

Refugee Employment Experiences: Utilising Tamil Refugee Skills in London



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Abstract

This research investigates the skills that Tamil refugees who have moved to the UK bring with them, the extent to which they utilise these skills, and how they adapt and develop their skills for the UK labour market. Through qualitative research with twenty-six Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka, and a further seventeen interviews with 'elite' contacts in London, the refugees' experiences of integration through employment are examined. Here the human and social capital factors influencing the use, or lack of use, of skills within the Tamil refugee community are analysed. Particular focus is placed on contrasting the practices of male and female refugees and the variations of perceptions of individual success within wider perceptions of success in broader Tamil societies. Further research undertaken with Tamils in Montreal offers a counterpoint to the situations of refugees in London, providing an international perspective on the wider Tamil diaspora. The concepts of success, gender, coping strategies, gratitude and integration are used to theorise the employment experiences of individuals. With a few exceptions, most previous research investigating the skills of immigrant groups has focused on the demand for, rather than the supply of, skills, and on the economic, rather than social, aspects of skill utilisation and adaptation. Research in this area has important implications for policies that disperse asylum seekers away from their ethnic communities. Supporting the utilisation of skills could contribute to overcoming some skill shortages and integrating refugees into society, as well as enhancing the lives of the refugees themselves. This thesis argues that the ethnic community and ethnic economy play a crucial role in shaping the employment experiences of Tamil refugees. The importance of the wider Tamil refugee community and the ability to be immersed within the Tamil ethnic economy on a day-to-day basis, however also contributes to the difficulties that Tamil refugees face integrating into wider societies. This is not a unique situation. Tamil refugees face some similar experiences to other immigrant groups. Consequently this work builds upon earlier work concerned with the migration-asylum nexus, arguing that the differentiation between forced migrants and economic migrants has been over-simplified when examining their experiences in host countries.

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Thesis Preface

As a white, middle class, woman, who had been brought up in predominantly white suburban England, my connections to this topic might seem unlikely. I have never lived in London nor, prior to attending university, had direct experience of asylum seeker or refugee issues. However, my interest in this topic came about as a consequence of my university experience working with refugees as part of my undergraduate dissertation. I became interested in the narratives of refugees, particularly around individual personal experiences. My interest in asylum seeker and refugee experiences was continued through my Masters dissertation where I examined the way a local refugee centre supported asylum seekers and refugees. This thesis followed on from this, examining the characteristics of the individual experience with that of employment. Given my background and positionality I am able to look at refugee experiences from the perspective of a native UK resident. Through this, I am able to examine the issues faced by a newly arrived group with, in anthropological terms, a 'fresh' perspective. I am able to challenge things that might normally be taken for granted by people who are more immersed within the setting. Consequently, I have been able to turn my outsider position into an advantage in asking questions as to why particular situations occur rather than accepting individual experiences as given.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: refugee employment experiences

1. Refugees and employment in the UK

At the end of 2007 there were approximately 11.4 million refugees worldwide (UNHCR 2008). The refugee population of the UK represented just 3 percent of this global figure, accounting for 0.5 percent of the total population of the country (approximately 299,700)¹ (UNHCR 2008). The integration of these refugees is seen by the government as being in the interests of the host population and the refugees themselves (Home Office 2005). Refugees living in the UK make up some of the most marginalised and excluded groups in society (Refugee Council 2004). Amongst such concerns, integration has become a key policy objective, and a matter of public discussion (Home Office 2000; Ager & Strang 2004a). Employment is considered to be core to the process of integration. Employment promotes economic independence, provides opportunities to plan for the future, offers occasions to interact with the wider host society, makes available chances to develop language skills, restores self-esteem and encourages self-reliance (Ager & Strang 2008; Home Office 2005). Consequently the *Refugee Integration and Employment Service* was established in 2008 to emphasise the significance of supporting refugee employment as a part of their wider integration and settlement in the UK.

This research is positioned at the intersection of research on refugees, skills and integration through employment. The focus on this 'triad' is significant as the interrelations between these three features play an important role in the settlement experiences of refugees. This research investigates the skills that refugees brought with them when they moved to Britain, the extent to which they utilise these skills, and how they adapt and develop their skills in the UK labour market. These individual experiences are understood through a focus on the employment of individuals within the context of integration. Through a qualitative case study of Tamil refugees in London, this research contributes to discussions of the employment and integration of

¹ UNHCR (2008) estimate based on 10 years asylum-seekers receiving refugee status, excluding resettled refugees.

immigrants in general, emphasising the socially situated context of individuals and their lived experiences. These are under-researched areas as, with a few exceptions (for example, Valtonen 1999; Lamba 2003), most previous research on the skills of immigrant groups has focused on the demand for, rather than the supply of, skills; and the economic, rather than social, aspects of skill utilisation and adaptation (Cortes 2004; Waxman 2001; Escalona 1995).

The utilisation of the skills of refugees is an important topic as refugees, unlike other groups of immigrants, rarely return to their country of origin unless circumstances in their country of origin change (White 2001). Therefore, they may require greater integration assistance. Research in this area has important potential policy implications that may contribute to overcoming skill shortages and assist refugees to integrate into society, as well as enhancing the lives of the refugees themselves. Employment which refugees consider to be appropriate, whether in terms of skills, gender, or ambitions, may lead to enhanced or improved integration of the migrant group into the resident society (White 2001; Bloch 2008). Targeting policies at education, job skills, and information about the labour market may aid integration and reduce ‘brain waste’ (White 2002). This thesis specifically addresses the skills set of a group of Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka. It examines how the skills of the participants are utilised and the ways in which individuals adapt to their new situations in the UK. This involves an analysis of the ambitions they have for themselves and those around them, and the coping mechanisms they employ to manage their lives in a new country. This is situated within a social context of policies around integration and the Tamil refugees lived experience in the UK.

2. Context

This research is positioned within literature on migration studies and specifically that on refugees. Refugees are a complex group to define. The legal definition of a refugee comes from the United Nations who defines a refugee as a person:

“who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail him [or her]self of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it” (United Nations 1951: 16: Article 1.2).

Interpretation of the United Nations' (1951) definition is variable. Some of the different countries who signed the agreement have chosen to take a narrow perspective of 'social group', for example the UK, whereas other countries have adopted a perspective that includes a broader acknowledgement of what constitutes a social group. For example, Canada recognises a refugee on the basis of persecution because of their gender, whereas officially the UK does not (Crawley 2001).

Policy context

Asylum seekers seek recognition as refugees. Whilst waiting for their cases to be heard asylum seekers are not allowed to work in the UK. As an asylum seeker the individual has to wait for a decision as to whether they are granted refuge, another form of status or refused asylum. Over the past two decades, successive British governments have preferred to grant temporary status which has fewer attendant rights, such as family reunification, and is less secure than refugee status (Schuster & Solomos 2001). Before 1st April 2003 individuals seeking asylum could be granted Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR). ELR was applied under earlier immigration laws and now only exists for those who claimed asylum some time ago. It was granted for four years, in many cases after which time people could apply for refugee status, which was usually granted (UK Border Agency 2008a). ELR was the predominant status given to Tamils seeking asylum in the UK prior to 2003. Today, if an asylum seeker is not recognised as a refugee, they may be considered for humanitarian protection (UK Border Agency 2008a). Humanitarian protection comes from the European Convention on Human Rights to which the UK is a signatory. Article 3 of the Convention prohibits torture, intrusion and degrading treatments. Sending someone back to a country where this would occur would breach Article 3. Humanitarian protection is granted to asylum seekers if it is accepted that they face a serious risk in their home country. Humanitarian protection normally allows the asylum seeker leave to stay in the UK for three years, although in some cases it is for a shorter period. After three years, they may re-apply for refugee status. This is not granted automatically, and indeed the Home Office has become stricter in returning cases after the humanitarian protection period if they feel the risk in the home country has reduced. In February 2005 the government stopped granting indefinite leave to remain to people who were recognised as refugees (Refugee Council 2005a). Instead individuals who are granted refugee status are now given temporary leave to remain for five years. This leave is subject to review at the end of the five years, if the situation in their country of origin has not improved

significantly after this time: then they become eligible to settle in the UK (Tempest 2005; Scotland is the Place 2009).

In the UK, the asylum system has dramatically altered over the period since the current Labour government came to power. Before 'New Labour' was elected in 1997 the asylum system already offered two streams of entitlement. If asylum seekers applied at the port of entry they were entitled to 90% of income support (support came in the form of vouchers): those who applied within the country were not entitled to cash support. The responsibility for asylum seekers fell to local authorities. Asylum seekers were entitled to apply for a work permit after 6 months of being in the UK. The asylum changes New Labour introduced built upon Conservative ambitions to separate asylum seekers from mainstream social security provisions introduced in the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act (Bloch & Schuster 2005). New Labour introduced the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) in 2000. NASS administered asylum seeker accommodation and support. Asylum seekers were eligible for 70% of Income Support which came in the form of vouchers with a £10 cash element. In April 2002 this entitlement changed to cash but still at only 70% of Income Support. NASS provided accommodation to asylum seekers who were dispersed to specific areas around the country on a no-choice basis. This strategy was also devised to deliberately discourage asylum seekers coming to the UK who wished to reunite with friends and family who were based in the South East. Refusal to move to the designated area meant asylum seekers forfeited the right to accommodation (Bloch & Schuster 2005). The significant impact of these policies has been the marginalisation of asylum seekers and their families through limited social support, dispersal and lack of legal access to employment (Bloch & Schuster 2005). Furthermore, the introduction of the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2000 altered the grounds for asylum of some individuals in the UK. Now, being a member of one of twenty-one organisations considered as terrorist organisations, including the Tamil Tigers, has become grounds for deportation. Previously, membership of such groups was taken to be evidence of political persecution (Schuster & Solomos 2001).

Over this time period the UK has concentrated on tackling actual and perceived abuses of the asylum system (Schuster 2003; Lloyd 2003; Crawley 2005b). On 23rd July 2002 the Home Office withdrew the right for asylum seekers to formally work after six months; volunteering continued to be permitted and encouraged (Refugee Council

2005b). This was the culmination of the practice of harmonizing EU policies to discourage asylum seekers from travelling to particular countries where they could work. Despite evidence suggesting that asylum seekers have relatively little knowledge of the availability of work in the UK (see Robinson & Segrott 2002), the government justified this decision on the basis that the right to work acted as a 'pull' factor drawing potential asylum seekers to the UK as opposed to other countries. The previous employment concession, introduced in the UK in 1986, allowed the main applicant to apply for permission to work, if after six months they had not received an initial decision (Refugee Council 2005b). The Home Office justified their decision to remove the right to work on the basis that 80 percent of initial decisions were now being made within six months, and that the opportunity for asylum seekers to work acted as a draw factor (Refugee Council 2005b). Home Office data do not give precise figures on the length of time initial decisions take. Although the figures for asylum claims in 2006 (23,610) and the number of initial decisions made in 2006 (20,930) (Bennett *et al.* 2007) suggest a rate of 89 percent in one year, this is likely to be misleading. Given that the data do not acknowledge when claims were submitted and when those claimants received an initial decision, it is impossible to verify the Home Office statement accurately. Alongside this, many initial claims are appealed against, once or more, requiring asylum seekers to request support from the government for much longer than the six months the Home Office argues as the turnover period. Some other non-European countries have continued to allow asylum seekers to work. For example, Canada offers the opportunity for asylum seekers to apply for a work permit after six months². People who have ELR or humanitarian protection are able to apply for a work permit. Individuals who are granted refugee status obtain the legal right to reside and work in the UK. As a refugee the individual receives the same rights as permanent residents of the UK (UK Border Agency 2008a).

Finally, the way in which family is defined by governments in terms of reunification is an important part of the policy context for refugees in the UK³. Attempting to define 'family' in the international context is a particularly difficult challenge. The concept varies between different cultures and is not static over time (Staver 2008). Consequently, what is family to a refugee may be broader than the Western two parents.

² All of the interviewees who participated in this research claimed the legal right to work. Either they had full refugee status, or had successfully applied for a work permit (either before the restrictions on asylum seekers working were enforced, or after receiving Exceptional Leave to Remain).

³ Note that in Canada the parameters of 'family' are broader. The implications of this for Tamil refugees are discussed later.

two children, nuclear model on which many reunification policies are based. ECRE (1999) illustrate that the UK only allows individuals who have received refugee status or ELR the right to reunion. There are no support or accommodation provisions given to the family of the refugee. In terms of defining family for reunification the UK government provides the right to reunion with spouses, heterosexual or homosexual partners, children under 18, and the parents of unaccompanied children. Not included in this definition of family are: children aged over 18, the parents of adult refugees, siblings or extended family. Under exceptional circumstances individuals belonging to one of these groups may be allowed but this is relatively rare. The parameters of who is eligible for family reunification are becoming increasingly restricted as reunification becomes one of the primary ways in which forced migrants are able to enter the UK and other European countries (Van Hear 2009).

Refugees are often marginalized in the host society and typically attract negative attention in the media as they are perceived as a drain on social welfare (Hinsliff 2006). Many of these connotations are a consequence of the lack of understanding of the distinction between asylum seekers and refugees. Political discourses and subsequent media messages often blur the distinctions between asylum seekers and refugees, confusing the terms which may sometimes be used interchangeably (Statham 2003). Refugee employment highlights the dual perceptions of refugees by host societies: between seeing them as making an important contribution to the UK society and economy; and seeing them as a drain on society (Bloch 2004). Day & White (2002: 15) argue that in recent years governments have viewed refugee arrivals as “potentially troublesome in a number of respects – economically, politically and socially.” Consequently the government has focused on the economic integration of refugees. Newly arrived asylum seekers and refugees have both the skills and qualifications which could be of benefit to UK employers (UK Border Agency 2009; Phillimore & Goodson 2006; Sargeant & Forna 2001). In order to improve the image of refugees in the UK, the potential economic focus is emphasised by the government, there being “a strong business case for making better use of the skills of refugee professionals” (Employability Forum 2006: 3). However, the four policies outlined above (dispersal, the right to work, removal of indefinite leave to remain, and the definition of family for the purpose of reunion) restrict or delay asylum seeker and refugee employment possibilities. In terms of the integration and employment of refugees these four policies

have particular effects upon individual experiences. The implications of these are discussed where relevant in this thesis and drawn together in the conclusion.

Integration and employment

In policy terms, refugees are dealt with separately from other immigrants. Britain's policy on immigration is one of managed migration: a mixture of containment and prevention (Crisp 2003) focused around three areas: asylum, border control, and professional immigration⁴. Although refugees may frequently have the potential to come under the professional immigration category, they have, to date, been dealt with under the area of asylum. This is significant as it influences the policy categories into which individuals are then placed. Consequently work with refugees falls into the asylum area of migration management, and a focus upon settlement experiences links into notions of integration.

Integration is a confused concept: a word frequently used but often understood differently by different people (Robinson 1998). In 2000 the UK government policy towards refugees moved to emphasise integration (see Home Office 2000). Rather than suggesting refugees should absorb the host country culture, the policy emphasised how refugees should adopt aspects of the new society whilst retaining their own cultural identity (Zetter *et al.* 2002). In the Home Office (2005) report *Integration Matters: A National Strategy for Refugee Integration*, integration is defined as “the process that takes place when refugees are empowered to achieve their full potential as members of British society, to contribute to the community and to become fully able to exercise the rights and responsibilities they share with other residents” (Home Office 2005: 5). This definition concentrates on empowering refugees so that they may contribute to society, for example through employment. Implicit in it is a requirement that refugees should reciprocate the host country's generosity by contributing to the host country economically and socially. However, the report underplays the role of the host community within the process of integration. Integration in this way is envisaged for people who have received full refugee status, ELR or humanitarian protection. Although the government recognises that the experience of being an asylum seeker affects later integration it is believed that “integration in its fullest sense can take place only when a person has been granted refugee status so that they can make plans.

⁴ This thesis examines the literature and policy situation until mid-2008. It is important to note the potential significance of the introduction of a 'Points-based Immigration System' in the UK (UK Border Agency 2008b).

including those for employment. That is why it makes sense to concentrate resources available on that group” (Home Office 2005: 14).

Employment is seen as a key area in which integration may be enhanced (Home Office 2005). Ager & Strang (2004a; 2008) identify employment as one of four key markers and means (alongside housing, education and health) by which integration may be indicated and achieved. Employment may enable individuals to achieve economic independence and self-reliance, no longer having to rely on family, friends or state support. Furthermore it offers the chance to meet and interact with members of the wider host society enabling individuals to create bonds beyond their refugee or ethnic communities. This is particularly important in supporting refugees to develop English language skills in the UK. Finally, gaining meaningful employment, particularly after an extensive period of being outside the formal labour market, offers the opportunity to restore an individual’s self-esteem. Crawley & Sriskandarajah summarise this: “getting refugees into employment, and particularly into employment that matches their skills, is one of the most important aspects of the process of integration” (*Preface* in Bloch 2004: 5).

Refugees “bring a wider range of skills and experience, many of which are much needed, and the process of integration will enable them to use these for the benefit of themselves and our communities” (Home Office 2005: 12). The *Refugee Integration and Employment Service* provides refugees with three areas of support: critical areas, such as housing and education; employment advice and long-term planning; and mentoring from members of the receiving community. Government notions of integration emphasise both short and long term goals, particularly around employment. These aim to support refugees in achieving ‘successful’ employment. However, as this thesis goes on to discuss, the notion of success is highly individual and context dependent.

The policy of integration is problematic. The British Refugee Council (2001) defines integration as a two-way process involving both refugees and the host community, a mutual process where adaptation needs to take place on both sides. Although this definition focuses on how the host community needs to create an open atmosphere where refugees feel included and allowed to make a contribution, it also states that this requires a willingness on the part of the refugee to adapt, for example by learning the

language. This ‘requirement’ of change by the refugee has some parallels with assimilation policy (see Chapter Two). Integration desires that refugees become part of the wider community rather than ethnic communities, and it is the state that determines when a refugee is ‘integrated’. Trevor Phillips has argued against certain understandings of the term:

“Integration is a learned competence – like maths or driving a car ... It is not instinctive ... If we all lived separately but knew, liked and mixed with people of different races and backgrounds, we might regard that as a tolerable compromise. But we know that human nature is not like that” (Trevor Phillips, quoted by Socialist Worker 2005: 1).

It is argued here that integration needs to be learned. In the way in which integration is currently thought of by the government, whereby the parameters of integration are set ‘from above’, the concept raises serious concerns. However, if individual refugees themselves play a role in defining the parameters, there is potential value gained from the concept. There remains no straightforward definition of integration: the concept continues to be controversial and hotly debated (Castles *et al.* 2002). This discussion is continued in Chapters Two and Eight.

There is evidence that, as a group, refugees possess a higher proportion of human capital skills than the population of their countries of origin as a whole (see Kirk 2004). This may occur because those who manage to leave are drawn from the more enterprising elements in their original society. However, research among particular refugee groups indicates that many refugees are underemployed or out of work entirely in the UK, with the unemployment rate for refugees estimated at 36% in 2002, six times the then national average (Hurstfield *et al.* 2004; DTI 2006; Bloch 2005; Home Office 2005). Many refugees essentially become long term unemployed after they receive legal permission to work⁵ (Phillimore & Goodson 2006). This is of particular concern as “Britain is failing to tap into a wealth of expertise which would benefit vital areas of the economy by ignoring the talents of highly qualified refugees and asylum seekers” (Smithers 2005: 1). It is important to investigate how refugees cope with the uncertainty and changing nature of the UK labour market. Refugees, like other migrants, commonly accept de-skilling, as they may earn more in the UK in a low-skilled occupation than they were able to earn in their country of origin in a higher skilled position. The adaptations and development of skills post-migration cannot be divorced from the more general process of acclimatisation to the host society.

⁵ Note that before asylum seekers receive refugee status they do not have permission to work in the UK.

Improving the utilisation of refugees' skills and moving them from this marginal position is important. For the refugees themselves, the utilisation of their skills would improve their lives, giving them greater confidence in their abilities: "For a refugee who has been ... dependent on the ... receiving country, the psychological value of obtaining a job will be greater even than for an unemployed indigenous worker" (Phillips 1989: 137). Alongside this, greater utilisation of refugee skills in local labour markets may increase community cohesion. The importance of this topic is reinforced by the 2005 government policy changes to review refugee claims after five years (Tempest 2005); this is likely to increase uncertainty and impact negatively on integration (Bailey *et al.* 2002). In 2008, if an individual is recognised as a refugee or given permission to stay for humanitarian reasons, they are given temporary permission for an initial period of five years⁶ (UK Border Agency 2008b). The knowledge for the individual that they may be forced to return to their country of origin after this five year period may lead to difficulties settling in the UK.

Research aim and parameters

This research has one main aim: to analyse the utilisation of skills of refugees within an agenda of integration through employment. To achieve this aim, the research has four key parameters in choosing research participants. Firstly, this research aims to work with refugees who experienced an underutilisation of their skills *and* with refugees who have more positive stories, having achieved employment more related to their skill levels. In order to assess whether there is an underutilisation of skills it is important to work with a refugee population who are skilled. Secondly, this work includes individuals who have relatively good English language skills. Often the generic answer given to a lack of uptake of skills of refugees in the UK is the standard of their English language skills. Even if individuals have higher skill levels they need to be able to transfer their skills to the UK labour market. Thirdly, this thesis involves participants who have arrived in the UK before 2002, giving them at least five years experience within the UK at the time of the interview. Individuals gain understanding of the labour market over time. This five year period will have given participants the chance to settle into the labour market, and progress within it. Fourthly, in order for this research to be

⁶ Those refugees who are given permanent residence immediately receive what is called indefinite leave to remain (ILR).

relevant to asylum policy and processes at the time of the interviews, the refugees needed to arrive since 1997.

As a group, Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka meet the research requirements. Within overall aim of this research there are three main objectives which address the relationship between refugees, skills and integration through employment alongside two cross-cutting analytical themes.

Objective 1: To investigate the skills of the Tamil refugee community in London and the level of utilisation of these skills.

Objective 2: To examine the human and social capital factors influencing the use or lack of use of the skills within the Tamil refugee community.

Objective 3: To explore the concept of integration through employment in the light of the everyday experiences of Tamil refugees.

Cross cutting analytical themes:

- a. To analyse what is deemed successful utilisation of skills of Tamil refugees by the Tamil community and Tamil refugees, and the barriers which prevent success.
- b. To analyse the influence of gender on the utilisation of Tamil refugee skills in the UK.

These aims are investigated through qualitative research in London consisting of twenty-six in-depth interviews with Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka and a further seventeen interviews with elite contacts.

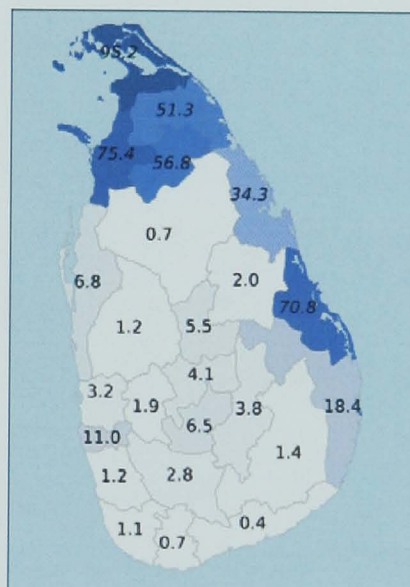
3. Tamil refugee case study

Sri Lanka was a former British colony. The legacies of colonialism, particularly in the education system, influence the skills of some Tamil refugees today (for example English language abilities). Tamil refugees are predominantly from the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka (see Figure 1.1 based upon the 2001 census). Sri Lankan migration to the UK has been significant, although with a few exceptions (see Jazeel 2006) relatively little geographical research has been conducted on the diaspora and their experiences. Complex flows of migrants have left Sri Lanka over the last 20 years creating a large global diaspora (Fuglerud 1999; Van Hear 2004). Flows from Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) to the UK became noteworthy in the 1960s when high numbers of relatively well-educated migrants seeking professional jobs arrived in the UK (Siddhisena & White 1999).

In the early 1980s the largest component of Sri Lankan movement to Britain was refugees (Siddhisena & White 1999; Bloch 2000). This coincided with intense periods

of fighting in Sri Lanka in 1983-1987, in 1990-1994 and from 1995 until 2001 (Van Hear & Rajasingham-Senanayake 2006). More recently, arms were raised once again with the dissolution of the 2002 peace-keeping talks. In February 2009 the Sri Lankan army announced that it was close to defeating the Tamil Tigers having struck a 'decisive blow' when they took the rebel naval base at Chalai (CNN 2009). The majority of refugees from Sri Lanka are of Tamil ethnicity (Valentine-Daniel 1996; Bloch 2000). Table 1.1 illustrates the Sri Lankan asylum figures between 1989 and 2001. This shows the number of asylum applications, the number granted asylum, the number granted Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR) and the number refused. Many of those refused will have appealed the initial decision, those who did not, or who were unsuccessful, generally returned to Sri Lanka.

Figure 1.1: The proportions of Tamils in Sri Lanka, 2001



Source: Department of Census and Statistics (2008)

Table 1.1: Asylum seekers from Sri Lanka, 1989-2001

	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Asylum applications	1,790	3,330	3,765	2,085	1,965	2,350	2,070	1,340	1,830	3,505	5,130	6,395	5,510
Granted asylum	10	15	20	40	10	10	20	5	55	50	20	900	1,415
Granted ELR	840	455	730	4,265	2,420	105	95	25	15	10	10	285	525
Refusals	30	5	20	215	260	955	1,225	2,115	1,710	1,950	1,550	5,115	7,245

Source: Heath & Hill (2002) Note: the shaded area illustrates the period of arrival of participants in this research.

The total number asylum seekers from around the world in the UK jumped from 5,739 in 1988 to 16,775 in 1989 as a result of global warfare (Schuster & Solomos 2001). By 2000 it had reached 97,860 (Schuster & Solomos 2001). For much of the period between 1989 (1,790 asylum applications) and 2001 (5,510 asylum applications)

asylum seekers from Sri Lanka constituted one of the largest flows from Asian countries to the UK (Watson & Danzelman 1998; Heath & Hill 2002). Despite consistent flows of refugees from Sri Lanka, it was not until 2000 that significant numbers were recognised as refugees (Heath & Hill 2002). Prior to this, particularly between 1989 and 1993, the majority of Tamils who were given any status were given ELR.

Home Office Statistics account for country of origin not ethnicity; however, importantly, Sri Lankan refugees are predominantly Tamils who have sought protection from ethnic persecution in the 19 year civil war (1983-2002) and the 2005 resumption of hostilities⁷. The UK was the principal destination for Tamils from Sri Lanka until the government introduced tighter immigration legislation, for example the Carriers' Liability Act in the later 1980s. As a consequence Tamil asylum seekers then opted to travel to more diverse destinations in Europe and particularly Canada, adding to the already established Tamil diaspora (Van Hear 2004). This project has benefited significantly from an element of comparative research in Montreal. The opportunity for this comparison came from an *Economic and Social Research Council Institutional Visit*. The purpose of this three month trip was to learn about Tamil refugee experiences in another context. The Montreal study is not a direct comparison of the London research, rather knowledge of the situation in Canada and an understanding of the Tamil experience there, provides a counterpoint to the London findings (see Appendix One for further details on the Montreal findings). The findings of this research are used at times throughout the rest of this thesis to develop or support particular arguments.

London itself is significant within the Tamil experience of refuge in the UK. London is the main concentration of Tamils in UK. Estimates vary about the overall size of the community, from 200,000 Tamil refugees in Europe (Ganguly 2001) up to improbable extremes of about 200,000 Tamil Refugees in London alone (Tamil Nation 2008). The asylum figures indicate that in 2001 (five years before the research interviews) the majority of the 5,510 new asylum applicants from Sri Lanka, 4,250 in total, opted to stay in London with the existing Tamil community, whilst they waited for their cases to be heard (Heath & Hill 2002). People who identified themselves as being born in Sri Lanka in the 2001 Census live predominantly in inner city London (see Table 1.3). As already discussed these figures highlight individuals from Sri Lanka, not necessarily

⁷ It is important to note that whilst Tamil refugees overall match the criteria, often individual refugees may not. For example, individual skill abilities vary, as do levels of English.

Tamils. Although the highest percentages of individuals born in Sri Lanka lived in Harrow, Brent, and Merton, Tamil refugees were particularly referred to by other Tamils, as living in East London; specifically Newham. Tamils form the second largest refugee community in Newham (Bloch 2000).

Table 1.2: Distribution of people in London born in Sri Lanka, 2001

Borough	Number	Total Population	Percentage	Rank
Harrow	5,239	206,814	2.53	1
Brent	5,999	263,464	2.28	2
Merton	3,874	187,908	2.06	3
Newham	3,591	243,891	1.47	4
Ealing	4,240	300,948	1.41	5
Redbridge	3,194	238,635	1.34	6
Kingston upon Thames	1,920	147,273	1.30	7
Croydon	3,238	330,587	0.98	8
Lewisham	2,156	248,922	0.87	9
Waltham Forest	1,661	218,341	0.76	10
Hounslow	1,446	212,341	0.68	
Sutton	1,163	179,768	0.65	
Hillingdon	1,552	243,006	0.64	
Wandsworth	1,539	281,800	0.55	
Enfield	1,488	273,559	0.54	
Barnet	1,681	314,564	0.53	
Greenwich	817	214,403	0.38	
Haringey	629	216,507	0.29	
Bromley	710	295,532	0.24	
Bexley	414	218,307	0.19	
Richmond upon Thames	324	172,335	0.19	
Barking and Dagenham	304	163,944	0.19	
Camden	348	198,020	0.18	
Kensington and Chelsea	306	178,600	0.17	
Lambeth	457	273,200	0.17	
Westminster	387	234,100	0.17	
Islington	241	175,797	0.14	
Southwark	372	274,400	0.14	
Hammersmith and Fulham	206	172,500	0.12	
City of London	8	8,000	0.10	
Havering	176	224,248	0.08	
Hackney	150	202,824	0.07	
Tower Hamlets	102	196,106	0.05	

Source: Office for National Statistics (2008)

From initial contacts in Newham, a 'snowballing' technique was used to identify participants. The majority of these individuals were living or working within the Newham area, with a small grouping in Lewisham, and a few from other inner city London boroughs (see Chapter Three). Both Newham and Lewisham are ethnically diverse inner city areas with higher than average unemployment rates. Newham is situated in east London whereas Lewisham is in the south east. There were 2,156 people (0.87 percent) in Lewisham who identified themselves as being born in Sri

Lanka in the 2001 Census, and 3,591 (1.47 percent) in Newham (Office for National Statistics 2008). The established community is significant within the Tamil experience, as are the specificities of life in London. As a global city with many different ethnic communities, cultures and societies, London offers a unique location in which to live and work, offering opportunities which other cities could not.

4. Outline of thesis

In the next chapter this research is contextualised within the broader framework of refugee studies and immigrant employment experiences. This chapter explores the relationship between refugees, skills and integration through employment, situating the thesis within wider areas of research. This provides contextual background to the analytical chapters and emphasises the specific focus of the thesis. By examining this point of intersection between these themes it is possible to investigate tensions and nuances through a focus upon the individual. This raises the importance of the ethnic community and the ethnic economy within the lives of refugees.

Chapter Three discusses working with Tamil refugees and the research methods used to help understand the relationship between Tamil refugees, their experiences based on their skills and integration through employment. The thesis is based on a case study approach. The research consists of twenty-six in-depth interviews with Tamil refugees in London, and a further seventeen interviews with elite contacts alongside a limited number of returns to a large scale questionnaire. This chapter examines the mixed-method approach conducted to meet the objectives of the research.

In Chapter Four the context of the Tamil study is established through an examination of Tamil society in the diaspora. This chapter discusses the specific characteristics of the Tamil community and Tamil refugees in the UK. It introduces detailed consideration of the importance of community within the diaspora for Tamils specifically. The chapter begins by exploring the notion of 'Tamilness', illustrating the importance of Tamil identity for Tamil refugees living in the UK. The pre-migration influences which drive the Tamil community and individuals are then analysed, followed by a substantive exploration of the post-migration situation, specifically examining the importance of community and diaspora within the experiences of Tamil immigrants and refugees.

Having established the framework for this thesis, the subsequent five chapters investigate the skills of the Tamil refugee community and the human and social capital factors influencing the utilisation of those skills and integration through employment. Chapter Five considers the definition of skills; this is then interpreted within an analysis of what is deemed successful utilisation by Tamil refugees and the wider community. A framework of success is established based upon individual refugee perceptions, and an analysis of the historical focus of Tamils on education.

Using this framework, Chapter Six analyses the skills and experiences of skill use of the male and female participants. Here it is suggested that although the male participants were overall more highly skilled than their female counterparts, these differences were minor. Employment experiences, however, differed considerably. Returning to notions of success, the chapter argues that although there remains a dominant focus upon education for the Tamil community, individual interpretations of success are more nuanced and complex.

Chapter Seven builds upon the distinction between community and individual notions of success, specifically considering the ethnic economy. Here work within community organisations, self employment and employment within ethnic businesses is examined. This chapter analyses how employment within the Tamil community frames strategies which assist individuals with their employment in the host country.

Chapter Eight focuses on one of the main government aims for refugees: specifically that of integration. This chapter begins with an interpretation of integration through the eyes of the participants of this research. The concept itself is then explored through the theoretical lens of the notion of 'gratitude': drawn from literature on hospitality and ethics. The chapter argues that integration is a process of transactions that requires refugees to be grateful to the host country for the refuge they have received. However, the way in which this may work in practice is made more complex by the importance of the Tamil community within the everyday lives of Tamil refugees.

In the final analytical chapter of this thesis, Chapter Nine, the themes of the four previous chapters are drawn together to re-focus upon the individual through the stories of four different research participants: Kiran, Dhanya, Khush and Bimala. Individual

narratives offer a starting point to ground the themes discussed in the previous chapters within real life experiences.

The Tamil refugees with whom I worked in this research were predominantly entwined within the ethnic community. This had both negative and positive outcomes. They commonly worked within the ethnic economy in one way or another. This had consequences for their potential integration and their employment prospects. Whilst employment may offer opportunities for integration, it can only do so if the employment that people are undertaking creates spaces for transactions and communication between Tamil refugees and wider communities. The wider Tamil community plays an important role in shaping perceptions of success, which limit the desire of some individuals to leave the ethnic economy as this is an area which may allow their success. Importantly as a consequence of the strength of the community, this research has found that the experiences of Tamil refugees are not unique to them as refugees; they are similar to that of other immigrants. This thesis thereby concludes by calling for an extension of the 'migration-asylum' nexus to include not only the ways in which individuals arrive in the UK, but also their experiences once here. The boundaries which distinguish between refugees and migrants, although useful, often negate the potential for understanding the nuances of the experiences refugees have by recognising similarities with other migrants. This thesis calls for future research which blurs dualistic tendencies and develops a more holistic understanding of refugee experiences.

CHAPTER TWO

Research frame: refugees, skills and integration through employment

1. Research frame

This thesis seeks to examine the intersection of refugee experiences of skill utilisation and integration through employment. As the previous chapter has illustrated, this is an important relationship whereby refugees have the opportunity to find a place for themselves in their host countries and begin to establish their lives. This chapter seeks to position this thesis within relevant areas drawing on literature from refugee, forced migration and migration studies, and immigrant entrepreneurship. Here I wish to identify the point at which this research intersects with previous work, where the literature on refugees meets holistic interpretations of skills. This analysis is situated within a discussion of integration through employment and consequently, this chapter begins by establishing the background to the integration policy context. This literature is used to establish ideas which this thesis then explores in more detail through the case study of Tamil refugees. This framework has emerged through the research: a grounded scaffold which focuses on the intersection of refugee experiences of skill utilisation and integration through employment that surfaced from the analysis.

In 2000, with the Home Office publication of *Full and Equal Citizens* (Home Office 2000), policy moved away from a multicultural agenda towards a position where refugees were expected to adopt aspects of the new society whilst retaining their own cultural identity (Zetter *et al.* 2002). The notion of multiculturalism had been a feature of immigration policy since the 1960s to accommodate increasingly diverse groups of people living in the UK (Kelly 2003). Multiculturalism offers the opportunity for individuals to maintain their individual identities, whilst at the same time becoming part of the wider society of the country in which they now live (Kelly 2003). Modood (2007) discusses multicultural equality, which he sees as being fundamentally democratic citizenship. Multiculturalism therefore, as far as he is concerned, is the elaboration of democratic equality. This is the quality of sameness in terms of equal

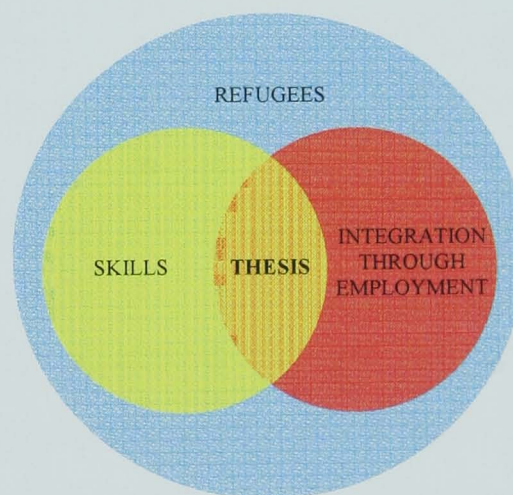
rights which does not exhaust the concept of equality, but builds on it, respecting the right of individuals to identify with the things that matter to them. A multicultural society is one where people are considered equal in the public realm, but where diversity is encouraged or tolerated in private or communal areas (Rex 1996).

More recently the term has been criticised for its links with more negative consequences. Firstly, multiculturalism has been related to increased segregation. The theory of multiculturalism means that in maintaining their culture, people may end up living, working and schooling apart from other groups in society. A report by the Home Office Community Cohesion Review Team argues that separate “educational arrangements, community and voluntary bodies, employment, places of worship, language, social and cultural networks, means that many communities operate on the basis of a series of parallel lives. Their lives often do not seem to touch at any point, let alone overlap and promote any meaningful interchange” (Home Office 2001a: 10). In an interview with *The Sunday Times* (July 4th 2004) Trevor Phillips, the Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality (now head of the Equality and Human Rights Commission), argued that the term ‘multiculturalism’ was of another era and should be discarded, and an agenda around integration should be emphasised (BBC 2004). In a speech in Manchester in September 2005, he raised concerns about self-segregation within some UK communities. He warned against the country ‘sleep-walking’ into a ‘New Orleans-style’ quagmire of ‘fully fledged ghettos’ (Phillips 2005).

Immigration and integration legislation are distinct areas. Here they are examined together to illustrate the effects of underlying discourses in both areas. Since 1993, both Conservative and Labour governments have passed five major pieces of legislation on immigration and asylum: the Asylum and Appeals Act 1993, the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996, the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, and the Asylum and Immigration Act (Treatment of Claimants etc) 2004. Several White Papers on integration and cohesion have attempted to combine this legislation into a broader framework of sustainable development as these changes in policy have also coincided with a change in perceptions of refugees. The policies around integration (for example, Home Office 2000; 2001; 2003; 2005) are problematic, as the term means different things to different people: “the value of integration is contingent on whom you are asking to integrate, what you are asking them

to integrate into and on what basis you are asking them to do so” (Younge 2005: 2). As a consequence of the complex rhetoric around the concept; differing views have emerged (Robinson 1998). However, integration remains the state policy surrounding the settlement of refugees in the UK and a targeted outcome for projects working with refugees (for example, Home Office 2005, European Commission 2004, Scottish Executive 2006). It is characterised as a process of appealing and accepting the loss of social ties, as well as creating and securing new social networks: a process which requires change and effort on the part of both the refugee and the host community. This thesis is underlain by the policy context of the integration of refugees, and the significance of employment in appealing the process of integration. As such this chapter draws together the three themes of refugees, the skills they have and how they are used, and how the process of integration is facilitated through employment.

Figure 2.1: Refugees, skills and integration through employment intersection



The three-way links between the themes of refugees, skills and integration through employment are important. Examining each of the themes in isolation would miss the connections and tensions that this ‘triadic’ approach affords. Figure 2.1 illustrates not only what is examined within this research, but also where this thesis is contextually situated in the literature. This chapter provides a basis of ideas from which to analyse the individual experience of refuge. A focus upon the individual illustrates the realities of broader issues through the lens of the everyday experience of people who, in part, live at the intersection of the three themes. In order to thoroughly discuss the different points of the intersection this chapter expands on the distinctive situation of refugees, before examining the relationship between refugees and skills, followed by that of

refugees and integration through employment. Finally the three themes are drawn together in an analysis of their importance to the thesis¹.

2. Refugees

In many situations, and often in the media, refugees may be conflated with other groups: asylum seekers, illegal immigrants and economic migrants for example (see Watts 2004; Crawley 2005a and Ward 2008 for discussion of attitudes to asylum and immigration). Yet at times, refugees may be regarded as members of each, or all of these other groups (Black *et al.* 2006; Black 2003; Salt & Stein 1997). It is therefore important to explore similarities and differences between the refugee experiences and those of other migrant groups. This section addresses the ontological differences within the group – the ‘nature’ of refugees and the realities they experience (see Hayden 2006). The blurring of boundaries between different immigrant groups may offer insights into the broader experience of individuals. Hence rather than following the government definitions of a refugee rigidly, it is necessary to be flexible in how the term is used in order to comprehend the broad range of ‘refugee’ experiences (see Zetter 2007).

Transition from asylum seekers to refugees

The transition from asylum seeker to refugee is important both legally and personally. Asylum seekers have limited rights and support in the UK (Refugee Council 2005). Once an individual has applied for asylum, if they are not able to support themselves and their families whilst their applications are being considered, they can apply for somewhere to live and to receive money to buy essential things such as food, clothing and toiletries (UK Border Agency 2008c). The children of asylum seekers are able to go to school in the UK for free. However, adults are only entitled to limited access to education, including basic English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes. For other courses they have to pay international fees (UK Border Agency 2008c).

Once asylum seekers are recognised as refugees and given leave to remain, they are eligible to work and train in the same way as other residents (NICEC 2004). However, this leaves an indefinite amount of time as an asylum seeker when individuals are unable to work; this has a tendency to affect their employment experiences later on.

¹ A section specifically on the relationship between skills and integration through employment is absent. These themes are only relevant through the refugee experience of them.

The Refugee Council (2005) argues that this reception phase ought to be seen as an integral part of their process of integration. The government maintain that the integration of asylum seekers upon arrival, and allowing them to work, encourages individuals to choose the UK as their destination. There remains a tension between policy and restricted asylum seeker access to the labour market (Bloch 2004; 2008). Whilst managed migration programmes seek to fill labour market gaps, asylum seekers remain an untapped potential (see Stewart 2008). Evidence suggests that the longer refugees, like other groups, are excluded from the labour market, the more likely they are to lose confidence and struggle to participate, with potential negative consequences in the future for society as a whole as well as the individual (Bloch 2004; Refugee Council 2005). For those individuals with temporary status in the UK (see Chapter One) the right to work is less definitive than for refugees; however in general work permits are issued. Individual asylum seekers whose cases had not been resolved prior to the change of policy in 2002 have the right to work². However, employers may not recognise that right. Employers may ask for refugee status documentation to avoid fines for employing asylum seekers illegally. Individuals who have the right to work, but do not yet have refugee status, will not have these documents.

The time period when individuals are not working may be a difficult time, the consequences of which have the potential to filter through to their future employment experiences (Refugee Council 2005). The absence of employment at this point may have two main impacts. Firstly, it may reduce the asylum seeker's standards of living and prevent them from starting to build on and maintain their initial skills base. Secondly, it is likely to prevent them from establishing ontological security (a person's understanding and acceptance of their own place within their worldview) via fulfilment through work (Phillips 1989). This may have a knock-on-effect of perpetuating the asylum seeker in a state of 'limbo' with few fixed certainties. Within such circumstances individuals may attempt to establish ontological security through inserting themselves in, and seeking support from, the relevant ethnic community. Research has found that when asylum seekers gain informal employment opportunities or volunteer this experience is likely to influence their employment as refugees later (Franz 2003a). The enhancement of the role of the ethnic community therefore may also reduce connections between asylum seekers (and subsequently refugees) and wider

² One refugee interviewee (Bhaskar) was categorised as an asylum seeker but was permitted to work as he arrived before 2002.

labour markets by becoming a safe haven for individuals when they are attempting to re-build their lives.

Refugees and immigrants

Alongside their experiences of seeking asylum, refugees may also have characteristics which distinguish them from those of other immigrant groups. Individuals may move from one country to another for a variety of reasons: professional occupations, seasonal employment, temporary work, or they were forced to leave their homes. Although 'economic migrant' is a term used specifically to define a particular type of migrant who has entered a new country to work, refugees sometimes possess similar characteristics, in terms of skills and experience, to economic migrants. As argued in Chapter One, evidence suggests that refugees may possess considerable skills (MacKenzie & Forde 2007; Cliff 2000) and in some cases a higher level of human capital skills than their country of origin population as a whole (Kirk 2004). In the first study of its kind, Kirk (2004) surveyed nearly 2,000 people who had recently become refugees exploring the skills and qualifications these individuals brought with them. She found that overall two-thirds of respondents were working prior to leaving their country of origin, one in ten were students, and less than 5 percent were unemployed or looking for work. Just under half of the respondents had received ten or more years of education and over 40 percent held qualifications before they arrived in the UK.

Despite being relatively skilled, differences remain between refugees and economic migrants. For example, immigrants are generally self-selected whereas refugees are generally not (Wooden 1991). Although there may be severe economic pressures upon immigrants to migrate, refugees are forced to leave their country of origin for fear of their safety (Kay & Miles 1988; Segal & Mayadas 2005). The information flows about particular countries may be more substantial for economic migrants because individuals may have been planning for some time and collected information. Therefore economic migrants may have different perceptions of particular countries. However, if the refugee group has a large diasporic community it is possible that the information flows may be greater from potential destination countries (Hein 1993; Crisp 1999). Economic migrants may choose their destination country on the basis of their understanding of the labour market and the opportunities potentially available to them there; refugees do not make such choices. Whereas some migrants may be migrating on the basis that they

already have a job in place before they arrive (for example Nagel 2005; Beaverstock 1996), refugees are likely to be less concerned about where they are moving to as their prime concern is refuge, not employment; although refugees may prefer to go to a place that they know something about³. Both groups may experience difficulties adjusting to their new country, for example the climate in the UK may be significantly different from their country of origin. Refugees in particular may experience significant trauma after their experiences (Hauff & Vaglum 1993; Spouse 1999), including potentially having lost or left behind family members and friends. Evidence suggests that their access to resources may be different to those of migrants as they were forced to leave material goods in their country of origin (Segal & Mayadas 2005). This is in contrast to immigrants who have more likely chosen to take such items with them or sold them (Phillimore & Goodson 2006).

The geographical origins of the immigrants, “the cultures and religions involved ... the reasons for leaving the country of origin, educational level and professional experience” (Solé & Parella 2003: 122), have the potential to influence the kinds of jobs open to them and in which sectors of the economy. Research suggests that refugees have diverse abilities to work in a variety of different employment areas (Kirk 2004), however, in contrast to economic migrants, the UK does not take into account the past work experience or qualifications of refugees when choosing to admit individuals (Crewe 1992) as this would not be within the spirit of the United Nations definition. Other countries, such as Australia, operating quota number systems, generally choose individuals from refugee camps who they believe are likely to better ‘integrate’ into the host country. A skills element is often a part of such integration criteria. Inevitably this places bias upon refugee acceptance reflecting utility rather than need; a questionable approach on the basis of ethical responsibility.

When immigrants to the UK choose to come as professionals, there is a higher chance that they have some background knowledge of the English language and potentially some cultural awareness (for example Beaverstock 1996), which may have been an incentive in their choice of destination country. It has been suggested that refugees often have less or no choice over their country of asylum (Koser 2003; Day & White 2002). Consequently it is possible that they have little or no knowledge of the language

³ Economic migrants may use information channels through ethnic communities to ‘choose’ a destination country. If a ‘choice’ is available asylum seekers may also use these channels.

or the different cultures in the country. This may contribute to the difficulties individuals experience in employing their skills in the wider labour market (Bloch 2008). Where possible, when refugees have a choice in where they are located in the host country, they likely choose an area where they already have extended networks (see Robinson & Hale 1989). Depending upon the networks available to them, this may create greater opportunities within the ethnic economy.

Over the last few decades UK policy has generally assumed that most immigrants would return to their countries of origin (Hein 1993; Cortes 2004) and therefore integration was not a main priority. However, it is generally accepted that refugees, unlike other groups of immigrants, are unlikely to return (White 2001; Valtonen 2001) and therefore require greater integration assistance. Yet although the legal expectations over refugees have changed slightly, with the introduction of national strategies for refugee integration, such as *Integration Matters* (Home Office 2005), there may remain differences for refugees in their employment experiences in the UK in comparison to other migrants. Within the focus of this research, the specific entrance of refugees into the labour market in comparison to migrants is important. Although refugees may be less likely to return home than other immigrant groups, even after several years in exile, refugees may still see their current situation as temporary. Many Tamil refugees particularly, maintain strong links to Sri Lanka, especially to events in the northern and eastern provinces. The 'myth of return' to home countries has the potential to make individuals reluctant to invest in employment and training opportunities in the host country, as this implies an expectation of permanent residence in their country of asylum (Bloch 2004). Kay & Miles (1988) argue that refugee migrations are anticipated to involve settlement, whereas economic migrations are considered to be temporary (despite the fact that many economic migrants have become settlers). Although there is a strong possibility that both groups could end up settling in the UK, the policies around refugees remain distinct from that of other migrant groups.

This discussion has illustrated how although there are differences between the experiences of refugees and those of other immigrants, there are also several similarities. Most importantly there are three main distinctions: firstly, refugees generally experience a minimum period of at least six months as asylum seekers when they are unable to work. Secondly, refugees are generally particularly highly skilled

relative to many economic migrants. This is a consequence of how the people who manage to make it to the UK are generally the more skilful and resourceful of the country of origin's population, although individual abilities remain absent from a criteria for refuge. Thirdly, it is anticipated that refugees are more likely to settle in the host country permanently than economic migrants.

Refugee definition boundaries

The boundaries between refugees and other immigrant groups, legal or otherwise are often definitive within government policy, such as the definition of a refugee (United Nations 1951). However, refugees may experience some form of illegality or, more positively framed, 'irregularity' in part of their flight from their country of origin to a successful asylum application in the host country. Alongside confusion of the legal status of a refugee, it is also important to consider who should be included within the category of 'refugee' (Zetter 2007; Hayden 2006; Nash 2002). When an individual leaves their country of origin seeking refugee status, they may not come alone. Although only one person from their household may claim asylum and comply with the legal definition of a refugee, spouses, partners or other kin may experience labelling as a 'refugee', and may also consider themselves to be so. The Home Office statistics indicate that the majority of applications for asylum in the UK are made by men (Heath & Hill 2002); this would suggest that there are fewer female refugees in the UK. By the strict definition of the United Nations and the Home Office this may be true, yet the dependents of these male refugees may still consider themselves as refugees. Therefore this research considers both the person who has received refugee status (or another form of protection) and their spouses, partners or other kin who consider themselves to be refugees, and who have come from their country of origin with, or shortly after, the primary asylum applicant in the process of family reunification. Although their experience of seeking asylum may be distinct, their subsequent experience in the UK potentially is one of a refugee (Hayden 2006). Confining the research to individuals who applied for asylum would severely curtail the number of women who could participate in the research and miss a vital area of unique and differentiated experience.

Women on average represent around one third of the main applicants for asylum (Home Office 2007). Some women who need protection may seek safety in a different way. Where women do seek asylum independently, they face different issues to their male

counterparts. In the past there has typically been no gender attached to the term 'refugee' (Crawley 2001; Kofman *et al.* 2005). This absence implies a homogenised experience of seeking asylum across different genders. Women can be exposed to and experience the same, and different, types of persecution as men (RWRP 2003). Unique to women are experiences "such as rape, sexual violence, forced sterilisation, genital mutilation and domestic violence, from which they are unable to get state protection" (Asylum Aid 2002: 1). Some countries, however, have begun to recognise the specific needs of refugee women and respond to the ways in which gender impacts upon the experience of seeking asylum (Crawley 2001). Women cannot claim asylum on the basis of their gender specifically. Despite work re-examining the refugee definition (for example, Greatbatch 1989) persecution as a woman remains absent from grounds for asylum under the United Nations definition. Bloch *et al.* (2000: 175) argue that the "practice of granting women humanitarian leave to remain, rather than refugee status, reinforces the view that women and the issues of gender persecution are less deserving of refugee status than the persecution which is experienced by their male counterparts." Officials also have less awareness of how the gender of applicants "has shaped their experience of persecution" (Asylum Aid 2002: 1). Therefore some genuine applications from women have a risk of failing due to a lack of understanding.

Independent applications for asylum from women remain less common, although between 2001 and 2007 on average of 30 percent of applications from Sri Lanka were from women (Bloch *et al.* 2000). Seeking asylum alongside a male family member and family reunification are often the main ways in which women receive asylum (Pedraza 1991; Hein 1993). These women have not been given refugee status in their own right and consequently they may experience some vulnerability in their status despite having gone through the asylum system alongside the main applicant. Rhetorically at least, for women whose applications are in some way tied to that of male relatives, their status may depend upon stability in that relationship. For married applicants, if those marriages subsequently fail, the security of their status could be in jeopardy. Although the reality of this is likely to be limited, the possibility may increase the feelings of vulnerability experienced by individuals.

The final group I wish to discuss is that of sponsored spouses (see Khoo 2001). These are the individuals who were sponsored by refugees already in the UK to move to the

UK as their wives. This group is the more controversial group to consider as refugees. However, here I wish to argue the case that these women and their experiences are just as valid as 'refugees' as the previous groups. The options available to women who need to seek asylum are more limited than for their male counterparts. Women may find asylum in some form through their refugee husbands. Therefore as single women, in need of protection outside of their country of origin, marriage to refugees in Britain could be seen as a way of leaving the country and seeking refuge for themselves. This may be an option which is more open to them than attempting to seek refuge independently. Alongside this, the women who come to the UK as sponsored spouses may experience comparable connections to home and lifestyle in the UK as other refugees. This is particularly significant as they are likely to have experienced similar social constructs pre and post-migration. Finally, some of these women consider themselves to be refugees. The significance of their belief that they are refugees should not be undervalued, as although they may not have experienced the same asylum process as the independent refugees, they have experienced very similar processes to women reuniting with their husbands through family reunification. The circumstances by which female refugees arrive subsequently impact upon their experiences and aspirations within the new country: the way in which they arrive may also be a consequence of their past experiences and future aspirations.

Identity as a refugee

Identity as a refugee may be significant because of the way in which it may affect a person's life in the host country. For the purposes of this thesis, identity is taken to be a reflexive project: emphasizing its multiple, fluid and unstable nature (Valentine 2001). This conception of identity acknowledges standard social categories such as ethnicity, gender, class, age, nationality, and includes other features which contribute to identity formation; and in this context, immigration status (for example refugee status, citizenship) and transnational or diasporic identities. Yet these social categories are not fixed: individuals' identities are multi-faceted, constantly changing and complex. In contrast to Marxist constructions of identity, where identities are structurally decided and subjectivities are taken to be ideological constructs (Pratt 2000), here identity is perceived of as performed, rather than given; negotiated rather than static. Identity is a set of practices that are, at times, actively and consciously performed, but generally played out through the everyday (Butler 1993). For Butler, the concept of

performativity offers an embodied way of re-thinking the relationship between social structures and individual agency (Nash 2000). From this position Butler suggests that people perform ingrained forms of socially practiced identities which become so habitual as to appear natural: “practices which enact identities” (Nash 2000: 655). This notion of performativity allows the possibility that these naturalized codes are challenged (Nash 2000). In the context of this research, such an approach develops a more textured understanding of what it may mean to be a refugee, and more specifically a Tamil refugee. Like all other identities, Tamil and refugee identities cannot be reduced to a single symbolic or material signifier. It is both an unconscious and conscious performance, a mask worn at particular points and discarded at others (see Phan *et al.* 2005). Perceptions of identity may underlie the experiences of refugees in the UK, whether in terms of their ethnic identity, or their immigration status. These identities potentially influence where and how they seek support in the UK. The next three sections examine the relationship between refugees and skills; and refugees and integration through employment before discussing the three themes together.

3. Refugees and skills

Here skill acquisition is envisaged as a continuum of the development of abilities rather than the ways in which people learn. Specifically this research is interested in how skills already possessed are subsequently put into practice in employment, or not, how people attempt to move towards greater use of their skills or/and how skills are unutilised, and how people potentially manage their new situations through further training. This requires an understanding of what is meant by skills in the context of this thesis and a discussion of how refugee skills can be used and developed through training and experience.

Social capital and interpreting the utilisation of skills

Human capital theory has commonly been used to discuss investments in people, focusing upon the skills individuals possess and the experiences they have had (see Becker 1962; Rosen 1983). Through the lens of perceptions of success it is possible to breakdown some of the dominant ideas around skills. Here skills are distinguished from qualifications, whereby skills are either learnt or innate abilities to conduct tasks with the minimum amount of energy and in the minimum time period (Thomas 1996). Consequently, skills are broader than just the education an individual has received.

However, the specific skills individuals wish to acquire may relate to their perceptions of success and which occupations they consider to be better than others, and the skills required for them.

Ideas from social capital theories offer further potential to challenge dominant conceptions of human capital theory (Coleman 1988). Through social capital it is possible to consider skills and their utilisation in greater depth within specific contexts, and therefore perceptions of success, as opposed to the traditional neo-classical understanding of skill utilisation. Social capital is defined as:

“the web of connections, loyalties, investments, and mutual obligations that develop among people, both as part of their regular interactions in which intra-group connections are strengthened (bonding capital) and new links are forged and exploited (bridging capital)” (McMichael & Manderson 2004: 89).

Resources from social capital aid understanding of the context of skill utilisation and the process by which human capital is given value (Coleman 1988). This emphasises the importance of social connections and the potential value of human capital through this. At its most basic, Field (2003) sums up the concept in two words: relationships matter. A working definition of social capital for this thesis begins with conceiving social capital as access (networks) plus resources (Foley & Edwards 1999). Putnam defined social capital in more community than individual terms: the “features of social life – networks, norms, and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives” (Putnam 1995: 664-665). Rather than taking Putnam’s view, which ties social capital to collective goods, such as civic engagement (Foley & Edwards 1999), here it is acknowledged that individuals do not always have shared goals, for example when individuals have different ambitions in the labour market⁴. Instead, Bourdieu & Wacquant’s (1992) and Coleman’s (1988; 1994) ideas on social capital offer a contextual lens for the methods by which refugees attempt to overcome the ‘economic cost’ of being refugees (the coping strategies individuals utilise), or alternatively how the ‘darker’ side of social capital affects the utilisation of refugee skills; where social capital affects people’s abilities to operate in a new country.

In order to maintain social capital, Bourdieu argues that individuals have to work at it, and invest in it (cited Field 2003). Bourdieu views his approach to social capital as a

⁴ More recently Putnam has argued that there is a negative link between ethnic diversity and social capital: “put crudely, the more ethnically diverse the neighbourhood, the less likely you are to trust your local shopkeeper, regardless of his or her ethnicity” (Robert Putnam, cited Bunting 2007: 2).

way of reconciling structuralist accounts of inequalities with constructivist understandings of human agency (Ritzer 1996). Foley & Edwards (1999: 146) favour an approach more in keeping with Bourdieu, agreeing that “neither resources in general, attitudes and norms such as trust and reciprocity, nor social infrastructures such as networks and associations, can be understood as social capital by themselves.” Bourdieu also recognised that social capital is context-dependent and therefore not distributed evenly.

Coleman (1988; 1994) instead defines social capital by its function. It is not a single entity, but a variety of entities with two characteristics in common: social capital consists of some aspect of social structure, and it facilitates actions of individuals who are within that structure. Like social structure, social capital may be enabling and also disabling. Coleman identified different forms of capital including: ‘obligations and expectations,’ ‘information potential,’ ‘norms and effective sanctions,’ ‘authority relations,’ ‘appropriable social organization,’ and ‘intentional organization’- understood as ‘direct investment in social capital’ (Coleman 1990: 306-13; Foley & Edwards 1999). Actors did not purposefully create social capital; rather it was produced as an unintended consequence of their pursuit of self-interest (Field 2003). Coleman conceives social capital in instrumental terms in relation to rational calculations of self-interested agents, and not as Bourdieu envisaged it, as constitutive of individual identities and strategies (Foley & Edwards 1999). Coleman’s theory of social capital attempts to fuse sociology and economics under the umbrella of rational action theory (Coleman 1994). This is where, perhaps, the concept falls slightly short as the ideas underlying rational choice over-emphasise individual agency (Hughes 2002).

Social capital is built up through time as an investment (Field 2003). Social structures may change but the choices of individuals may not. Social capital and social structures have a similar relationship to that of money in the economy (Bourdieu 1986). However, there is a distinction between external and internal social capital. External social capital is structural, whereas internal social capital is attitudinal or of perceived value (Kadushin 2004). Trust is an outcome of social capital, not a factor within it. Trust may also be established through the creation of wider social networks. Evidence suggests that the dispersal of asylum seekers away from other members of their ethnic group, limits an individual’s opportunities for the development of social capital and

social networks within ethnic communities (Loizos 2000; Damm & Rosholm 2003; Morris 2007). Following this argument it may be the case that social capital amongst refugees may be primarily within an ethnic community; therefore it can be argued that ethnicity itself, or Tamilness, works as social capital in terms of creating a set of common norms, values, and a background from which networks emerge (Dwyer 2007).

However, although social ties may be useful, research suggests they do not compensate for the downward mobility of individuals (Lamba 2003). For example, if people who are connected (that is from the same family/ethnic background/immigration status) are geographically close to one another, they may be expected to partake in family care responsibilities (Lamba 2003). In this situation social capital may become a disadvantage (Field 2003). Further examples from the literature can be identified, where social capital may have negative consequences for the individuals involved. Firstly, some forms of social capital are of value in one environment, but can be ineffective or even harmful in another (Lin 2001). In the different stages of Tamil migration to the UK there have been different societies. Forms of social capital which were of value for colonial migrants in the 1960s may be ineffective for Tamil refugees arriving in the 1980s. Secondly, “the same social mechanisms that give rise to appropriable resources for individual use can also constrain action or even derail it from its original goals” (Portes & Sensenbrenner 1993: 1138). Within Tamil society those mechanisms which enable men to find certain types of employment, such as working in a petrol station, may constrain women from being offered the same employment because of the cultural scripts surrounding what is be considered suitable employment for women. Thirdly, social networks and institutions can limit their members’ connections with the wider community, and exclude others (Foley & Edwards 1999). This may be true for refugees whereby being immersed within an ethnic community may make it difficult to have connections outside those networks. Once a part of these networks, it becomes harder to create connections outside of the community. Social capital may provide people with particular connections and networks. However, these connections may not meet the requirements that the individual has, for example by providing a highly skilled worker with the connections they need in order to utilise those skills. Finally, “social ties can bring about greater control over wayward behaviour and provide privileged access to resources; they can also restrict individual freedoms and bar outsiders from gaining access to the same resources through

particularistic preferences” (Portes 1998: 21). This may be true for Tamils where individuals are pushed into education in particular disciplines, and subsequently employment, due to social ties predominantly in those areas (for example, solicitors, engineers, doctors).

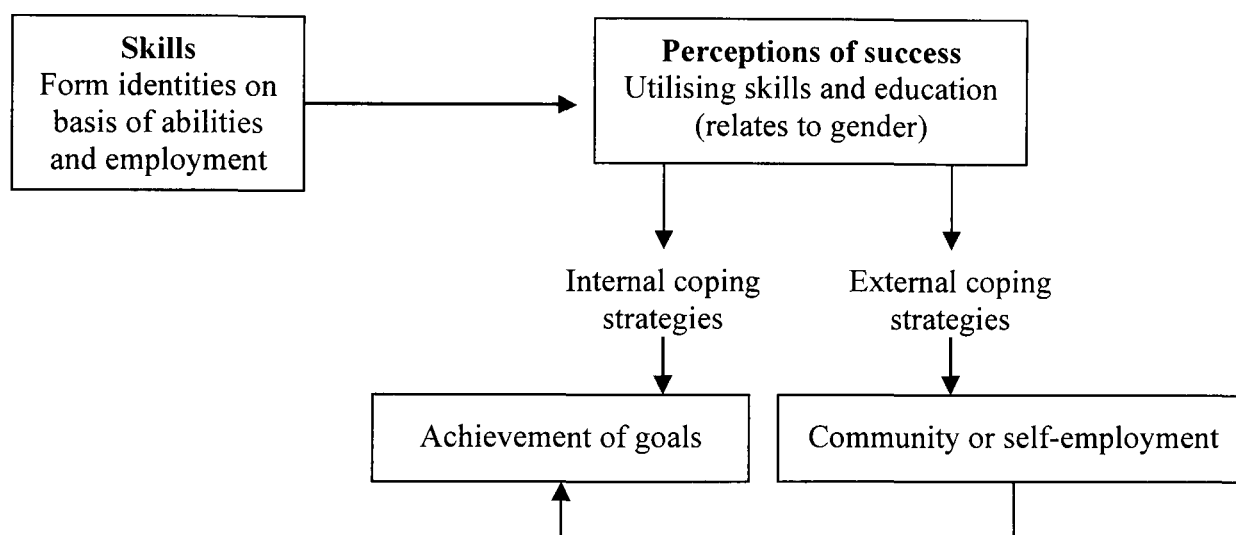
The social capital literature distinguishes between types of social capital used by men and women (Field 2003). This is too simplistic a division based on gender. Men are perhaps more likely to use bridging social capital, encompassing more “distant ties of like persons, such as loose friendships and workmates” (Woolcock 2001: 13), to gain networks of greater variety. This could lead to greater possibilities of finding employment in occupations that utilise their human capital (Coleman 1988). Women are thought more often to utilise bonding social capital “ties between like people in similar situations, such as immediate family, close friends and neighbours” (Woolcock 2001: 13). This may limit their opportunity to gain information on employment opportunities in wider circles. I would question the simplicity of this distinction and argue that cultural gender norms and scripts may not prevent women from working directly, but instead they may position other responsibilities and expectations in the way of such women, diverting them from formal employment, or pushing them into particular types of employment (see Franz 2003b). This may make it particularly difficult for women to have the time or support for them to find employment outside family owned businesses or particularly low skilled positions.

The focus of this research is upon interpreting skill utilisation through the eyes of the individual refugees themselves, and their desires for their employment achievements in the future. This moves from the broader societal scale of skills use and considers what individuals desire. Social capital is a concept complementary to a grand theory of society, not a plausible contender for a primary theoretical role (Loizos 2000; Kadushin 2004). The concept itself may be used as an analytical tool for understanding processes rather than as a solution to situations. Here the concept of social capital has potential use for comprehending the importance of the ethnic economy and the ethnic community within the lives of refugees (see Fuglerud & Engebriksen 2006; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2003).

Skills and success

Figure 2.2 offers a way in which skills utilisation may be interpreted. This diagram illustrates a model of the relationship between skills and success. Employment and the skills which individuals possess, have the potential to be an important part of the way in which people identify themselves. The way in which people then interpret their achievements in work is likely to be related to their perceptions of success in employment. Such attitudes influence the skills individuals seek to acquire, and how they subsequently desire to employ those skills. For example, if success was perceived as working as a professional, the individual may seek to gain appropriate skills to enter that profession.

Figure 2.2: Skills and success: achieving employment goals



This analysis may imply that individuals always have specific large scale goals. Although this may not always be true, it is likely that people have some form of target, even if it is only financial. Some individuals will have specific definitions of the meaning of success (for example education within the Tamil community), whereas others may have broader understandings of where they would like to see themselves in employment terms. These goals may change over time as a result of experience. For example, an asylum seeker living in a host society may renegotiate their employment ambitions in response to their experience of working in a cash-in-hand position within the ethnic economy⁵.

⁵ The ethnic economy is an alternative route of economic attainment for immigrants using their ethnic ties and resources (Fong & Ooka 2002).

The ways in which skills are acquired and utilised may be influenced by the identities of the individual (for example gender, ethnicity, sexuality, age and so on). Alongside this, employment goals are likely to be ahead of the individual, or unachievable given the individual's situation and/or abilities. Therefore whilst individuals work towards their goals they may find it necessary to adopt coping strategies (Berry 1997) as a way of managing their inability to achieve their targets immediately. Refugees may find themselves utilising their social capital, volunteering or working in the community or self employment as an external coping strategy for a period of time whilst they build up the skills and experience to enable them to move towards their desired employment (if volunteering, or community or self employment is not in itself their ambition). It is possible that this whole process sits within a climate of obligation. Some refugees may believe that they are expected to give back to the host country for the support they have been given.

Evidence suggests that refugees have consolidated their resources (for example financial and intellectual) through the process of seeking asylum in the UK (Kirk 2004; MacKenzie & Forde 2007). It follows on, therefore, that in order for refugees to have access to such resources, it is possible that they are from a more skilled group of the population of their country of origin. Yet in the UK, there is evidence that some refugees are either underemployed or out of work entirely (Crewe 1992; Feeney 2000; Valtonen 2004; Bloch 2005; Mayor of London 2007). In a 1999 European Commission study the majority of refugees (87 percent) had jobs before coming to the UK (Sargeant & Forna 2001). Alongside this, a more recent study found that 30 percent of all refugees come from higher education or professional backgrounds (Employability Forum 2006).

The assimilation hypothesis argues that “over time, assuming equally qualified individuals, earnings will be higher the greater the duration of stay in the host country or alternatively that over time immigrant earnings will converge with those of comparably qualified indigenous workers” (Sloane & Gazioglu 1996: 401). The justification for this settling in period is that immigrants who arrive without employment, like refugees, may initially be forced to accept undesirable jobs (possibly in the ethnic economy). Over time, Sloane & Gazioglu (1996) argue that immigrants acquire skills appropriate to the host country (through volunteering, paid work or

training), including language skills. They become more knowledgeable of the local labour market enabling them to move into more 'appropriate' jobs and achieve greater economic integration (Hirschman 2001). This is an idealised explanation of what actually occurs (see Åslund & Rooth 2007). Individual immigrants rarely have the same opportunities as native residents and those immigrants that do are frequently white professional workers from other Western countries.

However, refugees remain distinct to some extent from other immigrant groups. Adams & Jesudason (1984), in a quantitative study of 1,000 Ugandan refugees, found that the economic costs of migration were likely to be greatest for political refugees because many had non-transferable skills. Although they may be highly skilled individuals, Adams & Jesudason (1984) suggest that the skills they have are specific to the occupations they had in their country of origin and consequently it may be difficult for them to transfer their abilities to their new contexts. However, the transferable nature of an individual's skills may also be dependent on their specific experience, qualifications, innate abilities and their desired employment within the host country: alongside whether qualifications from their country of origin are recognised in the UK. Within the labour market some skills may be valued more highly than others. For example, the skills of a doctor are likely to be more highly valued by the refugee and host society than the skills of a cleaner. This may relate to perceptions of success: perceptions which may vary between different groups. Yet even with highly transferable skills, individuals may still be underemployed when many of their skills are unused in their position.

English language skills

Evidence suggests that language is the most significant transferable skill for refugees entering the labour market of the host country (see Hurstfield 2004; Sloane & Gazioglu 1996; Strand 1984). Language can be analysed as exogenous and endogenous human capital (Pendakur & Pendakur 1997). The language skills developed by individuals as they grow up are endogenous to a person, whereas those skills which are learnt at a later stage in their development are exogenous. For refugees, English skills are more likely to be exogenous. Therefore English language knowledge is seen as a skill itself, rather than a characteristic of the refugee. For Tamil refugees, as a consequence of being taught in English as the result of colonial rule, a few individuals may have endogenous English skills, but the majority have learnt English later in life.

There is some confusion about the significance of English and the particular English skills necessary for a better chance of employment in the UK. Strand (1984), working with Indochinese refugees, argues that refugees with poor or non-existent written English tend not to have jobs, as opposed to those who are able to write English, who are more likely to be employed. In research with fathers and sons from Turkey and Bangladesh, Sloane & Gazioglu (1996) found that immigrant ability to speak English substantially raised the earning potential of Turkish immigrants, but not Bangladeshis. Despite this differentiation between groups, the lack of English language and literacy was the most frequently identified barrier to immigrant employment identified in Hurstfield's (2004) study. Furthermore there may be gendered differences in experience of, and ability to speak, English and the consequential employment opportunities such skills provide.

The government introduced new English tests for immigrants as a strategy to be 'tougher' on immigration whereby compulsory English language tests have been given to an extra 150,000 migrants who want to settle in the UK (Wintour 2007). English ability is clearly not a factor in the decision as to whether an individual should be granted refugee status or not. However, this distinction may differentiate the entry of refugees into the UK labour market from other migrants, as focused on in the previous section. Whereas migrants who planned to move for work may have chosen to go to a place where they already knew the language, refugees would not have had the same choice. However, for those who do not know English upon arrival, Cortes' (2004) research found that refugees adapted more quickly to learn English to a higher level than immigrants who arrived at the same time. One of the main skill gaps in the UK labour market is communication skills. Significantly in Inner London many of the less skilled jobs available require culturally specific information, personal skills and some linguistic competence which excludes many newly arrived refugees from certain occupations (Corporation of London 2003). This may lead them to seek out work within the ethnic economy.

Utilising skills

The types of jobs available outside the ethnic economy for individuals who have limited language abilities in the host country may often be low skilled and low paid: this may

suit some individuals with a lack of skills. Anderson (2001) illustrates how, with the increased demand for domestic workers, migrants and particularly female migrants and refugees frequently end up working in the domestic sector. When such work is carried out by UK citizens the work is frequently professionalised and individuals are “nannies, cooks, carers etc with specialist qualifications, job descriptions and career structures” (Anderson 2001: 19). Consumers appreciate employing individuals for less money who are more flexible to the required chores (Franz 2003a). In an effort to find work quickly, many individuals are willing to accept socio-economic downward mobility. Thus Franz (2003a: 18) found that the Bosnian refugees she interviewed “continued working in maid service, tourism, construction, and farming – the same occupations they had already been working in illegally” after they had received refugee status. The slide into work of which individuals already have experience may be a common feature of employment as networks have already been established in that area and they may also have established information flows. This is significant as the ethnic economy often provides initial employment to refugees and consequently draws individuals into the ethnic economy and a particular form of work at an early stage. They may also lack wider information flows of other opportunities.

Asylum seekers and refugees are encouraged to volunteer as this provides “a chance for [them] to integrate” (Craig & Lewis 2008). Depending upon who they volunteer with, this may also be an opportunity for them to build up their skills, make connections with wider communities and develop their English language abilities. This could be a way for refugees to gain experience in the UK labour market, making them more employable in the future (Bloch 2004). Refugees have the opportunity to volunteer in any organisation which is willing to have them. However, asylum seekers can only volunteer, if they “are carrying out the work on behalf of a registered charity, voluntary organisation or body that raises funds for either. Any voluntary activity undertaken should not amount to either employment or job substitution” (Volunteering England 2008: 1). It is argued that volunteering for asylum seekers is a good experience which distracts them from waiting for their cases⁶. Yet the type of volunteering asylum seekers are able to do, does not often prepare them for the work they might do when they are refugees. Relatively few asylum seekers or refugees take up volunteering opportunities due to time commitments or poor English to begin with (Craig & Lewis

⁶ Delegate at *Good Asylum* Conference 2008.

2008). Refugees may be more concerned with concentrating upon earning a living. Those who do find work through their information field may end up working within the ethnic community or refugee organisations. This limits the positive effects volunteering may have upon the employment experience and potential of refugee employment.

It is estimated that one in three refugees of working age is unemployed, while many more are under-employed (Home Office 2006). With such high unemployment rates, refugees may seek work within the ethnic economy either as a fall back option or in preference to employment in the mainstream economy. Although the ethnic economy is argued to contribute towards social exclusion (Ethnic Minority Employment Task Force 2008), for many refugees the ethnic economy may be their first choice within their work ambitions. The ethnic economy may offer employment opportunities when the mainstream labour market is out of bounds for individuals without work permits such as asylum seekers (Jones *et al.* 2006). It may provide social connections to search and find work, and in certain situations it may enable individuals to utilise the language skills from their country of origin when the occupation serves the wider ethnic community (Wauters & Lambrecht 2008). The ethnic economy however may result in individuals experiencing an underutilisation of their wider skills. Presence in the ethnic economy may be a consequence of refugees moving into the ethnic economy, or the result of them looking for work there. The former may be the result of a lack of success entering the wider labour market, whereas the latter may be the result of a lack of knowledge of the wider labour market. This is an important distinction, the reality of which may assist in understanding the type of support refugees may need to enter the wider labour market more effectively. This chapter returns to the ethnic economy below.

4. Refugees and integration through employment

In order to enter the wider labour market asylum seekers need to be better prepared for what happens when they become refugees (DWP 2005). Negative attitudes towards asylum seekers and refugees are compounded by the perception that they are dependent on welfare systems (Mestheneos & Ioannidi 2002). The nature of the asylum system and the inability for asylum seekers to work in the UK, and the sudden change of status may provide individuals with few opportunities to learn about the UK labour market. The government emphasis on volunteering may enable individuals to gain some experience. However, volunteering opportunities may often be in areas with which

individuals have little interest for future paid employment. In the initial period when an individual has first become a refugee, employment which utilises their skills may also not be a priority. The *Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES)*⁷ has been launched nationally. The RIES is based upon the Sunrise pilot, which ended on 31st March 2008 (UK Border Agency 2008d). It aims to offer a 12 month service to each person over the age of 18 who has been granted refugee status or humanitarian protection. The service has three complementary elements:

- an advice and support service offering help in addressing initial critical needs such as housing, education and access to benefits;
- an employment advice service to help the person enter long-term employment at the earliest opportunity;
- and a mentoring service offering the person an opportunity to be matched with a mentor from the receiving community (UK Border Agency 2008d: p1).

As RIES recognises, the focus of individuals is likely to be upon finding somewhere to live and accessing social security when they first receive their status. The Home Office (2006) recognises how refugees require greater understanding of the UK labour market to find employment. It has been argued that those individuals who do gain employment experience positive psychological impacts of having a job and feeling independent (Phillimore & Goodson 2006). The state may also benefit from the reciprocity of the individual giving back to the host through employment. However, the quality of the occupations individuals have remain all-important in enabling refugees to become more included and increase their contribution to their local area (Phillimore & Goodson 2006; Bloch 2008). Training which adds to skills and is likely to improve the quality of refugee employment may be of particular value (Bloch 2004). However, if refugees are subsequently to work in the ethnic economy these potential benefits may be lost.

Critiquing integration

The concept of integration for refugees returned to UK government policy in 2000 with the publication of the White Paper, *Full and Equal Citizens* (Home Office 2000). Moving away from ideas around assimilation and the ‘melting-pot’, the government wished to adopt a notion whereby refugees could maintain their individual ethnic and migrant identities, yet also be included in what is perceived to be mainstream society. This develops the argument that the best way to reduce prejudice and increase

⁷ The Refugee Integration and Employment Service became fully operational throughout the UK in October 2008.

integration is through contact between groups (Valentine 2008). Integration can therefore be viewed as making transactions and contacts between refugees and wider communities. Through communication and dealings between communities, relationships are formed and over time, through the build up of these relations, people may become 'integrated'. The labour market is an area of possibility for making these transactions – for example through transactional flows of labour, goods, services and capital. The specifics of the London labour market mean that 'integration' may occur through transactions across different ethnic communities as well as with the wider labour market. The level of the transactions established may vary, for example an ethnic business offering services to the needs of the wider community, or only the local ethnic communities. These variations create a dual economy (Averitt 1968; Tolbert *et al.* 1980; Johnston 2000a), whereby the ethnic economy can function quite separately from the wider economy with only limited transactions between them (see Wilson & Portes 1980). It is important to note that integration policy in the UK tolerates the differences of others on the basis that this does not disrupt the normal workings of the host country. Consequently integration is a relatively limited self protectionist view of the settlement of refugees.

Integration is a wide and all-encompassing concept examining many different aspects of the settlement experiences of refugees (Ager & Strang 2008; Voas & Kapoor 2007). Integration often assumes a long term or permanent stay in a country particularly for refugees who, as already discussed, may be less likely to return to their country of origin⁸. The concept considers the spatial (residential), structural (education, employment, housing etc) and social or cultural features of settlement. The policy of integration is problematic, as the term means different things to different people: therefore the understanding of the term by refugees targeted by the policy may be very different from that of the policy makers (Ager & Strang 2004a). Although this definition focuses on how the host community needs to create an open atmosphere where refugees feel included and allowed to make a contribution, it also states that this requires a willingness on the part of the refugee to adapt, for example by learning the language. This 'requirement' of change could be one of the hardest things for Tamil refugees to do as the ethnic community and nationalistic ties that they maintain are

⁸ It is important to note the change in policy to grant refugee status initially for five years. After this period the individual's claim is reviewed with the aim to send people, who are no longer considered to be at risk, back to their countries of origin.

central drivers of their lives (Orjuela & Sriskandarajah 2008). The government has moved towards ideas of integration of refugees in an attempt to justify its refugee obligations by arguing how much refugees can benefit the country.

The concept of integration is understood in a variety of ways by refugees: how they consider their experiences is as important as more normative indicators of adaptation (Korać 2003; Spencer 2005; Atfield *et al.* 2007; Brahmhatt *et al.* 2007), yet it is the government who defines the parameters by which integration is measured. Ager & Strang (2004a: 3) found that refugee perceptions of integration vary from ‘not having any trouble’ through ‘mixing’ in the community to ‘belonging’. These general views were identified through the extent to which individuals felt settled in the wider community. Local understandings of integration were influenced by the expectations of relationships between groups in the area, with the majority of interviewees identifying ‘belonging’ as the strongest mark of living in an integrated community. Alongside this, the actual desire for integration in the way envisaged by the government, as illustrated, is not always desired by the Tamil refugees themselves. Ager & Strang (2004b: 5) provide one of the more in-depth discussions of the ambiguity of the term integration. According to their ‘tentative definition’:

“An individual or group is integrated within a society when they:

1. achieve public outcomes within employment, housing, education, health etc. which are equivalent to those achieved within the wider host community;
2. are socially connected with members of a (national, ethnic, cultural, religious or other) community with which they identify, with members of other communities and with relevant services and functions of the state; and
3. have sufficient linguistic competence and cultural knowledge, and a sufficient sense of security and stability, to confidently engage in that society in a manner consistent with shared notions of nationhood and citizenship.”

To apply this definition requires identification of the indicators of integration. Ager & Strang’s (2004b: 3) framework has four levels:

1. “‘Markers and means’ cover the four domains of employment, housing, education and health. These are grouped together because the domains represent major areas of attainment that are widely recognised as critical factors in the integration process.
2. ‘Social connections’ cover three domains: social bridges, social bonds, and social links. These factors cover the importance of relationships within understanding of the integration process.
3. ‘Facilitators’ are divided into two: language and cultural knowledge, and safety and stability. These are the key facilitating factors for the integration process to occur.

4. 'Foundation' of individual rights and citizenship. This is the basis upon which individuals have expectations and obligations on which the process of integration is established."

This definition of integration covers the expectation of public outcomes, for example in housing or employment. It examines the social connections that stimulate these public outcomes/achievements – not only relationships initiated by the refugees themselves, but also the wider relationships within local communities (Ager & Strang 2004b). However, it also suggests a degree of involvement with society. Ager & Strang (2004b) point out that this participatory level of integration is not achieved by many, regardless of their immigration status. Therefore the definition should be viewed as a goal rather than a preset outcome. This is a normative definition of integration.

This thesis aims to raise some ideas which may assist in an interpretation of integration. The concept of transnationalism demonstrates how migrant communities have stretched affiliations back to their countries of origin (Bailey *et al.* 2002; Bailey 2001; Al-Ali *et al.* 2001). Integration as a process does not allow for such connections. These transnational ties may be more important within a migrant's life than local relations with other communities. This suggests that the concept of integration may need supplementing in order for it to be of use in developing an understanding of refugees. For refugees the concept of transnationalism is less useful. Many refugee groups have not maintained sustained contact with their countries of origin as a consequence of their reasons for seeking asylum. Diaspora is a more useful term for comprehending the Tamil refugee community's connections (Cheran 2007; Vertovec 2005; 2006; Houston & Wright 2003).

Identity theories offer a further critique to the concept of integration. Integration may imply a more fixed concept of identity. It is anticipated that refugees will adjust to their new circumstances by building connections with wider communities. Yet identities and cultures continue to be performed and negotiated (see Harris 2001). At particular points certain identities are more prominent than others. Through integration, the way in which refugee identities are performed may be altered through practice. This may be of particular concern to Tamil refugees. Within the community there may be the sense of a fear of loss of Tamilness, and the cultural practices that accompany this ethnic identity, through integration.

A rather more severe criticism of normative definitions of integration is the anticipated goal. The definitions presented here are underlain by the notion of equality and assumes desire for refugees to become 'equal' to the wider host community. None of these definitions adequately defines my own position on equality. Although the idea of equality appears on the surface to be positive, unless defined and understood in the same way by those discussing, analysing and participating in the research, it can be misleading. Whilst the term 'equality' may concern equal rights, the questions of what equal means remain important. To whom should refugees be equal? Should they be equal in every way? As equals, are differences allowed for? The term equality has many connotations. Without a satisfactory definition this may lead to confusion over what is meant by the term. Equality could also underlie an assimilationist, melting pot perspective whereby everyone should be the same. The Italian Feminist school of thought (Bock & James 1992) provides some interesting insight into the term, whereby their use of equality means 'equal *and* different' (see Scott 1988). Hughes (2002: 50) illustrates this position within an argument on gender equality:

"It is as essentialist to assume that women are the same as men as it is to assume that they are different. Both positions assume some innate nature of essence of being. Rather their position is one that argues that we cannot know what woman essentially is because this knowledge cannot be gained outside of the past and present conditions to which she is subjected. We can, however know how womanhood is differentiated from, subordinated to, and shaped by masculinity. Thus, unless women shape these fields of knowledge and practice for themselves, they will remain homologized, that is made to correspond with masculine interests."

For refugees to be expected to become 'the same' as their host societies would assume that there was an archetypal norm which could be aimed for or achieved. Although perhaps more difficult to measure statistically, a perspective of social justice as an aspect of integration may be more appropriate. Social justice, at its simplest understanding, is the "distribution of society's benefits and burdens" (Smith 2000a). Social justice brings perhaps the more positive sentiments behind equality into the arena, yet allowing some of the more negative sides of the term to be reduced. A quantifiable method of comprehending social justice would be difficult; however, the concept draws connotations with moral judgements and moves towards an ethical argument of the benefits of integration.

It is argued here that integration is not about equality, as equality itself is a misleading concept. Instead, integration is about building and maintaining functional relationships

and ties between the refugee community and the wider host communities. This follows the Refugee Council's (2001) view that integration is a two-way process involving adaptation of both refugees and the host societies to develop networks between one another. The role of language is significant in creating the potential for functional relationships (Bloch 2004) and the prospective for social integration is greater if the different societies are not distinctly spatially distributed. For Tamils the ethnic economy is spatially concentrated, making wider connections more difficult to establish. Practical connections and ties between different groups increase the ability of refugees to develop tacit everyday knowledge of the host country, whilst host societies benefit from cultural diversity and recognise the contributions that refugees bring (Hage 1998). The development of these implicit knowledges may assist in refugee adaptation to the structural elements of integration (for example, education, employment, housing and so on). Integration has greater potential to be achieved when access to these is socially just.

Employment and integration

This thesis concentrates on a dimension of integration focusing upon the structural element of employment, drawing on the social and cultural features within this. Other themes provide context to Tamil refugee experiences (see Figure 2.1). For example refugee access to institutional structures, such as the health service, schooling and housing (Zetter *et al.* 2002; Spencer 2006); discussions around social integration through features such as inter-marriage between refugees and people from wider communities; and residential integration in terms of where individuals are geographically located (Ager & Strang 2004a). These other factors are not the primary focus of this research; however, they touch upon other arguments at appropriate places within the thesis.

Employment is particularly significant as it is argued that "employment is the key to integration as it allows the refugees to become part of society" (Refugee Council 2001: 9). The act of being paid is significant here, as the remuneration of work implies a particular value which is not gained through volunteering. Other aspects of structural integration and spatial integration are taken to be a part of the situated context for this research. For example, the geographical location where many of the Tamil participants live may be residentially segregated. This feature of the lived experience of individuals

is not the focus of this research and is therefore accepted as part of the wider context of the refugee experience. However, it remains important in providing the pre-conditions for the operation of social capital in the ethnic community and ethnic economy (Field 2003).

The process of integration of refugees through employment is complex (see Wilkinson 2008). Individual identities, and the desire to preserve aspects of those identities perceived to be threatened through integration, are an important factor in the realities of the process of integration. The identity of the individual as highlighted earlier may be based upon multiple facets: here ethnicity, gender and perceptions of success are important (for example Butler 1993). These facets, and the refugee's potential desire to maintain these characteristics, may influence the ways in which integration works within the lives of individuals (for example Valtonen 1998). Identification as a refugee or as part of a particular national or ethnic group can lead individuals to avoid the process of integration (Fuglerud & Engebriksen 2006). In attempts to negotiate sometimes conflicting interests and ambitions, individuals adopt coping strategies (Berry 1997). They re-evaluate their goals, potentially allowing their skills to evolve. This may lead them towards their wider ethnic communities or directly towards establishment in the 'mainstream' society⁹. Through coping mechanisms individuals may experience a complex path towards a form of integration. The next section combines these ideas with those around refugees and skills to complete the intersection of refugees, skills and integration through employment.

5. Refugees, skills and integration through employment

In order to comprehend the intersection between refugees, skills and integration through employment, it is essential to understand the different features impacting upon the individuals themselves. The previous sections have dissected the notion of what it means to be a refugee, followed by an examination of the relationship between refugees and skills, and refugees and integration through employment. In building this picture of the ways in which refugees negotiate their experiences it is clear that a focus upon the individual and the identities which make up the individual are central to the path

⁹ This is a simplification of the division between these apparently different communities. The ethnic and wider communities are not clearly differentiated concepts: rather they are practices and performances of particular identities which change over time and are emphasised or dismissed under different circumstances. This is particularly the case in London with multiple different communities where it may be difficult to define a 'host' community.

towards integration that the refugee walks. The skills the individual has may influence not only what they are capable of doing, but also what they desire to work as in the future, alongside their perceptions of what it means to be successful in employment. Ethnic identity and gender may further complicate notions of success along with other forms of identity, specific to the individual, which demonstrate themselves under different circumstances. Integration has more recently been implicitly unquestioned as a good thing. The appropriate utilisation of skills may be one way in which this process may be facilitated (Bloch 2008). However the route by which integration through employment is established in reality is far from straightforward (Wilkinson 2008). Where the individual enters the labour market the experiences they have of employment may affect their assessment of the requisites for success by either confirming that such a route is possible or through a realisation that further steps are necessary to achieve their desired success.

The role of the ethnic economy

The 'ethnic enclave economy' describes a geographical cluster of ethnic businesses with vertical integration of co-ethnic workers and consumers (Portes & Bach 1985). This economy is based on reciprocal obligations and ethnic solidarity (Hillmann 1999) which by its nature often creates an inward-looking enclave hindering integration; that is the ethnic enclave may prohibit or restrict transactional contacts with wider societies. Research suggests that when refugees move to an area, in order to be close to friends and family, they may establish employment through social networks in contrast to individuals who had no choice over where they lived (Bloch 2004; Clark & Drinkwater 2002). This may be particularly true of Tamils, where services were established in London specifically to welcome newly arrived Tamils in the 1980s. This may lead to "ethno stratification of the job market" (Solé & Parella 2003: 124) isolating individuals, to varying extents, from wider societies. These enclaves can often be residential and social, further indicating the context of the lives of individuals. Yet the ethnic community is an attractive option for refugees in so far as it has the potential to provide them with a path for perceived upward mobility and increase ontological security (Portes & Bach 1985). Self-employment may be the refugee's goal. For a refugee lacking in host language skills, self-employment within an enclave minimises language disadvantages and provides the opportunity for 'success' within their new world (Sloane

& Gazioglu 1996; Wauters & Lambrecht 2008): albeit the individual's aspirations and concept of success may be different from those held by them in their country of origin.

London, in particular, offers a wide variety of networks and connections into different social and ethnic groups for individuals to access. Tamil refugees draw upon Tamil connections, but also wider Asian networks within the London ethnic economy. A high level of social capital facilitates the flow of information and resources to the individual (Field 2003). Earlier refugee arrivals, with more capital of various kinds, may have facilitated refugees with fewer resources to migrate to the UK. Evidence suggests that later waves of refugees are poorer, and have reached a lower educational level prior to their migration, than previous refugees (Hauff & Vaglum 1993). They may also receive more support on arrival than the first migrants could call on. The lower overall skill levels of these refugees may lead to further barriers preventing them from achieving their potential in the labour market, as they have a fewer skills to draw upon in the first place. This may further increase the reliance on community employment, where available, or lead to particularly low skilled manual work. This may be useful for individuals whose skill level in the language of the host country is low and who lack evidence of their abilities and previous experience.

The notion of the ethnic economy raises important ideas about employment and what this means. Employment here is distinguished from concepts of work. Individuals who work either legally or illegally within the ethnic economy are perceived of as employed within this context. However, there are many variables within such a statement. Employment is taken to be earning a wage for the work being carried out. Yet within the ethnic economy and particularly in family businesses, the work undertaken may not earn a wage. These experiences within the ethnic economy and ethnic community may not be unique to refugees; there are other factors which may differentiate the refugee experience.

For women, opportunities for employment found through the ethnic community within the ethnic economy are sometimes deemed more appropriate by family members. It may be believed that, through the ethnic economy, female refugees remain within an environment more like that of their country of origin. Family pressures also influence male experiences of employment. For example, Hauff & Vaglum (1993) found that the

risk of unemployment was higher among refugees with low formal education and with no accompanying spouse than for individuals with family responsibilities. However, despite pressure from family members, and possibly the wider ethnic community, refugees may continue to experience high rates of unemployment (Home Office 2006). This may be a reflection of a lack of understanding of the UK labour market and knowledge of how to find work outside of the ethnic community, which leads them into working in the ethnic economy.

Experiences of integration may also be significantly different as a consequence of the gender of the individual. Alongside employment within the ethnic economy, self employment, also often within the ethnic economy, is significant. As Hillmann (1999) argues, self employment stories have long been illustrated as 'success stories' of certain immigrant groups. However, there is also a more 'hidden' side to the "the myth of the self-made man" (Ferree, 1979: 40) whereby the successful self-employed male immigrant obscures the efforts and accomplishments of the whole family, particularly women. The Home Office (2006) found that refugee women did not have the same access to community and professional networks as male refugees, which therefore limited their opportunities to establish businesses on their own. De Dunn & Paul (2002) further illustrate the distinctive female experience when they argue that visible differences are significant but that non-white ethnicity had a greater impact on black and minority ethnic women than their male counterparts. The skills of women may also vary (Franz 2003b), not necessarily in terms of the variety of abilities individuals have, but rather the specific skills and experience useful to establish and run a business. As a consequence women frequently end up partaking in work for the family business, within the ethnic economy, but often more as an employee than in a managerial role. These experiences may also apply to immigrants who are not refugees.

Refugees who do establish businesses may face a number of distinct barriers, such as social and cultural adaptation to UK business cultures and practices, language issues and access to information and finance (DTI 2006), a knowledge of which would contribute to the process of integration (Wauters & Lambrecht 2008). However, these factors may be less important if the individual remains within the ethnic economy. Sloane & Gazioglu (1996) found that individuals catering for their own ethnic or national group through self-employment have a comparative advantage due to common

language and/or familiarity with ethnic preferences. Yet such a position once again may likely limit opportunities to acquire other knowledge which assists an individual in developing their position in the wider community.

Leaving the ethnic economy

When individuals experience employment in the mainstream society, they can at least gain a functional role in the host society (White 2001). However, when they experience *appropriate* employment, outside of the ethnic economy, this functional role is likely to be greater. Colic-Peisker & Tibury (2007) observed that some refugees are so grateful to be in the host country that they are happy doing low-skilled jobs, even when this is below their previous experience and skill level. Yet for some this may be demoralising and a waste of talent for the host country. For those individuals who leave the ethnic economy, the visible differences of refugee groups may become more significant in the wider labour market with the potential for discrimination (Colic-Peisker & Tibury 2007). Neo-classical approaches to understanding the labour market do not adjust to encompass the significance of racial differences and yet such features may have significant implications for the individual's experiences in the host country.

Wooden (1991) examined refugee employment in Australia. He argued that refugee employment probabilities were close to 20 percentage points lower than other comparable non refugees, but that these differences were not the result of discrimination but rather a consequence of the relatively poor English skills of the individuals. As already discussed, where communication is a significant key skill in the UK, a lack of communication skills is a particular disadvantage for individuals in similar situations. In contrast a more recent study by Colic-Peisker & Tibury (2007), also in Australia, found experiences of discrimination. Through working with refugees whose formal skills and English were at least functional, they were able to compensate for an absence of communication skills by choosing the most highly skilled individuals of the population. Colic-Peisker & Tibury (2007) examined the significance of 'visible differences' on refugee integration into the mainstream labour market and found that their three different groups had different outcomes, despite compensating for language abilities. Their evidence supports a 'political economy of labour migration' interpretation for the different experiences being "based on both structural and interpersonal racism" (Colic-Peisker & Tibury 2007: 59). Although Australia may be a

more racialised society than the UK (Hage 1998), and therefore provide a more extreme example of discrimination, it would be fair to argue that some discrimination may be present based on an individual's background, or perhaps their accent, when looking at individuals with similar skills sets in the mainstream labour market¹⁰ (for example Solé & Parella 2003). Certainly some of the Tamil participants believed this to be true. The ethnic economy may offer a way of overcoming such discrimination.

In the wider market, refugee women may also have less access to employment opportunities than refugee men. This is a consequence of barriers more specific to women such as childcare responsibilities (Bloch 2004), again a feature other immigrant groups may experience. Franz (2003b), in her study of Bosnian refugees in Austria and the USA, found that men did not appear to adapt as quickly as women to restrictions in the labour market and the loss of their social status in the host society. She argues that, in general, men focused on the losses they had experienced; for example, belongings, the war and other misfortunes they had had. Women, however, emphasized their families as their main source of motivation and stimulus for their struggle to improve their socioeconomic position in their new society. These gendered differences in expectations and underlying emotions around their experiences, are significant in the ways in which they eventually enter the labour market. For example, women may focus on supporting their family before pursuing their own employment opportunities. This was certainly true for several Tamil women. Such a focus may limit integration through employment, as the type of work being carried out may be in positions in the ethnic economy which provide less opportunity to meet other people from wider societies. This erects barriers to the employment and integration possibilities individuals experience.

Crewe (1992) illustrated some of the initial barriers Vietnamese refugees experienced, whether real or perceived, when attempting to change jobs in Nottingham. Among them were: poor English, lack of skills, a lack of childcare support, elderly relatives to care for and lack of knowledge of how to find desired jobs. Of particular significance here is the lack of childcare support. This influences the employment opportunities available particularly to women, as they need to be able to work around their childcare

¹⁰ It is also important to recognise that some members of host societies may consider refugees to be more 'legitimate' than some economic migrants, therefore potentially reducing the discrimination experienced by some refugees.

responsibilities. Furthermore refugees may lack confidence, and have an immediate need to earn money. The London experience may be significantly different due to the extended familial or social networks which may help lessen such barriers through access to the ethnic community. However, many of these barriers, particularly poor English, still remain. Alongside this, asylum seekers frequently arrive in the UK without evidence of their qualifications, skills and previous experience. Having had to flee suddenly from their countries of origin (Phillimore & Goodson 2006). It is therefore not surprising that many individuals who had obtained skills prior to coming to the UK were likely to be working in occupations that do not, for the most part, reflect their level of attainment (Bloch 2004). Skills gained or developed after entering the UK may have a larger impact on improving the likelihood of appropriate employment. This could be because firstly, the refugee's English language skills are likely to be higher, enabling them to meet the English requirements to study in the UK. Secondly, employers may be more comfortable employing individuals with UK experience and education as employers have a greater understanding of what that experience entailed, and the refugee then has evidence of their achievements. Finally, through having studied in the UK, individuals may have established support networks from and through the institutions where they worked, to enable them to have a greater understanding of the UK labour market. As mentioned earlier, a better understanding of the mainstream labour market may differentiate the experience between economic migrants and refugees, particularly prior to arrival in the UK. These features contribute to making the ethnic economy a more attractive option.

6. Summary

This chapter has established a broad framework for this thesis based within the context of integration as a key policy objective related to the resettlement of refugees. It has established the importance of identity as a refugee, and the complexities of labelling someone as a 'refugee'. This has led in to an interpretation of how identities are performed and the impact this may have upon the everyday lives of individuals. In discussing the utilisation of skills the significance of social capital has been analysed drawing attention to the importance of the ethnic community and economy. This has been built upon through a discussion of integration, focusing upon ideas of transactions and gratitude before analysing refugees, skills and integration through employment simultaneously. This framework provides the basis for the discussion in the following

chapters. Five key concepts have emerged from this chapter, those of success, gender, coping strategies, gratitude and integration. These concepts have significance in the subsequent analysis chapters, and are brought together through a return to individual cases in Chapter Nine. The next chapter discusses the methods used to research these ideas.

CHAPTER THREE

Methods and working with ‘potentially vulnerable’ people

1. Introducing ‘potentially vulnerable’ people

Research with refugees has often constructed forced migrants as vulnerable individuals. Although recently researchers have gone some way to rectify their assessment of individuals, there remains a tendency, at least in the UK, to emphasise refugees as passive victims of persecution: this is partly in response to the emphasis of the UK’s moral responsibility towards refugees. Yet “refugees are not passive victims in an abnormal state of being, rather they are active agents who are able to develop strategies and thus still function socially” (Brun 2001: 18). Like anybody else, despite their experiences, refugees are capable, active individuals who can challenge dominant structures and create new ways of being. It is important, however, to recognise that ethically refugees have perhaps greater potential to be vulnerable within the research setting. Consequently it is necessary to consider the areas where individuals may feel more exposed to distress and for the researcher to prepare to avoid this. The emotive term of ‘refugee’ should be recognised, accepting that refugees are not “to be pitied, be on the end of a ‘charity approach’ or be labelled as ‘vulnerable’ or a ‘victim’” (Baycan 2003: 22). The way in which refugees are understood affects how they are approached within research. It is important that the term ‘refugee’ is defined in relation not only to how the Home Office constructs it, but also as to how refugee communities perceive the definition. From this perspective this chapter discusses the methods and extends the research design introduced in Chapter Two.

2. Research design

As the previous two chapters have indicated this thesis examines the intersection between refugees, skills and integration through employment. It aims to inform refugee and forced migration and immigrant entrepreneur studies, by developing a greater understanding of UK refugee settlement and the utilisation of their skills in the labour market. This research sees refugees as resourceful individuals who do not have the

same opportunities as others to reach the potential they may desire in their host country. Within an agenda of integration through employment, an understanding of how individuals experience the use of their skills and what employment ambitions they have, it is possible to move towards considering the support individuals need to achieve their ambitions. Consequently this thesis seeks information on: the skills Tamil refugees have, how they utilise their skills; the human and social capital factors which influence the utilisation of their skills and the employment experiences individuals have; and, finally, the barriers that influence the utilisation of skills and the integration of individuals.

In order to investigate the aims and the objectives of this thesis, a case study approach was adopted. Case studies are generally the preferred approach “when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (Yin 2002: 1). Here the research investigates the contemporary phenomenon of everyday Tamil refugee employment experiences asking ‘how’ refugee skills are being utilised within the framework of integration through employment and ‘why’ full utilisation may not occur (Yin 2002). This is a situation in which the investigator has little control. A case study approach is therefore an appropriate methodology as this research “aims to explore and depict a setting with a view to advancing understanding of it” (Cousin 2005: 421). Following Bassey’s (1999) ethic of caution, this case study aspires to make ‘fuzzy generalisations’ which assert that everything is a matter of degree, and nothing is certain. Therefore the generalisations are predicted in terms of ‘may’ rather than ‘will’ (Cousin 2005). This study aims to question the tensions and experiences that participants faced in attempting to utilise their skills in the UK (Stake 1995).

Issues of cross cultural research with people of different cultural heritages, backgrounds and practices need to be considered (Skelton 2001). Within the increasingly globalised research agenda, the debate on insider/outsider positioning needs to be revisited to include an explicit focus on transnational/transborder feminist praxis (Staeheli & Lawson 1994). This requires adopting a methodology across cultures that

“acknowledges, respects and works with difference; recognizes and takes responsibility for differential power relations that may exist between the researcher and those participating in the research” (Skelton 2001: 90).

My being white and born in a country which is a former colonial power may impact upon the relationships that can be established during the research with Tamils (Skelton

2001). Inevitably power imbalances between the researcher and the researched occur, especially between Western (-trained) scholars and researching people from the 'Third World' (Miraftab 2004). The cathartic potential of an interview compensates for some of the power relations ingrained in the research process by empowering the researched. This is particularly so in the case of refugees. The process of the in-depth interview may help individuals 'open up' and come to terms with some of their experiences. However, this is unlikely to be the case for all who take part, and power relationships inevitably still remain as the researcher continues, in general, to choose who and what is to be researched (Goss 1996). Many of the ideas behind this thesis were decided before Tamils were chosen as the study group. As explained in Chapter One, Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka were chosen as an appropriate group for this study because they meet certain key criteria. The Tamil refugees who participated in this research, therefore lacked a voice in deciding what *should* be researched. Despite the lack of consultation with the formation of the research design, the overarching ethical position taken here is that this research is *with* refugees rather than being *for*, or *on* refugees (Hynes 2003). The individuals who participated within this research are the people who own the knowledge, as a researcher I act to interpret their voices through wider frameworks. This may be recognised in general through the use of the exact words of the refugees. This allows the reader to hear the voices of the refugees alongside the interpretation of what this means within the broader context. Yet as a researcher I have an obligation to render the respondents comprehensible to the reader, so in a few places it was necessary to interpret phrases in context of what I have learnt about the Tamil community and individual views, rather than necessarily the exact words used.

3. Methods

The method adopted entailed a 'flexible' approach towards working with the Tamil community (Bloch 1999). To address the aims of the research, predominantly qualitative methods were used to consider the "multiplicity of meanings, representations and practices" (Smith 2001: 24) that refugees experience. This included interviews and questionnaires¹. In-depth interviews were employed, creating a "conversation with a purpose" (Dexter 1970: 136) about the participants' own experiences of employment and the use of their skills in the UK. Questionnaires were used to provide context to the interviews, and to access participants in addition to those found through contacts

¹ It was never anticipated that the questionnaire would provide a sample great enough for statistical analysis.

established with gatekeepers. A sample of Tamil male and female refugees of working age (18-65) were approached.

Questionnaire: accessing wider groups

Given the limitations of the questionnaire method to collect in-depth information for research such as this, the questionnaire was designed to provide contextual information from a small number of responses and to access individuals outside of the Tamil community networks accessed through gatekeepers (discussed below). As Chapter One mentioned, this research aims to talk to people who have experienced an underutilisation of their skills *and* those who have positive stories. I also wished to work with Tamil refugees who had less contact with the wider Tamil community, since community ties may affect people's experiences. The participants were therefore identified through different networks and the postal questionnaire, to avoid an over-dependence on one refugee network with similar experiences (Bloch 1999; Castles *et al.* 2002).

The content of the self-completion questionnaire (Appendix Two) focused on Objective 1 (to investigate the skills of the Tamil refugee community in London and the level of utilisation of these skills), gathering factual data on Tamil skills and previous employment in Sri Lanka, their former education, the number of months of English-language training received in the UK, the number of months of training or education obtained in the UK, their current employment status in the UK, and extent of utilisation of their skills. The questionnaire specifically addressed English language as a skill (Pendakur & Pendakur 1997). This followed Lamba's (2003) research which found that knowledge of both official languages in Canada (English and French) acted as a valuable form of human capital for refugees. The questionnaire contributed towards investigating the skill levels of Tamils in London and the level of utilisation of these skills, and included an examination of the cross-cutting themes alongside providing a tool to identify potential interviewees.

The questionnaire was sent out in English and in Tamil² to approximately six hundred Tamils in London. Two main methods were used to identify participants: 1) different community gatekeepers and 2) the telephone book (to include individuals who have no

² Siva Pillai (one of the gatekeepers, see below) was employed to translate the questionnaire under consultation with myself. Siva is a professional teacher of Tamil in the UK.

contact with community gatekeepers) (Castles *et al.* 2002). From the telephone book, a list of Tamil names and addresses was compiled. Approximately five hundred questionnaires were sent out through this database, with a further fifty disseminated through the London Tamil Sangam³. Alongside this each of the twenty-six interviewees were also given a questionnaire with a stamped addressed envelope. The questionnaires were sent out after ten interviews had been conducted, and followed by the remaining interviews. The construction of questionnaire was based on the information collected in the interviews and contained a filter question identifying participants as refugees for further possible interviews.

The success of the questionnaire was limited. In total thirty-two questionnaires were returned by Tamils, a response rate of 5.3 percent. Twenty-six of these were from people who had received the postal questionnaire and six were from the interviewees. The information contained in the questionnaires returned by interviewees is dealt with separately from the questionnaire findings themselves. None of the postal questionnaire respondents wished to participate further in the research. The low response rate is likely to be a result of three main things. Firstly, the dominant sampling framework using the telephone directory on the basis of potentially Sri Lankan Tamil surnames was limited as names thought to be common to Tamils, were not exclusive to them: some of the people who received the questionnaire were therefore neither Tamil, nor refugees. Secondly, the length of the questionnaire may have limited response rates. All the questionnaire questions were, however, deemed necessary in order to access the information required to make a small number of responses useful. Thirdly, some of the potential participants may not have considered themselves to be refugees⁴. Fortunately the findings of the questionnaire had never been envisaged as representative in any way of the Tamil community, nevertheless the thirty-two responses did supply sufficient material to provide a useful context to the more detailed in-depth interviews. These contextual findings are analysed in Chapter Six.

³ The London Tamil Sangam is a registered charity, an ethnic minority organisation in East Ham, Newham.

⁴ I did receive approximately five more responses stating that they were not eligible to complete the questionnaire. One respondent was particularly insulted at having been sent the questionnaire at all. It is possible such responses were not uncommon given the number of questionnaires which were never returned.

In-depth interviews

Objective 2, to examine the human and social capital factors influencing the use or lack of use of the skills within the Tamil refugee community, and Objective 3, to explore the concept of integration through employment in the light of a comprehension of the everyday experiences of Tamil refugees, concern the tactics and strategies that refugees use with regard to their skills and networks. Interviews were conducted with twenty-six Tamil refugee participants (thirteen males, and thirteen females) of working age in London⁵. These interviews ranged from fifteen minutes in duration to two hours depending upon the background experience of the individual and their interest in the topic.

The participants were illustrative of the range of different people in the broader Tamil refugee community. They ranged in age from young adults (early 20) to people in their mid-50s. The female participants stretched this age range, with the oldest male participants being in their mid-40s. Given that refugees are generally drawn from the younger adult population of their country of origin and the Tamil refugee community in London has been building since the mid-1980s it seems reasonable to assume that the age range of the participants is broadly similar to the Tamil refugee community as a whole. The participants came to the UK in a variety of ways, with six of them claiming asylum in another EU country before moving to Britain. The majority of the participants were Hindu, with some practicing Christianity. This is indicative of the proportions of Tamils who categorise themselves in these different religious groups in Sri Lanka (Ross & Savada 1988); however, there is also a minority Muslim population in Sri Lanka who are not present in the group interviewed. The participants were relatively highly educated in comparison to the Sri Lankan population where only 10.6 percent have A-level qualifications or above (Department of Census and Statistics 2008). However; this is common of refugee groups in other countries (see Chapters One and Two) and so likely reflects the wider Tamil refugee community. However, in terms of the way the majority of the women who participated in this research became refugees, either alongside or through male relatives, the proportion of women in this group who sought asylum independently is smaller than the wider Sri Lankan asylum population. Whereas on average 30 percent of applicants from Sri Lanka were female between 2001 and 2007, among the participants only 13 percent of the individuals who applied for asylum independently were women.

⁵ A further seventeen interviews were conducted with elite contacts.

The main aim of the interviews was to evoke narratives of Tamil refugee experiences of employment, skill use, and integration in the UK. The interviews with the refugees were semi-structured and the questions concerned the nuances of their experiences as well as investigating the individual skill level and type of skills being used, the perceptions of the refugees of their current place in the UK labour market, and their adaptations and development of skills in the UK. The interviews addressed the second research objective by examining how the utilisation of refugee skills varies over time, a form of biographical approach. In the interviews this requires discussing with individuals what employment they have had since arriving in the UK and after they first received refugee status, followed by how their opportunities had changed, if they had at all. Therefore the Tamil refugees spoken to had generally been in the UK for five years or more⁶. The focus was on their qualifications and experience, their expectations and perceptions, and their experiences of the labour market: in Sri Lanka, on arrival and at the time of the interview, and the way in which they manage their employment or lack of it. The interview then looked in more detail at the networks and people involved in assisting them find work. This provided the interviewee with the opportunity to discuss the networks and social capital involved in accessing their employment thoroughly. The third research objective was addressed in the interviews by analysing the underlying factors influencing individual experiences or the comments that Tamil refugees made. In a quantitative study using multiple regression analysis, Lamba (2003) found that refugees' performance in the Canadian labour market was largely not determined by their prior education or work experience, or by additional human capital acquired in Canada. Therefore it was important also to examine the possible other barriers preventing full utilisation of refugee skills in the UK. The major factor normally accounted for as preventing the full utilisation of refugee skills is language (Hurstfield 2004; Sloane & Gazioglu 1996; Strand 1984). English language was considered as a skill in itself and people were generally selected on the basis of their having English skills. Respondents were asked about their perception of integration and the way in which they consider barriers to influence their life chances.

As already stated, the questionnaire failed to produce any further participants for interview. The twenty-six refugee interviewees were identified through gatekeepers,

⁶ Savita and Ravi were the only exceptions to this. Savita had arrived about a year before the research. However as she spoke English and was currently employed to a reasonable level, her experience illustrates how length of time in the UK is not necessarily a defining factor as to whether an individual may be utilising their skills. In contrast, Ravi has low English abilities and at the time of interview worked in a local factory.

snowballing from interviews and general word of mouth within the community. The majority of interviewees were originally from Jaffna or Colombo descended from Tamils who had been in Sri Lanka for many centuries. Those refugees who wished to take part in the study were verbally provided with information on the purpose of research, including an introduction about myself and the project more broadly, and informed consent obtained. It was clearly stated that they could withdraw at any time (all completed the interview in full). These participants, as already stated, were also asked to complete the questionnaire.

The majority of the interviews were recorded on a Dictaphone and then transcribed in full. Three interviews in London were not recorded: one with a refugee participant: Rohak – who did not wish to be recorded. In two other cases with Thooyan and Siva the conversation was more informal and was not recorded (Appendix Three lists the interview participants by pseudonyms to preserve anonymity). Appendix Four illustrates the range of topics covered in the interviews. The interviews with refugees were generally more structured as illustrated in Appendix Four, whereas the interviews with the elite contacts were more flexible.

Refugee participants may have experienced some vulnerability through their experiences with UK officialdom. Therefore asking them to sign a consent form is likely to cause unnecessary distress and concern. Instead I talked thorough the detail of the project with participants and made it clear that they could withdraw from the interview at any time, and that it was the interviewee's decision as to what was discussed, with no pressure put on them to answer any questions. At this point I also presented the interviewee with a business card embossed with the university logo to provide evidence of who I was. If I noticed any distress I further emphasised that participants could withdraw at any time. None of the interviewees who started the interview withdrew, however several people who initially said that they were willing to partake did not attend the arranged meeting. Participants were guaranteed anonymity. From the first contact with possible participants in the research, they have been identified through pseudonyms. Therefore all documents storing their interview transcripts or comments are identified using pseudonyms. However, as not all research participants desire anonymity (Grinyer 2002), it was made clear to the interviewees that they would be given anonymity unless they wished to be named.

Research can be read through the frame of “power and knowledge: the ability to dominate people, things and events at a distance, and the ability to see the world in new ways” (Hanson & Pratt 1995: 82). Qualitative data provides greater depth to the knowledge participants may provide researchers. However, considering the sensitive and sometimes traumatic experiences of refugees, sensitivity is required. Through asking participants what barriers they perceived to be affecting their utilisation of skills, it was possible for them to identify the trauma and psychological distress experienced when seeking asylum. In order to reduce the risk of distress in the interview it was made clear at the beginning of the interview that they did not need to discuss the reasons why they sought refuge. However, if they still chose to discuss those experiences, this may have been because they gained a cathartic experience from the opportunity. Interviews probe experiences. It is important to allow the participant to discuss issues important to them, providing them with an opportunity to unburden themselves, as the researcher bears witness to their experiences. The refugee interviewees were asked about themselves rather than about actions within the wider community, however they sometimes also reflected on more general Tamil issues at times. Furthermore other considerations were necessary given the topic under discussion. In conversing about employment it was possible that some individuals could have been involved in illegal work. Alongside this the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)⁷, has a large base of transnational connections in which it is possible some of the participants were involved. As the researcher has a legal responsibility to report illegal activity, it was decided that if I was in danger of learning of such experiences, people would be asked to talk about general examples rather than specific experiences or to anonymise themselves.

Translation

Despite a selection criterion searching for individuals with abilities in English, inevitably some of the participants were not comfortable speaking English to me. Consequently translators were used for five interviews. Table 3.1 provides a list of the participants and highlights those interviews where translators were necessary. The interpreter used in the London interviews was the same for each interview - a male from the Newham United Tamil Association, apart from Kayla who used her son to translate anything she did not understand.

⁷ The UK government considers the LTTE to be a terrorist organisation.

Table 3.1: List of refugee interviewees in London

Female Refugees	Male Refugees
<i>Bimala</i> <i>Chitralkha</i> <i>Dhanya</i> <i>Elisai</i> <i>Harita*</i> male employee at NUTA <i>Jayani</i> <i>Kayal</i> <i>Maina*</i> her son <i>Mala</i> <i>Paavarasi</i> <i>Parinita</i> <i>Pragya*</i> male employee at NUTA <i>Savita</i>	<i>Bhaskar</i> <i>Caleb*</i> male employee at NUTA <i>Jwalia</i> <i>Khush</i> <i>Kiran</i> <i>Madhu</i> <i>Mudita*</i> male employee at NUTA <i>Ponmudi</i> <i>Ravi*</i> male employee at NUTA <i>Rohak</i> <i>Rustam</i> <i>Tanay</i> <i>Trinabh</i>

Note: Pseudonyms in italics. The interviews where translators were used are marked with a *, and the translator is stated. NUTA = Newham United Tamil Association.

These interviews were *with*⁸ rather than *through* interpreters, therefore their role should be critically evaluated (Edwards 1998). Three main issues were raised in using a translator. Firstly, deciding when the responses should be translated, for example, as the interview progressed or at a later point; secondly what is translated, for example, a verbatim account of the exact words of what is said, or a general impression of the information given; thirdly, the information that is given to the translator and the extent to which they are included within the entire project. As Temple & Young (2004: 174) point out: “the choice of when and how to translate is in part determined by the resources available to the researcher.” Ideally the translator should be included within the duration of the project and particularly the analysis of the data (Temple 1997). However, given the limited resources for this project this was not possible. The main interpreter for the four interviews highlighted was, himself a member of the Tamil community. He was not a professional interpreter but worked in a Tamil organisation. He was a friend or acquaintance of each of the interviewees, but he was also in a position of power in relation to the individuals. In the past he had helped them find work through the organisation. As a male interpreter, his presence may have affected the willingness of some of the interviewees to discuss certain experiences; this is recognised within the analysis of the data. I talked to him about the project and what the research was interested in, he then translated the general overview of what the interviewee was saying. He translated in the third person to make visible the role of the translator within the analysis (Edwards 1998). In working with this group of

⁸ The translator is acknowledged as being a participant in the information given by the interviewee - they are not passive vessels through which information flows, interpreters affect the conversation.

individuals, who have a background in English from Sri Lanka, the translator's role was slightly different from interviewing people who have no knowledge of English. In general the participants understood what I was asking, however they lacked confidence in speaking English. The translator acted to assist them in what they wished to say in response to the questions. Although only five individuals of the twenty-six interviewed required a translator, the level of English ability of the others varied significantly. There is a danger in presenting information as if individuals are fluent English speakers. This research attempts to avoid this (Temple & Young 2004).

Positionality and gatekeepers: accessing research participants

As a white, middle-class woman from a university, who had never been to London for more than an overnight visit, my own positionality constructed me as an 'outsider' to the Tamil community; as such there was some level of difficulty in gaining the trust of refugee participants, as well as some Tamil organisations. As an outsider to the community, I may have noticed everyday practices, behaviours and language that structure the experiences of the refugees in the labour market that someone more socialised to the setting of the Tamil community may not. However, it is also important to consider how who I am might have affected the interviews. For example, whereas most of the interviews with refugees in London took place at neutral locations, such as the London Tamil Sangam, a school in Lewisham and the Newham United Tamil Association, two participants invited me as a young single woman into their homes. It was remarked upon by research participants that single men would not invite me to their homes, but family men most likely would.

It is clear therefore that my positionality in some instances gave me access to individuals in a way that may have not been possible for someone else. To address issues of positionality in terms of accessing the community, initially I worked with a variety of different community gatekeepers. Table 3.2 provides a list of the elite interviewees and contacts. Asterisks are placed next to those who also acted as gatekeepers (all of the elite interviewees are marked with an asterisk throughout the remaining thesis). Four individuals were key gatekeepers who introduced me to several of the refugee participants, all of whom, bar Siva, were also formally interviewed. Siva acted as the written translator for the questionnaire. Kibru was the manager of a Tamil community organisation, a refugee himself, but from Ethiopia originally. Kibru introduced me to two of the women who worked at the centre and invited me to

community events at the centre. Mangai was the manager the London Tamil Sangam which ran English classes and other short courses specifically for Tamil women. Mangai also helpfully distributed some of the questionnaires for me. Paul is a councillor for Newham. He knew many of the local people, and because of his position of authority many people felt they should talk to me when he asked them to. Consequently, in order to avoid individuals feeling obliged or coerced into meeting with me, I always arranged to meet potential interviewees at another place on another day: therefore providing them with the opportunity to choose not to partake in the research if they so wished. The other elite interviewees were from a variety of different backgrounds, generally Tamil (Nalan, Thooyan, Varad, Kovalan) or refugee organisations (Thomas, Sarah), or a privileged position in Tamil society, such as Zarine (a Tamil immigration solicitor) and Paul. The majority of these interviewees have been given pseudonyms to help preserve their anonymity. However, for others, given their specific role their real names were kept with their permission. Some of these elite contacts were also refugees and/or Tamils themselves (identified by ^R next to their names for refugees and ^T for Tamils). They have been placed within the 'elite' contact category on the basis that they hold some form of managerial position within Tamil organisations and have been in the UK for over a decade.

The types of questions asked of the elite interviewees were slightly different from those with the refugees. The interviews with the Tamil community elite particularly addressed the third research objective by talking about their opinions of the barriers influencing the utilisation of skills and the integration of individuals. Interviewees were asked to reflect on the experiences of Tamil refugees, providing a more general view. These interviewees provide context and broader narratives over the experiences of Tamil refugees in the UK. Translators were not used for any of the seventeen interviews with elite participants.

When working with 'potentially vulnerable' people and in ethical practice in general, it is important that individuals need "honest self-appraisal over motives, definitions, interpretations and accountability plateaus" (Teariki 1992: 86). An English information sheet (Appendix Five) was given to potential gatekeepers. Here it is clearly acknowledged that this research was being carried out to obtain a PhD and that sections of the research will form the basis for the presentation of conference papers, publications written for a wider audience of practitioners and those interested in refugee

matters. Emphasis is placed on the potential public and policy implications with the aim to better inform policy makers about refugees' transition to the labour market.

Table 3.2: Elite interviewees and key gatekeepers

Elite interviewees and contacts	Organisation or position
Danny Sriskandarajah ^T <i>Thomas</i> <i>Japesh^{TR} and Zarine</i> Kibru ^{*R} <i>Kaaviya^T</i> <i>Mangai^{*T}</i> <i>Meyyan^{RT}</i> <i>Nalan^{RT}</i> <i>Eric</i> Paul Sathianesan ^{*RT} <i>Rishi^T</i> <i>Sarah</i> <i>Varad^{RT} and Kovalan^{RT}</i> Siva Pillai ^{*T} <i>Ellen</i> <i>Thooyan^{RT}</i> <i>Semmal^{RT}</i>	Institute for Public Policy Research Refugee Council Policy Advisor Tamil solicitor and friend Tamil Relief Centre Manager Tamil Relief Centre Employee London Tamil Sangam Manager White Pigeon and Freeman of London South London Tamil Welfare Group Refugee Council Tamil Labour Councillor Researcher: Refugee Belonging Exhibition Employability Forum Tamil Community Housing Association Goldsmiths College Teacher of Tamil LORECA Employee Harrow Refugee Forum Chair of the Tamil Action Committee

*The key gatekeepers. ^RRefugee. ^TTamil. Note: names in italics are pseudonyms.

4. Analysing the data

The epistemology of the research dictated which analytical methods were chosen. For this project forms of grounded methods were used to interpret the transcripts attempting to allow the data to structure the constructs rather than a prior imposition of ideas by the researcher (Bailey *et al.* 2004). As already discussed, this research had pre-determined objectives, and as such, these inevitably influence the research design and analysis. However, through the different periods of data collection⁹, attempts have been made to allow the research to inform the focus of the analysis and to question the researcher's assumptions.

Analytical themes

The interview data was analysed using NVivo, drawing on the relationships between refugees, skills and integration through employment to contextualise findings. The use of this programme within the conceptual framework helped to create a rigorous analysis of the data that produces a strategic and systematic understanding. The two cross-cutting analytical themes – a) to analyse what is deemed the successful utilisation of

⁹ The *ESRC Overseas Institutional Visit* to Montreal allowed further reflection on the analysis.

skills of Tamil refugees by the Tamil community and Tamil refugees, and the barriers which prevent success; b) to analyse the influence of gender and on the utilisation of Tamil refugee skills in the UK – are used to examine the information provided by the participants. The first cross-cutting theme emerged from the research, an inductive approach; whereas the second theme was deductive. The first theme concentrates on the significance of the participants' perceptions of success within their employment experiences. This theme examines what is important to the individual refugee within and alongside community perceptions of success. It is argued that it is necessary to comprehend the ambitions of the individual in order to understand the importance of the utilisation of skills they are experiencing. At the same time, success cannot be understood without comprehending the barriers preventing individuals from achieving their aims. This acknowledges the limitations of the individuals alongside the more structural barriers refugees face.

The second analytical theme, of the influence of gender upon skill utilisation, informed the structure of the interviews. Within the interviews it was acknowledged that neither 'gender' nor 'refugee' is a homogenous category: universalising examples "undermines the diversity in experience amongst them" (Baycan 2003: 23). Gender is considered in a more nuanced way, rather than simplistic male and female differences. Gender differences were not specifically asked about, however, the analysis of the interviews is underlain with an awareness of gender. To avoid categorisation the focus is upon the life course. Gendered issues are recognised through the types of questions asked and the information given by males and females.

The analysis is based within the context of the literature on how immigrants generally enter the UK labour market in comparison to refugees. As discussed in Chapter Two, this is an important area of consideration. It is necessary to acknowledge the uniqueness of the refugee experience as opposed to other immigrant groups. The interview questions around this theme concentrated on the expectations of Tamil refugees of their potential in the UK, and their experiences of integration policy and of being classified as a 'refugee'. Whereas for immigrant groups the choice of employment may be related to an occupation they intend to return to in their country of origin, the 'myth of return' (White 2001) may or may not be alive in refugees, and therefore this might affect the work they have chosen to undertake. The traumatic experience of seeking refugee status may have an impact on the type of work

individuals wish to do: for example, they may want to 'start afresh' with something different, or they may seek something that is familiar, depending upon their personalities.

Specific analytical approaches

Within the broader analytical themes there are three specific analytical approaches which should be discussed in greater depth: firstly, how the questionnaire responses were analysed; secondly, the distinction between refugee participants and elite groups; and thirdly, the analysis of the skills individuals possessed. The questionnaire data was inputted into an Excel spreadsheet. The information was analysed for the overall patterns it provided, leading to a simple count of, for example, different qualifications, skills and employment experiences. Chapter Six summarises the findings from the questionnaire data.

In the following analysis chapters a distinction is made between elite interviewees and refugee interviewees¹⁰. However, as stated above, this distinction is fluid as several of the elite contacts could also be considered to be refugees. Individuals who also possess an identity as refugees, but were classified as elites for this research, were organized in this way because of their privileged position from which to comment on Tamil society and the experiences of Tamil refugees. But also they are self-classified as elites by their topics of conversation and the angle from which they did this. This is not to say that the individuals without 'elite' status within this research (could not or) did not discuss general Tamil experiences. Rather that those individuals who are refugees and elite contacts arrived at a different time period and mostly discussed the experiences of the many Tamil refugees they had had contact with, instead of focusing upon their personal experiences.

Finally, in addressing Objective 1 it was important to provide information on the specific skills individual refugee participants possessed. In order to do this, tables were compiled based on a classification of different types of skills (Appendix Six and Seven). This classification was adapted by the University of Washington (2007) from Fine (no date) and Bolles (1994). The information provided in the interview was used as evidence to support whether individuals had each of the different skills and a list of the skills the individual had was created. This analytical tool was used to provide an

¹⁰ Elite interviewees are identified by an asterisk in the remaining chapters.

indication of the variety of different skills within the group of Tamil participants based on the evidence I had available. This may not be a definitive list: the interviewees may have a variety of further skills not identified here. These lists concentrate on the skills that were identified within the interview, their previous work experience, qualifications and wider pursuits.

5. Conclusion: feeding back meaningful research

This chapter has discussed the specific methods of this thesis used within an ethical framework. As Valentine-Daniel & Knudsen (1995: 5) argue: “information provided by the refugee must not only *not* be used to oppress, but if trust is to be restored, it must also be rendered meaningful.” Therefore a ‘principle of reciprocity and feedback’ (Smith 2002: 15) has been adopted. Feedback will occur after submission with the cooperation of one of my contacts and gatekeepers, Siva Pillai. A knowledge transfer plan has been produced to feedback the research findings to the wider Tamil community. This involves a planned article for a Tamil newspaper which Siva has offered to translate into Tamil. The organisations that supported the research will be sent a summary of the research findings, along with any of the refugee participants who have expressed an interest to see this. This research seeks to contribute to knowledge about the experiences of Tamil refugees in the UK. It discusses integration through employment and argues how the Sri Lankan population cannot be treated as one group; there are distinct differences within and between ethnic communities. The next chapter examines the nature of Tamil society in the diaspora.

CHAPTER FOUR

Tamil society and the diaspora

1. Tamil society

The Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora consists of up to 800,000 people spread throughout the world; around one in every four Sri Lankan Tamils now lives outside the island (Orjuela & Sriskandarajah 2008). The majority of these people migrated since the mid-1980s as a consequence of the civil war¹. The conflict continues due to the calls of many for the creation of a separate Tamil nation: Eelam. This chapter examines the workings of Tamil society beginning with an explanation of what it means to be a Tamil refugee. Here the relationship between Tamil refugees and Tamil society is discussed in depth, a theme which is touched upon in the rest of the thesis. The construction and practice of this relationship within the everyday lives of individuals is an important factor influencing many things from community perceptions of skills to how integration through employment is experienced.

This chapter draws a picture of Tamil society by examining the substructure and elements that drive it, highlighting the potential contribution of social theory to a comprehension of Tamil refugees. The unity of Tamils within the UK has significant impacts upon the ways in which Tamil refugees experience the host country, including employment and skill utilisation. This chapter draws particularly on the work of Fuglerud (1999; 2001); Fuglerud & Engebriksen (2006); Sriskandarajah (2004; 2005); Valentine-Daniel & Knudsen (1995); Valentine-Daniel & Thangaraj (1995); Valentine-Daniel (1996); Van Hear (2004) and Van Hear & Rajasingham-Senanayake (2006). Three main factors emerge as significant for understanding Tamil society, and more specifically Tamil refugee society. The following account is structured around identity as a Tamil refugee, pre-migration features and post migration society. As Sriskandarajah (2004: 500) argues, the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora “is a complex social formation that has been shaped by pre-migratory experiences, the process of migration

¹ The Sri Lankan civil war, predominantly been between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), has been ongoing since July 1983. The LTTE are a separatist group who desire the independence of ‘Tamil Eelam’ – an area which includes the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka.

and dispersal, the process of adjustment to host societies, the growth of Tamil nationalism, and the hegemony of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as the dominant Tamil political force.” Although the dominance of the LTTE may be exaggerated here – as within this research overt support of the LTTE was more limited in the everyday practices of many individuals – the remaining factors can be seen within the three areas discussed. The ways in which the factors drive the community are influenced by other features such as the importance of family, the social significance of education, and societal structures around gender.

The distinction between pre-migration and post-migratory features implies a simplistic linearity. Migration itself may not be linear, and the effects of migration also exist beyond the migratory path itself. This division, and the complexities within this, are illustrated through the discussion of the processes of migration and especially notions of ‘Tamilness’ in the next section. The reasons why people left Sri Lanka may be crucial to the shape of the diaspora space of interest to this research. Identity as a Tamil may also influence experiences within Sri Lanka and the host country. This section moves beyond the discussion of who is a refugee in Chapter Two, to explore Tamil refugees. Section three examines the pre-migration influences. Specifically the effects of gender, religion, education and class, and caste and village or town of origin upon Tamil society are explored. The fourth section examines the post-migration influences, specifically community and diaspora. Post-migration features may bind the Tamil community in such ways as to encourage certain behaviour amongst members. These driving forces have the potential to effect the UK employment experiences of Tamil refugees.

The notion of ‘drivers’ of the community identifies the features of the society which steer individuals within it, or the community as a whole, to make certain choices. The way in which these driving forces are seen to operate is underlain by a particular conception and understanding of structure and agency. The concepts of structure and agency have been used for many years as a way of looking at, and understanding, the social world (Giddens 1984). The structures and agencies understood within this thesis are more nuanced than those previously conceived in order to aid subtlety in the conception of the influences on Tamil society. The relative importance of ‘structure’ and ‘agency’ varies, as structural forces are a part of every action of human agency. This is the duality of structure whereby structure is implicated in each moment of action, but also all actions reflect on structures. Structure is at the same time both

constraining and enabling. However, conversely, structure is also an 'absent' discourse, 'present' only in moments of interaction through which it is reproduced or changed (Gregory 2000). Refugees may respond in different ways to the opportunities and constraints available to them and the structures implicated in those actions (Healey 2006). Human agency is defined as "the ability to act" (Valentine 2001: 349). Structural forces are complex to define; they relate to the hegemonic discourses and culture of a society, and work to steer particular behaviour by the individual or the community as a whole. The drivers of the Tamil community may be interpreted through this lens of structures and agency. Ideas around the subject and choice add another dimension. The individual is socially produced and multi-positioned, neither determined, nor free, and both simultaneously (Jones 1997). These theoretical concepts are drawn upon to help interpret Tamil society in London.

2. Tamil refugees

The diasporic identities of Tamils around the world are unique and complex. Identification as a refugee adds a further dimension to notions of 'Tamilness'. Identity as a refugee is not just a part of the lives of individuals who meet the 1951 United Nations definition. As Chapter Two has argued, such definitions of refugees are more complex than bureaucratic guidelines suggest, particularly around gendered distinctions in asylum. This may also raise interesting questions about the composition of the female Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora. The women who are part of the refugee community are war exiles and/or newly arrived dependents. This may shape the diaspora in a variety of ways, as this thesis goes on to discuss. In considering Tamil refugees in this way, there is an assumption of Tamilness; however, some individuals may be ambivalent to their ethnicity. Yet, the significance of persecution on the basis of ethnicity may surround the wider community and consequently impact upon individuals, even if this is not their personal perspective. Without meaning to reify the concept of Tamilness, Tamil refugee identity is now explored. Individuals may not be understood as simply refugees, they are *Tamil refugees* (Fuglerud 1999).

As Chapter Two illustrated, identity is performed and negotiated. The performances of diasporic identities provide potential sites for exclusionary practices, as may be the case for Tamils experiencing discrimination. This is particularly significant when distinguishing between Tamil refugees and the wider Tamil diaspora. Present refugee migration may not be comprehended properly without taking earlier migration for work

and education into deliberation (Fuglerud 1999). There are connections between Tamil refugees and the wider diaspora, yet they are distinct communities and spaces. Valentine-Daniel (1996), concentrating specifically on Tamil migration from Sri Lanka, considers there to have been three phases of migration: firstly, the Tamil Elite, upper or upper-middle class, upper caste, highly educated Ceylonese migrants in the 1950s. This group included a brain-drain of professionals and of people aiming to advance their education abroad. Some of these individuals began leaving Ceylon after independence, choosing to move particularly to the UK (Van Hear 2004). Secondly, Tamil students migrated to the UK in the 1960s and 1970s. Their educational opportunities had been closed off in Sri Lanka with the introduction of an institutional quota system. This was a more mixed class and caste group who wanted to leave their experiences of discrimination in education and employment (Van Hear 2004). Thirdly, Tamil refugees left Sri Lanka before and after the 1983 anti-Tamil riots (continuing into the present day) as a consequence of the “complex combination of ethnic, nationalist, socio-economic and religious tensions” contributing to the armed conflict (Van Hear & Rajasingham-Senanayake 2006: 46). Initially, for Tamil men, and later Tamil women, the choice was flight from the violence, membership of one of the many militant separatist groups or attempt to become invisible in Sri Lanka’s southern and central cities and villages. Many Tamil youth, who did not leave, joined the armed struggle movements, which recruited forcibly and imposed heavy punishments for perceived disloyalty (Shah 2000; de Silva 2005). Those who were able to leave were often of a similar age, creating a scattered community of one generation (Fuglerud 1999).

Considerable movement of refugees was initially focused towards Tamil Nadu in southern India: however many Tamils sought asylum further away. This wider diaspora grew when the Indian government began returning Tamils to Sri Lanka in the early 1990s (Van Hear & Rajasingham-Senanayake 2006). Many of the individuals originally leaving Sri Lanka in the 1980s were drawn from lower castes and classes than had previously been the case. Yet the first migrants in the 1950s were of a particular high class. Consequently, later refugees were still from higher castes and classes, and generally more skilled, than the wider population. Whilst some of this group received help from members of the Tamil diaspora who had arrived earlier, others were scorned by those already established abroad. These new Tamil asylum seekers were seen to be undermining the status of the earlier Tamil migrants in the host country (Valentine-Daniel & Thangaraj 1995).

Tamil nationalism and the lack of a nation state

For some Tamil refugees the experience of being a part of a discriminated group in Sri Lanka may have created distance between themselves and the nation state: Sri Lankan nationality may not be a feature by which they identify themselves. Semmal* commented how pleased he was that this research was “focusing on how Tamils from Sri Lanka should be recognised as a distinct group rather than categorised as Sri Lankan” (Project Information, Appendix Five). For him, this was a fundamental issue with the way in which Tamils had been categorised and consequently understood in the UK. As a Tamil refugee, he did not see himself as Sri Lankan. For some, Tamilness itself may have greater resonance as a national identity.

Nationalism may be particularly important for refugees, in many circumstances, possibly more important than for the Tamils who left Sri Lanka for other reasons. The choice to leave may be seen as a lack of commitment to the nation (Eelam or Sri Lanka), whereas refugees had no choice in leaving their country. The nature of being refugees and seeking protection from persecution from the government of Sri Lanka may also be a consequence of their political actions in relation to the nation of Eelam. For some, the very nature of the diasporic imaginary has been shaped by a common nationalist identity in exile (Fuglerud 2001). This imagined or ideological ‘feeling’ has great power in uniting the Tamil diaspora as an entity to be reckoned with politically. Nationalism may not be the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: rather it *invents* nations where they did not previously exist (Gellner 1964). The prospect for Eelam depends upon the invention of the nation (Fuglerud 1999).

For Tamils displacement is not just geography; it is also a state of mind (Fuglerud 1999). Within the spaces of the diaspora different nationalisms work to unify or separate individuals, for example linguistic and ethnic nationalisms (Valentine-Daniel 1996). Nationalism draws upon the concept of self-determination with “the right of a group with a distinctive territorial identity to determine its own destiny” (Smith 2000b: 533). However, this right to self-determination can only be achieved if it does not impinge upon the rights of those who do not belong to the nation. In the case of Tamil Eelam, the Sinhalese may argue that this is impinging on their rights to territory given to them by Buddha himself (Fuglerud 2001). Wayland (2004) suggests that Tamil nationalism developed in several stages from the point of Ceylonese independence.

beginning with the lack of response to Tamil demands for political power and leading to a full-fledged secessionist movement.

The lack of a nation state for individuals, either through an inability to feel Sri Lankan or the desire for the state of Tamil Eelam, may lead them to experience a loss of national identity. Within a new country nationality becomes increasingly significant. For some Tamils, whose connection to their national identity is limited, their ethnicity may become more important. Individuals may call upon their ethnicity as a substitute or potentially stronger identifying feature of themselves in the host country than nationality. Cheran (2007) illustrates examples of Tamils who consider themselves to be Canadian-Tamil or Tamil-Canadian. He comments that this creates a 'doubleness' whereby the Tamil diaspora live between two worlds (Cheran 2007). Although individuals have adopted a Canadian nationality, their Tamilness remains engrained within their everyday practices.

'Tamilness'

Significantly, evidence suggests that historically Tamils often had a privileged heritage (Valentine-Daniel & Knudsen 1995). It is the perception of a Tamil heritage rather than a Tamil history which shapes refugee identities. Tamilness may be more complex than simply ethnicity for Tamil refugees. Solidarity and understanding of the experience of persecution in, and exile from, Sri Lanka, emphasises unity within the Tamil community. Yet the collective experience of persecution was not necessarily a unanimous 'enemy'. For some, persecution came at the hands of the Sri Lankan Army, for others the freedom-fighting Liberation Tigers for Tamil Eelam (LTTE) became their tormentors. Consequently even the group experience of persecution is varied. Yet a sense of Tamilness remains. Whitaker (2007) argues that Tamilness became the predominant identity after the collective traumas of 1983 and the resultant war. Identification as Tamils may be a consequence of collective experience.

Identity as Tamils places an emphasis upon difference. Difference from other ethnic and wider communities suggests that an aim of equality within the host society may be impossible (see Chapter Two). Zarine* focuses upon the differences between Tamils and Sinhalese of Sri Lankan origin:

“Sri Lankan Tamils... I don't know why, but compared to Sinhalese of Sri Lankan origin, they [the Sinhalese] adapt easily to this society. But I don't know why the Tamils, they integrate but

then it takes a long time for them to be and adapt to the way of life because of their culture. Why I don't know, but they're all from Sri Lanka, then I thought maybe because the Tamils believe in their culture a lot. They don't change, they have their own culture, but when it comes to Sinhalese, they are very independent people."

Here Zarine* believes Sinhalese migrants settle into UK society more easily than Tamils. She focuses upon the role of culture within this distinction between the two groups. She makes no mention of the wider arguments for the preservation of Tamilness. Difference remains important within a multicultural agenda; it is an essential part of accomplishing a truly varied cosmopolitan community where groups are able to maintain their cultural identities. Yet it is important to continue to be attentive to the potential divisiveness created by an identity politics which focuses upon difference rather than sameness.

The refugee participants in this research rarely talked directly about identity in terms of their Tamilness. Their identity may be tied up in their everyday practices and activities such as work and their children. However, as discussed in subsequent chapters, Tamilness may inflect upon and be a part of these identities in themselves, and the perceptions behind them. The importance of community (Chapter Five) and expectations around gender roles (Chapter Six) are all tied into a vision of Tamilness in some way. The extent to which Tamilness is a part of such identities may vary for the individual and the context. However, Tamilness may still remain a part of these other identities.

Tamilness may be more than the ethnicity of Tamil refugees. The term encompasses a variety of different features of the exile identity. Processes of migration may create a cleavage within the community. Individuals consider themselves to be divided in terms of when they left and for what reason. Those who left as migrants before the more extreme ethnic discrimination and subsequent persecution of Tamils in 1983 may be part of a different community from the refugees who left after 1983. The extent to which any one of these identities is emphasised depends upon the individual and their context. This may be reflected spatially and economically within London. However, as an overarching and intertwining, hidden and visible identity, Tamilness may continue to feature in many forms in the identities individuals perform. The subject and identity are in process, they are constantly forming. Identity continues to be a central focus of the Tamil refugee, yet this construction remains "grounded within the feeling of being a stranger and a suspect in everyday life" (Sanathanan 2008: 1) in the host country.

3. Pre-migration factors

Generic literature on refugees has lacked understanding of the refugees' historical, cultural and socioeconomic experiences (Franz 2003a). The societies from which individuals come and the reasons why they leave may influence the way in which they manage their lives in the host country. Engebrigtsen (2007) uses the conceptual tool of 'cultural scripts' in order to understand the influence of refugee backgrounds. Cultural scripts "denote systems of symbols, structures and processes, localised in what is perceived as one's 'home country', that act as directions and orientations for an individual's adaptation to new environments" (Engebrigtsen 2007: 729). A comprehension of the main features of the pre-migratory society adds a more nuanced perspective of what drives individuals. However, structures or cultural scripts do not have independent existences; they continue only to the extent that individuals reconstruct them through their experiences and performances of the social system (Sarre 1986). Fuglerud (1999) identifies three overarching hierarchical orders in Tamil society: *gender* (as men superior to women), *age* (as the older generation superior to the younger one) and *caste* (as pure superior to impure). These meta-narratives underlie the workings of the society. The 'orders' are more complex than such a typology suggests; nevertheless they provide a useful basis for interpreting the pre-migratory cleavages in the Tamil diaspora along the lines of gender, religion, education and class, caste and village or town of origin (Orjuela & Sriskandarajah 2008).

Gender

Despite Fuglerud's hierarchical order above, it would be too simplistic to refer to gendered relations within Tamil society or Sri Lanka as purely patriarchal. Gender needs to be considered in a more nuanced manner. Speaking more generically, Walby (1990: 21) identifies six patriarchal structures: 1) household: whereby women's household labour is expropriated by their husbands or cohabitants, and their maintenance is received in exchange for her labour; 2) paid work: in which complex forms of patriarchal closure within waged labour exclude women and segregate them into the worst jobs deemed to be less skilled; 3) the state: patriarchal, capitalist and racist, the state is systematically biased towards patriarchal interests in policies and actions; 4) violence: male violence against women is systematically condoned and legitimated by the state's refusal to intervene against it except in exceptional circumstances, for example, rape or domestic violence; 5) sexuality: where two features are prominent:

compulsory heterosexuality and the sexual double standard; and 6) cultural institutions: where a variety of gender differentiated forms of subjectivity are generated. These categories are fluid structures, less rigid than they may appear here.

Traditionally Tamil society is based upon a patriarchal structure whereby the traditional hierarchical traits presuppose that men are superior to women and once married “women are supposed to venerate their husbands as gods” (Fuglerud & Engebretsen 2006: 1129). However, within the wider Sri Lankan context since the late 19th Century onwards, women have gained more democratic rights, and become more involved in education, social organisation, employment opportunities and political rights (Jayawardena 2000). These ‘advances’ do not cover all domains and are a particularly Western interpretation of women’s rights. They are also part of the national context rather than necessarily the experiences of Tamil women, yet they are likely to have influenced Tamil society to some degree, for example, through high levels of female education. For Tamil women in the pre-migration society, three patriarchal structures particularly impact upon them: that of the household, violence and cultural institutions.

The civil war in Sri Lanka has increased the social identities available to Tamil women. Men may be represented as the creators and defenders of the (new) nation and women as the core symbols of the nation’s identity (Schrijvers 1999). ‘Traditional’ discourses conceptualise Sri Lankan Tamil women on the basis of their relationships with men: they are daughters, sisters, wives and mothers, not persons in their own right. The patriarchal structures of the household may maintain Tamil women’s reliance upon their husbands whilst their roles revolve around reproductive labour. The Tamil nation represents this “troubled nexus of women and the nation” (de Silva 2005: 11) whereby the LTTE stress both women’s responsibility to participate in the military and emphasise the crucial importance of women’s reproductive role. In pursuit of encouraging reproduction, family planning services were banned from health departments by the LTTE and women were encouraged to persuade their sons and daughters to fight for the nation whilst producing as many children as possible to expand the nation (Schrijvers 1999).

The state’s power is more prominent within the patriarchal structure of violence. Violence against women is an extreme example of patriarchy, but has long been a means by which authority and control are marked by one ethnic community over

another. An extreme example of this is the systematic violence against women as part of warfare against the LTTE – for example systematic violence against women in the name of nationalism (see de Silva 2005). Moreover, the interest in the nationalist project prevents women from speaking out against other forms of patriarchal repression, such as ‘everyday’ violence from their own men. In research on NGO support to women in Eastern Sri Lanka, evidence suggests the overwhelming need for ethnic communities to “demonize ‘other’ men as doers of violence rather than acknowledge the aggression and violent behaviour” (Ruwanpura 2007: 326) committed by men in their own community. This prevented acceptance and support to those women experiencing such violence within the household. Male members of the community argued that exposure to such violence may bring shame on the community “ignoring the ways in which violence and abuse degrade the moral fibre of community ethics” (Ruwanpura 2007: 328). Consequently patriarchal interests continue to be promoted via ethno-nationalism (Ruwanpura 2007).

Cultural institutions may also constitute patriarchal structures. The consequences of the civil war have resulted in an increase in the number of female-headed households, either as a consequence of death or desertion. As a result of economic deprivation in the Northern and Eastern provinces, male family members left in search of opportunities in urban settings. Over time contact between these men and their families decreased leading to a breakdown of some marriages. Research in Sri Lanka found that non widows were considered to be ‘undeserving’ female heads whereby they are in some way responsible for their troubles; if they had been better wives their husbands would not have left them, or taken to drink and so on (Ruwanpura & Humphries 2004). In contrast, widows were nominated as ‘deserving’ female heads, as their status is not their choice; they are victims of the civil war. Attitudes such as these may work to subjugate women by varying degrees in different situations in the pre-migration society. Yet, the growing number of female headed households in Sri Lanka is likely to continue, increasing matriarchal structures within the private realm. Though unintended consequences of adversity, these women may have gained some semblance of independence and empowerment, albeit hesitantly and apprehensively (Ruwanpura & Humphries 2004).

Religion

The majority of Sri Lankan Tamils may describe themselves as Hindus, with smaller proportions being Muslim and Christian (Ross & Savada 1988). Evidence from Canada suggests, however, that religious identification may only play a secondary role in comparison to the primary badge of ethnic identity (Younger 2008). Hindu temples may still constitute local centres for Tamils (Fuglerud & Engebrigtsen 2006). Hinduism is concerned with place, whereby places possess sacred power to grant health and moral purity to those visiting them (Fuglerud & Engebrigtsen 2006). The importance of the extended family and responsibility towards the family is also part of Hindu doctrine. Consequently, before arriving in the UK, Tamils may have a variety of different obligations towards their family. Obligations to the host country may come low down on an individual's agenda; instead refugees may be grateful to fellow Tamils who have supported them (see Chapter Eight).

Hinduism believes in self determination and responsibility to the collective and the individual. As such, religion may bring together castes. Hence within Tamil society religion brings people together at the temple and begins to break down aspects of dividing cleavages. Personal autonomy within Tamil society is related to Fuglerud's (1999) hierarchical orders (described above), further emphasising this community-centric notion. For the "strictly hierarchical, caste-based agricultural society of South Asia comes with a set of values and interactional norms that play down individual agency except for the highest ranking person" (Fuglerud & Engebrigtsen 2006: 1128). David's (1973) work identified two contrary 'normative schemes' by which people steered their own actions and orientated themselves to the conduct of others. These were the *aristocratic* scheme (ordering a code of conduct for enduring relationships between actors), and the *mercantile* scheme (ordering a code of conduct for temporary, specific, mutually manipulative relationships between actors). The aristocratic scheme is distinguished by hierarchical solidarity, whereby the hierarchical relationships were described as respect: "the superior is held always to command and to give permission for action to take place, the inferior is in his right to expect aid and support" (Fuglerud & Engebrigtsen 2006: 1129). This scheme is not limited to inter-caste interaction. The aristocratic scheme is very much present in the Tamil diaspora and helps to explain features of the community, particularly the important position held by community leaders (Fuglerud & Engebrigtsen 2006).

Education and class

The legacies of Britain's colonial past in Sri Lanka are particularly present in its education system. The geography of Sri Lanka is such that the Northern and Eastern Provinces, where the majority of 'Jaffna Tamils' live, are particularly poor in natural resources (Wayland 2004). With lack of investment in other industries many Tamils found that education was the only way in which they could improve their social mobility. Consequently Tamils may place a premium on education. Sri Lanka has a long history of migration for education (Orjuela & Sriskandarajah 2008). Children may be encouraged, if not pushed, into working hard at school. It is not unusual for children to have further tuition everyday after school in academic or extra curricular pursuits. This may characterize a certain metropolitan, upper middle class of children within Tamil society; however, several of the interviewees within this research referred to this in relation to their own children and wider Tamil society. As a reflection of this emphasis, up until the 1970s Tamils represented a disproportionate proportion of the population in higher education (Sriskandarajah 2005). In the 1970s the Sri Lankan government introduced the policy of standardization in an attempt to reduce this disproportionate representation.

“They called it standardisation. They divided individuals into districts, and each district was set a standard number as to pass marks. Now if you did a total of four subjects you could get a maximum of four hundred marks. So... in one district you have a total of 200 marks you'll be able to go into medical faculty, but in our district, even with 380 you'll not be able to get even to bio science” (Varad*, TCHA Employee).

These districts were distinguished on the basis of the predominant ethnic group in those areas. As state policies started to take effect Tamil admissions fell (Sriskandarajah 2005). The “proportion of Tamils in science-based courses fell from nearly 40% of all successful candidates in the 1960s to around 25% by the late 1970s” (Sriskandarajah 2005: 349) and by the early 1980s the overall proportions of North-eastern Tamils in Sri Lanka's universities were roughly on a par with their share of the population (Sriskandarajah 2005). For those affected directly by such policies the situation was dire and perceived alongside the escalating violence as ‘strategic ethnic cleansing’: whereby the government is “strategically refusing education... strategically, cleansing the educational welfare of kids to university degrees” (Ponmudi). Education had been “a key investment producing a group of professionals who gave a stamp of learning to the new class” (Jayawardena 2000: 349). With the change in state policies, higher education opportunities and state employment avenues, which had been particularly important for Tamil social mobility, were curtailed (Sriskandarajah 2005). This

ethnicized access to higher education was a catalyst which further fuelled tensions leading up to the civil war.

Caste and village or town of origin

Caste and village or town of origin are interrelated cleavages (Orjuela & Sriskandarajah 2008). Knowledge of where an individual lived may be used to make an educated presumption at the nature of their caste. Older members of the society may ask someone where they live or lived early on in a meeting in order to acquire information about a person's caste background.

“Now I grew up in a middle class family back home where there is caste. When I was about 17 I fancied a boy who is of a very low caste and I didn't know it. The minute I heard he was low caste I lost interest in him! Culture! But even now the first thing I ask when I meet a Sri Lankan Tamil - where do you come from, which street, what's your surname? It's just impulse [...]. You can't ask them directly because it's very rude. So I say, which area, which surname, because we know everybody inside out by this. All these things will tell you who they are” (Paavarasi).

Paavarasi continues to be caste-conscious within the diasporic context. This is partly a consequence of her age (51) and her upbringing where she considered caste to be significant. For others caste may be relatively ignored until situations whereby it is deemed noteworthy – for example within marriage, or in developing bonds between people of similar caste backgrounds (Fuglerud 1999).

The nature of caste within Sri Lanka is complicated by ethnicity, place and time. The caste system varies within different ethnic groups and in different locations within Sri Lanka. This distinction is based on their different dispositions, past, history, heritage and hybridity (Bass 2001). It is important to recognise, however, that these categories are not mutually exclusive. The Sinhalese majority (74 percent) has lived on the island now known as Sri Lanka since the 5th century BC, while the Tamils (Jaffna Tamils) (13 percent) arrived soon after in the 3rd century BC (Saikia 2006). These narratives have fed into the majority/minority contested national imagination in Sri Lanka. The Malaiyaha Tamils, sometimes referred to as Estate Tamils, came from South India in the 19th and first half of the 20th Centuries, brought by the British to work on plantations (Bass 2001). Estate Tamils constitute around 5.6 percent of the Island's population. Many Tamils from Jaffna, on the other hand, were professionals and white-collar workers, belonging to management in the state, schools or offices – the side of power (Valentine-Daniel 1996). However, inter-ethnic socio-economic distinctions were relatively small (Sriskandarajah 2005).

The Malaiyaha Tamils consider themselves to be distinct from the Jaffna Tamils. The LTTE has, in the past, attempted to join the two ethnic groups together politically. However, although the Malaiyaha Tamils may sympathise “with the LTTE’s desire for freedom and justice for Tamils” (Bass 2001: 13), like some Jaffna Tamils, they do not support separation in any substantial way. Both groups have been on the receiving end of Sinhala anti-Tamil violence. However, it is the Jaffna Tamils who have experienced the most severe treatment (Valentine-Daniel 1996). Whereas the Jaffna Tamils have sought refugee status in countries such as the UK, the majority of the Malaiyaha Tamils who have left Sri Lanka, migrated to their ancestral homeland of India (Bass 2001).

The caste system implicated within the experiences of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in the UK is related to that of the Jaffna Tamil system. In the lead up to the civil war, relationships between castes began to break down as the result of capitalism and state intrusion; however the bonds of *intra*-caste loyalty become more important in the competition over rights and resources as people utilised like-caste contacts to gain access to various assets (Fuglerud 1999). Instead of using caste as a marker of difference, the emphasis was upon similarities on the basis of caste. The LTTE in particular has sought to eradicate casteism (Saikia 2006), arguing that caste was a hindrance for the liberation struggle. This draws upon Marxist arguments around false consciousness whereby the LTTE argue that preoccupations with caste issues deflect from the ‘real’ issues of ethnic discrimination.

Despite the perhaps limited relevance of caste within the experiences of the diaspora, for Tamil refugees there are still some remnants of this social structure. As Fuglerud & Engebriksen (2006: 1129) argue, “castes as such may in fact have lost much of their earlier social significance; [this] does not mean that neither the normative basis nor the interactional reflexes implied by the old society are gone.” The nature of caste consciousness is embedded within the social structure at least rhetorically. Individuals, particularly older members of society, may see the structure as part of their identity. Younger members of the community have a weaker relationship with the structure until it comes to prospective marriage partners where, particularly for their parents, caste plays an important role (Fuglerud 1999; Schrijvers 1999). As for the development of *intra*-caste relationships, this can be understood through ideas of social capital whereby individuals are capitalising upon existing relationships in order to develop a greater pool

of resources from which to draw. This capital may be used to assist in finding employment or for general support within society. These networks may potentially be reclaimed upon arrival in a new country. The cleavage of caste has changed in its impact on Tamil society. In the past it constituted a major distinction between individuals; however as a consequence of developments in the social organisation of the country, caste has reduced in significance.

4. Post-migration factors

Exile affects the social worlds of refugees (Fuglerud 1999). This section examines the social spaces in which the post-1983 Tamil refugees are situated in the UK. This includes a discussion of the relationship between Tamil refugees and other parts of the broader Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora. These are distinct groups with specific spaces and experiences, yet there are clear relations between the two. The 800,000 Sri Lankan Tamils constituting the Tamil diaspora have migrated all over the world, living in Canada (400,000), Europe (200,000), India (67,000), the United States (40,000) and Australia (30,000) (Ganguly 2001). Some went directly to their final destination whereas others first settled in India before the Indian government ceased to welcome asylum seekers after brokering a peace agreement in Sri Lanka in 1987 (Sriskandarajah 2004).

Earlier generations of Tamil migrants in Britain were not always as supportive of the arrival of Tamil asylum seekers. The different waves of Tamils were “sceptical of those who departed earlier or stayed longer” (Fuglerud 1999: 84) with earlier Tamils expecting newcomers to conform, take their advice and move rapidly up in British society by turning to education, and keeping a low profile (Valentine-Daniel 1996). This created a complex social world for newer asylum seekers and refugees. The variations in structural forces between and within different societies, and the implicit knowledge of social structures, may be particularly difficult for newcomers to a society to comprehend, especially when coming from a different cultural background. When examining the features driving the post-migratory society it is important to remember that “exile is not primarily a geographical location, it is a state of mind through which one becomes what one has left behind” (Fuglerud 1999: 178).

Communities

Both terms, community and diaspora, have been the subject of multiple discussions concerning their meanings. Johnston (2000b: 101) describes community as “a social network of interacting individuals, usually concentrated into a defined territory.” The concept of community has been used in many different ways (see Tönnies 1955). For example, groups have been referred to on the basis of ethnicity regardless of whether they occupy distinct territories (Johnston 2000b). The concept of ‘community’ is used within policy without being defined by authorities or ethnic groups and has become an important foundation for ethnic mobilization (Kelly 2003). Evidence suggests that some ethnic groups may form ‘communities’ in order to benefit from the support structures put in place for groups who work as communities (Kelly 2003). This communitarian approach has four main functions: overcoming isolation, providing material help to community members, defending the interests of the community, and promoting the community’s culture (Rex *et al.* 1987; cited Kelly 2003: 38). This may be particularly true for refugees. For Tamil refugees the nature of seeking asylum, whereby many people are from the same generation, means there is a “lack of elders in the exile population” which can lead to a “break in the transmission of cultural knowledge” (Fuglerud 1999: 138). This situation may lead to increased value being placed on the wider community to maintain the transfer of cultural knowledge to younger generations.

The concept of ‘community’ is particularly relevant when considering Tamil society. However, the classification and characterization of a Tamil ‘refugee community’ is difficult (Fuglerud 1999). The concept of community assumes that all individuals will be members of a group that is culturally defined with clear boundaries (Kelly 2003). Ethnic communities must not be imagined to exist in an organic wholeness with clear boundaries; rather communities are fluid entities (Dwyer 1999). It is also important to recognise the distinction between different Tamils; they are not a homogenous ethnic group. Firstly, the different waves of Tamil migration have created internal tensions. Fuglerud (2001; 1999) illustrates how this relates to two different models of culture. The ‘traditional model’ is upheld by mainly early migrant workers, centring upon the hierarchical relationship of age, gender and caste. The ‘revolutionary model’ is based upon a principle of equality of all members under the leadership of the LTTE. These different social models may create distinctions between different groups of Tamils. Secondly, in considering the Tamil refugee community, further questions are raised as

to who may be included in such a 'community', considering the complications discussed in Chapter Two and above as to who is defined as a Tamil refugee.

Cleavages within the 'community' also exist on the basis of ethnicity. Refugees came from both Tamil groups, but the different backgrounds of Tamils are significant when thinking of the Tamil 'community'. Alongside this it is necessary to "take into account broader issues and more deep-seated traditions" (Fuglerud & Engebrigsten 2006: 1125) and the potential relevance of caste within different situations. Despite pre-migratory cleavages, the commonalities that unite the Tamil community still remain in the UK – particularly as the majority of refugees could be classed as Jaffna Tamils. This links to ethnic nationalism as "it is not important whether that ethnicity is real or imagined, only that the members of the community believe it to be real" (Kelly 2003: 41). These community links are a major driving force underlying the logic of Tamil refugees in the UK and are intricately linked to the concept of diaspora.

Diasporas

The diaspora discussed here is predominantly the wider Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora along with the more specific post-1983 Tamil refugee diaspora. Tölöyan (1991: 5) sees diasporas as "the exemplary communities of the transnational movement." Diasporas have specific characteristics distinguishing them from transnational communities. White (2003: 311), summarizing existing definitions, highlights five different aspects:

1. After dispersal, a diaspora population must exist at a minimum of two destinations.
2. The diasporic population must display some self-awareness of their own identity. Such self-awareness deploys a notion of ethnicity, which normally privileges the place of origin as a basis for the construction of identity.
3. The diaspora must exist as a dispersion over at least two generations through the transmission of heritage.
4. There must be some relationship between the diasporic population and an actual or imagined homeland.
5. There should be interaction between diaspora populations in different destinations.

Tamils settled outside of Sri Lanka meet each of these five criteria for a diaspora. The Tamil exile population lives in several different destinations globally. Members of the society are self-aware on the basis of their ethnic identity. Tamil migrations are more than transmigration – at least two generations of Tamils now live outside of Sri Lanka. There remain strong links within the diaspora and both Sri Lanka and Tamil Eelam. Finally, there are high levels of interaction between Tamils in various different countries: "We can travel anywhere in the world, with only a travel ticket; we will

always find family or friends who will accommodate and support us” (Interviewee in Engebrigtsen 2007: 731). Further to this discussion, Cheran (2007: 152) argues that diasporas are distinct from other groups of migrants who “willingly live outside their places of origin.” This definition would therefore exclude the wider Sri Lankan Tamil migrants from earlier migration waves. From these brief notes it is possible to see how the Tamil population outside Sri Lanka may be termed a diaspora: however, it is the significance of diaspora in understanding Tamil society and Tamil refugee experiences that is the particular interest of this research.

Identities are socially constructed throughout a person’s life. Often people consider a place element to an individual’s identity, producing the “image of a settled community – literally, a home place” (Holloway *et al.* 2003: 178). However, when working with a diaspora, ‘place’ and ‘home’ may not be settled concepts. Place and home may be subjected to continuous transformation as individuals negotiate their own identities, through contact with their country of origin and their host countries, whilst simultaneously developing and producing networks with the wider diaspora in other places. Critics of the ‘diaspora’ term are concerned by the suggestion of homogeneity and fixed historical identities (Vertovec 2005). Cheran (2006: 1) argues that the concept of diaspora challenges social categories: “Not only [is the concept of diaspora] useful in challenging the rigidities and boundedness of identities (religious, ethnic, national etc.), [it] also offer[s] new possibilities and new points of becoming.” This is true to the extent that identities are always highly complex, manipulated and variable depending upon the context in which individuals find themselves.

For Tamils, the city has become a site for the modern diaspora. The city plays an important role in how diasporas envisage their space and identity (Cheran 2007). In a ‘global city’ such as London – diasporas, nationalities and ethnicities overlap and interact, sometimes creating tension and conflict (Sassen 2001). This unique situation in the global city creates the ‘diasporiCity’ (Cheran 2007). The diasporiCity produces the exclusive experiences and imaginaries through an uneasy coexistence of different groups, which create awareness and mobilize communities. The Tamil community in Montreal may also experience similar imaginaries as a consequence of the cosmopolitan community. The term captures

“an ‘enunciation’ and an entanglement of ethnicity, cityscape and marginality simultaneously in a transnational moment and space. DiasporiCity is not only a process, an element of identity, but also a location signifying changing relations” (Cheran 2007: 159).

Diasporic communities are influenced by migrant and homeland societies, and are altered by the processes of cultural reproduction and dialogue in which they are a part (Keith 2005; Vertovec 2005). Notions of belonging and attachment to a place of origin and its culture, alongside a desire to return, remain significant within the host country. Yet the complexities of living within a global city further dismantle traditional conceptions of ethnicity.

The underlying aspects of diaspora and community are clearly related. However, diaspora adds some important features which also drive Tamil society in the UK. A part of this is what Clifford (1994) calls a diasporic consciousness based around an idea of eventual return to a place of real or mythical origin. This is potentially more emphasised for refugees than wider diaspora as a consequence of the continued transnational networks back to Sri Lanka and within the diaspora. Yet, as argued in Chapter Two, refugees are the least likely people to return to their country of origin, given the reasons they were forced to leave. Although the term ‘diaspora’ has been criticised as an extension of an out-of-date nation-state model that assumes correspondence between territory, culture and identity (Wayland 2004), for Tamils there is that strong connection between identity, culture and territory. The potential of Tamil Eelam may be important for some Tamils and their cultural origins.

The Tamil diaspora, like the Tamil community, is not a homogenous entity. Members of the Tamil diaspora may be differentiated according to when they migrated, how they gained residence in host countries, and their success at integration in the UK (Orjuela & Sriskandarajah 2008). In discussing the diaspora as a whole, caste may become more significant with the greater variety of backgrounds in the whole diaspora than in the refugee community. Yet the refugee diaspora remains a close-knit community. Orjuela & Sriskandarajah (2008) point to four developments which have created spatial, social and political conditions conducive to fostering close community ties.

1. Relatively large flows of Tamil asylum seekers have created clusters of recent arrivals in established diaspora centres e.g. London.
2. The spatial clustering has been reinforced by tighter social networks established by asylum seekers.

3. Asylum seeker numbers have increased the size of the diaspora, creating a critical mass for the establishment of social and economic services and a variety of diaspora associations.
4. With the change in welcome from India in the early 1990s, the Tamil diaspora in the West became increasingly important.

These features illustrate the way in which Tamil society may function in relation to Sri Lanka and Tamil Eelam. Sriskandarajah (2004) discusses the triadic relationship of host-diaspora-homeland. He argues that for Tamils, the presence of the LTTE as an additional stakeholder and the diaspora's translocal political practice (rooted in an acknowledged homeland that does not coincide with the former nation-state), further complicates the situation. As such, diasporic identity and politics are mobilised by Tamil elites in three different ways: "1) information exchange within the Tamil community via Tamil-language newspapers, radio, the Internet and ethnic organisations; 2) spreading awareness of the Tamil struggle through marches, conferences, and the lobbying of government officials; and 3) lawful as well as illegal fundraising" (Wayland 2004: 418). The main influence of community and diaspora may have been to consolidate Tamil society to be almost self-reliant and maintain pre-migratory cultural scripts within their day-to-day lives in the UK. This Tamil unity may significantly impact upon the ways Tamil refugees experience the host country including employment and how their skills are utilised.

Diasporic nationalism

Nationalism and the political power that the diaspora encompasses are significant driving forces of Tamil society, particularly for refugees who lacked the choice in leaving Sri Lanka. The political aspects are not adopted by all refugees; although as refugees the political element is likely to have some significance. Broadly speaking the political goals of the Tamil diaspora may be rooted in nationalism (Wayland 2004). The LTTE needed to promote the Sinhalese Sri Lankan state as the 'Other' in order to develop a shared focus on Tamil Eelam. The power of the Tamil diaspora politically is through the financial support it commands. Tamils were encouraged to contribute to the Tamil war effort in Sri Lanka (Valentine-Daniel 1996). The on-going conflict and plight of family and friends back in Sri Lanka is prominent within the minds of members of the diaspora, and particularly refugees (Orjuela & Sriskandarajah 2008). It was reported by the internet sites of 'Tamil Canadian' and 'Tamil Net' that they received "more than a million hits during the first two weeks of November 1999, corresponding with a major LTTE operation" (Wayland 2004: 420). The diaspora has very real, direct and regular contacts to events in their former home through Tamil

media or communications with personal relations. As such “the spaces, events and initiatives produced through Tamil nationalist political discourse are ... important in the life of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora” (Orjuela & Sriskandarajah 2008: 329).

Marriage: gender and caste

The drive of community unity within the Tamil diaspora maintains certain perceptions around gender and caste, particularly when it comes to marriage. Fuglerud’s (1999) research in the diaspora examined the continued patriarchal relations within marriage. Some individuals may remain committed to inherent Tamil community ideals around patriarchy, whereas for others the traditional patriarchal structures are breaking down. This is particularly significant when trying to understand marriage whereby the creation of the union is seen as entering back into the Tamil community: “on marrying, a man steps out of the utopian fellowship of the heterotopia and back into Tamil society proper” (Fuglerud 1999: 107). Women are expected to uphold the values of premarital chastity, marital fidelity and obedience (Engebriksen 2007). Many Tamil men in Norway were found to want a wife from Sri Lanka as “through their interaction with Norwegian society, women may, literally speaking, no longer embody the virtues expected from a Tamil wife” (Fuglerud 1999: 109). Tamil men may be single upon arrival. They may then study or work for several years before bringing a wife from Sri Lanka (Engebriksen 2007). Traditional ideologies of Tamil women may continue.

“Most young men want to marry a woman who is like the women in Jaffna, and this quality can be read straightaway through her body language: To be morally pure, virtuous and obedient are considered as the highest form of ethical ideal prescribed for women. Shyness, timidity, ignorance, passiveness, obedience are regarded as ideal patterns of behaviour, or rather, the essential qualities of ‘femininity’ ascribed to virtuous women” (Fuglerud 1999: 109).

Such conceptions of the ‘ideal’ woman may be developed and maintained as a consequence of the various patriarchal structures discussed above.

The cultural scripts of patriarchy from Sri Lanka may most prominently impact on women in the forms of household structures, violence and cultural institutions. However in the post-migration situation the patriarchal structures shaping the worlds of female Tamil refugees may be different, whilst simultaneously being influenced from scripts with which they are familiar (see Chapter Six). Experiences of patriarchy for Tamil women in the UK may be a complex interaction between private and public structures whereby some women may end up being excluded from certain situations. Yet, if the household structures of which they are a part enable them to participate more

widely, they may experience similar structures of patriarchy as other women in the UK in the form of segregation. The three structures dominant in Sri Lanka (household, violence and culture) may have less impact in the UK, yet they may be maintained in the private sphere to different degrees through their reproduction within the household and ethnic community. In the UK, Tamil women are also subjected to patriarchal structures in paid work and from the state. Patriarchal structures around sexuality may be so extreme within both pre and post migration situations that heterosexual expectations are rarely questioned. Kanags² alluded to his disapproval of homosexuality when he commented how “the karma-sutra does not show only men or only women: it is for them both.” The lack of recognition of non-heterosexual coupling more generally, and the negativity around Kanags’ comment, further suggest heterosexual expectations.

State policies may provide opportunities for greater support of women working but they still identify women as the primary care provider. However, structures are not just constraining; they can also be enabling. Patriarchy has negative impacts on women’s lives, but the structures persist because they are reproduced by both men and women. In certain circumstances Tamil women may appreciate some forms of patriarchy. For example, they may feel more comfortable with a male family member in public than without, as they may feel safer in the protection of a man.

Although caste may be less relevant than in the past “a migrant may better his and his family’s caste position, as well as his economic status, by marrying a woman from a higher-ranking caste” (Engebrigtsen 2007: 737). Members of lower castes within the diaspora become more attractive options due to their citizenship, or potential citizenship, in a Western country (Engebrigtsen 2007). Many men give up on education and career prospects to work, so that they can invest everything in their female relations’ marriages to exiled grooms in an attempt to reconstruct a traditional society abroad (Fuglerud 2001). Marriages are generally arranged by the families of the prospective bride and groom rather than through a love match. The institution of arranged marriage expresses, at least in symbolic form, all the main organising principles of traditional society under the traditional model (Fuglerud 2001). The nature of the arranged marriage also creates greater obligations to maintain unity in times of struggle due to responsibilities to the wider family. Divorce is relatively rare within

² One of the Montreal interviewees.

Tamil society, as a consequence of community disapproval. In the event of the end of a marriage, it could be expected that the divorce would “be destructive not only to the marriage, but to the whole fabric of kin and friends that make up the supportive network of Tamil exile life” (Engebrigtsen 2007: 740). Such pressures within the exile population mean that even though some renegotiation of gender roles has caused internal conflict and sometimes even domestic violence, it has not resulted in the breakdown of the family (Engebrigtsen 2007).

Family, success and social capital

Engebrigtsen (2007: 738) found that the Tamil family is a cohesive unit, “an expression of the centralising values of Tamil cultural scripts.” The nature of the closed Tamil society based on mutual trust creates an environment where conformity and restriction of personal autonomy may be significant. Tamil youth are expected to have respect for their elders, particularly when it comes to education (see Engebrigtsen 2007). Fuglerud (1999) argues that Tamil refugees may typically suffer financially for between five and eight difficult years on arrival in the host country after leaving Sri Lanka due to financial commitments, for example, remittances, dowry payments, travel costs, before things may improve. The Tamil saying: “if you invite *Lakshmi*, the goddess of prosperity, into your house, *Saraswati*, the goddess of learning and wisdom, will leave” (Fuglerud 1999: 97), suggests that Tamils may not simultaneously achieve educationally whilst also prospering economically. This summarizes the situation for Tamil refugees who may rarely be educated to a high level in the host country, whilst also earning enough money to support their various obligations and responsibilities.

Success for Tamil refugees may be different from that for the wider community within employment and wider life. The concept of success for Tamils within the host country is “defined in terms of individual access to higher education and a socio-political position” (Fuglerud & Engebrigtsen 2006: 1131): to this there may also be added the maintenance of certain traditional values and the transfer of cultural knowledge. In terms of employment there may be particular occupations which are valued over others. These relate to educational interests and the maintenance of certain Tamil ideals. Doctors and engineers may be the most prestigious types of employment and parents’ desires for their children, with occupations such as teachers and solicitors being other options which may be deemed acceptable. All of these occupations require high levels

of education. In reality many Tamil refugees work, or are self employed, in the retail sector (see Chapter Five).

In his research with Tamil refugees in Norway, Fuglerud (1999: 84) found that “the most valuable thing that people bring, the object most closely guarded, is normally a well-worn notebook with telephone numbers.” From arrival onwards Tamils may seek to find and consolidate relationships which may then be used, intentionally or unintentionally, to assist individuals to settle into their new country. Information networks provide Tamils with both psychological and social benefits in their own right (Fuglerud & Engebriksen 2006). Tamils seek to make contact with the rest of the local Tamil community because in its most basic form social capital may be described “as a collective identity, a ‘we-ness’” (Fuglerud & Engebriksen 2006: 1123). These ties may be primarily informal and created spontaneously to facilitate the needs of the group. Several studies have looked at or touched upon the social networks and uses of social capital within Tamil communities in various different countries (Fuglerud 1999; Wayland 2004; Fuglerud & Engebriksen 2006; Engebriksen 2007). Ambition and opportunity work together to influence the employment directions individuals travel.

5. Conclusion: Tamilness and Tamil society

This chapter has examined Tamil society in the UK. Here the focus has been upon understanding what drives Tamil refugees in the UK, to enable an examination of the relationship between Tamil refugees, their skills and their integration through employment through the remaining chapters. It is these drivers which influence the structures of the society and the self-determination people envisage of themselves when these structures impact upon their behaviour. Despite the potential lack of desire to integrate in the UK in many ways, several of the cultural scripts underlying the Tamil way of life are concurrent with the cultural scripts underlying British life. In these ways Tamils may feel perhaps more at ease within British society than other migrant groups. Previous research with refugees has suggested that community associations may play an important role in the adaptation and integration of community members to the host society (Joly 1996). However, as this chapter has indicated, they may also create barriers by bonding the Tamil community in a way which lessens the desire to integrate. Pre-migration cultural scripts create cleavages within the society on the basis of various social stratifications. Yet because these cleavages are comforting structures to the individuals they have a unifying effect. By following these scripts, the resources of the

family are concentrated and the Tamil community may become bounded in solidarity, striving towards social mobility (Engebrigtsen 2007). This social mobility leading towards Tamil economic integration on certain levels has not been paired with cultural incorporation “but with a certain degree of social and cultural isolation from the majority society” (Engebrigtsen 2007: 744). The drive of community and diaspora has been to consolidate Tamil society to rely on the ethnic community and ethnic economy, maintaining pre-migratory cultural scripts within their everyday lives through the processes of settling in and progressing within the new country. Individuals living with these structures gain security from a society which works in this way, that they understand, and can accomplish a level of agency within. The next chapter begins the first of the analysis chapters examining the concepts of skills and success for the Tamil community.

CHAPTER FIVE

Perceptions of success: skills and barriers to achieving success

Paavarasi is a 51 year old journalist from Sri Lanka. She moved to the UK in 2001 having worked as a journalist for the best part of two decades. She speaks fluent English having been educated in English as a child, and as a young woman in the 1970s she lived in England for two years. Her asylum claim was settled relatively quickly as her abduction in Sri Lanka was well documented on the Internet. When first arriving in the UK, despite having such experience and having worked for a month on the Washington Post, she was forced to take a job working as a checkout assistant at John Lewis, and the following Christmas she delivered turkeys door to door. Whilst trying to scrape together a living doing relatively menial work she volunteered to do research for the Refugee Council and Employability Forum. Yet they could not employ her full time due to a lack of funding. Therefore she turned to her connections within the Tamil community. Having recently begun a job as a legal secretary in the Tamil solicitors firm that represented her asylum case in the UK, she remains vigilant and determined to achieve her ambitions of a journalism job in the UK. As such she frequently writes articles for various British publications, such as 'The Press Gazette', in an attempt to build up a portfolio of work in the UK. She has come to believe that both her age and Sri Lankan surname are against her, despite her extensive experience in the field. In the long term she would like to return to Sri Lanka and establish her own newspaper.

1. The utilisation of refugee skills and barriers to successful uptake

Paavarasi's experiences since arriving in the UK illustrate a clear lack of utilisation of her skills. Her ambitious nature and determination combined with her experience, qualifications and desire to work, are key skills which could be put to better use in the UK than her work either as a shop cashier or as a legal secretary. Although it is clear that the uptake of the use of her skills has improved over time, she is the type of person who would be best suited to working in a management position or another highly skilled profession. What she does not acknowledge is the significance of contacts as a journalist and her subsequent loss of these contacts through moving to a new country. However, whatever options may present themselves in the future to Paavarasi, success for her can only come if she achieves a journalism job, ideally in a 'respectable'

broadsheet newspaper such as *The Guardian*, even if her chances are limited. This demonstrates her desire to utilise her background education and experience and her wish to work within the wider community rather than just the ethnic economy.

This chapter specifically examines the relationship between refugees and skills. It focuses on the interrelationship between Tamil refugees and their skills. Here I seek to analyse the Tamil perceptions of skills, and more specifically discuss what amounts to successful utilisation, not only in terms of the skills used but on the basis of what success is to the individuals themselves. This leads to a discussion of the importance of education for the Tamil community (Orjuela & Sriskandarajah 2008). This chapter explores the concept of success, a focus which is developed in subsequent chapters. The emphasis on education in this chapter is further discussed and explored in following chapters.

In exploring different notions of success, the barriers to successful utilisation must also be scrutinized. Consequently, rather than simply examining the skills people have and how these are used, I argue that success in employment is more complicated than the utilisation of an individual's skills. Success is related to an individual's goals and ambitions in the context of their local Tamil community and perceived expectations from people back in Sri Lanka. Therefore the 'successful' employment of individual Tamil refugees is related to their wider lives. Concurrently the barriers preventing successful employment are discussed in order to comprehend the features which stand in the way of individuals achieving their goals.

This chapter begins the first of five main analysis chapters. It first introduces and defines the concept of skills and examines the perceived barriers individuals face to achieving the utilisation of their skills. The chapter then discusses the concept of success in relation to what is conceived of as success, given societal and cultural pressures of education, and the Tamil community's perceptions of success.

2. Defining skills and barriers to uptake

Skills are distinguished from qualifications. Whereas qualifications are an official record of achievement awarded on the basis of successful completion of training, or passing an examination; skills are defined as the learnt capacity or talent to carry out

actions, often with the minimum amount of energy and within the minimum time (Thomas 1996). This research adopts a broad definition of skills to include work-content skills gained through education and experience, and the generic, self-management and transferable skills individuals possess. Table 5.1 defines these three different types of skills¹.

Table 5.1: Definition of skills

ADAPTIVE or SELF-MANAGEMENT SKILLS	FUNCTIONAL or TRANSFERABLE SKILLS	SPECIFIC or WORK-CONTENT SKILLS
<p>Rooted in temperament.</p> <p>Acquired in early years among families, peers, and school or later in life by intensive education.</p> <p>Related to environments and particularly to the requirements or demands for conformity and continuity vs. risk and discretion and change.</p> <p>Examples: Management of oneself in relation to: authority space & time direction moving towards, away from or against others self-pacing self-routing punctuality dress care of property impulse control</p> <p>In everyday speech: Regularity Dependability Initiative Resourcefulness etc.</p>	<p>Rooted in aptitudes</p> <p>Acquired either as natural born talent, refined by experience and education; or by specific educational, vocational or avocational special training.</p> <p>Related to people, data and things, in generalizable or transferable fashion (from one field, profession, occupation or job to another).</p> <p>Examples: Tending and operating machines Comparing, compiling or analysing data Exchanging information with or consulting supervising people</p> <p>In everyday speech: Artistic talent A born problem solver A natural salesman or saleswoman A gifted writer Effective in dealing with many kinds of people Bringing new life to traditional art forms etc.</p>	<p>Rooted in personal experience and preference and involve particular job conditions vocabulary and artefacts.</p> <p>Acquired by private reading, apprenticeship, technical training institute, school or (often) on the job.</p> <p>Related to performing a job in a particular field profession, or occupation, according to specification and conditions of a particular employer.</p> <p>Examples: Detailed knowledge of various parts of a car Knowing the names of all the muscles in the human body Understanding the psychology of human motivation</p> <p>In everyday speech: Financial planning and management A skilled engineer Theatrical production, planning and management Market research analysis Making radio and TV presentations Personnel administration etc.</p>

Source: University of Washington Centre for Career Services (2007)

¹ This definition offered breadth to an understanding of skill, whilst other definitions, for example that by Green (1998), takes a relatively narrow comprehension of skill. I wished to work with a broad definition in order to examine the variety of different abilities of the participants, and how these might be utilised.

This definition is useful for moving beyond a simplified conception of skill. People possess skills which are innate to the individual as a talent or personality feature. In this conception of skill, adapted from Fine (no date) and Bolles (1994) by the University of Washington (2007), three different types of skills are defined:

- Self-management skills are the basic personality traits and attributes that support individuals in their ability to manage themselves in a new environment (e.g. ambition, creativity).
- Transferable skills are a combination of self-management skills and technical job skills that can be transferred from one job to another (e.g. meet deadlines, communication).
- Work-content skills are those skills which are technical skills needed for a specific job (e.g. engineering terminology, legal knowledge).

This typology of skills is useful as it acknowledges the wider abilities of individuals such as the tacit everyday expertise like language abilities, which are more important to the Tamil community than some of the expertise valued by organisations such as the *Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills*. With this more nuanced comprehension of skills, English language proficiency is particularly important.

Utilising skills

Figure 5.1 is a heuristic device to understand the occurrence of skills underutilisation. A distinction is made between ‘high’ skilled and ‘low’ skilled. This implies a dichotomy. However, in reality a continuum of skill levels exist. In using the definition of skills in the previous section, more highly skilled individuals have skills in the three different areas and have a greater variety of these different skills. Importantly they often have more transferable and work-content skills than people who would be classified as lower skilled within this definition. Lower skilled individuals have fewer abilities in all of the categories, but particularly fewer in the transferable and work-content areas.

In terms of distinguishing between low skilled and high skilled work, this chapter begins by examining the US Social Security Online (2009: 1) definition:

- (a) “*Unskilled work*. Unskilled work is work which needs little or no judgment to do simple duties that can be learned on the job in a short period of time. The job may or may not require considerable strength. For example, we consider jobs unskilled if the primary work duties are handling, feeding and offbearing (that is, placing or removing materials from machines which are automatic or operated by others), or machine tending, and a person can usually learn to do

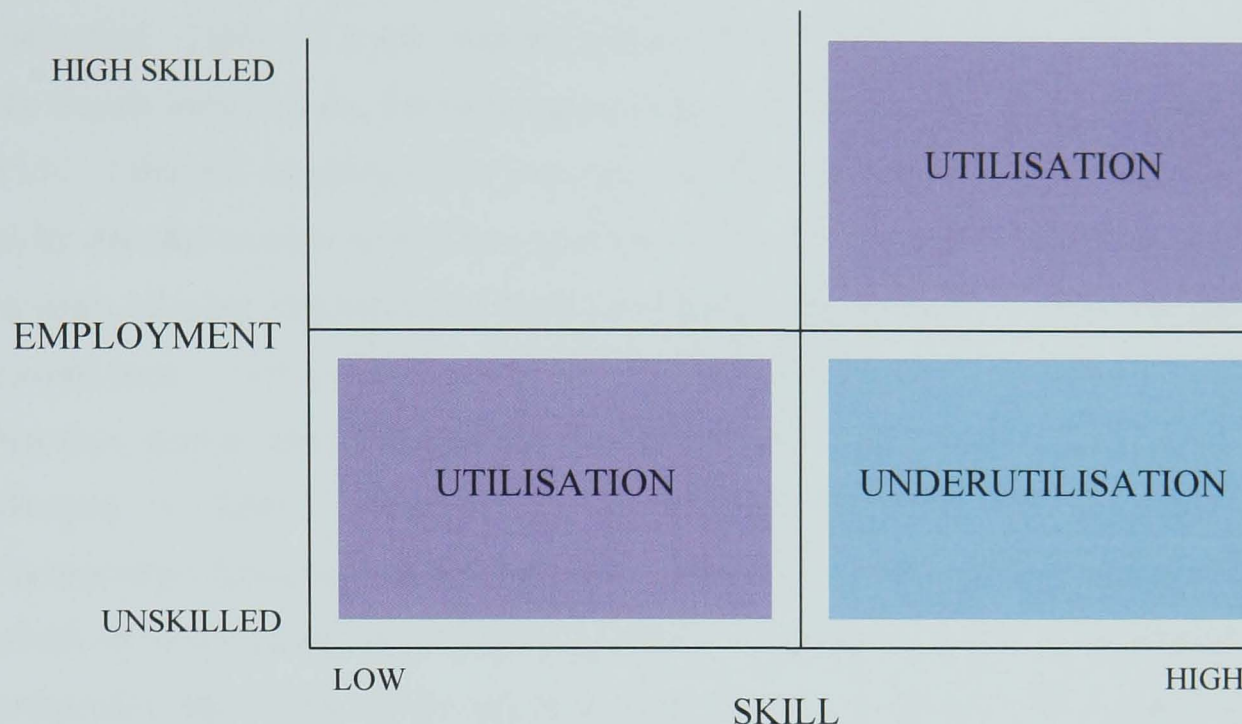
the job in 30 days, and little specific vocational preparation and judgment are needed. A person does not gain work skills by doing unskilled jobs.

- (b) *Semi-skilled work*. Semi-skilled work is work which needs some skills but does not require doing the more complex work duties. Semi-skilled jobs may require alertness and close attention to watching machine processes; or inspecting, testing or otherwise looking for irregularities; or tending or guarding equipment, property, materials, or persons against loss, damage or injury; or other types of activities which are similarly less complex than skilled work, but more complex than unskilled work. A job may be classified as semi-skilled where coordination and dexterity are necessary, as when hands or feet must be moved quickly to do repetitive tasks.
- (c) *Skilled work*. Skilled work requires qualifications in which a person uses judgment to determine the machine and manual operations to be performed in order to obtain the proper form, quality, or quantity of material to be produced. Skilled work may require laying out work, estimating quality, determining the suitability and needed quantities of materials, making precise measurements, reading blueprints or other specifications, or making necessary computations or mechanical adjustments to control or regulate the work. Other skilled jobs may require dealing with people, facts, or figures or abstract ideas at a high level of complexity.”

This definition of different levels of skilled work illustrates a relatively simplistic categorisation of the levels of ability required and the type of work. However, in terms of thinking about the range between the different types of work and the skills required, the key features of lower skilled work are small amounts of judgement to do relatively simple duties, and specific skills which may be learnt within a short period of time. For higher skilled work important judgements are necessary in terms of operations, performance, quality or quantity, and specific skills which take long periods of time to develop. The range of levels at which different work requires an individual to have abilities in these different areas illustrates the range of different levels of skill within different forms of work.

Where individuals are highly skilled yet are in employment that only requires low skills, there is an underutilisation. A number of the interviewees are situated in the low skilled, low employment, utilisation group. However, the two groups which are the focus of this chapter are firstly those who are situated in the high skilled realm, yet experience low skilled employment – the underutilisation group; and secondly those who have high skills and high skilled employment – the high skilled utilisation group. This latter group is important for understanding the reasons why some people experience greater use of their skills than others, and this may be useful for developing policy to support refugees. These categorisations are, of course, simplifications of complex and multifaceted people.

Figure 5.1: Defining an underutilisation of skills



In assessing where utilisation or underutilisation occurs, the variety of skills the participants possess have been analysed. Appendix Seven provides information on the employment status and main skills of each interviewee. The skills identified here are an exhaustive list of the skills which were apparent from the interviews. Those people with a greater variety of different skills are generally considered more highly skilled. The classification of skills in Chapter Five included English as a specific skill. Therefore the individual's English abilities are acknowledged in recognising whether their employment is appropriate to their skills. Within this work, those people who had a high variety of skills also generally had a reasonably high level of English skills.

To begin I wish to provide a general impression of the skills set within this research group. Table 5.2 was constructed based upon the different types of skills defined above. The University of Washington Centre for Career Services (2007) provided a list of the different types of skills which were a part of each category. Appendix Six, Tables A6.1-A6.2 illustrate these different skills, classifying them into self management and transferable skills. Work content skills are illustrated in Table 5.3. There are significant differences in the skills possessed by men and women, alongside the differences in employment experience. In Table 5.2 the numbers account for the different skills the individual demonstrated in the interview in each category, such that when an individual illustrated a particular skill this was marked in the relevant table. These crosses were then totalled to provide a tally of the different skills each individual

had. Though a simplification it is assumed here that generally speaking the greater number and variety of different skills an individual has the higher the skill level of the individual. Table 5.2 shows that the male refugees had a larger diversity of skills than the female interviewees, but only approximately 10 percent more (583 in comparison to 533). Table 5.3 illustrates how in terms of self-management skills the men had more skills than the women; this is the same for the transferable skills. However, in contrast, in terms of work content skills, the women had a slightly higher variety than their male counterparts. Yet proportionally all of these differences were small. There are, however, greater gender differences in some of the specific areas of skills rather than in diversity of skills. Appendix Six, Table A6.1, illustrates how in terms of self-management skills there is little difference between the two groups; the table shows a relatively even scatter of different abilities. However, in terms of transferable skills (Appendix Six, Table A6.2), the women had distinctly fewer skills when it came to practical skills and marginally less when working with data. When examining the skills individuals had for working with words and ideas, both the male and female groups indicated similar patterns, with some individuals in each group excelling in this area in comparison to the others. There were slightly more male individuals who demonstrated talent in this area. The leadership category demonstrated a similar story, whereby two individuals (one male, one female) illustrated abilities, although overall there was little difference between men and women. In the few examples of creative and artistic skills, those who did provide evidence of such abilities were all women with the male interviewees not expressing any attributes in this area. This does not mean that they lacked such abilities, rather that they did not express them. This may relate to gendered expectations of skills in this area.

What is of particular interest is that the women had a greater number of formal qualifications between them than their male counterparts (Table 5.3). They may have obtained a qualification, but not embedded the skills encompassed within the qualification. All the women had at least O Levels, with twelve out of the thirteen also having A Levels. In contrast eleven of the males had O Levels, but less than half of them (six out of thirteen) had gone on to study A Levels in Sri Lanka. Five of the men had studied some further education as opposed to only three of the women. The impact

Table 5.2: Total number of skills of the interviewees

Total no. of skills	Females													Males														
	Bimala	Chitralekha	Dhanya	Elisai	Harita	Jayani	Kayal	Maina	Mala	Paavarasi	Parinita	Pragya	Savita	Total	Bhaskar	Caleb	Jwalia	Khush	Kiran	Madhu	Mudita	Ponmudi	Ravi	Rohak	Rustam	Tanay	Trinabh	Total
Self-management skills	35	10	19	8	2	20	12	5	32	36	27	8	7	221	34	9	17	33	29	11	7	40	4	15	19	8	21	247
Transferable skills	37	20	19	11	3	14	7	9	32	56	35	19	10	272	51	7	15	28	33	14	3	63	11	24	21	12	17	299
Work content skills	4	3	3	3	1	4	2	2	3	4	4	4	3	40	4	1	4	4	2	3	1	5	2	4	3	2	2	37
Total out of 132	76	33	41	22	6	38	21	16	67	96	66	31	20	533	89	17	36	65	64	28	11	108	17	43	43	22	40	583

Table 5.3: Qualifications and English skills of interviewees

Work-Content Skills	Females													Males														
	Bimala	Chitralekha	Dhanya	Elisai	Harita	Jayani	Kayal	Maina	Mala	Paavarasi	Parinita	Pragya	Savita	Total	Bhaskar	Caleb	Jwalia	Khush	Kiran	Madhu	Mudita	Ponmudi	Ravi	Rohak	Rustam	Tanay	Trinabh	Total
O Levels	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	13	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	11
A Levels	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12	X		X	X		X		X		X				6
Further Education	X					X					X			3			X	X					X	X	X		5	
Degree		X	X					X	X		X			5	X					X			X				3	
Postgraduate qualification														-							X						1	
Specific work experience	X			X		X				X	X	X	X	7	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	11
Total	4	3	3	3	1	4	2	2	3	4	4	4	3		4	1	4	4	2	3	1	5	2	4	3	2	2	
English Skills																												
Very low					X									1		X				X		X						3
Low				X			X	X				X		4											X		1	
Medium			X										X	2					X						X		2	
High		X				X					X			3			X	X	X				X	X			5	
Very High	X							X	X					3	X						X						2	
English education in UK	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				10	X								X	X			3	
English education in Sri Lanka	X	X	X	X		X			X	X	X	X	X	10	X		X	X	X	X		X		X		X	9	
Taught in English in Sri Lanka	X							X	X					3	X		X				X						3	

of the larger proportion of women doing A Levels also influenced the opportunities the groups had experienced in higher education. Five of the women had done degrees, in comparison to only three of the men. One man had gone on to study for a postgraduate qualification. Despite the fact that women clearly out-perform their male counterparts in educational qualifications, men had more examples of specific work experience. The distinction between skills and qualifications is illustrated here. Although there are not huge differences between the skills of the men and women, the lack of work experience of some of the women is likely to have influenced their wider skills development despite their relatively high levels of educational attainment.

The level of English each individual had (Table 5.3) was marked on the basis of my judgement of their English abilities. This categorisation was based upon their spoken English, their qualifications, and wider evidence such as their written English in the completion of the questionnaire. When it comes to English skills (Table 5.3) most of the participants, both male (nine) and female (ten) had undertaken some English education in Sri Lanka and three men and three women had been taught in English in Sri Lanka. Yet overall the women's abilities in English were marginally lower than their male counterparts, despite the fact that more of the women had 'very high' English abilities compared to the men. Most of the women (ten) had had some form of formal English education since arriving in the UK, whereas most of the men had not (only three out of thirteen). This is a consequence of employment experiences, or lack thereof, whereby women who were not working had the time to learn English, or sought the opportunity to study English in the UK. Their male counterparts have concentrated on their employment and therefore may have had less time to study English since arriving in the UK.

Returning to the questionnaires sent out to the wider Tamil community, the main findings from these also show some division by gender. For the male group: four out of the eight responses were from men who were employed. Three of these men owned their own shop, having begun working in a similar business before opening their own. Two of the men who owned their own shops had experience of working in this area in Sri Lanka, although one commented that he was qualified in building construction, but was unable to get work in this area. The third man was an accountant, but could not get work in the UK and so opted to open a retail business. The fourth man who was working in the UK was working in a petrol station. Each of these four men said that

they understood spoken English or spoke English either fluently or fairly well. Two of the men who owned their own business answered that they read and wrote English fluently, whereas the other two working answered 'fairly well' or 'slightly' on the questionnaire. All bar one of the interviewees who were working noted that they could read and write Tamil fluently. One participant marked that they could not read or write Tamil at all; however as he had answered a Tamil version of the questionnaire and written sections in Tamil I suspect he had misunderstood the question. The other four men who answered the questionnaire were not currently working in the UK. In contrast to the four employed men, they said that they understood spoken English or spoke English either 'fairly well' or 'slightly'. All had been employed in Sri Lanka doing a variety of different types of work, and two of the four noted that they had O Level or above qualifications from Sri Lanka. These responses suggest the importance of English speaking skills for employment, either self-employment or as an employee. Reading and writing skills were less important for the people who owned business than for employees of other businesses.

By far the highest underutilisation identified in the questionnaires was within the female responses. Several of the women had degrees or/and experiences which were not being fully utilised in their work. For example, one woman had a Masters degree in Education, had lectured in Psychology for several years before becoming the Minister of Education in Sri Lanka. She answered that she was fluent in English in all areas. She stated that she was self employed. Although she did not note any further details to the question asked, it is unlikely that the various years of experience, qualifications and the variety of skills she will have built up working as a public servant will be fully utilised within many forms of self employment in the UK. Six out of the eighteen responses were from women who were currently working, and all these noted that they read, wrote, and understood spoken English and spoke English either fluently or fairly well. The level of English abilities identified related to whether individuals were working or not. In order to gain work initially it is generally necessary that people speak at least some English. If they are then working within an English environment they have the opportunity to learn more. Having established the broad picture of the utilisation of skills of the research participants, it is important to address the potential barriers to them utilising their skills.

Barriers to utilising skills

Within the research literature, authors have frequently cited certain 'barriers' to the uptake of the skills of refugees (Korać 2003). The specific barriers to each individual are personal. However some are common. The list below is that of the perceived barriers to the use of the skills of refugees from the refugee interviewees and the elite contacts². The barriers identified by people are ranked by frequency mentioned, on the basis of the significance within the lives of the refugees interviewed and elite perceptions.

1. English abilities and an individual's accent (refugee and elite)
2. Motivation and individual drive (refugee and elite)
3. Self-esteem and self-confidence (refugee and elite)
4. Family responsibilities and patriarchal relations (refugee)
5. Continuous links to home and wider Tamil community (refugee)

Here, I concentrate on the first two; self esteem and family responsibilities are discussed in Chapter Six and continuous links to home are a particular focus of Chapters Seven and Eight. Some variation existed between the barriers identified by elite contacts and those identified by only refugees. This may be a consequence of some barriers not being a part of the everyday lives of individual refugees, or that the barriers are so ingrained that they are taken for granted. As may be expected, English is at the top of this list. However, there are other barriers which are also significant. The barriers noted here position the discussion of the use of skills of refugees within a broader context.

English skills and the refugee experience

A lack of English language ability was the most frequently cited barrier to successful utilisation of skills by participants in this research. Language may be analysed as exogenous and endogenous human capital (Pendakur & Pendakur 1997). For Tamil refugees there is potential for English skills to be exogenous or endogenous as some Tamils learnt English as they grew up, whereas others learnt it later in life. Without these skills the individuals have to look for employment in their ethnic community or in lower skilled occupations where English abilities are not as important. However, Tamil English abilities vary as a consequence of the changes in English within the Sri Lankan

² This is not a definitive list. Other barriers identified were: lack of qualifications (refugee), discrimination (refugee and elite), mental health issues as a consequence of the refugee experience (refugee), lack of knowledge of where to get a job (elite), receiving welfare benefits (refugee), competition for jobs from other groups e.g. Eastern Europeans (refugee), age (refugee), lack of recognition of qualifications or previous experience (elite), lack of understanding of UK work practices (elite).

education system and the later civil war. This combined with the experience of being a refugee, and potentially moving through other countries on route; affect an individual's English abilities.

The English language and an English education have great historical significance within Sri Lanka (Canagarajah 2008). Individuals who arrived in the UK before 1983 frequently had a good level of English and English transferable qualifications (Danny Sriskandarajah*). Up until the 1950s, when Sinhala-only language policies were introduced, English was frequently the mode of tuition in city schools or the main second language, to Tamil, for Tamil students. For example, six of the interviewees were taught in English at school and a further fourteen stated that they were taught English at school. Khush argued that "because we are under colony, some people got a good education ... but unfortunately some villages they didn't get the English ... English is a very posh language." English in Sri Lanka was considered to be the language of the professional classes (Canagarajah 2008). Consequently higher English abilities reflected a higher standard of education. Furthermore, the opportunity to develop English skills was geographically specific to particular areas of Sri Lanka, such as urban locations, and areas dominated by Tamils in the North and Eastern provinces.

Sinhala-first policies impacted upon refugees who were being educated in or after the 1950s. The focus on Sinhala meant Tamils could no longer use English, except as a third language, in their everyday lives (Varad*). Yet English remained significant at University where certain disciplines continued to be taught in English. Consequently English language abilities can be related to subjects chosen at university. For example, English was the medium of tuition for most courses in medicine and law. Meyyan* commented that the instruction of medicine in English was important as "English is a second language for us there ... so yes we were able to communicate with the people, that is important, especially with the patients." A similar situation was applicable to law:

"The Law College is where the British people came and started Law College, that was about 200-300 years back, I can't remember. So in that place they teach English, so the medium is English, the tuition" (Zarine*).

Zarine's* point is interesting, as English abilities are therefore related to the disciplines people studied.

Tamil refugees who have moved to the UK frequently had breaks in their education at some point in their lives as a consequence of the civil war (Fuglerud 1999). Not only will these have impacted upon their wider education but may also have limited their English education. As a result of their situation, individuals may be restricted to finding work through the wider Tamil community. This can lead to them working in Tamil environments such as a factory with mainly Tamil employees, or in a Tamil organisation (see Chapter Seven). Khush pointed out that refugee opportunities to improve their English skills once in the UK are related to where they end up working: “so if they working in an English environment then they can pick up easily, but unfortunately some small factories, they contain a lot of Tamils, so there people find difficult to grow in the language” (Khush). In contrast, the participants in this research who studied full time (either at school, college or university) in the UK are, mostly, much more competent in speaking and writing English than those who have not studied at any point in the UK.

The colonial relationship between the UK and Sri Lanka remains significant in the perceptions of many Tamil refugees, and therefore if a choice is made, the UK is often a desirable location to seek refuge. The English education system is seen to be the best in the world and, where options are available, many Tamil refugees believe the UK is the best place for their children’s education. Some people moved to the UK at a later date, after they received refugee status in another EU country, for the sake of their children’s education (for example, Chitrlekha).

This was also the case in Canada where it was the perception that Tamils originally sought asylum in Montreal, only to move to Toronto in order for themselves and their children to learn English. The importance of English was re-emphasised in Montreal in a way that it is not possible to identify so clearly in London. One interviewee in Montreal, Mandeep, argued that it was easier to learn French first and then English afterwards, otherwise people could not correctly pronounce French vocabulary. As so many Tamils had been exposed to English prior to arriving in Montreal, learning French had become particularly difficult as they pronounced French words as if though they were English words. It was argued that the difficulties in French were more severe for women who could normally get by on a day-to-day level, but not hold conversations. By contrast to the London situation, Tamils in Montreal therefore did not consider English to be a problem for them, despite the vast numbers of Tamils whose English

abilities were relatively poor. In comparison to their French abilities, they felt much more confident speaking English in Canada.

Motivation and individual drive

Some people perceive their new situation as a series of opportunities whereas others see it as an obstacle to their ambitions. For example, Bimala discussed the accountancy course she is currently attending: “if you want you can finish within a year, within a six months. It’s entirely in my hand, but because of my circumstance, because I’m working full time and studying in the sense it’s a bit difficult for me.” Bimala was particularly determined to achieve. For her this means gaining her accountancy qualifications because she believed that she would be more successful in the UK with these. Whereas other Tamil refugees settled for getting a job, Bimala had wider ambitions which she believed would improve her quality of life. Bhaskar had a similar attitude. He notes the consequences of his university education: “when I graduated, I came out from university with £36,000 worth of debt. Right, I paid them off, so I didn’t get a grant.” Bhaskar came from a middle class family in Sri Lanka and probably had some support from his parents in funding his education. However, he did have a full time job (or two part time jobs at times), throughout his degree. The hard work he put into not only the degree itself, but also his working in a convenience store to pay for it, is indicated in the sense of pride he has at not having taken out a loan.

In contrast, Savita continues to concentrate on employment: “I would like to study here, but economics problems, I can earn here.” Some people need time to adjust upon arrival and have responsibilities which mean that they often choose money over education. Tamil refugees may rarely be able to learn to a high level in the receiving country, whilst also earning enough money to support their various obligations and responsibilities, yet some people find a way. The overwhelming driving force to their ‘success’ at earning and educating themselves is their own personal ambitions. However, this drive to achieve successful occupations also relates to their current educational level in the UK.

3. Success for the community versus success for the individual

This section argues that satisfaction within employment is more than just about utilising the individual’s skills; it is about wider features of the society within which the individual operates. I begin by considering what success is to Tamils, before looking

specifically at the importance of education and finally the significance of particular types of education. Individuals appear to *choose* certain paths, even if this choice is only an illusion. Along this line of thinking people achieve what appears to be choice as a consequence of the impact of the structures of which they are a part. In comprehending the notion of success within the Tamil community the reality of 'choice' is illustrated. What is perceived as success to follow such a route is influenced by wider cultural scripts (see Chapter Four).

Success is discussed in relation to the community and the individual. The concept of success for individual Tamils within the host country is related to education and social status (see Chapter Four). Notions of success are highly individual and complicated by the multiple factors which contribute to forming personal ambitions. These cannot be separated from success in other areas of the individual's life such as their desired life style or desire for particular material goods, all of which are set in the wider context of community ambitions and wider structural influences. Perceptions of success relate to past experience of work, qualifications, marital background, gender, and other commitments (such as children).

Success is locally constituted. Individual perceptions of success are set within the environment of the local area and what is expected of people within that context. For individual Tamil refugees, success at a personal level in the UK could be achieving the same level of work as they had in Sri Lanka (such as Paavarasi's goal), or success could be seeing their children achieving goals which also benefit them (Chitrlekha's move to the UK for her children), or success might mean attaining other people's expectations – for example parents' hopes for their children (inter-generational expectations from Sri Lanka), or success may have already been achieved by escaping from the situation they faced in Sri Lanka and receiving refuge in the UK. During the asylum process concepts of success may be altered or postponed, as "the aspirations and goals of children like those of their parents, [are] 'on hold'" (MacKenzie & Forde 2007: 4). For others success is a combination of these or other different factors. The extent to which individual desires relate to community comprehensions vary by personality. In fact, separation from the ethnic community and integration into the wider community can be more successful. Ponmudi mentioned a "very successful guy who has created these calling cards who has gone into the international market, not necessarily the mainstream, but the international market." In this instance success is considered to be

moving into a wider market than just that of the ethnic community and earning a good wage from such activities.

For the community, success is also related to maintaining networks between the London community and Sri Lanka, and the continuing development of Tamil culture and teachings across generations within the diaspora. This consolidates community unity which is believed as necessary in order for the situation in Sri Lanka to improve either through the liberation of Tamil Eelam or the accomplishment of a sustainable peace settlement in the country. The Tamil community as a whole has no ambition set out as such, yet the desires of individuals and groups of individuals in certain directions lead the 'community' to appear to have certain dominant directions: these can be seen as discourses of success (see Chapter Four).

Alongside these complicated multiple influences of community and the individual, there are also expectations from the people who remain in Sri Lanka. These may be related to dominant community ideals, yet are also based upon potentially idealistic images of how people live in the UK. Family members often have to spend a large amount of money helping an individual travel to the UK to seek refuge (Fuglerud 1999): thus family members may inadvertently create additional pressures on refugees to become successful in a particular way. This may also relate to concepts of gratitude (see Chapter Eight). For example, Jayani explained how her family in Sri Lanka thought the lives of Tamil refugees were luxurious: "'Oh you are living in luxury', we are not living in luxury." But they don't realise the difficulties that we are having here." Such expectations from back home, against the reality of the refugee experience, add pressure to individuals to contribute remittances back to Sri Lanka.

Success can also be understood through the perceptions of the unsuccessful. For some people the achievement of being in the UK and the welfare support provided may allow them to feel successful. However, others, who define themselves through their work, would find it demoralising to receive benefits. Bimala commented how "I want to work; I don't want to go for benefit or anything like that". As an individual who has always worked and was in the process of achieving her ambitions in Sri Lanka, the idea of receiving hand outs from the government (without having done anything to earn them) created a situation which made her feel particularly uncomfortable. Likewise

Paavarasi illustrated how some Tamil families' desires to connect with home limit their success in the UK. The benefits system is central to her criticism:

“They sit in front of the TV and watch [Tamil TV] because that is their link to home. It is understandable but on the other hand, they are not doing themselves any favours by sitting in front of the telly all the time, because they are living in England, you are going to have to work. So you must get out of that! Because the system is giving them benefits they don't give a damn. That's good enough for them!”

She believes that their lack of connection with the wider community and what she perceives as their choice to 'live off the state', rather than attempt to find work, is an example of a lack of success. She is far more motivated to achieve her ambitions than to receive money that she does not feel she has earned.

Within the context of this research individual success was frequently related to employment and therefore associated with other ambitions such as purchasing a house. Consequently alongside dealing with reduced employment status, a financial reduction was also significant.

“When I was in Sri Lanka I was in a very high position. I was working in the Head Office in cash department [as an] assistant manager, and I was [in] charge for billions amount of money. But when I came here, I'm not knocking the position but I haven't got no job, it's really because of no money, I can't do anything on my own” (Bimala).

Even if individuals feel that their skills are being utilised to a fair extent, they may not feel successful in this area unless they are earning enough money to provide for themselves and their family in the life style they believe is necessary.

From this analysis it is fair to argue that each feature of success relates to an individual's status within the community. However, the features which are perceived as attaining status within the Tamil community are also significant features of success within wider communities in the UK such as education (see Chapter Four). People also appear to perceive success over a long time period rather than over the transitory period when they first arrive. From an analysis of the data, the dominant notions of success within the community are in order of importance:

1. Education (of firstly the next generation and secondly the current generation)
2. Education in particular fields
3. Employment using education background
4. Possessions

Education is the feature most emphasised by the interviewees. Yet the significance of this varies through the life course of the individual. The importance of children's

education is of primary importance for those who have children; this is followed by adult education. Education is significant as it entitles the individual to a particular status. However, success is also seen to be increased in certain types of education, within specific subjects (for example, medicine, engineering, accountancy and so on). Certain subjects are important because of the types of work which flows from them. These are mainly well paid jobs which, therefore, enable the individual to achieve the material possessions they desire and which symbolise status within the community, such as owning a house. Although not entirely distinct from the individual definition of success, what is perceived as community success is related to maintaining a strong identity of 'Tamilness' within the community and the future independence of Tamil Eelam (see Chapter Four).

To a certain extent, success is linked to an individual's or community's ambitions and as such is rarely achievable in a full sense, as many people instinctively set themselves goals for the future. The attainment of such goals is therefore often before them, as their future aims change with successful achievement of previous targets. Consequently, the achievement of complete 'success' remains elusive. This section now discusses these concepts of success in greater detail by focusing on education and subsequent employment, and the importance of the family in maintaining such social constructions of success.

Education and familial pressures: the 'Tamil obsession with education'

In Tamil society "your mum and your father and your teacher are your gods" (Rishi).*

Rishi's* statement above forms a good basis to begin examining the strong cultural expectations around education and parental authority. Education is a signifier of success within the Tamil community (discussed in Chapter Four). There is great family pressure and expectations for individuals to achieve within this domain. Paavarasi summarised the social status surrounding education and education institutions: "Every Tamil parent here wants to send their children to Oxford and Cambridge and no where else! I'm talking about Tamil parents who [only] know a word of English." The prestige surrounding Oxbridge represents the pinnacle of success in education for Tamils who have been brought up on the colonial heritage of the significance of these renowned institutions. Although individual Tamils may know nothing more than the reputations of these places, the implications for their social mobility within the Tamil community of their children's attendance at one of these universities is considerable. A

child who graduates from either university would be considered a true example of a success in the UK.

Sri Lanka has a long history of migration for education, particularly since the 1970s (Orjuela & Sriskandarajah 2008). A likely consequence of changing education policies in Sri Lanka was the increased significance of an English education. This was partly because a Sri Lankan higher education was available to fewer Tamils, a particular failing of the government, especially for the more academically inclined. Therefore the reputation of the universities and the significance of an education in England in general became increasingly important for the Tamil population of Sri Lanka. The previous notion of education being the route to success was slowly becoming subsumed within the perception that an English education was suitable, or even superior to that of an education in Sri Lanka.

The emphasis on the wisdom of the teacher places further educational pressure on individuals. Tamils focus on providing continuously better economic and educational opportunities for their children (Fuglerud & Engebriksen 2006). Rutter (2006) illustrates how, in Lewisham, the education focus continues to be transmitted to children. Research in two different schools found that 77% and 82% of Tamils were receiving grades A*-C GCSE in comparison to the average for the two schools respectively of 16% and 75% of grades A*-C GCSE. It was anticipated that both daughters and sons should be educated; albeit different expectations surrounded the way in which they may receive this education (see Chapter Six). Education becomes a route for parental social mobility through their children in the host country. "My family were insisting on my education all the time; that was the only reason we've come to [the UK]" (Ponmudi). Linking back to the perceptions of the status of an English education, this explains Ponmudi's family's desire for him to come to the UK.

Tamil children are certainly encouraged, if not pushed, into working hard at school. It is not unusual for children to have further tuition every day after school in academic subjects or extra curricular pursuits:

"mostly Sri Lankans have after school tuition, like back home isn't it [laughter], and also weekends here because now the children study in English medium so the Tamils, especially the Tamil community want to what do you call ... teach Tamil and their religion" (Zarine*).

“In the 70s there were some lovely stories about kids studying for their A Levels would go to like 6 hours tuition outside school everyday. That I’m afraid has translated itself to London” (Danny Sriskandarajah*).

Before, and after, the mass exodus of individuals from Sri Lanka, educational aspirations have been definitively upon Tamil children and Tamil youth rather than on newly arrived or established adult refugees. As a newly arrived refugee, Chitrlekha had no intention of re-training despite possessing a degree in History from the University of Jaffna and speaking relatively fluent English and French. She and her husband had moved the family to England from France in order for their children to have an English education. Chitrlekha saw her children as the architects of the family’s social mobility, within not only the Tamil community, but also into wider societies. Their children’s education is seen as leading into employment which could also provide for them in the future:

“We want [our children] to get good education ... I want my son to educate very well, and go to the university and get a proper job” (Parinita).

Not only does Parinita indicate her desire for her children’s futures, but she has certain views on what constitutes a ‘proper job’ for her children. This begs the question: what is seen as a ‘proper’ job by the Tamil community in the UK? Notions of success in education tie in considerably with the perceptions of ‘proper’ work. This continued focus upon education for their children, not for themselves, suggests an absence of the expectation of lifelong learning opportunities in Sri Lanka, and thus in the UK.

Favourable subjects: social mobility by discipline

Not only is education an important route to social mobility or perceived success, but it is education of a particular form. Certain subjects are favoured more highly than others. Frequently these tend to be those in the pure sciences or law, generally in vocational disciplines. Danny Sriskandarajah* theorised that this could be an impact of the change in language legislation to Sinhala only in 1956 in Sri Lanka.

“If you were a Tamil speaker the chances of you getting into university in the humanities or social sciences were very low, on the other hand many of the natural sciences and things like accountancy were areas where English continued to be the lingua-franca which means if you’re a Tamil speaker with some English you had a better chance” (Danny Sriskandarajah*).

The predisposition of Sri Lankan Tamils living in the North East of Sri Lanka to favour education in these subjects is continued in the diaspora. “You say Tamil and people tend to think maths... I don’t know how that works, I’m very bad [at maths]” (Rishi*). This statement nicely illustrates the distinctions between perceptions and realities. Although of Tamil origin himself, Rishi* is a social worker rather than a scientist, yet

despite his own deviation from the expectations of Tamilness, his initial reaction is to assert the dominant perceptions that Tamils have a talent for mathematics. Rustam's aspirations for his younger brother also revealed expectations and ambitions generally articulated by the wider Tamil society, "I think he can do something like doctors ... I'd like to push him to the business ... it's easy to ... implement your own business. But again he's interested in doctors. So I say 'Ok, you can do it'." Rustam recently graduated from the University of East London with a degree in Computer Science and Business Information. His aspirations for the future include establishing his own business, hence his opinion that an education in business would be beneficial to his brother (see Chapter Six). At 14 his brother's interest in medicine indicates the dominance of the medical profession amongst the more favoured occupations for individuals. For the 14 year old boy this could be a passing phase or a concrete aspiration strongly influenced by the aura of success surrounding those individuals who have become doctors within the community. This vision of success is likely to be one constructed by parental and community cultural aspirations or definitions of success.

When discussing a conversation he had with his aunt when he found that he had got onto his law degree course, Danny Sriskandarajah* nicely illustrates the hierarchy of occupations:

Aunt: Oh Dhananjayan, oh you're doing law? Couldn't you get into medicine?

Danny: Oh no I could.

Aunt: Couldn't you get into engineering?

Danny: No I could

Aunt: [She ran off the list of disciplines] So why are you doing law?

Danny: Because I want to!

All of the favoured education options within the Tamil community are vocational. However, medicine, engineering, and accountancy are perceived as the most prestigious types of employment. Therefore most parents appear to desire these for their children, with occupations such as solicitors, and teaching (more often for single women), being deemed acceptable, if not as desirable. The focus on the knowledge and advice of their family members may be more intense in the diaspora due to changes in family structure and the loss of extended family. Whereas the opinions of direct family members may have been more diluted in Sri Lanka, the intensity of the asylum experience may lead individuals to pay more attention to immediate family in the UK as they expect them to be more knowledgeable in the host country than members from the wider community who may not understand the individual's background as clearly.

In Canada, the language difficulties emphasised in Montreal related to individuals having no background in French. Yet, although there are difficulties in living in a bilingual city, some Tamils embraced the opportunity to learn both languages. This related to their perceptions of success and what they wanted themselves or their family to achieve. In Canada, in order to work in the higher echelons of the national government, it is necessary for individuals to speak both English and French. Tamils have a history of working in government positions in Sri Lanka under colonial rule: an employment position which prior to the recent difficulties carried high status (see Chapters One and Four). In provinces other than Quebec individuals who worked at the local level could do so even if they were not bilingual. However, if they wish to work at a national level it was a pre-requisite that individuals were fluent in both languages. Children educated in Montreal were advantaged as they had greater opportunities to pick up both languages, furthering their chances to work within the government and achieve high status jobs within the Tamil and wider communities.

This section has examined the concept of success within the Tamil community. Success is socially constructed around the importance of education and in particular, certain types of education. This perception is emphasised by familial pressure on education and particular subject disciplines. Success remains personal: it varies by education and gender (discussed in Chapter Six) and may relate to success in the individual's whole life in the UK rather than just work. Chapters Six and Seven develop this further. Success becomes differentiated on the basis of what is possible in the host country. The ethnic economy and self employment are crucial outlets for Tamil skills. The reality of what individual Tamil refugees do in the UK can be quite different from their desires for their children or the discourses around the Tamil diaspora in general.

Perceived Tamil Employment in the UK: educational barriers

Success has been shown to be based around a route through higher education for the Tamil community. The occupations which appear to almost embody 'success' in Tamil society require high levels of education. However, a lack of education appears to alter the expectations of success within Tamil employment. It is important to discuss different employment perceptions around two broadly differentiated groups based on an education background: the highly educated and the less educated. For the purposes of this discussion the highly educated are those individuals who have at least a university

degree, whereas the less educated are those who range from no qualifications up to A levels. Though the latter group is hugely variable, in this section I discuss perceptions rather than realities; therefore a more nuanced distinction is not necessary to understand the apparent clear differences expressed by the interviewees of the occupations Tamil refugees have in the UK.

Many Tamil refugees lack high levels of education or abilities. The impact of the civil war in Sri Lanka meant that several of the refugees I worked with had experienced an interruption to their education to some extent: “I finish O Level after that I got in civil war, I couldn’t continue anything, stuck in somewhere on the corner” (Kiran). In the aftermath of the beginning of the Sri Lankan civil war in the early 1980s, migration to the UK and other parts of the world took place for reasons of safety rather than education. However, the significance of education as ‘the route to success’ continued, partly as greater education is seen by some as a method to increase integration: “people who are fortunate to come through a formal education... we have been fortunate to understand and include ourselves in the main community” (Ponmudi). Ponmudi believed that through more formal education, alongside his ability to speak fluent English, was the route towards successful integration (this discussion of integration continues in Chapter Eight). He was keen to express the Tamil cultural focus on education as he felt he gained more respect in the UK because of his and his community’s educational achievements.

However the specific educational opportunities for Tamil refugees are limited. If many of them were to train or retrain in the occupations they had in Sri Lanka they would earn more money in the UK, but financial commitments prevent them from taking up educational opportunities. “First thing they do is like start looking for a job. they look for a job, but then if you give them opportunities to study they will... education is a big priority, the main priority of Tamils” (Zarine*). Upon arrival, for many refugee adults the priority is earning enough to live on rather than necessarily utilising their skills. It should be noted that personality is a big factor in such a decision. The low skilled, or ‘un-re-trained’ predominantly end up working in the service industry, particularly the retail sector, or resort to community employment or self employment (also often within the retail sector).

Participants believed that what Tamils who were highly educated were doing, and their levels of success, depended upon the person's situation in relation to these barriers. For example one of the Tamil Community Housing Association (TCHA) Employees, Varad* was trained as an accountant in Sri Lanka with a degree which he thought would be recognised in the UK. He was the Finance Director of a bank in Sri Lanka. Upon arrival in the UK he tried to find a position in various businesses but was unsuccessful. Varad* "finally became an auditor, a very junior position, and now I have this position here, and because it is a community organisation I get recognition of the qualification." This example raises another significant issue which distinguishes the employment experiences of different highly educated people: that of the choice to try to use their previous qualifications. The non-professional participants, who had not had direct experience of trying to receive recognition for their past qualifications, believed that professionals from Sri Lanka were able to work in their professions in the UK.

"People, when they know they are coming as doctors or engineers in Sri Lanka, they have a certain level they are established, financially and so on. And when they come here they have friends who can accommodate them until they have passed through these exams and so on" (Kovalan* TCHA Employee).

Kovalan* does not question whether or not the individuals would want to be doctors or engineers in the UK, and he assumes that the wider community would support them in their endeavours, as all they need to do is to pass their exams. This contrasts with Varad's* experience where the only way he could use his qualifications and experience to a level he felt was appropriate, was to become an accountant for a community organisation. These assumptions may be based on the fact that these degrees were taught in English in Sri Lanka and therefore from an outsider's perspective there are few reasons to prevent an individual from doing the same profession in the UK (the reality of this is further discussed in Chapter Six). The main definition of a successful job however is "a mostly respected job, and plus the job is available with the respect of the community ... and the money!" (Meyyan*). Meyyan* clearly denotes the importance of the community (see Chapter Four). However, despite being educated "obviously people start off at the very bottom in shops or whatever" (Rishi*). The theory is that when individuals arrive they have to start at the bottom to earn money in order to support their educational ambitions. Although the Tamil community may well be relatively highly educated, the lack of people in highly skilled employment, and the subsequent lack of networks into professional areas, means that the likelihood of finding appropriate employment for highly skilled individuals is small.

A lack of education is seen as a barrier to achieving success. The less educated frequently stay ‘at the bottom’ in petrol stations and supermarkets. “There was a huge influx of refugees and those refugees they didn’t do any skilled work, probably they didn’t have chance” (Bhaskar). Despite claiming asylum himself and being highly educated, Bhaskar perceives that Tamil refugees in general had fewer chances in education and therefore lacked the opportunity to partake in ‘skilled work’. People begin working in local shops, positions found through social networks while they are concentrating on earning money.

“One of my friends is working in Tesco and that Tesco manager, when they have some staff vacancies they tell the Tamil people to bring Tamil people because they are hard working” (Rustam).

Participants argued that the Tamil reputation of being hard working – “Tamils work really hard like three or four jobs” (Dhanya) – leads employers to value them as employees. Networks are easily utilised to gain entrance into certain occupations where Tamils are already working (see Chapter Seven). However, as their commitments increase or their living expenses rise higher than anticipated, the once temporary work, becomes more permanent. As a consequence of a lack of opportunities for more highly educated jobs, or the more permanent status of temporary work, people with higher skills or ambitions opt or plan for self-employment.

4. Conclusion: the importance of community

This chapter has examined the concept of success in employment and skills development through the eyes of the Tamil refugee community. It has identified barriers affecting individual refugees in their ambitions to achieve success: English language abilities, and motivation have been discussed here. A lack of confidence, family responsibilities and connections to home are explored later. However, it is important to note that whereas these prevent some people from achieving in a particular way, for others they are surmountable. Within the community as a whole education is a target for both adults and children. Through this discussion, the experiences of individuals have been overshadowed by the importance of community within perceptions of success. This is partly in response to the significance of the wider community within the day-to-day lives of individuals. The next chapter develops individual experiences of skill utilisation. Building upon the ideas of success from this chapter, it examines the reality of experiences, particularly focusing upon gender differences.

CHAPTER SIX

Gender utilisation of skills: role expectations and success

Chitrlekha is in her 40s and has a degree in History from Jaffna University. She did well and received a Gold Medal for her dissertation. She sought asylum with her husband in France in 1989. In 1998 she and her husband decided to move to the UK for the sake of their children's education. Chitrlekha is responsible for the children's day-to-day lives whilst her husband works nights at a local hotel. She has chosen not to work so that she can raise her children the way she wants to. She takes part in some voluntary work at the Tamil Community Housing Association, helping translate information for clients. Through this position she has found a niche for herself which does not interfere with her responsibilities for her children in ways which could impact upon their futures and her ambitions for them.

1. Gendered skill utilisation

Chitrlekha illustrates how individuals may conform to community expectations: she has put her children before her own potential career in the UK, as she would have done in Sri Lanka. She takes a particularly active role in her children's lives. In many ways she lives vicariously through her children by setting them ambitious futures. The potential of social mobility through them, alongside her work in a Tamil organisation, provides her life with meaning and success on a daily basis.

This chapter analyses the influence of gender on the utilisation of Tamil refugee skills in the UK. The argument here is not that gender is the most important factor explaining the differentiation of Tamil entrance into the labour market, but rather that gender has significance alongside other factors, such as their circumstances in the UK or London society, which make it worth exploring in greater detail. Tamil society has different expectations of men and women (see Chapter Four). These affect the skills they acquire and attempt to utilise.

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section re-examines the importance of community within the everyday lives of Tamil refugees, specifically analysing how community values influence gendered expectations. This section

considers how household structures impact upon and frame employment opportunities and experiences. The second section develops arguments raised within Chapter Five by focusing upon the different skills of men and women. Rather than simply reiterating the significance of education, this chapter moves beyond the dominant view of perceiving education as a route to success within the Tamil and wider communities, and emphasises the nuances of the ways in which individual Tamil refugees perceive of success within the dominant framework of education. This examines the mismatch between the skills people have and the work they have undertaken.

2. Gender within the diasporic Tamil community

The cultural scripts from Sri Lanka creating gender attitudes and perceptions continue into the diaspora (see Chapter Four). However, within the diasporic space different influences have a role in constructing expectations of people of different genders. Patriarchy and ethno-nationalism continue to play their part, albeit in potentially different ways, along with additional forces, such as community and the refugee experience. The Tamil community influences refugee perceptions around skills and success in employment (see Chapter Five), alongside playing a role in the way in which refugees settle into their lives in the UK (see Chapters Seven and Eight). This section first discusses the significance of Tamil community expectations on individual employment opportunities before discussing the importance of household structure on skill utilisation.

In Chapter Four it was argued that the cultural scripts of patriarchy in Sri Lanka most prominently centred on household structures, violence and cultural institutions. However, in the post-migration situation, the worlds of Tamil refugees are shaped by modified structures, whilst simultaneously being influenced by the cultural scripts with which they grew up, often in response to community expectations around them. Walby (1990) recognises the distinction between private and public patriarchy. Based upon Western cultural ideas of patriarchy and how the structures have changed in the way they work over time, I argue that the experiences of patriarchy for Tamil women in the UK are a complex interaction between both private and public structures. Whereas, in some cases, there is evidence of strong matriarchal self-determination (particularly in the ways in which individuals sought asylum), for others there remain elements of a more traditional patriarchal structure. The structures dominant in Sri Lanka are potentially lessened in the UK, yet maintained in the private sphere to different degrees

through their reproduction at the household and ethnic community level. The private structures within the household contribute to the exclusion of individuals from certain situations, which may shift into the public realm. For women this may involve an exclusion from public employment: “initially ladies, most of the ladies are not working – they are housebound, when the husband is working, now they are in the same situation here as well – due to the language barrier” (Kaaviya*). What is originally a private form of exclusion, whereby the women are not working because their husbands are providing for them, becomes a public exclusion as language barriers prevent them from fully participating in the wider labour market. Alternatively women may be segregated within the labour market. As opposed to being able to access certain types of jobs (for example, self-employment), several of the women who participated in this research were expected to work in areas which are considered to be more feminised occupations. Often this is a combination of both community and self exclusion. Harita was excluded from particular forms of employment which were considered male work, for example, working in her husband’s carpet shop. Kayal experienced a similar situation in which she was excluded from formal work outside the family. However, her role in running the family business, as a cashier, allows her certain freedoms.

For men the issues are different. In private they may experience a loss of status when they are unable to provide for their families whilst waiting for their cases to be heard or because they struggle finding employment, in contrast to when they were the “bread winner in their home country” (Ellen*). Madhu struggled with the fact that he was finding it difficult to access employment. He felt responsible for his wife and children and so was searching hard to find work. On the day of his interview with me, he had been to one employment interview and had another the next day. Through his unemployment he fails to fulfil his traditional role or meet the social expectations of him. Male Tamils often do not consider themselves to be ‘real’ men if they are not working and providing for their families: “they work hard and they look after the family” (Meyyan*). This is partly the result of the situation in Sri Lanka whereby a lack of social support from the government places the burden upon the family. Khush argues that “we don’t have social security back home, so the women always want to look to the husbands to provide everything.” For some, it is anticipated within the patriarchal structures, that the women can depend upon their husbands, as evidenced by the seven Tamil women who are married and do not work. Chitrlekha was able to decide to volunteer in the UK rather than work for payment as she knew that her

husband would support her. Some people marry partly to ensure this security. Where this is not available, some women look towards other male relations.

However, Khush argues that it is necessary for women to defy normal Sri Lankan expectations and work in the UK due to the expense of living. For example, Parinita and her husband decided that she should apply for work at the Tamil community organisation because with their two children, and another one on the way, life in the UK was too expensive on his shop assistant salary. These changing roles may exacerbate the inferiority complex of some Tamil men as they are expected to provide for the family on their own, potentially making the men “less keen to allow their wives or daughters or whatever to work” (Sarah*). For example Mala started a part time job at a jewellery shop so that she could contribute her money towards the family income. This may be difficult for some men to accept as, for Mala’s father, not only does his wife have to work, but so does his daughter. Through her work Mala reduces her reliance upon her family by at least supplementing her social activities and travel between home and university, if not contributing towards her upkeep.

These attitudes have developed on the basis of expectations of Tamil women. Meyyan* described the traditional Tamil woman: she is “a bit shy and coy, they don’t come out, but that is the tradition.” This was a dominant and accepted narrative of Tamil women, although the extent to which this was a reality varied between individuals. Harita and Pragya illustrated some of this shyness by the way in which, although they could understand me, particularly Harita refused to attempt to talk to me in English. Rather than simply saying ‘Hello’ when I introduced myself, Harita chose to sit silently. It was clear later that she understood and spoke a lot more English than she first appeared to. The extent to which ‘shyness’ is an accurate description of the women who were sponsored to the UK is dependent on the individual case. Individuals who do encompass such qualities may find these traits influence their employment experiences in the UK. For example, Tamil society and Tamil men do not expect women to talk back to them (Siva*) and they “like to keep their wives at home” (Jayani).

Furthermore, Tamil women reflected these expected discourses at the sub-conscious level. The most dominant example of this was that of confidence. There appeared to be a commonly agreed discourse whereby women were more likely to understate their abilities; seeing themselves one dimensionally, rather than reflect a more

comprehensive reality. For example, several of the women used some variation of the phrase “I am only a housewife” (Dhanya). Elisai also had a similar perspective on her role. With her second child on its way, she concentrated on her role in her children’s lives, rather than her potential in the labour market. Yet as highly educated women they may be perceived to produce ‘better’ children (Yuval-Davis 1997). By contrast, males less frequently acknowledged their role as husbands or fathers: rather they concentrated more on the skills they had gained through their work and education. For example, Ponmudi¹ talked about his qualifications and his business in terms of skills, but only mentioned his children in terms of his hopes for them, not his own abilities. These differences link to perceptions and attitudes through which women are often more self-deprecating than men, perhaps because they feel it is expected of them².

These different attitudes and expectations of female members of the family continued when analysing the contrast between male and female children attending university. Building upon ideas in Chapter Five where parents held high aspirations for their children, here it is possible to see some differences between education for sons and daughters.

“They prefer to live with [their parents] and find a university if possible locally because, especially with girls, you know they prefer to be with their parents and the parents prefer to be at home with them. So they are very insecure ... because now you can see in London, how many killings and its getting worse. So I will worry about my daughter if she is going to university a far – I will send my son to Durham from here, because I want him to learn the world, you know, see the world rather than be with us” (Meyyan*).

The contrast in Meyyan’s description of his plans for his daughter’s education and his son’s education is dramatic. The perceived escalating violence within London means that families wish to keep their daughters close where parents could protect them; however, their sons need to be able to see the world. This may be a convenient rationalization for practices that would occur anyway. Yet, within this research the two participants who had recently gone to university were living at home: Rustam and Mala. Neither had considered going to university outside London, although many Londoners may not envisage leaving the city to go to university due to the options available to them locally. For Rustam this was a consequence of his responsibilities in helping run his father’s shop. For Mala the decision to go to university in London was based on

¹ In snowballing for participants, Ponmudi was suggested as an interviewee. He originally lived in London before moving to Oxford and then Lincoln. Despite living in a geographically distinct location, he still makes considerable use of his London networks and contacts.

² Although note Paavarasi’s statement about her various different work experiences at the beginning of Chapter Five.

financial considerations (in addition to her gender): her parents could not afford accommodation in another location. Although Meyyan* believed himself to be an open-minded man who wanted his children to choose for themselves, his view was inherently patriarchal in that he would worry more about his daughter than his son under the same circumstances. For him, geographical proximity is important for female family members but less so for male family members.

Similar attitudes surrounded concerns over the safety of Tamil wives. Mangai* commented that in London husbands “want their wives to use their full potential. So they give them opportunity, they give them freedom.” She believes husbands give their wives ‘freedom’ so that they may achieve their potential – suggesting that without this ‘freedom’ their wives may not fulfil this potential. However, she went on to comment that “men can work anywhere, they can travel, maybe the basic barriers to relevant communities, what all the communities face we also face [but] women can’t travel that far” (Mangai*). At first it appears that some of the private structures preventing women from moving into the workplace and constraining men as the sole provider are lessening, yet the assumptions around what men and women *can* do remain for Mangai*. In contrast, Parinita lived in South London (Tooting) and travelled daily to North East London (Enfield) for her work in the Tamil Relief Centre. This is because the job within the Tamil community utilised her accountancy skills more than the jobs she could find closer to home. The structures influencing other ethnic communities continue to affect the Tamil community; however men are perceived as dealing with this constraint, in comparison to women who often work more locally and consequently are pushed toward the local ethnic economy (see Chapter Seven).

Structures are not just constraining, they can also be enabling. Although it can be argued that “women are in fact emancipated when they move, because they move away from those cultural [structures]” (Sarah*) that have prevented them from behaving in certain ways, some women may not choose such changes. Patriarchy can have negative impacts on individual lives in terms of the expectations of both genders. Yet the structures persist because they are reproduced by men and women. In certain circumstances people may appreciate some forms of patriarchy. For example, at a Tamil cultural event I attended, the majority of the audience were families or couples, rather than single women attending the event alone. In contrast there were men who had attended the event alone.

Women may prefer being housewives than having a paid position as they “think that marriage is more, it’s a job like” (Meyyan*). Dhanya commented that she “can’t manage work and housework” indicating her view that housework is a full time occupation. Siva*, who runs classes for Tamil women at a local school, considered the women’s lack of commitment to the English and computer classes he put on as ‘laziness’. He had taken on board the difficulties some of them had with childcare, so he provided facilities to care for their children and scheduled most lessons during school time. However, he found that often the women still did not turn up. He believed that they did not really want to participate in the class. A similar case occurred when it came to some women’s employment. Harita and Chitrlekha stated that their reason for not working was their responsibilities to care for their children. However, their children were older than twelve or coming up to being so, and yet neither showed any indication that they would begin looking for work soon. It is possible that neither of them wanted to be formally employed and their children were a convenient excuse.

Some people perceive there to be a sense of equality between Tamil men and women. Within a discussion about Tamil women’s position within the community Mangai* emphatically stated how women are “equal to men, or more than men ... there is a general saying, yes even in English there is this saying that behind every man so there is a woman.” What she fails to acknowledge in this statement, as with the English saying, is that the woman is considered to be *behind* the man, supporting him, or pushing him – but not independent of him. Jazeel (2006) illustrates gender hierarchies in Ceylon’s (now Sri Lanka) colonial past. He argues that the “early twentieth-century independence movement was characteristically male-led ... [and] the education of Ceylonese women was concerned foremost with the preparation of suitable wives for professional men” (p24). These patriarchal structures infiltrate individual consciousness, as a consequence of institutional patriarchy in both Sri Lanka and the UK. Women are envisaged in a supportive, albeit important, role in the man’s life. The woman is perceived as secondary to her husband by the wider society and herself (Kaaviya*). This theme is continued in Jayani’s comment that “mainly the problem with our people, our women is when they get married.” Marriage is commonly expected of Tamil women and consequently many of the assumptions around Tamil women identify them as wives or mothers whereas Tamil men, for whom a lack of matrimony is more acceptable, are perceived as both workers and providers. Yet these

identities are changing. Changes in the economy and society inflated by the civil war have increased the range of social identities available to Tamil women (see Chapter Four). The ‘traditional’ discourses which continue to conceptualise Sri Lankan Tamil women on the basis of their relations with men are destabilizing (for example, Fuglerud 2001; Ruwanpura & Humphries 2004). Such changes have led to an increase in more independent women, who are able to support themselves and their families without male support (Ruwanpura & Humphries 2004).

Many of these features of Tamil diasporic society follow similar patterns to other Asian migrant groups (see Razool 1999). Having established the importance of community within expectations around gendered behaviour in the Tamil refugee community, I now look in more detail at the differences in gendered responsibilities and how these responsibilities frame skill development and employment opportunities. This differentiation appears to occur in relation to whether the individual is married or not, whether they have children or not and by the way the responsibility of care for children is divided. The remainder of this section is separated into those individuals with families and those without, focusing upon the gendered variation within these two different groups. It is important to recognise the diversity of experience within these categories. Significantly, experiences vary on the basis of the age of the children, personality of the individual, marriage situation, spouses’ employment and so on. For young women the changes in their responsibilities and the expectations of them are not particularly altered upon marriage itself. For them it is when they have children that their roles become significantly changed. However, as Tamil women often become mothers shortly after getting married, the time period in which they are married and do not have children is in general relatively limited. In contrast, for men it is marriage which makes a significant difference to the roles they are expected to perform.

Married and single refugees

“It’s not easy to live without a man, in a different country” (Jayani).

Marriages are generally arranged by the families of the prospective bride and groom rather than through a love match. Meyyan* argued that “mostly arranged marriage still going on because they want some support from their family, ... if everything goes wrong they don’t want the responsibility, pass it to the family, parents and uncles.” The institution of arranged marriage expresses, at least in symbolic form, all the main organising principles of society (Fuglerud 2001) (see Chapter Four). The nature of the

arranged marriage also creates greater obligations to maintain unity in times of struggle, due to responsibilities to the wider family. Divorce is relatively rare within Tamil society, as a consequence of community disapproval. As Meyyan* comments “compare the divorce rate, Sri Lankans are very, very low – it shows that it works well.” This is his interpretation of the situation. Another interpretation could be that divorce is so unacceptable that people choose to remain in unhappy marriages. In the event of the end of a marriage it could be expected that the divorce would “be destructive not only to the marriage, but to the whole fabric of kin and friends that make up the supportive network of Tamil exile life” (Engebrigtsen 2007: 740). Bimala was the only participant within the research who was divorced. She, however, divorced in Sri Lanka with the support of her parents. Divorce may be more difficult within the UK, where a severe loss of support networks in the community may have greater impact on the individual’s experiences. Even though some renegotiation of gender roles has caused internal conflict, such as greater financial pressure on husbands (for example, Khush and Jwalia), it has generally not resulted in the breakdown of the family (Engebrigtsen 2007). The cultural scripts discussed in Chapter Four are what keep Tamils together and focused upon the importance of the Tamil community in exile.

At least rhetorically, in Sri Lanka, it is expected that young women will marry earlier in their lives than men. In the UK, before they marry, they are likely to be living in their parents’ home. Whilst living in their parents’ house, like Mala, they may be working in occupations approved by their parents. If they are working it is expected that they will have responsibilities to contribute to the family income. Meyyan’s* earlier statement about daughters staying at home for university education rhetorically supports this belief that young single women continue to live at home. As women are often in the family home prior to matrimony, marriage at a young age does not, in itself, have so great an impact upon the opportunities available to them, although it may suspend their education. For those women who do not marry at an early age, the opportunity to progress far academically may reflect in their attitudes towards work and marriage later on in life (for example Paavarasi). Yet, in general, education remains significant for women. For example, Thooyan’s* argument: quoting Ghandi: “if you educate a woman, you educate the community.” The desire for men to have educated wives is important, as highly educated mothers help to educate the children. Dhanya commented that she was undertaking a computer class so that she could help her children with their homework.

Marriage impacts upon expectations of employment for men and women. Traditionally, as Jayani comments:

“In our culture most of the women when they get married then they don't think about work or career or anything and mostly husbands support them, so that's why they don't have the motivation to carry on with their studies or career.”

In the UK, as in Sri Lanka, women may appreciate the patriarchal constraints and pull against potential change in the UK. Likewise men may appreciate their responsibilities as they know what is expected of them and what to expect from others. “My wife, she start shouting more than 7 months” (Jwalia) about him not having work. Although Jwalia makes this comment with an edge of resentment he does appear to appreciate that he is depended upon and that he has a clearly defined role. Several of the men commented on their responsibilities to work and support their family (for example, Mudita, Trinabh, Madhu). For men their ability to provide for their family, and the social credit they gain from achieving this, is an opportunity for them to develop their masculinity. For some this may mean that gaining a job, any job, is more important than working towards employment which reflects their abilities. For others, their personal achievements remain important – although they may experience pressure to provide for their families.

In both Sri Lanka and the UK, male Tamils are expected to marry later than their female counterparts. Societal expectations of men require them to marry later so that they are able to secure themselves a position from which they can provide for their wife and family. Within this group most of the males were either single (Bhaskar, Rustam, Rohak) or had married recently (Caleb, Ravi, Mudita, Tanay). The majority of these men were in their late twenties or early thirties. As refugees, the age of marriage may also be later than for individuals still resident in Sri Lanka for several reasons, most significantly because it may take an individual longer to build up to a position of security. Individuals have other responsibilities, such as remittances home, which limit their opportunities to marry as they needed to earn a large amount of money (Siva*). These financial expectations occur even before they encounter the “marriage problem” (Tanay). For Tanay, marriage is a problem because he needs to earn enough money to bring his bride over from Sri Lanka³, and then support her once she is here. This further limits the opportunities men have to train. The balance once again has to be negotiated

³ None of the interviewees mentioned the possibility of marrying outside of the community.

between earning money quickly and looking for more skilled employment which may delay matrimonial possibilities. For example, Bhaskar is in his early thirties and single. He is highly educated, which may have been a reason for delaying marriage. The effect of seeking asylum, and the nature by which higher numbers of men than women seek asylum, for the reasons described in Chapter Two, means a gender imbalance in the refugee population is common. In the UK this leads to a higher proportion of young unmarried men to the unmarried women from the same country. Consequently, young unmarried Tamil men are quite common and accepted in the UK. Yet marriage remains the ideal. This expectation indicates how some individuals remain committed to the inherent Tamil community ideals around patriarchy. Marriage could be viewed as upholding such structures by providing a 'housewife' with a 'breadwinner'.

These constructs and structures imply that it is unusual for older men to be single. In this research, no male refugee participant over the age of 35 was single, and the topic never emerged from any of the interviews. Therefore assumptions around older single men are based on a general understanding of the community and how it works. I suspect by the lack of discussion on the topic that the group of people who would fit into such a category are perhaps a small minority. The precedent of men choosing to sponsor women from Sri Lanka to come to the UK perhaps indicates how there is a lack of acceptance of unmarried older men, or an attempt to maintain the Tamil community rather than having males marrying outside the community. That said, a particularly prominent older male elite contact was unmarried at the time of this research, yet potentially there is greater acceptance within the community because society may perceive that the importance of his work outweighs the social pressure to marry.

Only one woman who participated in this group had been married for a substantial time and did not have children: Jayani. The other married women either had children or, as in the case of Savita, had only been married for a matter of months. Consequently it is difficult to comprehend the significance of marriage itself upon women's lives.

Paavarasi discussed the authority the Tamil wife has within the marriage:

“Sri Lankan women are very strong , they don't put up with any nonsense by the husband. They handle the budget, the family budget, and if the husband is looking at another woman, they will go and kill the other woman, not the husband! You know they are not meek. These women, they look meek, but they are not! The house, the man is a mouse!”

As wives, women appear to be relatively empowered within the private realm of the household itself. However, this authority may only be over the domain which is

considered to be theirs: that of the house rather than the public sphere. Within their own home the women are the dominant matriarchs, in contrast to their parental abodes where they are expected to be subservient to not only the male patriarch generally in the form of their fathers, but also to their mothers. Although Paavarasi sees Tamil women as being relatively powerful within their marriages, her opinion may be based on a rhetorical view of the relationship between husband and wife, as she herself was not married and lacks the experience of the relationship. Alternatively, she may be presenting a more realistic situation; whereby within the home women are particularly empowered; but it is not considered appropriate to discuss this openly.

At the age of 51 both unmarried and childless, Paavarasi is the most highly skilled of all the female interviewees and particularly independent. This suggests that for older women, singledom may well be significantly different from marriage in more than just the presence of children. Paavarasi's single status has potentially opened greater opportunities for her to train and establish a career. Conversely, her abilities may have separated her so far from 'traditional' Tamil women, as to make her unmarriageable to men who are seeking a more conventional bride. The impact of being unmarried can also be seen in the example of Bimala who separated from her husband and is independently training and working towards building a future for herself and her son. The difference here is that in the UK her lifestyle is that of a single woman without a family, as her son is in Sri Lanka being cared for by his grandparents. Although her financial responsibilities remain, as she continues to send money back to care for her son, her daily activities do not revolve around childcare. Paavarasi and Bimala are highly independent, despite clear underutilisations of skills of both of them; in their work they are utilising their skills better than many of the other women interviewed.

Family refugees

For Tamil women the type of work is even more limited when they have children. Engebriksen (2007: 738) found that the Tamil family is a cohesive unit, "an expression of the centralising values of Tamil cultural scripts." Since the loss or dispersion of extended family around the world, the Tamil family in the diaspora is based more on a nuclear two children two parents model (Engebriksen 2007). This is not only a Tamil ideal but also a Western ideal reducing one aspect of social differentiation between Tamils and the host society model. Of the family structures of the participants in this research, the majority consisted of two (Dhanya, Kiran, Elisai, Kayal, Maina, Mala,

Rustam, Trinabh, Jwalia, Madhu, Ponmudi) or three children (Chitrlekha, Harita, Parinita, Khush) and two parents. State policies in the UK may well provide opportunities for greater support of women working, but they still identify women as the primary care provider – assumptions underlined by patriarchal structures. In contrast, the expectations of men as family providers in Sri Lanka are much the same as those demanded once married; however, in the diaspora some of their roles may alter or change.

The main example of family life having a particularly large scale impact on an interviewee's life was that of Ponmudi. The ambitious academic decided to resign his aspirations to find a position as a lecturer, which would have involved moving around the country following different opportunities, and decided to set up his own business. Like other academic jobs, the positions Ponmudi sought were geographically variable, and although his family (his wife and two children) were part of his decision to remain settled and begin a business, he himself did not wish to be constantly moving. There are also examples of everyday impacts upon individuals of having a family. For Jwalia, not only is he required to support his family financially but because of his wife's lack of English he is also needed on a more practical day to day level.

“I've already told my wife leave me alone, don't push me on the domestic problems, if the kids are sick, you have to take them to hospital, the problem is she doesn't know English at all, even one word, so I have to take any hospital or school or anything ... So she's only, she's the cooking and the cleaning and feeding the kids, that's it!” (Jwalia).

He is frustrated by this as she also puts pressure upon him to fulfil what she sees as his duties to her and their children: for him to find employment. Without English Jwalia's wife also has less opportunity to develop new skills in the UK, leading her into a cycle of reliance upon her husband.

Traditionally it is the woman who takes up the family care responsibilities and this appears to continue within the diaspora. As a consequence “they put their profession back and look after the children or others” (Kibru*). This is partly because they are not content, or it is socially unacceptable, to have their children cared for by someone else. “They want to care for their children like their parents and grandparents cared ... And the husband also want to have good food and good wife and you know that sort of life so they also don't allow them to go off [to work]” (Meyyan*). If the children's grandparents are there, women are more likely to be happy for them to care for their children. The presence of extended family supports the opportunities for mothers to

work. However, the experience of being refugees means that often mothers do not have their own parents close by in order for them to share childcare with the older generation. The cultural scripts from Sri Lanka and their own childhood experiences make them feel that they are not fulfilling their roles as mothers if others care for their children. Yuval-Davis (1997) argues that women are often the cultural reproducers of the nation: that is, reproducing what is acceptable behaviour of individuals. In some cases where the mother has a particular desire or need to work, then one option is to bring a female family member – a mother or mother-in-law – over to care for the children whilst the parents work. In the UK, Parinita is happy for her mother-in-law to care for her children as it is more acceptable socially, and more convenient for herself and her husband. Yet this is an expensive option. It is therefore often more financially manageable for the mother to stay at home and care for her own child, particularly given the type of work that the woman might be able to access, as a result of other potential barriers.

It was generally easier for Tamil refugees in Canada to bring their parents over, than for individuals living in the UK. This may be a consequence of the Canadian perception of ‘family’ when considering sponsorship of individuals to Canada. In the same context in the UK, the concept of family is narrower limiting ‘family’ to children and partners (see Chapter One). As a consequence of the Canadian policy, it is possible for women to bring their parents over to Canada to care for their children. With the support of their families, women have greater opportunities to seek employment. The same expectations of women or female family members to care for their children continue in Canada, but in Montreal (as opposed to London) there is greater potential for these family members to be brought over.

“I mean knowing the community and, they’re not going, they’re not going to be as open to taking their little child hand in hand and dropping them at the day care. It’s not the tradition right. And so if family class [in the UK] does not include extended family, they then don’t have the day care” (Peter Showler).

Without having to pay for day care, economically it is more viable for women to work. The desire for women or family members to care for children remains the preference for the community in Montreal. However, Tamil women appear to have greater opportunities to work in Canada than in the UK. In Canada, Tamil women seem to turn increasingly to the work domain while women’s experiences are not restricted to any one domain” (Balan 2008: 1). Rather than being dominated by the domestic sphere, Tamil women in Montreal were able to straddle the divide between household

responsibilities and formal employment, potentially as a consequence of the family support available to them. The impact of family reunification policies upon female employment opportunities is particularly significant and has implications for immigration policy.

If individuals would like to go back to work after their children have gone to school, the length of time they have been out of the workforce and their English abilities influence the likelihood of their achievement or eventual desire to gain employment.

“The problem is once the women start to remain at home and look after children when they are ready for employment, then it becomes difficult because maybe they haven’t updated their skills, maybe because of looking after children they did not do any English classes, and they did not integrate into the society properly” (Kibru*).

The type of work women do if they have children may well be an extension of their family responsibilities – for example, working in the family shop such as Kayal. Yet the role Kayal actually plays in running the shop is limited. Her role is to help in the shop, not to be in charge of it. Running the business is the role of her husband and son.

The picture drawn here is a particularly ‘traditional’ image of South Asians living in the UK. As the next section suggests, this may not be the case for all Tamil refugees, rather the gendered roles and identities illustrated here were the experiences of this group of individuals which may not be illustrative of the wider Tamil community, both in London and more widely within the diaspora. However, there are also very real aspects to this view on an everyday level. The differences between the experiences of the male and female Tamils interviewed for this research may be a consequence of the fact that they are refugees and the first generation in the UK, in comparison to other groups who are more established. For those Tamils who have been in the UK for a longer time period, or who were born in the UK, this image may be much more rhetorical than real. Yet for the participants in this research the Tamil community remains significant on a daily basis, as do established expectations of individuals. Within certain spheres women may be much more empowered than suggested by many of the participants within this research. However, much of the rhetoric around gendered relationships pertains to traditional patriarchal structures, as it remains unconventional to talk about such social changes. The perceptions and attitudes presented, illustrate what are still expected views of gender relations: although the roles adopted by individuals of different genders are impacted upon differentially by marriage and children. It is clear that the responsibilities around gender have very real impacts upon the employment

potential of Tamil refugees. It appears that it is necessary for women to make a more conscious decision to enter the labour market against community expectations of them, as men have to go against conventional expectations as the provider in order to seek further training or education, if this means they must take an employment break.

3. 'Successful' utilisation and gender

This section returns to the definition of skills outlined in Chapter Five and discusses the notions of success in relation to the gendered utilisation of skills of Tamil refugees. These personal stories of success are told through a lens of the social context of community, family structure and education.

The distinctions in the way individuals claimed asylum impact upon experiences (see Chapter Two). For some of the participants, status as a refugee would not be recognised officially due to the methods by which they arrived in the UK. However, all the individuals who participated in this research consider themselves to be refugees. All but two of the male interviewees sought asylum directly in the UK or another EU country. Bhaskar originally came to the UK as a student, and then sought asylum once he had arrived, and Rustam came to the UK as a child to join his refugee father. All of these men therefore, had the means and networks to seek asylum. Within the research only two women (Paavarasi and Bimala) sought refugee status in their own right. The way in which these individuals sought asylum underlies their experience. In particular the family support available to them may be limited. The majority of the women, five in total, sought refuge alongside their husbands or another male family member (Chitrlekha, Jayani, Kayal, Mala and Maina). Three of these did so in another EU country and later moved to the UK (Chitrlekha, Jayani and Maina). All but Mala received refugee status tied to their husband's application. Mala was thirteen when she came to the UK and so her refugee status was tied to her father's. Alongside this, three more women who participated in this research became 'refugees' through family reunification (Dhanya, Harita and Elisai). One of these women, Dhanya, joined her husband in Germany before they moved to the UK. Three of the women involved in this research are categorised as sponsored spouses (Savita, Parinita and Pragya).

In comparison to the asylum applications by gender since 2001, where on average women have represented around one third of the applications for asylum from Sri Lanka, the number of women who sought asylum independently in this group is

relatively small (approximately 13 percent of the independent applications). Table 6.1 illustrates the proportion of men and women who sought asylum from Sri Lanka, in comparison to the total applicants in 2001-2007. The table illustrates that the gender division in application from Sri Lanka is similar to that of the total differences between men and women, apart from in 2005, when the applications from women represented nearly half the number (46 percent) from Sri Lanka in comparison to the total proportion at 29 percent. Since 2001 the proportion of women seeking asylum independently from Sri Lanka has ranged from 18 percent to 46 percent. On average over these seven years women from Sri Lanka have represented approximately 30 percent of the applications from the country. Many of these women who have contributed to the increasingly higher proportion of women seeking asylum are highly educated and have previously been employed in relatively well-paid jobs, coming as single women, or on their own with children. Such behaviour clearly challenges the 'traditional' roles discussed in the previous section. However, there appears to be a trend towards an increase in applications from women since 2001. The statistics do not show the national data by gender earlier than 2001, therefore it is not possible to illustrate a substantial change over time. Yet, it is important to note that the majority of the women who participated in this research arrived prior to 2001, when perhaps the proportion of women was slightly lower. Therefore at this time it may have been more common for some women to find asylum in some form through their refugee husbands (see Chapter Two). Those individuals who sought refuge in this way may conform to more 'traditional' norms than women who applied for asylum on their own, hence the emphasis in this research upon a particular gendered division of roles.

What is distinct about the experience of women who come to the UK as sponsored spouses is that they are unable to study for the first two years they are in the UK without paying international fee rates. This was an issue for Pragya who desires to re-train. However, individuals seeking asylum have, in the past, had to wait an average of between six months and two years in order to have their case heard due to the backlog of asylum applications at the turn of the century. During this time period, if they wish to study any more than basic English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses, they too, have to pay international fees. Alongside this, women who come as sponsored spouses are able to work immediately they arrive (for example, Savita). However, the same issues affecting women arriving through family reunification, such as a limited amount of English, also apply to this group, preventing them from working immediately

in the mainstream labour market (although opportunities still remained in the ethnic economy). Savita was the exception as she started work soon after arrival in the UK. These women go through the experience of being a refugee through connection with both their husbands and their own circumstances.

Table 6.1: Total and Sri Lankan asylum applicants by gender

Year	Sri Lankan Applicants	Total Applicants
2001		
Male	4,535	55,435
Female	975	15,930
Female applicants	18%	22%
2002		
Male	2,405	62,355
Female	730	21,780
Female applicants	23%	25%
2003		
Male	505	34,090
Female	200	15,320
Female applicants	28%	31%
2004		
Male	235	23,660
Female	95	10,300
Female applicants	29%	30%
2005		
Male	215	18,345
Female	180	7,365
Female applicants	46%	29%
2006		
Male	345	16,505
Female	180	7,105
Female applicants	34%	30%
2007		
Male	675	16,465
Female	310	6,930
Female applicants	31%	30%
TOTAL		
Male	8,915	226,855
Female	2,670	84,730
Female applicants	23%	27%
Average percentage	30%	28%

Source: Home Office Asylum Statistics UK 2001-2008

In terms of skill utilisation, the way these women came to the UK is important. The skills the women had distinguish them in terms of the way they sought asylum and their subsequent employment experiences. Illustrating the 30 percent of women who seek asylum from Sri Lanka as the principle applicant, Bimala and Paavarassi both had

contacts and networks of their own to assist their entry into the UK. These networks are likely to influence how their skills are used, and vice versa; the fact that they possessed such social capital is likely to be a consequence of their abilities to build connections which could help them progress in their work. The impact of social capital and social networks is significant upon the utilisation of skills. The change in family structure in the diaspora influences the form and availability of social capital for individuals. Consequently social networks have greater significance for the work individuals find. For example, whilst providing people with work that individuals may not have been able to find alone, the use of social networks may also limit the type of work available within the community. Community can be a double edged sword in as much as there is pressure for individuals to do well educationally, yet alongside this are responsibilities to the community. Individuals use their social networks within the community when they first arrive, only then to feel a sense of obligation or responsibility at a later point towards those networks which originally supported them. It is possible that women with higher skill levels who employ their abilities and networks to assist them to seek asylum independently are also likely to be employed to a higher level. Both Bimala and Paavarassi were ambitious and determined. They had both already improved their employment, bringing themselves more in line with their skills backgrounds. Although they may never be in the exact same line of work as they had been previously, they continue to be determined to improve.

Eleven out of the thirteen female participants' 'refugee status' is tied to their husbands (or male relative) in some way. Women who have fewer abilities are perhaps more likely to rely upon other people, particularly family members, to help them apply for asylum and assist them to settle in the UK. For example, Savita utilised her husband's networks to search for work. He found her employment in his cousin's solicitor's firm. Potentially, reliance upon others within the asylum process may reduce self-sufficiency later on. The women who travelled in connection with family members, particularly their husbands, were then also able to look to their husbands to support their families. Harita, for example, tried working in the fruit packing factory, but as she did not enjoy it she was able to leave because her husband was supporting her. This provides these women with the 'choice' not to work as there are other members of the family already working. In Montreal, Ramani illustrated the importance of the route to refuge and the impact this may have upon employment potential. She argued that:

“Only women who are sponsored wives maybe they stay home with the husband already settled down, he is working, he doesn’t want her to go to work and also here they have the support from the government like the family allowance we get for the children” (Ramani).

This may be a reflection that those women who were sponsored to go to Canada had lower skills sets and relied more greatly upon their husbands.

Gender and the utilisation of skills

In analysing the utilisation of skills, the twenty six interviewees had a variety of different skills and broadly speaking could be divided into four groups. These groups offer the opportunity to investigate the skills of the Tamil refugee community in London and the level of utilisation of these skills. They illustrate the similarities within the group experiences and the differences between individuals within different groups. There are two male groups and two female groups:

- Male low skilled workers whose skills are mainly utilised.
- Housewives whose skills are generally underutilised.
- Male high skilled workers who experience a small amount of underutilisation of their skills.
- Female workers whose skills are highly underutilised.

The division in gender between the four groups is important and is discussed where relevant in the next four sections.

Male low skilled workers whose skills are generally utilised

These men are relatively low skilled and experience a general utilisation of their skills. They are part of the less educated group, and as such their employment expectations and their perceptions of success are not focused on education (although they may still expect educational success for their children). Their English abilities vary significantly from those who required a translator to be interviewed, to those who are comfortable with a conversation in English. This relates to the English education they had received in Sri Lanka rather than formal teaching since arriving in the UK. What connects these men is their association to Tamil networks and the type of employment they have is generally suited to their main skills. To examine the experiences of the individuals within this group I first start with the four men who share similarities by the nature of their age and length of time in the UK.

Caleb, Ravi, Mudita and Tanay all live in East Ham. Whereas the first three all work in a fruit packing factory, employment they found through a local Tamil organisation.

Tanay works two jobs at Kentucky Fried Chicken and his cousin's shop. Although the type of factory work these men are carrying out is unskilled, they have relative use of their skills. This is due to their particularly low English skills and the small range of skills they possess.

Caleb completed his O Levels before moving to the UK but did not study any further in Sri Lanka. He arrived in 2001 having previously worked on his father's farm in Sri Lanka. His agricultural knowledge is not applicable within the British farming context, so his specialised work content skills are irrelevant in his new context. This is obviously a lack of use of his knowledge, yet an unavoidable one whilst living in the UK. He is particularly proficient at working with 'things' (see Appendix Six Table A6.2). Whilst working in the factory his other transferable abilities, his people skills, could be seen as being underutilised in the UK. However, his low English skills mean that although he works well with other people, he would be less suited to employment which required competence in English. Originally Caleb found work at an Indian restaurant through the job centre. However, he was unhappy working there and so looked for work through community networks and a community charity and employment centre: Newham United Tamil Association. Although this organisation deals with clients from a variety of different backgrounds, their predominant clients remain Tamils. He aspires to be a car mechanic in the future as he believes this would be a good way of earning a living. However, he has no background in this, neither at this point has he taken any actions towards meeting this goal.

Ravi had a similar experience. He took his O Levels in Sri Lanka before moving to Holland where he stayed for a few years. He arrived in the UK in 2004. He has only ever worked in factories. In Holland he was employed by Philips to assemble plugs whereas in the UK he is packing in a fruit factory. Although he is enthusiastic he has little experience or skills beyond his current employment, particularly with his lack of English skills. This low English ability may be a consequence of his relatively short time in the UK. However, the factory where he works mainly employs other Tamils and therefore his opportunities to develop his English skills are limited.

Tanay and Mudita are currently saving their earnings in order to sponsor their new Sri Lankan brides to come to the UK. They need to be able to cover their wives' travel costs and living requirements in the UK for two years. This is a government financial

prerequisite before their new wives can be brought to live in the country permanently. Mudita also works in the fruit packing factory, employment he found through the Tamil employment centre. He had tried job centres and friends but had been unsuccessful. He previously worked in a Japanese restaurant as a kitchen hand, work which he found through a friend he knew from Sri Lanka. Consequently, this same friend was his first port of call when he decided to look for different work. Like the other men working in the factory, he is experiencing a limited underutilisation of his skills, as a consequence of the limited variety in his abilities combined with a limited knowledge of English. In the future Mudita would like to open an off-licence. However, he currently lacks knowledge, English skills and experience of running a business, alongside the capital requirements. His hope to run his own business may be a dream, rather than a reality.

In contrast to the other three men who experienced similar beginnings, Tanay currently has two jobs. He found local employment in his cousin's shop and a Kentucky Fried Chicken take-out restaurant. He originally used his familial networks to find work. However, because of his recent marriage, and the subsequent financial strain, he needed to find secondary employment. In neither of these jobs is he generally engaged in customer service – a benefit considering his limited English skills. Despite his lack of confidence in his English abilities (Tanay was particularly concerned that a translator should be available if necessary for the interview), he could get by and have a conversation relatively easily. Therefore the major barrier for Tanay is his lack of confidence in his abilities. There is a greater underutilisation of Tanay's abilities than the other three men as he had greater technical knowledge and experience from back home. However, in terms of transferable skills he has a similar range of experience to the other men, limiting the work for which he has the credentials. He sees success in more material terms than some of the interviewees discussed. His aim is to purchase a house for himself and his wife. He expects that he will still be working in a shop in the future, or possibly own a business, more because he sees others doing this rather than his own aspirations – this lack of direct ambition may make such a future difficult.

At this stage in their lives these men are less concerned with their status within the community than the general vision of success implied in Chapter Five. They still would appreciate the status but their main concern is about achieving a particular life situation. Consequently for this group of men the hierarchical order of success would be:

1. Employment which earns a reasonable amount of money

2. Earning enough money to bring Sri Lankan wives to the UK (where relevant)
3. Being able to afford a house

These men were motivated to earn as much as they could, particularly for the two men who had new wives waiting to be brought from Sri Lanka. However, the main barriers to this are their lack of English abilities (and the opportunity to develop these), a lack of experience in the areas they think they would like to move into, and a lack of confidence. They lack the aspiration and opportunity to seek further training or English tuition to improve their skills and move beyond their current employment at this point in time, as the need to earn is of paramount importance.

Kiran, like the other men, came to the UK with a limited variety of work-content and transferable skills. His hard work and resourcefulness led him to improve his initial situation, working in a factory like the men discussed above. He worked his way up to become manager of the Newham United Tamil Association. This is a charitable organisation which provides advice and information on welfare rights and benefits, immigration and asylum issues, employment, education and training, housing, homelessness and health to Sri Lankan Tamils and other ethnic minority communities. This employment utilises his skills and is well suited to his self-confident and friendly personality. However, despite his achievements in this situation, it is unlikely that he would have done so well if he had not made use of his social networks and social capital to gain employment and a reputation within a Tamil community organisation. Trinabh also used his social networks to find his first position in a petrol station. Although his knowledge of the Sri Lankan Tea industry is not being utilised, Trinabh would consider himself to be relatively successful in work and material possessions.

A future option for these individuals would be to train and build up skills. However, this seems to be a minor consideration at this point in time. For Kiran and Trinabh success is related to wider perceptions of success:

1. Improved employment e.g. working their way up or through community
2. Family
3. Own a house

Both Kiran and Trinabh have improved their employment prospects since they first arrived. They move beyond the dominant perception of success through education by offering alternatives which are more appropriate to their abilities. They have worked their way up either within their original occupation or through community links. However, their community networks may almost be a barrier to them achieving success

outside their ethnic connections. The ethnic economy can be both an opportunity and a hindrance to individual achievements (see Chapter Seven). The lack of motivation to study or learn more English, discussed by the first four men, may be a consequence of the ideas they have for their futures. The occupations they see for their futures, such as those held by Kiran and Trinabh, have not required them to improve their overall skills set as they see it.

Housewives whose skills are generally underutilised

Elisai and Pragya both have children under the age of four. Pragya has a one year old son. Elisai has a three year old son and is pregnant with her second child. Neither of them has worked since they arrived in the UK, as they started their families soon after their arrival. Elisai and Pragya differ in their attitudes towards seeking employment in the UK in the future, despite the fact that both of them had skilled jobs in Sri Lanka. Elisai worked as a pharmacist in Sri Lanka, having completed her A Level in Pharmacy. Along with the transferable skills she has developed helping and caring for others, she has a friendly personality. However, she did not express any particular ambitions for the future. Pragya is particularly skilled. She has a degree and management experience in the garments industry; however she lacks confidence in her English abilities. Despite this, she is competent in writing and reading in English as indicated by her questionnaire response, which she answered in English. These two women are reasonably well educated and skilled, yet given their circumstances at this time it is unlikely that these women would have been in paid work in Sri Lanka either.

The remainder of these women have older children. Two of the women interviewed have a similar educational background: Chitrlekha and Dhanya. In contrast Maina, Harita and Kayal are less skilled than these two women, yet operate within similar forces and therefore have similar lifestyles in the UK. All of these women share similar perceptions of success: that their children and their educational development is more important than their own employment experiences. Success for them is measured by what their children achieve.

Chitrlekha and Dhanya both have degrees. They are in their 40s and both left Sri Lanka at the turn of the 1990s. Chitrlekha and her family went to France and Dhanya joined her husband in Germany. They both received refugee status in those countries and have French and German nationality respectively, along with the rest of their

families. They both also moved to the UK about 10 years after they arrived in Europe. Both families moved to the UK because they saw an English education as important (see Chapter Five). Since moving to the UK they have both attended English classes and both volunteer in different realms. Chitrlekha volunteers at the Tamil Community Housing Association and Dhanya is heavily involved in a local Tamil school. However, neither of these women is employed. This is a lack of use of the many different skills both women have, which could potentially be used in the UK as both have reasonable English abilities. Chitrlekha chooses not to work as she believes that she could not find work that coincides with her children's school day as she did not wish to leave them alone after school. Both these women enjoyed volunteer work, but they were happy being housewives and caring for their children, and unconcerned about their own employment. Their decisions not to work do not put their families in the position of living in poverty, as their husband's both work (Chitrlekha's husband at a hotel, and Dhanya's husband in retail); therefore they were satisfied with their lifestyles.

As already noted, Maina and Harita were not as well qualified as the other women in this section. Maina has some teaching experience and several transferable skills, including experience of childcare whilst living in Norway, before moving to the UK. Yet her main difficulty is her English ability. Like Pragya, she lacks confidence but can understand a lot more spoken English than she acknowledges. Consequently, utilising her teaching skills in the UK would be problematic. She has undertaken some lessons in English, but these are relatively informal and her children come first in her time schedule. In the future she would like to work in a crèche; however, she believes that her English abilities will prevent her from achieving this goal. Her interest in working in a nursery seemed to be related to the fact that she believed "all the Tamil ladies like the crèche job" (Maina). It is perceived that this type of work is suitable employment for Tamil women. In contrast to the other women in this group, Harita is particularly unskilled, with little work experience or any real desire to work. She briefly worked in the local packing factory through the Newham United Tamil Association but gave this up quite quickly, preferring to remain a housewife whilst her husband worked as a carpet salesman.

Kayal is the only woman in this group who is employed; she works in the family shop. The nature of this work, and the tasks she carries out within her employment in this business, are more an extension of her household work and familial responsibilities than

an independent form of employment. As discussed in Chapter Two, the distinction between work and employment is fluid. The work Kayal carries out within the shop is seen here as part of her role as a wife and mother, yet she is employed to some degree, even if she fails to receive a specific wage. Although Kayal talked about “running the shop”, further questioning revealed that her main role in the business was that of cashier. It was her husband who managed the business itself. Like the other women discussed within this group, Kayal’s main focus was on her children and what their future might hold. She helped out at the local Tamil after-school club and she helped care for her sister’s young children. Although she works, this work is more a reflection of what the family see as her role within the family unit, rather than employment that reflects her variety of transferable skills. Her poor English skills may prevent her access to other forms of work which may use these skills.

Each of the women featured in this section had children and each of them stated at some point in the interview the significance of their children to their current lack of employment. Their children’s care was their focus and therefore they could not, or had decided not to, work. As discussed, there are several driving forces influencing these women’s decisions not to work and to care for their own children. However, each of the women saw their children becoming professionals whether their children were male or female. They envisaged their children going to university and most of them thought that their children would become doctors or engineers (see Chapter Five), although the likelihood of all of their children achieving such goals is clearly limited. The present situation of these women is the result of the choices they have made. However, ‘choice’ is related to the drivers acting upon individuals, and therefore choice is perhaps too strong a description for the reality of the situation. Of the restraints impacting upon these women, that is, the variety of different skills, experience, levels of confidence and English abilities, childcare is a predominant constant consideration amongst them. Their situations lead them into putting their children before their personal employment; as argued previously, it may be that they see their children’s success as a direct reflection of themselves as mothers. Success for this group of women can be ordered as:

1. Education of children (living vicariously through children)
2. Husband’s and children’s employment

These women’s conceptions of success continue to relate to status: however in this case their status is related to their other family members.

Male high skilled workers experiencing semi-underutilisation of their skills

Education in the UK is of major benefit to refugees with regard to their search for work. It is also an indication of their English abilities. However, what is most important about each of the individuals within this section is their motivation. This personality trait which pushes them into setting and achieving goals within education and employment is instrumental to their success. Yet, as already illustrated, success remains elusive as individuals continue to set the bar higher upon achievement of their original goals. As a consequence of this, this group of men are yet to achieve employment that they perceive as 'successful'.

The first two men I discuss have poorer educational backgrounds: however, they share a personal drive and ambition to achieve more. Jwalia came to the UK 1997. Since then he has worked as a cashier in a petrol station, although this was only part time and therefore according to him "not a proper job". The area around the petrol station was unsafe and Jwalia was mugged one night on the way from home. This experience was the final incentive for him to leave his employment there, and seek further education to achieve his goal of a 'real job'. Having completed his A Level in economics and commerce in Sri Lanka and having an interest in accountancy, he has been studying book keeping and accountancy at Newham College. He is currently applying for work which will utilise these newly established skills. In achieving this, Jwalia believes he will feel like a success in the UK with a "proper job".

Madhu is in a similar position to Jwalia, currently applying for work. However, in contrast to Jwalia he has not sought further education in the UK. He has ambitions related to his past experience. Madhu has experience in marketing and commerce, having worked in a travel agency in Sri Lanka and different Telecom businesses in Sweden and the UK. Madhu's life alternated between Sweden and Norway for a time after leaving Sri Lanka in 1989 and he permanently moved to the UK in 1995. He applied for Swedish citizenship after being given refugee status there. He moved his family to the UK partly because he found the darkness of the Scandinavia winter particularly hard, but mainly in order for his children to have an English education. Madhu has established several businesses over recent years. He was able to achieve a viable telecom business in Sweden; however, after moving to the UK his first attempt to set up a business was unsuccessful. Consequently, with the pressure of rent to pay, he is

now looking for any work he can get, but particularly in the telecom industry. Both men have been searching for work for a few months and they are becoming disheartened with their current lack of success. For both of them, the reality of owning their own business looks particularly favourable. If Jwalia does not find work soon, his brother in law has offered to put forward the capital for him to begin a convenience store. However, although self-employment appears to be particularly appealing to both men, the fact that Madhu's earlier attempt in the UK was unsuccessful, and that Jwalia has no experience of having worked in a convenience store or established a business before, may go against them both.

Rohak and Rustam who have good qualifications, are both working towards their goals. However, they both currently work in low skilled occupations as part of their commitments to the wider Tamil community. Rohak is motivated and resourceful. His English skills are good and he is near to completing his accountancy course at the local college. He has balanced doing this course with working full time at the local Texaco garage. Like the previous group of men, Rohak utilised his social networks in order to find this employment, a method he had previously used when searching for the work he found in a sandwich factory. He found both jobs through his cousin. Rohak's cousin has been in the UK for a couple of years longer than Rohak and has built up a store of social capital on which Rohak was able to draw. For Rohak success will be achieving an accountancy position in a firm within the wider community. This is significant, as Rohak was one of the few participants who perceived employment success as being beyond the Tamil community.

Rustam has just completed his degree in the UK. Rustam arrived in 1998. Due to the interruption to his education in Sri Lanka he was unable to complete any qualifications there. However, with the support of his family, with whom he came, he went to Newham College and learnt English full time for a year before beginning a BTEC National Certificate in Computing. During this time he also continued to work on his English skills. He then went on to do a BSc degree in Business and Information Systems at the University of East London. Fortunately, as he had British citizenship, Rustam was able to go to university as a home student. Rustam currently works in his father's shop. He has contributed to the running of the family business throughout his course. He sees himself as working temporarily in this business as he now believes that he is beyond this kind of work; as such he has been looking for work elsewhere.

Although he is ambitious – intending to establish his own mortgage company with four or five shops – he appears to underestimate the realities of what is required in his vision for success, by anticipating smaller capital inputs than will likely be necessary. For example, he estimates that he would need to work for two or three years and save “£50,000 to start the business, if you've got £30,000 or £50,000 it's easy to get together the rest of the money from bank.” This appears to be a relatively short time period to save money and a small amount of money to begin a business.

Khush's case is particularly interesting because the type of career that he sees as successful is based on personal experience rather than pre-conceived community perceptions of what represents worthy employment. Like the other men in this section Khush is motivated towards his goal. Khush believes he is the only Tamil counsellor in London, possibly in the UK. The rest of the time he is employed as a parcel sorter by Parcel Force. Khush has a range of different types of skills, which his current mail sorting does not utilise. He plans to continue to build on the clients he already has and become a full-time counsellor.

Bhaskar and Ponmudi are business partners. However, for both of them success lies in routes other than their current business venture. Bhaskar and Ponmudi have both done degrees in the UK. Bhaskar completed his BSc degree in Engineering at the University of Surrey, whereas Ponmudi did his MSc in the Management of Fisheries Technology at the University of Hull. Ponmudi's perception of success is a lectureship at a university. He taught Business Systems Thinking at the University of Lincoln on temporary contracts for several years. The lack of stability in temporary contracts meant that he had to find alternative options and moved into opening up a convenience store (an area in which he was knowledgeable having worked there when he first arrived in the UK). This grew into three stores, and recently he and Bhaskar have branched out into the Internet business by opening up an Internet Café. Ponmudi believes that under different circumstances he would have become an academic. He is currently planning his PhD, a project that will combine his experience of running the businesses with his academic knowledge. Outside his employment, Ponmudi is keen to support his children's educational development. Rather than having pre-conceived ideas of what he would like his children to do, he waits for them to show interest in certain subjects or activities. In the meantime he is keen for them to learn about Tamil heritage, especially for them to be able to speak Tamil.

Finally, Bhaskar sees success as being related to utilising his degree directly and therefore employment in a firm which uses his engineering knowledge. Bhaskar used to work for an engineering company in the UK; however he was made redundant when the company had to re-size. Bhaskar's experience is unique within this group because of the particular situation surrounding his immigration status. This makes it difficult for him to work as an employee due to the protocols and policies around employing asylum seekers rather than refugees. Bhaskar has been in the UK for 13 years. He applied for asylum shortly after arrival yet his case, at the time of interview, had still not been assessed. When he applied, asylum seekers were allowed to work in the UK. His work permit has never been retracted, despite the changes in policy disallowing asylum seekers in general from working. Although he can legally work in the UK he does not have papers stating that he is a refugee, and therefore many companies will not employ him as they believe they might be breaking the law. For Bhaskar this meant that self-employment was his only option. He has two businesses: an Internet company which deals with registering domain names and web design, and the Internet café with Ponmudi. A feature of success of Ponmudi and Bhaskar's business may well be that they moved away from London and branched out into a different activity. Both Ponmudi's convenience stores and the Internet café are situated in Lincoln. This may be a higher risk venture, as they do not have the ethnic market to draw upon (see Chapter Seven). This leads these businesses to serve the wider community rather than just the Tamil community, unlike many of the other self-employed interviewees. Their success suggests that there may be a limit to the 'success' individuals can achieve solely within the Tamil community without entering into wider labour markets. Yet, this would depend upon the success the individuals themselves desire and therefore whether this may be achievable within the Tamil community alone. It is important to note that Tamil social networks were still utilised to establish this particular business as Ponmudi and Bhaskar knew each other from Sri Lanka.

For this group of men there are several components to their success in the following order:

1. A proper job (utilising skills/self employment)
2. Ability to afford desired material possessions (e.g. house)
3. English education for children and themselves
4. Tamil tuition for children
5. Working in the wider community

Unlike the previous group of women, not only is their own employment first on their agenda, but it is also a specified type of employment which utilises their skills. This is linked to their desires to afford certain material possessions. English education is perhaps less important for this group as they are all fairly proficient in the language. Working outside the Tamil community is significant to them, as well as the apparent contradiction of continuing to provide some Tamil education to their children to maintain their children's links with Sri Lanka. The focus on education itself as success is less prominent in this group, as they are already relatively highly educated. The barriers preventing these individuals from achieving their goals are similar to the barriers preventing many people in the UK from achieving their goals. They still have more work to do. However, this group of men recognise this and are motivated to continue to work towards their ambitions.

Female workers whose skills are highly underutilised

This group is comprised of women who are working in paid employment. This group of working women is more eclectic than the first group of women. Some are single and some are married, some with children and some without. As with the last group of men, these Tamil women are distinct because of their ambition and motivation.

Of all the interviewees in this research Savita is the latest arrival to the UK. She arrived in 2006, but the fact that she is employed, and the type of work she is doing in comparison to some of the other Tamil women discussed, indicates that length of time in the UK is not always a factor in limiting skill utilisation. As for some of the other participants, Savita found her employment as a secretary at a local Tamil solicitors' firm through her social networks. Her husband is related to one of the solicitors. Savita has reasonable English skills to operate in the bilingual nature of the firm and therefore, despite the lack of use of her scientific background and interest, at this stage in her life in the UK this employment utilises many of the skills she has. Savita is married without children. If she opts to have children, sooner rather than later, she may then decide not to work. Although she is motivated and would like to study to be a nurse, this seemed to be a fleeting ambition. Her main priority is to earn enough money so that she and her husband can move out of their current residence – sharing a room in a friend's house – and get a place of their own.

Jayani has been married for about 12 years and is in her mid-30s but has no children. As previously stated, this is unusual for Tamil women, as most women who are married tend to start a family relatively early on in their marriage. Jayani is content not having children; this may be influenced by the fact that she realises that if she has children it would be socially frowned upon for her to put her career first. Jayani and her husband moved to Holland in 1989 where they both sought refuge. She was keen to study in Holland and build upon the A Level qualifications she had gained in Sri Lanka. However, her husband was against this as he did not want her to learn Dutch. He believed that because he was educated in English, the only second language she should learn was English. She was able to do one or two courses in Holland such as a cookery course, but very little learning of the language. When they moved to the UK in 2000 she believed that his attitude would change. He accepted that she could learn English, and eventually allowed her to look for work. He was hesitant about this originally as he felt that he should be able to provide for her, and that her working suggested to other people that he was unable to look after her. Consequently, Jayani has struggled to achieve what she wanted. She now works in a community organisation working on different projects. She is currently formally working to improve the socialisation of elderly Tamil women. This work utilises her skills well. She perceives herself as successful; however not for the use of her skills, but rather that she is working at all, through her negotiation with her husband.

Parinita believes that success is only achieved if she can find work with her qualifications outside of the Tamil community. Parinita is the only woman in this group who is married and has children. At the time of the interview she was also pregnant with her third child. What distinguishes Parinita is her childcare system – she and her husband brought her mother-in-law over from Sri Lanka to care for her children. Zarine* commented that this was a common practice within the Tamil community; however Parinita was the only woman in this research to have done this. Parinita currently works as an accountant in a Tamil organisation. This utilises her skills and accountancy qualifications well; however, she is dissatisfied that she has not been able to gain employment in the wider community. She believes that this is a consequence of her accent and English skills, since she has had to do presentations for several of the accountancy jobs she has applied for. Although she has good English abilities she struggles under pressure in a public speaking forum. She dislikes working in a Tamil organisation as she feels that this contributes to her English problems as predominantly

Tamil is spoken in the work place. For Parinita, like Rohak, success would therefore be moving out of ethnic employment and into an accountancy job which takes her into the mainstream labour market.

The final three women this section discusses are single: Mala, Bimala and Paavarasi. The nature of their current family situations impacts upon their current employment and their work plans for their future. Mala is the youngest of these three women. She arrived in the UK when she was 13 in 1997. She entered the local secondary school and, although she was a little behind in some subjects due to the language barrier, she excelled in the sciences and maths. Consequently she did A Level Biology, Chemistry and Maths. Mala wanted to go to university: however at the time she was applying she did not have refugee status. Her parents being in low paid employment – her father in an off-licence and her mother working for an ironing service business – they could not afford the international tuition fees. Mala considered doing an accountancy course at the local college instead of university. Fortunately before she finished the repeat of her chemistry A Level the family received refugee status. She applied to do medicine, but was unsuccessful and so decided to take biomedical science at the University of Westminster. Although her parents, particularly her mother, were disappointed that she was not going to be a doctor, her mother told her that “as long as you work in a hospital” then she’d be happy. This reflects the earlier discussion around the social status of certain occupations in the Tamil community (see Chapter Five). Mala is in the final year of her course: however, she continues to contribute to the household budget by working in a local jewellers; a job she obtained as her mother was a friend of the owner. Mala is motivated and has ambitions to use her degree and become an optometrist, or a medical sales person, utilising the sales skills she has developed within her work at the jewellers. Or she may possibly do a conversion course and fulfil her mother’s dreams and become a doctor.

Bimala is the only woman in this research to be single and have a child. The nature of Bimala’s experience of refuge meant that she had to flee from Sri Lanka very quickly leaving her son behind. Bimala is currently training as an accountant in the UK. In Sri Lanka she worked as an assistant manager at a bank before deciding to leave this job to help with her parents’ bed and breakfast business, indicating the importance of family responsibilities in her life. Here she became the manager of the bed and breakfast. Therefore, like Parinita, Bimala’s work in the Tamil community organisation fails to

utilise her high variety of skills. Though, the organisation benefits considerably from her various different language skills – Sinhala, Tamil and English. For Bimala success will be bringing her son to the UK, receiving her UK accountancy qualifications, moving out of London and buying a house for herself and her son. Bimala’s vision of success is specific, revolving around her maternal responsibilities and desire to set up a safe home for her son.

I now return to Paavarasi, the woman whose experiences are illustrated in the vignette at the beginning of Chapter Five. Paavarasi is probably the most skilled woman interviewed for this research.

“I’ve got two degrees, one’s in Sri Lanka – one from the University, one from the college of Higher Studies, and I’ve got a fellowship in Berkeley, from Berkeley University, California, and I worked at the Wall Street Journal for a month” (Paavarasi).

She is particularly ambitious and motivated. She is a trained professional; however unlike Parinita she does not lack confidence in her English abilities. She has come to believe that both her age and Sri Lankan surname work against her, despite her wide experience in the field: “Believe me, if I changed my surname I would have been in the newspapers by now” (Paavarasi). Whether this perception of discrimination is a reality, or a way in which she is able to justify her situation, the circumstances are particularly frustrating for Paavarasi. They have meant that she has had to take a job in a position beneath her skills and experience, and yet she believes other white people with less experience and lower skills are getting jobs in journalism. It is possible that Paavarasi’s lack of success within journalism in the UK is a result of her inability to, or choice not to, use Tamil networks to help her achieve her goals.

In accordance with the definitions of success for the other groups, success is ranked on several different levels. For this group the success would be ordered as follows:

1. Working (preferably within the wider community)
2. Using their skills and experience (meeting the expectations of them)
3. Being able to afford desired material goods

Working outside of the Tamil community is important to this group of women. However, in attempting to find work which utilises their skills they also have other considerations such as parental aspirations (Mala) and battling social expectations of women (Jayani). There are also specific barriers which prevent them from achieving their vision of success, for example discrimination (Paavarasi), and a lack of confidence in English abilities (Parinita). These barriers are similar to the previous group of

women. In contrast to the women who saw family responsibilities as a barrier to their work, for this group those responsibilities are what drive them to work so hard (Bimala).

This section has examined four different groups of Tamil refugees, illustrating the nuances in the dominant view of success within the Tamil community surrounding education. Despite the analysis in the previous chapter of the community's perception of success, for the individual this is less focused on education. Ideas of success also vary by gender. For the first group – the less skilled males – education is less of a focus due to the need to earn money immediately. For the second group – the females who choose not to work – education is not a priority for themselves, firstly because they often are already fairly highly educated and secondly because their focus is upon improving the chances for their children through education. For the third group – the ambitious males – education is important but they have already achieved much because of it; their future success is about utilising that education. For the final group – the females whose skills are frequently underused – they are also generally fairly highly educated, and as such their focus is less on their future education, but as with the highly educated males, success is about utilising their skills. The focus of these groups therefore remains related to education. However, for the individual, although hopes of success remain, education has become less significant, as their educational goals have been achieved or were unrealistic in terms of their abilities.

4. Conclusion: gender and utilising skills

This chapter has analysed the utilisation of skills of Tamil refugees in relation to gender, gender expectations, and perceptions of success. The importance of community expectations affects the behaviour of women from the way in which they may seek asylum to the decision to work formally. What are predominantly 'traditional' roles of responsibility follow from these expectations. Men's lives alter particularly upon marriage, whereas women's roles change more upon starting families. Like many 'traditional' societies, these responsibilities follow hierarchies of protection whereby men are expected to protect and care for their wives: the wives, in turn, are expected to be the primary source of protection for the children. That is not to say that men are absent from their children's lives: rather care is predominantly the female responsibility. However, as this chapter has shown, within the diaspora these dominant, more traditional models of role division are being altered and disrupted, for example where

fathers are taking on greater responsibilities for their children's lives than they might have expected to do in Sri Lanka. However, there remains the expectation that individuals perform to expected norms of behaviour, related to their gender. This has been shown to influence their desire to find employment which utilises their skills, as they perceive success in terms of the whole family rather than simply their experiences. Furthermore, there is a lack of expectation for women to work and therefore it is necessary for them to have a strong determination to go against this convention in order for them to gain formal employment in the UK.

This analysis has taken on board what is important to the individuals in terms of success rather than arguing that success is simply utilising the person's skills. Success is multi-faceted and specific to the individual. However, in discussing individual perceptions of success, dominant themes emerge within the community as a whole. The Tamil community is generally important to the individual; individual refugees are rarely acting alone. Success for the Tamil community can be seen in order of importance as:

1. Education (of children and adults)
2. Education in particular fields
3. Employment using education background
4. Possessions

This list of factors may be a function of the age group of the individuals whereby previous employment may have ranked higher if respondents were older with more experience from Sri Lanka. Consequently, success relates to life course and gender. The significance of these four predominant features of success relate to individual social standing. The main focus is upon status within the Tamil community, yet many of the features which achieve status within the Tamil community would also produce status for the individual within wider communities in the UK, albeit the importance of this to the individuals themselves may be limited. The interviewees also appeared to perceive success over a sustained period of time rather than over the transitory period when they first arrive. The illusive nature of success is illustrated within the experiences of the interviewees whereby the significance of education becomes less important to the individual once they have achieved in this area.

Full utilisation of these skills is not always a priority for the individual; there are wider concerns to be taken into account. For the more highly skilled working members of the community, success involves working outside the Tamil community towards a specified type of employment which utilises their skills and experience. The focus on education

specifically as success is less prominent for these individuals, as they are already relatively highly educated, although they may continue to focus on their children's education in academic and Tamil subjects. For some of the women, specific barriers may be perceived as preventing them from achieving their goals: discrimination and a lack of confidence. However, for several of the male highly skilled individuals, the barriers preventing them from achieving their ambitions are similar to the barriers preventing many people in the UK from achieving their goals: they still have work to do. Individuals within both groups recognise the barriers against them achieving their goals and are motivated to continue to work towards their ambitions.

For less skilled individuals the link between aspirations and experiences can be broken and success becomes differentiated on the basis of what is possible in the host country, in response to the task of making a living. The focus on education then passes to Tamil children. The social mobility of these individuals becomes possible through their children, even though these parents cannot succeed in the way they would have perhaps desired. Success is socially constructed around the importance of status, often around self employment and the ethnic economy. Yet all the examples of success, either desired or achieved, are part of a wider community definition of what is successful for Tamils. Chapter Seven develops these ideas of success and gender differences to analyse employment in the ethnic economy.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The ethnic economy: strategies, risk and the information field

1. The ethnic economy

The ethnic economy may be understood as the production and consumption of goods and services within the ethnic community. Engagement in the ethnic community is an alternative route to employment in the mainstream labour market. The concept of the ethnic economy examines how the structure of social contacts and relationships contribute towards labour market performance (Fong & Ooka 2002). For example, how ethnic ties can lead immigrants into the ethnic economy (Zhou 1992; Waldinger 1994; Stepick 1994) and where ethnic social networks contribute to individual's earnings (Portes & Sensenbrenner 1993; Light & Bonacich 1988). Kaplan (1997) further nuances the concept through his discussion of the ethnic enclave economy. This focuses on the significance of geography. An ethnic enclave is where the entrepreneurial activities of an ethnic group are within a defined geographical space. This space fosters linkages among businesses, customers and employees (Kaplan 1997). Therefore the ethnic enclave "provides an additional avenue of opportunity for compatriots" (Kaplan 1997: 215). It has been argued that as a consequence of the ethnic economy, ethnic networks and connections should not be seen as a hindrance to the process of integration, but rather an advantage to settlement (Zhou 1992; Portes & Sensenbrenner 1993; Waldinger 1994; Fong & Ooka 2002). Yet immigrants and ethnic minorities who cluster in occupational niches as part of the ethnic economy often earn less than native-born persons of the host community (Light 2007) and lack the opportunity to create the transactions across communities which aid integration (see Chapter Eight).

This chapter examines the importance of employment in the ethnic economy for Tamils whilst examining the reasons for its significance. Here the ethnic economy is seen as a framework for the coping mechanisms individuals employ. Starting with the information field individuals have available to them, the importance of the ethnic

economy is understood through the concept of coping strategies. This involves an analysis of risk and the way in which individuals perceive risk through the information they receive. The coping strategies chosen are entwined with the information flows within which individuals are immersed. These information flows differ between men and women as do the employment opportunities available to individuals. Male and female refugees enter the labour market differently, though the Tamil ethnic economy remains important within the day-to-day lives of both groups.

In this research the ethnic economy was enlisted by individuals to assist them to cope with their employment situations in three main ways: through community organisations, self employment and employment in an ethnic business. These are each discussed individually. Employment within the ethnic economy may impact upon potential integration especially when this employment limits transactions between the Tamil community and other communities. Obligations to other members of the Tamil community may tie individuals to jobs in the ethnic economy as they ‘give back’ for the support they have received as refugees (see Chapter Eight). This chapter develops ideas raised in the previous chapters by examining the wider implications of the importance of community in perceptions of successful employment, by analysing the ethnic economy.

2. Coping strategies and managing risk with the information available

Coping strategies in this thesis are not the last resort or final option available to an individual; the meaning I wish to consider in this chapter is far less finite. In psychoanalysis the term coping strategy has centred on ideas of defence and a “style for managing threat” (Lazarus 1993: 234). Instead coping strategies, here, are conceived of as acts of agency whereby people are able to take some control, or at least feel that they are taking some control, of the situation they find themselves in. The experiences of the participants are discussed in relation to the coping strategies they utilise in order to gain employment in the UK through the ethnic economy, and how they manage their new lives. Some individuals opt consciously or unconsciously to move into the ethnic labour market through accessing social networks in order to gain employment, and frequently expect to establish, or have established, businesses within this ethnic economy through opening ethnic orientated enterprises. Within this research five people volunteered or worked in community organisations (four women, one man), three men were actually self employed (with several other men stating ambitions to

follow this route). six people were employed within ethnic businesses (four women, two men), five men had found work outside the Tamil ethnic economy but through Tamil networks in petrol stations and factories, and seven people were unemployed (five women, two men).

In Chapter Five the notion of success was discussed. Here I examine how, when the link between aspirations and actual experience is broken, success becomes differentiated on the basis of what is possible in the host country. For example, the focus on employment which utilises an individual's skills may move to a focus on gaining any paid work the person can find, often by way of their fields of information. Notions of risk and external and internal coping strategies (defined below) theorise the mechanisms by which people adjust to their new situations. Risk is a useful way of considering refugee actions as it considers perceptions of the likelihood of success and risk of failure. In terms of employment, here perceptions of risk are related to the information individuals have about work, and therefore how they think about their potential for success in different areas of employment.

As discussed in Chapter Four, the Tamil community is strengthened through the maintenance of social networks based around reciprocity and trust. The individual's information field may to some extent pre-determine the employment opportunities they are aware of, yet it may also be a consequence of the individual concentrating upon what they know most about. Where individuals have experience in a particular field, there is less perceived risk of failure. Tamil refugees maintain and develop connections with the Tamil community and other communities as a way of dealing with the experience of living in a new country and to assist in their social mobility over time in the UK. For example, upon arrival Kiran made contact with people who lived in "the same district in Jaffna". He made contact with the individuals due to his previous geographical links with them, that is, through chain migration; he had particular information available to him. He sought out familiar connections in order to obtain knowledge through them about his new situation. He put these contacts to use to reduce the risks he faced as he attempted to settle into his life in London. Rohak had a similar method when it came to finding work. He used his family connections. Not only did he use his cousin as a source of information, but also as a reference: "My cousin picked up the application form for me, he was very important as he gave me a reference for the job" (Rohak). This flow of information came through his cousin as the result of his

cousin's Tamil contacts who were working at the petrol station: "all of them are Tamils that I work with, except one, he is Indian" (Rohak). Through the flows of information from the Tamil community his cousin heard about the job opportunity. This method of searching for work was also similar for Jayani who heard "through my friends and they said they have a vacancy there if you want you can go and ask them." Each of these individuals illustrates how information flow has supported them to find work. Yet this also illustrates how, as social and cultural outsiders they lacked access to social networks within the host community, limiting their opportunities to find work in the mainstream economy (Light 2007). Furthermore these examples also shed light on the extent to which people take risks in searching for employment. In using theories around risk there is the possibility of emphasising rationality at this point. Rational choice over-emphasises individual agency, and an analytical concept of risk would overstate such a position. Therefore two different theories of risk are discussed: the analytical system and the experiential system. These are combined with ideas around coping strategies in order to understand the logic underlying the driving forces of the ethnic economy.

Two different modes of thinking can help to consider risk. These are the analytical system and the experiential system (Table 7.1). Both systems are important in understanding why the ethnic economy has such significance. Slovic *et al.* (2004) illustrate the differences between risk in the two systems: the analytical system is a conscious process of evaluating risk using algorithms and normative rules, such as probability, calculus, formal logic, and risk assessment. This may relate to an individual's everyday life if they are attempting to weigh up the employment options that they have. The nature of the system means that it is relatively slow, effortful, and requires conscious control. For example, Bimala's plans for her future when her son arrives have been well considered. She has carefully thought through the potential risks and seeks to limit any potential issues by saving money and working towards gaining accountancy qualifications as soon as possible to enable her to move out of London and find work elsewhere. In contrast, the experiential system is instinctive, fast, mostly automatic, and relatively inaccessible to conscious awareness (Slovic *et al.* 2004). The experiential system is the intuitive method which enabled human beings to survive during their long period of evolution and is the most natural and frequent way for people to respond to risk today. For example instinctive decisions are based upon, among other things, 'vibes', rather than logical evaluation.

Table 7.1: Two modes of thinking: comparison of experiential and analytic systems

Experiential System	Analytical System
1. Holistic	1. Analytic
2. Affective: pleasure-pain oriented	2. Logical: reason oriented (what is sensible)
3. Associationistic connections	3. Logical connections
4. Behaviour mediated by 'vibes' from past experiences	4. Behaviour mediated by conscious appraisal of events
5. Encodes reality in concrete images, metaphors, and narratives	5. Encodes reality in abstract symbols, words, and numbers
6. More rapid processing: oriented toward immediate action	6. Slower processing: oriented toward delayed action
7. Self-evidently valid: 'experiencing is believing'	7. Requires justification via logic and evidence

Source: Slovic *et al.* (2004: 313)

These two theories of risk can be made more nuanced by using the concept of coping strategies. Lazarus & Folkman (1984) identified two different forms of coping: 1) problem-focused coping (whereby people attempt to change or solve the problem); and 2) emotion-focused coping (in which people attempt to regulate the emotions associated with the problem). However, each of these forms of coping implies a conscious decision making process. Diaz-Guerrero (1979) highlights the differences between *active* and *passive* coping. Active coping focuses upon altering the situation in a similar way to problem-focused coping. In his work on immigrant adaptation, Berry (1997) argues that these forms of coping may only have limited success if the problem lies in the host society, particularly if the host society has little interest in accommodating the needs of immigrants. In contrast passive coping is related to patience and self-modification. Berry (1997) believes that passive strategies may only stand a chance of success, if the host society has a positive attitude towards immigrants. If they are hostile, then passive strategies are more likely to lead to exclusion. These theories of coping imply a conscious decision to the way in which individuals manage their situations and Berry (1997) links the success of these strategies to the host community. Here I make the distinction between internalised and externalised coping strategies.

Internalised coping strategies are achieved through internal beliefs inherent to the individual; they are ways of thinking about and seeing the world. This may involve changing expectations and adjusting perceptions of success to look towards something more attainable in the host country. This belief system is likely to be strongly

influenced by the cultural scripts and attitudes discussed in previous chapters. For example, some women may desire employment in particular types of work such as childcare or teaching as they are deemed to be more appropriate for women. Several women commented that Tamil women often go into childcare (Dhanya) because they like the “crèche job” (Maina). However, when these jobs are not available within the ethnic community, women may end up doing other jobs which still fall within the ethnic economy partly due to a lack of knowledge of other possibilities, the geographical factor of proximity and partly because employment in the ethnic economy is more acceptable for women. Perceptions of the suitability of different forms of work illustrate an internal strategy. These are influenced by what is going on around the individual but not directly related to the host community. Internalised coping strategies are largely connected with ontological security. This is a person’s understanding of their place within their worldview and with which they feel comfortable. Forced movement to another country disturbs this; therefore Tamil refugees lose relative stability in their known world, through the amount of agency that they can exert. Internalised strategies contribute to the perception of where people see themselves within their worldviews.

Externalised coping strategies are the actions people take to deal with the situations they face by doing something deliberate, such as seeking training. These are more like the types of coping envisaged by Diaz-Guerrero (1979) and Lazarus & Folkman (1984). For example, several individuals threw themselves into work, many taking up several jobs in order to make enough to live on or to save money, such as Tanay who works in the local Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) and his cousin’s shop. Both positions became available to him through his use of social connections. Living and working with his cousin, Tanay’s information field was limited to the knowledge his cousin passed on to him. His family connections obliged them to offer him work in his cousin’s shop (and obliged him to work there, see Chapter Eight) and he knew friends who worked in KFC who notified him about the opening of a position as a cashier.

Kiran initially began working illegally (that is, before he received his refugee status) with a cash-in-hand job in a Tamil shop filling shelves and cleaning. Although he has moved into a management role he continues to work seven days a week. He obviously enjoys his work, yet his commitment to it potentially indicates that he gains a sense of control over his situation by working hard. Khush developed a unique method of coping by choosing to go to counselling when he was experiencing particular

difficulties. As a consequence of his situation, and his decision to seek external help, Khush's information field grew. He became aware of other opportunities. For him at this point the risk of not seeking outside support was greater than reaching out beyond his comfort zone.

Like others, Bimala first took a cash-in-hand job cleaning a house because of her responsibilities for her son back in Sri Lanka. The practical actions of taking such a position helped Bimala cope with her situation as she was then able to contribute towards supporting the care of her son. However, what is significant here, is that it was her love for her son which allowed her to cope internally through the particularly difficulties she found in her experience of doing menial tasks for someone else.

As most of these examples have indicated, the main focus for individuals is gaining some form of employment: "First thing that they do is like start looking for a job, they look for a job, but then if you give them opportunities to study they will" (Zaine*). The educational qualifications they have from Sri Lankan universities are often unrecognised in the host society, reducing the accessibility of the mainstream labour market without further training (Light 2007). In Chapter Six, although education was shown to be of significant importance to achieving success, within the Tamil community the reality of the situation is that work comes first. For example, Tanay commented how he would be interested in studying, but that he could not spare the time away from earning money at this point. Yet even if individuals do wish to study, the information field individuals have may limit their knowledge of education opportunities: "because my Dad was working locally in a Tamil supermarket he didn't have any knowledge of like how to get education from the college or anything" (Rustam). Only Bhaskar talked about working part time whilst he was studying at university. No one mentioned seeking work in order to save so that they could take up a course specifically. This may be because individuals find themselves caught up within the ethnic community as a consequence of their social capital. This 'dark' side of social capital (Field 2003) can lead individuals into staying in certain jobs which they originally had illegally within the community, even after they receive their status, because they feel a sense of responsibility towards the individuals who employed them, or more simply that they stay in these occupations because they know them. Although this may have previously provided a particularly important coping strategy, the various responsibilities and obligations that come with such employment may make it difficult

to leave and begin studying. This, along with other barriers (see Chapter Five), may reduce the opportunities individuals have to move into professions or occupations more suited to their educational backgrounds. Externalised coping strategies are often linked to internalised coping strategies, in that it is the attitudes of people that make them seek to regain an external sense of security in the host country. Internalised and externalised coping strategies illustrate the practical and discursive consciousness of refugees. Coping strategies are a way in which Tamil refugees can re-establish ontological security in the host country.

The ideas around coping strategies can be brought back to notions of risk through these conceptions of consciousness. Schutz (1972) argues that people have 'stocks of knowledge'. These are formed from the constant monitoring of the flow of their activities, and agents also expect others to undertake similar monitoring. Through these 'stocks of knowledge', human agents can rationalise their actions and choices. No action or choice is made in suspension from the rest of the person's life (Gutting 1996). Whereas the analytical system of risk works at the discursive level of consciousness, the experiential system is working within practical consciousness. Practical consciousness exists when people unconsciously monitor the events occurring around them (Gregory 2000). Practical consciousness is the unconscious recognition of the events and structures that surround people; the taken-for-granted nature of the structural systems that surround them. Practical consciousness indicates the long-term structures that are in place for Tamils in Sri Lankan society. For example, within the pre-migratory Tamil society, Chapter Four indicated how Hindu teachings have encouraged some Tamils to consider the wider Tamil community first and foremost in their obligations. The perceptions of gender discussed in Chapter Six have also become fixed within the practical consciousness of individuals, creating certain expectations of people on the basis of whether they are a man or a woman. Practical consciousness acts at a more structural level than discursive consciousness (Giddens 1984). Discursive consciousness involves people being able to give a coherent account of their activities and reasons for them (Giddens 1984). This consciousness is where individuals are able to talk about their understanding of the world around them. Discursive consciousness tends to operate more within an individual's agency. Internal strategies provide the internal belief system or motivation to conduct external coping strategies. Externalised coping strategies express discursive consciousness as there is a clear deployment of agency. However, practical consciousness and the cultural scripts of the pre-migration

society underlie these actions as they are intertwined with internal strategies of coping. Externalised coping strategies to some extent work more in relation to the analytical system of risk, whereas internal coping strategies are more closely entangled with the experiential system of risk. This is a simplification as the examples below illustrate; however this impacts upon the potential to develop the information field. Within this theorisation of risk and coping strategies the action of an individual to extend their knowledge frame is likely to be more purposeful and linked to the discursive consciousness. By taking a risk, individuals might develop new coping mechanisms (for example, Khush's experience above).

Coping strategies and risk underlie the continued maintenance of the Tamil community and diaspora over a sustained period of time (see Chapter Eight). Mala illustrates how being a part of the Tamil community consolidates information flows: "Because we're Sri Lankan the people communicate and then that's how we know about [work]." Unconsciously individuals employ the experiential system of risk and internal methods of coping in choosing to consolidate networks with other Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka. Instinctively, relating to Anderson's (1983) ideas of imagined community, Tamils acknowledge commonalities with each other. In terms of employment, opportunities within the ethnic economy appear to have lower risk of disappointment or failure, and they are the opportunities that individuals know about. By contrast, attempting to find employment within wider communities is perceived to run higher risks of rejection, and individuals have less knowledge about positions or how to go about finding them.

Community organisations

By working in community organisations, whether by chance or default, individuals consolidate these community coping strategies. Employment within community organisations is an option for reasonably educated and skilled individuals, whose English skills are lower than will enable them to work in the mainstream labour market, or those who experience discrimination in the wider economy. Community organisation employment in this context is working in a Tamil community organisation set up to assist other members of that community.

Of the twenty-six refugee interviewees, four were employed in community organisations and one volunteered (Chitrlekha) for a Tamil community organisation.

Four of these refugees were women, and one was a man. As a consequence of the methods used to make contact with the Tamil community several of the elite contacts also worked in community organisations. Most individuals, such as Jayani, Bimala and Kiran, fell into community employment through being offered jobs or hearing about opportunities through friends and family. The information networks of which they are a part brought up particular types of work. They had not been looking specifically for this type of work, the opportunity had just arisen at the right time. However, for others there was perhaps more of a plan: "I wanted to learn about this organisation, as I am new to this country" (Parinita). Yet over time the desire to remain in what is sometimes seen as 'second best' employment can occur, "Now I have finished four years so I think I know every thing so I must go" (Parinita). This links to perceptions of success discussed in Chapter Five. For Parinita the job she was doing was enjoyable. However, as an accountant she felt that she had only been employed because she was a Tamil. She wanted more than this. She wanted to be recognised for her skills and abilities rather than her background. Consequently Parinita did not feel she would be successful until she had quit the ethnic economy and established her career within the wider labour market. She was defining her success to a degree by integration through employment. For these examples the entrance into the ethnic economy was a method by which they coped at a point in their early years as refugees in the UK. Yet, being immersed within the ethnic economy in this way increased the potential difficulties for individuals to leave if they so chose, for example, because there were fewer opportunities for people to pick up English within a predominantly Tamil environment.

Tamil women appeared to feel that there was less risk involved in their employment within a Tamil organisation than within the wider community. For Jayani there was less risk of her husband preventing her from working in a community organisation and for Parinita there was a greater chance that she would be appointed and not experience rejection again. This may relate to the arguments discussed in Chapter Six about what is expected of women and the roles they play. It is likely that male family members of the women employed at a Tamil organisation feel more comfortable with their employment within the Tamil community because they know the other people working at the organisation share similar cultural expectations and attitudes. For example, Jayani's husband accepted her work in the community organisation enough to allow her to do it. In contrast to the boundaries he put before her in learning the language in Holland, he appears to be more comfortable with her working in a community

organisation by not standing in her way. The women are therefore working in a more familiar environment. Alongside this, as already discussed, women are expected to work at a closer geographical proximity than men. In the example above I discussed how Parinita's experience disputed this argument. However, her experience may well support the importance of information flow. The position may not be located close to where she lives, but she has greater knowledge about the work because of the information networks she is a part of: "My friend because one of the person working here was the friend to my friend, so you know informal thing, I came to know that there was a vacancy" (Parinita). Living within particular areas where large numbers of Tamils are concentrated means that work within the ethnic economy in general is the predominant form of work available locally. Locality is likely to increase the potential flow of information; however the Tamil links across the city of London are clearly functional at passing information about employment. In Montreal, Ramani also found employment for her greater abilities within a community organisation acting as an adviser and women's activist. Part of her reason for opting for this particular type of work was her limited French abilities. The risk of failure in search of employment in the wider sphere of the Montreal workforce was higher because her conversational French skills were not high enough for the wider labour market.

Self employment

The analytical system of risk may be consciously employed in the decision to establish a Tamil grocery store. A variety of participants viewed self-employment as a potential coping mechanism and route to success. The information they had available suggested that this was a way other Tamils had achieved successful employment. Light & Rosenstein (1995) illustrate how ethnic minority entrepreneurs created businesses that employed themselves and their family members as a consequence of being disadvantaged in the mainstream labour market. In doing this, for example, Tanay's cousin has created a job for himself, decreasing labour supply, whilst creating jobs for others (Tanay and other Tamil staff members), which increased labour demand (see Light 2007). Particularly for Tamil men, self employment was frequently raised as an option for the future or an example of where Tamil friends had been successful in the UK. Only three of the respondents had created their own businesses, but nearly all of the respondents mentioned self employment as a perceived form of success of a wide variety of migrants. The emphasis on self-employment however, focuses upon Tamil men as the entrepreneurs. Men have greater confidence to establish their own

businesses. Although he is unemployed, Jwalia is considering starting a business: “I’ve got the confidence because I used to work, I know all this kind of business” (Jwalia). Although some argue that they are family businesses – “You can see the corner shops being most of them run by husband and wife, so they are becoming a bit forward” (Meyyan*). The extent to which this is actually true is questionable. “In our community we strongly believe that, even if you go to the shop and it is owned by a man, the lady also tries to help him out” (Mangai*).

The self employment envisaged by the interviewees was of a particular type; that of owning their own retail business. Within the relatively small area of the East Ham high street, a high proportion of the businesses are run by Tamils from solicitors to estate agents and particularly shops, from groceries to clothing stores: an example of the ethnic enclave economy discussed earlier (Kaplan 1997). For those individuals without the professional backgrounds to look into another form of businesses, retail is seen as an option as Jwalia illustrates “self employment in that means find a shop. I mean a grocery shop.” This form of business is a reflection of the employment individuals gained upon arrival. Consequently when looking to establish a business they consider areas which they know, “I went into a convenience store because where I had the experience” (Ponmudi). Yet, with the variety of qualifications Ponmudi has, running a convenience store is an underutilisation of his wide range of skills.

Of the thirteen male refugees interviewed for this research the majority either mentioned their desire to establish their own business in the future, or had at some point or currently did work in their own business. The perceived employment experiences of Tamil males discussed in Chapter Five were based on a division between the highly educated and less educated. Parinita draws the distinction between refugees of different educational backgrounds and their methods of coping: “There are two categories, some people are from educated backgrounds some people, most of the refugees they are not educated I would say they are mainly focusing on their money” (Parinita). However, this divide does not necessarily reflect the reality of the situation. Individuals from a variety of different educational backgrounds cope in the UK by finding success in other avenues. For example, although Tanay was working in other people’s shops he had begun another small outlet repairing watches by using his skills and experience from Sri Lanka. This example illustrates where an individual has initially stayed within the familiar area and then adapted and begun to do something slightly different. Yet his

adaptation remains small scale within the ethnic economy and based upon social networks. It is necessary to have access to the information field in order to be aware of demand. However, although information may be carried through these networks, the size of the network itself is relatively small. The ethnic economy only provides information within the community from which individuals may draw when searching for employment, thus limiting opportunities to find employment which utilises their full range of skills.

In general the individuals who run their own businesses are not influenced by their level of education; rather this is an option based on the information they have available within the ethnic community. Bhaskar and Ponmudi are the only people interviewed whose business was operating in the main stream labour market rather than the ethnic economy. This is probably because the business was situated outside of London and the Tamil community, in Lincoln. Both men had good business sense through experience and training, however they still began with something they knew. In Ponmudi's case he began work in the same retail area as he had when he first arrived in London. For Bhaskar his first self-employed business was a small-scale family-owned Internet domain name provider. This was unique to his background and know-how.

Slovic *et al.* (2004) found no apparent logical relationship between information provision and risk benefit judgements. It is the way in which that information is presented that is important. The perception of the success of Tamil grocery stores is enough for individuals to start to envisage self-employment as a potential external coping mechanism. Although they may believe they are being analytical in their assessment of the potential success of these businesses, Tamils who choose to follow other community members in establishing stores are being more experiential in their analysis of risk in which they *feel* that because other Tamil businesses have been successful they will be too. They also go into businesses in which they have had some previous experience, to decrease the potential risks involved based upon their perceived understanding of the labour market. Self employment appears to initially begin with social networks and social capital in the establishment of a business in the first place. The most significant factor in terms of the form of employment is the knowledge of the individual. As most individuals have worked in local convenience stores and similar retail outlets they perceive this as having the least risk as an option for employment.

However, where individuals have greater experience or knowledge other options are possible.

Employment within an ethnic business

Often ethnic businesses employ almost exclusively co-ethnic workers (Light 2007). These co-ethnic workers may be disadvantaged in the mainstream economy as a consequence of for example, discrimination and a lack of recognition of individual abilities and skills (Light 2007). Consequently these workers are often underemployed in the ethnic economy or unemployed (Light 2007). Ethnic entrepreneurs hire individuals rejected from the mainstream labour market at low wages; their disadvantage in the mainstream economy compels them to accept (Anker 1998). Employment within an ethnic business is a frequent way in which asylum seekers are able to earn money through 'cash-in-hand' positions (Rishi*). This can be a mutually beneficial relationship for employer and employee. As Paavarasi illustrates, some illegal activities are covered up by other Tamils: "They don't declare they're working, they work for the Sri Lankan shops, so they cover each other's back, that is happening a lot." These mutual arrangements lead to some refugees feeling obligated toward the people who supported them when they arrived (see Chapter Eight). Yet, "ethnic minority workers earn more when employed in mainstream firms than when employed in the ethnic economy" (Light 2007: 545).

As already shown, employment within the ethnic economy in this way also leads to future work potential, in terms of self employment, or refugees can remain employed within the same ethnic businesses. Information flow is a particularly significant feature in leading Tamil refugees into working in Tamil businesses. In this research six people were currently employed within ethnic businesses: Kayal, Mala, Paavarasi, Savita, Tanay, and Rustam. With the exception of Mala and Paavarasi these individuals found work in family businesses. Mala and Paavarasi found their work through social networks.

There is a gender division within employment in ethnic businesses in this group of individuals. It appears that Tanay and Rustam have a more important role within the running of the businesses they work for than their female counterparts. Tanay's work in his cousin's shop is generally behind the scenes due to his low English skills as discussed in Chapter Five. However, his watch repair service contributes to the wider

business by drawing, generally Tamil, customers into the shop. Rustam has an even more significant role in his father's shop. As stated earlier, either he or his father need to be at the shop whenever it is open, as one of them is always in charge. For these two participants employed in Tamil businesses, they both have a greater role in the running and organisation of the business rather than simply being employed. This may be a strategy on behalf of them both to build up their experience in order to open their own businesses.

In contrast, the women's roles are more as employees, or, as in Kayal's case as an extension of family responsibilities (see Chapter Five). Savita found her work through her husband's networks: "My husband's relatives are solicitors and they gave me the job." She works as a receptionist in the solicitors firm. She has little to do with the decisions in running the firm. Paavarasi is a legal aid worker in another Tamil solicitors firm, a role she found after the firm represented her in her case for asylum. She is more involved within the business than Savita; but still low down in the hierarchy of the firm. Finally, Mala is employed part time at a Tamil jewellery store: "My mum used to come here (the jewellery store), she's a regular customer ... so she just informed the lady that owns this place [that Mala was looking for work]. So that's how I got the job" (Mala). She is a sales assistant within the business; she sells the jewellery to customers and deals with payment for items. From these examples, it can be seen that these women are less involved in the running of the ethnic businesses than Rustam and Tanay.

Like entry into community organisations, for some, entry into the ethnic economy is a coping mechanism. This is particularly true when individuals first arrive and are in desperate need of work and money. There are perceived lower risks working within a Tamil business than in an organisation about which individuals have little knowledge. The information field once again is important here: not only on the basis of information about job availability, but also in terms of knowledge about the potential risks of working in a particular organisation, as opposed to choosing a Tamil business, or other Asian business. Refugees believe they have better knowledge of Tamil or other Asian businesses than employment outside of the ethnic community.

This section has illustrated how the most commonly used coping mechanism of entry into the ethnic economy varies in its utilisation by gender. Whereas all of the formally employed women were working in community organisations or were employed in

ethnic businesses, the men more often saw their future success in the form of self employment. This is initially an internal strategy whereby people deal with their current situation by planning for the future, and may become an external strategy when the business plan becomes a reality. For those who had not already achieved in this area, two men were currently employed within ethnic businesses, and the remaining male participants found their work through the Tamil community. This probably relates back to the differences in the types of skills male and female participants have. The ability to establish and run a business entails a particular set of skills which women may not recognise in themselves. The support a woman would receive if she decided to establish her own business would vary between individuals, but such actions would go against expected norms of behaviour. The proportion of men who actually set out to establish businesses, let alone succeed along this path is likely to be relatively small, and hence more often than not they remain in the ethnic economy as employees. Three of the thirteen males were employed in other Tamil businesses, with a further five having found work through their Tamil networks. Those men who mentioned self employment as an option but who do not have the skills to make it a viable reality most likely recognised this on some level, but desired it to be possible, or they had not thought through the necessary requirements for establishing a business.

All of the women interviewed who were formally employed worked in either community organisations or were employed within the ethnic economy. This finding may be because of a fault in the nature of the sampling framework whereby the snowballing technique simply led to more people in a similar situation. Yet, if we take into account the attitudes and expectations of Tamil women, community and employment in ethnic businesses are still a likely significant option. This is partly a consequence of the types of positions people know to be available. It is possible that these forms of work are deemed as a 'proper' working role for educated women. These examples indicate how Tamil refugees 'choose' to cope with their new situations by remaining within the Tamil ethnic economy for the reason that they lack the opportunity to leave; or because of a strong fear of leaving, where the risks both analytically and experientially seem too high. There are both societal and individual forces at work. Socially there are forces which prevent women from generally considering opening their own business: they have different roles within society. For the individual, the familiarity with a position is an incentive to remain in a particular occupation whereby the refugee may maintain some control over their situation by continuing to work in an

area they have gained some understanding of, and comfort within. It is more difficult to set up new networks outside the community (Foley & Edwards 1999).

3. Conclusion: coping and risk in the ethnic economy

This chapter has considered the importance of the ethnic economy, through an analysis of coping strategies, notions of risk and the information field. Perceptions of how individuals should behave stimulate the ways in which they cope in the UK and how they utilise their social networks to gain entry to the labour market. Both men and women opt for external low risk coping strategies which lead them into the ethnic economy, often on the basis of the information field they possess. However, the way in which they work within this economy and the reasons behind their particular positions, are different. Women become a part of the ethnic economy, for example, in Tamil community organisations due to the perceptions of what is appropriate work for them (see Chapters Four and Six). In contrast, men of a variety of different backgrounds feel that they have access to self-employment, even if the reality of achieving such goals is questionable. As illustrated in Chapter Four there are different social expectations of individuals on the basis of their gender.

As in the previous chapters, the dominant theme running throughout this chapter is the significance of community. The ethnic economy is also a framework for employment coping strategies whereby individuals enter such employment, at least initially, because on the basis of the information they have, the risks appear lower and the chances of success in achieving employment are higher. Yet although the ethnic economy may provide people with work, it does not necessarily utilise their skills appropriately. Few people mentioned their employment in the ethnic economy as a disadvantage directly, however, for some their employment there has clearly resulted in an underutilisation of their skills (for example Bimala). Even though the ethnic economy gave them employment, in some cases it has reduced their chances of appropriate employment. Yet, the perceptions of risk in employment outside of the community remain. This perception of risk is heavily influenced by the information individuals have available to them. The continued importance of the Tamil community, and the information networks that accompany it, has significant implications for the integration of Tamil refugees. This is particularly noteworthy considering the role of employment within the ethnic economy, negating the possibilities for transactions to be made between Tamil refugees and wider communities. The next chapter discusses the importance of the

Tamil community and employment in the ethnic economy from the position of the refugee's obligations to members of the community.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Tamil integration transactions, gratitude and employment

Ponmudi is a successful man by both Tamil and British standards. He owns a convenience store chain and has recently established an Internet café with his colleague and fellow Tamil exile, Bhaskar. Ponmudi only lived in London for a short time, moving soon after his arrival to Oxford where he began working in a convenience store whilst waiting for his refugee claim to be heard. He found this work through contacts he knew from the Tamil community in London, indicating how the Tamil network goes beyond London. His education in Britain has provided Ponmudi with further skills and potential for a future academic career, for which he is grateful. He feels that had he been able to stay in Sri Lanka he would have been able to achieve an academic career more easily and would not have had to resort to setting up his own business. Ponmudi felt that his status as a citizen would assist his integration into British society. Consequently he no longer thinks of himself as a refugee. By moving away from the larger Tamil community in London, the convenience stores that Ponmudi owns serve a wider range of people than just Tamils. He is pleased by this as he wants to give back to wider society because of what he perceives the UK has given to him. Through achieving his goals he feels that he will be more accepted in the UK.

1. Gratitude and integration through employment

This reminder of Ponmudi's story illustrates an example of an 'ideal' immigrant (Keith 2001). As an entrepreneur he has established his business within the wider UK society; a business which he continues to expand. He was educated in the UK and speaks fluent English. Ponmudi no longer considers himself as a refugee, and has gained British citizenship. In terms of his achievement of integration through employment, he still experiences the notion of 'always being at the gates', never fully accepted. He is grateful to the host country for the refuge he received and his education, and he attempts to give back to the country. Unlike the majority of the other Tamil participants, Ponmudi's work is within the mainstream labour market as opposed to the 'ethnic economy'. Although his business partner is also a Tamil, he has opportunities to transact through employment on a daily basis with wider communities. Yet he continues to feel only tolerated as an immigrant in the UK.

Tensions around gratitude and integration

Chapter Two discussed ideas of integration. This chapter aims to explore the concept of integration, specifically the notion of integration through employment, in the light of an analysis of the everyday experiences of Tamil refugees. This moves beyond more normative conceptions of integration and discusses the flaws with the concept in more detail. Integration may be the current rhetoric: however 'integrated' is not an accurate description of how refugees actually experience their lives in the UK. In terms of theorising the everyday experiences of Tamil refugees, multi-communitarianism offers a more useful understanding of the situation of individuals. It may offer opportunities for greater inclusivity of the 'stranger' (Bauman 1991). Multi-communitarianism may be distinguished from multiculturalism (Momin 2004). Instead of the individual being the building block for the cohesion of different societies, the community is the basis. Multi-communitarianism is potentially more segregating than multiculturalism. Through this perspective it is possible to examine the interfaces between where the everyday experiences of refugees meet different notions of integration. Employment is considered as a key site of integration potential where individuals may have the opportunity to build connections and transactions with wider communities than their ethnic or refugee communities. Transactions are important for integration as they offer the opportunity to develop sustained relationships between communities. Transactions are generally thought of in economic terms. The meaning I wish to convey here is more than economic transactions but rather transfers of information, social contact and monies in and across communities between individual people. Formal work may provide people with a sense of purpose and value, whilst they simultaneously contribute towards the wider economy. However, as with some other refugee groups, in the case of Tamil refugees, the significance of the ethnic economy affect the opportunities available for such integration.

Integration as a policy expects individuals to "act like true refugees... grateful" (Centlivres & Centlivres-Demont 1987). For the Home Office, integration partly occurs when refugees are empowered to contribute to the community (Home Office 2005: 14). Community here is considered to be the wider community rather than the ethnic community. *Integration Matters* (Home Office 2005) concentrates on enabling refugees to give back to the wider community. Yet the expectation that refugees *should* contribute is not explored. The Commission for Racial Equality further supported this position. Their definition of integration is based upon three interrelated principles:

- Equality – for all sections of the community – where everyone is treated equally and has a right to fair outcomes
- Participation – by all sections of the community – where all groups in society should expect to share in decision-making and carry the responsibility of making society work
- Interaction – between all sections of the community – where no-one should be trapped within their own community, amongst the people they work with or the friendships they make (CRE 2006: 1).

Their concept of participation anticipates a contribution and/or for refugees to take responsibility for making society work. Whilst admirable ideals, these expectations are entwined within conceptions of gratitude, implying that individuals wish to be in the UK and wish to integrate.

I wish to highlight two main tensions which run throughout this chapter. These tensions concern integration and citizenship, and scales of gratitude. Some definitions of integration suggest that citizenship is a goal of integration. Yet there are important tensions between legal citizenship and the integration view of citizenship. Ager & Strang's (2004b) definition of integration, discussed in Chapter Two, is underlain by a particular interpretation of citizenship. Individuals are perceived as being more integrated if they have achieved citizenship. In October 2008, Phil Woolas, the Immigration Minister, discussed plans for a "carrot-and-stick approach to ensure migrants go on a 'journey towards citizenship'. They will have a choice to 'earn citizenship' or go home" (BBC 2008: 1). Citizenship is something to be earned, something to be grateful for: "feelings of gratitude of a certain kind are centrally important to being a citizen in a democratic society" (White 1999: 43). In two ways citizenship may not achieve such results. Firstly, legally citizenship may not result in integration as individuals who do have citizenship may merely view it as a practicality – for example, assisting them to travel to different countries. Secondly, as refugees never desired to leave their country of origin in the first place, and for many, citizenship may not be something they want, gratitude is not always a common emotion within the host context. For those who do feel grateful, employment offers the opportunity for individuals to clearly give something back to the host country. For those who do not experience gratitude, employment is a way in which they may find a place for themselves, an outlet for their skills and experience, and to earn money to care for themselves and their families. Drawing upon more contemporary arguments of the value of refugees based upon what they may do for their host country (for example,

Chan 2005); through employment refugees are able to almost 'justify' their presence in the UK on the basis of their active gratitude.

Throughout this chapter notions of gratitude vary by scale. At the macro scale this features gratitude to a country. Such feelings of gratitude to the UK as a country are relatively rare beyond being thankful for the refuge an individual has received. At the micro scale is the individual: a single person to whom a refugee feels particularly grateful because of the support they have been given by that person. This is more common, and by the nature of the Tamil community is often focused towards other Tamils. However, there is also a middle scale on which this chapter particularly focuses. This is the feeling of gratitude towards the broader Tamil society because of what the society offers refugees whilst they are waiting for their cases to be heard, and beyond.

This chapter focuses upon the contribution of the concepts of gratitude and transactions in understanding integration. It begins by addressing the integration debate. Here, different definitions of the term are analysed and problems with the concept are discussed. This offers a critique to existing understandings of the term, rather than establishing a working definition. The next section focuses upon ideas around hospitality, examining the rhetoric of hospitality from the perspective of Tamil refugees themselves and what gratitude to a country entails. It is argued that gratitude underlies conceptions of integration, and consequently the feeling of being grateful for the refuge they have received is necessary for individuals to integrate (in terms of normative comprehensions of integration). In terms of the actual experiences of Tamil refugees, the following section theorises Tamil interactions and transactions with wider communities in terms of multi-communitarianism. The everyday experiences of Tamil refugees are generally in opposition to government concepts of integration. A multi-communitarian perspective offers a theorisation of how the Tamil community works in London. Employment is then reconsidered, linking integration through employment, with employment as a way of contributing to society. The process of integration is aided if the individual is employed. Through employment people are more likely to feel gratitude towards the wider community, and the potential of integration increases if refugees feel grateful and wish to give back.

2. Integration: a contested term

The institution of asylum is inherently an ethical responsibility: providing refuge to individuals in need of protection. For some countries ethical responsibilities are fulfilled through allowing forced migrants to stay. For others, greater consideration has been given to the settlement of refugees. In the UK, the process of integration has become the dominant model for supporting people once they have received refugee status.

Perceptions of integration

The concept of integration re-emerged in policy as an alternative to multiculturalism (for example, Wetherell 2008). One of the reasons the government desire the integration of refugees is to harness the variety of skills and experience they bring with them, and the potential for these to benefit the refugees themselves and wider UK communities (Home Office 2005). Consequently the *Refugee Integration and Employment Service* was launched in 2008. This provides refugees with support to develop their employment in the UK. As discussed in Chapter One, this supports refugees in three areas: housing and education; employment advice and long-term planning; and mentoring from members of the wider community.

“British policy has demonstrated an approach based on the importance of minority groups and has placed an emphasis on integration, not as a process of acculturation to the nation and civic values, but as a programme of equal access to the rights of British society, which itself recognises multiculturalism as a social and political feature” (Bertossi 2007: 4).

As Bertossi illustrates, integration has become the emphasis of British policy focusing on the importance of minority groups and their experiences, yet it remains the government which defines the parameters by which integration is measured. Employment is seen as a key area whereby integration may be encouraged or assisted, as economic integration is believed to lead to other forms of integration. Alongside this, through ‘integration’ individuals could gain greater use of their skills. This section concentrates on different understandings of integration before moving on to discuss the way in which discourses of integration are interpreted by Tamil refugees through the lens of theories of hospitality and expectations of gratitude.

Refugees may have a very different understanding of what is meant by integration from that of the policy-makers. LORECA (London Refugee Economic Action) argued: “we perceive integration to be the two way process about the host community adapting, but

as well as the individual community themselves” (Ellen*)¹. When ideas such as this are put into practice Kibru* believed that if refugees expected to be tolerated themselves, they also had to tolerate and accept the host country’s way of doing things. Although these perspectives focus upon how the host community needs to create an open society where refugees feel included and allowed to make a contribution, they also state that this requires a refugee to adapt, for example by learning the language. The idea that the refugee should be willing or desire to adapt implies that the individual is grateful or obliged to be in the UK.

This ‘requirement’ of change could be one of the hardest things for Tamils, as their community and nationalistic ties are central drivers in their lives, alongside the desire to maintain their Tamilness (see Chapter Four). As Sarah* argues, “refugees have more of a longing of the home than is realised.” Even if “people don’t want to go back there’s still this element of being rooted there” (Thomas*). These constant connections to home, albeit a lack of opportunity to return, enhance people’s desires to maintain ethnic and community ties. Different comprehensions of integration mean that individuals are hesitant to ‘integrate’ as they fear a loss of cultural identity. There are also those who would like to return: “if our country's problem settles, lot of people like to go back to our country. So.. because [this] country is not our country, this is your country not our country” (Jwalia). Jwalia feels that he is on the edge, never fully included. He is tolerated, not respected as a refugee in the UK. Consequently if he had the opportunity to return, he would. Khush further supports this position by recognising that refugees are sometimes considered “as a secondary citizen sort of”. Although being an ‘outsider’ may appear to be partly of their own choosing, there is a cycle of re-enforcement which further excludes individuals, emphasising inherent desires to return to their country of origin.

Interpreting integration

The concept of integration is understood in a variety of ways. So far this thesis has addressed normative understandings of the term; these need to be interwoven with the perceptions of integration from the participants in this research. How the notion of integration is understood by refugees is significant: “how refugees feel about their experiences is as important as ‘objective’ indicators of adaptation” (Korać 2003: 414)

¹ Thomas* also noted that the Refugee Council viewed integration as starting from day one when the individual arrives “regardless of the final outcome of their claim and this is the big difference between us and others and the Home Office.”

decided by the government. Ager & Strang (2004a: 3) found that refugee perceptions of integration vary from 'not having any trouble' through 'mixing' in the community to 'belonging'. This research found a similar sense of settlement experience. As Harita's translator interpreted, "she don't feel like home, but it's still no trouble, she like it." For Harita the reference to 'no trouble' mirrors Ager & Strang's findings of how refugees conceptualised the meaning of integration. These general views were identified through the extent to which individuals felt settled in the wider community. For Ager & Strang (2004a), local understandings of integration were influenced by the expectations of relationships between groups in the area, with the majority of interviewees identifying 'belonging' as the strongest mark of living in an integrated community. For refugees to be integrated means that:

"they are not refugees any longer... What I really meant by not being a refugee is they forget, they should forget what they went through back home. Where it is you see in Sri Lanka it's really hard to forget, but it's a new life, it's a new thing given to you" (Mangai*).

Within this perception of integration Mangai* argues that identification as a refugee is a lack of integration. Her view is that an individual must 'forget' what they have been through in order to be able to fully 'integrate'. By this I suspect she means coming to terms with their experiences rather than blocking them out. The extent to which someone can and should 'forget' is questionable: rather than by reconciling themselves with what they have been through they may be able to move forward in their new country. Yet 'forgetting' to consider themselves as refugees within the UK offers opportunities for integration if those individuals now consider that they belong in the UK rather than seeing themselves as temporary residents. In addition Mangai's* phrasing: 'it's a new thing given to you' is significant. The idea that refuge and the 'new life' is a gift to be accepted, and that people should be grateful, continues.

Integration was also confused with assimilation in the ways in which participants comprehended the notion. Kaaviya* illustrated how she and her clients at the Tamil Relief Centre considered integration to be giving up their culture:

"Yep, firstly, they have to, they have to be fluent in language - English. And second thing, till they are found with the culture and they are not ready to give up their culture, they don't want to give up their own culture, but even their style of dressing, they want to follow their own culture."

These assimilationist connotations continue through to Zarine's* view that individuals "adapt to this way of life in this country like culturally and in all aspects." Although less extreme than Kaaviya's, Zarine's definition still envisions some form of cultural

change. Kibru* noted that there is a 'middle way' where he can "practice some of my culture and some of my way of doing things which are not in clash or in conflict with the mainstream existing culture" (Kibru*). Again the emphasis is upon a practice of culture which is tolerated as long as it does not go against 'mainstream' expectations.

Yet for those affected by integration policies there is still confusion over what they actually mean:

"Integration? I'm still not sure about what the government expectations are. Is it language? Culture? Food? Lifestyle? I still see 'some' staff at the Home Office, do not follow any dress code, munching snacks at the counter when looking at our papers and humiliate with worst possible pronunciation of English words" (Bhaskar).

Bhaskar cannot comprehend how there can be certain expectations of his behaviour and 'integration' when the staff who, for him, represent the face of the Home Office do not meet any of his perceived requirements themselves. The notions of equality which underlie his current comprehension of integration lead him to question equality in the behaviour of those around him. Yet as Mangai* argues, refugees can never be 'equal' in every respect: "however we try we can't speak like an English person." Although a particularly practical interpretation of equality, Mangai raises an interesting point, that equality is not an achievable goal, nor should it be. As argued in Chapter Two, an approach towards social justice is more appropriate than a position which envisages an equal state of being.

Bhaskar's thoughts raise further interesting points about what it means to be integrated:

"I don't have trouble integrating with English people... even history wise I can talk about any history, European history or English history. There was a small quiz on the BBC website after the English Way of Life ['Life in the UK'], the examination they have to take before becoming a citizen, and I could answer all the questions. I could talk, you know, in that British way of life they ask questions about King and Queen and previous like, I can answer those" (Bhaskar).

This statement considers important ideas, particularly around the notion of citizenship and fixing identities. Knowledge of the Kings and Queens of England is a very specific framing of what it means to be a citizen. However, within policy, individuals are categorised into groups and consequently are fixed in certain identities whereby there is no flexibility to accept circumstances. Refugees are expected to perform to certain normative standards to be integrated. As an asylum seeker Bhaskar "always used to feel that I was well integrated until they actually asked me to continue to report every week." Bhaskar had been reporting to the Home Office once a month for several years with out any problems. Within the new policy, Bhaskar fell into a situation whereby he

was still an asylum seeker and had to alter his behaviour in order to fit the new schedule. He had previously felt what he describes as ‘integrated’ only to be reminded how his presence was simply ‘tolerated’, and that he should comply with the new rules as an asylum seeker. Integration continues to be widely interpreted. I return to my concept of the process through an examination of integration through employment later in this chapter.

3. The rhetoric of hospitality: gratitude within integration

Whilst alluding to the underlying rhetoric behind ‘integration’ in the previous section, the focus of this section is to examine how Tamil refugees experience integration in the UK. This section questions the sense of what integration may be, and begins to consider how Tamil employment experiences fit within these perceptions. Touching on Derrida’s work on hospitality and ethics (for example, Derrida 2001) this section investigates the dominant discourses and potential structures working around Tamil refugee experiences within the UK. The notion of gratitude introduced in the first section is developed, within the concept of integration. Gratitude in this context implies indebtedness to the host country. Theories around hospitality are a conceptual means of framing refugee experiences of gratitude for their settlement in the UK. The discussion presented here develops an understanding of the way the integration agenda is seen and understood by the Tamils who are expected to conform to such ideas. For integration to be possible, in the way in which it is currently conceived, citizenship is often emphasised as the end goal. Integration anticipates citizenship in a particular way focused around civic participation. Consequently, citizenship, and thus integration, requires a return from the refugee. As argued above (p170), this anticipation of a return can be seen as expectations of gratitude. The notions of gratitude, expected or actual, which are ultimately entwined within the settlement experiences of refugees, are two fold: firstly for the asylum provided, and secondly the lifestyle attained or worked towards in the host country. From this position employment is not only a way that the refugee can benefit by having work, but also they can be ‘giving back’ to the country through paying taxes and making connections, moving towards integration.

Within this research feelings of gratitude could be placed upon a continuum. At one end of this continuum were those participants who clearly expressed gratitude to the UK for their protection. They considered themselves to be integrated to a degree, and wished to contribute to British society in some way. Of the twenty-six refugees, four

respondents' experiences (Bhaskar, Mala, Khush and Ponmudi) directly fitted within this discourse in relation to the host society. At the opposite end of the continuum were those who felt no gratitude whatsoever. Only one participant (Harita) provided no evidence of feelings of gratitude when interviewed. However, in general the experiences of participants could be placed in the middle ground between these two poles, where individuals felt safe in the UK and had found work in the Tamil ethnic community. A further twenty others expressed gratitude for their wider safety in the UK and more specifically towards the wider Tamil community, although they lacked connections with wider societies.

Defining refugee gratitude and hospitality

Gratitude is defined as a "readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness" (Thomas 1996: 593). Berger (1975) suggests that expressions of gratitude are a complex combination of feelings and attitudes. In showing gratitude people demonstrate their belief that the donor acted with their interests in mind (White 1999). In the context of asylum, this means that the refugee appreciates the refuge they have been given and wishes to give back to their host. For example, Korac (2001: 105) found that refugees voted at local and national elections as they "considered it their duty or an expression of gratitude towards the country or political party that accepted them, rather than their need and feeling that such participation can improve their situation." Yet gratitude also implies that the refugee is indebted to the host for what they have been 'given'.

"The host acts as adjudicator defining hospitality as a project oriented towards their self-benefit ... [there is] a danger in losing sight of these differences in the face of the celebration of minorities as an asset and, instead, it becomes all too apparent that minorities are caught in a position of continued indebtedness" (Chan 2005: 21-22).

This debt instates continuous power relations between the refugee and the host country. Kant (1780/1979) stresses that people should avoid a situation of indebtedness, as although the beneficiary may repay their benefactor, they can never be completely even. For the refugee, asylum is a debt which can never fully be repaid, leaving refugees to forever seek acceptance and respect, beyond the tolerance they are offered for the asylum they have received.

White (1999: 47) argues for an alternative view of gratitude which allows for situations, as with friendships, in which people offer support or gifts to others, and in "accepting such help and recognising the goodwill of the giver the beneficiary is benefiting the

giver. And for this the benefactor too can be grateful, thus creating a beneficent circle of gratitude.” White (1999) acknowledges that some people, such as people who have experienced prejudice or the homeless may feel they have very little, or nothing to feel grateful about from their fellow citizens, and are therefore excluded from the beneficent circle. Yet, this more relaxed notion of gratitude can be seen as strengthening mutual bonds between, for example, families, friends and members of the wider community. It offers the opportunity for mutual caring and concern creating the foundations of a beneficent circle of gratitude. Within the Tamil community this beneficent form of gratitude may be possible, strengthening bonds between Tamil refugees and the community. Yet refugees are largely excluded from this circle in the host society. To develop similar connections between the host community and refugees requires recognition. Without this, refugees remain in a situation of indebtedness rather than mutual benefit.

The political figure of the refugee frequently produces particularly emotive responses from all angles of the political spectrum (for example, in the 2005 UK National Election manifestos and debates²). Much of this discussion is around narratives of large numbers of ‘bogus’ asylum claims. Hence, anti-asylum rhetoric often dominates political discourses around asylum seekers, and underlies perceptions of refugees. Despite this, it remains difficult to completely separate the notion of the refugee, from an ethical responsibility: the relationship between states and refugees is intrinsically an ethical one (Hayden 2006). As Fuglerud (1999: 124) argues, “seeking asylum is something you do when no other option is available; it means relinquishing your dignity for handouts and leftovers, entering a relationship of individual submission to authority.” People who are born into a “place of good fortune” have moral responsibilities towards the Other born into a place of lesser fortune, whereby individuals are thrown into a situation where they have to rely on the support of another (Smith 2000c). This view is not an absolute. Rather it is a culturally conditioned perception of responsibility. Yet from this position it is possible to move towards “an ethics grounded in a responsibility toward distant others and a politics in which that responsibility is brought to the fore” (Popke 2003: 299). Policies of integration are particularly significant in the UK’s ‘treatment’ of refugees, “democracies should be judged not only by how they treat their members but

² In the UK general election in May 2005 a series of discussions around immigration emerged. The then Home Secretary Charles Clarke announced a five-year strategy for immigration and asylum. This involved identity cards as a way of targeting illegal immigrants. The Conservative leader, Michael Howard, announced that immigrants from outside the EU would be tested for HIV, tuberculosis and other diseases.

by how they treat their strangers” (Benhabib 1998: 108). Consequently the UK offers a particular form of hospitality towards refugees.

In order to discuss Derrida’s ideas around hospitality it is important to comprehend his ideas on ethics. Hospitality, as far as Derrida is concerned, is the same as ethics: hospitality being the process of being ethical. I do not attempt to define a single ethics, as Popke (2003: 300) argues that “any project aimed at defining *an* ethics, or *a* normative theory of society, would be doomed to failure.” This section attempts to do neither. It is argued that ethical ideas could be seen to influence the dominant views around supporting refugees through integration. Derrida based his view of hospitality and ethics on Levinas’ principle of an ethics of intersubjectivity, the ‘first philosophy’ whereby ontologically people should be bound to the ‘Other’ before themselves. For Levinas, ethics arises primarily out of our rudimentary responsibility to the Other (Levinas & Kearney 1986). Within this argument, just as the host country is firstly responsible towards the Other of the refugee; the refugee has a responsibility firstly towards the host country Other. For many Tamils a responsibility towards others is inherent within Hindu teachings. However, often it is the wider Tamil community that comes before the ‘strangers’ of the host societies. Here both the individual Tamil and the Tamil community become the Other to the host society. This contradicts the model of integration in which Tamils are expected to also give back to the host societies by allowing more substantial connections to exist between the two communities. In order to move beyond a responsibility towards the Tamil community only, gratitude offers a conceptual distinction which re-writes a responsibility towards the host community.

The subject of modern ethics is fundamentally constituted through the maintenance of both social and spatial boundaries (Popke 2003). According to Popke (2003), within this spatialization the figure of the stranger becomes the ‘prototypical ethical problem’ because “the stranger is ... someone who refuses to remain confined to the ‘far away’ land or go away from our own and hence ... defies the easy expedient of spatial or temporal segregation” (Bauman 1991: 59). The notion of supporting the stranger has rhetorical undertones in most religious scriptures whereby the stranger is given hospitality whatever, whoever they are. The practicalities and realities of this can be questioned as societies have changed to be more fearful of the stranger. This inability to isolate deviants from the social norm leads to policy to reduce their impact. Integration fixes structures between ‘us’ and ‘them’ whereby immigrants must meet certain

thresholds in order to integrate and become integrated. The 'mainstream society' tolerates the 'deviants' who do not meet desired norms but who are attempting to adjust in pre-determined ways; if they are truly grateful then they will seek to adjust to pre-conceived norms.

Tolerating the 'stranger' and desiring hospitality

In response to a December 2006 news issue, where a Muslim teaching assistant refused to remove the veil covering her face whilst working with children, Kibru* commented: "tolerance means not only from one group, this lady expects her society to tolerate her way of doing things, but at the same time she has to look at the other side of it. i.e. she also has to tolerate and accept." Although Kibru sees tolerance within integration as two sided, the very notion of 'tolerance' implies a hierarchy, a concept laden with power relations between the people tolerating and the 'to-be-tolerated'. It is generally linked with the dominant group tolerating the minority: "it's now the majority has tolerated the minority to play their own role, to practice their own way of doing things – religion and so on" (Kibru*). It can be argued that in the Canadian asylum system there is greater 'tolerance' as a consequence of the distinction in the use of terminology (see Appendix One for further details). Rather than referring to people who are claiming asylum as 'asylum seekers', in Canada they are called 'refugee claimants'. In general there is less animosity towards people seeking asylum in Canada than in the UK. Some people put this down to Canada's history of immigration. However, Peter Showler agreed that this could potentially be a result of the terminology used. The term 'refugee claimants' encourages the Canadian public to think more favourably of those individuals seeking refuge than in the UK as the general public are more aware that refugee claimants become refugees. This situation established a different discourse around asylum and refugees than in the UK, leading people seeking refuge to experience less negativity and greater 'tolerance' from the host society than many people experience in the UK.

The process of integration is a way in which the feared segregation of strangers is potentially reduced and individuals will be tolerated for their differences on the condition that they do not threaten dominant social norms. As a consequence of the entrepreneurialism of many Tamils in the UK they are 'tolerated' and seen relatively positively as they do not threaten social norms and are seen to be self-sufficient (for example, Ponnudurai and Bhaskar). Alongside this, those individuals are grateful that

they have “been given the opportunity, to set up our own businesses and come up in business life, call it as an entrepreneurial enhancement culture that has been encouraged in the UK” (Ponmudi). Recognition has more positive connotations than those implied in notions of tolerance: “recognition on both sides, and not simply tolerance. since tolerance does not necessarily imply acceptance or approval” (Dikeç 2002: 236). However, the positive implications of the hospitable nature of ‘recognition’ assume that hospitality is desired.

Hospitality is almost always established as being a desirable quality, particularly by the host country, despite how this position of responsibility towards the Other requires the notion of unconditional hospitality to the stranger (Dikeç 2002). In the UK it is assumed that being hospitable towards refugees is appropriate. It is also anticipated that the stranger will be grateful for any hospitality they are shown. Venn (2002) discusses the contradictory nature of hospitality whereby the conditions of citizenship may define hospitality and who is ‘welcome’, but the prescription of such conditions also excludes and limits the ‘welcome’ itself. The idea that people should act unconditionally to the Other before the Self is rhetorical and impossible: for example in the act of giving, the act itself negates the presence of the purity of the gift (Chan 2005). As Danny Sriskandarajah* argues:

“the problem is that either way, whichever way you look at it, either the positive or the negative sort of arguments, they both involve the defence of burden or obligation. If you happen to be that refugee or asylum seeker, no wonder you feel that, you’re not here as a welcome contributor, you’re someone who’s here with a different degree of begrudging-ness, welcome here for one reason or another.”

The gift of protection is negated by the perception of refugees as a burden on the host, or the requirement that they may benefit the state. Bhaskar is grateful for his protection, yet he feels he has been treated poorly by the immigration officials in the UK: “Immigration may be taking a hard stance but I’m very grateful that I had something good here. I shaped my life and career here in UK.” His particular situation has been difficult as he had to wait thirteen years for his case to be decided.

Being grateful and giving back

The gift of refuge is given with strings attached, yet some people may still feel grateful for the protection in whatever form it comes. As mentioned above, refugees may feel grateful for the asylum provided, and/or the lifestyle attained or worked towards in the host country. It is more likely that notions of gratitude may emerge in response to the

refuge they have received, as public discourses might imagine. However, where perhaps gratitude is likely to be lost, is in response to the experiences individuals have had since arriving in the UK. Thomas* commented that the idea of feeling safe was key to integration. This was mentioned by other interviewees whereby the lack of safety and freedom in Sri Lanka (Savita) and “it’s the fear, basically” (Bimala) prevents them from returning. By inference, it is therefore a feeling of being safe in the host country that aids in the settlement of individuals, and for which refugees are, or are expected to be, grateful. Several of the refugee participants commented on the importance of safety in one form or another. Savita concentrated on the absence of safety in Sri Lanka: “Sri Lanka is we have not security, not freedom ...” Mudita supported this point, but takes it further, by recognising that by contrast the UK is safe: “lots of problem back home so here's safe here, happy.” The lack of safety means that individuals live in constant but varying levels of fear in Sri Lanka “back home the ongoing war is there, so here they don’t have that, that threatening or distressed life” (Khush); here “we can talk to the police men” (Trinabh). This ability to talk to officialdom in complete safety is for Trinabh a poignant contrast between the UK and Sri Lanka. Finally, Mala illustrated the crucial point when she stated: “I feel protected.” This feeling of protection may result in feelings of gratitude and tolerance. The desire to be accepted and to ‘return the favour’ may make refugees more amenable to change through integration. Where individuals do not feel safe, for example due to discrimination, then the process of integration is stalled. This could be read as a lack of welcome to refugees in the host country.

In Canada Tamils face different challenges in terms of integration. In Montreal, as discussed already, the biggest issue is language. Lack of French limits the potential for refugees to ‘give back’. If people want to reciprocate, they need to learn the language. It was perceived by several of the interviewees (Kanags, Dr Meena, Savia) that many Tamils originally sought asylum in Montreal and then moved to Toronto so that their children could learn English. French is predominantly spoken in the province of Quebec. Despite being a bilingual city, refugees in Montreal are offered free French language tuition but not classes in English. Tamils did not feel gratitude specifically towards the Quebec courts who gave them asylum. In the late 1980s and early 1990s the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) in Toronto featured several prominent Indian members who, it was believed by Tamil refugees, were less favourable towards Tamil cases. It was perceived that Indian judges in Toronto would share the beliefs of the

Indian government³ and consider it safe for Tamils to return. Consequently if individuals had a choice in where they settled they originally chose Montreal as they believed they stood a better chance of receiving refuge there. Despite having received refuge in Montreal, they did not wish to live there as the acquisition of a new language was too much to ask.

In London gratitude was also experienced within specific situations. This was particularly true around education. As demonstrated in Chapters Four and Five, education is important to the Tamil community. Consequently individuals demonstrated gratitude for the experience of education in the UK of both adults and children. Because several interviewees had moved to the UK so that their children could have an English education (for example, Dhanya, Chitrlekha), some gratitude is likely to infiltrate their feelings. However, higher education was more specifically remarked upon by participants. For example, Mala was grateful that she “was accepted as Human Rights – under the Human Rights, so I don't have to pay tuition” for her university course. Without this she would not have been able to go to university as her parents could not have afforded the fees. Ponmudi experienced a similar situation for his Masters degree where the University of Hull allowed him to pay home student fees whilst he was still going through his asylum case. Rustam was also given “help from the government ... because when I entered University I was permanent citizen so I didn't have to pay any higher fees, all I had to pay was their student fees.” Outside of higher education, Jwalia was able to study his accountancy course for free because he was on job seekers' allowance. In contrast Ravi commented that: “Because I am working I have to pay for the course, if I was not working and I was on benefits I would not have to pay.” With the exception of Ravi, each of these individuals has benefited from education in the UK and had financial assistance in some way. They are grateful for this to some extent, although their gratitude may be directed to the institutions that have supported them rather than the host community as a whole. Education is a particularly interesting area in terms of gratitude as it is difficult to identify where gratitude may be directed, and obligation to work in a field which utilises such skills may be felt. The Tamil community, or family members, may provide extensive pressure, encouragement and support; even if the education has been within the host community gratitude, may not be focused there.

³ In the late 1980s India, in an agreement with the Sri Lankan government, had deported many Sri Lankan Tamil refugees resident in India back to Sri Lanka.

The 'welcome' given to refugees is not altruistic. The CRE (2006) and Home Office (2005) definitions of integration indicate the expectation that refugees should participate in and contribute to wider society. They are not just given refuge, it is anticipated that there will be a return for the asylum provided. Chan (2005) argues that migrants inevitably have some form of (unwritten) debt to pay for their stay, or at least feel that they do. The emphasis in integration policy is upon improving refugee lives by enabling them to contribute within their new society. Improving the utilisation of refugee skills could be read more cynically as gaining something back from the obligated refugee for the 'hospitable' society, or justifying their acceptance within the country in the first place, therefore people "defend refugee status on account of untapped capital" (Chan 2005: 21). Ponmudi believed that refugees were welcome "proving also that we are good citizens that have been chased out of the country and we are here for a good living." As long as he is a genuine refugee, and a 'good' citizen (conforming to expected norms and meeting integration markers) who works hard in the UK, then he believes he is showing his gratitude. Here Ponmudi illustrates how gratitude, from the perspective of the refugee, means paying back in a particular way. Parker (2000) calls this a discourse of 'cultural contribution', whereby when placed upon "identifiable subjects a debt of hospitality signals the potential of repayments through the idealisation of a contributive, servile, and grateful minority as an antithesis to an indebted, unruly migrant" (Chan 2005: 21). Such a perspective supports a discourse that associates a right to residence in the country with the exchange for capital contributions and cultural investments (Chan 2005). Some individuals are also happy to pay such debts: "you know it's our duty to pay tax. I had some thing to say, I went to university I had a good degree so that's a benefit that I've got from this country so I'm happy to repay" (Bhaskar).

Tamil community leaders certainly seem drawn to the idea of Tamils as 'good citizens' in order to secure a more flattering image of Tamils within the perceptions of the host. Although to the government, the asylum seeker is an individual and their ethnic identity remains outside the basis of the decision of legal status; moral responsibility is conferred on the basis of community identity (Fuglerud 1999). Tamils, or at least Tamil community leaders, wish to convey a positive image of this group identity in the hope of achieving greater acceptance.

Reciprocating hospitality to host and Tamil societies

The concept of the 'host' community raises interesting issues around hospitality and the anticipated temporary nature of being in the position of host (Dikeç 2002). This is based on the notion of reciprocity, whereby individuals provide hospitality to the stranger because they would expect the same in similar circumstances. However, the rhetoric underlining assumptions of behaviour when a stranger needs support appears to be different when the stranger is also a migrant, or more specifically a refugee. Beyond simply the predominance of negative discourses surrounding refugees, and the lack of distinction between 'bogus' and 'genuine' applicants: in terms of hospitality, the reciprocal nature of such behaviour is potentially lost. The expectation that members of the host society could become refugees in the future is seen as an unlikely possibility when the host is situated in a democratic Western country. Consequently refugees are unlikely to have the opportunity to repay the host's 'kindness' by offering them refuge in the future. As suggested above, the reality of hospitality is limited to the ideological stranger, yet when the stranger is replaced by the refugee, the fundamental necessities of the concept of hospitality – that the guest replaces the host in the future – is negated. Therefore if they cannot reciprocate the host's generosity by providing them asylum in the future, the refugee must find another way to indicate their gratitude. Trinabh explains his view of the way he feels he is treated:

"I living here and also working, I make money, I pay the tax, I pay the council, do everything well and fair I think, I don't have any criminal, so I good, then free time I go and work the Tamil Sangam and Temple, and work like that. Community works, I [do] my duty."

Trinabh meets societal norms, paying taxes, making money, and working in the community. Yet in the interview he expressed frustration that he remains 'to-be-tolerated' rather than 'accepted' and approved of in the host country. He may only be able to return his gratitude through working towards pre-set integration goals, as the society he is based in has no expectation of ever needing to seek protection elsewhere. The lack of reciprocity leads them to only tolerate.

In the reality of the everyday lives of refugees it is the processes of learning tacit everyday knowledge which is most important to integration. People who have this knowledge are seen as more integrated, but there will always be the cultural aristocracy who do not have to gain the same cultural attributes as they already have them, for example, whiteness (Hage 1998). For Tamils, their racial difference becomes a lack of whiteness, and individuals are only able to gain cultural acceptance through giving back to the host by integrating, as such gratitude has potential to lead towards a process of

integration. That is not to say that white refugees would not need to express gratitude; rather they may experience greater initial acceptance relative to non-white refugees. Language is a significant feature of everyday tacit knowledge which makes and maintains boundaries between individuals:

“Most of the refugees they feel isolated because they don't know the language, they feel that they are not confident enough even to ask the route a white person, rather they prefer to ask the route to other community. ... According to them the reason is – they don't understand the white person pronunciation. So that's the one reason, and then they have a perception that white people, they won't like us” (Nalan*).

Language and confidence lead the people to go to the community for help. The perception that the host community will not 'like' them limits contact between the two groups. This prevents individuals from feeling content in the host country.

Dikeç (2002) argues that the relationship between host and guest is constantly unstable; the host sets out conditions so as to 'control' the guest so that the guest does not take over the host's space. Instead of considering the association between the host and the guest as absolute, “hospitality implies a questioning of the authority of the host” (Dikeç 2002: 239). This is the ethics of unconditional hospitality (for example, Levinas & Kearney 1986). However, for Tamil refugees the 'white' British hosts are unlikely ever to require the reciprocal hospitality from others in the future. Rather the hospitality given to arriving Tamil refugees is more associated with chain migration. Tamil migrants become the host to future migrants, as recent Tamils become the guests of some of the more established Tamil refugees. Consequently Tamils are more likely to be grateful to other Tamils, or form a part of a beneficent cycle with other Tamils. Refugees may have become the hosts to other Tamils, yet the feeling of still being a guest can remain as the 'white' society has not followed expected norms of behaviour as the host. “So even in my day-to-day life I would rather be on the mainstream without all this identification and things, you know. So I have acquired the British citizenship before two years, it's not like I feel the refugee status isn't good, but certainly it's you know, to change the perspective” (Ponmudi). Ponmudi would like to be accepted by the mainstream 'white' society. For him this has involved becoming a citizen to 'change the perspective' of him from being a refugee, and move away from being only tolerated. Yet this may remain a constant battle. Hence, the perceived obligatory nature of trying to return such hospitality by way of doing something that benefits the host may have been lost for some Tamils and the wider host community.

Obligations and gratitude to Tamil society

The Tamil community comes first along with the complex web of obligations to traffickers and family responsibilities and commitments to Sri Lanka itself: “Basically we're Tamil community, we think, because they are Tamil people. because of I don't see much foreigner, because we can speak Tamil with all the people on the streets they can speak Tamil so we are not feel we are alone” (Rustam). This is also a consequence of a lack of spatial integration. For Tamils this works at the smaller scale of fellow Tamil hospitality by perhaps working in the host family's shop or helping out with childcare. This notion of ‘community’ and support can extend to other Asian groups and their businesses. For example, Caleb searched for work in the extended Asian community, but Tamil participants rarely moved to the wider ‘mainstream society’. “So if I am thinking like a typical Sri Lankan I would rather say if I go to an Indian work environment we will, their work culture is slightly different that they can understand their workforce culture and things like that” (Ponmudi). This is an option within the UK, and particularly in London, by virtue of there being a large Tamil community and other Asian communities. In other countries such as Holland “people [Tamil refugees] are not living as a community like here, so you have to mix a bit with Dutch people, so then you'll understand their culture and how they behave and all that in the work place and all that so luckily I got the chance, afterwards I came here” (Jayani). Not living in an ethnic community may affect the employment and broader experiences of individuals, and as such, has significant implications for dispersal policy in the UK (see Chapter Ten). The host-guest relationship remains in Holland, yet in this example, the only hosts are the Dutch rather than the pre-existing community of Tamils, as Holland lacks Tamil community concentrations. Therefore the geographical and spatial integration of individuals matters. The next section moves to discuss this in more detail.

4. Multi-communitarian experiences

In previous chapters, the importance of community for Tamil refugees has continually been re-iterated. Whereas integration anticipates people playing a role in the wider host society and economy, creating connections between groups: multi-communitarianism, as perceived of within this research, theorises different communities sitting alongside each other with possibly little interaction between them. Through a theorisation of multi-communitarianism this section now examines a more accurate description of the way Tamils experience their settlement in the UK other than the notion of being

‘integrated’. The question here may be whether the benefits of integration outweigh the costs of integration, and as such is integration a viable alternative to the reality of multi-communitarian communities.

Multi-communitarianism, rather than amplifying the individual, considers the group. It moves beyond multiculturalism, which focuses on recognition and acceptance of cultural diversity and the co-existence of different ethnic groups, by emphasising common bonds and linkages among people who belong to different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds (Momin 2004; Bauman 2002; Noor 2000). This theorisation is combined with a discussion of Tamil experiences of gratitude since arriving in the UK and the notion of transactions between communities. This theory contradicts integration as envisaged by the CRE (2006: 1) “where no-one should be trapped within their own community, amongst the people they work with or the friendships they make.” Within this communitarian⁴ perspective, if gratitude is felt by refugees it is more likely to be felt towards the Tamil community, than to the wider host society. This section examines the interfaces between the everyday experiences of Tamil refugees and policy. It centres particularly upon the significance of the ethnic economy.

Multi-communitarianism and communitarianism

Multi-communitarianism is distinct from multiculturalism. Yet the basis of multiculturalism has legitimised multiple ways of being for Sri Lankan Tamils. The notion of multiculturalism became a policy ideal in 1968 when the then British Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins, stated that multiculturalism should be understood “not as a flattening process of uniformity, but cultural diversity, coupled with equal opportunity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance” (cited by Rex 1996: 134). This concept of tolerance continues to underlie much of the rhetoric around multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is the belief, therefore, that people of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds have the right to maintain their distinctiveness rather than being assimilated into ‘mainstream’ norms (Jackson 2000); something Keith (2005) refers to as the metaphor of the mosaic rather than the melting pot. Multiculturalism considers people to co-exist, but does not imply connections between them. It is a theory of pluralism applied to individuals who may bring together different elements of their

⁴ The term communitarian as opposed to multi-communitarian is used in places within this section to emphasise specifically the Tamil community, rather than multiple communities living alongside each other.

identities and create their own way of being. Yet multiculturalism appears to depend upon a belief in homogenous cultures and identities (Jackson 2000).

For multi-communitarianism, instead of individuals being the building blocks for the cohesion of different societies, communities are made the basis. Momin (2004) argues that multi-communitarianism could be an alternative to ethnic nationalism, restoring the balance and harmony between individuals and society. Yet the reality of the world working in this way is that communities become distinct spaces and groupings of their own. For Kiran this is particularly important: “I'm very happy with this country because we can stay with our culture.” Sriskandarajah (2004: 499) argues that

“Sri Lankan Tamils have not adopted the cosmopolitan, multicultural framework espoused by many Western host societies in relation to their homeland. Rather, despite their dispersal and residence in liberal states, these diasporas cling to traditional loyalties associated with nation and ethnicity, and on pre-migratory frameworks.”

This may be a consequence of the communal experiences of trauma in Sri Lanka. “We are, as a community, been suffering with ill treatment and discrimination for a long time [in Sri Lanka]” (Meyyan*). This communitarian model is particularly true of the older members of the community and the first generation, whereas younger Tamils have the opportunity to meet other people at university and school (Rishi*). As non-Tamils, Kibru* commented that “Tamils I must say, very strong community”, and Zarine argued that “they call themselves as Tamils and they mix with the Tamil community.” From the perspective of people who associate with the community in different ways, the Tamil community predominantly mixes with other Tamils. Tamil identity as illustrated in Chapter Four is very important to Tamil refugees. The strength of the community helps to maintain Tamil identity. “A lot of Tamil refugees don't mix with other communities; they are a very closed community. So as a result, even the children like the house that I am living in right now, at the moment everybody's downstairs their television is, they've got a satellite, is geared to ... Tamil TV stations” (Paavarasi). In maintaining the Tamil community, connections with other communities are limited. This reduces the opportunities for transactions between communities. Paavarasi's example illustrates the wider connections to Tamils across the globe through Tamil television broadcast from the diaspora around the world, in preference to socialising with wider communities in the UK. These connections are built upon, with and through social networks and Tamil institutions, “like if you go to temple. if you know the person, its Tamil person then we talk, then the next day we become friends” (Mala). Even when Tamils do have work contacts elsewhere, at predominantly Tamil events “if

I go to a Tamil party, then all 100 people will be the Tamils. It is very rare, even though they work in the mainstream organisation, even though they have colleagues would be rare for them to come to the party, mostly it would be Tamils” (Nalan*). In a communitarian reading of the Tamil community the rights of individuals only remain if people stay within the original community. Individuals are discouraged from looking outside the community. Hence at private events that might be focused around Tamil networks, individuals are perhaps wary of bridging gaps and bringing in people who may be considered to be outsiders.

A multi-communitarian approach may therefore be more appropriate for Tamils than the integration focus; particularly for Tamil refugees where persecution was experienced, not because of individual characteristics (such as political beliefs), but because of membership of that group (for example see Chapter Four). Yet the focal point being upon the Tamil community may have negative consequences such as those illustrated in previous chapters where individuals are held back by community social ties. The multi-communitarian theorisation of the Tamil community is only possible because there are enough people living as a community. This is a key feature of East Ham, Newham and other smaller concentrations within London: “Compared to other European countries Tamil refugees have not largely dispersed outside the capital and the people outside London rarely know our existence or the identity” (Bhaskar). This lack of dispersion around the rest of the country created the opportunity to build a self-sufficient community that does not require connections with other communities. This enables Tamil refugees to rely predominantly upon Tamil organisations for services and the Tamil ethnic economy for employment (see Chapter Seven). The Tamil community offers support: practically, psychologically and economically. Consequently, Tamil refugee lives are immersed within the Tamil community, meaning that often gratitude for their life experiences may be directed towards other Tamils, albeit not exclusively, as illustrated earlier.

Community support and employment

Tamil refugees predominantly utilise Tamil organisations in terms of support for refugee and other services. Speaking from his position as manager of a Tamil organisation, Kibru* commented that they “tend to go to their own community rather than to Refugee Council.” This situation was mirrored in several of the other organisations where Mangai* and Kiran, both commented on how Tamils opted to visit

their organisations over others “they still come because the language problem is still ... so they access our services” (Mangai*). Concerns over their abilities to speak and understand English lead Tamils to turn to specifically Tamil services. These organisations were specifically established in London as a “safety net for the people, those who eventually arrived later” (Sathienesan*). The organisations support a whole range of requirements from employment, training and educational needs, to health issues (Sathienesan*) negating the necessity for individuals to seek support from another place.

Furthermore, as discussed in Chapters Six and Seven, the Tamil community offers a vast array of employment opportunities within the ethnic economy. The Tamil ethnic economy offers Tamil refugees the chance to earn money where “they can speak their language, native language so that is how that started” (Zarine*). In searching for employment the Tamil social networks are often drawn upon before looking further afield: “Because we're Sri Lankan the people communicate and then that's how we know about [work]” (Mala). The shared ethnic/national identity enables individuals to hear about work on the basis of these identities. The ethnic economy may also sometimes stretch beyond just the Tamil community, focusing upon the next best thing: “he's always trying in our community or let's say in Asian community trying, so when he asks for work he's got the relationship, like Indian. So you don't widely looking for a job everywhere” (Translator for Caleb). Commonalities are important within the hunt for work. Where Caleb feels he has a ‘relationship’ with a community, and an understanding of how that community works, he is willing to examine the possibilities for work there. Transactions between communities with greater similarities to the Tamil community are more common than those within the wider host society. As stated earlier, the majority of participants expressed some form of gratitude towards the Tamil community. For many this was on the basis of employment opportunities. For example Maina’s husband and Elisai found work through the community, as did Savita and Tanay, who found work through Tamil family members.

However, the ethnic economy may also have a negative impact on individual’s employment opportunities. As discussed in Chapters Four, Six and Seven the employment individuals may find within the ethnic economy may lead to disadvantages for the refugee. Mangai* comments how Tamil refugees “will extend the community, and that’s the reason they were exploited as well because that’s the reason they were

paid very low wages, less than the minimum wages, on many occasions, and they have to cope with that because there are no other way than can survive.” Tamils enter the ethnic economy, sometimes as their only option, and yet may experience exploitation in the process. Clearly Tamil refugees have to start somewhere: “obviously people start off at the very bottom in a shop or whatever [...] below poverty wage, long hours, you know and.. the very low” (Rishi*). Some people are taken advantage of by the community they feel safe within. Although they may be grateful for their employment, working within the ethnic economy means they may potentially be exploited. As argued in the previous chapter, Tamils may be maintained in isolation, in a position of exclusion and lack of integration. They may feel gratitude to the Tamil community, and may ‘pay back’ to the community through community work, but ultimately individuals may not be fulfilling their potential in a number of ways.

Communitarianism and integration

This section has illustrated how the primary focus of individuals is often upon the Tamil community. Thus in many ways the Tamil community has become self-sufficient. This self-sufficiency further serves to drive Tamil refugees to consolidate Tamil society to be more self-reliant and maintain pre-migratory cultural scripts within their day-to-day lives in the UK. This unites Tamils and results in their particular experiences within the host country in a variety of ways. Refugee communities and community organisations are believed to play a crucial role in promoting successful integration (Refugee Council 2004) and have been shown to be highly significant in assisting migrants to settle in their new countries (Aspinall 2002). For example, several interviewees expressed gratitude to the Tamil community for the support they had been given since arriving in the UK. Pragya stayed at her friend’s house and Bimala stayed at her uncle’s house, whereas Kayal returned the generosity she experienced by providing her sister and sister’s family with a place to live. This illustrates examples of the beneficent cycle. Yet, because of the significance of community in helping individuals settle, there is a lack of desire from Tamil refugees to ‘integrate’. The refugee and community organisations to which they are grateful are Tamil organisations. Hesitation and fear around integration further bond the Tamil community partly on the basis of maintaining heritage, and for those who desire it, the freedom of Tamil Eelam (see Chapter Four). “I would rather say in my experience almost 90 percent of the people would still be thinking and following what is going back there in a day to day life and they try to support our freedom struggle and the freedom” (Ponmudi). Ponmudi perceives that by

far the majority of Tamils are focused on what is happening with the struggle for freedom in Sri Lanka. Tamil Eelam, it is believed, can only be accomplished through a united Tamil community in exile and in Sri Lanka: “people are very loyal to the LTTE” (Tanay). This may further prevent Tamils, who wish to return to Tamil Eelam, from wishing to become more a part of wider society.

The policies of integration shape and reify the community itself by keeping Tamils at the gates, to-be-tolerated, never fully accepted. The integration envisaged by the government, as illustrated, is not always desired by the Tamil refugees themselves as they are constantly placed in a position of obligation rather than inclusion. Yet, despite this, the positives of integration may still overcome the negatives. The hospitality instantiated through ‘integration’ policy shapes and affects the Tamil diaspora in the UK by continuing to allow them residence, but only whilst the refugees work towards the goals of integration set out by the government. Consequently the UK as a home is not complete, through a lack of acceptance and a desire to return to an ideal home. In research with refugees in Newham, a high proportion of whom were Tamils, Bloch (2000) found that 71 percent of refugees would go home given the right circumstances, 19 percent would want to return home no matter what and 10 percent would definitely not return. This desire to return is particularly significant because these immigrants are refugees who have had the experience of refuge forced upon them. A continued maintenance of Tamil connections is therefore a survival strategy in itself for those individuals who wish to return to Sri Lanka and those who are attempting to ‘make the best of it’ in the UK.

Although integration may not be desired by all Tamil refugees, it surrounds their worlds in a way that is important to understand. The most pressing concern for Tamil refugees remains “not how to achieve ‘integration’ but how to remain in touch with their Sri Lankan Tamil origin” (Fuglerud 1999: 17). This is particularly significant in the UK where many Tamils have the advantage of some knowledge of the local language. Aspects of the forces driving the community and their everyday worlds are in direct opposition to the theory of integration, yet other aspects of these forces, particularly some of the Tamil cultural scripts, make potential integration within the UK easier for Tamils than for other groups, at least on the surface. The distinctions between the Tamil community, as illustrated through this analysis of the multi-communitarian perspective, and other communities, are significant in an understanding of integration.

This separation of communities is seen negatively within government policy: envisaged as segregation, discourses which imply distinctions between groups are problematic. Transactions between communities may offer opportunities for integration processes. Integration through employment is a potential way of developing connections between communities.

5. Integration through employment and ‘giving back’

“He or she must be having some kind of skills or something. So you know, try to use that, and try to give back to the country, either because this country has given you so, so much to you.

Give it back, and then you, you mix with the society - you get integrated in that way” (Mangai*).

As stated throughout this thesis, employment is seen as a way in which individuals may be able to integrate. Employment is also seen as a way in which refugees may make a contribution to society. As this chapter has illustrated, a feeling of gratitude towards the host society may also aid the process of integration, albeit the number of people who actually feel gratitude towards the host community may be small. Integration consists of connections and transactions between refugee communities and wider communities, as Paavarasi nicely demonstrates: “if we want to put it simply, integration is socialising.” Employment is one way in which these networks and contacts might be established, providing refugees with spaces and opportunities for such ‘socialising’ with other groups. The government clearly relates employment with integration, with the introduction of the *Refugee Integration and Employment Service*. The service title brings the two together, and one of the three main aims of the service is to offer employment advice to help refugees enter long-term employment at the earliest opportunity. Drawing upon contemporary arguments of what refugees can do for their host countries, Mangai`s* comment demonstrates how refugees are expected to ‘give back’ through their employment because they are grateful for what this country has given them.

As Danny Sriskandarajah* argues:

“For me it, integration has to be, has to start with social economic integration, it has to be about allowing people to get the jobs that they should be able to get preventing discrimination in the labour – fundamentally that is about equality and equality of opportunity.”

This position of socio-economic integration is a common starting point for most definitions, particularly a focus upon employment whereby individuals have the opportunity for greater social interaction within their work to assist in other areas of integration. Integration through employment is therefore two fold: firstly, employment

offers the individual refugee the opportunity to earn a living and make wider connections, potentially resulting in their greater immersion within the host society: and, secondly, employment may be a way for refugees to give back to the host country.

The opportunity for refugees to partake in integration through employment is also perceived to be related to the refugees' skills and abilities. Sriskandarajah* related ease of integration to professionals with transferable qualifications, and English abilities, who had:

“relatively little trouble integrating because they are professionals on the whole, they speak a fairly good degree of English, they have English transferable qualifications, they are *au fait* with the ways British society works, either because they've been here or because they grew up very *au fait* with British descent, British Empire or whatever else it was, while in Sri Lanka they were sort of Anglophiled in a way” (Sriskandarajah).

In contrast he recognises that someone who comes from a “poor village in Sri Lanka, doesn't speak a word of English, hasn't reached school because the war started before school ... probably ends up working in a petrol station” (Sriskandarajah*) and will have greater problems integrating. The focus upon skills and background experience in an individual's ability to integrate echoes the discussion from Chapter Six which examined women's routes to asylum and how these related to the skills and abilities they had. Skilled professionals have greater opportunities to ‘give back’ and fully integrate.

Individuals who are more skilled have greater options in the UK. This is particularly important where their English skills are greater. With abilities in a variety of different arenas, individuals may have the chance to utilise these skills in the UK, but only if they have the English skills to translate their abilities into their new environment. The importance of the individual's personality also remains important for example, whether they have the drive and desire to achieve a position which utilises their skills:

“I think that I can only attribute [the utilisation of their skills] to the individual's determination, because I've seen some people practicing law – solicitors, I've seen some people being GPs or medical doctors. You know irrespective of the education they received from home and so on, but because they are determined they invest their time, they invest their resources, they work on accreditation” (Kibru*).

Some individuals have more advantages than others, or they have had the determination to take up those advantages. Ponmudi, referring to himself and Bhaskar, commented that because of their “formal education [in the UK] ... we have been fortunate to understand and include ourselves in the main community and there are people who are still having that sort of difficulty and they don't know where to go, what to do and basic

things like that.” The opportunity to study in the UK gave Ponmudi and Bhaskar the chance to develop their English abilities alongside providing them with spaces to make connections and transactions with people from other communities. Employment, if situated within the wider economy, may also offer such a situation. By coincidence or as a result of their education in the UK, Ponmudi and Bhaskar were two of four people, all educated in the UK, who expressed gratitude towards wider UK society and not just the Tamil community.

However in terms of gratitude, a skilled professional is unlikely to remain grateful to the host country if they feel that the host society constantly places barriers to their achievement. Discrimination was raised within this research relatively infrequently. However, there was a definitive rhetoric around refugees experiencing discrimination. It was mentioned that there was perceived discrimination towards refugees on the basis of their names: “the moment somebody sees your name or when you put in an application you always have you know that somebody will see me or interpret me as a refugee, that’s always there” (Kibru*). As Kibru notes, this discrimination does not necessarily prevent employment, rather that the individual is then noted as a refugee, which may have certain connotations in the mind of the employer. Varad* noted more severe discrimination whereby “some institutions where they are in need of people, they need the kind of expertise and they need to employ these kinds of people, but still most of these people they are not given the positions they really should get, they are not.” Integration through employment is only possible if the refugees are actually employed and accepted within their work, rather than constantly considered to be refugees. What is significant is the need for Tamils to also be employed within the wider labour market rather than the ethnic economy in order for transactions to be made possible between communities. Individuals are likely to feel more gratitude to a country where they believe they are treated fairly.

Alongside highly skilled Tamil refugees who may or may not experience the feeling of gratitude towards the host community, there are also those who do not feel the need to ‘give back’. Paavarasi wishes to tell her fellow Tamil refugees that “because they are living in England, you are going to have to work.” She believes that it is only possible for them to show their gratitude and integrate if they work. This is the perception of the rhetoric of hospitality which might relate to Tamils, that they must work in order to be welcome. However, Paavarasi believes that “because the system is giving them benefits

they [Tamil refugees] don't give a damn." Ponmudi commented in reference to crime within the Tamil community how "most of the people (Tamil refugees), they come at the age of like 12 or 13 without their parents they tend to get confusion about the culture because the culture is slightly different in here so they get mixed up and go in all of the wrong way, quick money and they show off with their friends." In contrast to those young individuals, who Ponmudi suggests have become 'lost' in their new society, "there are also a tremendous amount of benefit frauds" (Paavarasi). Paavarasi argues that these are covered up within the ethnic economy by the Tamil community. Many Tamil refugees are not grateful towards the host country: rather than giving back, they may have become mixed up in fraud, or simply unmotivated to find work.

Engebrigtsen (2007) argues that in Norway Tamil refugees as a whole are constructed in the media as 'good migrants' who have complied with the demands of Norwegian society and are economically integrated. Among refugees, Tamils have the highest rate of employment in Norway and the lowest welfare support, hence they are perceived as being integrated economically (Fuglerud 1999). The attitudes and competences which allow Tamils to achieve this in Norway are also present in the UK. However, as discussed in the previous chapters and referred to throughout this chapter, for a variety of reasons Tamil refugees principally work within the ethnic economy. They occupy a good position economically, adapting to similar employment perceptions as the wider community, yet their achievements in the UK are mostly within the Tamil ethnic economy: the transactions across communities necessary for integration through employment to occur are generally absent. For the majority, those Tamils who are employed within Tamil businesses, as argued elsewhere, are in some ways in that position as a consequence of their coping mechanisms. Alongside this, they may wish to give back to the Tamil community, either to individual people who supported them and gave them work as asylum seekers, or family members who have given them a place to stay. If they are grateful, this is more likely to be directed towards the Tamil community who have supported them psychologically, economically and practically, so if they must 'give back' then their gratitude is often focused upon other Tamils in a cycle of beneficent gratitude. Hence if individuals do wish to give back there is a further incentive to work within the ethnic economy.

6. Conclusion: gratitude and the integration project

The concept of integration is a vastly disputed and complex term. It is understood differently by academics, policy makers, and refugees themselves. Within this chapter the concept has been deconstructed in the light of an understanding of the everyday experiences of Tamil refugees. It has been shown that integration is underlain by an expectation of gratitude from policy makers and the need for broad transactions between refugees and wider communities. Gratitude may assist in the process of integration. However, it is questionable whether integration itself should be targeted. A multi-communitarian approach more accurately depicts the way in which the Tamil community relates to wider communities within the UK, yet this also has negative potential for refugees. It is possible that the benefits of integration may still outweigh the costs.

The notion that refugees might feel gratitude towards a country because they have been protected by that country is debateable. As forced migrants, refugees did not choose to leave their homes, nor did they always make the choice to come to the UK specifically (Koser 2003). Therefore many never actually desired to be in this country. A feeling of being grateful for the protection they have received is possible, but not guaranteed. Furthermore the experiences refugees have, once in the UK, could reinforce a feeling of gratitude or retract from such a position through positive or negative experiences. More likely, given the multi-communitarian structure of London, is that any gratitude that may be felt in response to the everyday experiences of Tamil refugees would be directed towards other Tamils rather than wider communities.

As this chapter has argued, gratitude endorses particular power relations between the recipient and the giver. It implies a position whereby the recipient desires to re-pay the giver for what they have received. Integration through employment plays upon such a position. The idea that refugees should give back to the host country through their employment is beneficial to both the host country and the refugees themselves. For the host society, refugee employment improves the economic performance of the country by contributing to an amelioration of skill shortages, and by reducing refugee welfare payments. For the refugee, employment offers them both financial and psychological value. However, in terms of anything more than an economic contribution, as Tamil refugees predominantly worked within the ethnic economy, there are few opportunities

for integration through employment to move into other forms of integration, particularly the social element.

The concepts of gratitude and transactions have provided useful tools for analysing the notion of integration. In terms of understanding the Tamil community and refugee experiences, the concepts have further illuminated the significant ties within the ethnic community. They have also provided evidence of the ways in which some individuals have stronger attachments and desire to pay back to the UK – frequently those who had received more than refuge, and particularly education, from the host community. Although the concept of gratitude fails to enable a deeper understanding of integration for those who did not identify gratitude in any way, the concept of transactions offers insight into the importance of these actions between communities. These concepts together offer the opportunity to critically assess the significance of citizenship as a route toward integration, yet they offer little towards finding potential alternative ways of supporting the integration of refugees beyond the importance of employment.

The links between integration transactions, gratitude and employment are an important three part relationship. Employment assists in the process of integration transactions; gratitude towards the host community is more likely if individuals have employment; and the chances of integration are higher if refugees feel grateful and wish to pay back. However, for the refugee who has received protection, the debt is eternal: the refugee can never fully repay their benefactor. As a consequence of these different features, integration as a process may be unobtainable and many Tamils will continue to live in a perpetual state of exile (Ramaswamy 2005). For some this is desired, taking them closer to the possibility of return: for others who find themselves on the outskirts of British society, they remain ‘to-be-tolerated’, never fully accepted. It is necessary to consider how this plays out in the daily lives of individuals. The next chapter examines the themes from the last four chapters together from the perspective of the individual.

CHAPTER NINE

Returning to the individual: successful use of skills, gender differentiation and integration in individual cases

1. Returning to the individual

I started three of the analysis chapters with vignettes of individual refugees with varied experiences and ambitions of settling in the UK. It is important to understand individuals within a socially situated context. Therefore this chapter returns to the individual in more detail by bringing the arguments featured in Chapters Five to Eight together through the narratives of four refugees. Whereas previous chapters have examined the relationship between refugees, skills and integration through employment using forced migrants' experiences to illustrate themes, the aim of this chapter is to focus on individual stories. The key themes of success, gender, coping strategies, gratitude and integration, which emerged in the previous chapters, are part of the life stories of each of the individuals; albeit in a more nuanced manner, some themes are more prominent in the experiences of some individuals than others. As a qualitative piece of research, this chapter aims not to generalise, but rather to individualise themes from the wider analysis. A discussion of the complexities of the individual experiences shows how each of the themes examined does not stand alone, but is inextricably intertwined with one another. This chapter aims to demonstrate how integration is always complex, and varies from individual to individual. This is demonstrated through the four narratives of Kiran, Dhanya, Khush and Bimala. The subtitle of each person's story encompasses the overall feeling of the interviewee's aims and experience since arriving in the UK. Returning to the individual is an important way of demonstrating the complexity of individual narratives which speaks to the notion of integration.

2. Kiran: Building a new life in the UK

Kiran arrived in the UK in 1997 as a low-skilled refugee. He then worked his way up, developing his range of abilities to work as a manager in a charitable organisation mainly used by Tamils. The organisation provides advice and information on welfare rights and benefits, immigration and asylum issues, employment, education and

training, housing, homelessness and health to Sri Lankan Tamils and other ethnic minority communities. The organisation offers interpretation and translation services alongside recruitment services for a fruit packing factory. Kiran's current skills are generally utilised in this line of work. Kiran managed to obtain his O Levels before the civil war in Sri Lanka interrupted his education and he was unable to continue. He arrived in the UK with a limited variety of work-content and transferable skills. Consequently through hard work and the use of his resources he was able to improve his employment prospects. This related to his personal desires for a particular form of success. Initially his need to sustain himself in the UK led him to take a cash-in-hand job, prior to receiving refugee status, in a local Tamil convenience store stacking shelves and cleaning. Once he received asylum he worked in a local factory before being given the opportunity to work in the charitable organisation. Over time he was trained and became manager. Now in his early thirties, Kiran's perception of success relates to his personal ambitions and status within the society rather than a focus upon education (see Chapters Five and Six).

He is well suited to his current position with his self-confident and friendly personality. Yet his ability to achieve this job is a consequence of his use of Tamil social networks. Kiran's ability to speak Tamil is an essential component of his job specification, as the group of people who mainly utilise the organisation's services are Tamil and generally lower skilled individuals who know little English. The organisation then refers clients in search of work mainly to a factory and provides a bus service to this factory. As employees of the factory, individuals generally speak Tamil in day-to-day activities. Consequently, many of Kiran's clients have had little opportunity to build their English skills. His work in the organisation illustrates a continued connection to his Tamilness. His status as a manager, particularly within a Tamil organisation, improves his socio-economic position within the Tamil community. However because his managerial role is within a small ethnic organisation, it is likely that this status will not transpose in the same way in wider societies. As discussed in Chapter Seven, the ethnic economy offers various opportunities to reduce risk and manage situations in the host country. This could potentially lead him to purposefully maintain his work within the community enterprise or another similar form of community employment, whereby he can continue to maintain his status within the Tamil community.

Kiran is not currently looking to move to a different position. He feels successful in what he is doing. For him, being employed in a community organisation is as successful as being employed in a mainstream organisation. This is unlike some of the women interviewed who felt that they had not proved themselves and their abilities until they had achieved a position in an organisation that caters for wider societies. However their desire to gain such posts may be a consequence of their professional backgrounds in Sri Lanka, unlike Kiran who had not had such previous experience. Kiran actively sought out employment through the Tamil community where he focused on individuals he knew who had come from the same district as him in Jaffna. This shared geographical identity was his basis for drawing on his social capital with individuals to gain employment, particularly in his first job in the UK. His ability to use these networks further empowered him within the host country, providing him with a clear sense of direction in looking for work. Yet these connections limited his opportunities to build transactions with wider communities. He appears to strongly identify himself with his work. Not only does he show his devotion to his work by working seven days a week, he also has an affinity with being a manager. He is proud of his identity and the responsibility in his current position. Consequently he has no current desire to seek further training to provide him with a wider skills base from which to apply for different jobs outside the Tamil community. He would like to return to Sri Lanka, but he is less certain as to his family's thoughts on the subject. As his wife and children were all born in Britain he suspects that they may not be keen to move to a new country. His focus is currently his family responsibilities.

Kiran was the only participant to have married a British citizen¹ after receiving refugee status in the UK. His identity as a husband and father is clear within his everyday activities where he is responsible for taking his eldest child to school. His role is distinct from many of the men who participated in this research. His day begins when he meets the bus which runs employees to the factory at around 6am to check that there are no problems. He then returns home to collect his eldest daughter and take her to school, before starting his working day at the organisation. His level of involvement with his two daughters' welfare indicates a slightly different division of labour than within some other Tamil families. This could be a consequence of his British wife having different expectations of his role within the family, although she currently does not work as she cares for their three year old daughter. The Sri Lankan wives and

¹ It was not asked whether his wife was also Tamil or not.

mothers, where possible, appear to have reinforced more traditional roles in the UK. This example illustrates how expectations and anticipated roles are changing.

Kiran stands out, as having been in the UK for longer than some of the other participants because of his strong London accent, potentially a consequence of marrying a British woman and speaking fluent English in the home. He learnt basic English at school in Sri Lanka, and he enjoys spending time with other English speaking people, further developing his English skills. His ability to speak English and his status as manager of the charity provides him with many opportunities to create transactions between himself and wider societies. However, he has chosen to participate mainly within the Tamil community, certainly in his working life. As this takes up much of his everyday experiences (seven days a week) he lacks the time to spend with other people from different groups and participate in leisure activities. Alongside this, as already stated, Kiran would likely not be recognised for his abilities to the same extent outside of the Tamil community. Consequently Kiran feels more comfortable within the community where he has high status. It has also been the Tamil community and his role there which led him to develop his skills; therefore any feelings of gratitude are likely to be towards Tamils rather than the wider society (see Chapter Eight). He values and does what he can to support local Tamils through his role in his work.

3. Dhanya: Creating opportunities for her children

Dhanya has a geography degree and was a teacher in Sri Lanka. Dhanya is one of the women who participated in this research who are housewives in the UK and whose skills are mainly underutilised. The key feature of this group of women is a lack of clear desire to utilise their background knowledge and experience. These women have found other routes to fulfil their ambitions. For Dhanya, in her late thirties, her focus is upon her children and their futures. What is particularly significant about many of Dhanya's experiences is how they are not unique to a refugee. Individual immigrants entering other large ethnic communities as migrants may well experience similar situations.

Dhanya's conception of her identity is interesting as she came to join her husband through family reunification. She does not recognise her own vulnerability as a consequence of coming to a new country as an addition to the main asylum application of her husband. She identifies herself through the situation of her husband: she is

secondary to his immigration status. Her diasporic identity is also highlighted by the route through which she ended up in London. Dhanya is also one of the participants who came to the UK via another EU country. Her husband received asylum in Germany in 1995, where she originally united with him before moving to the UK in 2001. Her residence in a third country not only provided her with different experiences which inflect upon her wider conceptions of self, but also raise her consciousness to the diasporic experience of Tamils. Alongside this, she and her children (who were born there) have German nationality, which provides them with full rights to UK residence via EU citizenship. From the way she described her and her husband's motivation to seek citizenship in Germany, it was for practical reasons rather than notions of integration and settlement which are perceived by governments to underlie the act of applying to become a citizen of a country. This was further emphasised by the family's decision to leave Germany more recently and move to the UK so that their children would be taught in English. The emphasis on the importance of the English language, which was discussed in Chapter Five, is re-visited in this illustration. The lack of attachment to a country, despite having received citizenship, exemplifies the significant draw of English tuition for Tamil refugees alongside the inconsequential status of being citizens in a country for practicalities. As argued in Chapter Eight, integration is often related to citizenship – here Dhanya's lack of connection to a country where she has citizenship illustrates the sometimes weak relationship between citizenship and integration.

This group of women were most likely to undervalue the skills that they possessed. Dhanya was one such woman, describing herself not simply as a housewife but “*only* a housewife”. Despite possessing a degree she did not consider herself to have a further identity around her proven abilities. Yet her use of the word ‘only’ is interesting in itself, as it has the possibility of at least two meanings: firstly, as mentioned, that she does not value her previous skills and experience, and secondly, that she considers being a housewife a slightly ‘pitiabile’ life choice. Potentially the statement is a combination of the two. In speaking to a white, western woman she desires to show awareness that it is more acceptable in the UK for women to work as well as raise families. Consequently she does not appreciate the value of the informal housework she carries out in the process of acknowledging that she understands there are different expectations in the UK than in Sri Lanka. In the context of the responses given by the other women, in general women were more self-deprecating than their male

counterparts. Furthermore, this example illustrates the nature of how particular different identities of individuals come to the surface or are subdued on the basis of the context in which the individual finds themselves.

Success for Dhanya continues to be through her children. She had her first child after she reunited with her husband in Germany in 1995. Consequently her focus on her children may be the result of changing life course rather than her experience as a refugee. She currently seeks education for herself, not so that she can expand her own skills base in order for her to be more employable, but rather so that through learning to use the Internet and wider computer skills she will be a better mother. She takes the course, specifically for Tamils, in order to be able to assist her children with their school work. A bi-product of the course is also socialising with other Tamil women with children at the school, but her main focus is upon being able to support her children's education. The achievements of her children in the future will be the reward for her dedication; her children will be seen as a reflection of her as their mother. Within the Tamil society which dominates her social circle her abilities as a mother will be assessed by the progress of her children, particularly in their educational achievements and the types of occupations they enter.

Dhanya discusses how hard Tamils work in the UK: "Tamils work really hard like three or four jobs" (Dhanya). However, within the context of how she views gender roles, her statement can be read slightly differently. It is not just Tamils in general who work hard; rather it is Tamil men who have three or four jobs. When discussing the employment of Tamils, in this context, her first consideration was how employed Tamils must therefore be male Tamils. When pushed to consider the employment of women she immediately links Tamil women with traditionally feminised occupations, such as childcare and crèche work. For Dhanya, a Tamil woman's place is in the home. She does not believe that a woman can manage her household responsibilities properly if she is also working. However, household responsibilities extend further, at times, than just the house. Children are also part of that role and therefore voluntary work as a teacher² running a Tamil school³ on a Friday afternoon is simply an extension of her role as a housewife and mother, rather than a distinct and separate position which takes her away from what she believes is expected of her as a Tamil woman. The Tamil

² Dhanya was a geography teacher in Sri Lanka before she went to Germany.

³ This school is run at the primary school which Dhanya's daughters attend.

school teaches children about Tamil culture and history. Tamilness is a part of Dhanya's everyday life through her voluntary work and her identity as a mother.

For Dhanya happiness in the UK is as follows: "Happy children, good, not war - sad, everybody is in this place is happy." The happiness of her children comes first, and she wishes that there was no war in Sri Lanka. She is not concerned about her presence in 'mainstream society'. As she is not formally employed in the UK as a teacher she does not have much opportunity to mix with a variety of people and transact with others in the mainstream labour market. Her obligations are to the Tamil community. As she considers her husband to be the refugee she pays less attention to the ideas around integration as she believes they are for him and that they do not apply to her. This illustrates a situation whereby she is fixed in a category where she is expected to partake in the process of integration and yet, as this does not apply in her mind, to her state of being, she does not connect to the ideas behind the policies.

4. Khush: Counselling the Tamil community

Khush is a highly skilled individual who experiences an underutilisation of his skills. He is relatively ambitious. This ambition currently prevents him from feeling completely successful at this point. Yet he has overcome several hurdles in his life so far, changing his career path completely and moving towards his new ambitions since seeking asylum in the UK. However, his decision to change his career route was not a consequence of his experience of moving to a new country. He initially worked as a car mechanic in a Tamil business in the UK, a similar field to his past experience in Sri Lanka, only to suffer a personal setback which led him to seek counselling to help him deal with his difficulties. Like Dhanya, Khush's experiences are less related to his refugee status, and more the experiences of an immigrant entering a larger community of people from their country of origin.

A few years after arriving in 1995 in the UK, Khush's son, who was then two and a half years old, was diagnosed with autism. As a consequence of this diagnosis Khush experienced a breakdown. This may well be a consequence of his identity as a father. He stated how he felt that he had somehow failed in his role as a parent when his child had been diagnosed with a life-altering condition. In comparison to the other men who participated in this research, Khush lacked confidence in his abilities, particularly his ability to meet the gendered roles expected of him. This is possibly a consequence of

his experience of his child's diagnosis where he felt powerless and a disappointment in himself as a father: "my son, has a speech delay so that becomes on the autistic spectrum so that puts me in depression due to thinking about this is my guilt to bring him to the world" (Khush). He was referred to a counsellor by his doctor to help him come to terms with his son's diagnosis and deal with his own anxiety over his son's health. This was not a specifically Tamil counselling service; rather this experience led him to connect with wider society. The counselling treatment helped Khush overcome his difficulties and re-assess his goals in the UK.

The success of his own experience of counselling led him to realise the need and potential benefits the service could provide other Tamils, especially those who have come to the UK as refugees and have had particularly difficult experiences as a result of their past persecution. Having learnt English when he was growing up in Sri Lanka, he was able to go to night school where he gained his diploma in counselling. In his forties, his goal in the UK is not only to establish a counselling service that Tamils can use, but raise awareness within the community of mental health and treatments for illnesses. Currently counselling is seen quite negatively within the wider Tamil community where people are expected to deal with difficult experiences and situations on their own. This example illustrates how there is the potential to change community and community perceptions, at least from Khush's perspective. He currently works part time as a self-employed counsellor, although he hopes to be able to build a base of clients from the Tamil and wider community so that he may leave his current employment as a parcel sorter for Parcel Force. His ambition is partly a consequence of the way he views his work as a counsellor in comparison to that of working at Parcel Force. By working with other people and helping them through their problems, Khush is able to make a difference more generally than just relating to the trauma of asylum. This power to aid someone is a huge draw factor for Khush, giving him meaning and purpose beyond his everyday life. Yet Khush's ambitions would take him further into the Tamil community, when at present he has wider connections.

Khush identifies himself slightly differently from the other refugees who participated in this research. Khush is descended from parents who moved to Sri Lanka as 'estate Tamils', South Indian Tamils who were brought over to Sri Lanka to work on the British tea plantations. The majority of Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka are generally referred to as 'Jaffna Tamils' (see Chapter Four). The so called 'Jaffna Tamils' have

been living in Sri Lanka for hundreds of years. Consequently Khush starts from a different identifying marker than many Tamil refugees living in London. Yet his Tamilness remains a strong feature within his identity which he relates to a broader collective Tamil consciousness. This underlying perception is a factor in his desire to bring counselling to the Tamil community. He wishes to contribute to, and in his mind improve; the situation for the Tamil community by providing them with a service which he believes is much needed. This relates to the importance of community, and serving the community (see Chapter Four). Furthermore his identity as someone who has suffered from mental illness, and survived and been healed through the support of counselling services, is heavily tied up within his value judgments on the benefits of the service for the Tamil community. He identifies himself not as a counsellor, but as a Tamil counsellor: a Tamil for the Tamil community.

Alongside this, Khush is conscious of the colonial relations between Sri Lanka and the UK. He raised this as part of a discussion about the English skills of the wider Tamil community in London. His own English abilities are high, having learnt English as a child, enabling him to gain his diploma in the UK. He is attuned to the difficulties other Tamils have in the UK because of their lack of English abilities and the importance of there being a counsellor available to the Tamil community who can converse in their native language, particularly when discussing sensitive issues. The colonial history of the country meant that people generally have some knowledge of the language; however the extent of their knowledge varies. Access to English education was variable over space in terms of access to English schooling in different places, and also over time with the changes in the official language in Sri Lanka to Sinhalese, and the effect of the civil war on schooling since 1956. Despite his good grasp of the English language, his wife does not speak English at all, illustrating a gendered division in skills within this family.

Like Dhanya's family, Khush and his wife form a more traditional Sri Lankan household than Kiran. Khush and his wife travelled to the UK together. She has never worked in the formal labour market in Sri Lanka or in the UK. She remains at home caring for their three children, including their eleven year old autistic son. Khush commented that men are expected to be the 'bread winners' of the house in Tamil society, yet this traditional rhetoric, as evidenced elsewhere, is clearly breaking down, with several women in this study having worked in Sri Lanka and the UK. Difficulties

in adjusting to the UK, such as speaking English, have provided opportunities for such expectations to be reasserted. In Sri Lanka, a lack of social support for individuals who do not have an income reinforces the expectation that Tamil men should provide for *their* women. Consequently Khush works hard to fulfil his role as provider for the family whilst his wife stays at home and cares for their children. He is aware that the expense of living in the UK makes it even more challenging for a family to live on just one income. Today his counselling strategy provides him with a focus and a chance to value his work and the support he can give his clients.

Khush feels an obligation to give back to the country in which he is now living. However, he wishes to give something to the Tamil community, and give back to wider society. He knows that there is a demand within the Tamil community for his services and he wishes to fill that gap. He has gained a lot from the UK society in the form of protection, education and therapy. Consequently he wishes to give back to society because of a moral responsibility he feels towards people who are experiencing difficulties in the UK. Rather than envisaging being the guest himself, in some ways Khush sees himself as the host to the new arrivals. As such he wishes to teach other members of the Tamil community to be counsellors: “I wanted to do that, to teach a few people and develop, but that is a long process now ... maybe people learn the counselling skills that’s all, so we need at least 5 people like that to come out from the community” (Khush). He wishes to provide future Tamils with a ‘welcome’ and support in the UK, particularly assisting individuals to deal with their past experiences.

5. Bimala: Planning for the future

Bimala is a single mother who experiences significant underutilisation of her skills in her current employment. Despite this, her experience is better than some of the other women within the group that she represents here. In her mid-thirties, she believes she has not yet achieved her goals. Although she is currently studying to improve her employment prospects in the UK, her life is overshadowed by her personal circumstances and her constant endeavours to bring her son over from Sri Lanka. Consequently she is continuously looking towards the future and what her life will be like once her son is living with her in the UK. Had she not had to leave Sri Lanka suddenly as a refugee, she would have been able to plan to bring her son with her when she left. Instead she was forced to leave her, now fourteen year old, son under the care of her parents in Colombo. When she left in 2002 her son was ten years old, the

uncertainty as to what her experience of flight would entail and where she was going, led her to make the difficult decision to leave him with her parents.

Bimala was one of only two women within this research who sought refuge in the UK alone, claiming asylum once she had arrived. She clearly identifies herself as a refugee and her experiences of persecution have significantly affected, and continue to affect, her day-to-day life in her new country. Not only have the mental scars of her trauma led to various medical issues in the UK, but this is of continuous focus for her. Her identity as a mother and her responsibilities focus her attention on providing for herself and support of her son back in Sri Lanka, even when this conflicts with other features of her identity. Back in Sri Lanka Bimala was from a high caste and class background and was used to having people wait upon her. However, in order to maintain herself (and send money back to care for her son in Sri Lanka) she was forced to accept lower status work than her management in a bank and take cash-in-hand work in London cleaning other people's homes:

“I went and told them my situation ... this is what my background, I have a son, I want to pay his school fees, but I've never done cleaning because back home, I got 4, 3 or 4 servants at home ... but it doesn't matter you can't expect it here. But I went there, it was really painful for me like doing cleaning their clothes, washing their toilets and stuff like, but I did it” (Bimala).

The sense she felt of the downward mobility of her social status led Bimala to emphasise her desperation and how she overcame her shame in order to provide for her son. She is a proud woman and does not expect, or want, what she perceives as 'handouts' from the government. This attitude is probably influenced by the cultural scripts of Sri Lanka, whereby a welfare system does not exist, and consequently individuals have to work in order to survive (see Chapter Four). To cope with her situation she took a cash-in-hand job and lowered her expectations of the type of work she should be doing in order to focus on her responsibilities. She wished to work because she identifies her sense of self through her employment.

In Sri Lanka Bimala worked as a manager in a bank where she was responsible for millions of Sri Lankan Rupees. She went into banking having obtained her A Levels, and worked her way up. She is keen to do a similar type of job in the UK and is currently training as an accountant. This is clearly a type of work that she values and enjoys. Yet before fleeing Sri Lanka Bimala's work status changed when she decided to leave her job at the bank to help out her parents in their bed and breakfast business. This move appeared to have coincided with her separation from her husband when she

needed to re-arrange her life to focus on her son⁴. As argued in Chapter Four, divorce is relatively rare in Tamil society; consequently this was a particularly significant action on her part. Her status as a single parent, and the fact that she was helping her parents, further indicates the importance of family responsibilities in her life. This illustrates the importance of family and further supports evidence from Chapter Four that women rarely live alone. Her move to work in her parents' home probably relates to the rarity of a woman living independently of her husband. In the UK Bimala currently lives with her uncle, yet her ambitions for a home for herself and her son would take her away from these cultural scripts (see Chapter Four).

Bimala focused less upon her Tamil identity than the other people discussed in this chapter. She went as far as to announce that given the opportunity and the finances, once her son and she were reunited, she would move away from London and consequently the Tamil community. Although she currently works within a Tamil organisation she only identified with her Tamil origins out of a coping mechanism to find work and support structures when she first arrived. Bimala's work at the Tamil organisation does not utilise her variety of skills. Her ability to speak several languages and ambitious nature in working concurrently to complete her accountancy qualifications in the UK, led her to an official position in the charitable organisation, the same employer as Kiran, after she had worked in a factory of predominantly Tamil employees for a few months. The organisation benefits greatly from her skills, yet she has much more to offer than her current position allows. She mobilised her Tamil identity and made use of the connections that benefited her when it was necessary in order for her to find work. However, in looking towards the future this is not where she wants to be. For her, success would be managing to arrange for her son to come to the UK, receiving her accountancy qualifications enabling her to get a job outside of London and for her to be able to afford to buy a house for herself and her son. It is her responsibilities which drive her to work so hard and this specific vision for the future where she is able to establish a safe home for her son. This safety aspect is key to the underlying notions of settlement and integration in the UK as discussed in Chapter Eight. Whereas other Tamil refugees may focus upon obtaining a job, or a particular job, Bimala has a whole plan for the future in a way which will improve the quality of life for herself and her son.

⁴ Although Bimala did not go into detailed specifics of her need for asylum, she indicated that it had nothing to do with her husband.

What is particularly interesting about Bimala is the fact that she chose to separate from her husband before leaving Sri Lanka. She mentioned that the marriage did not work and so she decided to leave him. As a single woman her experiences and her expectations are very different from the married women interviewed. Although she has a child, or in fact because she has a child, her behaviour is focused upon more than just caring for him: she also needs to provide for him. She has become both carer and provider, roles which are traditionally divided between mother and father respectively. She is independent and training to work towards a better future for her and her son⁵. However, significantly, at this point in time Bimala's son remains in Sri Lanka and therefore she does not play a day-to-day role in his life. Consequently her lifestyle in the UK is that of a single woman, yet her financial responsibilities remain, as does her constant focus on her future plan.

Bimala arrived in 2002, much later than some of the other women, yet by the normative comprehensions of integration she is going through the process of integration well. This is potentially because of her language abilities and her employment experiences. However, she continues to experience the notion of only being tolerated in the UK rather than accepted. This is something she experienced when going through the asylum system and particularly lately as she struggles to arrange to bring her son over to England because of 'red tape' and difficulties arranging this. These experiences emphasise how she views the government as only tolerating her presence, yet she remains keen to move away from predominantly Tamil support. She still feels like a burden on the host society. This sentiment stays with her throughout her experiences of integration in the UK. Consequently although she is not so focused on her presence within the Tamil community, she does not feel obligated to the host community either.

6. Conclusion: intertwining themes with individuals

Each of these four examples has brought together the themes from Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight within the context of socially situated, whole people. Significantly this chapter offers insights which refer back to Chapter Four in understanding the workings of Tamil society and the diaspora. Being specifically *Tamil* refugees has varying importance to the individuals discussed here. Whereas as cited in Chapter Four, previous work (for example Fuglerud 1999) has emphasised just how important

⁵ She is currently dealing with bureaucracy in the UK to enable her son to move to join her.

Tamilness may be for individuals, this research has illustrated how this is dependant upon the specific person and their circumstances. Although Kiran, Dhanya and Khush have all illustrated the importance of their Tamilness, each of their stories demonstrated differences between the ways in which being Tamil affects their everyday lives. For Kiran, working directly in the community offers opportunities to develop social networks and to support members of the community. For Dhanya, the importance of her children's understanding of Tamil culture and volunteering at the Tamil school evidence her own connection to her Tamil roots. Khush, in contrast, identifies with a different form of Tamilness, having not had the same heritage as the other refugees. Rather than being focused on customs or connections, for him his Tamil identity provided him with language skills which meant he could support others in the Tamil community. Bimala, on the other hand, appeared to some degree to wish to disconnect herself from the Tamil community, hoping for a new life away from the spatial and cultural ties. In terms of social capital these ties, or desire to move away from these connections, have implications for the employment of individuals. Bimala and Kiran found employment through their social networks; Khush used these networks to assist him to build his client base, and Dhanya found they offer her a support network in terms of finding English classes and the voluntary work at the Tamil school.

The cultural scripts from the pre-migration society are maintained to some degree. Dhanya's attitudes, and comments made by Khush, suggest the continuation of patriarchal structures. Yet Bimala's experiences and attitudes show a move away from the more traditional social norms illustrated in Chapter Four. Instead, like the women discussed in Ruwanpura & Humphries' (2004) study – through unintended consequences, Bimala has gained some semblance of independence and empowerment. From this position she now develops plans for greater autonomy from the wider community. None of these stories explicitly mentions religion, or religious beliefs, yet there are clear underlying attitudes built upon religious rhetoric, for example the hub of community within the day-to-day lives of individuals. Kiran, Dhanya and Khush all illustrated, in some ways, how they were supporting members of the Tamil community, and although perhaps less intentionally than the other three people, Bimala's job actually centred on assisting the Tamil community.

Each of the stories touched upon education in some way – Kiran taking his daughter to school, Dhanya learning computer skills, Khush studying for his counselling diploma.

and Bimala for her accountancy qualifications. Clearly for three of these people, education was in some way to ‘better themselves’. The purpose of this betterment varied, and for Dhanya specifically focused on her children. Yet the significance placed on education in Sri Lanka appears to be reiterated in the UK. Caste, however, did not emerge within any of these stories. The importance of caste in Sri Lanka has, in the diaspora, been almost eradicated in the everyday lives of these Tamil refugees. The things that bind the community appear to have become more important in exile than the factors that divide them.

The key themes of success, gender, coping strategies, gratitude and integration from the previous chapters remain a part of the lives of each of the individuals. Here these have been shown to be more subtle features of the refugees’ lives than earlier chapters may have suggested. Whereas Kiran challenges the more traditional roles of Tamil men within the group, Dhanya perpetuates expected female behaviour. In contrast to many of the research participants, Bimala and Khush both identify with their Tamilness, but within different situations. The individual experiences of integration vary significantly. Integration is not a straightforward black and white concept; the notion is complex through individual desires to be a part of wider societies alongside the underlying rhetoric of tolerance rather than acceptance. This chapter has illustrated how each of the themes of the analytical chapters here are intertwined with one another within the complex negotiations and actions. The next, and final chapter, brings together the themes of the thesis and examines the extent to which the aims of this research have been met and the contributions of this thesis to different areas.

CHAPTER TEN

Discussion and conclusion

1. Tamil refugee employment experiences

This thesis has analysed the intersection between refugees, skills and integration through employment. Through the case study of Tamil refugees, the relationship between this 'triad' of aspects offers insights into understanding wider refugee experiences in the UK. The findings from this research contribute in several different ways to the areas of refugee and forced migration studies, migration studies more widely, Tamil studies and immigrant entrepreneurship. Importantly, this thesis has developed these areas through a revised comprehension of the significance of the ethnic community and the ethnic economy in the lives of Tamil refugees.

The importance of the ethnic community and ethnic economy for the lives of these Tamil refugees raises questions about existing understandings of refugee experiences; particularly the distinction between refugees and economic migrants post arrival. In the case of Tamil refugees such a dualism is often obsolete within their everyday experiences. The male and female participants have been shown to seek asylum in different ways as a consequence of their differing previous experiences in Sri Lanka. The skills individuals have affect the way in which they seek asylum, and consequently, for some, their potential in employment after they have been granted refuge. Particular employment strategies further emerge as a result of the individual's abilities and their perspective of what is possible in the host country. Perspectives on their potential are influenced by, for example, gendered expectations of individuals. The employment strategies individuals develop may also be similar features of the immigrant experience, not solely refugee practices. It is important that refugees are treated as 'whole people': individuals should not be categorised by groups alone, as this is detrimental to the understanding of the wider picture. Rather refugees should be understood as complete people, without which the nuances of their experiences are lost. Furthermore the wider Tamil community played a crucial role in shaping identity and the settlement experiences of these Tamil refugees in the UK. The importance of the community

impacts upon wider understandings of the process of integration, especially through employment.

The aim of this chapter is to summarise the findings of this thesis and to discuss what this contributes to the wider fields of research. This chapter begins by revisiting the original objectives of the thesis before discussing the specific contributions of the research to different academic areas. The final section examines how the findings may contribute towards policy and suggests future areas for research that have emerged from this work.

2. Revisiting the thesis objectives

Research into refugee employment experiences is important in the context of concerns over the integration and contribution of migrants in general in the UK. Employment which is appropriate to the individual may lead to enhanced or improved integration. This research has been based upon qualitative research with twenty-six refugees and seventeen elite contacts in London. As stated in Chapter One, this research had one main aim: to analyse the utilisation of skills of refugees within an agenda of integration through employment. To assess the success of this aim, it is important to address the three main objectives which deal with the relationship between refugees, skills and integration through employment.

Objective 1, to investigate the skills of the Tamil refugee community in London and the level of utilisation of these skills, has been addressed in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven. Initially it was envisaged that this objective would be addressed through the questionnaire. The relatively low number of responses means that the focus has been upon all the people who participated, either through interviews or questionnaires. Chapter Six illustrated how the participants within this research had a variety of different skills. The utilisation of these skills, however, varied significantly between individuals. Whilst use of these skills may contribute to some areas of skills shortages in the UK, this would be at a small scale. As Chapters Six and Seven have illustrated, the range of utilisation is differentiated on the basis of individual abilities, the individual's ambitions for success and their gender. These chapters have therefore also addressed the two cross cutting themes to analyse a) what is deemed successful utilisation of the skills of Tamil refugees by the Tamil community and Tamil refugees.

and the barriers which prevent success; and b) the influence of gender on the utilisation of Tamil refugee skills in the UK.

The women overall experienced a greater underutilisation of their skills than the men. The two groups identified in Chapter Six (housewives whose skills are generally underutilised, and female workers whose skills are highly underutilised) showed how this underutilisation may not be a concern for some of the women interviewed. For example, the first group of women – the housewives, who were generally unemployed and consequently were experiencing a lack of use of their various abilities – in general showed little regard for the issue (see Dhanya in Chapter Nine). In considering individual notions of success, this underutilisation was not necessarily an anxiety for the women. They saw the importance of the use of their skills as being in supporting the education of their children. In contrast, the second group of women – the female workers who were experiencing an underutilisation of their skills – were in general attempting to overcome this in some way. Their skills were predominantly used to an extent within the ethnic economy: either in community employment or through being employed within an ethnic business. Yet by being based within the ethnic economy, often there was a limit to the skill utilisation that was possible. For the male refugees there was a greater utilisation. Particularly for the male low skilled workers, their lower English abilities to support their wider skills limit their overall chances within the UK labour market. Consequently the employment of individuals was often related closely to their abilities. Finally, the male high skilled workers were experiencing some underutilisation of their skills. However this was because they had more work to do to accomplish their aims, rather than clear barriers making it harder for them than the UK citizens. Their ambitions had changed over time and consequently their vision of success had progressed.

In terms of Objective 2, to examine the human and social capital factors influencing the use or lack of use of the skills within the Tamil refugee community, this was addressed indirectly throughout the thesis. Chapter Five specifically examined human capital as expertness and practiced ability gained through education and/or experience by examining the skills that individuals had, and the way in which those skills were used. The human capital differences between men and women were particularly small. Chapter Six found that variation between men and women's abilities were negligible, yet the differences in employment experiences were considerable as described above.

Chapter Five also argued how English skills were significant in enabling the use of other skills. For Tamil refugees, English skills were more often exogenous. Therefore English language knowledge was seen as a skill itself, rather than a characteristic of the refugee. English knowledge was shown to be related to the utilisation of skills. However, this research found that English abilities were not the only factor influencing the employment experiences. As Chapter Five illustrated, the use of skills was more complex than this. It was related to ideas around success, although notions of success were connected to what individuals perceived as possible in the host country. English abilities influenced perceptions of what was possible. Chapter Six also added the importance of gendered expectations within the complex mixture of factors which were implicated within the use of skills.

Chapters Four and Seven focused more upon social capital. Social capital provides part of the context within which skills may be used. A high level of social capital facilitates the flow of information and resources to the individual. As Chapter Seven specifically discusses, the information field of the Tamil refugee participants is generally tied up within the Tamil community. The information that was available to individuals affected their awareness of options outside the community – both the jobs themselves, and how to go about applying for a position beyond the ethnic economy. Social capital within the community assisted people to obtain certain types of work. However, this may limit opportunities for individuals to utilise their skills to their full potential. This was particularly true for the skilled female participants, who ended up working in community organisations or the ethnic economy, only able to use their skills to a certain extent. For some men, their information fields had expanded into the wider labour market, often as a consequence of education, and they had been able to achieve greater use of their skills in the wider labour market. The Tamil community may provide a coping mechanism with lower risk as a consequence of the information people had access to. Therefore the social capital that people predominantly made use of, at times, may have limited the use of some of the skills of participants. Yet it is important here to return to notions of success, where some individuals consider achievements in the ethnic economy to be the epitome of success, even if their skills were not being utilised to their full extent. This dependence on the ethnic economy by some was disadvantageous for the use of their skills.

The final objective, to explore the concept of integration in the light of the everyday experiences of these Tamil refugees within employment, has been specifically addressed within Chapter Eight. Here the notion of integration has been analysed in two ways: through the concept of gratitude, and more broadly in terms of transactions. Normative definitions of integration were deconstructed and interpreted through Tamil refugee experiences of integration. Policies of integration can be seen as perpetuating an expectation of gratitude. This chapter argued that if and when gratitude was experienced, it was more often directed towards the Tamil community. Feelings of gratitude and information flows contributed to the high presence of Tamils in the ethnic economy; at different levels refugees were attempting to reciprocate the support they were given by the Tamil community and therefore worked in the ethnic economy. This represents the paradox between the ethnic economy and integration. On the one hand the ethnic economy may aid integration by providing employment opportunities and support for the individual; yet on the other hand the ethnic economy hinders integration by limiting opportunities beyond the ethnic economy. The focus on the ethnic economy was by virtue of the types of transactions with which they were a part. Their transactions gave them more opportunities in the ethnic economy than wider communities. For these Tamils, the centrality of the ethnic economy is partly a consequence of the relatively recent arrival of the ethnic group. Theories around multi-communitarianism were therefore more helpful for comprehending the everyday experiences of Tamil refugees. Integration, gratitude and employment work together. The process of integration, and the formation of transactions, is made possible through employment. Through working it is more possible that individuals may be grateful to the host society, and gratitude towards the host society would help improve chances of integration.

Chapter Nine then brought these three objectives and cross cutting themes together, to illustrate how they were interrelated through examination of the experiences of four individuals. The focus on the individual offered the opportunity to return to the participants and their perspectives on the issues addressed within the thesis. This demonstrated once more how integration is not a clear cut concept: the process is experienced in a variety of ways by individuals. Furthermore this chapter illustrated the connections between the objectives and the themes of the ethnic economy and the ethnic community which run throughout each of the analysis chapters.

The aim of the thesis was to analyse the utilisation of skills of refugees within an agenda of integration through employment. Through the case study of Tamil refugees this thesis has achieved an analysis of the skills of a group of Tamil refugee participants, and examined the way in which Tamil refugees experience integration, specifically through employment. The Tamil participants had a wide variety of skills, yet these skills were not being used to their full extent. Employment within the Tamil ethnic economy was very important to Tamil refugees, limiting the potential for integration through employment. This had significant effects on their integration and employment prospects. Consequently 'integrated' was not an appropriate term to describe the way in which Tamil refugee society operated in the UK. Whilst employment may offer spaces and experiences which may facilitate the process of integration, it is only possible if refugee employment offers opportunities for transactions and communication between Tamil refugees and the wider community. These Tamil participants were largely working and socialising within the ethnic community, limiting such potential. Several ideas arise from this analysis, which suggest ways in which the research field may be developed further.

3. Refugees, skills and integration through employment: developing the research field

This section examines four main contributions of this thesis to the research field. Firstly, it questions the value of the distinction between refugees and economic migrants post arrival building upon the migration-asylum nexus. Secondly, it highlights the significance of understanding employment experiences through the eyes of the refugees themselves and how they perceive their success. Thirdly, it illustrates how integration may be understood through the concepts of gratitude and transactions and, through this, how the consideration of individuals as 'whole people' may improve an understanding of their experiences, in order to provide greater support in the future. Finally, the thesis suggests that aspects of the workings of Tamil society in London need to be reconsidered.

The conclusions from this research suggest that current boundaries in policy definitions of refugee identities should be challenged. For Tamils the binary opposition between economic migrants and refugees is immaterial to their own self-conception (Fuglerud 2001). This research has explored the term 'refugee' and how, broadly speaking, the way people have sought asylum, or managed to travel to the UK, influences their

settlement. A few of the people who considered themselves to be refugees within this research would not fit into the relatively narrow United Nations (1951) definition: this includes people who came as students or through family reunification or as sponsored spouses. It is necessary to consider the fluidity of such identities in order to comprehend nuances in forced migrant experiences post arrival. Identity as a refugee is ambiguous; the intersection of immigration status, gender and ethnic identities in the utilisation of skills of refugees raises questions around the migration-asylum nexus (for example, Castles & Van Hear 2005; Crawley 2006). This illustrates the complexities in differentiating between forced and economic migrants after they have arrived as a consequence of the closely related causes of these forms of migration, and the similarities in the migratory process for both groups (for example, Stewart 2008; Hyndman 2005). This research, with Tamil refugees, found that the distinction between forced and other migrants after arrival needs to be explored further in order to comprehend individual employment experiences.

The Tamil refugee participants who entered the large Tamil community in London experience similar circumstances to other people entering large ethnic communities as economic migrants (for example, Fuglerud 2001; Fong & Ooka 2000). The diverse Tamil migrant population (see Chapters One and Two) offers a large ethnic community in which many refugees gain work. The ethnic economy affects employment opportunities and ambitions. Hence the employment of refugees in host countries disrupts commonly perceived distinctions between refugees and other categories of migrants, questioning the boundaries of refugee identities. This is particularly important when considering support for the settlement of refugees, as individuals entering large ethnic communities require different support structures than those who are more isolated. As Chapter Four suggested, often the significance of being a refugee *and* Tamil cannot be separated; the reason for their refuge being so intertwined with their ethnicity and/or nationalism. For this group of individuals, the community into which the Tamil refugees entered is so much a part of their lives that, like other migrants entering large communities, their experiences cannot be understood in separation from their connections to wider Tamil society. This research calls for an expansion of the 'migration-asylum' nexus to include not only the migration process, but also their experiences once here. Whilst it remains imperative to continue to investigate specifically refugee experiences, the boundaries which distinguish between refugees and migrants, although important, at times may also negate the potential for

understanding the nuances of the experiences refugees have post arrival. By recognising similarities with other migrants it is possible to learn more about refugee experiences in the host country.

Building on the significance of the ethnic community, this thesis has illustrated how, when investigating the employment experiences of refugees, it is important to deconstruct their own perceptions of success. The wider Tamil community is constituted in shaping conceptions of success which may reduce the incentives for some individuals to leave the ethnic economy. Rather, the Tamil community may create a 'portfolio of obligations' (Castles & Van Hear 2005) which may pull individuals into working in ethnic businesses and keep them there; for example, in reciprocating the support they have been given when they first arrived. These obligations relate to the ideas of gratitude in Chapter Eight, whereby the refugees feel grateful for the support they have received from the Tamil community and therefore they feel obliged to 'give back'. As argued, such obligations relate to religious rhetoric discussed in Chapter Four. The ethnic economy is a space in which some people have succeeded in certain interpretations of success, particularly in terms of self-employed individuals. Alongside this, these refugees often found that they are more accepted within the ethnic community or that they have more opportunities for transactions within the ethnic community. Perceptions of success in the UK within the Tamil refugee community, as in many migrant ethnic communities, are predominantly around owning a business. The types of businesses are generally in retail and most often grocery shops in the ethnic economy, serving the Tamil community. Work in retail businesses has a cyclical effect, as it relates to the experiences of employment refugees have when they first arrive in the UK. People open up businesses in these areas because they have some experience in them, often having been employed in Tamil businesses when they were seeking asylum or as a first job as a refugee. Such businesses have also offered a significant informal route into employment, particularly for Tamils forbidden to work as asylum seekers.

The employment experiences of Tamils are however, often affected by how success was perceived of in Sri Lanka. As argued in Chapter Four, wider expectations of success in Sri Lanka were related to educational achievements, which in the UK have often been transferred to offspring. However, now in the UK, immigrant entrepreneurship has, for many, become a consolation prize, as individuals have altered their perceptions of

achievement in the host country. This develops ideas in the field of immigrant entrepreneurship and Tamil studies by examining the nuances of what success means to refugees. Moving beyond models which illustrate how success is related to educational achievement or entrepreneurship, this work demonstrates a more personal understanding of individual desires for their futures in their host countries. As illustrated, these ambitions vary significantly by gender, skills background, and English abilities. Yet, even if an individual possesses attributes (such as male, highly skilled, good English abilities) which favour their chances of conventional success, as perceived in Sri Lanka, their ambitions in the UK may not follow such a path. This may be a consequence of their changing perceptions since seeking refuge: for example Khush found his 'calling' as a counsellor since arriving in the UK. Understanding what refugees want out of their employment in the UK is significant in terms of learning how best to offer support.

This work has conceptualised integration in a more holistic way than previous research, to include questions of identity (Pennix *et al.* 2008). It is important to recognise the distinction of Tamil identity over Sri Lankan nationality: the participants were, in general, not concerned by a loss of national identity, but rather they were hesitant that ethnic cultural practices and identity might be lost through the process of integration (see Chapter Four). The wider Tamil community played a crucial role in shaping identity and settlement experiences of many of the Tamil refugee participants: this impacts upon wider understandings of the process of integration, especially through employment. Theorising Tamil integration from the perspective of the refugees themselves, through the concepts of gratitude and transactions, provides an opportunity to explore further notions of integration in order to look towards more practical ways of supporting refugees. Although integration itself may not be an appropriate term, it is currently the framework within which refugee support is situated. Through an examination of the relationship between gratitude and integration, this work has theorised the concept of integration from the point of view of the refugee as a 'whole person' and the nuances this brings. These ideas may influence work on refugee integration policy and practice (Zetter *et al.* 2002). By understanding integration through the lens of the individual as a whole person it may be possible to create policy which offers support to their ambitions in a more directed way.

Returning to London Tamil society in the light of these findings, it is clear that suggestions of the workings of Tamil society laid out in Chapter Four are more nuanced

for the participants than implied. Although the community continues to be a major part of individuals' lives, some of the pre-migration factors can be seen differently through this research. Gender, for example, continues to divide the community to some degree, yet clearly there are women within this research who challenge traditional expectations of them. Given the statistics of the proportion of women seeking asylum as the primary applicant over the last seven years, in comparison to the participants from this research, it is possible that some of the findings from this group may have over emphasised the extent of this division (see Chapter Six). Caste was infrequently discussed, suggesting the continued decline in the importance of this social structure, although it still has remnants in the lives of older members of the community and within particular situations such as marriage. The term diaspora continues to provide a fair description of the spread of Tamils throughout the world. Many of the participants in this research referred to family in various different international locations, alongside connections back to Sri Lanka. Although the focus upon Tamil Eelam was limited in many of the participant's everyday lives; for some, it remained significant. For all, however, ties to Sri Lanka either personally or to current events, continued to be implicated within their daily lives.

4. Policy implications and future research

The continued significance of the Tamil community and the Tamil ethnic economy within the everyday lives of Tamil refugees raises broader questions for policy, particularly around the effects of dispersion of asylum seekers and how this may limit support and individual opportunities for employment when they are refugees.

Policy implications

This thesis is contextualised within four key policy discussions laid out in Chapter One: dispersal of asylum seekers, the right to work of asylum seekers, removal of indefinite leave to remain, and the definition of the 'family' for the purpose of reunion. This section discusses these policies in the light of the findings of this research.

Like the work of others (Lamba 2003; Loizos 2000), this research has emphasised the significance of the ethnic community and ethnic economy. This has important implications for the dispersal policy regarding asylum seekers. Since the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, people applying for asylum in the UK who requested residential and financial support were dispersed to different 'cluster' areas in the UK. The aim of

this policy was to reduce the concentration of asylum seekers, and subsequently refugees, settling in the South East. This research has supported others illustrating the potential limitations of dispersal policy (Morris 2007; Damm & Rosholm 2003; The Foreign Policy Centre 2002). Moving asylum seekers to areas where they lack large ethnic communities may reduce the support networks available to individuals. As this research has shown, the ethnic community offers support in terms of accommodation and personal assistance; the ethnic economy provides employment, both legal and illegal. Together the ethnic community and the ethnic economy create a space for individuals when they are asylum seekers and furthermore when they become refugees. It was clear that, for Tamils, the experiences individuals had when they were asylum seekers (particularly in terms of their employment) were significant in their later situations as refugees. Where individuals had worked as asylum seekers (illegally or before the right of asylum seekers to work was removed) or early on as refugees, this created obligations or knowledge which influenced their work later on. By dispersing individuals these networks of support and knowledge will be affected. People may have greater contact with the wider host community, yet as argued throughout this thesis, as they are rarely wholly accepted within this community, the feeling of constantly being on the outside has detrimental effects. In the ethnic community refugees may gain comfort and security through working with other people from the same background. Without this, individuals may experience greater difficulties in terms of health (Johnson 2003), employment (Fong & Ooka 2000) and relations with wider communities (Weaver 2003).

This research focused upon refugee experiences. However it also contributes to discussions about the right of asylum seekers to work (see Refugee Council 2005b). The thesis has established the importance of employment within the process of integration (see Chapters One & Two) and discussed the significance of employment experiences. As with other others (Refugee Council 2005b), this research questions the logic behind the removal of the right to work for asylum seekers. The exclusion of asylum seekers from the labour market removes their economic independence, limits their opportunity to plan for the future, reduces the occasions they have to interact with the wider host society and develop language skills, lowers their self-esteem and discourages self-reliance. This research has demonstrated how the work individuals are involved in early after their arrival impacts upon their subsequent work later on in the UK. For example, Ponmudi's later decision to open a convenience store on the basis of

his experience working in this type of store when he first arrived, illustrates the significance of early experiences on subsequent employment choices.

Throughout the thesis the role of the ethnic economy has been stressed. It offered various individuals opportunities to work legally and others illegally during the hearing of their asylum cases. The majority of the interview participants had the right to work during their early years in the UK as they arrived before 2002. However, for those who arrived after the removal of this right the opportunity to work illegally presented itself primarily within the ethnic economy. In removing the right to work, individuals who are desperate for money will take up opportunities in the spheres they have available to them. These experiences will likely, as was the case in this research, influence the type of work individuals do when they become refugees. If they are forced into the ethnic economy at an early stage, this may create obligations to individuals or the wider community, and perpetuate their involvement in that economy.

Whilst the Home Office does not desire the integration of asylum seekers, nevertheless individuals who later become refugees are predominantly asylum seekers beforehand. Through this economic and social exclusion, asylum seekers and subsequently refugees are denied a major opportunity to begin establishing themselves in the UK. If asylum seekers were given the right to work, reliance on the ethnic economy may be reduced as individuals would be able to look for work more broadly. This would give them the opportunity to learn more about the workings of the wider labour market and how to find work, and significantly increase the chances of interactions with wider groups, consequently further supporting the process of integration.

Furthermore, there are also benefits in allowing asylum seekers to work, even if their application for refuge is ultimately unsuccessful. Firstly, if asylum seekers were allowed to work, this would reduce the financial burden on the state to support asylum seekers whilst they await an initial decision. Secondly, through allowing these individuals to work, they maintain their skills which they can then use in their country of origin. Thirdly, many asylum seekers who are unsuccessful on their first application will appeal against this decision. For example, in 2006, 17,050 people were refused refuge, exceptional leave to remain, humanitarian protection or discretionary leave. In the same year, 14,920 people appealed against the decisions on their applications (Home

Office 2008)¹. If they are allowed to work, this will reduce the number of destitute failed asylum seekers during the appeal process or as steps are made by the government to repatriate them to their country of origin.

Returning to the removal of indefinite leave to remain when individuals are given refugee status, the discussion around integration throughout this thesis offers a perspective on the likely limitations of this policy on the lives of individuals. Like the Refugee Council (2005a) study, this research suggests that such insecurity in their future lives is likely to impact negatively on refugees. Being in a state of limbo where their status is subject to review at the end of five years limits the opportunities and motivation for refugees to integrate. In this research the perception around the success of self employment and owning a business has been emphasised. In terms of settling and feeling that they are progressing towards the lifestyle they desire, it is important that individuals have goals which are achievable. For refugees who are uncertain as to the likelihood of their receiving indefinite leave to remain after five years, going about establishing a business is unlikely to appeal. If they were to become self-employed in a business which was rooted in the UK, and then had to leave the country, they would then also have to give up their business. More broadly than just employment, integration through connections and transactions with wider groups may be further limited as a consequence of this policy. The uncertainty which surrounds their futures may increase the desire to maintain contact with home and the wider ethnic community. In this research there was a lack of desire to integrate on behalf of some of the participants because of the expectation that they might return, and the desire to unite in the hope of the independence of Tamil Eelam. For individuals who know that they may not have a choice whether they return or not, the connections to the wider ethnic community are likely to increase as they hope to maintain contacts in the country of origin if and when they return. At the time of writing there has been a decisive shift in the situation in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan Government has declared that the civil war is at an end (CNN 2009). If this remains the case, then Tamil refugees in the UK will increasingly be considered 'returnable'. Tamil refugees living in the UK under this 'limbo' state of temporary leave to remain will have even less reason to wish to integrate as the likelihood of them being returned increases.

¹ Note that of the 14,935 appeals which were determined in 2007, 23 percent of the appeals were successful (Home Office 2008).

The differences in opportunities for Tamil women to work in Montreal, in comparison to London, related to policies around family reunification. As for other migrant groups (see Rangaswamy 2007), Tamils have benefited from the Canadian policy of family reunification. The socially expected norms of women caring for their own children continued in the diaspora, as did the acceptance that other members of the family could also care for children (see Chapter Six and Appendix One). The Canadian government operates a system which allows permanent residents or citizens to sponsor eligible relatives under the Family Class programme to come to Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2009). In contrast to the UK policy of family reunification (see Chapter One) this enables refugees who have received permanent residence or citizenship to sponsor their parents' applications to immigrate to Canada as permanent residents (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2009). The broader definition of 'family' in Canada provided opportunities for female family members such as grandmothers to travel to Canada and care for their grandchildren whilst their children worked (see Mooney 2006). The differences in family reunification are significant as, through the support of extended family, women have enhanced opportunities to become formally employed and utilise their abilities.

The more specific implications of this work involve the language support available to individuals and the importance of family reunification policy. The counterpoint of the study in Montreal provided significant differences between the two cities that Tamils were living in. In Montreal the support to individuals to enable them to learn French made a significant impact upon the opportunities for refugees to pick up the language. The interaction of state agencies with members of the refugee community was greater for Tamils in Montreal than in the UK. Although Tamils in London often had some basic knowledge of English already as a consequence of the positive valuation put on the language since British colonization (see Canagarajah 2008). The subtleties of the broader potential are important here: by assisting in language tuition it is possible to improve many different aspects of the lives of refugees. Through language development the abilities and experiences of refugees may experience greater recognition within the host society.

Future research

Finally this research has raised further questions. This thesis has touched on the broad experiences of the Tamil diaspora in London and Montreal. It has suggested that there

are not substantial differences between Tamil experiences in these different locations. Yet beyond the direct impact of differing national refugee policies, wider policies such as family reunification affect the opportunities available to Tamil refugees to seek work. However this may not be the case for other countries where Tamil refugees have settled. This thesis has challenged host country interpretations of integration. The concept of gratitude has been used to think through the ways in which refugees experience integration, providing a theoretical perspective on a bottom-up interpretation of integration. Through wider international comparative work with the Tamil diaspora it will be possible to analyse if this is true elsewhere, and if so, how smaller scale aspects of place and policy may affect integration. This research would further push issues surrounding the role of skills within refugee communities, the significance of diaspora (Van Hear 2006; 1998) and how methods of migration (Castles & Van Hear 2005) impact upon integration through employment.

Secondly, the importance of the Tamil community within this research should be examined further. Work with Tamil refugees who are not a part of the Tamil community would provide a broader picture of the findings of this thesis. Rather than working in cities such as London, Toronto, and Montreal, where there are sizeable Tamil communities, research in cities, and possibly countries, where Tamil refugees have few Tamil contacts would be valuable. Through research such as this it would be possible to examine the employment experiences of individuals who have 'created' social networks and capital on the basis of distinctly different fields of information. This may have significant implications for their potential in the labour market of their host locations.

The third area of future research draws specifically upon the ideas from this thesis and develops these ideas in different contexts. Examining how these ideas work with different groups and different aspects of integration may help to interpret wider refugee experiences and wider comprehensions of integration. For example, earlier work comparing the experiences of Somali and Tamil refugees (Engebrigtsen & Fuglerud 2006) found significant differences between their experiences. Whereas in Norwegian society Tamil refugees were considered to be 'ideal' migrants, Somali refugees, in contrast, were considered to be undeserving migrants who often lived on state benefits. Research using the ideas around success could be illuminating, particularly contributing to knowledge about the aspirations of other refugee groups in their countries of origin

and in the UK. Integration through employment has been usefully analysed through the concepts of gratitude and transactions. How this works with other forms of integration, for example integration through residence or schooling, could facilitate the usefulness of the concept of gratitude, offering further insight into developing policy which helps to support refugees.

Refugees and migrants remain distinct groups. Despite an analysis which dissolves the boundaries between refugees and migrants, the reasons the different groups arrived in the UK remain crucial for understanding the refugee experience. In January 2009 the new Immigration Minister, Phil Woolas MP, called for a review of the 1951 Convention, saying that it “was intended to protect individual people from persecution. A significant number of people who claim asylum are doing so for broadly economic reasons. So I think it is right we look at the framework, as indeed other European countries are doing” (Refugee Council News Letter 2009: 1). In stating such an opinion, the Immigration Minister gives support to the notion of ‘bogus’ asylum seekers. If refugees are ever to be completely accepted in the UK it is necessary to discontinue rhetoric which, by association, demonizes people in genuine need of protection. In an earlier study of asylum seeker and refugee experiences, one of the refugee participants that I interviewed, Adil, summed up the potential of refugees in the UK (Healey 2006: 269):

“For those people who are educated, like me, it will be easier – when you compare it to those of poor educational background, poor experiences – but the problem is still there. What I think is government should be able to promote some healthy relationship among the members of the public and the asylum community, just to help integration. I think we can contribute a lot to this economy and culture, lots of things!”

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Appendices

Appendix One: Montreal: a counterpoint to understanding

As part of the funding for this PhD I had the opportunity to visit Concordia University, Montreal, CA through an *Economic and Social Research Council Institutional Visit*. The research conducted in Montreal offers a counterpoint to the London research. This appendix uses interview data from Canada to analyse the Canadian Tamil refugee experience of skills utilisation and integration through employment (see Table A1.1 for list of participants). Research in Canada helped to shape the analysis of the London case by offering different insights to the workings of Tamil communities, and variation in the experiences of members of the Tamil diaspora in different countries and policy contexts. Of particular significance is the contrast between the interpretation of family reunification between the UK and Canada, and the result of this upon the entrance of women into the labour market. This appendix discusses the Canadian context, and the method used, before examining the predominant themes of Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight within the experiences of Tamils in Canada.

Table A1.1: List of participants in Montreal

Interviewee	Background
Aleeda Aghasi	Centre Social D'aide aux Immigrés: Employment counsellor
Annette	Second generation Tamil volunteer at Action Réfugiés Montréal
Denis Otis	United Nations High Commission for Refugees in Montréal
Doctor Meena	Described as the only Tamil doctor in Montreal
Father Andrew Thavarajah	Tamil priest at the Tamil Catholic Church.
François Crépeau	Academic in International Law, University of Montréal
Kanags	Male Tamil refugee insurance broker in Tamil pages
Mandeeep	L'Association Tamoule Eelam du Québec
Peter Showler	Director at the Refugee Forum, Human Rights and Education Centre at the University of Ottawa
R. Cheran	Academic, University of Windsor
Ramani Balendra	South Asian Women's Community Centre
Rivka Auginfeld	Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées immigrantes
Rosamund Oxlade	Action Réfugiés Montréal
Susan McGrath	Director of Centre for Refugee Studies, York University
<i>Wahab, Sabari and Chera</i>	Run a Tamil Radio station are first and second generation
<i>Ganapati</i>	Male Tamil refugee runs a printing company for Tamils
<i>Ganesh</i>	Male Tamil refugee owns a tailors
<i>Harij</i>	Male Tamil refugee runs his own bakery
<i>Pirapa</i>	Male Tamil refugee runs a small clothes store
<i>Qadir</i>	Male Tamil refugee owns a grocery store
<i>Savia</i>	Male Tamil refugee works as a teacher in a college

Note: Names in italics are pseudonyms.

Canadian context

Canada is a particularly useful contrast to the UK due to the related asylum and immigration policies. Both the UK and Canada operate a system whereby individuals may apply for asylum upon arrival. The asylum case is heard and claimants either receive refuge or are deported. The rights of asylum seekers differ slightly between the two countries, with asylum seekers having the right to apply for a work permit in Canada after six months if a decision is yet to be made on their case. UK policies are related to the European context (for example, *Treaty of Amsterdam* 1997). Canada's policies are influenced by that of the United States and vice versa. Yet Canada adopts a broader remit than the US as to who is considered a refugee (see Chapters One and Two). Within these situations both Canada and the UK operate the first safe country policy, whereby individuals seeking asylum must claim in the first safe country they reach or be deported back to that first 'safe' country. In contrast to the UK, by the nature of its geographical position Canada attracts proportionally more asylum seekers from South America¹. Similarly to the UK, Canada has adopted integration policies underpinned by discourses of multiculturalism.

Together Canada and the UK host nearly half of the global Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora (Becker 2006). Whilst the UK has the longest history of Tamil migration from Sri Lanka, Canada became the principle destination for Tamil refugees after the UK government introduced tighter immigration legislation, such as the Carriers' Liability Act in the later 1980s. The 1991 Census illustrated that between 1984 and 1991, more than 25,000 Tamils moved to Canada (Statistics Canada 2009). The country is now the destination for the largest number of Tamil refugees outside Sri Lanka: with population estimates ranging between 200,000 and 400,000 (Cheran 2007; Ganguly 2001). Like the UK, between 1987 and 2001, Sri Lanka has been among the top source countries for refugee claimants in Canada (Citizenship & Immigration Canada 2003). The estimated Tamil population of Montreal is approximately 0.6 percent of the population. This is just under half the proportion of Tamils living in London who constitute approximately 1.4 percent of the total population of the city. However, the actual number of Tamils in the two cities is significantly different with estimates of around 10,000 people in Montreal to 100,000 in London, reflecting the different sizes of the two cities. As a

¹ Canada became a key destination for Tamil refugees, partly as the result of more restrictive policies in the US, chain migration, and changes in European policies towards Tamil asylum seekers.

people with a unique and complex diasporic identity, the context within which Tamil refugees reside is a significant factor within their experiences.

The Canadian asylum process is considered by some refugee scholars to be one of the best in the world, as a consequence of its supposed independence from the government (Peter Showler). The reality of independence is questionable. The nature of the way in which members are appointed to the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) by the government limits this 'independence' (Peter Showler; François Crépeau). However, the system does allow some separation from the governing power. The system involves two different asylum streams: 1) refugees selected overseas by Canadian officials or the UNHCR, and 2) asylum seekers who apply for asylum on Canadian soil. The second stream is similar to that of the UK. Upon arrival in Canada there is a three stage process for successful asylum seekers to become Canadian residents: 1) apply for asylum, 2) become recognised as refugees, and 3) apply for permanent residence. Having received refugee status, the application for permanent residence generally takes one further year.

Method

The Canadian research data consisted of twenty-one in-depth interviews with a variety of different people, mainly in Montreal, with one interview in Ottawa and two in Toronto. The interviews conducted in Montreal were slightly different from those in London. As I was not seeking to conduct a direct comparative study, I opted to find participants through the 'snowballing' technique and for a less structured approach to the interviews. With the intention of focusing upon elite contacts, fifteen interviews were with elite participants; these consisted of six community elites, four academics (Tamil studies, refugee studies, international law) and five with people working in the refugee sector (employment agency, UNHCR, refugee organisations, volunteers). The other six interviews were with male refugees who owned their own businesses². With a basis of the research I had done in London, I asked individual refugees more broadly about the employment experiences of the Tamil community, as well as their own. In interviews with elite contacts I sought to learn more about the Canadian context, in terms of the asylum system and the support services available to refugees, specifically in Montreal, and where relevant learn about the Tamil community and their experiences as refugees. Here translation was only necessary twice when someone wished to

² Each of these six interviewees owned their own businesses and therefore they are likely to be unusual for the members of the Tamil community in Montreal. I worked with this group of individuals by virtue of the snowballing technique.

explain something for which they did not have the words. In Montreal only one participant requested that he was not recorded: Ganesh.

Success and employment in Montreal

As in London, notions of success for the Tamil community in Montreal related to an educational focus. What was significantly different in the Montreal context was the bilingual nature of the country and the impacts this had upon employment opportunities and ambitions for success. Despite such contextual differences, certain features remained similar within Canada, particularly the influence of pre-migration cultural scripts on perceptions of success. As in London, individuals often found work through friends and family within the Tamil community. The interviewees frequently mentioned restaurants and factories as the type of work most Tamils were doing, as opposed to the retail focus in the UK. Alongside this, several of the people who were interviewed in Montreal were running their own businesses (partly a consequence of the snowballing technique used to contact participants). These businesses ranged from restaurants and bakeries to printing companies and tailors. Furthermore, these businesses predominantly employed and served other Tamils.

Gender experiences of skill use in Montreal

Overall there appeared to be similar attitudes and expectations around gender in Canada as were found in the UK. Patriarchal structures occurred to certain degrees, albeit as in the UK, gender relations continued to be negotiated within the Canadian post-1983 diaspora. For example, Savia was frustrated as neither of his daughters wished to marry Tamil men:

“I have a problem with them – they don’t want to get married [...] I gave them freedom if you want to allow other boys, no we will allow our own people we will not allow another [...]. My children [feel that] the men are ungrateful people so [my daughters] don’t want to get married, we don’t want [them] to get married and then within six months time Daddy we [want to] come back to you. Ok so that we divorce? We don’t want to get that word.”

His daughters felt that Tamil men had closed minds. Consequently Savia was frustrated with them, as they refused to marry and he refused to allow them to marry a non-Tamil. He explained that their prospective husbands needed to understand their faith and language, and he believed only another Tamil could do this. Marriage and spouses remain significant within the Canadian Tamil diaspora, as do patriarchal relations whereby Savia’s daughters opt not to marry rather than face greater parental disapproval through matrimony with a non-Tamil. Savia remains concerned about two issues: firstly the frustration that his daughters remain unmarried, and secondly the potential

embarrassment of divorce if their marriages were not to work. His adult daughters remain defiant: they have concerns about how a Tamil husband may affect their work experiences by preventing them from working in particular occupations or entirely.

In Montreal, women were perceived to be engaged in formal work more than in London. In terms of Tamil women “I would say 50 percent of them, they work there in factories. In the other 50 I would say maybe 10 percent stay home taking care of the children – it’s very rare” (Ramani). However, the type of work that these women are doing is relatively low skilled. In terms of the 50 percent who do not work in factories, Ramani fails to provide examples of what the other 50 percent of Tamil women are doing, although it is clear from further research that they often worked in Tamil restaurants or other Tamil businesses (as in the UK, predominantly run by men).

Multiculturalism and gratitude in a ‘country of immigration’

Canada provides an interesting contrast in which to think about hospitality and gratitude in comparison to the UK as, unlike European countries, Canada considers itself to be a country of immigration. Yet despite the country’s historical background where immigrants have been ‘welcomed’ there remain some strong similarities with the UK in the way in which settlement is experienced by immigrants. This is particularly interesting when examining Montreal, as the uniqueness of the Quebec province adds a further dimension to the complexities of the Tamil diasporic experience.

As in the UK, Canada adopted an official policy of multiculturalism in the 1960s, albeit for different reasons (Cheran 2007). Canada adopted this policy in order to hold the state together in the light of Anglo-French rivalries (Taylor 1992). Canada prides itself on its multicultural agenda and recognises that social and cultural change fuelled by immigration is an enduring societal constant in the country (Ray 2005; Taylor 1992). Despite public pride in a ‘multicultural’ country there remain individuals who are considered to be deviants, whose welcome to the country is limited. Immigrants continue to be tolerated as part of the government support for multiculturalism, yet different people are welcomed to the country in different ways, some who possess desired qualities of the ‘mainstream society’ have a better chance of being accepted than immigrants who are visibly the Other. This does not mean that gratitude is no longer an anticipated response from refugees, rather that those refugees who appear to fit requisite norms of Canadian society may experience greater acceptance initially. As Chapter

Eight suggested, there is a difference between acceptance from wider Tamil society and the host country society.

Tamil refugees have mainly become refugees by applying for asylum after arrival in Canada. There are two main streams to asylum in Canada; those who claim asylum inland and those who are resettled from refugee camps around the world. Refugees from camps are selected by the government for re-settlement in Canada, on the basis of who is expected to integrate more easily into Canadian society. They want people who are going to be able to support themselves in the new country³. The obligatory nature of the process is put into direct practice, whereby people are selected specifically so that they may give back to the country. Tamils generally arrived in Canada by the alternate route; as asylum seekers on Canadian soil. Yet the expectations of investment return of refugees from camps filters through to the anticipated returns from other refugees, even those that Canada did not hand pick for these qualities. Once individuals are Canadian residents they are entitled to the same educational opportunities as citizens, providing them with many options to retrain to work in Canada and follow through with their 'obligations' by contributing to the Canadian economy (Aleeda).

As discussed elsewhere (see Chapter Eight) Tamil refugees in Canada were perceived to have claimed asylum in Montreal and then moved to Toronto in order to learn English. Migration to Toronto impacted upon the types of employment available to individuals, particularly the professional jobs. Gratitude is likely to be increased if people are employed to a suitable level (see Chapter Eight). Doctors, lawyers and engineers were perceived as being predominantly in Toronto. Particular professional opportunities were therefore perceived as less available within Montreal, and as such gratitude towards Quebec perhaps lessened. However, those who foresaw the benefits of being bilingual remained in Montreal where their children could learn French and English. For those Tamils who did not learn and participate in French in their daily lives, the welcome in Quebec was particularly limited. The province, concerned with attempting to maintain the French language, is to some extent threatened by immigrants arriving who only speak English. The fear that English will eventually surpass French through

³ There is no benefit for the government to choose individuals or families who are going to put a burden on the government. "They go to the refugee camp, they select 250 families and they always choose the, you know, the parents are young(ish), healthy, and they have diplomas, and if they have money that's even better. That gives them points, and not 7 kids; 2 kids, 3 kids – maximum. And that's the target family they will choose, because that's the family that is considered as the family that will integrate most easily into Canadian social fabric" (François Crépeau).

an increasing number of immigrants speaking English reduces the desire for immigrants from English speaking areas in the region. Tamils, who generally prefer English, therefore are less encouraged than immigrants from French-speaking backgrounds.

Family reunification policies will likely have increased the size of the Tamil population in Canada. Although there is a substantially smaller community of Tamils in Montreal than in London, the significance of community remained in the day-to-day lives of individuals within the city. People appreciated the opportunity to utilise Tamil services in Montreal: for example, as the Tamil doctor in the local area Dr Meena has 10,000 Tamils on her patient register (her son is currently training to be a doctor, and he will become a partner to share her patient load). Tamils likely reciprocate their gratitude towards the wider Tamil community, rather than the host society. Dr Meena commented that Tamils appreciate seeing a Tamil doctor, and she felt a responsibility to not turn anyone away. Like in London, the ethnic community and the ethnic economy is significant within the day-to-day lives of individuals. However, possibly as a consequence of the smaller size of the population in Montreal, the everyday community connections stretched much further, with members of the diaspora situated in Toronto having great significance for individuals in Montreal.

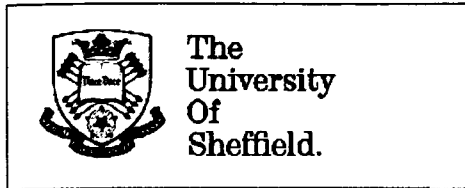
Summary and conclusion

The Tamil diaspora remains, as in the UK, tied to connections in the homeland. Canadian family sponsorship programmes are open to a wider definition of 'family' than the equivalent in the UK. Consequently many more Tamil families were able to bring their parents and in-laws over from Sri Lanka. This assisted in re-shaping the family unit in Canada to encompass older family members to care for children whilst the parents were working. It is possible that Tamil refugees may feel gratitude towards Canada, by contrast to the restrictions they would have had in the UK. However, participants did not note how their situation was potentially easier in Montreal: rather they recognised the greater difficulties. The French language caused particular difficulties; Tamils in Montreal believed that their counterparts in English-speaking locations experienced fewer problems than themselves.

This appendix has illustrated the nuances of the Tamil refugee experience in a different location. The Canadian research has given this thesis a counter perspective which at times supported ideas found in London, and at others offered differing ideas. In support

of the London work emphasis has been repeated towards the importance of the ethnic community and the ethnic economy through individuals finding work through friends and family, and the significance of the Tamil doctor in Montreal. The experiences of individuals in a bilingual city altered the way in which difficulties with English were viewed in London. Comparatively with knowledge of French, people had some basis of knowledge of English. Finally, differences in family reunification policies between the UK and Canada offered different opportunity for individuals to bring relations to their country of refuge. This appeared to impact upon women's work prospects, with women in Canada having more chances for formal employment because they had family members to care for their children. These findings have provided additional support to the analysis and overall conclusions in Chapter Ten.

Appendix Two: Questionnaire



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Skills survey of Tamil Refugees

Dear Sir or Madam,

Please note this letter has nothing to do with determining your refugee status

This is a survey asking about the skills of Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka. If you are between 18 and 65 years old and a Tamil from Sri Lanka who has received refugee status in the UK, I would be most grateful if you would complete this questionnaire. If you have more than one person in your household who fits this description could either the eldest male or eldest female in the household please complete this questionnaire?

I am interested both in refugees who feel their skills are underutilised or not used at all through unemployment, and those who feel their skills are fully used. Hence, you may or not be currently employed.

This survey is part of a 3 year PhD research project on Tamil refugee employment in the UK that I am undertaking at the University of Sheffield. The project involves this survey as well as in-depth interviews about the employment experiences of individuals. There is a question at the end of the survey that gives you the option to participate in the interviews.

What is it about?

The project is about the nature of the jobs undertaken by Tamil refugees and how much their skills and abilities are used within those jobs, or not at all through unemployment. I hope as a result of the research to help improve the experiences of refugees in the UK.

My five questions are:

1. How do the skills of Tamil refugees compare to other refugees?
2. What factors affect the use of Tamil refugee skills?
3. How is the use of skills for Tamil refugees different from immigrants?
4. What are the differences between employment experiences for men and women?
5. What barriers prevent the use of Tamil refugee skills?

What do people who participate get?

People who complete this survey will be increasing knowledge of the variety of skills within the UK's Tamil community. Individuals who participate will give information that will be used to understand better the employment of refugees in the UK. I will disseminate my findings to interested parties including the government and bodies who seek to help refugees. The research findings will highlight the problems affecting the Tamil community and Tamil refugees. All responses will be strictly confidential and comments will be anonymised in the presentation of findings.

What do I get?

This research is part of my University PhD.

Possible implications for government policy

The government policy towards refugees focuses on helping people feel content in the local community. Employment is an important way people can feel content. Through this research I hope to comment on ways that Tamil refugee skills could be better used to help refugees. By understanding factors that prevent Tamil refugees from obtaining jobs or using all their skills, I may be able to suggest changes in government policies on refugee employment.

Alongside this I would like to raise awareness of the unique experience of Tamils seeking refuge from Sri Lanka and emphasise how Tamils from Sri Lanka should be recognised as a distinct group.

If you have any questions please contact me at R.Healey@sheffield.ac.uk, or at the address at the top of this letter.

If you are a Tamil refugee aged between 18 and 65 from Sri Lanka I would be very grateful if you would please complete the following questionnaire in whichever language you prefer and return it in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope. If you would prefer an electronic version of the questionnaire please send me an email.

Thank you for your help.

Yours faithfully,

Ruth L Healey

Please tick the relevant box

About You

1. Are you...? Male
Female
2. How old are you? 18-30 years old
31-49 years old
50 years old or over
3. How long have you been living in the UK? Less than 1 year
2 to 5 years
6 to 9 years
10 or more years
Can't remember/don't know

Your Language Skills

4. What language do you speak most every day? Please mark only one
Tamil
English
Other
Please state _____

5. How well can you **read** Tamil?
Fluently Fairly well Slightly Not at all

6. How well can you **write** Tamil?
Fluently Fairly well Slightly Not at all

7. How well can you **read** English?
Fluently Fairly well Slightly Not at all

8. How well can you **write** English?
Fluently Fairly well Slightly Not at all

9. How well do you **understand spoken** English?
Fluently Fairly well Slightly Not at all

10. How well can you **speak** English?
Fluently Fairly well Slightly Not at all

11. Do you know any other languages? (not including English or your first language) Yes
No (go to Q13)

12. Which other languages can you...	Speak	Understand spoken	Read	Write
Please state language _____	Fluently [] Fairly well [] Slightly [] Not at all []	Fluently [] Fairly well [] Slightly [] Not at all []	Fluently [] Fairly well [] Slightly [] Not at all []	Fluently [] Fairly well [] Slightly [] Not at all []
Please state language _____	Fluently [] Fairly well [] Slightly [] Not at all []	Fluently [] Fairly well [] Slightly [] Not at all []	Fluently [] Fairly well [] Slightly [] Not at all []	Fluently [] Fairly well [] Slightly [] Not at all []
Please state language _____	Fluently [] Fairly well [] Slightly [] Not at all []	Fluently [] Fairly well [] Slightly [] Not at all []	Fluently [] Fairly well [] Slightly [] Not at all []	Fluently [] Fairly well [] Slightly [] Not at all []

Your Skills and Education

13. Are you currently employed in the UK either part time or full time? Yes []
No (go to Q20a) []

14. What job do you do?

Title and description of work: (Please give as much detail as possible e.g. title of job, business of employer and description of what your work involves).

Start Date / / / / / Is this full time or part time? Full time [] Part time []

15. What qualifications do you need to do this job? (For example school certificate, or a degree.)

16. What skills do you need to do this job? (For example a driving license.)

17. What other skills helped you get this job? (For example networking skills, computer skills.)

18. What work related skills do you have that your current job does not use? (For example communication skills.)

19. What other skills do you have? (For example things that help you gain work.)

20a. Are you currently in full time or part time education?

Yes []
No (go to Q21) []

If yes, what are you studying and where?

20b. Is this full time or part time?

Full time []

Part time []

21. Before leaving Sri Lanka did you have any qualifications?

Yes []
No (go to Q23) []

22. Before leaving Sri Lanka what was the highest qualification you held?

Full title of qualification _____

Subject(s) _____

Country where qualification was awarded _____

Please state any other educational qualifications you may have.

23. Have you gained any qualifications since being in the UK?

Yes []
No (go to Q25) []

24. What was the highest qualification you have gained in the UK?

Full title of qualification _____

Subject(s) _____

Please state any other educational qualifications you may have gained in the UK

25. Did you live in another country (other than Sri Lanka) before coming to the UK?
Yes No (please go to Q29)

26. Which country or countries did you live in (please state up to two countries in which you lived the longest before coming to the UK below).

27. Did you gain any qualifications whilst in the country or countries stated above?
Yes No (go to Q29)

28a. What was the highest qualification you gained in the first country you lived in before coming to the UK?

Full title of qualification _____

Subject(s) _____

Country where qualification was awarded _____

Please state any other educational qualifications you may have gained in that country?

28b. What was the highest qualification you gained in the second country you lived in before coming to the UK?

Full title of qualification _____

Subject(s) _____

Country where qualification was awarded _____

Please state any other educational qualifications you may have gained in that country?

- | | | |
|--|-------------------------------|-----|
| 29. How many years of education have you had? | None | [] |
| | 6 or less years of education | [] |
| | 7-10 years of education | [] |
| | 11-13 years of education | [] |
| | 14-16 years of education | [] |
| | 17 or more years of education | [] |
| 30. How many years of education did you have in Sri Lanka? | None | [] |
| | 6 or less years of education | [] |
| | 7-10 years of education | [] |
| | 11-13 years of education | [] |
| | 14-16 years of education | [] |
| | 17 or more years of education | [] |
| 31. How many years of education have you had in the UK? | None | [] |
| | 6 or less years of education | [] |
| | 7-10 years of education | [] |
| | 11-13 years of education | [] |
| | 14-16 years of education | [] |
| | 17 or more years of education | [] |
| 32. If you went via another country or countries, how many years of education did you have there? (Please indicate name of country next to number of years). | None | [] |
| | 6 or less years of education | [] |
| | 7-10 years of education | [] |
| | 11-13 years of education | [] |
| | 14-16 years of education | [] |
| | 17 or more years of education | [] |

Full title of qualification _____

Subject(s) _____

Please state any other educational qualifications you may have gained in the UK

25. Did you live in another country (other than Sri Lanka) before coming to the UK?
Yes No (please go to Q29)

26. Which country or countries did you live in (please state up to two countries in which you lived the longest before coming to the UK below).

27. Did you gain any qualifications whilst in the country or countries stated above?
Yes No (go to Q29)

28a. What was the highest qualification you gained in the first country you lived in before coming to the UK?

Full title of qualification _____

Subject(s) _____

Country where qualification was awarded _____

Please state any other educational qualifications you may have gained in that country?

28b. What was the highest qualification you gained in the second country you lived in before coming to the UK?

Full title of qualification _____

Subject(s) _____

Country where qualification was awarded _____

Please state any other educational qualifications you may have gained in that country?

- | | | |
|--|-------------------------------|-----|
| 29. How many years of education have you had? | None | [] |
| | 6 or less years of education | [] |
| | 7-10 years of education | [] |
| | 11-13 years of education | [] |
| | 14-16 years of education | [] |
| | 17 or more years of education | [] |
| 30. How many years of education did you have in Sri Lanka? | None | [] |
| | 6 or less years of education | [] |
| | 7-10 years of education | [] |
| | 11-13 years of education | [] |
| | 14-16 years of education | [] |
| | 17 or more years of education | [] |
| 31. How many years of education have you had in the UK? | None | [] |
| | 6 or less years of education | [] |
| | 7-10 years of education | [] |
| | 11-13 years of education | [] |
| | 14-16 years of education | [] |
| | 17 or more years of education | [] |
| 32. If you went via another country or countries, how many years of education did you have there? (Please indicate name of country next to number of years). | None | [] |
| | 6 or less years of education | [] |
| | 7-10 years of education | [] |
| | 11-13 years of education | [] |
| | 14-16 years of education | [] |
| | 17 or more years of education | [] |

Your Employment History Before Coming to the UK

33. Before coming to the UK what was your main activity in Sri Lanka? (tick one box only)
- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| In employment | [] |
| Self employment | [] |
| Unemployed and looking for work | [] |
| A student | [] |
| Looking after home and family | [] |
| Retired | [] |
| Not working for some reason | [] |

Please state _____

34. Before coming to the UK, what were your last two types of work in Sri Lanka, either paid or unpaid? Please state these starting with the most recent. If none, please go to Q35.

Most recent work: Title and description of work: (Please give as much detail as possible e.g. title of job, business of employer and description of what your work involved).

Start Date / End Date /

For each letter (a to d) please tick one box only

- a) Employed [] or Self employed [] b) Full time [] or Part time []
- c) Temporary [] or Permanent [] d) Paid [] or Unpaid []

Reason for leaving

Work 2: Title and description of work: (Please give as much detail as possible e.g. title of job, business of employer and description of what your work involved).

Start Date / End Date /

For each letter (a to d) please tick one box only

- a) Employed [] or Self employed [] b) Full time [] or Part time []
- c) Temporary [] or Permanent [] d) Paid [] or Unpaid []

Reason for leaving

Please only answer the following questions if you lived in another country or countries on route to the UK. If not please go to Q37.

35. In the country you came via on route to the UK what was your main activity? (tick one box only)
- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| In employment | [] |
| Self employment | [] |
| Unemployed and looking for work | [] |
| A student | [] |
| Looking after home and family | [] |
| Retired | [] |
| Not working for some reason | [] |

Please state _____

36. In the country you came via on route to the UK, what was your last work, either paid or unpaid? Please state these starting with the most recent. If none, please go to Q37.

Title and description of work: (Please give as much detail as possible e.g. title of job, business of employer and description of what your work involved).

Start Date / End Date /

For each letter (a to d) please tick one box only

- a) Employed [] or Self employed [] b) Full time [] or Part time []
- c) Temporary [] or Permanent [] d) Paid [] or Unpaid []

Reason for leaving

37. If you would like to make any comments on your skills, qualifications or work, or on this questionnaire, please use the space below. For example comparing your work in Sri Lanka with your present work in the UK, or comments on how easy it was to get work in London.

Would you be willing to be interviewed about your employment skills and experiences?

Yes (please provide contact details below) []

No thank you []

Thank you for completing this questionnaire

I would be grateful if you could please return this as soon as possible in the stamped addressed envelope to:

**Ruth L Healey
Department of Geography
University of Sheffield
Sheffield
S10 2TN
United Kingdom**

Appendix Three: Lists of participants: refugee and elite interviewees in London

Table A3.1: Female and male refugee interviewees

Female Refugees	Male Refugees
Bimala	Bhaskar
Chitrlekha	Caleb
Dhanya	Jwalia
Elisai	Khush
Harita	Kiran
Jayani	Madhu
Kayal	Mudita
Maina	Ponmudi
Mala	Ravi
Paavarasi	Rohak
Parinita	Rustam
Pragya	Tanay
Savita	Trinabh

Note: All of the participants opted for anonymity, these names are all pseudonyms.

Table A3.2: Elite interviewees and contacts

Elite interviewees and contacts	Organisation or position
Danny Sriskandarajah	Institute for Public Policy Research
<i>Thomas</i>	Refugee Council Policy Advisor
<i>Japesh and Zarine</i>	Tamil solicitor and friend
Kibru	Tamil Relief Centre Manager
<i>Kaaviya</i>	Tamil Relief Centre Employee
<i>Mangai</i>	London Tamil Sangam Manager
<i>Meyyan</i>	White Pigeon and Freeman of London
<i>Nalan</i>	South London Tamil Welfare Group
<i>Eric</i>	Refugee Council
Paul Sathianesan	Tamil Labour Councillor
<i>Rishi</i>	Researcher: Refugee Belonging Exhibition
<i>Sarah</i>	Employability Forum
<i>Varad and Kovalan</i>	Tamil Community Housing Association
Siva Pillai	Goldsmiths College Teacher of Tamil
<i>Ellen</i>	LORECA Employee
<i>Thooyan</i>	Harrow Refugee Forum
<i>Semmal</i>	Chair of the Tamil Action Committee

Note: These interviewees are marked with a * throughout the thesis. The interviewee names in italics are pseudonyms.

Appendix Four: Interview schedule notes

Skill utilisation of refugees: the case of Tamil refugees in the UK

This research is looking at the employment experiences of Tamil refugees. I am interested in your general life experiences since you left your home country, and am particularly interested in your experiences of employment in the UK. Are you ready to begin?

Interviewee background

So, sitting here in XXX could you start by telling me about yourself and your family. Where from? Spouse? How long in the UK? Via?

Work and skills

Work – here and there – paid/unpaid? Time? Change – what other work have you had? Involved? Skills needed?

Country in between?

Where live here? Where work?

Language as a skill e.g. Did you grow up speaking English as well as Tamil?

What sort of qualifications did you need to do that job?

Social networks

What helped you get work in London?

- Formal networks: Employment advisors, Job centres
- Informal networks: Connections, Loyalties, Investments, Mutual obligations
 - Part of regular interactions (bonding)
 - New links (bridging)
 - How ‘darker’ side of social capital affects use of skills e.g. family care responsibilities

How know XXX? What is their background?

- In XXX in Sri Lanka did you mix with people from all the different communities there? In XXX in the London do you have similar connections? What about people from Sri Lanka?
- Impact of refugee status? Do you plan to go back?

Expectations for the future? What other things have helped you get work?

Coping strategies

How do you deal with difficult situations? E.g. London labour market? De-skilling? Settling in to the host society? Employer reactions? Family events?

Integration

- What things do you think make it hard or stop you from feeling happy or unhappy?
 - Policy environments, Attitudes of the host community, Employment opportunities in local community, Refugee status.
- When received refugee status? Worked as A/S? Constraints of different types of status on employment?
- What do you think most Tamil refugees end up doing in the UK?
- What makes you feel happy or unhappy in London? Make you feel settled? Employment? Socialising? Fitting in?
- What things do you think make other Tamil refugees feel happy or unhappy?
- Do you think you live in a Tamil community only or something broader?

Appendix Five: Project information sheet

Skill utilisation of refugees: the case of Tamil refugees in the UK

This is a three year PhD research project looking at the issues Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka face in employment in the UK. The work involves a mail questionnaire and interviews with 30 people (male and female) about their employment experiences in the UK. This work will be done in London over a period of about three months.

What is it about?

The project is about the type of employment Tamil refugees have and how much their skills and abilities are used within that employment. The research seeks to understand individual experiences better so as to inform government policy towards refugees and improve the experiences of refugees in the UK.

There are five main points the project will look at:

1. The skills of Tamil refugees in relation to the skills of the wider refugee population in the UK.
2. The factors influencing the use of Tamil refugee skills.
3. How the use of skills is different for Tamil refugees compared to immigrants.
4. The differences between men and women in employment experience.
5. The barriers preventing the use of Tamil refugee skills.

What people who participate get?

People who participate in this study will have the opportunity to tell their story of their employment experiences in the UK. Through this they will be increasing academic knowledge of the experiences that people like themselves have when trying to find jobs. By participating, individuals will provide information that will be used to understand the experiences of refugees in the UK better, and therefore could be used to inform government policy.

What I get?

Through this research I will be given the opportunity to use the knowledge I gain to inform government policy. I hope that the research findings will raise

awareness of issues affecting the Tamil community and in particular Tamil refugees. This research is part of my University PhD.

Possible implications for government policy

The government policy towards refugees focuses on integration into local communities. Employment is an important way in which integration may occur. Through this research I hope to be able to comment on ways in which Tamil refugee skills could be used more effectively to the benefit of them and the wider UK economy. By understanding factors that prevent Tamil refugees from gaining jobs or using their full level of skills, I may be able to suggest changes in the government policies around refugee employment and integration.

Alongside this I hope to raise awareness within government policy of the unique experience of Tamils from Sri Lanka. Focusing on how Tamils from Sri Lanka should be recognised as a distinct group rather than categorised as Sri Lankan.

Ruth L Healey

Any further questions please ask or contact me at R.Healey@sheffield.ac.uk.

Appendix Six: Skills of refugee participants

Table A6.1: Self management skills

Self-management Skills	Females														Males														
	Bimala	Chitralekha	Dhanya	Elisai	Harita	Jayani	Kayal	Maina	Mala	Paavarasi	Parinita	Pragya	Savita	Total	Bhaskar	Caleb	Jwalia	Khush	Kiran	Madhu	Mudita	Ponmudi	Ravi	Rohak	Rustam	Tanay	Trinabh	Total	
Key Skills																													
Accept supervision	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	10	X	X		X		X	X		X	X	X	X		9	
Get along with co-workers	X	X				X	X	X		X	X			7	X	X		X	X	X	X	X					X	9	
Get things done on time	X					X			X	X	X			5	X				X									2	
Hard worker	X								X	X	X			4	X			X	X				X		X	X	X	8	
Honest	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X			9	X		X		X				X				X	5	
Reliable	X	X				X		X	X	X			X	7				X	X				X				X	4	
Punctual			X						X	X			X	4	X			X					X					3	
Good attendance														-														-	
Productive									X	X	X			3	X		X						X					3	
Other Skills																													
Able to coordinate			X			X			X		X	X		5				X	X				X					3	
Ambitious	X					X			X	X	X			5	X		X	X	X	X			X		X	X		8	
Assertive										X				1	X				X				X		X	X		5	
Capable	X	X				X	X		X	X	X			7	X	X	X	X	X				X		X		X	9	
Cheerful	X		X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X		9		X	X	X	X			X	X				X	7	
Independent	X					X			X	X				4	X			X		X			X				4		
Formal														-	X								X				2		
Intelligent	X	X	X						X	X	X	X		7	X		X	X					X		X			5	
Intuitive										X				1									X				1		
Learn quickly	X	X							X	X	X			5	X		X	X					X				4		
Efficient	X								X	X	X			4	X		X	X	X				X				X	6	
Energetic				X					X	X	X			4					X				X	X		X	5		
Enthusiastic			X	X			X		X	X	X			6		X	X	X	X			X	X	X		X	9		
Friendly	X		X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X		9	X	X	X	X	X			X	X				X	8	
Good-natured	X	X	X	X		X	X		X		X	X	X	10	X		X	X	X	X			X	X		X	X	9	
Helpful	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X	X			9	X		X	X	X				X		X		X	7	
Creative			X							X				2				X					X				2		
Competent	X					X	X		X	X	X	X	X	8	X	X	X	X	X	X			X		X	X	X	10	
Conscientious	X		X			X			X	X	X			6	X		X	X	X				X				X	6	
Informal	X													1		X				X							2		
Dependable	X	X	X						X				X	5					X						X		2		
Discreet	X	X										X		3													-		
Loyal	X						X		X		X			4					X						X	X	X	4	
Mature	X								X					2	X				X								2		
Methodical									X	X				2	X				X				X		X	X	5		
Motivated	X		X			X			X	X				5	X			X	X	X			X		X	X	X	8	
Flexible	X		X						X	X				4	X	X		X	X	X			X			X	X	8	
Open-minded	X		X			X			X	X	X			6				X	X				X					3	
Original										X				1	X			X					X				3		
Patient	X					X		X	X					4	X			X					X				3		
Persistent	X					X			X					3	X			X					X		X		4		
Tactful	X					X			X					3	X								X				1		
Resourceful	X		X			X			X	X				5	X		X	X		X	X		X		X	X	X	10	
Self-confident	X	X							X	X				4	X		X	X	X	X			X		X	X	X	9	
Well-organized	X								X	X				3	X			X					X		X	X	5		
Responsible	X			X			X		X	X				5	X			X	X				X		X	X	X	7	
Solve problems						X			X					2	X			X					X		X	X		5	
Optimistic	X		X						X	X				4			X	X	X			X	X					5	
Versatile	X				X		X		X	X				5	X			X	X				X		X	X	X	7	
Total	35	10	19	8	2	20	12	5	32	36	27	8	7		34	9	17	33	29	11	7	40	4	15	19	8	21		

Table A6.2: Transferable skills

Transferable Skills	Females										Males																	
	Bimala	Chitralekha	Dhanya	Elisai	Harita	Jayani	Kayal	Maina	Mala	Paavarasi	Parinita	Pragya	Savita	Total	Bhaskar	Caleb	Jwalia	Khush	Kiran	Madhu	Mudita	Ponmudi	Ravi	Rohak	Rustam	Tanay	Trinabh	Total
Work with things																												
Drive, operate vehicles								X					1	X	X		X	X	X			X	X				X	8
Operate tools, machines			X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	8		X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	11
Construct/repair/build													-	X			X									X	3	
Observe/inspect													-	X	X		X					X				X	5	
Repair things													-	X			X									X	3	
Operate complex equipment												X	1	X	X		X					X	X				5	
Build things													-	X			X					X				X	4	
Work with hands	X							X					2		X		X	X			X	X	X		X	X	8	
Assemble things													-	X			X	X			X	X			X	X	7	
Work with data																												
Analyse data	X	X	X					X	X	X			6	X		X					X		X	X			5	
Calculate/compute	X									X			2	X		X					X		X				4	
Check for accuracy	X			X				X	X	X			5	X		X					X		X	X			5	
Observe/inspect	X							X	X	X			4	X							X		X				3	
Locate information	X								X	X			3	X							X		X	X			4	
Detail-oriented	X	X						X		X			4	X		X					X		X				4	
Evaluate	X		X			X		X	X	X			6	X			X				X		X	X			5	
Investigate	X					X		X	X	X			5	X			X		X		X		X	X			6	
Classify things	X							X		X			3	X							X		X				3	
Record facts	X							X	X	X		X	5	X		X		X			X		X	X		X	7	
Research		X						X	X	X			4	X			X				X			X			4	
Synthesize	X			X				X	X				4	X							X						2	
Audit records	X									X			2			X							X				2	
Budget	X							X	X	X			4	X							X		X	X	X	X	6	
Compare	X	X	X						X	X			5	X							X		X				3	
Manage money	X					X		X	X	X	X	X	7	X						X	X		X			X	6	
Compile	X							X	X	X			4	X				X			X		X				4	
Take inventory	X					X		X	X	X	X		6	X				X			X	X	X	X		X	7	
Work with people																												
Administer	X			X					X	X	X	X	6	X				X	X		X						4	
Confront others									X				1	X			X	X			X						4	
Counsel people	X	X	X			X			X	X			6				X	X			X						3	
Interview people	X								X				2	X			X	X			X						4	
Help others	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	12	X		X	X	X			X	X		X			7	
Teach		X	X					X		X			4			X					X						2	
Listen	X	X			X	X	X	X		X		X	9	X		X	X	X			X						5	
Care for	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X		X	9	X				X	X		X						3	
Supervise									X		X		2	X			X	X	X		X			X			6	
Demonstrate		X	X					X	X	X			5								X		X				2	
Diplomatic									X				1		X				X		X					X	4	
Collaborate								X	X	X			3						X		X		X				3	
Advise	X	X	X	X		X		X	X				8					X	X		X		X			X	5	
Perceptive	X								X				2				X				X						2	
Persuade								X	X				2				X	X	X		X						4	
Negotiate									X				1					X	X		X						3	
Instruct	X	X	X	X				X		X		X	6	X					X		X		X			X	5	
Meet with the public				X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	8	X			X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	9
Total	27	12	11	8	3	9	5	6	23	31	26	9	8	32	6	10	23	21	10	3	38	8	24	13	9	12		

Table A6.2: Transferable skills continued

Transferable Skills	Females										Males																	
	Bimala	Chiralekha	Dhanya	Elisai	Harita	Jayani	Kayal	Maina	Mala	Paavarasi	Parinita	Pragya	Savita	Total	Bhaskar	Caleb	Jwalia	Khush	Kiran	Madhu	Mudita	Ponmudi	Ravi	Rohak	Rustam	Tanay	Trinabh	Total
Working with words, ideas																												
Articulate	X	X				X		X	X	X				6	X		X	X	X	X		X			X			7
Communicate verbally	X	X	X			X		X	X	X				8	X		X	X	X	X		X			X			7
Communicate in writing	X	X						X	X	X	X			6	X		X					X						3
Remember information	X		X	X					X	X				5	X	X	X					X						4
Inventive			X						X					2	X			X										2
Library research		X	X						X					3	X							X			X			3
Correspond									X					1	X							X						2
Create new ideas														-	X							X						2
Logical		X		X				X	X					4	X							X	X					3
Edit									X					1	X							X						2
Design									X					1	X							X						2
Public speaking								X	X	X				3														-
Leadership																												
Arrange social functions		X	X			X			X					4					X			X						2
Explain to others	X		X	X		X		X	X	X	X			9	X		X	X	X			X	X		X	X	X	9
Negotiate agreements											X			1	X							X						2
Results-oriented														-								X						1
Influence others	X	X					X		X					4	X				X			X						3
Mediate problems	X								X		X			3								X						1
Motivate									X					1				X	X			X						3
Organize projects	X					X		X	X		X			5						X		X			X			3
Run meetings									X					1								X						1
Manage or direct others			X						X		X			3	X				X	X		X			X	X	X	6
Decisive								X	X	X				3	X				X			X						3
Delegate									X		X			2	X				X			X				X		4
Plan	X		X				X		X	X	X	X		7	X				X			X	X		X	X	X	7
Initiate new tasks									X		X			2					X			X						2
Make decisions	X							X	X	X	X	X		6	X				X			X			X	X	X	6
Creative/Artistic																												
Artistic														-														-
Dance/body movement		X												1														-
Perform														-														-
Present artistic idea								X						1														-
Expressive									X					1														-
Drawing/art														-														-
Total	10	8	8	3	-	5	2	3	9	25	9	10	2		19	1	5	5	12	4	-	25	3	-	8	3	5	

Appendix Seven: Status and skills of interviewee participants

The skills identified here are not an exhaustive list of the skills of that person, rather the main skills in each section which were most prominent in the interview with the individual. Chapter Five features the discussion around the skills of the refugees.

Interviewee	Age	Employment status	Family status	Self-management skills	Transferable skills	Work-content skills	English skills
Bhaskar (male)	Early 30s	Self-employed.	Single.	Hard worker Reliable Productive Self-confident Ambitious	Supervise Analyse data Organize projects Manage or direct others Communicate in writing (Tamil, Hindi, English) Communicate verbally (Tamil, Hindi, English)	Engineering Degree Engineering work experience Internet programming experience Management of own business	Very high Studied for degree in the UK
Bimala (female)	Early 30s	Employed full-time.	Single with one son (still in Sri Lanka at time of interview).	Hard worker Reliable Punctual Responsible Ambitious Independent	Communicate verbally (Tamil, Sinhala, English) Communicate in writing (Tamil, Sinhala, English) Organize projects Help others Analyse data	Managerial experience of bed and breakfast Accountancy qualifications Banking knowledge A levels	Very high Taught in English at school
Caleb (male)	Late 20s	Employed full-time.	Married.	Personable Cheerful Enthusiastic Get along with co-workers	Diplomatic Operate tools, machines Work with hands Inspect things	Sri Lankan agriculture knowledge Tesco organisation O Levels	Very low – translation needed in interview Has not studied a lot of English
Chitrlekha (female)	Early 40s	Unemployed. Volunteers.	Married with three children.	Honest Competent Patient Responsible Good natured	Communicate verbally (Tamil, French, English) Caring for people Help others Instruct Advise	History degree Volunteering Tamil organisation Tamil community knowledge Teaching skills Royal Mail Organisation knowledge	High English education levels in the UK

<i>Dhanya</i> (female)	Mid 40s	Unemployed. Volunteers.	Married with two daughters.	Friendly Helpful Good-natured Self-confident Well-organised	Teach Care for others Help others Communicate verbally (Tamil)	Geography degree Teaching	Medium Some English education in Sri Lanka – answered questionnaire in Tamil
<i>Harita</i> (female)	Late 30s	Unemployed.	Married with three children.	Accept supervision Competent Versatile	Caring for others Help others Listening	O Levels Factory work Caring of children	Low – translation needed for interview Understands some spoken English but lack of tuition in Sri Lanka or the UK
<i>Jwalia</i> (male)	Mid 40s	Unemployed. Studying.	Married with a son and a daughter.	Good-natured Helpful Self-confident Resourceful Friendly	Operate tools, machinery Analyse data Logical Audit records Teach	Book keeping A Levels Finance Accountancy knowledge Economics, commerce and logic knowledge	High Studied English in Sri Lanka
<i>Elisai</i> (female)	Mid 20s	Unemployed.	Married with one son, and pregnant at time of interview.	Honest Reliable Friendly Enthusiastic Helpful	Caring skills Help others Take inventory Advise	A Level Pharmacy Course Experience as a pharmacist Caring of children	Low Lack of English education
<i>Jayani</i> (female)	Early 30s	Employed full-time.	Married.	Motivated Good natured Conscientious Independent Persistent	Organize projects Operate tools, machines Help others Counsel people Advise	Tamil community organisation knowledge Knowledge of a doctors surgery operation Specific project knowledge A levels Cookery knowledge	High English education in Sri Lanka
<i>Kayal</i> (female)	Early 30s	Employed part-time in family business.	Married with two daughters.	Friendly Helpful Good natured Accept supervision	Help others Manage money Care for others Take inventory	A levels Grocery store specifics Till operation Working with children	Low English practice in shop & some tuition

<i>Khush</i> (male)	Early 40s	Employed part-time and self-employed part-time.	Married with three children.	Honest Reliable Friendly Helpful Conscientious	Counsel people Help others Advise Work with hands Repair things	Royal Mail organisation knowledge Counselling skills Car mechanic skills Engineering Diplomas (engineering and counselling)	High English tuition in Sri Lanka
<i>Kiran</i> (male)	Early 30s	Employed.	Married with two daughters.	Resourceful Open-minded Optimistic Hard worker Self-confident	Manage or direct others Make decisions Help others Supervise	Managing community organisation Tamil community knowledge O Levels	High Married to an English woman
<i>Madhu</i> (male)	Mid 30s	Unemployed.	Married with two children.	Persistent Competent Informal Flexible	Manage or direct others Plan Organise projects Negotiate Persuade	Telecom knowledge Establishing own businesses Marketing and commerce A levels Travel agency knowledge	Medium Some tuition in Sri Lanka
<i>Maina</i> (female)	Mid 30s	Unemployed.	Married with children.	Friendly Patient Honest Reliable	Teach Care for others Listen	A Levels Educating children on professional and voluntary basis	Low Attended local English classes in the UK
<i>Mala</i> (female)	Early 20s	Employed part-time. Studying.	Single.	Punctual Hard worker Productive Friendly Well organised	Operate tools, machines Investigate Analyse data Evaluate Persuade	Biomedical Sciences Degree Medical networks Jewellery knowledge Sales experience	Very high Studied degree and some schooling in UK
<i>Mudita</i> (male)	Mid 20s	Employed full-time.	Married with one child.	Responsible Resourceful Cheerful Friendly	Manage money Work with hands Assemble things	Japanese restaurant kitchen knowledge Factory work O Levels	Very low – translation needed for interview Lack of English education

Paavarasi (female)	Mid 50s	Employed full-time.	Single.	Motivated Ambitious Well organised Intelligent Assertive Efficient	Logical Research Investigate Organize projects Decisive Interview people	Journalism degree Solicitors firm legal aid knowledge Wall Street Experience 30 years Journalism experience	Very high Taught in English at school and parents
Parinita (female)	Mid 30s	Employed full-time.	Married with two children, pregnant with third child at time of interview.	Cheerful Responsible Conscientious Helpful Motivated	Analyse data Communicate verbally Manage money Audit records Help others	Accountancy qualifications Tamil community knowledge A Levels	High Some English tuition in Sri Lanka, though lacks confidence
Ponmudi (male)	Mid 40s	Self-employed.	Married with a son and a daughter.	Productive Reliable Honest Hard worker Motivated Responsible	Analyse data Research Supervise Negotiate Organise projects Plan	Internet business Convenience store Masters Degree Management of own business Systems thinking	Very high Studied for Masters degree in the UK
Pragya (female)	Mid 30s	Unemployed.	Married with one child.	Capable Efficient Reliable Methodical Responsible	Operate tools, machines Organize projects Plan Take inventory Manage others	Hindu Civilisation Degree Manager of garments factory	Low – translation was needed for interview Some English education in Sri Lanka. Answered questionnaire in English.
Ravi (male)	Mid 20s	Employed full-time.	Single.	Enthusiastic Informal Good natured	Work with hands Build things Take inventory Assemble things	Factory work Phillips factory knowledge in Holland O Levels	Very low – translation needed for interview Lack of English education
Rohak (male)	Early 20s	Employed part-time. Studying part-time.	Single.	Motivated Responsible Resourceful Learn quickly Capable	Operate tools, machines Organise projects Manage money	Texaco technical specifics Accountancy qualifications A levels	High Doing accountancy course in the UK

<i>Rustam</i> (male)	Early 20s	Employed full-time in family business.	Single.	Self-confidence Motivated Methodical Persistent Ambitious	Manage money Supervise Library research Plan Decisive	Degree in Business Information Systems Running of small retail business Convenience store business knowledge Till operation BTEC	High Studied degree and some schooling in the UK
<i>Savita</i> (female)	Early 20s	Employed full-time.	Married.	Reliable Punctual Competent Discreet Dependable	Help others Administer Plan Record facts	A Level biomedical science Tamil solicitors knowledge Secretarial knowledge of solicitors office	Medium Some English education in Sri Lanka
<i>Tanay</i> (male)	Early 30s	Employed part-time in two different businesses.	Married.	Resourceful Loyal Capable Flexible	Build things Work with hands Assemble things Operate tools, machines	Kentucky Fried Chicken organisation knowledge Running of grocery store Motor bike mechanical knowledge Small mechanics engineering – watch repairing	Low Lack of English education
<i>Trinabh</i> (male)	Mid 30s	Employed part-time in two different businesses.	Married with two children.	Good natured Friendly Reliable Cheerful	Manage or direct others Supervise Make decisions Instruct	Sainsbury's Petrol Station BP Petrol Station O Levels Sri Lankan Tea Factory	Medium Some English education in Sri Lanka