PATHWAYS TO INTEGRATION: LESSONS FROM AUSTRALIA'S HUMANITARIAN RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM

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The increased demand for refugee admissions and resettlement in developed countries makes it important for host countries to understand the refugee integration process. Yet, the literature on processes and pathways driving and facilitating integration is under-theorised, poorly understood, and in need of systematic research. This paper contributes to advancing our understanding of integration processes and the interaction between individual actions, social connections, and structural pathways by using the analytical framework of Merton's (1968) theory on goals and means.

Australia has been involved in the UNHCR resettlement program since 1977 and is one of the top three resettlement countries in the world. Despite considerable experience and policy and program efforts, humanitarian migrants experience lower economic and social integration than other immigrants, even after controlling for a range of factors such as human capital or pre-migration experiences. Drawing on data from an ethnographic study with recently settled South Sudanese refugees, and a longitudinal survey of humanitarian migrants in Australia, I demonstrate that the main reason for this poor outcome is a lack of accessible pathways to refugee migrants. I conclude by discussing the merits of host countries focusing their settlement policies on the *processes* of integration to ensure that resettled refugees have accessible *pathways* to turn their personal resources into economic and social participation.

Keywords: Integration, resettlement, Robert Merton, Australia, South Sudanese refugees

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INTRODUCTION

Australia has a long history of immigration to support population growth and subsequent economic prosperity (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2014). As many as 28 percent, or 7 million, of Australia's current resident population was born in a country other than Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Despite this history of immigration, Australia offers protection to far fewer refugees than many countries. Of the 2.45 million refugees globally who had their status recognised or were resettled in 2015, just 11,776, or less than 0.5 percent were assisted by Australia (UNHCR, 2016). Yet, if one considers Australia's contribution as a proportion of the number of refugees resettled within the UNHCR resettlement program[2], Australia ranks third overall behind the US and Canada (UNHCR, 2016). This is consistent with the Australian Government's long-standing position to give priority to resettlement within the UNHCR program. For the last 15 years, Australia has resettled between 6,000 and 12,000 refugees each year, and has recently announced it will permanently increase its refugee intake to 18,750 a year by 2018–19, in addition to its one-off special intake of 12,000 resettled refugees from the Syrian and Iraq humanitarian crisis (Kenny, 2016).

Part of Australia's support of the UNHCR resettlement program is a claim that Australia's resettlement services are a 'world leader in the field' (Ferguson, 2009). This view has its origin in the 1990s when the Australian Government and its Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs showed a strong commitment to manage, with an equal emphasis, the three important aspects of immigration policy: selection and control of immigrants intake; support of those accepted for resettlement; and the management of a diverse society created by immigration (Jupp, 2002).

The last 20 years, however, have seen three main changes at the Federal Government policy level. Firstly, an extreme emphasis on selection, control, and securitisation of intake of immigrants. This is reflected in re-structuring and naming the department in 2013 to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection and establishing a para-military unit within it – the Australian Border Force. The impact this change has on the life of refugees settling in Australia is illustrated by the case of the 12,000 Syrian refugees of whom the Australian

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[2] The three durable solutions supported by UNHCR and the international community are: (i) voluntary repatriation to the home country; (ii) the identification of appropriate permanent integration mechanisms in the country of asylum; or (iii) resettlement to another country (UNHCR, 2016).

Government has pledged to resettle in September 2015. The then prime minister Mr. Abbott said that Australia would 'move quickly' to resettle refugees living in dire circumstances, but they would be subject to standard security checks (Bourke, 2015). One year after making the commitment, Australia has settled only 3,400 Syrian refugees, less than 30 per cent of the target. Immigration officials advised that delays have been caused by health, character and security checks, which are required before resettlement could be granted (Winsor, 2016).

The second main change is the streamlining of settlement services. Resettlement specific support has been minimised and economic and social integration has become the responsibility of the immigrant household, aided by a limited range of government-funded 'welfare' services, coordinated by mainstream departments, and delivered by the third sector. Indeed, the government information booklet defines settlement as 'the adjustment that new arrivals experience before they become established (and) independent in Australian society'. While the document acknowledges the role of settlement services and the influence of the willingness of Australian society to welcome new arrivals, the emphasis is on 'the commitment of those arrivals to establishing a life in Australia' (Department of Social Services, 2015, p. 3).

The third change is, paradoxically, as Australia's migrant intake from culturally diverse origins are increasing markedly, the Australian Government has withdrawn its leadership role in managing diversity. While some state and local governments still recognise the value of diversity, and the importance of strategically managing it, at the federal level the focus is on cohesion through migrants adopting 'Australian values' – a concept lacking clear definition.

Of these three main changes this paper focuses on the minimisation of targeted support of humanitarian migrants and the impact it has on the economic and social participation of refugee migrants in their settlement country. The balance of this chapter is made up of four main sections. First, I review the main theories on settlement and integration. Section two provides a brief description of the research methodology of the study. The main findings from qualitative and quantitative research components are presented under section three and four respectively. I conclude by arguing for a new emphasis of settlement policies, with a focus on the processes of integration and accessible pathways for refugee migrants to economic and social participation.

THEORIES ON SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION

Most research on settlement and integration is concerned with outcomes of settlement and the extent it is influenced by migrants' characteristics and conduct. Much less is known on the impact of community networks and social structures framing and assisting settlement.

A dominant theory focusing on individual orientations which immigrants adopt in relation to the interplay between their heritage and host cultures is John Berry's classification of acculturation strategies. According to this theory, individuals coming into contact with new cultural groups may: simultaneously retain their heritage cultural identity, while developing the mainstream cultural identity—integrate; accommodate their identity to the mainstream culture—assimilate; reject the mainstream cultural identity in favour of their heritage identity—separate; or reject both mainstream and heritage cultural identifications—marginalize (Berry, 1980, 1992, 1997).

Research by Irene Bloemraad and colleagues has looked at the impact of multiculturalism—a theory of political inclusion and citizenship — on immigrant integration, suggesting that multiculturalism facilitates political integration, which in turn facilitates socioeconomic integration (Bloemraad, 2007). While modest empirical evidence was found of the positive effects of multicultural policies on immigrants' sociopolitical integration, evidence for socioeconomic integration in the first and second generation, was inconclusive (Bloemraad & Wright, 2014). In response, the authors concluded that other factors, such as anti-discrimination policies' employment protection may be of greater importance.

Another theorisation, focusing on resettlement styles by refugees in Australia, by Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2003) proposes that, although resettlement styles depend primarily on refugees' human, social, and cultural capital, they are also significantly influenced by social structures, such as host societies' responses and support services provided.

The importance of social connections and structures are also emphasized in the work of Ager and Strang (2008) in their conceptualisation of the process of refugee integration. They identified four core domains of integration. The first domain is largely indicators of successful integration, such as employment. The fourth domain represents 'foundational' principles or legal rights. Between these two domains are processes to mediate between foundational principles and integration outcomes. There are two main types of processes. The first type is social connections, such as social bridges, bonds and links. The other types of processes are facilitators to provide pathways and to remove barriers blocking successful integration. Ager and Strang (2008) argued that despite the

importance of these processes, they are under-theorised and poorly understood. Instead research, especially applied research, is dominated by the analysis of integration outcomes and goals.

The significance of pathways, and the tension between cultural values and goals towards which people are expected to strive, and approved pathways available to people for reaching these goals, are the key elements of Robert Merton's adaptation theory (Merton, 1968). In the Mertonian system the social environment of individuals involves a cultural structure—a set of normative values governing behaviour common to members, and a social structure—a set of social relationships in which the capacities of individuals in the social groups are socially structured. In other words, the cultural structure sets goals, while social structure provides pathways for making and implementing goals. Merton argued that valued goals of society, such as economic participation and success, are desired by all, but opportunities to achieve them are not equally distributed and pathways for some are structurally blocked or restricted (Merton, 1968).

Merton identified five modes of behaviour based on the intersection of cultural goals and means for reaching these goals. The most common adaptation type in stable societies is conformity, where individuals attain societal goals by socially accepted means. But when legitimate pathways to achieving prized social goals are blocked, or become too hard to sustain, people adopt nonconforming conduct, such as *innovation*—keeping normative goals but finding unorthodox means to fulfil them; *ritualism*—subscribing to the means but abandoning the cultural goals; *retreatism*—withdrawing from both normative goals and their formal institutions; and *rebellion*—replacing normative goals and their institutions with new ones (Merton, 1968).

Merton saw ritualism to be a frequent mode among migrants – unable to reach economic success, yet continuing to subscribe to the means by working hard in often menial jobs, many become part of the most marginalized of their new country. Their goals of a better life are often realised through their children.

While ritualism is probably the most prevalent response among refugee migrants, other forms of adaptation are starting to emerge in Australia. For example, my research has found *retreatism* to be dominant among some refugee migrant groups. High unemployment due to a decline in low skilled labour, and unmet expectations of educational achievement by their children due to a school system struggling to accommodate to their needs, led them to abandon both the goals and means of social and economic inclusion, which they fully embraced at their arrival but have found to be blocked to them. In other words, social structures account importantly not only for settlement outcomes, but also for the conduct by individuals.

METHODOLOGY

To connect the human and structural elements at play I used a critical realist approach (Danermark, Ekström, Jakobsen, & Karlsson, 2002) and a sequential mixed methods research design. An initial qualitative phase, informed by grounded theory, was followed by a quantitative phase. The use of a critical realist framework provided a robust method to capture the interplay between the analytically distinct elements of migration research, and to analytically explicate the causal mechanisms producing social change or reproduction (Iosifides, 2012; Losoncz, 2017). The use of inductive analytic processes of grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006) allowed the research to uncover how participants made sense of their new country, its normative values and social structures. Together, grounded theory and a critical realist framework allowed me to go beyond describing meanings among participants, to examining and analysing the structures which generate them. Subsequent quantitative analysis of a larger, more representative dataset of refugees provided a robust test of the generalisability of the propositions risen from the qualitative phase.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Qualitative data was collected between 2009 and 2012 through ethnographic engagement and individual interviews with 32 South Sudanese men and women and 9 community workers from the four Australian cities. The South Sudanese population was chosen because of the relatively larger number of South Sudanese refugee migrants, approximately 20,000 (Lucas, Jamali, & Edgar, 2013), accepted for resettlement in Australia between 2003 and 2007 and because of concerns voiced both by government and in the South Sudanese community regarding their settlement outcomes (Dhanji, 2009; Hebbani, Obijiofor, & Bristed, 2010; Milner & Khawaja, 2010; Murray, 2010).

Initial snowball and convenience sampling procedures progressed to purposive sampling as the research advanced. Participants from Southern Sudan had migrated to Australia less than 10 years ago. The majority of participants were Dinka or Nuer, while a smaller proportion was from other tribes. The age range of participants was between 18 and 50, and about one-third of the participants were women. A third of the participants stated they had a tertiary education and another third a secondary education level. Nearly half of the participants were single. The rest of the participants were married, but did not always cohabit with their partner. About one-third of the participants were employed, and nearly all participants were pursuing some form of education or training. In addition, nine

Sudanese and non-Sudanese community workers who had close professional connections with the community (in the capacity of community development workers, refugee counsellors, and school counsellors) were interviewed for their insights about the resettlement experiences and challenges of the community.

Formal interviews were between 30 and 90 minutes long. All participants were interviewed in English, which most could speak well. Data was analysed and increasingly abstracted using constant comparative methods of grounded theory. While interviews were the primary source of data, this was augmented and informed through regular attendance at community meetings, celebrations and church services as part of my ethnographic fieldwork. This use of multiple methods and data sources brought layered, yet convergent meanings to the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

QUANTITATIVE DATA

Quantitative data was drawn from the Wave 1 of the Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants or 'Building a New Life in Australia' (BNLA) Survey collected in 2014. BNLA is a longitudinal survey of humanitarian migrants, commissioned by the Department of Social Services (DSS), collected across Australia. The sample was drawn from a database of resettled refugees who had been granted visas through Australia's humanitarian program, and had arrived in Australia 3–6 months prior to the interview. Onshore visa holders had to have received their permanent protection visas in the same period. This paper uses data from all 1,798 adult respondents between the ages of 21 and 55.

Although results from the qualitative and quantitative analysis are reported in separate sections, as they are related to two different, although closely related samples, inferences and interpretations are integrated in the *Discussion* section.

RESULTS FROM QUALITATIVE RESEARCH
WITH THE SOUTH SUDANESE AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY

Participants reported a strong desire and expectation to connect with the economic and social life of Australia, and to become more self-sufficient. They saw employment as the main pathway to this goal. At a public event celebrating the first anniversary of South Sudanese independence (21 July 2012, Canberra), the local community leader put the following public request to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs: *'We want the opportunity to contribute to this society. We do not want to stay refugees relying on service providers forever.'*

Employment was also seen as an important opening to become active members of their new social environment and to learn about its practices, norms and values. As expressed by one of the young male community members, '*Employment is the best and the quickest way to integrate.*'

Indeed, stable employment is a very important aspect of settlement; it provides an income and sense of security and enables the development of social networks and cultural skills vital for integration. Stable employment and income is at the top of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees list of essential indicators of successful resettlement (UNHCR, 2004).

But, despite expecting and desiring economic participation, the unemployment rate among the Sudanese-born population is almost six times as that of the overall Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Further, those employed are often underemployed and/or clustered in low occupational status immigrant employment niches (Correa-Velez & Onsando, 2009).

The main reasons identified by participants for not being able to attain employment included lack of skills and English proficiency, lack of networks and knowledge of the local employment context, discrimination from employers, and a merit-based selection system which fails to recognise the relative disadvantage of refugee migrants. These issues fall into the three conceptual categories of human capital, social capital, and systemic barriers.

HUMAN CAPITAL

English proficiency is a significant predictor of employment in Australia, and poor English speakers are disproportionately represented among the unemployed (Bureau of Immigration Multicultural and Population Research, 1996). All participants identified the importance of good communication and English skills to participate in the labour market. At the same time they were concerned that the current provision of the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) is grossly inadequate for adult migrants with very little or no previous experience in formal education to learn a new language.

They've been to English classes, the CIT classes, for 510 hours without learning A, B and C. They managed to teach them nothing. And I don't blame them. Many of us are coming from a village where only one per cent of the women went to school. Just learning to hold a pen took time. (Female South Sudanese community worker).

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Another challenge for obtaining employment identified by participants is the lack of social connections facilitating job-search. As expressed by one participant:

Getting opportunity is based on who you know, not what you know. And that's the problem for our community; we don't have that connection where you can easily access employment opportunities. (Young male South Sudanese participant)

Social connections are one of the important domains of Ager and Strang's (2008) conceptual model. Bridging type of social capital (Putnam, 2000) are especially important mediators of gaining employment (Lancee, 2010; Stone, Gray, & Hughes, 2003). The importance of these weak ties beyond family and friends, which provide the capacity to be more successful at searching for and obtaining employment, is also established by Granovetter (1983). His research demonstrated that work-related ties are of a distinctive form; although they are weaker than the ties connecting people to friends and family, they connect people to a multitude of outside worlds, providing a bridge to new work-related networks.

While participants reported high levels of bonding social capital in their community, they also observed that the value of these connections for finding employment is limited as very few people in their community have connections with Australian employers in their newly emerging community. Bridging social capital, on the other hand, was reported to be weak. Participants also noted that despite the importance of these connections for finding a job, employment services did not help them to cultivate these connections.

SYSTEMIC BARRIERS

A more distressing issue among participants was what they called 'hidden racism' and which, I argue, are systemic barriers in the Australian employment labor market. Participants' claim of discrimination by Australian workplace recruitment practices against the African community is supported by research (Abdelkerim & Grace, 2012; Correa-Velez & Onsando, 2009; Dhanji, 2009; Gebre-Selassie, 2008; Tilbury & Colic-Peisker, 2007).

A particular concern among participants was the large proportion of graduates in their community with a qualification from Australian universities who cannot find employment.

Many of us are doing factory work, even though we've got skills. We are trying hard to get into the education system so that we can get a better job. But most of us, even though we completed our degree in Australia, we are not getting employment. So we go to the factory. (Male South Sudanese participant)

While the employment of first generation adult refugee migrants in the lower echelons of the labour market is a relatively established trend in Australia, there is a new dimension to the problem; a large proportion of young African-Australians with high-level qualifications from Australian universities who cannot find jobs. The 'countless African-Australian refugees with high-level qualifications who've found it virtually impossible to work in their field of expertise in Australia' has even raised the concern of the then Finance Minister who concluded that '[p]rofessional employment opportunities are still heavily influenced by the informal connections of familiarity that attach to people who are well integrated into our society. Outsiders are subtly excluded by a complex web of invisible barriers' (Tanner, 2008).

The next section reports quantitative results from a much larger sample, independent from the sample above, to find out if the claims presented in the qualitative section can find support in quantitative analysis of a more representative sample of the most recent humanitarian migrant community in Australia.

RESULTS FROM THE QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF BNLA

Characteristics of adult respondents of the BNLA Survey are presented in Table 1. The mean age of respondents was 36 years, 59 per cent were married, and 43 percent were female. Three-quarters were born in the Middle East and Central Asia (Iraq – 38 percent, Afghanistan – 26 percent, and Iran – 12 percent). Human capital in terms of formal education and English was somewhat low. While 38 percent of survey respondents reported Year 12 or post school qualification, a considerable proportion (15 percent) had never been to school. English proficiency was also considerably low among survey respondents with 70 percent reporting not to speak English at all, or not well. In terms of work experience, 58 percent of respondents had paid work before coming to Australia. Only 6 percent of survey respondents were currently in paid work.

Human capital, in terms of self-assessed personal resources, was multidimensional. Participants' reports of experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), was high (33 percent) compared to the 12-month prevalence

Table 1.

Sample characteristics of adult respondents (n=1,798)

Demographics	%
Female	43
Under 35 years old	52
Married	59
Country of birth	
Iraq	38
Afghanistan	26
Iran	12
Myanmar	6
Bhutan	4
Pakistan	3
Other	11
In paid work	6
Human capital / personal resources	
No formal education	15
Fewer than Year 12	47
Year 12 or post school qualification	38
Speaks English well or very well	30
Had paid work before coming to Australia	58
Strong self-efficacy[a]	89
Positive self-concept[b]	93
Suffers from PTSD[c]	33
Social capital (networks and community support)[d]	33
Deprivation (more than 1 type of hardship)[e]	23

[a] Self-assessed ability to accomplish goals, think of good solutions, handle whatever comes ones way.

[b] Feeling of having good qualities, can do things as well as others, and positive attitude toward self.

[c] Eight questions measuring on recurrent thoughts/memories, feeling like a traumatic event is happening again, recurrent nightmares, feeling jumpy, on guard, avoidance of certain activities, avoiding thoughts associated with the event, and emotional or physical reactions when reminded of the event.

[d] Level of support from own ethnic community, religious community and other community groups.

[e] Items included: difficulty paying bills or rent, being unable to afford meals or heating and cooling of home, pawning items, and needing help from welfare organisations.

Source: BNLA, Wave 1, 2013–2014.

of 5 percent in the broader Australian population (Phelps, 2014). Despite the high prevalence of self-reported PTSD, 89 percent of participants had positive self-efficacy and 93 percent reported positive attitudes toward self. Social capital among survey respondents was relatively low, with only 33 percent responding positively about their community support networks.

Significant predictors of employment, computed using a logistic regression model, are presented in Table 2. The model was significant at the .01 level. In terms of demographic characteristics, males had much higher odds of employment than females. Age has shown a curviliniar relationship, with odds of emplyment increasing slightly with each year (as shown by variable age), but decreasing as people got older (shown by variable age squared). Finally, the likelihood of being employed doubled with each year spent in Australia.

Country of origin was also found to be a significant predictor, as was the migration pattern. Unauthorised Maritime Arrivals, more commonly known as asylum seekers arriving by boat, had more than twice the odds (2.26) of being employed than those on other visa types, even after controlling variables, such as, country of origin and time spent in Australia. Theorising of the underlying causal mechanisms of these variables is outside of the scope of this paper.

In terms of refugees' human capital, odds of employment improved by 1.7 times with each point of improvement in mean English proficiency score, yet education level and employment prior to coming to Australia were not significant predictors of being currently employed. Neither self-efficacy nor self-concept improved employment chances. Interestingly, PTSD did not show a negative impact on gaining employment either.

When looking for work, the majority of refugee migrants turned to family and friends (64 percent), followed by Centrelink and employment agencies (55 percent), employers (48 percent), and their own community (46 percent) and newspaper and internet (37 percent). Only 19 percent reported looking for work through connections within other communities, confirming limited bridging type social connections among the most recently arrived refugee communities in Australia.

In terms of the helpfulness of available services, the agency which they found the least helpful is the very agency tasked with helping job seekers finding a job—employment agencies. Nearly 40 percent found them to be not at all helpful, and an additional 25 percent only slightly helpful. This confirms claims made by South Sudanese participants of the qualitative study of employment agencies being unresponsive to the needs of refugee migrants.

The main reasons for finding it hard to get a job are listed in Figure 1. Similarly to South Sudanese Australians, this larger and more representative

Table 2.

Logistic regression analysis of being employed as a function of demographics and human and social capital variables

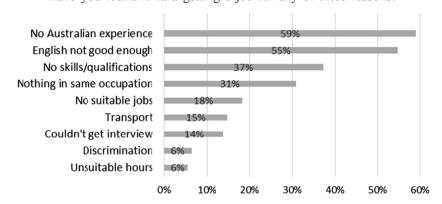|	Odds ratio	Robust Standard Error[a]	Level of statistical significance
Female	0.266	0.107	p<.05
Age	1.165	0.077	p<.01
Age squared	0.998	0.001	p<.01
Years in Australia	1.924	0.278	p<.001
Unauthorised Maritime Arrival	2.264	0.674	p<.05
Education			
Less than Year 12 (ref)	1.000		n.s.
Never been to school	1.018	0.411	n.s.
Year 12 or post school qualification	1.068	0.328	n.s.
Had paid work before coming to Australia	1.501	0.456	n.s.
English proficiency score (0–3)	1.668	0.310	p<.05
Networks and community support (0–9)	0.921	0.053	n.s.
Self-efficacy	1.120	0.090	n.s.
Self-concept	1.056	0.082	n.s.
PTSD	0.885	0.259	n.s.

[a] Standard Error adjusted for 1272 Migrating Unit clusters.
Note: Other significant control variables included in the model is country of origin. Non-significant controls included in the model are: married, has children living with them, more than one type of hardship, and lives in regional Australia.

Source: BNLA, Wave 1, 2013–2014.

refugee migrants sample identified a lack of Australian work experience followed by English proficiency as the leading reasons. Both have been selected by more than half of the respondents. A lack of skills and qualifications and not being able to get a job in the same occupation as they had overseas was identified by about a third of the respondents. Discrimination, however, was only identified by 6 percent of respondents. This discrepancy could relate to the relatively short period survey participants has spent in Australia compared to South Sudanese participants. As participants were still in the process of enhancing their English, attesting their qualifications from overseas and acquiring Australian qualifications, the potential for discriminatory practices to arise had been limited.

Figure 1.

Have you found it hard getting a job for any of these reasons?

Source: BNLA, Wave 1, 2013–2014.

DISCUSSION

An employment rate of 6 percent among refugee migrants, with high aspirations and personal resources after 6 months of their resettlement is unjustifiably low and raises the question of unequal opportunity within the Australian employment system. Indeed a number of important large sample size quantitative Australian studies have found considerably lower employment rates among refugee migrants compared to other migrants even after controlling for differences in education and English proficiency. While their employment outcomes improved with duration of residence, it continued to lag behind other migrants (Cobb-Clark, 2006; Thapa & Gorgens, 2006; Vandenheuvel & Wooden, 1999). Additionally, employment outcomes did not improve with time for all refugee migrants. Some groups, such as those from Africa, continue to experience higher levels of unemployment, even after a considerable length of residence (Hugo, 2011).

This research found that while human capital is an important predictor of employment among refugee migrants, what is more important from a policy perspective is available means and pathways to turn their personal resources into economic and social participation.

In terms of human capital, the strongest skill-based predictor for employment among refugee migrants is English proficiency. Yet, English levels are typically low among humanitarian migrants, and acquiring a new language requires considerable investment. Studies in areas of language acquisition showing that

the process of acquiring a new language requires 7 to 11 years (Thomas & Collier, 2002), and possibly longer for adult migrants. While proficiency in English is viewed by the Australian Government as one of the most important indicators of integration and resettlement (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2006), the current provision of English classes, which delivers up to 510 hours of basic English tuition, does not reflect its importance.

While English proficiency is low among humanitarian migrants, a considerable proportion hold post-secondary school qualifications and work experience prior to coming to Australia. Yet these personal resources do not improve their odds of employment, indicating that current hiring practices give little recognition of considerable human capital and capabilities among refugee migrants. Similarly, while refugee migrants have high levels of self-efficacy and self-concept, these personal resources are not being supported by structural pathways into participation and inclusion.

A vital resource for newly arrived refugee migrants to finding employment are employment agencies – private enterprises founded by the government. This research found employment agencies to be the second most frequently used method to find employment. Yet both qualitative and quantitative analysis found that these agencies are unresponsive to the needs of refugee migrants. This points to the need of re-evaluating the effectiveness of the use of mainstream employment agencies to assist refugee migrants to find employment.

There are a number of potential reasons why mainstream employment agencies fail to respond to the needs of refugee migrants when seeking employment. One is institutional inertia and lack of appropriate skills. For example, cultivating bridging type of social connections and linking refugee migrants with potential employers is a specific and high ranking need among this population. Yet, employment agencies fail to act on assisting the development of these connections. Rather, they see their role as 'expert mediators' between the unemployed and potential employers, and providers of training to job seekers (Tilbury & Colic-Peisker, 2007). Another potential reason is the operational disincentive in the current contractual arrangements built around the number of clients serviced and/or placed in employment. Refugee migrants represent a relatively small proportion of their total clients, yet have very specific needs which would require employment agencies to go outside of their routine activities. For example, gaining Australian work experience is an acute problem, as a lack of opportunity for work experience prevents migrant jobseekers from competing with other applicants in the labour market. Yet, there are no programs to provide this crucial function. These findings question the merit of policies dominated by a strong emphasis on becoming independent in their new society, delivered by mainstream services.

Despite increasing evidence of the ineffectiveness of current resettlement policies, the Australian Government is not picking up on the systemic issue of this disconnect between goals and pathways, arguing that existing mechanisms and protocols, such as anti-discrimination laws in Australian workplaces, give equal rights and access to all job seekers, including refugee migrants.

The standard method of recruitment in Australia applied to all job applicants, including those from a refugee background, is merit-based selection. The mechanism is believed to deliver equal access and opportunity to *all* members of Australian society. It follows an assessment based on the candidate's work-related and personal qualities. It is designed to be blind to race, gender, religious or political differences.

The principles of the merit-based selection system rest on recognition theory which emphasises equal rights, respect and esteem for the diverse identities of societies (Honneth, 1992; Taylor, 1992; Young, 1990). There is, however, a debate within this school of thought on the point of recognizing difference. Theorists such as Barry (2001) maintain that equality of opportunities requires rights to be difference-blind. Others, notably Holtug and Mason (2010) and Young (1990) argue that rights need to recognise differences in order to give people substantively, rather than formally, equal opportunities.

Young distinguishes between equal treatment and recognition of equal worth. *Recognition of equal worth*, she argues, 'requires different treatment for oppressed or disadvantaged groups'. Young reasons that under *equal treatment*, group differences are reduced to 'a purely accidental and private matter' (Young, 1990, p. 157). However, the relative disadvantage of refugee migrants is not a result of personal choices under their control, instead it comes from their group experience of being refugees. In other words, despite its intent, merit-based recruitment without provisions for disadvantaged groups systemically discriminates against disadvantaged groups such as refugee migrants.

This research, however, found the simplistic application of these mechanisms and protocols to be unresponsive to the needs of refugee migrants. Because of their refugee experiences, refugees are not entering the labour market on equal terms with people who grew up in Australia. The current system, with its approach of equal treatment, fails to account for the fact that refugees are not on equal terms with the rest of the population, and it may indeed block the economic participation of humanitarian migrants and heighten their socio-economic disadvantage. For example, 23 percent of recently arrived refugee migrants experience more than one type of hardship due to a shortage of money (Table 1), compared to only 8 percent in the broader Australian community

(author's analysis of data collected from The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey, Wave 13, 2013).

Australia is not unique in failing to have effective policies and programs to assist in the integration of refugee migrants despite some good intentions and considerable resources. Sweden, Norway and Belgium also have very high levels of unemployment and subsequent marginalisation of refugee migrants, despite refugee migrants being given equal foundational principles and rights (Eurostat, 2014). And indeed, once they have secured permanent jobs and are 'inside the system', many enjoy good conditions. But a large number remain outside the system, demonstrating that simply giving equal rights and equal access to social institutions and structures will not lead to good integration outcomes.

If unaddressed, systemic exclusion of refugee migrants from the labour market will not only lead to further hardship but also risk creating exclusionary spaces and producing a fragmented and divided society. Yet, when managed with care for ensuring that accessible pathways and support to navigate pathways towards inclusion are available to refugees, resettlement can be a flourishing process, contributing positively both to the life of refugees and the cultural, intellectual and economic wealth of the receiving country. In the case of Australia, settlement policies should focus on unblocking existing pathways to economic participation and ensuring that social and welfare services are responsive to the needs of refugee migrants. In addition, changes should be made to current institutional procedures and protocols to ensure that they are responsive to the needs of humanitarian migrant communities.

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