NEW ISSUES IN REFUGEE RESEARCH

Feeling like an outsider:
a case study of refugee identity
in the Czech Republic

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Introduction

Refugee identities are complex and formed not only by internal feelings, beliefs, ethnic and cultural traditions, but also by external factors, such as resettlement practices, forced migrant policies, cultural traditions and the economic, political and social conditions of his/her new host country (Hein 1993; Capo Zmegac 2007; Holt 2007). Over time, refugees undergo a complicated process of identity reformulation as a result of displacement (Griffiths 2001).

Forced migrant identity reformulation can generally be examined in three stages: the initial journey to seek asylum, during the time spent awaiting a decision on the asylum application and after receiving refugee status. As scholars have connected part of the construction of identity to place, oftentimes, during their journeys and while awaiting the asylum decision, asylum seekers are seen as a people without a place (Brun 2001, Eide 2007, Papastergiadis 2006, Robinson and Rubio 2007).

Upon arrival in their destination country, asylum seekers are frequently housed in camps during the application process. These camps are also deemed placeless and are oftentimes located in remote areas of a country and/or not legally part of the country to which they physically belong. This enhances the impression of placelessness. Georgio Agamben describes refugee camps as 'non-sites of detention' underlining their placeless status (in Papastergiadis 2006). Because identity has been associated with place, what happens when asylum seekers with no legal identity live in a place with no legal foundation? Do they continue to base their identity on their country of origin, do they form an identity connected to a non-place or do they no longer have a part of their identity based on place?

Once given the status of refugee and resettled into their new host country, refugees begin another phase of identity reformulation. The resettlement of refugees into new social, cultural, economic and/or political environments can be disruptive to their identity and their sense of belonging in their host country (Koser Akcapar 2006).

Potentially having an impact on refugee identity is a country's political standpoint (positive or negative) and policies toward voluntary and forced immigrants, which can determine a refugee's reception in the destination country (Brun 2001). One could assume that all immigrants have to contend with new living conditions that can affect their identities; however, it can be argued that forced migrants have a far more difficult resettlement experience since the new living conditions may not have been a matter of choice for them.

Refugees also have to confront the new label of 'refugee' that can affect the process of identity reformation; a component that they previously did not have to consider while living in their country of origin. Such a label reflects the 'need to manage globalized processes and patterns of migration and forced migration in particular' (Zetter 2007: 174). A person who was formerly a citizen of one country is now a 'refugee' in another, which can (and often does) have a profound effect on that person's identity. The label of refugee is influential not only for defining and categorizing people but also in the way the label impacts an individual who must carry it (O'Neill and Spybey 2003).

Zetter (2007) argues that the word 'label' is more influential as an identity marker than classifications such as 'category', 'designation' or 'case'. Refugees do not have a choice in having or not having the label imposed upon them, but they can decide how they want to perceive, accept and/or use the label and can be agentic in all three. The label of 'refugee' has a concrete political definition that has transformed throughout recent history. It also has a figurative meaning that changes based upon the individual, society and place: ranging from those in camp situations to someone awaiting an asylum decision to a refugee successfully integrated into his/her new host society (Hein 1993; Ager 1999; Kibreab 1999; Capo Zmegac 2007).

In refugee studies, labeling can have the effect of creating an 'us' and 'them' and designating an identifying mark that can essentially create and/or compound the feeling of being an 'other'. In this case study, it is essential to define the 'us' in order to contrast with the 'them'. 'Us' is the majority Czech society, which consists of people with Slavic heritage and culture that are tied to the Czech lands. According to Vlachová and Řeháková (2009: 256), a person cannot be considered 'Czech' if they do not live in the Czech Republic and speak Czech and 'full participation…in the cultural and political life of the community known as the Czech nation is what makes a person Czech'.

Holý (1996) asserts that Czech identity is naturally, not culturally, derived and that people speaking of being Czech refer to Czech identity as being born on Czech territory, speaking Czech as their native language and having Czech parents. Results from the 2003 International Social Survey Program on national identity defined being Czech as someone who speaks Czech, feels Czech, had lived in the Czech Republic for most of their lives and has Czech citizenship; interestingly, this survey showed an increase from the previous survey (based on information gathered in 1995) in the importance of being Christian to being Czech, which some have attributed to the resettlement of non-Christian immigrants in the Czech Republic (in Vlachová and Řeháková 2009). This definition of being Czech makes 'them' (i.e. refugees) clearly discernible in many cases.

Contributing to a refugee's identity reformation are the opinions and perspectives forced or imposed upon them by society due to their refugee status. The refugee label can carry contextual stigma with it (O'Neill and Spybey 2003). Oftentimes the stigmas are based on negative and/or misinformed viewpoints (frequently perpetuated by politicians, the media and the general public) that portray refugees as economic migrants who take jobs from native citizens, as uneducated migrants who are in the country to receive state aid and/or with xenophobic characterizations (Bowes et. al. 2009, Moore and Clifford 2007, Zetter 2007). A Congolese refugee living in the UK agreed with the notion that 'refugee' as a label carries negative social connotations: 'If you say it, they won't consider what you do – it's nothing, because of that word: 'refugee'' (Moore and Clifford 2007: 455). In addition, refugees have further labels attached to them, such as 'outsider' and 'other', which can work as a force of ostracism and exclusion from society.

After a review of the literature on identity formation, a brief summary of forced migration in the Czech Republic and an introduction to my case study participants, this article will examine the identity of my respondents first as perceived by themselves and second to see if and how the refugee label has affected their identity formation and claiming process. This article will also discuss whether or not the designation of 'refugee' has made my participants feel as outsiders

and/or 'others' in Czech society and whether they have noticed any change in how they perceive themselves based upon how Czech society sees and treats them. Throughout the article, when applicable, my data will be discussed in the context of findings presented by previous studies of refugee identity. Finally, the media plays a critical role in how different groups of people perceive themselves and are perceived by others. I will examine different media outlets to understand how the media perceives refugees and how the media contributes to the process of refugees' identity formation.

Identity formation literature reviewed

Identity is an ever-changing aspect of a person's life. It is individual and collective and based on numerous variables, including environment, location, age, nationality, gender, ethnicity, religion, among others (an almost infinite list). Kuus (2007: 91) defines identity 'not as a single, monolithic thing, but as an amalgam of contested elements…[and] a moving and contested target…' Since identities are dynamic and flexible, researchers study the experiences of identity formation within different populations and circumstances.

Social scientists and other scholars have offered several definitions of identity. Holt (2007) provides a synopsis of identity definitions, including that identity is the creation of an individual and his/her personal histories but is also affected by place (e.g. an individual's relationship with specific features of a place). Social, cultural and political aspects as well as contextual situations play an important role in identity formation, and refugees are active in the reshaping of their identity (Ager 1999).

Identity formation and maintenance is a continuous process, and individuals play an active role in mediating this process. Identity politics deals with both the collective and personal facets of one's identity – the plurality of these facets creating a 'hierarchy of identities' that an individual must choose how to organize (Pani 2011: 46). Identity reformulation is based on factors that unify or differentiate an individual from others with the individual actively choosing the ways to identify themselves (Mutanen 2010); however, in some cases the choice is not made by the individual but by the society or state in which they live (Penn 2008). As identity is constructed of a plurality of elements, individuals have to choose which aspect of their identity to emphasize in different situations (Sen 2006).

In my research, I focus on the process of my respondents' identity reformulation by analyzing how/if the change from citizen to refugee was noticeable to them; how they are/not choosing to respond to their new role as a refugee in Czech society; and how/if the label of 'refugee' as part of their identity has changed with time. In the study of asylum seeker and refugee identity reformulation, the combined elements of identity are extremely varied and place specific due to the diverse natures of the sending and receiving countries.

According to scholars, one of the main influences of a refugee's evolving identity is place (Brun 2001, Griffiths 2001, Hein 1993, Holt 2007, Parker and Brassett 2005, White 2002). This influence is partially due to the existing legal infrastructure in the destination country; different places respond to resettling refugees in different ways leading to a range of reactions at the

individual level. Oftentimes the admittance of refugees is tied to a state's foreign policy (Hein 1993). Additionally, forced migrants often cross internationally recognized borders through varying legal systems. Because each country involved has a different political structure, history, culture and demographic composition, among others, 'place shape[s] law and legal relations…[and] law and legal relations shape places' (White 2002: 1071).

Given these circumstances, when no global binding legislature concerning forced migrants exists, the destination country can decide to admit whomever (and however many) they choose. The overall effect of this transpolitical journey is that refugees are often seen as people who have lost their identity because they no longer have legal connection anywhere (Papastergiadis 2006, Parker and Bassett 2005, White 2002). White (2002) finds this problematic as it emphasizes legal citizenship as the most significant aspect of identity.

Population classifications or definitions (e.g. age, gender, race) are other identity markers that can change based on the specific location (Haines 2007, Hein 1993, Keel and Drew 2004). Refugees may ethnically describe themselves differently than the host country, and 'concepts generally thought of as relatively fixed, like ethnic identity, have a capacity for fluidity…' (Summerfield 1999: 122). Legal bodies sometimes confuse the issue by framing identifiers differently as Haines (2007) found in his study of refugees in the United States (US). He noted that ethnic, racial, national and class distinctions vary from sending to receiving country, which can become confusing for refugees classifying themselves based on categories used in the US.

This brings the notion of governance into identity reformulation as the receiving country imposes its conceptions of identity on refugees (Haines 2007); making a forced migrant choose an ethnic identification based on indigenous categories, definitions and significations illustrates how even ethnic identity can be politically impressed upon refugees. Another inconsistency can appear when refugees identify themselves as specific nationalities that no longer exist, as in the case of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union (Keel and Drew 2004). I encountered issues of inconsistency while compiling descriptive data about my respondents, which made me question the value of measuring these characteristics in the first place.

Scholars often mention the 'us' and 'them' aspect, being the 'other' or feeling as outsiders in both their country of origin and destination country as impacting identity (Eide 2007, O'Neill and Spybey 2003, Papastergiadis 2006, Parker and Brassett 2005, Robinson and Rubio 2007, Zetter 2007). Refugees are a part of and also excluded from both their country of origin and host country (Zetter 2007). Again this connects to the legal aspect of refugee studies as policy is often blamed for creating an 'other' by putting people in a refugee category and labeling them as such (O'Neill and Spybey 2003, Zetter 2007). Zetter (2007) asserts that the refugee label underscores a sense of isolation for refugees.

Besides the legal distinction, the sense of 'otherness' is often apparent between refugees and the host society (Eide 2007, Grove and Zwi 2006, Papastergiadis 2006, Robinson and Rubio 2007). 'Othering' is a process of creating an identity based upon a perception, often of difference, that can affect identity both internally and externally (Capo Zmegac 2007). It is described as something that 'defines and secures one's own identity by distancing and stigmatizing an(other)' (Grove and Zwi 2006: 1933). The feeling of being the 'other' is often intensified when refugees

come from countries that are ethnically/racially dissimilar from the host country since their 'otherness' is more noticeable (Parker and Brassett 2005). Connected to this is the feeling of fear that some refugees feel in their destination country based on their refugee status (Griffiths 2001); although refugees experienced a sense of fear in their home countries, this is a new type of fear that accompanies their refugee status upon resettlement.

In my research, I analyze the ways refugees self-identify; leading to a discussion of transculturalism, which examines the connection between integration and identity as refugees begin to identify more with their host country as they progress through the process of transculturalization. I also examine the influence of religion on refugees who identify as religious in a mainly secular society. In fact, this dimension of analysis, the intersection of religion and secularism, seems to be omitted from scholarly literature. Secondly, I analyze what impact, if any, the 'refugee' label had on my respondents.

Forced migration in the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic was a major sending country of asylum seekers to Western Europe in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s; it received its first asylum applicant in 1990 while still part of Czechoslovakia (UNHCR 2001). Once becoming a migrant receiving country, the number of annual applications for asylum increased or decreased commensurate with European trends. According to the UNHCR (2001), the Czech Republic received a total of 20,415 asylum applications from 1993[1] to 1999, with the highest number received in 1999 (7,285). The numbers pale in comparison to many Western European countries whose annul number of asylum applications were in the hundreds of thousands (France, Netherlands, Sweden, UK) or millions as in Germany.

The nationalities most commonly represented among asylum applicants in the Czech Republic during the 1990s were Romanians and Bulgarians until 1997 when the countries of origin became more diverse; in 1998 and 1999 most applicants came from Afghanistan (Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic 2007). The large number of Romanian asylum seekers in the early 1990s was due to 'a faltering economy, continued political unrest, human rights abuses against Roma (Gypsies), and laws discriminating against homosexuals in Romania' (USCRI 1998: 1). Similar conditions forced the migration of Bulgarians during this time period as well (Mason 1996). The political ascendance of the Taliban in the mid-1990s and subsequent civil war in Afghanistan resulted in the proliferation of asylum seekers from there (UNHCR 1997).

The countries of origin for recognized refugees varied throughout the decade with refugee status granted to individuals from Africa, Central Asia and the Middle East (Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic 2007). An examination of the number of applications, rate of asylum granted and the number of persons granted asylum shows that the numbers do not always compute as expected (e.g. in 1995 Romanians and Bulgarians submitted the most applications, but do not appear as one of the top five nationalities granted asylum (Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic 2007). Reasons for this are that not all submissions go through the entire application process, some asylum seekers withdraw their applications, some leave the country and some are

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[1] I am using 1993 as a benchmark since that is when the Czech Republic became an independent country.

initially denied and in the appeal process. In some cases asylum is granted and the data will appear in a later year.

The number of asylum applications received in the Czech Republic from 2000 to 2009 again emulated the European trends in yearly increases and decreases totaling 64,228 for that time period (Czech Statistical Office 2012b; UNHCR 2005, 2009, 2012). There was a distinct downward trend in the number of asylum applications throughout Europe and the European Union (EU) in the 2000s due to restrictive asylum policies and readmission agreements. In fact, the biggest decrease from the previous year in the Czech Republic was in 2004 when it joined the EU.

While in the 2000s asylum applicants in the Czech Republic were arriving from a more diverse array of countries (especially from 2007 onward), the majority of applicants were mainly from countries of the former Soviet Union with Ukraine submitting the most applications (Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic 2010; UNHCR 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2012). Ukrainians represent the largest percentage of the foreign-born population in the Czech Republic, which is a pull-factor for Ukrainians forced to migrate (OECD 2010).

People granted asylum in the Czech Republic in the 2000s were mainly from former Soviet countries with Belarussians, Russians and Ukrainians receiving the most positive decisions (Czech Statistical Office 2012a). Similarities in culture and geopolitical histories between the Czech Republic and former Soviet countries attract forced migrants from those countries. Worth noting is the increasing diversity in asylum recipients in the past decade as more Central Asians, Middle Easterners and Southeast Asians are being granted asylum in the Czech Republic.

Methodology

Research for this case study was performed in Prague, Czech Republic during the 2008-09 academic year. Multiple sampling methods were used to establish a sampling population. I used nonprobability sampling methods to find participants for this research. Initially I contacted nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and international agencies whose responsibility is to provide resettlement services (legal, social, among others) to refugees. Further participants were located through snowball sampling.

Once a sampling population was established, semi-structured interviews were performed. These interviews included over thirty questions (some with multiple parts) about the refugee's resettlement experiences in the Czech Republic. I conducted eleven interviews in English and a translator conducted the remaining interviews in Czech. I attended these interviews; the translator asked the questions in Czech and translated the answers into English while I transcribed. This made it possible for me to ask follow-up and/or clarifying questions if needed.

Case study participants

My sample population consists of twenty refugees who originated from a diverse set of countries (fourteen different countries in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, South Asia, Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa) who currently reside in or very near Prague, Czech Republic. The majority of my sample population is married. Their ages range from 24 to 62. A slight majority of the participants are women. All of them received an education in their country of origin: 35 percent had a high school diploma (or its equivalent), 25 percent had some college education, 35 percent had an undergraduate degree and five percent had a graduate degree.

My sample population included respondents from diverse cultural, geopolitical, social and/or historical backgrounds. This diversity of experiences enriched my case study and allowed me to learn how different walks of life shaped my respondents' resettlement processes. Due to confidentiality reasons, in order to protect the identity of my participants I cannot provide a more detailed breakdown of their personal information.

All of my participants are in the Czech Republic as a result of gaining refugees status through the asylum seeking process (none arrived as part of a government resettlement program). The reasons for seeking asylum varied. Nevertheless, political persecution in the home country was indicated as by a majority of respondents (65 percent); these asylum seekers were mainly members of political opposition parties or political activism and/or resistance movements. Religious persecution (25 percent) and humanitarian reasons (ten percent) were also grounds for receiving refuge in the Czech Republic.

Refugee identity in the Czech Republic

A refugee's identity is complex and affected by internal and external factors. As such, this section will examine different aspects that can impact a refugee's identity. Initially I will explore the ways in which my participants identify themselves, which leads to a discussion about transculturalism. I then focus on religion as an identifying factor and the impact that practicing a minority religion in the Czech Republic has on my participants' identity. Next the label of 'refugee' and its impact on my participants' identity is explored as well as the discrimination some of my respondents suffered based on the label. Finally, media portrayal of refugees and the media's impact on refugee identity is examined.

Refugee self-identification

I asked my respondents a series of identifying questions; in particular, how they identified themselves racially and/or ethnically. This became a more complicated issue than expected as racial/ethnic classifications are not standardized throughout the world and their meanings are flexible. For example, in the Czech Republic Roma ('gypsies') are often called 'black', whereas in the US, an ethnic Roma would not fit the standard impression of a 'black' person. Gemie (2010) gives the example of an Iranian woman in the US who had always considered herself 'white', but was not classified as such (to her surprise) in the US.

As an American, I was expecting racial/ethnic self-identifiers to correspond with those that I was familiar with. I did not give my respondents options to choose from and it was soon apparent that my perception of how my respondents would self-identify did not necessarily coincide with theirs. Most respondents (56 percent[2]) identified themselves based on their country or region of origin, while only one respondent racially self-identified ('black').

Four respondents specifically mentioned their former nationality as an identifier, while one said that he would identify himself based on his country of origin if he still lived there. This contradicts Malkki's (1992) assertion that national identity is inherently connected with territory; since deterritorialization is one of the first experiences in a refugee's journey, it is assumed that the national identity would disappear. My data shows that emigrating does not automatically result in a person denying their home country as a part of their identity.

Respondent 13 who identified himself based on his country of origin is a distinct case. The country is known by two names, and when asked to self-identify, he used the no longer nationally recognized name. A similar issue arose in Keel and Drew's (2004) study of refugees from the former Yugoslavia in Australia. Most of the refugees in their study identified themselves as Yugoslav.

The authors found it fascinating that the participants continued to identify based on a country that no longer existed as they knew it (Keel and Drew 2004). None of my respondents were from the former Yugoslavia so I do not have any comparative data; however, two of my respondents said they were from the Soviet Union when asked their country of origin (both had been in the Czech Republic prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union). Although they did not self-identify based on this or any national or ethnic categorization, it gives an example of claiming affiliation with a country that no longer exists, which can indicate how they relate to or have a connection with the nation-state.

Rather than alter my question to provide racial/ethnic choices that conformed to American notions, I left the question open-ended in order to discover respondents' own interpretations. This is in accordance with Haines' (2007: 305) conception that predetermined categories of identification could inhibit my participants from revealing their view of self-identification; she says that Americans are often 'ensnared' by identification categories. I was certainly 'ensnared' by the Americanized racial/ethnic categories that were familiar to me. I asked about racial/ethnic categorization in order to obtain (what I thought were) simple population characteristics of my respondents (other questions concerned age, gender, education level, among others).

Maybe racial and ethnic classifications should not be used at all since they are subjective and can differ based on national contexts and places. This is evident in the answers given by 28 percent of my respondents: 'cosmopolitan' and 'human' as racial/ethnic identifiers. No generalizations can be made of those respondents (i.e. all female, all from the same country of origin). Compounding the rationalization that these types of identifiers are almost futile, two respondents said that they did not know how to answer the question. In fact, during one of the interviews, my

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[2] This percentage is out of 18 replies. Two respondents did not answer the question because they said they did not know how to answer.

Czech interpreter said that people who are not American do not think about racial and ethnic classifications so this was a hard question for them to answer.

My reasoning for asking about self-identification was to see how many of them would identify based on their country of origin. I was interested in whether my respondents are experiencing transculturalism, are open to adopting Czech customs and traditions or are maintaining a strong connection with their country of origin.

Transculturalism[3]

I examined the transcultural nature of my respondents to gain an understanding of the importance their country of origin has on their identity and to determine whether they are open to accepting the culture of the Czech Republic. It can be presumed that a refugee who is not closed off from Czech society and does not only identify with his/her country of origin and strictly adhere to its customs would be more successful in the resettlement process. It would also be reasonable to assume that a refugee from a culturally similar country of origin would find it easier to adopt aspects of the Czech culture (ex. language) into his/her life.

Only 30 percent of my respondents felt their country of origin was similar to the Czech Republic culturally, politically and/or socially; therefore, the majority indicated that it was not. As culture can influence one's identity, what effect, if any, does resettling in a culturally dissimilar country have on a refugee's identity? Does a refugee retain their traditional culture or accept a new culture and attempt to identify with it? Do they even want to retain their accustomed cultures and traditions? Koser Akcapar (2006: 843) contends that 'Following migration, whether it is forced or not, new communities or migrant networks need to be formed if the migrant is to regain her sense of identity and continuity with her previous self'. This claims that all migrants want to have a continued connection with their country of origin, but what of the migrants who were forced to migrate and have created successful lives for themselves in a new place without maintaining a tie with their country of origin?

While some refugees claim to have severed all ties to their country of origin, it is almost certain that they retain some aspects of their former culture, whether consciously or not. An example of this occurred when I interviewed Respondent 14 at a café in Prague. During the interview he said he never maintained any cultural aspects of his country of origin. Though, when we arrived at the café, he was adamant about paying for my order (even after I protested). He said in his country of origin the man always pays no matter how much money he made, and he wanted to continue that tradition in the Czech Republic. So, while he said he did not practice any cultural traditions, in reality (though seemingly unconscious of it), he did.

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[3] In this context, I will use the term 'transcultural' (and it's variations) in the original form as defined by Ortiz (1970: 102-103): 'I am of the opinion that the word transculturation better expresses the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture…it carries the idea of the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena…the result of every union of cultures is similar to that of the reproductive process between individuals: the offspring always has something of both parents but is always different from each of them'.

In order to determine the transcultural sentiments of my participants and whether or not they still feel connected to their home country, I asked a series of questions on this topic. Firstly I wanted to know if they would return to their country of origin if the situation that forced them to leave changed. A majority of my respondents (68 percent) said they would not; others said they would like to visit but not move back. Some expounded on their reasoning:

> The situation has changed, but we don't want to go back. It is a totally different country now. And now we are more similar to the French [i.e. Western Europeans] than the 'new [nationality of country of origin]'. The people have changed very much. There is much more nationalism due to the dissolution of the Soviet Union; the mentality has changed. We are only able to 'understand' the [nationality] who left [country of origin] fifteen years ago as we did.
> Respondent 3

> I have a son in Czech school. The school is good; there is a different style of teaching than in [country of origin]. In the Czech Republic the teaching is better. The pupil is taken as an individual. I would not move because of the children. The future for my kids is here in Prague.
> Respondent 8

Other rationales for not wanting to return to their country of origin were having a job and liking the public services available in the Czech Republic and also feeling that the Czech Republic was now their home.

As a follow-up question, respondents were asked about their sense of belonging to their country of origin versus the Czech Republic. This was an attempt to gauge whether their perceived identities had changed since being in the Czech Republic. Although most of my respondents did not want to return to their country of origin, half of the respondents[4] still felt they were very much a part of it. Less than a quarter did not feel connected to their country of origin. Since several refugees responded that they did not feel at all or very much part of their home countries, the statement made by Koser Akcapar (2006) claiming that all migrants want to maintain a connection with their country of origin seems to be negated by this case study.

My study also contradicts Robinson and Rubio's (2007) claim that refugees have repatriation as their goal, which in turn preserves identification with their country of origin and inhibits integrating into their new host society. While many of my participants ethnically identified themselves based on their country of origin, most of the respondents distinctly stated that they did not want to return even if the situation that led them to migrate were remedied. This means that voluntary repatriation is not on their minds.

Nearly the same number of participants responded that they felt both a part of their country of origin and the Czech Republic:

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[4] Questions concerning how much the refugee felt part of his/her country of origin and part of the Czech Republic were only asked to eighteen respondents rather than twenty.

> We fall somewhere in between – like a tree who has [country of origin] roots but is nourished by Czech culture. I feel like a mutant. We are Czech artists of [nationality] origin.
> Respondent 3

This quote illustrates the epitome of transculturalism where the respondents have successfully combined aspects of both cultures. Respondent 3 replied that he and his wife felt equally a part of the Czech Republic and their country of origin (although they would not want to return); they have been in the Czech Republic for almost 20 years and have raised a family there. They attend Czech and ethnic-related events equally and have many friends who are Czech and others who are from their country of origin.

To continue examining the notion of transculturalism, I asked my respondents about the aspects of their culture they adhere to in their new lives in the Czech Republic in order to gauge what they felt was important to retain. The majority (90 percent) holds on to some aspects of their native culture, such as celebrating national holidays and cooking traditional foods.

Several respondents said that they have integrated part of the Czech culture into their home life because of their children:

> I cook [ethnic] food because I'm used to it. I celebrate [country of origin] and Czech Easter and Christmas mainly because the children are in Czech schools. There are not so many differences between Czech and [country of origin] cultures.
> Respondent 11

> Easter, Christmas…but we also have Czech traditions, mainly because the children know them from school.
> Respondent 17

> We celebrate Czech and [country of origin] Christmas. Czech Christmas more for the children, for us (parents) the New Year is most important…I cook borscht in the winter.
> Respondent 19

Only two respondents[5] said that it was very important to them to adhere to customs and traditions from their country of origin, while the majority (80 percent) was ambiguous. Some respondents mentioned their children as a reason for adapting the Czech culture (here and quoted above):

> I would say that we keep half Czech and half [country of origin] traditions. The kids are for the Czech traditions. My husband is [nationality] so we have [nationality] traditions.
> Respondent 17

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[5] This question was asked to eighteen respondents. Of those, three chose not to answer the question.

Such responses show a deliberate effort on the part of my respondents to integrate their children into Czech society. It also indicates that my respondents plan to stay in the Czech Republic and want their children to feel a sense of belonging to the new host country. These responses contradict Byrne et. al.'s (2002) argument that the Czech Republic is mainly seen as a transit state for migrants.

My data negates Koser Akcapar's (2006) statement that migrants strive to maintain a connection with the country of origin since a majority of my respondents did not feel strongly about retaining some aspects of culture of their country of origin. While such practices as cooking traditional dishes and celebrating national holidays are only a few ways to identify with the former home, eliminating them from everyday life reflects a desire for integration in their new country of residence.

This, however, could also be a reflection of forced migration, and the fact that my respondents left their home countries due to some type of persecution. It may be easier for them to cut ties to their culture because they do not want to be reminded of their former experiences and are embracing the chance to resettle and start a new life in the Czech Republic. That some of the respondents are making a conscious effort to include aspects of the Czech culture into their homes because of their children also shows their willingness to accept Czech traditions and their process of transculturation. Although my respondents did not all strongly identify with the Czech Republic or Czech society, this could change over time.

Religion as an identifying factor

Religion is frequently used as an identity marker, oftentimes taking precedence over other aspects of self-identification (Amini 2009). Koser Ackcapar (2006) discusses religious conversion as a strategy for Iranian migrants in Turkey who convert from Islam to Christianity in order to be accepted. I wanted to determine the level of religiosity of my participants and whether or not religion, and identifying as religious, had any effect on their experiences in the Czech Republic.

Since the population of the Czech Republic is mainly secular, it seems important to understand the impact on a religious person continuing to identify based on religion. There is also the question of the religion a refugee practices. Czechs who practice religion are mainly Roman Catholic leading to the question of whether refugees who practice another religion maintain and identify with their traditional religion or convert to the mainstream religion as in the aforementioned study.

I asked my participants if they considered themselves religious, and if so, what religion they practiced. The majority (70 percent) said they were religious; Christian (50 percent, none specifically mentioned Roman Catholic) and Muslim (29 percent) were the two most frequently mentioned religions. About one-fifth did not specify their religion. Because of the secularity of the Czech population, religious differences did not seem to matter much to my respondents. In fact the secular nature of the Czech Republic was seen as liberating for some. One respondent noted:

> In the refugee camps they asked about religion, and I told them I was born a Muslim but that I don't practice. My parents don't practice either, but in [country of origin] they would say they are Muslim. I was never allowed to say in public in [country of origin] that I'm not religious. I always had to fake it, and it was a relief in the Czech Republic to say that I don't have a religion.
> Respondent 9

Three of my respondents were forced to migrate from their country of origin due to religious beliefs. They practiced a minority religion in their country of origin and were persecuted because of it. However, none of these respondents chose the Czech Republic because of its religious freedom. And none of them mentioned their religion as having an effect on their own identity or how they were treated and/or perceived in the Czech Republic.

To find out whether my respondents' religion had any effect on how they were treated by Czech society, I asked if they had experienced any discrimination or felt segregated or isolated because of their religious beliefs. All of them responded in the negative. Respondent 14 gave her opinion of the attitude toward religion in the Czech Republic:

> Since most people are atheists, religion doesn't matter.
> Respondent 14

However, two respondents who are practicing Christians said they did not face prejudice or intolerance, but that being Muslim may result in discrimination:

> The Orthodox Church is similar to Catholic; there is a similarity in culture and so on. I think if I were a Muslim it would be more difficult.
> Respondent 8

> When I was seeking the apartment for rent, they asked me if I am a Christian or Muslim. The Christianity helped in seeking the new apartment – it was about the time of the 9/11 attacks.
> Respondent 17

None of the Muslims interviewed said they experienced hostility or discrimination because of their religion so it is interesting that the above respondents would expect discrimination if they were Muslim. This could be a reflection of their own personal feelings and reactions toward Muslims or negative stereotyping they have witnessed.

Based on these responses it does not appear that religion is a critical factor in my participants' daily lives. Therefore, it would not seem that religion plays a major role in their self-identification. Furthermore, none of the respondents mentioned converting to Catholicism in order to be accepted by Czech society. The fact that the Czech population is mostly secular probably makes religion a less sensitive topic as it is elsewhere.

The 'refugee' label

As shown throughout the literature on refugee identity, the label of 'refugee' tends to have a negative impact on one's identity (Harrell-Bond 1999, Timotijevic and Breakwell 2000, Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003). Harrell-Bond (1999) quoted a Sudanese refugee in Ireland who formerly managed a refugee camp in Sudan; he felt that his social and economic status was lowered as a result of becoming a refugee and that also lowered his self-esteem. In Timotijevic and Blackwell's (2000: 366) study of Bosnian refugees in Britain, respondents experienced some of the same feelings about their refugee label: 'I am a refugee, and that sounds terrible, really bad…When you say to the people here that you are a refugee, everyone turns their head away from you.'; '…when I go to the Home Office…I feel 'oh, look at yourself how low you are now, you used to be a normal person…''. Highly skilled professionals in Colic-Peisker and Walker's (2003) study of Bosnian refugees in Australia felt uneasy about their refugee classification since it left them socially disadvantaged.

Several of my respondents mirrored these negative attitudes about their new refugee status. Two specifically echoed the sentiment in Timotijevic and Blackwell's (2000) study that they were made to feel 'lower' since becoming refugees:

> Yes, there is a feeling. I am considered the lowest. It would be different if I were here as a student or businessman.
> Respondent 13

> Maybe it makes me feel lower than others. Before I had a passport; now I am just adapting.
> Respondent 14

My respondents also felt negatively toward their label because of how others perceived them and what others thought about being a refugee:

> At first I did not feel anything. I did not know the Czech language. I received asylum in two months. Now I know something about it because I know the language. I know how people react when they hear 'refugee'. Also I myself know something about refugees.
> Respondent 8

> I feel that the asylum seeker has a very bad reputation. I feel like an asylum seeker and receiver is not taken as a person or a human.
> Respondent 17

Respondent 8's comment that the refugee label affected her negatively partly because she now 'knows something about refugees' is perplexing. She does not like how she is now perceived as a refugee. She also implies that she can understand the negative perceptions since she knows about refugees. From her responses, it did not appear that she experienced negative treatment personally; however, she may have seen others being treated in a discriminatory way. A possible

explanation is that she sees how refugees are depicted in the media, which tends to portray refugees in a negative light. This shows that the identity-making process not only involves a refugee's personal experiences but also the surrounding practices that can have an influence on him/her as well.

Contrary to the findings that the 'refugee' label carried a negative connotation, one of my respondents specifically felt that obtaining refugee status and the accompanying label was positive:

> Before we received asylum, it was a hard time for us. At the beginning, it's like being in a prison. You have to go to Mladá Boleslav [a city 35 miles northeast of Prague] for a stamp. It's a little bit messy, and you're still waiting to see how it will end. And you know that you can't go back home. After we received asylum, we were all crying, and we felt liberated and life became something totally different, and we were feeling that now we can do everything.
> Respondent 19

This response was unexpected since the literature I encountered dealt with the negative aspects attached to becoming a refugee, including a feeling of inferiority and actual or perceived discrimination. The positive aspects and feelings toward becoming a refugee are overlooked. In this case, Respondent 19 felt that becoming a refugee was a release from her past and the persecution she experienced. She felt liberated; obtaining refugee status meant that she could start over and build a new life in the Czech Republic.

While for some, the refugee label had no effect on their identity, it did elicit a response from others:

> We were running away from something since my childhood. When I was a little kid, we were fleeing from… bombs that were falling on our villages in the northern part of our country. We ran away like refugees to [neighboring country]. Two years later we went back home and across southern [country of origin]. It took two years until we got back to [region in country of origin]. And when I was ten, we started to run from bombs from the…War. It was until 1988, after a short break time and another escape…So I am still running. That's why the label of refugee is not strange to me. The funny thing was, when I received asylum, one of my colleagues from [foreign country] read the paper from the police. There was some data about me. After the first name and surname there is a cell for sex and there was written: 'man' and underneath it was status: 'refugee' and it amused this [foreign nationality] guy so much.
> Respondent 12

This response shows that even if the label does not impact the individual, it still may influence the way that individual is perceived by others, underlining the process of subjective identity-making that such a label creates. In Respondent 12's case his colleague's perception of him was not negative, but as demonstrated earlier in this paper, it often can be. Such attitudes can make a

refugee question whether to mention his/her status since he/she cannot always be sure of other's reactions.

Negative identification with their refugee status can also be based on opinions about them in their country of origin. Timotijevic and Blackwell (2000: 366) found that 'being an immigrant requires dealing with the two imposing, but equally derogating representation – that of an intruder (in relation to the host country) and of a traitor (in relation to the home-culture)'. One respondent echoed the fear of what being a traitor could mean:

> In [country of origin] when someone becomes a refugee, they become a traitor and unfaithful to the country. I didn't want to face activists in [country of origin] after becoming a refugee. Since I didn't make the decision myself (I was somewhat forced into it because of my job), I had a hard time digesting the issue. After six months I finally started living a normal life again.
> Respondent 9

Respondent 9 did not fit into the typical archetype of political refugee. She mentioned in her interview that she was not planning to apply for asylum when she left her country of origin to work at an internship in a Western European country; she did not leave her home country with the prospect of resettling elsewhere. She got a job in the Czech Republic and was 'somewhat forced' to apply for asylum by her employer. Due to her profession she could not go back to her home country without the threat of being unable to ever leave again. Because of this, she strongly felt the effects of being seen as a traitor to her home country. Her ultimate goal is to be able to live in her country of origin again; ironically, when asked how strongly she feels to be a part of her home country, she replied that it was more so after she left:

> Very strongly. Even more than when I lived there. Not because I am homesick, but once you're out and in contact with foreigners, you realize how much people don't know and you try to inform them.
> Respondent 9

There are numerous ways that asylum seekers can begin the legal process of claiming asylum. While the majority flees their country of origin based on some type of persecution, some are employed internationally and start the asylum process when they realize that, because of their occupation, they will undoubtedly face persecution if they return home. Because they have already established themselves in the new host country with housing and employment, this can affect the asylum application process.

Several of my respondents either worked at an internationally known corporation or had family that did, which factored into their asylum application process. They did not have to go through the procedure typical to most asylum seekers (applying once crossing the Czech border). Representatives from the company managed their application process. They also did not have to wait for their asylum decisions in a refugee camp or center, and they (or their family members) already had employment when the asylum process started so they did not have to search for employment once granted refugee status. The company paid for expenses incurred during the

application process and helped find housing for them as well. Because of the company's role, these participants had a very different experience of the asylum process than others:

> No, the label does not have any effect on my identity. But because of the status, we could not leave the country. We had to get fingerprinted at a refugee camp. The process took one day and [company name] took care of everything else. In the camp I said to my mother 'Look at the refugees'. She said 'So are we'.
> Respondent 2

> I didn't have to stay in the camps like other asylum seekers, but I had to do the interviews in the camps. [Company name] set it up so I didn't have to stay in the camps.
> Respondent 9

This detachment from the asylum application process clearly affects the way those accommodated by their employers feel about their refugee status and the way the label is considered part of their identity. The fact that they did not have negative experiences like my other participants during the application process and afterward while seeking employment and housing means they may not have connected being a refugee with negativity as others did. In fact the lack of a typical application process and the virtual guarantee of obtaining asylum led Respondent 2 to view herself differently and identify others in the camps as refugees, but not her.

Discrimination based on the 'refugee' label

Even if having the refugee label did not impact my participant's identity, oftentimes the label led to feeling as outsiders or as being discriminated against based on Czechs' reaction to it. Some respondents said Czechs were often accepting of them until becoming aware of the respondents' refugee status:

> People don't know that I'm a refugee until I tell them. Then they start looking at me differently.
> Respondent 9

> It's okay until people find out I am a refugee in Prague.
> Respondent 13

Timotijevic and Blackwell (2000) found a similar situation in their research on refugees from the former Yugoslavia. One Bosnian refugee contemplates whether to tell people she is a refugee or not because of what their ensuing reaction could be:

> When I meet the English people and when they ask me where I am from, I think – OK, what that guy will think of me when they hear that I am a refugee, from Bosnia and all these things, that I am a refugee…I never had any kind of complexes in my life, but this has become a social complex, and you can't go straight to these people and ask – oh, can I sit here, etc., as you would do in your

17

country. They would probably not like me because I am from Bosnia (Timotijevic and Blackwell 2000: 367).

The part of the above quote about disliking her because she is Bosnian connects with statements made by my respondents. When asked about feeling as an outsider or being discriminated against because of their refugee status, other than the above statements, most felt that they were treated as such not because of their refugee status but because, due to their physical appearance, they look like foreigners (the Czech population is quite homogeneous with about four percent foreign-born).

Because of this, the 'us' versus 'them' aspect of identity is conspicuous. Hobsbawm and Kertzer (1992: 6) underscore this when discussing nationalism in Europe: 'Who 'they' are is…not difficult. 'They' are recognizable as 'not we', most usually by color or other physical stigmata or by language'. Regarding xenophobia in the Czech Republic, Burjanek (2001) says that Czechs tend to think negatively about foreigners. Burjanek (2001: 57) further (quoting) Gabal (1999) lists three categories of foreigners and their perceived acceptability by the Czech population: ''capital' foreigners who are seen as acceptable in cultural terms (e.g. Americans, French, Germans)… 'relations' (Slovaks, Czech émigrés, Jews) towards whom the attitude is somewhat mixed but who are still seen as acceptable…[and] Arabs, Vietnamese, Chinese, people from the former Yugoslavia, Russians, Ukrainians, Blacks…are seen…as the most foreign 'foreigners''.

A survey on the attitudes of Europeans toward minorities shows that 39.3 percent of Czechs questioned are resistant to a multicultural society and 61.8 showed a resistance to diversity; 49.8 percent of Czechs surveyed have resistance toward immigrants, and when asked specifically about asylum seekers, almost 30 percent of Czechs surveyed felt negatively toward them (EUMC 2005). In themes entitled 'favoring ethnic distance'[6] (31 percent) and 'perceived collective ethnic threat'[7] (75.1 percent), the Czech Republic ranked second (after Greece) out of 19 European countries surveyed (EUMC 2005). Unfortunately I could not locate a more recent survey of this type in order to ascertain whether attitudes toward foreigners in the Czech Republic have become more or less favorable. I can surmise that attitudes have not changed significantly since several of my respondents experienced hostility or discrimination based on looking foreign:

> Socially yes I feel like an outsider, but not because of being a refugee, but because of being a foreigner. I felt it in bureaucratic ways because traveling outside the Czech Republic was a terrible process. In customs there were two groups – Czech and [nationality] in a non-EU line. The way customs looked at my passport and at me made me feel it.
> Respondent 2

> We wanted to get ownership of our apartment, but they wouldn't let us because we were [nationality]…we were searching for an architect for our summer

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[6] 'Favouring ethnic distance' was figured by asking if a person minded if his/her boss was of a different ethnicity and/or if his/her close relative married someone of a different ethnicity.
[7] 'Perceived collective ethnic threat' was determined by asking if/how immigrants affected the country socially and economically.

house, and he told us first that he will not make a house for [nationality] because they are murderers and thieves.
Respondent 3

I recognize the difference because the country has a homogeneous population. Some people speak slowly to me or shout because they think I can't speak Czech because I look different.
Respondent 7

In smaller villages we are considered 'others'. We are called names, such as 'yellow' but not as much in Prague.
Respondent 13

You always feel like an outsider here. You are new and since this was a communist country, if the old don't like you then the young won't either. I feel discrimination and prejudice. Eastern European refugees get integration apartments but Africans don't.
Respondent 14

These statements reflect discussions in the literature on 'otherness' and the tensions created between refugees and the host society (Eide 2007, Grove and Zwi 2006, Papastergiadis 2006, Robinson and Rubio 2007). Most of these respondents were all ethnically/racially included in Gabal's third category 'the most foreign 'foreigners'' listed above. Because the Czech Republic has a quite homogeneous population, these respondents' 'otherness' is conspicuous in Czech society due to their physical appearance. Thus, some, in addition to being recognized as refugees, also have the new identity marking of 'foreigner' imposed upon them; in their home countries, neither of these identity-markers was present.

The anti-foreigner sentiment in the Czech Republic does not make the situation any easier for those migrants. Wallace (2002) attributes this sentiment found in the Czech Republic and other Eastern European countries to the isolation of those countries during the time of communism. Moreover, during that time, the Soviet satellite states were mostly experiencing emigration. Wallace bases her conclusions about xenophobia in the Czech Republic on 1980, 1990 and 1995 World Values Survey and 1998 New Democracies Barometer data.

While the percentage of Czechs who would not like to live next to foreigners decreased over time based on data from the World Values Survey, the latest survey results showed that almost 50 percent of Czechs would not want to have a Muslim as a neighbor (only a one percent decrease from the preceding survey), which shows that anti-Muslim sentiments are widespread (Wallace 2002). The New Democracies Barometer also alludes to Czech intolerance toward foreigners; 44 percent of Czechs surveyed agreed with the statement that migrant numbers should be reduced, 82 percent agreed that migrants increase crime rates and 53 percent agreed that migrants take away jobs (Wallace 2002).

Complicating matters for some is the history of social and political intolerance in the Czech Republic toward the Roma ('gypsy') population that has been present for centuries (Burjanek

2001). Respondent 4 (who is not Roma) said he often gets mistaken for a Roma because of the way he looks:

> Yes, we feel like outsiders. Czechs are not nice people and are not good to people with brown skin.
> Respondent 4

Respondent 4 said he experienced job discrimination because employers think he is Roma. In addition to his appearance, he does not speak Czech; he said this also makes potential employers think he is Roma since many Roma speak the Romany language and not Czech. In a European Values Study, when asked whom they would not want to have as a neighbor, 39.8 percent of Czech participants answered 'Roma' (Burjanek 2001). Since Respondent 4 'looks' like a Roma, the feelings of intolerance are erroneously assigned to him, and he is treated with the same intolerance.

Besides feeling as outsiders, some respondents also experienced hostility and/or discrimination based on their perceived foreignness:

> Sometimes I do [experience discrimination] by a small percentage. I had problems with some Nazis, and I think Czechs are racist but not more or less than other countries…
> Respondent 2

> We don't have any specific experiences. It is just a general feeling that we always have.
> Respondents 4 and 5

> Maybe every day in shops, hospitals – especially trams. When people get drunk they express how they feel. It is still an obstacle; they need a lot of time.
> Respondent 14

> It was mostly that time we were living in Kralupy nad Vltavou [a small town twenty miles north of Prague]. The locals had the feeling that foreigners came to steal their jobs. They also did not want to rent an apartment to us.
> Respondent 17

> I remember once on a tram in Olomouc [a city 175 miles southeast of Prague]. I was accosted by drunks and asked 'Why are you here? You are foreign'.
> Respondent 18

If Burjanek (2001) is correct in declaring that Czechs desire a homogeneous population, it can be presumed that people who are conspicuous because they are in the ethnic/racial minority would feel their 'difference' as well. It is important to point out that two of the above-quoted respondents mentioned that this discrimination happened outside of Prague. Typically more xenophobia is witnessed in smaller towns and rural areas (Wallace 2002). While Olomouc is a relatively large town in the Czech Republic, in its population of just over 232,000, less than

4,500 are foreign-born and the majority of those are from Slovakia (Czech Statistical Office 2011). Also worth noting is that two respondents experienced this discrimination from people who had been drinking, which 'permitted' their behavior and comments.

Interestingly two respondents from countries outside Europe said they did not experience discrimination or hostility from Czechs because they actively decided not to go to places they would likely be mistreated. This tells us that they assumed they would encounter racism or harassment based on their ethnicity and/or skin color if they went to certain places either due to past experiences, stories they heard and/or perceptions of such treatment. When asked if they had encountered discrimination or hostility because they are perceived as foreign, they answered:

> No, not really. I keep to myself and don't go to bars. In 1987 there was an incident with [nationality], but I didn't go to places where I would get into any trouble.
> Respondent 6

> No, not really. I was trying not to go to the places where I could expect that. It means like going to restaurants or bars where I expected people with not so high IQs or people who do not know something different than the borders of the Czech Republic. So I was trying to avoid that.
> Respondent 12

Scholars have pointed out that refugees often use a 'strategy of invisibility' (Kibreab 1999). Respondents 6 and 12 give evidence of using this tactic in their daily life. Kibreab (1999) discusses Liisa Malkki's research of refugees in Tanzania, and the tactic they used of assuming a new identity (that of the majority ethnicity) in order to avoid trouble based on their refugee status. My respondents were not in a camp situation or a designated site for refugees as in Malkki's study, but in the case of Respondents 6 and 12, they did avoid certain areas in order to assume a sense of invisibility. Malkki (1995: 193) asserts that the strategy of invisibility by her participants 'entailed a denial of identities…' I do not surmise that my respondents were denying their identities as refugees or foreigners, but rather attempting invisibility by keeping away from areas perceived as potential problem spaces in order to avoid experiencing hostility in an already discordant environment, thus limiting the spaces they occupy.

Remembering what made them feel like outsiders, three responded:

> People are not so open even if you are Czech-speaking. No, I don't think it's a problem now. In the beginning I thought it was because I am black, but then I realize that between Czechs it still is not harmonized. I work with children who don't care. Some people block out foreigners; there's an epidemic reaction, but I see it as having a problem with themselves.
> Respondent 1

> Once when I was buying a newspaper on one Sunday; the woman told me that
> I've got a strange accent. This I considered ridiculous; the woman was mostly
> upset about being at work on a Sunday.
> Respondent 19

In these instances, respondents decided the discrimination was not actually about them, but more about the person/people who were being discriminatory; they were able to recognize that reactions to them were of intolerance by individuals and therefore attempted to not take them personally. Such strategies of coping with prejudice show my respondents' ability to address the perceived difference in a constructive way rather than letting negative attitudes distress and marginalize them.

Deciding how to live with the new label of 'refugee' can impact a person's identity. Oftentimes this new label produces not only individual tension, but societal tension as well. Refugees from further afield than Eastern Europe have experienced more difficulties due to their refugee status and conspicuous difference from the majority of Czech society. Compounding the xenophobia thought to be inherent in former communist states of Europe used to isolationism and cultural homogeneity are media outlets that fuel negative attitudes. The following section examines the media's role in perpetuating stereotypic and xenophobic sentiments toward forced migrants.

Media coverage of forced migrants in Western Europe

Media coverage throughout Europe often engenders a negative sentiment about refugees, and this could be responsible for fueling fires of anti-refugee sentiment. Several studies in the UK, for example, illustrate the extent to which the media is responsible for stimulating and encouraging negative attitudes toward forced migrants; the media in the UK regularly portrays them in a negative light and depicts them as being responsible for an assortment of societal problems from the increase in crime rates to the lack of affordable housing to the quality and accessibility of healthcare, among others (Greenslade 2005, Lewis 2005, Moore and Clifford 2007, White 2002).

Greenslade (2005) performed an analysis on a sample of British daily newspaper headlines from 2002 to 2004 that referenced asylum seekers and/or refugees. These titles repeatedly portrayed asylum seekers and refugees negatively; examples of these titles are: 'Surrender to Asylum: Outrage as Blair gives up our veto on Brussels bureaucrats', 'Asylum war criminals on our streets', 'Asylum: Tidal wave of crime' and 'Plot to Kill Blair: Asylum seekers with hi-tech equipment and maps caught half a mile from PM's home' from the *Daily Express*; 'Brutal crimes of the asylum seekers' and 'Asylum gangs are to blame for new era of crime' from the *Daily Mail*; 'Handout UK: how many refugees are living in your town?' and 'Britain's 1bn [pound] asylum bill' from the *News of the World*; 'Swan Bake: Asylum seekers steal the Queen's bird for barbeques' from *The Sun*; and 'Asylum seekers ate our donkeys' from the *Daily Star*. In addition, Lewis (2005) references other negative headlines: 'Fury at asylum seekers' free golf lessons' and 'Asylum seeker? Doctor will see you first' from the *Daily Express*.

What is disturbing about these newspaper headlines and the stories that followed (besides their content and the variety of newspapers included) is that some of them came to light as untrue ('Plot to Kill Blair', 'Swan Bake' and 'Asylum seekers ate our donkeys'); they were proven to be falsified stories or based on unsubstantiated events. The newspapers did not always acknowledge the inaccuracy and report it to their readers, and if the stories were retracted, it was usually done weeks later, typically by printing a small article in the latter pages of the newspaper.

Also leading to negative impressions of forced migrants is the media's choice of wording when reporting on this population. Newspapers and other media outlets in the UK have used terms such as 'crime, dirty, thieves, fraud, deception, bogus, false, failed, rejected, cheat, illegal, burden, drugs, wave, flood, influx, scrounger, sponger, fraudster, tide, swap, flood mob, horde, riot, rampage, disorder, race war, fight, brawl, battle, fighting machine, deadly, orgy of violence, fury, ruthless, monsters, destruction, ruin' (Tyler 2006: 191). And this is how 'the figure of the asylum-seeker has become sticky with grotesque qualities; qualities that invoke fear, anger and disgust amongst 'native' communities…[and] it is the repetition of these imagined qualities that shapes public perceptions of asylum-seekers' (Tyler 2006: 191).

In addition to headlines screaming negative statements about asylum seekers and refugees, British newspaper columnists have published disparaging and racist comments about them as well. According to Greenslade (2005: 24), a columnist for *The Sun* regularly used reproachful comments when writing about asylum seekers, including a frequent claim that asylum seekers are criminals and referencing 'Albanian mobsters, Kosovan knife gangs, Romanian shoplifters, and assorted riff-raff'.

Both Greenslade (2005) and Lewis (2005) found that racist comments are considered socially acceptable when discussing asylum seekers and refugees, although social restrictions exist against making racially and ethnically prejudiced comments about regular immigrants and British citizens. A representative from Refugee Action, an NGO in the UK, blames the news media for perpetuating negative images of asylums seekers and says that 'Newspapers have latched on to asylum seeker issues as a useful way of getting more readers. They scapegoat them, and use asylum as a coded way to talk about race' (Valios 2003: 32).

This negative press undoubtedly affects the identity imposed on refugees. Millions of people read these newspaper articles; many others notice the headlines only on a daily basis. Newspapers are expected to publish reliable, factual information, which leads people to believe the claims made against asylum seekers and refugees. In their defense, editors of some of the aforementioned newspapers said they reflect the viewpoints of their audience, deflecting the blame that could be placed on them for reproducing negative attitudes about forced migrants.

Having an allegedly reliable source publish negative (and often false) statements ultimately enforces those identities on asylum seekers and refugees. This can affect the way the general public views forced migrants and may discourage society from interacting with them and forming their own opinions. Even if the media coverage is not explicitly negative, the connotations derived from the coverage can give a sense of being antipathetic. One of Timotijevic and Blackwell's (2000: 366) respondents from a study of refugees living in the UK said that he does not want to be thought of in the way refugees are portrayed on television.

In addition to the media, political factions in Western Europe often propagate negative viewpoints regarding asylum seekers and refugees. Firstly this is seen in the increasingly restrictive asylum policies throughout the region (Guild 1999, Joly 1999, Byrne et. al. 2002). Statham (2003) finds that policies in Western European countries tend to be resolutely anti-asylum using national and societal interests as a defense for the restrictive policies.

Secondly, many Western European countries (e.g. Austria, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Switzerland, UK) have politicians that based their campaign platforms on anti-asylum and anti-immigrant components, and some of them have been quite successful (Duval Smith 2003, Immigration Control Platform 2004, Institute of Race Relations 2004, Statham 2003, Valios 2003). Statham (2003) concludes after his quantitative analysis that the state plays a major role in shaping the way migrants are perceived in Britain. The deputy director for the Institute of Race Relations, a London-based think tank, says that anti-asylum sentiments increased after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 in the US, and that refugees are often portrayed as terrorists (Valios 2003). Papastergiadis (2006) seconds this appearance of the refugee as terrorist in political spheres.

Media coverage of forced migrants in the Czech Republic

A search of headlines on the website for the *Prague Post* (the Czech Republic's English-language newspaper) about asylum seekers and refugees results in a numerous headlines using the aforementioned negative terms: 'Slovak crime boss asks for asylum' (April 2003); 'Some towns just say no to refugees…Fears of infectious diseases, crime and loss of tourist trade…' (May 1999); 'Czech police strengthen borders against refugees…in fear of a massive influx of illegal refugees…' (March 1999); '*Sun* Article Stigmatizes Refugees' (August 1995, a Letter to the Editor about an article reprinted in the *Prague Post* from the *Budapest Sun* that the rise of AIDS in the region was due to refugees from the former Yugoslavia); 'Czechs Prepare for New Wave of Displaced Balkan Refugees' (August 1995); 'Hungary Prepares for Refugee Influx' (August 1995) and 'Border Town Braces for Refugee Influx' (June 1993). Another example comes from the *Christian Science Monitor*: 'Prague Wearies as Host to Exiles from East; A proposed law would slow the flood of refugees, whose numbers are expected to triple this year' (November 2001).

Several of these articles use the terms that Tyler (2006) found in his aforementioned analysis: crime, illegal, influx – with influx being a commonly used word. Recall that 82 percent of Czechs surveyed for the New Democracies Barometer in 1998 agreed with the statement that migrants increase crime rates. The usage of the word 'crime' in these newspaper articles promotes the idea that migrants (including forced migrants) are involved in illegal activities, which puts them under unjust suspicion. Grove and Zwi (2006: 1934) discuss the language of threat that is often used when describing asylum seekers and refugees; these include threats 'of natural disaster, of invasion, of war, and of contagion…' Examples of natural disasters (flood, wave) and contagion (infectious disease) are seen in the article titles above.

I did not specifically ask my respondents their opinion about the media's impact on refugee perception in the Czech Republic, but two respondents raised this issue themselves:

> I don't feel that Czechs care that much about religion, but I don't like to see radical Muslims on the news because I don't want to be lumped in a group with them. Czechs seem to be ignorant of other religions. The news gives bad news about foreigners in general. I feel more discriminated against by being from [country of origin] than because I'm a Muslim.
> Respondent 2

> People are not trying hard enough to find out why refugees are here. Some people do bad things and when they see one black guy doing something bad on the news, and then they assume that they are all bad. In my country that doesn't happen, people are judged as one, not as all are the same.
> Respondent 14

Respondents 2 and 14 were both from places that fit into Gabal's (1999 – quoted in Burjanek (2001:57)) third category of foreigners in the Czech Republic: 'the most foreign 'foreigners''. Their reflections on the media and its role in disseminating negative information about foreigners simulate the viewpoints of refugees in the UK who do not want to be likened to refugees they see portrayed in the media. The respondents' problem with media portrayal was their fear of being considered the same as someone who was involved in the reported incident. This invokes an identity marker ('radical Muslim', 'black guy doing something bad') inflicted on them without their choice.

Anti-asylum and anti-immigrant political parties in the Czech Republic are not as prevalent as in Western Europe. Wallace (2002) attributes this to the perceived homogeneity and relatively low numbers of immigrants in Eastern European countries. That does not mean these types of political parties do not exist. The now defunct Workers' Party in the Czech Republic was a far-right party that campaigned with anti-foreign rhetoric. The Workers' Party held a few local seats but no national ones. This party was banned by the Czech courts from running in governmental elections in 2010 due to its 'racist, xenophobic, homophobic and anti-Semitic' sentiments (BBC News 2010); however the fact that it held three local seats means that they were able to find enough Czechs to support their anti-foreigner agenda.

The instances where disparaging terms are used to describe asylum seekers and refugees (and migrants in general) can certainly tarnish their image in the minds of Czech society. As shown earlier, Czech society is far from fully accepting a multicultural society, and this negativity propagated by the media cannot help the situation

Conclusion

Identity is dynamic and people consistently go through a process of identity reformulation based upon situational circumstances that vary according to physical, social and political environments, among others. A refugee's identity is impacted from the moment of fleeing their home country

until being granted refuge in a new host country. Once granted refuge, the individual has to decide whether and how to become a part of his/her new host society. Ideally resettled refugees would go through a process of transculturalism – adopting aspects of their new host culture, while retaining some aspects of their traditional culture. This was the case with many of my respondents who adopted aspects of Czech culture, while continuing to practice parts of their country of origin's culture; this mainly included cooking traditional foods and celebrating national holidays.

Also impacting a refugee's identity is the new label of 'refugee' attached to them. The label did not necessarily have the negative impact on my respondents that was found in previous studies; what did emerge from my research is that the negative experiences my respondents had were usually based on their perceived foreignness. In fact, a majority of my respondents experienced some type of discrimination and/or felt like outsiders in Czech society because of this. Conduct toward them ranged from minor incidents with Czechs to name-calling and blatant racism and/or discrimination. Some used a strategy of avoidance by staying away from places where they foresaw experiencing this type of treatment.

My research findings also shed light on how the asylum application process can have an impact on a refugee's identity. Three of my respondents worked for an international company that handled all aspects of their asylum procedure, and they did not have to reside in camps and/or centers like other asylum seekers. Further, their refugee status was basically guaranteed so they did not have to anxiously await a decision. Because of this, there was a disconnect with the asylum seeking process; the degree to which was reflected by one respondent not considering herself a refugee.

Refugee identity can also be impacted by outside forces such as the media. Media coverage of forced migrants tends toward the negative, which can influence the way the general public feels about forced migrants. Negative media coverage can impact a refugee's identity as discussed by my respondents who did not want to be considered the same as refugees portrayed negatively in the media.

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