looked at at the moment [...]. [Getting feed-back from clients and evaluating it] very much depends on each team. On paper there are set procedures to get feed-back from clients, but in reality they may never get put into practice.*
>
> (Vicky, refugee agency worker)

Likewise, Masoume, from the same refugee agency as Vicky, explained that her team did not have a system in place to collect feed-back from clients on a regular and systematic basis. She simply said that:

> *Our best feed-back is the satisfaction we see in the client.*
>
> (Masoume, refugee agency worker)

She argued that, since they might not see their clients more than once, it was difficult to get feed-back. Her team had, however, a complaints procedure which clients could use if they had any complaint to make about either the service received or the adviser(s) in the team who dealt with their case, though she could not explain how this procedure worked.

Masoume's argument is however unconvincing. First, as noted above for a Somali community association, her team's perception of clients' satisfaction may be very different from their clients' actual satisfaction. Second, the fact that clients may be seen only once is not a good enough reason for not obtaining feed-back from them on the adequacy of the services provided. Third, since she could not describe the complaints procedure of her team (which she led!), it is very questionable whether such a procedure was ever followed.

9.4.2 Feed-Back to Organisations: Exiles' Experiences

According to the Colombian respondents, only four of the ten organisations they had contacted in total had requested their feed-back on the services provided: two refugee agencies and two refugee community associations. The fact that (a) a few Colombian respondents had contacted some of the organisations mentioned above but none of these was included among the four they reported, and (b) not all respondents who had contacted these four organisations had been asked for their comments on the services provided, confirms that there was no consistent policy in place to request feed-back.

The Colombians asked for their feed-back by the two refugee community organisations provided this through questionnaires in Spanish. Only in one instance was this requested and provided verbally. The two refugee agencies requested feedback through questionnaires in English.

Among the Somalis, feed-back on the services provided had been requested by three of the twelve organisations they had contacted — all three refugee community associations. As in the case of the Colombians, the fact that (a) a few Somali respondents had contacted some of the organisations mentioned in the previous section but only one was included among the three they reported, and (b) only some of the Somali respondents who contacted these three associations had been asked for their feed-back, corroborates that this was not requested on a regular and systematic basis. Quoting a worker from one such organisation:

> *[Feed-back from clients is requested] only when we are not very busy and have the time.*
>
> (Faduno, refugee community worker)

One of the three community associations that requested feed-back from the Somalis did so either verbally or through a questionnaire in Somali, whilst in the case of the other two feed-back was always requested and provided verbally.

In sum, the cases studied above plus the experiences of the refugees interviewed raise two critical issues: first, that feed-back systems may be in place 'on paper' but completely ignored in practice; second, that staff members have a great deal of freedom as to whether and how to follow set procedures which, in turn, suggests a total lack of external supervision. Whilst the combination of these two factors invariably results in performance and service delivery being assessed in a haphazard manner, it also suggests that such an assessment does not depend as much on the availability of resources

as it does on the systematic implementation of systems that are often already in place.

Summary

Whilst neither the Colombians nor the Somalis knew what was available in Britain before they arrived here, most had become aware of several refugee organisations since their arrival. Word of mouth was the most common medium of gaining awareness of organisations for both groups, followed by printed material. Among Colombians, however, word of mouth may not be transmitted until trust has been established. This is so because of the level of suspicion pervading the Colombian refugee community, which may result in new arrivals not getting any information from fellow nationals concerning what is available. It was therefore not surprising that the Latin American press was the second most important way for the Colombians to gain awareness of refugee community organisations.

Although the findings indicate that, for a variety of reasons, refugees tend to approach fewer organisations than they know of, they also show that those who contact community organisations usually end up receiving help with more issues than the ones which led to the initial contact. This may be explained by a number of factors. First, refugee community associations tend to deal with a range of issues, which means that they can often provide more help than clients might initially expect. Second, these organisations speak their clients' mother tongue, which means that clients can make a fuller use of the services on offer (Carey-Wood et al 1995). Third, because of their closeness to the community, refugee

associations have experience and understanding of the individual's needs which other organisations may not have (Refugee Council 1990).

Whilst the Somalis were satisfied with all the organisations they had contacted, and particularly with community associations, the Colombians showed a high level of dissatisfaction, particularly in relation to this same category; i.e., community associations. The difference in satisfaction levels between both groups is due to the combination of two key factors. On the one hand, Colombian and Latin American organisations seemed less committed to their clients than their Somali counterparts. Conflicts of interests and favouritism were perceived as pervasive within the former, which hampered their efficiency and resulted in many of the problems reported by the Colombians. On the other hand, through their participation in political activities back home, the Colombians had developed a sense of what could be expected from a social organisation in a way that Somalis did not. Consequently, in exile the Colombians were generally more demanding of refugee organisations than the Somalis. It would be interesting to compare satisfaction levels with a third group of non-political refugees (e.g., from the former Yugoslavia) to see whether such differences still occur.

The research also shows important organisational issues within the two refugee communities studied. The existence of competing associations (Gold 1992), coupled with their leaders' conflicts of interests, resulted in a lack of community spirit among the Colombians, which was compounded by their reluctance to contact fellow nationals. Regarding the Somalis, whilst the findings

corroborate earlier research (e.g., Summerfield 1993; Sales and Gregory 1998) in that sex separation is still an issue for the organisation of the exiled community, they also suggest a positive development in terms of overcoming clan antipathies. Longitudinal research within these communities would yield invaluable information on settlement patterns.

A key finding of the research is that none of the organisations contacted seemed to have a formal feed-back system whereby performance and service delivery were evaluated. Further, where such systems existed, these were either not implemented at all or were implemented in a very haphazard manner. This raises, among others, the issue of lack of supervision within voluntary organisations. Research into management systems within such organisations is much needed.

CHAPTER TEN: ROLE OF REFUGEE ORGANISATIONS IN THE SETTLEMENT PROCESS

Having explored the experiences of refugees with their community associations and agencies in the previous chapter, it now becomes necessary to investigate the role that such organisations play (or are expected to play) during settlement. For this analysis to be complete and objective, it must take into account both the views of the organisations themselves and those of refugees.

10.1 Refugee Organisations' Own Views

Although the community workers and agency staff interviewed agreed that the overall objective of refugee organisations is to facilitate settlement, they were divided in their views of the actual scope of their role. In line with the Refugee Council's (1990) view, some believed that their role is to fill the gaps in the welfare system, covering those areas not covered by statutory services. Others however argued that the role of refugee organisations is broader than that. They saw the remit of refugee agencies and community organisations as facilitating the adaptation process of exiles to their new environment through the provision of both practical and moral support, dealing with the physical, psychological and emotional needs of refugees to enable them to settle in the receiving society. This is usually done by informing refugees about their rights and entitlements, putting them in contact with the relevant statutory and voluntary bodies, providing them with interpreting and translation services, counselling and so on.

Along similar lines to Carey-Wood et al (1995) and Duke (1996a), some respondents in the present study argued that both refugee agencies and community organisations act as reception centres during the first stage of the settlement process, that is arrival and reception. They receive asylum seekers and put them in contact with specialist agencies — within both the statutory and voluntary sector — that can help them with their asylum application, accommodation, health, education and other issues:

> *Refugee organisations are the link between refugees and.*
> *service providers.*
>
> (Ricardo, refugee community worker)

However, whilst the role of refugee agencies may cover only the initial stages of the settlement process, that of community organisations extends further because, even when refugees have 'found their feet' and can manage by themselves, community associations still play an important role. As suggested by Harris (1995) and Duke (1996a and 1996b), some respondents argued that one of their main roles is to provide cultural and social activities directly linked to the refugee community; for example, social events and celebrations, Saturday schools for children, elderly clubs and so on. According to one interviewee:

> *There is always a role for community organisations.*
>
> (Vicky, refugee agency worker)

The psychological and emotional support provided by community associations and specialist agencies was also perceived as of

paramount importance. This has been suggested by Field (1985), Gold (1992) and Joly (1996). Resettlement can be — and most often is — a very traumatic experience and may result in nervous breakdown or other psychological problems. These crises may happen at any point, even years after arriving in the country, and refugee agencies and community organisations can provide their clients with the help they need to overcome such crises. Nevertheless, Saadia argued that because of the uncertainty as to whether an asylum seeker will be allowed to stay in Britain or not, counselling and psychotherapy cannot be planned but has to be done on a day-to-day basis. She explained that:

> *Psychotherapy and psychological support requires continuity, and regular meetings need to be held between the client and the counsellor. But clients cannot plan ahead. They don't know whether they will be able to come back next week. They don't even know about tomorrow, about this afternoon. We must therefore leave the treatment "open ended".*

> (Saadia, refugee agency counsellor)

Most of the personnel interviewed felt that refugee organisations are doing what the government itself should be doing. They receive asylum seekers and give them advice on and help with benefits, training, education, employment and other matters. They provide refugees with interpreters and translators, solicitors, doctors and so on. By doing this, some staff respondents argued, they are actually *'playing the government's game'* on asylum and immigration:

> *Our role is doing what the government is supposed to do in the first place. Indirectly, we are working for the government; we are doing what the government is supposed to do itself.*
>
> (Ricardo, refugee community worker)

This results from the lack of a permanent, centrally-funded settlement programme in Britain. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter Six, recent legislation has, indirectly, made voluntary organisations responsible for the well-being of refugees. However, these organisations entirely rely on grants and donations and, due to the small budgets on which they operate, what they can do is indeed very limited:

> *The situation of refugee agencies and community organisations is like that of a boat struggling to sail against strong winds and high seas. It is not a boat that is sinking though, but it is certainly struggling to keep going.*
>
> (Saadia, refugee agency counsellor)

The new Bill is likely to make the situation even worse. With asylum seekers systematically dispersed throughout the country, their remaining rights to welfare benefits completely removed, and local authorities exempted from their current legal responsibilities, refugees will have to rely even more heavily on the support and assistance of voluntary organisations.

10.2 Exiles' Own Views

Whilst most of the Colombian and Somali exiles agreed on the overall role of refugee organisations, they differed in their views of the specific remit of such organisations. These are, in decreasing order

of importance, the main roles of refugee organisations as perceived by each group:

Colombians	Somalis
1. Provide support and advice to asylum seekers	1. Provide support and advice to asylum seekers
2. 'Guide' asylum seekers in the UK	2. Ensure the development and welfare of the Somali community in exile
3. Ensure the development and welfare of the Colombian community in exile	
4. Promote awareness and campaign for a solution of the situation in Colombia	

The majority of both groups saw the main role of refugee organisations as providing help, support and advice to refugees and asylum seekers in all areas where such assistance is needed:

> *Their main role is to help exiles, regardless of their immigration status.*

(Elena)

> *When [refugees] arrive in the UK, they don't know where to go, whom to contact. The role of refugee organisations is to do everything for new arrivals — from making 'phone calls to sorting out benefits, finding accommodation, providing translation and interpretation services, everything.*

(Somali woman in group discussion)

Respondents from both groups further explained that refugee community associations are a particularly important source of help for refugees, especially for those who arrive on their own and have

no contacts in the UK, those with no language skills, and those who cannot manage by themselves like the sick and the elderly. This is no surprise, given the closeness of community associations to the refugee community and their ability to speak their clients' mother tongue. Two such respondents commented that:

> When one arrives here, one is blind, deaf and dumb. It is then when one most needs these [community] organisations.
>
> (Manuel)

> When people arrive here they don't know what to do. They don't even speak the language. [Refugee community organisations] advise them and help them with everything.
>
> (Ahmed)

Somewhat differing from the above views, some Colombians saw the main role of refugee organisations as 'guiding' refugees and 'teaching them how the system works in the UK' rather than 'doing everything' for them:

> Their main role is to guide refugees to find their way in the UK and help them find their feet. Their role is not to do things for you but to guide you, to explain how to do things.
>
> (Vivian)

> If you are taught how to do something, you learn how to do it and eventually you will be able to do it yourself. However, if somebody does everything for you, you will always depend on them.
>
> (Isabel)

It could be argued that this need to be taught to deal with the host society and its institutions may be related to a conscious decision of refugees to start making a place for themselves in the UK and settle in this country. They want to learn about British society and how the British system works, so that they can do things for themselves and eventually become self-sufficient and independent. However, with the exception of one respondent (Enrique), this was unlikely to be the case among the Colombians who, as refugees with a societal project back home (Joly 1996), tended to see their exile in the UK as temporary. Their willingness to learn how to deal with the receiving society and its institutions can be better explained in terms of their need to maintain their role as social and political actors. The Colombians did not want to depend on others but to *do things for themselves'* and be able to help fellow refugees. In fact, some commented that, if the workings of British institutions in particular and British society in general were explained to them, not only would they be able to handle their own affairs but also to help new arrivals in the future.

Common to both the Colombians and the Somalis was the idea that one of the roles of community associations is to organise their respective refugee communities, ensuring their development and welfare. According to the advocates of this view, everyone should be involved in the community and, if possible, work for their community associations. Some Colombian and Somali respondents also added that refugee community organisations play an important cultural and social role, being responsible for keeping alive customs and traditions from the homeland:

> *[Community] organisations give us the support we need to stay together and carry on with our lives. They maintain our culture and customs. Also, they give us the opportunity to meet — we usually meet in the office [of the local community organisation]. I've made many friends in the community.*
>
> (Ali)

Similar to Joly's (1996) and Bustos Cortes's (1997) findings, most of the Colombians and Somalis had overcome or were trying to overcome isolation by being in contact with their respective refugee community organisations, for this made them 'feel at home':

> *Community organisations like this [where the interview was taking place] are of much help to overcome social isolation. One comes here and talks to people, there are social activities, dances, etc. They give you the opportunity to be with your people.*
>
> (Vivian)

> *When I come here [to the refugee community organisation where the interview was taking place] and see ten or fifteen Somali women together, I feel as if I were still in Somalia. We talk, exchange ideas, help one another. It is like being back home.*
>
> (Rahmo)

Although with varying degrees of involvement, some Colombians and Somalis were also doing voluntary work for their community organisations, which further enhanced their opportunities for socialisation:

> *I'm working as a volunteer for some Latin American and other human rights organisations, and that keeps me in touch with many people so I don't feel isolated.*
>
> (Maria)

Some Colombians also explained that an additional role of refugee community organisations is to publicise the situation in their home country and campaign for a solution. These respondents felt that community associations tend to focus on practical assistance in the UK but forget their advocacy and political role. This reflects the strong involvement of the Colombians in the political struggle back home and corroborates the comment made earlier on their perception of exile as temporary. For the Colombians exile did not mean a rupture with the fight for their ideals and political goals, and they perceived their community organisations as vehicles to promote awareness in the country of refuge of the situation back home and campaign for a solution. Yet, only one of the community associations approached was to some extent engaged in this type of advocacy activity. In the UK there are movements of solidarity with the fight for democracy and/or human rights in some Latin American countries. However, these are countries where the struggle takes place between groups clearly defined; it is therefore fairly easy to take sides and campaign against the instigators of the social problem. Colombia, however, offers a rather different scenario: there is not just one war but many wars. The Colombian situation is very complex: political parties, paramilitary groups, the guerrillas, the drug cartels, all fight their own war making it difficult to take sides or campaign in support of any particular contender. In response to the increase in the spiral of violence and human rights abuses, however, a solidarity campaign has been set up to call upon the international community to help restore peace in the country.

The dissatisfaction of some Colombians with refugee organisations became apparent in their comments on the role of such organisations. Some contended that, although the main role of refugee organisations is to help and advise refugees, many are not fulfilling that role, for the advice and support they provide is *'very superficial'*. Furthermore, some explained that Colombian and Latin American refugee associations are becoming more and more detached from refugees and their cause, and more and more focused on their own internal issues:

> *[Refugee community organisations] are becoming like a small Latin America [...]. Within organisations people fight against one another for power and other personal interests, not caring about the refugee.*

> (Paula)

This lack of support from refugee organisations may, according to these respondents, have very negative consequences:

> *I've seen Colombians in Brixton [South London] who have fallen into delinquency just because they don't get the support they need to overcome the problems faced over here, in exile.*

> (Andres)

Nevertheless, as in the case of community workers and agency personnel, exiles from both groups were generally conscious of the lack of funding pervading refugee organisations and its detrimental implications for the running of such organisations. Some Colombians argued that both refugee agencies and community organisations should assess who needs assistance and who does not, so that people actually in need are helped, thus making the most efficient use of

limited resources. The relationship between scarcity of funds and under-staffing was obvious to most of the respondents, some even relating lack of funds to difficulty in keeping volunteers. The Colombian man quoted below, a volunteer himself, explained how sometimes volunteers stop working because of the lack of financial support:

> *Volunteers are happy to come and work for free, to accompany clients everywhere and act as interpreters, but the only money they get is for travel expenses and nothing for food, and they have to eat out while they are working. Since some people don't have this money to spend, they stop volunteering.*

(Manuel)

10.3 Exiles' Relationship with their Community and Organisations

All but two Colombians and all the Somalis stated that they would remain in contact with their communities and organisations for as long as they stayed in the UK. The reasons for doing so were common to both groups and all carried almost the same weight:

- Need for help and support

- Working for the community

- Maintenance of customs and traditions

- Being with their own people

Both groups, particularly the Somalis, knew that they would always need help and their community associations were seen as the only source of support available to them:

> *I'll certainly stay in touch with the [community] organisation because I'll always need some help with something, and I know I'll get help from them.*
>
> (Khadar)

But their relationship with the community also provided some respondents from both groups with an opportunity to give through voluntary work, and those who were doing such work gave this as a reason to remain in contact. They argued that they obtained a great deal of satisfaction from their work:

> *I'm working with [this community organisation] as a volunteer and I like the work I do very much. Even if I get a job I'll still come here to work in my spare time.*
>
> (Manuel)

> *I've been with [this community organisation] for some five years and I'm not planning to leave the organisation. I'm a member of several committees in the organisation and I like working here.*
>
> (Elena)

Some respondents further explained that working with and for the community gave them satisfaction because they felt they were helping fellow refugees. They felt they had a responsibility towards the refugee community:

> *I'm learning from my experience and, as a member of the community, I must use my experience to help other people, new arrivals.*
>
> (Pedro)

> *Being in touch with the community is beneficial to everyone. Not only do you get the help you need, but you can also help many other people.*
>
> (Ardo)

Apart from practical help, community organisations also offer refugees opportunities for socialisation and maintenance of their own customs and traditions (Harris 1995; Duke 1996b). Although the Colombian quoted below only visited his local community organisation to attend social events, he explained that:

> I want to maintain my own culture, and being in touch with the community helps me do so. Hence, I'll certainly keep in contact with the [community] organisation.

(Francisco)

Both the Colombians and the Somalis commented that being in contact with their communities gave them an opportunity to *'be with their people'* and *'feel at home'*. Both groups felt that contact with their community and organisations was perfectly compatible with integration into British society. They argued that, although initially it might prevent them from learning English and the intricacies of British society and institutions, this would only be during the initial stages of settlement, and it was then that they most needed their community and organisations. However, over the course of the fieldwork cases of overdependency on their organisations were observed in both groups, primarily among the Somali women. For example, although Feryel, Ardo and Rahmo had been in the UK for six-and-a-half, seven and ten years respectively, at the time of the interview none had yet acquired any English language skills and depended entirely on their communities to deal with British institutions. This suggests that, if refugees are given the chance to immerse themselves into their own communities, this may

hamper their adaptation to life in the receiving country and their integration into the wider society.

It must be noted however that, in the case of female refugees, overdependency on their community and organisations is not incompatible with a broader, more public role in exile. Even though some women in the present study (including the three Somali referred to above) had to be accompanied by a member of their community who could speak English to deal with British institutions, it was still they themselves who took the initiative and responsibility to deal with such institutions to sort out their own affairs. This may be due to two factors: first, their role as mothers who, with or without their husbands, remain as the primary carers of the family; second, their more public role in exile.

The following two cases, a Colombian and a Somali respectively, support this argument. After nearly five years in Britain, Rosa still had a very limited command of English and had to be helped by her community association with everyday matters, such as filling in forms and dealing with service providers. However, she was an active member of her community, running Saturday schools for children and helping with other activities. She had also managed to find a part-time job as a cleaner to finance her English course, even though her husband did not want her to take such a course. Very expressively, she argued that:

> *Life is tough, but you've got to get on with things.*
> (Rosa)

Similarly, Delco had been in Britain for over two years but had not yet acquired any language skills and therefore relied on her local association to interact with British society and institutions. This, however, did not prevent her from following closely her children's progress at school and meeting with their teachers. Unhappy with the hostels where she and her children had been accommodated, she took the initiative to complain to the local social services. Dissatisfied with her GP and other NHS doctors, she decided to see a private doctor to get treatment for a heart condition caused by the stress of exile. Eventually, she also managed to obtain the prescriptions through the NHS.

Although two Colombians commented that their relationship with their community and community associations had become weaker over time, only in the case of Enrique was this due to his willingness to integrate into the wider society. He had a part-time job as an administrator in a charity organisation and was also studying for a new degree at a London college. Although dissatisfied with his life in exile, he was trying hard to get involved in activities outside the Colombian and Latin American communities and become part of the host society. Whilst this resulted in a progressive detachment from his local community association, he still felt excluded from British society.

The two Colombians who did not express willingness to maintain links with their community organisations shared common reasons. Pablo explained that it was because they had proved to be unhelpful. He

also argued that there was no solidarity among the Colombian community. Similarly, Victoria tried not to establish a close relationship with any organisation in particular because she believed there was a great deal of conflict of interests going on in most of them which was, in turn, damaging solidarity and cohesion within the refugee community. Although willing to stay within the community, Victoria explained that:

> *There is a lot of cheap politics going on in every organisation; everybody's fighting for control. And I don't like that, so I keep away from it.*
>
> (Victoria)

Summary

Whilst some community workers and agency staff believed that the role of refugee organisations is to fill the gaps in the welfare system (Refugee Council 1990), others argued that their role is broader than that and involves dealing with the practical, psychological and moral needs of refugees to help them settle in the new society. Although their function as reception centres during the initial stages of settlement seemed to be of particular importance, a distinction can be made between refugee agencies and community associations. Whilst the role of the former may cover only the initial stages of settlement, that of the latter goes beyond that, for *'there is always a role for community organisations'*. The refugees themselves saw their community associations as a particularly important source of help, a fact that can be explained by the closeness of such associations to the refugee community and their ability to speak their language.

Whilst the findings confirm earlier work in that community associations were seen as being responsible for preserving customs and traditions from the homeland (Harris 1995; Duke 1996a and 1996b) and as helping refugees overcome isolation and 'feel at home' (Joly 1996; Bustos Cortes 1997), they also suggest that perceptions of refugee organisations are influenced by refugees' background and circumstances of flight:

a) Unlike the Somalis, some Colombians viewed the main role of refugee organisations as teaching refugees how to deal with the British system rather than doing everything for them. This view was likely to be due to their willingness to become self-sufficient and to be able to help fellow refugees, which resulted from their need to preserve their role as social and political actors.

b) Also unlike the Somalis, some Colombians viewed their community organisations as a vehicle to publicise the situation in their home country and campaign for a solution. Again, this reflects their commitment to the political struggle back home and their perception of exile as temporary.

Dissatisfaction with their community associations resulted in two Colombians detaching themselves from such organisations. This corroborates the comments made in Chapter Nine about the factors weakening cohesion and community spirit among Colombian refugees;

that is, conflict of interests and favouritism within community associations, coupled with their lack of commitment to refugees.

Although both Colombians and Somalis believed that contact with their community and organisations was perfectly compatible with adaptation to British society, cases of overdependency on their .organisations were evident in both groups, particularly among the Somali women. Whilst this is in line with earlier research (Gold 1992; Buijs 1993; Carey-Wood et al 1995; Duke 1996b; Montgomery 1996; Sales et al 1996), it also suggests that women's overdependence on their community and organisations is compatible with their broader role in exile. This can be explained in terms of their primary role as family carers and their more public role in exile.

The findings also highlight the negative effects of current asylum and immigration policy on the role of refugee organisations. Whilst the psychological and emotional support provided by community associations and specialist agencies was perceived as of paramount importance (Field 1985; Gold 1992; Joly 1996), the uncertainty involved in the asylum application process makes their job in this area very difficult. Since asylum seekers do not know whether they will be allowed to stay, counselling and psychotherapy cannot be planned but have to be delivered on an 'ad-hoc' basis.

Most of the personnel interviewed felt that responsibility for refugee settlement has been shifted from the government and central statutory bodies to refugee organisations, so that these are doing

what the government itself should be doing. However, most also
shared the view that unavailability of funds very much limits what
refugee organisations can do. Whilst they have always had to operate
on very limited budgets, the 1996 Act has made their task even more
difficult.

The overall objectives of the research were (a) to explore issues affecting refugee settlement, (b) to investigate how exiles become aware of refugee organisations, and (c) to study their experiences, perceptions and expectations of such organisations and the role of these during settlement. In order establish whether the circumstances behind the flight of refugees condition their attitudes towards refugee organisations and ultimately their settlement, the study focused on two refugee groups: the Colombian and the Somali.

Whilst it was expected that the information gathered would provide a framework to improve services for refugees and the basis for further work, it must be noted that the research was conducted while new asylum and immigration legislation was being drafted and debated in Parliament. Hence, the findings and conclusions discussed here must be understood within this context and may need to be reviewed in the light of the new legislation once this is enacted.

Key Findings

The research showed that:

1. English language skills, transferability of previous skills and employment experience, circumstances of flight, racism and discrimination, cultural differences between the country of origin and the UK, and availability of adequate health-care services and accommodation are key factors affecting refugee

settlement. Whilst this is in line with earlier work, the research also suggested that these issues are not independent from one another but closely interrelated.

2. Refugee agencies and, primarily, refugee community associations play a crucial role during settlement. Whilst the Colombians and the Somalis showed different levels of satisfaction with the refugee organisations they had approached, both groups relied heavily on their community and associations. Lack of feed-back systems and supervision, however, seemed pervasive among the organisations contacted for the research.

3. Refugees' socio-cultural background and the reasons behind their flight affect not only their settlement in the country of exile but also their use and perceptions of refugee organisations in that country.

Issues Affecting Settlement

For the purpose of the study, settlement was defined as an individual-level process whereby refugees become economically self-sufficient and culturally adjusted, thus achieving some degree of social equality. This process was assumed to take place within the context of their own communities and the wider society. Refugees would be 'settled' when they started to see their new environment as their 'home' in terms of everyday life experience and its connotations of family and social networks. Based on this definition, almost none of the refugees interviewed was yet settled in Britain. They still had a long way to go to achieve equality in

British society, for their lack of opportunities made economic self-sufficiency and cultural adjustment impossible. Because of their lack of employment, poverty, lack of social and community networks and often also separation from their family, daily life for most respondents did not ensure the feelings of rootedness necessary to regard their new environment as 'home'.

Language is one of the main factors affecting settlement. Inability to communicate is the main cause of refugees' isolation, dependency on others and failure in finding suitable employment. Refugees' prior knowledge of English, their educational background and age were found to be key determinants of their capacity to learn the language.

Employment is another key element in the settlement process. Apart from the financial implications of having a job, employment is crucial for various reasons: it gives refugees a sense of continuity in their lives, provides an opportunity to use their skills and realise themselves as individuals, and gives them the opportunity to contribute to and feel part of the receiving society. However, for all this to occur, the refugee must be able to find suitable employment, in line with his or her qualifications and previous experience. But the study showed that refugees face two sets of barriers to employment: those intrinsic to refugees themselves and those rooted in the country of reception. The former include refugees' lack of adequate language skills, cultural restrictions (mainly on women) and the trauma experienced prior to, during and after flight. The barriers attributable to the receiving country

include non-recognition of foreign qualifications, discrimination, inadequate child-care facilities, employers' misconception of refugees, lack of information about the job market and the asylum application process itself.

Whilst adequate training and education would certainly help refugees overcome many of the barriers to gainful employment, other obstacles would still remain in the way of successful settlement, racism and discrimination being the most important. Whilst skin colour is indeed a factor affecting settlement in so far as it may precipitate racial harassment and discrimination, it is not more important than dress or any other phenotypical feature that may make refugees and asylum seekers look different from the receiving population. Furthermore, the racial hatred based on somatic characteristics is just part of the broader issue of cultural racism. Since refugees come from a different socio-cultural environment, they may feel different in Britain and may also seem so to some sections of the receiving population who, anxious to keep their imagined 'homogeneous' identity, may reject the newcomers, making such rejection obvious through discrimination and racial harassment.

Two further elements contribute to the racialisation process of refugees: the asylum seeking process itself and the misconception of refugees created by the media and politicians. The combined effect of these two factors is the belief that refugees and asylum seekers are unwanted and undesirable people, and that the 'natives' will not act wrongly if they treat them badly. Not only does the misconception of refugees have detrimental implications for them in

terms of racism, discrimination and reduced opportunities, but also for good community relations in general and the entire population.

Refugees' displacement from their own socio-cultural environment to a different one usually results in cultural clash. The larger the gap between the two cultures, the stronger the effect of such cultural clash on the refugee's capacity to settle in the new environment. Cultural differences refer not only to customs and traditions, but also to language and racism. Learning the language of the host country is part of the broader task of learning its culture and customs. The implications of this are very important when the society of reception has negative implications for the refugee. The refugee may refuse to adapt to his or her new society, thus making settlement very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.

Health and accommodation are also key issues for successful settlement. Refugees' health problems are usually the result of their experiences during and preceding flight, and need to be treated taking into consideration their cultural background. However, they must rely on mainstream health-care services, which are neither culturally sensitive nor aware of their delicate situation in exile. Furthermore, health professionals are unlikely to have specialist training to deal efficiently with the health problems of refugees. Whilst the combination of these factors usually results in poor quality services, this is often compounded by language problems and the unavailability of interpreters.

Under current legislation, asylum seekers are only entitled to temporary accommodation whilst they await a decision on their case. They often have to move several times during that period, which further accentuates their feelings of uncertainty and unsettledness. Given the lack of public housing stock, most new arrivals are accommodated in private properties and bed-&-breakfast hostels, which very often do not meet the minimum health and safety standards. Living in such poor conditions further exacerbates physical and, particularly, psychological problems.

Importance of Refugee Organisations

The research highlighted the crucial role played by refugee organisations during settlement. Whilst their function as reception centres during the initial stages of settlement is of particular importance — receiving new arrivals and putting them in contact with specialist agencies within both the statutory and voluntary sector — a distinction must be made between refugee agencies and community associations. The role of the former may cover only the early stages of settlement, but that of the latter goes beyond that. Refugees contacting community associations generally ended up obtaining help with more issues than the ones which precipitated the initial contact. This is due to the broad range of issues handled by community organisations, their ability to speak their clients' mother tongue, and their unique experience and understanding of the needs of refugees.

The study also showed that exiles generally wish to remain in contact with their communities and organisations for as long as they

stay in the UK. Although they tend to believe that contact with their community and associations is perfectly compatible with adaptation to British society, cases of overdependency on their organisations were evident in the two groups included in the study, particularly among Somali women. Whilst this is in line with earlier work, the findings also suggest that women's overdependency on their community and organisations is compatible with their broader role in exile. This can be explained in terms of their primary role as family carers and their more public role in exile.

Whilst several problems were reported by respondents regarding the efficiency of and services provided by refugee organisations, primarily Colombian and Latin American community associations, none of the organisations approached for the research seemed to have a formal feed-back system to assess performance and service delivery. Furthermore, there was a general lack of external supervision of agency and community personnel to ensure that their work was guided by the organisations' objectives and not by their own personal interests.

Implications of Refugees' Background and Reasons to Flee

The research findings suggest that refugees' socio-cultural background and the motives behind their flight are likely to shape not only their settlement in the country of exile but also their attitudes towards refugee organisations in that country.

The way respondents became aware of refugee organisations makes this evident. Although word of mouth was the most common medium of

gaining awareness for both Colombian and Somali refugees (followed by printed material), its efficacy was different for each group. Whilst the oral nature of Somali culture makes word of mouth the ideal way of passing information on to fellow nationals, 'suspiciousness' among Colombian refugees (and Latin American exiles in general) very much curtails the effectiveness of this means of communication, making printed material all the more important. Closely linked to the circumstances forcing people to flee, 'suspiciousness' is likely to result in new arrivals getting limited information from fellow nationals on what is available and, consequently, not getting the support they need during the early stages of settlement.

Respondents' background also conditioned their level of satisfaction with and perception of refugee organisations. As political refugees, the Colombians tended to be less satisfied with the organisations they had approached than the Somalis, who were non-political refugees. Through their participation in political and community activities, political exiles develop a sense of what can be expected from a social organisation that non-political exiles do not have. Consequently, in exile political refugees are generally more demanding of refugee organisations. Furthermore, determined to preserve their social and political roles, Colombian refugees were likely to see their community organisations as a vehicle to publicise the situation in their home country and campaign for a solution, this reflecting the commitment of political refugees to their ideological or societal project back home and their perception of exile as temporary.

Finally, within Colombian and Latin American community organisations, conflicts of interests and favouritism were seen as a reflection of current Colombian (and Latin American) society. Accentuated by the existence of numerous community associations, often competing against one another to protect their own interests, these issues resulted not only in a high level of inefficiency and a waste of valuable resources, but also in a lack of solidarity and community spirit among Colombian exiles.

Limitations of the Research

Whilst, overall, the research strategy employed proved appropriate to meet the research objectives, a number of issues arose during the study — some attributable to myself as an individual rather than to the research methods. First, I was little prepared to deal and cope with the emotional element of the research. During particularly difficult interviews with exiles, I sometimes did not know how to react and used to remain silent, letting the respondents sob freely. Whilst this was the only way I could think of at the time to handle these situations, it put a great deal of emotional pressure on me, the effects of which sometimes lasted a few days after the actual interviews. Even though I had worked with refugees in the past, I had never had access to their innermost secrets in the way I did in this study. Specific training in researching sensitive issues with a high emotional content would have helped me to better tackle such difficult situations.

Second, I realise on reflection that I tended to interact more with Colombian than with Somali refugees. Although the sharing of a common language was likely to play an important part in this, my own 'race' and culture may have also unwittingly contributed to it. This goes to show that not only may the researcher's personal characteristics affect the research participants and their accounts but also the researcher him or herself and his or her behaviour.

Third, the way the respondents were selected along with the small size of the sample means that the study cannot be expected to meet the criteria of representativeness and generalizability of random probability surveys. Yet, this was acknowledged from the start and potential biases were somewhat compensated by recruiting refugees from two different groups and through a number of organisations. The fact that key themes kept coming up in the interviews and were corroborated by my observation means that the results of this study are likely to reflect the current situation of most refugees in Britain.

Last but not least, membership of a particular group and, to a lesser extent, the status of refugee seemed to be more sensitive issues for the Colombians than for the Somalis. Whilst for the former membership of a political group was somewhat 'taboo', something that should not be talked about, for the latter clan membership was a fact of life, something one was born with, and therefore it did not carry such a negative connotation.

The study showed, however, that the choice of appropriate research methods enabled respondents to give coherent accounts and express their feelings. Although refugees may not have many opportunities to talk about their situation, most respondents were willing to share their experiences and views, given time, sympathy and respect. This, I hope, should encourage others to further my research and look into the specific needs of particular refugee groups.

Changing Nature of Refugee Flows

Whilst in this thesis I have distinguished between political and non-political exiles, or between refugees with and without a 'collective project' (Joly 1996), the expanding range of refugee-producing situations throughout the world is making such a distinction increasingly blurred.

Refugee movements are not isolated phenomena but the result of interacting global and local forces. Data on refugee-producing and refugee-receiving countries suggest that the rapid rise in the number of refugees in recent years has not been confined to one or two specific regions of origin nor to one specific destination. This suggests that this is a truly global process that cannot be accounted for by a single explanation (Overbeek 1995; Koser 1996). Instead, the displacement of refugee populations from certain nations and their resettlement in others can only be understood in terms of the political and economic relations among (Gold 1992) and within the world's nations.

Refugee movements are therefore becoming increasingly complex. Whilst until very recently armed conflict was the largest single cause of refugee flows, data published at the time of writing show this is no longer the case. According to the Red Cross, environmental refugees fleeing from drought, floods, deforestation and degraded land totalled 25 million in 1998, outnumbering those displaced by war for the first time (*The Guardian*, 24 June 1999).

Economic and political reasons are so closely interwoven that they cannot be easily separated. Demographic growth is putting more and more pressure on existing resources and is rising tensions within and between countries. Thirty countries already dispute water ownership whilst access to oil, land, minerals and energy is expected to be the source of innumerable disputes, even conflicts, in the next century. Whilst those resources are not expected to run out in the short term, the inequality between those who exploit them and those who want a share in the wealth they represent is expected to grow (*The Guardian*, 22 September 1999).

Consequently, the combination of environmental problems and rapidly changing social and economic conditions are resulting in catastrophes of a new scale. According to the 1999 World Disasters report, an annual survey of humanitarian trends (quoted in *The Guardian*, 24 June 1999), the hurricane 'El Niño' caused the worst drought in Indonesia for 50 years, setting off a chain reaction of crises: the rice crop failed, the price of imported rice quadrupled, the currency dropped by 80 percent and eventually riots erupted. 'El Niño' is estimated to have cost 21,000 lives in 1998.

The Kosovan civil conflict, followed a few months later by the secession war in East Timor, are further examples of the complexity of new refugee exoduses. In the former, ethnic rivalry co-existed with political discrepancies and secessionist feelings. This conflict showed how blurred the difference between political and non-political refugees is becoming, and how ethnicity can be entangled with other political and social issues (Turton 1997), making classifications based on any of these characteristics increasingly weak.

Furthermore, increasingly restrictive immigration and asylum policies will make it more difficult for refugees to leave their countries and, consequently, the number of 'anticipatory' refugees may substantially decrease. If so, Field's (1985) distinction between these and 'acute' refugees may also become increasingly irrelevant.

These developments, however, will not undermine the results of the present research in that refugees' capacity to settle in the country of exile and their attitudes towards refugee organisations in that country will be affected by their socio-cultural background and the reasons behind their flight. Such effects relate to the refugee's position in his/her country of origin and participation (or lack of) in the events leading to exile, rather than to the actual conflict situation.

Direction of British Policy on Reception and Settlement of Refugees

In order to put the research findings discussed above into perspective, these must be placed within the context of British asylum legislation and reception and settlement policy.

Since asylum and immigration policies in Britain have been developed as ad-hoc responses to perceived crises, the country has no coherent refugee policy to address the systematic arrival of asylum seekers. With the exception of temporary programmes specifically designed for particular refugee groups (e.g., Chileans, Vietnamese, Bosnian and, more recently, Kosovans), Britain has always refused to set up a permanent reception and settlement structure, preferring to see refugee flows as a temporary phenomenon (Duke et al 1999). Following Soysal's (1994) classification, Britain has traditionally been a liberal polity. Policy instruments that serve the general population are expected to benefit refugees as well, specific arrangements being in large part private and voluntary.

Unlike the existing system, under the new legislation there will be no distinction between in-country and at-port applications and no asylum seeker will be eligible for benefits. Instead, the government has decided to create a completely new system, which will be the responsibility of the Asylum Support Directorate (located within the Home Office), supported by three 'Assistants'. New arrivals will either be pointed in the direction of the Assistants or they will make their own arrangements. The three Assistants will be voluntary sector organisations: RAP, Migrant Helpline and the Refugee Council. Whilst RAP and Migrant Helpline will continue to operate reception

arrangements at Gatwick, Heathrow and Dover, the Refugee Council will make arrangements for asylum seekers arriving elsewhere in the country. Other refugee agencies and community organisations will, of course, continue to be the first point of contact for many new arrivals, offering them help and support at an early stage. Whilst these may also become involved with the Assistants, it is unclear how they will be funded to cope with the expected levels of demand (Refugee Council 1999c: 6-7).

It therefore becomes clear that, like previous legislation, the new Bill also sees asylum seekers as temporary residents and fails to address the need for a comprehensive reception and settlement policy. Under the new legislation, Britain will continue its historical trend of decentralisation in refugee reception and settlement policy, relying heavily on voluntary organisations operating at the local level. Such organisations will continue to compensate for public functions not performed by central government.

The new Bill has also fuelled the debate on social inclusion/exclusion of refugees initiated by previous legislation — a debate in which the government's alleged commitment to human rights exists alongside restrictions of entry, and assertions of equal treatment alongside discriminatory exclusion (Sales et al 1996; Morris 1997).

Social inclusion means equality and full participation in the host society. It involves the incorporation of newcomers into the receiving community through routes such as education and suitable

employment. Denial of access to those routes results in social exclusion, which extends from social isolation to a total rupture with society. All aspects of social exclusion (e.g., unemployment, low educational attainment, bad housing and poor health) are closely interrelated and compounded.

Whilst equal access to general state provision is ostensibly a pillar of British settlement and integration policy, such a principle has been increasingly eroded with the 1993 and 1996 Acts, which have restricted the rights of asylum seekers to benefits and other services. Although refugees and those with ELR have a formal right to equality of services, in practice their access to those services is limited in a number of ways. These include discrimination — both individual and structural — by service providers, as well as the difficulties posed by language problems and poverty (Sales et al 1996: 13).

Furthermore, welfare and other services have increasingly been used for surveillance, with access conditional on proof of immigration status (Sales and Gregory 1996). Such processes of exclusion make it difficult for some groups to realise their social and employment rights, whether they are asylum seekers or legally resident 'visible minorities', for their contact with public authorities will always expose them to excessive scrutiny (Morris 1997: 252) on the basis of their skin colour, accent or name.

Refugees' exclusion has been further compounded by the absence of any official data on refugees within the UK, for this results in

refugee organisations, local authorities and other bodies dealing with refugees having no idea of the number of clients they are supposed to assist or their socio-economic characteristics. They have to plan and operate within an informational vacuum, enforced by central government's unwillingness to collect or disseminate appropriate data. A second associated problem is that lack of information about the existence/non-existence of refugee constituencies in particular areas often provides a pretext for the lack of specialist provision by service providers, who can argue that there is no need for action because there are no refugees in their locality (Robinson 1999: 78).

Under current legislation, however, local authorities have a legal duty to provide services for destitute asylum seekers which ensure that they are adequately accommodated and have access to food. But as a result of the issues discussed above and lack of resources, their provision is often insufficient, inadequate and inaccessible. Although a few local authorities and health authorities provide special programmes to assist refugees during settlement (e.g., language courses, translation and advocacy services), these projects are threatened by increasingly stringent budgetary restrictions. In such a situation, refugees entirely depend on their communities and organisations for support.

Although the new Bill has been heralded by the Labour government as the basis for a 'fairer, faster and firmer' system, the emphasis seems to be placed on being faster and firmer rather than fairer. Despite the government's alleged aim to create an inclusive society

of equal opportunities, the new Bill takes the processes of exclusion of previous legislation even further. Its most important measures propose to:

- Forbid asylum seekers to work (and fine employers who hire them);
- Introduce vouchers which they use instead of cash to exchange for basic goods; and
- Force asylum seekers to accept the housing they are given, dispersing them around the country.

Whilst, as discussed above, refugees face a number of barriers in the way of gainful employment, the new Bill closes this avenue of incorporation into British society even further. Refugees' illegal under-employment (i.e., employment below their qualification levels and/or unrelated to their skills and previous experience) is likely to grow.

Under the voucher system, asylum seekers will be entitled to only 70 percent of the basic weekly rate of income support, of which only £10 will be paid in cash (to both adults and children). Whilst refugee organisations have voiced their concerns about the disastrous consequences of such a system, ministers admitted that it will be more expensive to run and may help fewer people than the present system of paying social benefits (*The Guardian*, 12 August 1999). Given that the new Bill is supposed to reduce the costs of receiving asylum seekers, this has been very embarrassing for the Labour government. Yet, ministers have defended the vouchers because they claim the current system is open to abuse and makes the UK a

magnet for bogus refugees, thus reiterating Britain's exclusionary approach to asylum policy.

The voucher system, however, will create a parallel universe of social exclusion for asylum seekers, resulting in a division between the indigenous poor and the stateless poor. Vouchers are also likely to stigmatise asylum seekers and will limit their choice of purchases (Refugee Council 1999c: 7). Hostility against refugees in supermarkets using vouchers provided by some local authorities has already been reported by the press.

Furthermore, the policy of dispersal underlying the new system of support will hamper the development of refugee communities and will compound social exclusion. Scattering refugees across Britain will reinforce the notion of 'burden sharing' and its negative connotations. Marginalisation and isolation are likely to follow. In these circumstances, refugee settlements are more likely to develop into ethnic minorities within an exclusionary society than into ethnic communities within a multicultural Britain. As occurred in the past, in the medium term a period of secondary migration is likely to take place (probably back to London), as refugees seek the support of their fellow nationals and communities re-establish themselves. Since refugees' entitlement to welfare benefits will be removed and local authorities will cease being responsible for them, asylum seekers will have to rely much more than they do now on their own associations and refugee agencies. Hence, overdependence on such organisations is likely to increase.

Although the ostensible aim of the new Bill is to admit only 'genuine' refugees (who, according to the government, account for a small proportion of all asylum claimants), it is in the same spirit as previous immigration and asylum policies: they all have been based on the assumption that their primary objective is to keep people out (Spencer 1994b; Sales et al 1996). Like most Western countries, the UK has used its own national interests to justify such restrictive policies, arguing that the British population and economy (welfare resources in particular) must be protected. Pressures from political parties (primarily, although not only, of the right) have also been important. Furthermore, there is a culture of disbelief at the Home Office, with the assumption being that applicants are fabricating their case. Perfectly plausible explanations for applicants' actions are dismissed as not being consistent with the actions of genuine asylum seekers, without any evidence to support these statements (Refugee Council 1997f: 22). This is reflected in the large proportion of refusals.

Yet, being part of a massive exodus, concentrated in space and time and 'positively' advertised by the media, increases applicants' credibility, images of devastation, misery and tangible pain making them more likely to be granted asylum (D'Souza and Crisp 1985). This is evident among the Somali and Colombian refugees in the UK, the former showing a higher rate of Convention status and ELR than the latter, partly due to the media coverage of the civil war in Somalia. Likewise, the government's official response to refugee crises around the world and co-operation with the international community to accommodate refugees in British territory, however

temporary such arrangements may be, suggest a distinction between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' groups. Whilst the former are seen as meriting humanitarian assistance and asylum, the latter are not. The Kosovan refugees flown into Britain during the war with Yugoslavia and the reception arrangements made for them are a good example of this.

Asylum seekers are therefore usually regarded either as a 'problem' or as a 'minority' in need of protection. The contribution made to British society by refugees and their dependants in the past (e.g., in business, the arts or academia) is, however, hardly ever acknowledged. Whilst emphasis has been put on keeping refugees out, little or no attention has been paid to helping them become self-sufficient and independent people once in the UK, so that they can realise their full potential and become active members of British society. The new Bill also fails to make clear provisions in terms of support for those who are granted Convention status or ELR.

Instead, the Labour government has been working closely with officials abroad to reduce the number of asylum seekers coming to the UK. As the new dispersal plan is about to be implemented, the government is joining forces with Germany and France to persuade the EU to tighten ever further controls on illegal immigration across Europe. The plan these three countries want to press will set down common rules for accepting refugees fleeing genuine persecution and will ensure that a failed asylum seeker rejected by one EU member state is rejected by them all. Such proposals are intended to control future flows of asylum seekers by developing a common EU

visa policy, stricter enforcement of border controls and tougher sanctions against illegal residents, including greater use of deportation (*The Guardian,* 8 October 1999).

At home, an extra £120 million will be spent over the next three years to speed up the handling of asylum cases and increase the removal of failed applicants. The number of Immigration Airline Liaison Officers are being quadrupled to 20, thus enabling more airlines to clamp down on the number of undocumented passengers. From April 1999, carriers' liability has been extended to *Eurostar* services arriving from Brussels.

All this leads to conclude that Britain is moving further down the path of exclusion: whilst immigration policies have been tightened up with tougher visa restrictions, carrier sanctions and stricter internal controls, the rights of those who do manage to reach the UK to seek asylum are being reduced to a minimum. As a result, the situation in Britain today is one where refugees are forced to rebuild their lives in an increasingly hostile environment and where the processes of exclusion are multiple: legal, social and economic (Sales et al 1996).

These processes will be compounded with the new Bill. By then, the 'we-do-what-we-can' approach taken so far by refugee organisations will no longer be valid nor acceptable. If action is not taken to ensure the best use of the limited resources available, the pressure refugee organisations will be working under once the new legislation has been enacted will be unsustainable.

Refugee Organisations: Improvements to Facilitate Settlement

Despite the precarious situation of refugees in Britain, the present research suggests that there is a long way to go before refugee organisations can satisfactorily meet the needs of their clients. Lack of resources is the main problem faced by such organisations, which very much limits what they can do and offer. Although they have always had to operate on very limited budgets, the 1996 Act has made their task even more difficult. Overwhelmed by the increasing demand for their services, refugee organisations do not have enough paid or voluntary staff to deal with all cases promptly and efficiently. However, although staff can only be hired if more financial resources are made available, this is not just a problem of availability of funding but also of using the existing resources more rationally and efficiently. There are numerous refugee organisations in London and they often overlap in terms of their provision, this resulting in a duplication of services and resources. In addition to competing for funding, there is little co-ordination among them so that services may not be used because nobody knows they exist.

In order to avoid such duplication of services and increase their efficiency, refugee organisations need to join their resources, expertise and experience. A concentration of resources in fewer but better funded and staffed organisations, along with increased co-ordination among them, would be the first step towards better meeting the needs of refugees. The issue of transportation to and from organisations also needs to be addressed, otherwise asylum

seekers with no money for public transportation and no English skills may be unable to use them. Furthermore, organisations need to be re-structured in such a way that they can cater for both men and women exiles. Yet, without adequate child-care facilities, refugee women and single parents would still be unable to use the services available because they could not leave their homes or take their children with them.

There is also an urgent need for more caseworkers specialised in various areas, such as immigration advice, benefits and housing, to improve efficiency and quality of services. Refugees need to be informed, in their mother tongue, of the asylum application process and the possible outcomes of every stage of that process, as well as the implications of each of those outcomes by a legal adviser (assisted, if needed, by an interpreter). In view of the accommodation problems highlighted by the research, housing advisers need to make sure that refugees are adequately housed. Accommodation providers need to be monitored to ensure that their properties are adequate, in an acceptable condition and in an area with a low incidence of racial attacks. These measures would result in refugees staying in one place as opposed to moving several times in search of better accommodation. Whenever possible, refugees need to be housed near their own communities. Not only would this ensure that their practical needs are met but also their psychological and cultural needs. The government's proposals to disperse asylum seekers around the country and force them to accept the accommodation they are given are therefore highly inappropriate.

More translators and interpreters are also needed to satisfy the demand for such services within the refugee community, particularly during the early stages of settlement. Immigration advice, housing and health are among the areas where interpreting services are most needed. Most refugees are unaware of their rights because these have never been explained to them in their own language. Likewise, language is a problem when explaining symptoms to doctors and other health professionals who, furthermore, very often lack awareness of the refugee's socio-cultural background. However, given the sensitive nature of counselling and psychotherapy, the use of interpreters may not always be advisable in these areas.

Having qualified professionals in all these fields who can speak the mother tongue of refugees very much depends on the availability of funds. However, this problem could be overcome by using qualified exiles from the relevant refugee groups as volunteers (though some of them could also be paid for their services), provided that their qualifications are recognised in Britain or appropriate conversion courses can be taken. Not only would they share their clients' mother tongue but also the same cultural background.

In relation to this last point, a more efficient use needs to be made of volunteers and their skills. In one of the refugee agencies visited for the study, volunteers were used almost exclusively to do manual jobs requiring very basic or no skills at all, such as serving food or washing up. Whilst they were happy to carry out these tasks, most volunteers had a wealth of skills (e.g., relevant language skills and specialist qualifications) that were not being

used. Even though this matter was discussed in several meetings with the organisation's management team, no effort was ever made on their part to engage volunteers in tasks where they could make better use of their skills.

There is also a need for training for both volunteers and paid staff on refugee issues, so that they can understand the problems exiles are likely to face in the UK and treat them with the respect any human being deserves. This need to increase awareness of refugee issues applies not only to refugee organisations but also to other bodies dealing to a greater or lesser extent with refugees, such as the Immigration Service, local authority social services and health services. Furthermore, health professionals whose catchment area includes a known refugee constituency require specialist training to be able to deal efficiently with the health problems of refugees.

When assessing personnel recruitment needs and service delivery, refugee organisations need to bear in mind the characteristics of their client group(s). For example, because of their fear of being reported and the perceived lack of commitment of fellow nationals, the use of non-Colombian (or non-Latin American) staff able to speak Spanish would be welcomed by Colombian refugees, for they would feel more comfortable discussing their problems with a non-Colombian person than with a fellow national. On the other hand, the use of Somali staff would be very positive for Somali refugees. Further, coming from a society where men and women have separate and well-defined roles, the use of male and female caseworkers for male and

female Somali refugees respectively, would also be advisable, particularly in health-care services.

Likewise, when promoting their services, refugee organisations need to take into account the background and characteristics of the refugee constituency(-ies) they intend to cater for. Whilst word of mouth may be the primary means of transmitting information within a particular refugee group (e.g., Somalis), others may rely more on printed material (e.g., Colombians). Consequently, refugee organisations (and other bodies dealing with refugees) need to use the most appropriate media mix. They also need to bear in mind that, unless information is made available to refugees in their own mother tongue, their promotional efforts are likely to be wasted.

In addition to the organisational and operational changes discussed so far, more emphasis needs to be placed on training and education to equip refugees with the necessary skills to become independent and self-sufficient in as little time as possible. New arrivals need to be helped to 'find their own feet', so that later on they can contribute both to their own community and to British society.

Since the ability to communicate is crucial for successful settlement, English language training is of paramount importance. English tuition of different levels needs to be provided, taking into consideration refugees' prior knowledge of the language, if any, as well as their educational background and age, for these are key determinants of their capacity to learn the language. Schools can be used as a base for language tuition, given the positive

connotations this institution is likely to have for refugees. In addition to language tuition, 'After School Clubs' would be invaluable in providing help with schoolwork, for many parents do not speak English and consequently cannot help their children.

Whilst English tuition would help refugees bridge the cultural gap they are likely to face in the UK, this needs to be accompanied by 'instruction' in British society and culture. Not only would this help reduce the culture clash experienced by most refugees but also, at least to some extent, domestic conflict. More specifically, most Somali refugees need to learn how to use, cook and eat available Western foods properly. Somalis are expected to live according to Koranic law and have the same dietary restrictions as other Muslims; hence, many new arrivals do not know how to eat in the Western world and some Western foods are taboo. They therefore need to be provided with coaching on health nutrition, so that they can use the foods available in Britain in an appropriate manner whilst still observing their dietary restrictions.

Steps can also be taken to overcome, at least to some extent, the barriers to gainful employment faced by refugees. In addition to the provision of English tuition, conversion courses would enable refugees to adapt and transfer their professional experience, skills and qualifications to the British labour market. Likewise, since many refugee women have never worked outside the home, training programmes would provide them with the necessary skills to enter the job market and obtain gainful employment. These courses could include coaching on the structure of the labour market, job search

methods and the interview process in the UK. The post of 'employment caseworker', with a remit to search for jobs and promote refugees to employers, would be a useful addition to the staff of refugee organisations.

Courses need to take into consideration the needs of specific exile groups, such as refugees already in employment or single parents. Each of these groups has specific requirements that need to be borne in mind if training programmes are to be successful. For example, while refugees in employment are unlikely to be able to attend day time courses, single parents are usually free during day time if their children attend school. Furthermore, training and educational programmes need to be complemented with suitable child-care facilities to make them accessible for women and single parents. This would also enable them to gain access to the labour market and other activities outside the home.

Refugee groups also require opportunities for socialising, both within their own refugee communities and with the British community. Regarding the former, there is a need for more cultural activities and workshops. These would give refugees an opportunity to get together and would enable the younger generation to maintain the customs and traditions of their home country. As for activities with the host society, there need to be more opportunities to facilitate interaction with the British, so that new arrivals could learn about British culture faster and also have the opportunity to become involved in the host community. Whilst employment and education provide a natural means of social intercourse with the receiving

society, additional activities in an equally natural setting are needed for those who are neither working nor studying — for example, using schools as a focus. Such involvement in the receiving community should result in exiles becoming more independent, thus reducing the likelihood of overdependency on their community and associations.

Although these social activities can be carried out by both refugee agencies and community associations, they are primarily the latter's responsibility. In addition to the provision of assistance and advice on a range of practical and psychological matters, community organisations also have a cultural and social role which extends beyond the early stages of settlement. They are responsible for maintaining customs and traditions from the homeland, for providing exiles with opportunities for socialising, and for organising the community so that nobody is left out. However, what refugee community organisations can do is indeed very limited if funding is not available.

Finally, minimum quality standards need to be agreed upon by all organisations and services need to be delivered to those standards. Refugee organisations need to put into place adequate systems to collect feed-back from clients in a regular and systematic manner. This information should be assessed and fed back into the system so that performance is closely monitored and services modified to best meet the needs of refugees. This could be complemented with a 'suggestion box', which clients could use to express and communicate their own ideas.

Future Research Agenda

Since the research was conducted at a time when new asylum and immigration legislation was being drafted, further research becomes necessary to explore whether and to which extent the findings and recommendations discussed above would be affected by the new proposals. Once this has been ascertained, additional research would also be necessary to explore how these recommendations could be best implemented within the context of the new policy.

Whilst this thesis showed important organisational issues within the Colombian and Somali refugee communities, longitudinal research within both communities would yield invaluable information on settlement patterns. Among the Colombians, this would provide knowledge on how conflicts of interests and 'suspiciousness' within the exiled community evolve over time. Regarding the Somalis, longitudinal research would be invaluable to explore in more depth the positive developments in terms of overcoming clan antipathies identified in this thesis and their impact on community formation. Such research should be placed within the context of the new legislation, paying special attention to the dispersal approach underlying the voucher system and its implications for community development.

The finding that refugee women's overdependency on their community and organisations is not incompatible with their broader role in exile also merits further investigation. Particular attention should be paid to the role of refugee women within their communities, how

this role evolves over time and its implications for gender relations. The results should inform the development of specific provision for female refugees.

Finally, given the changing nature of refugee flows, it would be interesting to explore how new refugee-producing situations will affect refugees' capacity to settle in the country of exile: their perception of exile as temporary or permanent, their level of organisation and their capacity to form communities and organisations. This should inform future reception and settlement policy in general and specialist provision in particular.

APPENDIX A: SCHEDULE FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH KEY PERSONNEL

1. *Situation of Refugees in Britain*

   1.1 General situation

   1.2 Awareness of the situation in Britain

   1.3 Awareness of community organisations and refugee agencies

2. *Implications of Recent Legislation (1996 Asylum & Immigration Act)*

   2.1 Respondent's general view

   2.2 Withdrawal of benefits

   2.3 Waiting for a decision from the Home Office

   2.4 Other implications

3. *Role of Community Associations and Refugee Agencies*

   3.1 Respondent's general view

   3.2 Effects of recent legislation on community associations and refugee agencies

   3.3 Specific activities of this organisation

4. *Problems Faced by Refugees and Factors Affecting Adaptation*

   4.1 Respondent's views

   4.2 Specific problems faced by the Colombians/Somalis

5. *Characteristics of the Colombian/Somali Refugee Community*

   5.1 Sense of community

   5.2 Structure of the Colombian/Somali refugee community

   5.3 Formal/informal links among groups around London/Britain

   5.4 Issues of gender, class, etc.

   5.5 Other issues

6. Advertising Activities and Referrals

6.1 Publicity   - Word of mouth
                   - Pamphlets, leaflets, newsletters
                   - Press
                   - Radio

6.2 Networking   - Links with other organisations
                   - Links with service providers

6.3 Other

7. Assessment of Performance and Service Delivery

7.1 Finding out about refugees' needs

7.2 Setting priorities

7.3 Delivering the service

7.4 Measuring effectiveness

1. Background Information
- Personal details (age, marital status, family, education, etc.)
- Reasons to leave the country
- Reasons to choose the UK as the country of exile
- Time to prepare the flight
- When arrived in the UK/length of stay in the UK
- Port/in-country applicant
- Immigration status

2. How Refugees Become Aware of Refugee Community Organisations and Refugee Agencies

2.1 Organisations aware of
- Which organisations
- How became aware

2.2 Word of mouth/referrals
- From whom

2.3 Pamphlets, leaflets, newsletters
- From which organisations
- How was this obtained
- In which language

2.4 Press
- Which paper(s)
- In which language

2.5 Radio
- Which station(s)
- In which language

3. Satisfaction with Refuge Community Organisations and Refugee Agencies

3.1 Community organisations/agencies contacted
- How contact was made
- Reasons for contacting organisations

3.2 Agencies/Community organisations NOT contacted
- Reasons for NOT contacting organisations

3.3 Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with organisations contacted
- Organisations satisfied with
- Reasons for satisfaction
- Organisations dissatisfied with
- Reasons for dissatisfaction

3.4 Role of community organisations/refugee agencies in the settlement process
- How these organisations are perceived
- Extent to which needs have been met
- Contact with community and associations
- Adaptation to British society

3.5 Feed-back to organisations
- Was this requested

- How was it requested
- Was this given
- How was it given

3.6 Changes (if any) that should be made in refugee organisations to improve services

4. Problems Encountered During Settlement

4.1 Language
- Command of the English language upon arrival
- Did they learn English in their home country
- Courses attended in the UK
  * Who provided the course
  * How they found out about the course
  * Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with course
  * Reasons for satisfaction/dissatisfaction
- Problems in the acquisition of English language skills
  * Reasons
- How language problems are perceived
- Implications of language for adaptation
- Help received from organisations
  * How found out
  * Satisfaction

4.2 Unemployment and loss of professional status
- Previous situation in home country
  * Education
  * Professional status
  * Experience
- Current situation in the UK
- Reasons for unemployment/under-employment in the UK
- Women's additional barriers to employment
  * With partners in UK
  * Without partners in UK
- Willingness to work
  * Would like to work
  * Would like to have a better job
- Other activities in the UK
  * Voluntary work/Skills learned
  * Study
- Welfare benefits
  * Income support
  * Housing benefit
  * Others
- Loss of professional status
  * Effects
  * Degree of success in getting back to previous level
- Effects of unemployment
- Help received from organisations
  * How found out
  * Satisfaction

4.3 Accommodation and Housing
- History since arrival in the UK
  - * Types of accommodation
  - * How found out
  - * Satisfaction/Reasons
- Current accommodation
  - * How found out
  - * Satisfaction/Reasons
- Problems experienced
  - * Homelessness
- Sources of help
- Help received from organisations
  - * How found out
  - * Satisfaction

4.4 Health
- Health situation
- Physical problems
- Psychological problems
- Registration with GP
  - * Satisfaction
  - * Problems encountered
- Access to and help from other health professionals
  - * How found out
  - * Satisfaction
  - * Problems encountered
- Understanding of refugees' situation and problems
- Help received from organisation
  - * How found out
  - * Satisfaction

4.5 Racism and discrimination
- Experiences
  - * Racism
  - * Discrimination
- Why it happened — respondent's perceptions
- Effects of these experiences on the respondent

4.6 Social isolation
- Feel isolated/Does NOT feel isolated
  - * Reasons
  - * Cultural shock
  - * Implications of language, employment and accommodation
  - * Feelings about home country
- Women's additional problems
- How isolation is overcome
- Contact with own community
- Consequences of social isolation

4.7 Waiting for a decision from the Home Office/Immigration status
- Worried/Not worried about decision from Home Office
  - * Reasons
- Possibility of repatriation
  - * Effects on respondent
- Family reunion
  - * Effects on respondent
- Help received from organisations
  - * How found out
  - * Satisfaction

4.8 Domestic/family problems
- Experienced problems/Never experienced problems
  - * Reasons
- Experience of exile as a couple
- Role reversals and domestic violence
- Inter-generational conflict
- Help received from organisations
  - * How found out
  - * Satisfaction

APPENDIX C: SCHEDULE FOR GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH REFUGEES

1. *Awareness of Refugee Organisations*

   1.1 Awareness of community organisations and refugee agencies

   - Awareness prior arrival
   - Awareness after arrival

   1.2 Word of mouth

   - Somalis' oral system - Importance over other means of communication
   - Colombians' word of mouth - Importance over other means of communication

2. *Awareness Versus Use*

   2.1 Refugee agencies versus community associations

   2.2 Reasons

3. *Use of Community Associations*

   3.1 More help than expected from community organisations

   3.2 Reasons

4. *Reasons for NOT Contacting Organisations (apart from 'Needs fully covered by other organisations contacted')*

   4.1 Colombians

   - 'All organisations are the same'
   - 'Political'/internal problems/conflicts of interests
   - Fear of being reported

   4.2 Somalis

   - Location
   - Sex segregation
   - Clan rivalries

5. *Satisfaction With Organisations*

   5.1 Level of politicisation among Colombians

   5.2 Awareness of scarce resources

6. *Dissatisfaction With Organisations*

6.1 Colombians (more dissatisfied with community organisations than with refugee agencies) because of organisations'

- Lack of commitment/understanding of refugee problems
- Conflicts of interests
- Lack of organisation
- Inadequate services
- Communication barriers

6.2 Somalis (no Somali respondent was dissatisfied with the organisations contacted)

7. *Role of Refugee Organisations*

7.1 Colombians

- Support and advise asylum seekers
- Guide asylum seekers in the UK
- Denounce situation in Colombia
- Organise Colombian community in exile

7.2 Somalis

- Support and advise asylum seekers
- Organise the Somali community in exile

8. *Relationship With the Community/Organisations*

8.1 Temporary/Permanent — integration into the wider society

8.2 Colombians

Reasons to keep in contact

- Cultural maintenance ('feel at home'/isolation)
- Help others/receive help
- Community spirit among Colombians

Reasons not to keep in contact

- Community/organisations proved unhelpful
- Organisations' internal problems

8.3 Somalis

<u>Reasons to keep in contact</u>

- Cultural maintenance ('feel at home'/isolation)
- Help others/receive help
- Community spirit among Somalis

<u>Reasons not to keep in contact</u> (if any)

9. *Changes Proposed to Improve Organisations' Efficiency and Refugees' Situation in Britain*

9.1 Colombians

9.2 Somalis

25 January 1998

Dear Sir/Madam

As part of my doctoral thesis at Middlesex University, I am conducting a number of interviews among Colombian and Somali refugees in the United Kingdom, and I am contacting you to request your co-operation.

The study focuses on the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in the United Kingdom, and the services and help they receive from refugee community organisations and refugee agencies. The objective of the research is three-fold:

1. To investigate how exiles become aware of refugee agencies and community groups, and how they establish contact with these organisations;

2. To analyse refugees' experiences and perceptions of the services and support provided by such organisations, and the extent to which such services help them overcome the problems encountered during settlement; and

3. To establish a reference frame to improve the efficiency of the various community groups and agencies working with exiles.

Attached is a list of topics to be covered during the interview. This will give you a fairly accurate idea of the information I would like to obtain from you. Needless to say that your responses will be treated in the strictest confidence, and your name will be in no way linked to your answers.

Of course, should you feel uncomfortable discussing any of the issues listed in the attached document, that topic may be omitted. However, your answers are important to me and your co-operation will be much appreciated. As a token of gratitude, £10 will be given to each participant.

Yours sincerely,

Enc.: Interview schedule

APPENDIX E: KEY PERSONNEL FROM REFUGEE ORGANISATIONS

For reasons of confidentiality and to maintain the respondents' anonymity, all names have been replaced with fictitious ones.

(1)   *Faduno*, Somali refugee community worker. She was a refugee from Somalia herself.

(2)   *Martin*, (central) refugee agency worker. He was a refugee himself from a Latin American country.

(3)   *Ricardo*, refugee community worker dealing mainly with Colombian refugees. He was also a refugee from a Latin American country.

(4,5) *Roberta* and *Mohad*, both worked for the same (umbrella) refugee community organisation. *Roberta* dealt with Latin American refugees; she was from Latin America herself. *Mohad* worked with Somali refugees; his family background was also Somali.

(6)   *Saadia*, counsellor from a specialist refugee agency providing psychotherapy and counselling. She was from Somalia.

(7,8) *Vicky* and *Masoume*, both worked for the same (central) refugee agency. *Masoume* was a Somali refugee herself.

F.1 The Colombian Sample

Personal interviews were conducted with 16 Colombian refugees and asylum seekers: seven men and nine women. The age of the male participants ranged from 17 to 45, with an average age of 31. The age of the female respondents ranged from 25 to 53, with an average age of 39 (see Table f.1).

Table f.1

Sex ⇒ Age Group ⇓	Men	Women	Total
25 and under	2	1	3
26-35	2	2	4
36-45	3	4	7
46-55	-	2	2
56-65	-	-	-
Over 65	-	-	-
Total	7	9	16

The majority were married or living with their partners. Whilst half of the men were married, the proportion was higher among the women; this was partly due to the fact that some of the women had come to the UK to join their partners, who were already here. Most of those who were married had children. The number of children ranged from one to five, with an average of two or three. However, not all the respondents had their families (i.e., spouses and children) with them in the UK.

The Colombian respondents had been in the UK for between eight months and nine-and-a-half years, with an average length of stay of

three-and-a-half years. At the time of the interviews only three had

been granted full refugee status (see Table f.2).

Table f.2

Sex ⇒ Immigration Status ⇓	Men	Women	Total
Still awaiting decision	6	5	11
Full refugee status	–	3	3
Appealing against neg. decision	1	1	2
Total	7	9	16

The three respondents with Convention status had been in Britain the

longest (nine-and-a-half, seven-and-a-half and nearly five years

respectively). Half of those still awaiting an initial decision on

their application had arrived in the UK after the implementation of

the 1996 Act in February 1996, as had one of the respondents

appealing against a negative decision (see Table f.3).

Table f.3

Before/After 1996 Act ⇒ Immigration Status ⇓	Before 1996 Act	After 1996 Act	Total
Still awaiting decision	6	5	11
Full refugee status	3	–	3
Appealing against neg. decision	1	1	2
Total	10	6	16

Thirteen respondents were main applicants and the remaining three —

two women and a boy — were dependents. The majority had applied for

asylum at their port of entry to the UK (see Table f.4).

Table f.4

Port/Country Applicant ⇒ Immigration Status ⇓	Port Applicant	In-Country Applicant	Total
Still awaiting decision	10	1	11
Full refugee status	3	-	3
Appealing against neg. decision	1	1	2
Total	14	2	16

Below is a brief profile of each respondent. For reasons of confidentiality and to maintain the respondents' anonymity, all names have been changed.

(1) *Andres*, 31 year-old man, unmarried. He fled from Colombia to Britain on his own, leaving his partner behind. He had been in the UK for under a year and was still awaiting an initial decision on his asylum application.

(2) *Clara*, 41 year-old woman, married. She fled Colombia on her own, leaving her husband and five children behind. She had been in Britain for eight months and was still awaiting an initial decision on her asylum application.

(3) *Elena*, 52 year-old woman, married. She left Colombia with her husband (main applicant) and her two children. She had been in the UK for over five years and was still awaiting an initial decision on her husband's asylum application.

(4) *Enrique*, 37 year-old man, single. He fled to Britain taking his elderly mother with him. He had been in the UK for over six

years and was still awaiting an initial decision on his asylum application.

(5) *Francisco*, 17 year-old boy. He came to Britain with his parents and his brother, his father being the main applicant. He had been in the UK for over five years and was still awaiting an initial decision on his father's asylum application.

(6) *Isabel*, 25 year-old woman, married. She came to the UK with her only daughter to re-join her husband. She had been in Britain for one-and-a-half years and was still awaiting an initial decision on her asylum application.

(7) *Luis*, 39 year-old man, married. He came to the UK with his wife and two of his children, leaving a third child in Colombia in the care of relatives. He had been in Britain for fifteen months and was still awaiting an initial decision on his asylum application.

(8) *Luisa*, 35 year-old woman, widowed. Her husband had been killed in Colombia. She and her two children were brought to the UK by Amnesty International, where she was granted full refugee status. She had been in Britain for seven-and-a-half years.

(9) *Manuel*, 45 year-old man, married. He came to Britain on his own and was later re-joined by his wife and his two children. He had been in the UK for two-and-a-half years and was still awaiting an initial decision on his asylum application.

(10) *María*, 41 year-old woman, widowed and re-married in the UK. Her first husband had been killed in Colombia. She was brought to the UK by Amnesty International, where she re-joined her three children and mother-in-law. She had been in Britain for two-and-a-half years and was still awaiting an initial decision on her asylum application.

(11) *Pablo*, 20 year-old man, married. He left Colombia for the UK with his wife. He had been in Britain for one-and-a-half years and was still awaiting an initial decision on his asylum application.

(12) *Paula*, 32 year-old woman, married. She and her daughter came to Britain to re-join her husband. She had been in the UK for over two years and was appealing against a negative decision on her asylum application.

(13) *Pedro*, 31 year-old man, unmarried. He came to Britain with his partner. He had been in the UK for one-and-a-half years and was appealing against a negative decision on his asylum application.

(14) *Rosa*, 38 year-old woman, married. She, her husband and their only child were brought to the UK by Amnesty International, where they were given full refugee status. They had been in the UK for nearly five years. Their second child was born in Britain.

(15) *Victoria*, 53 year-old woman, divorced (in Colombia). Helped by Amnesty International, she came to Britain on her own and was granted full refugee status. She had been in the UK for nine-and-a-half years.

(16) *Vivian*, 37 year-old woman, married. She came to Britain with her husband (main applicant) and her three children. She had been in the UK for three-and-a-half years and was still awaiting an initial decision on her husband's asylum application.

F.2 The Somali Sample

Personal interviews were conducted with 15 Somali refugees and asylum seekers: seven men and eight women. The age of the male participants ranged from 19 to 53, with an average age of 36. The age of the female respondents ranged from 40 to 66, with an average age of 49 (see Table f.5).

Table f.5

Sex ⇒ Age Group ⇓	Men	Women	Total
25 and under	1	–	1
26–35	2	–	2
36–45	3	4	7
46–55	1	2	3
56–65	–	1	1
Over 65	–	1	1
Total	7	8	15

There was an almost equal number of single, married and widowed respondents. With the exception of four single respondents, all had

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children. The number of children ranged from one to ten, with an average of four or five. However, like the Colombians, not all respondents had their families (i.e. spouses and children) with them in the UK.

The Somali respondents had been in the UK for between under four months and nearly 12 years, with an average length of stay of nearly five years. At the time of the interviews, most participants had a fairly permanent immigration status (see Table f.6). The two with full refugee status and the two with indefinite leave to remain had been in the UK the longest (six-and-a-half and ten years and seven and 12 years, respectively). All respondents with ELR had arrived before February 1996, whilst only one of those still awaiting a decision from the Home Office had done so (see Table f.7).

Table f.6

Sex ⇒ Immigration Status ⇓	Male	Female	Total
ELR	3	2	5
Full refugee status	-	2	2
Indefinite Leave to Remain	1	1	2
Family reunion	-	1	1
Overseas British citizen	1	-	1
Still awaiting decision	2	2	4
Total	7	8	15

Table f.7

Before/After 1996 Act ⇒ Immigration Status ⇓	Before 1996 Act	After 1996 Act	Total
ELR	5	–	5
Full refugee status	2	–	2
Indefinite Leave to Remain	2	–	2
Family reunion	1	–	1
Overseas British citizen	1	–	1
Still awaiting decision	1	3	4
Total	12	3	15

Thirteen respondents were main applicants whilst the other two came as family reunion or were invited by relatives already settled in the UK, respectively. Excluding these two respondents and a further one who had the right of entry as an overseas British citizen, the majority of the respondents were 'port' applicants (see Table f.8).

Table f.8

Port/Country Applicant ⇒ Immigration Status ⇓	Port Applicant	In-Country Applicant	Total
ELR	4	1	5
Full refugee status	2	–	2
Indefinite Leave to Remain	–	1	1
Family reunion	–	–	–
Overseas British citizen	–	–	–
Still awaiting decision	3	1	4
Total	9	3	12

Below is a brief profile of each respondent. As mentioned earlier, all names have been changed to protect respondents' anonymity.

(1) *Abdulahi*, 36 year-old man, single. He came to the UK on his own, where he was granted ELR. He had been in Britain for over six years. Abdulahi had recently become engaged to a Somali woman also exiled in the UK.

(2) *Ahmed*, 40 year-old man, married. He came to the UK as a post-graduate student and was already here when the civil war broke out in Somalia. He was granted indefinite leave to remain and was later re-joined by his wife and his two children. He had been in Britain for nearly 12 years.

(3) *Ali*, 53 year-old man, married. He came to Britain on his own; his wife and two children were still in a refugee camp in Ethiopia. He had been in the UK for some four years and was granted ELR.

(4) *Amina*, 66 year-old woman, widowed. Her husband died in Somalia of natural causes. Her five children were already in the UK and, hence, she came as family reunion. She had been in Britain for over seven years.

(5) *Ardo*, 44 year-old woman, widowed. Her husband was killed in the war and she came to Britain with her seven children, where she was granted indefinite leave to remain. She had been in the UK for nearly seven years.

(6) *Batulo*, 40 year-old woman, widowed. Her husband was killed in the war and she came to the UK with her three youngest children. Her fourth child was still back in Somalia. She had been in Britain for under four months and was still awaiting an initial decision on her asylum application.

(7) *Delco*, 47 year-old woman, married. She came to the UK with her four children, leaving her husband in Somalia. She had been in the UK for over two years and was still awaiting an initial decision on her asylum application.

(8) *Faisal*, 33 year-old man, single. He came to the UK on his own as an overseas British citizen (his father was a British citizen). He had been in Britain for four-and-a-half years.

(9) *Feryel*, 57 year-old woman, divorced (in Somalia). She came to Britain with her only child, where she was granted full refugee status. She had been in the UK for six-and-a-half years.

(10) *Khadar*, 41 year-old man, single. He came to the UK on his own and had been here for four years. He was granted ELR.

(11) *Mohamed*, 32 year-old man, married. He re-joined his wife and his four children in the UK. He had been in Britain for over a year and was still awaiting an initial decision on his asylum application.

(12) *Naima*, 40 year-old woman, married. She fled Somalia on her own, leaving her husband and their ten children behind. She had been in the UK for two years and was granted ELR.

(13) *Rahmo*, 52 year-old woman, separated (in the UK). She came to Britain with two of her six children, leaving the other four and her husband behind. She was re-joined at a later stage by

the rest of her family, although later on the couple separated. She had been in the UK for nearly ten years and was granted full refugee status.

(14) *Sado*, 45 year-old woman, widowed. She came to Britain with two of her four children, leaving the other two in Somalia. Her husband was killed in the war. She had been in the UK for over seven years and was given ELR.

(15) *Yusuf*, 19 year-old man, single. He left Somalia on his own. After over a year in the UK, he was still awaiting an initial decision on his asylum application.

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