

The labour force experiences of refugees in Britain:  
The case of refugees from Vietnam

by

Keri Roberts

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Department of Geography, The University of Sheffield  
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# **The labour force experiences of refugees in Britain: The case of refugees from Vietnam**

**Keri Roberts**

This thesis examines the labour force experiences of refugees living in Britain. By describing and exploring the employment, unemployment, training and job-search experiences of refugees from Vietnam it seeks to fill gaps in the existing literature. The literature currently recognises the importance of employment in the resettlement process, but fails to provide much insight into the long term experiences of refugees. Further, this thesis presents a new conceptual framework for understanding refugee labour force experiences.

Literature from a wide range of disciplines informs a theoretical framework which stresses the complex and diverse nature of influences on refugee labour force experiences. The review of the experiences of refugees from Vietnam, draws on existing literature and novel quantitative analysis of the 1991 census, before giving a voice to the refugees themselves. Workers at 27 Vietnamese Community Associations around Britain describe labour force experiences in the areas they serve, while half also detail their own individual labour force careers. Throughout, emphasis is placed on the refugees' own interpretations of what has influenced their labour force experiences, and their reactions to those experiences.

This thesis confirms that the refugees from Vietnam are spatially concentrated in locations which are characterised by high unemployment and a high ethnic Chinese population. This is reflected in their labour force experiences, which are dominated by unemployment or manual employment, particularly within the ethnic sector. Employment remains a minority experience for Vietnam refugees living in the majority of locations, although location specific differences in labour force experiences are identified. Self-reliance within the community of refugees from Vietnam is strong, as is the significance of access to labour force opportunities with the ethnic Chinese population. Both factors, do however have benefits and drawbacks.

The evidence presented in this thesis supports the proposed framework for understanding refugee labour force experiences. Accordingly, this thesis argues for a refugee policy which recognises both the importance of employment in the resettlement process, and the complexity of factors which influence labour force experiences. A comprehensive programme of intervention is recommended to improve refugee labour force experiences, and community development is seen as a key element of this. A call for a permanent refugee resettlement organisation is also made.

# **The labour force experiences of refugees in Britain: the case of refugees from Vietnam**

**Page**

	<b>List of contents</b>	<b>i</b>
	<b>List of figures</b>	<b>vi</b>
	<b>List of tables</b>	<b>vii</b>
	<b>Preface</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	
1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Contemporary British concerns	2
1.3	Research context and objectives	3
1.4	Thesis structure	6
<b>2</b>	<b>Refugees in Britain</b>	
2.1	Introduction - Britain as a receiver of refugees	8
2.2	The creation of an internationally recognised refugee status	10
2.2.1	The first international refugee organisations and the work of Fridtjof Nansen	11
2.2.2	The United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees	14
2.3	Refugees in Britain since the inter-war period	16
2.3.1	The major groups of refugees in this period	16
2.3.2	Trends between quota and spontaneous refugees	21
2.3.3	Shifts from an East to West movement to a South to North movement	24
2.4	European Union responses to increased requests for asylum	26
2.5	Conclusion	30
<b>3</b>	<b>The labour force experiences of refugees</b>	
3.1	Introduction	31
3.2	The labour force experiences of refugees	34
3.3	Contextual themes	37
3.3.1	The national arena	37

<b>3</b>	<b>The labour force experiences of refugees continued</b>	<b>Page</b>
3.3.2	The local arena	41
3.4	Conceptualising refugee labour force experiences	44
3.4.1	Education	46
3.4.1.1	Level of general education	46
3.4.1.2	Recognition of qualifications	47
3.4.1.3	Standard of English	48
3.4.2	Skills	50
3.4.2.1	Level of skills	50
3.4.2.2	Skills transferability	51
3.4.3	Search strategies	52
3.4.3.1	Knowledge of labour and training markets	53
3.4.3.2	Spatial knowledge	54
3.4.4	Support networks	56
3.4.4.1	Community support	56
3.4.4.2	Specialist support	59
3.4.5	Psychological influences	60
3.4.5.1	Life experiences	60
3.4.5.2	Support networks	61
3.4.6	Discrimination	63
3.4.6.1	Racial discrimination	63
3.4.6.2	Discrimination of the basis of refugee status	64
3.4.7	Legal status	64
3.5	Interactions between factors	65
3.5.1	Interactions involving support networks	65
3.6	Conclusion	67
<b>4</b>	<b>Primary research agenda and methodology</b>	
4.1	Introduction	68
4.2	Research objectives	68
4.3	The choice of a refugee group	70
4.4	Research methods	<b>72</b>
4.4.1	Quantitative methods	<b>73</b>
4.4.1.1	Locating the refugees	<b>73</b>
4.4.1.2	What are the refugees' labour force experiences	<b>74</b>

<b>4</b>	<b>Primary research agenda and methodology continued</b>	<b>Page</b>
4.4.1.3	Census media and access arrangements	75
4.4.2	Qualitative methods	76
4.4.2.1	Data collection	79
4.4.2.2	Analysis procedure	81
4.4.2.3	Processing	82
4.4.2.4	Investigation	83
4.4.2.5	Speculation and review	84
4.5	Conclusion	85
<b>5</b>	<b>Refugees from Vietnam</b>	
5.1	Introduction	87
5.2	An introduction to the history of Vietnam	87
5.2.1	Ethnic diversity	90
5.2.2	International reactions to the refugee crisis	91
5.2.3	Characteristics of the refugees reaching Britain	94
5.3	Reception and resettlement in Britain	97
5.4	Secondary migration and issues of ethnicity	100
5.5	Where to the refugees live now?	102
5.5.1	Population characteristics	102
5.5.2	The spatial distribution of refugees from Vietnam	104
5.5.2.1	County level data	104
5.5.2.2	Borough level data	107
5.5.2.3	Ward level data	107
5.5.2.4	Conclusion	111
5.5.3	The distribution of Vietnamese Community Associations (VCA)	114
5.5.3.1	VCA locations - borough level	117
5.5.3.2	VCA locations - ward level	117
5.5.3.3	VCA locations - conclusion	120
5.5.4	Issues of ethnicity	120
5.5.4.1	Ethnic Chinese - county level	121
5.5.4.2	Ethnic Chinese - ward level	123
5.5.4.3	Ethnic Chinese - conclusion	123
5.6	What is known about the refugees' labour force experiences?	125
5.6.1	National data from the 1991 census	125

	<b>Page</b>	
<b>5</b>	<b>Refugees from Vietnam continued</b>	
5.6.2	Published literature	129
5.6.3	Unemployment in areas of high refugee residence	131
5.7	Conclusion	132
<b>6</b>	<b>Vietnamese Community Associations</b>	
6.1	Introduction	135
6.2	The establishment of Vietnamese Community Associations	136
6.3	The funding arrangements of Vietnamese Community Associations	144
6.4	The role of Vietnamese Community Associations	151
6.4.1	Association general aims and activities	151
6.4.2	Employment development work	156
6.5	Conclusion	162
<b>7</b>	<b>Labour force experiences in provincial Britain</b>	
7.1	Introduction	163
7.2	Levels of unemployment and self-employment	164
7.3	Employment experiences	167
7.4	Barriers to employment	174
7.4.1	The pivotal role of language skills	175
7.4.2	A multiplicity of other influencing factors	178
7.5	Experiences of self-employment	188
7.6	Conclusion	193
<b>8</b>	<b>Labour force experiences in Greater London</b>	
8.1	Introduction	195
8.2	Levels of unemployment and self-employment	196
8.3	Employment experiences	198
8.4	Barriers to employment	208
8.5	Experiences of self-employment	216
8.6	Conclusion	221

<b>9</b>	<b>Individual narratives</b>	<b>Page</b>
9.1	Introduction	223
9.2	A profile of respondents	223
9.3	Labour force career histories	227
9.3.1	Older respondents	227
9.3.2	Younger respondents	245
9.4	Discussion and conclusion	257
<b>10</b>	<b>Summary and conclusion</b>	
10.1	Introduction	261
10.2	Main findings	262
10.3	Policy recommendations	268
10.4	Possible future directions	271
10.5	Conclusion	272
	<b>References</b>	<b>274</b>
	<b>Appendices</b>	
4.1	Initial contact letter and information sheet	281
4.2	Interview Outline - Vietnamese Community Association Workers	283
4.3	Interview Outline - Individuals	284
4.4	Example of <i>EXCEL</i> sheet	289
4.5	Labour force career history record sheet	290
6.1	List of Vietnamese Community Associations	291
9.1	Vietnamese names	292

## **List of Figures**

		<b>Page</b>
3.1	Factors affecting the labour force experiences of refugees	45
5.1	The location of Vietnam in South East Asia	88
5.2	The refugees from Vietnam - population structure	103
5.3	British population structure	103
5.4	Vietnam refugees in Britain	105
5.5	Vietnam refugees in Britain - percentage share	106
5.6	Vietnam refugees in London boroughs	108
5.7	Vietnam refugees in London boroughs - percentage share	109
5.8	Vietnam refugees in London wards	110
5.9	Counties / Metropolitan areas in which one or more VCA operate	115
5.10	The relationship between Vietnam refugee populations and the number of VCA operating	116
5.11	The location of VCA in London boroughs	118
5.12	The location of VCA in London wards	119
5.13	Ethnic Chinese in Britain	122
5.14	Ethnic Chinese in London wards	124
5.15	The economically active	126
5.16	Levels of unemployment and the activity rate	127
5.17	Levels of unemployment in London wards	133

## List of Tables

	<b>Page</b>	
3.1	Levels of English	47
5.1	Most common jobs held in Vietnam	95
5.2	Places of residence for refugees from Vietnam - Key borough / districts	113
5.3	Key locations of residence for refugees from Vietnam and Ethnic Chinese	121
5.4	Survey of industrial sector	128
5.5	Unemployment in key London Boroughs	131
6.1	The establishment of Vietnamese Community Associations in London	137
6.2	The establishment of provincial Vietnamese Community Associations	140
6.3	VCA sources of funding	144
6.4	Employment development work at Vietnamese Community Associations	156
6.5	Employment development work and reported levels of unemployment	160
7.1	Unemployment levels reported by provincial VCA	165
7.2	Self employment levels reported by provincial VCA	166
7.3	Types of employment amongst refugees from Vietnam	168
8.1	Unemployment levels reported by London VCA	196
8.2	Self employment levels reported by London VCA	198
8.3	Barriers to employment	217
9.1	Bibliographic details of respondents	224

## Preface

## Preface

Research rarely arises from a neutral position. This thesis arose from an academic interest in the impact of migration, personal experiences and a concern for the rights of refugees.

My own regular experience of migration led to an interest in how people adapt to new locations. For example, a move overseas (Sri Lanka) illustrated the greater difficulties associated with international migration. The impact of migration upon employment experiences also became clear as I watched family and friends attempt to find work in a new country. For my father, moves from Britain to Sri Lanka, Egypt, the Philippines, Russia, and shortly to Belgium, have meant a constant learning process in a spatial, factual, linguistic and cultural sense. Friends from Vietnam and Belarus have experienced similar difficulties when seeking work in Britain. These influences led to a particular interest in the employment experiences of international migrants.

My specific interest in refugees arose from a combination of academic and personal experiences. As an undergraduate at Aberystwyth, I took a course on International Migrations and subsequently wrote a project essay on Britain's response to refugees. In 1991, when Iraq had recently invaded Kuwait, I spent some months living in Cairo. Our flat was opposite the Iraqi embassy and in an area where Kuwaiti refugees lived (and demonstrated!). Later, I spent seven months working as a volunteer for the Ockenden Venture (one of Britain's principle charities working with refugees). This work, with refugees from Vietnam and Cambodia who live in Surrey, provided a practical insight into the lives of refugees living in Britain. Finally, whilst in the Philippines, I met officials of UNHCR and visited two refugee camps for refugees from Vietnam.

These experiences gave me an insight into the lives of refugees once they reach this country, and the difficulties and traumas they have undergone before their arrival. Having seen the rigours of the screening process, I became convinced that recognised refugees living in Britain should be entitled to the same opportunities as other residents. This belief led to a decision to undertake research into the employment experiences of refugees. As the work for this thesis progressed, the scope of the research grew to include refugee experience of unemployment, searching for work, training and self-employment.

During the course of completing this thesis I have received assistance from many people. I would like to thank my family for their encouragement; my supervisors, Professor Paul White and Dr Doug Watts for their advice and patience; and my friends for their enduring support.

This research would not have been possible without the participation of refugees from Vietnam. In particular, I thank Van Le Ung (Refugee Action) and the Vietnam Refugee National Council for providing the list of Vietnamese Community Associations. The research was dependant on the participation of community workers at these associations, and I thank every one of them for their valuable time and contribution.

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Dedicated to

H.V.Davies (1918 - 1994) and Tran.K.Y (1971 -1995)

# Chapter One

## Introduction

# Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

Refugees are a permanent feature of the world's population. Although the identity and origins of those who become refugees are constantly changing, there have always been groups of individuals who have sought refuge from persecution. While such people have only in modern times become known as refugees, their experiences of

*“persecution, expulsion and flight... are deeply rooted in the collective memory of every people, and typical examples are found in the Bible....  
“Joseph took Jesus and his mother and fled by night to Egypt because king Herod was searching for the child to destroy him” (c.f. Mt. 2:13-15)”*

(Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerants,  
n.d)

While the experiences of becoming a refugee (fleeing across borders in search of sanctuary) are ones which have been evident throughout history, the word refugee dates only from 1687. Its earliest recorded usage was with regard to the plight of 250,000 Huguenots who felt compelled to flee France following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685,

*"Refugee  
One who, owing to religious persecution or political troubles, seeks refuge in a foreign country; orig. applied to the French Huguenots who came to England after the revocation of the Edicts of Nantes in 1685....."*

*ſ. 1687 Evelyn Diary 12 June, "The poore and religious refugees who escaped out of France in the cruel persecution"*.

(Oxford English Dictionary 2nd Ed. on CD-ROM, 1992)

Thus, while flight from persecution has an immeasurable history, popular understandings that people who flee abroad to escape persecution are refugees, date from the seventeenth century. However, formal definitions of the term refugee only developed much later, arising in the twentieth century<sup>1</sup>.

The last couple of centuries provide ample evidence for the significance of refugees (recognised by both popular and formal definitions). The eighteenth century, for instance, saw the persecution of Old Believers in Russia who opposed reforms in the Russian Orthodox Church. While many of these Old Believers died rather than submit to reforms, others fled to the Danube Delta in Romania where their descendants live

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<sup>1</sup> These are discussed in section 2.2.

today under the name of Lipovani (Drysdale, 1995). During this century, the establishment of the Peoples Republic of China (1949) led to around 2,000,000 Chinese fleeing to Taiwan and the British territory of Hong Kong; while the creation of the state of Bangladesh (1971) caused between 8,000,000 and 10,000,000 people to become refugees (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1985). More recently, genocide in Rwanda has forced around two million people to seek refuge in neighbouring countries (Anon., 1994), while the United States of America has faced an influx of people fleeing the regimes in Haiti and Cuba (Adams, 1994; Adams 1995; Toomey, 1994). From these few examples, it is evident that the world has rarely, maybe never, been free of the plight of refugees in one place or another.

## **1.2 Contemporary British concerns**

Given the enduring presence of refugees, it is perhaps unsurprising that their fate is a much discussed issue in both political and public debates. Within Britain, much of this debate is concerned with formal definitions and the recognition of refugees, specifically with regard to possible abuse of the procedures used to grant refugee status. Indeed, debate has increasingly focused on the so-called abuse of asylum laws by ‘economic migrants’, particularly from the nations of the South, as political rhetoric and the media view those *claiming* refugee status (asylum-seekers) with growing scepticism. With such an emphasis dominating public, academic and political thinking, it is perhaps unsurprising that concerns for the experiences of those individuals who have been *granted* refugee status (refugees) have arguably become sidelined or marginalised. As Robinson (1993a) states,

*“decision-makers and researchers devote too little attention to... the later stages of resettlement ”*

(p. 230)

instead choosing to focus their attention on the determination procedures and the initial period of resettlement.

This is evident not only in the media, and political debates, but also in academia, perhaps because as newer crises emerge, interest in established groups of refugees begins to wane (Robinson, 1990). Thus, although the lives of refugees settled in Britain have been the subject of research in the periods immediately following their arrival (Community Relations Commission, 1974; Jones, 1982; Somerset, 1983), research which aims to explore experiences in the longer term is less common, although examples do exist

(Robinson, 1989; Robinson and Hale, 1989; Lam and Martin, 1994). While this focus on recently arrived refugees is understandable, it does not negate the need for research into the experiences of refugees who have been living in Britain for some time. Indeed, it can be argued that only when long term experiences are considered can the efficacy of policies which deal with the reception and resettlement of refugees be truly assessed. Moreover, with significant numbers of refugees arriving from the countries of the South, it can be argued that any neglect of their long term experiences represents a significant oversight.

Within this context of a focus of existing work on asylum-seekers and newly arrived refugees, this thesis chooses to centre its attention on those individuals who *are recognised as being refugees*<sup>2</sup>, in short those who the British government accepts as having been persecuted and being in need of protection. Moreover, the focus is upon their longer term experiences of life in Britain. Although not the focus of current political, media and public attention, an interest in the lives of individuals who have refugee status is justified, since the difficulties they encounter do not end with the formalisation of their status. Moreover, concern with refugees currently living in Britain has implications for the lives of asylum-seekers seeking the right to settle here. Lessons from the past can inform the future. In particular, given that growing numbers of people are claiming asylum in countries very different from their own<sup>3</sup>, a consideration of what they are likely to experience, should they be granted refugee status, is needed. In particular, if programmes to assist newly recognised refugees in their resettlement are to be implemented, assessments of past programmes of assistance are required. However, as Robinson (1993a) recognises, knowledge of how refugees adapt to life in Britain over an extended period is, as yet, largely absent.

### **1.3 Research context and objectives**

The discussion in this thesis has so far referred to the “experiences” of refugees in a general sense. However, refugees living in Britain have to adapt to life in this country in all sorts of ways. This thesis deals with one particular aspect of living in Britain, that relating to employment experiences. The justification for this emphasis is that it has

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<sup>2</sup> Here, and subsequently, the use of the term “refugee” is based on formal (legal) not popular understandings i.e. “refugee” refers to those with refugee status and not to those seeking such status (asylum-seekers). Where exceptions occur these are reported.

<sup>3</sup> This is discussed in section 2.3.3

commonly been argued that employment can be viewed as the key to a successful experience of resettlement for refugees (Phillips, 1989).

The importance of employment is understood as not only being because of its monetary returns, but also with regard to the psychological benefits that working has for individuals who are adjusting to life in this country<sup>4</sup>. Although this belief that employment is beneficial for refugees informed the research, the validity of the idea is accepted rather than questioned. Likewise no attempt is made to question what constitutes successful resettlement. Instead, given a lack of published data, and calls for more research in the field of refugee employment (British Refugee Council, 1987; Srinivasan, 1994), the aim of this thesis is to explore the employment, or more specifically, the labour force experiences (i.e. the employment, unemployment, search activities and training experiences of individuals who are in work or seeking it<sup>5</sup>) of refugees living in Britain. In particular, the experiences of refugees from countries of the South are central, given the greater difficulties they are thought to have in adapting to the British labour market. This, it is intended, will allow for the formation of relevant policy recommendations for use with current and future influxes of refugees.

This thesis focuses on the refugees from Vietnam<sup>6</sup>. For the purposes of this thesis this term refers not only to those individuals who came to Britain from Vietnam under a quota system<sup>7</sup>, but also those who arrived under the Family Reunion Criteria and Orderly Departures Programme. Although not refugees as discussed earlier<sup>8</sup>, such individuals were accepted into Britain on humanitarian grounds associated with the events in Vietnam<sup>9</sup> and arguably form an integral part of the community. Therefore, for the purposes of this thesis, they are included within the definition of refugees from Vietnam. Based on this definition, the research aims to address the following questions.

- 1 Where do the refugees from Vietnam live?
- 2 What are the labour force experiences of refugees from Vietnam?
- 3 How are these labour force experiences to be explained?

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<sup>4</sup> The psychological benefits of employment are discussed in more detail in 3.4.5

<sup>5</sup> A detailed discussion and conceptualisation of labour force experiences is the focus of Chapter Three.

<sup>6</sup> The decision to focus on refugees from Vietnam is discussed further in 4.4

<sup>7</sup> That is, granted refugee status prior to arrival *en bloc*.

<sup>8</sup> cf. footnote 3

<sup>9</sup> i.e. they are refugees by popular definition.

4 How have the refugees from Vietnam reacted to their labour force experiences?

5 What policy recommendations can be made for dealing with future refugees?

The thesis initially uses literary sources (a key source is Hale, 1991) to identify what is already known about the refugees from Vietnam. Subsequently, quantitative and qualitative research, based on analysis of the 1991 census<sup>10</sup> and a series of interviews, provides answers to the questions posed. A central concern throughout is to compare the labour force experiences of refugees in London (the majority), with those of refugees living elsewhere (the minority). With regard to the refugees' own labour force experiences, the aims of the research are both descriptive and discursive<sup>11</sup>. In addition to seeking descriptive details about labour force experiences in various locations, a primary aim of the research is to highlight refugee perceptions of their own (community and individual) labour force experiences<sup>12</sup>, in this way giving a voice to the refugees and avoiding the customary error of refugee studies, that of

*"dehumanising the experiences of refugees and of reducing these to numbers."* (Robinson, 1993b, p.212)

By giving a voice to those who have directly participated in resettlement, the aim is to present a refugee-centred view of labour force experiences, thus giving precedence to refugee understandings of their own experiences. However, it should be noted at this early stage that the voices heard within this thesis are those of community leaders (acting as community spokespersons) and not typical refugees. The reasons for this are discussed in some detail in chapter 4. It is then intended that the insight gained will allow for policy recommendations to be made.

As a final note in this brief introduction to the research, it is important to stress that the research has adopted a holistic rather than specialist approach. Principally, this means that the discussion does not focus on the influence of any one factor which affects labour force experiences. Instead, the complexity of factors affecting labour force experiences is illustrated. The aim is not to 'explain' refugee experiences, but rather to 'understand' them, with particular emphasis being placed on the response of the refugees themselves to their situation. In this way, the refugees are portrayed as active participants in their

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<sup>10</sup> The decision to utilise 1991 census data is discussed in full in Chapter Four.

<sup>11</sup> While introduced briefly here, the aims of the empirical research receive further consideration (in chapter 4) after a theoretical consideration of refugee labour force experiences (chapter 3).

<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that the research does not aim to compare the experiences of refugees with other job seekers.

own resettlement, something which has been illustrated by Hale (1991) with regard to migration decisions.

#### **1.4 Thesis Structure**

This thesis consists of ten chapters, incorporating background, theoretical and empirical work.

Following this introduction, a context for research into refugees living in Britain is provided. This chapter discusses Britain's response to refugees and the international agreements which guide this. A summary of the main groups of refugees to arrive in Britain since the interwar period is also provided. This section is considered factually, and is then reviewed as evidence of the changing nature of refugee movements during this century. In particular, the shift towards refugees from the South is highlighted.

Having established the scope and scale of refugee arrivals in Britain, chapter three, and the rest of this thesis, focus on the labour force experiences of refugees resident in this country. This emphasis is justified and the term "labour force experiences" explored before the conceptual and contextual framework, on which the research is based, is discussed.

Chapter four discusses the specific aims of the empirical research and explains the focus on refugees from Vietnam. It is also here that the research methodology, with its emphasis on Vietnamese Community Associations and their workers, is considered.

The fifth chapter discusses what is known about the refugees from Vietnam and their labour force experiences both from published literature and from data in the 1991 census. Although much of this chapter is contextual, it should be noted that utilising census material to research refugees from Vietnam is a new enterprise. While the census work provides additional evidence of the refugees' residential location (as initially provided by Hale, 1991), it goes further by providing details of the labour markets and ethnic character of the areas in which the refugees live.

Chapter six is the first of three chapters concerned with material gained during interviews with community workers in their roles as community spokespersons. It explores the character of Vietnamese Community Associations across Britain. This relates to both the general activities of the associations as well as those activities directly related to labour force experiences. In this manner, a basis from which to interpret community workers' views on labour force experiences is provided.

Chapter seven deals with experiences in 15 provincial (that is non London) locations, while chapter eight is concerned with the experiences of those refugees living in the capital (in 12 locations). In both chapters the approach taken is to explore community workers' views on employment and unemployment experiences before examining perceptions of the barriers which act to limit them. Finally self-employment is also considered.

In addition to discussing community experiences with workers at 27 Vietnamese Community Associations, 14 of these workers agreed to discuss their own labour force experiences. Chapter nine, explores the experiences of these workers in some detail. This, answers the need to consider the individual level consequences for refugees living in Britain.

Finally, the concluding chapter draws together findings from throughout the thesis and attempts to make policy recommendations for use with recently arrived refugees. Additionally, a brief critique of the research itself is presented, along with ideas for further research.

## Chapter Two

### Refugees in Britain

# Refugees in Britain

## 2.1 Introduction - Britain as a receiver of refugees

For much of the time since the arrival of the Huguenots in Britain, this country has had a liberal approach towards the admittance of refugees. In the eighteenth century, Jews from Poland and Germany sought safety in Britain, and from 1789 onwards they were joined by French people fleeing persecution associated with the events surrounding the Revolution (Holmes, 1988). Britain's welcoming attitude is thus testified and this is evident in a speech by Lord Malmesbury (Conservative) in 1852,

*"I can well conceive the pleasure and happiness of a refugee, hunted in his native land, on approaching the shores of England, .....but they are not greater than the pleasure and happiness every Englishman feels in knowing that his country affords the refugees a home and safety."*

(Quoted in Porter, 1979. p1-2)

However, it would be wrong to believe that Britain has always had a liberal approach towards refugees. While the British public and government generally wish to be seen as hospitable to those fleeing persecution, concern has frequently arisen when the numbers seeking safety in Britain have increased. This is not a recent phenomenon, it was for instance evident with regard to Russian Jews arriving at the start of the twentieth century, and again with those fleeing the Nazi regime in the years preceding the Second World War (Wasserstein, 1984). The general attitude towards refugees therefore appears to be that while

*"one refugee is a novelty, ten refugees is boring and a hundred refugees are a menace."*

(Kent, 1953. p. 172)

Thus, while Britain's long record of giving sanctuary to refugees has been demonstrated, these few examples also illustrate the contentious nature of granting refugees the right to live in Britain. In part, this debate surrounding the admission of refugees can be understood to have arisen from the way in which refugees are perceived.

For it is frequently thought that

*"refugee situations are isolated, deviant and non-recurring."*

(Jones, 1982. p. 49)

This tendency to perceive refugees as a temporary phenomenon encourages a negative response when 'yet another' refugee situation occurs. In addition to affecting general attitudes, there are also implications for those organisations which deal with refugees.

In particular, the perception of refugees as a temporary occurrence discourages forward planning. Thus although the evidence suggests the opposite, that refugees are a common, even normal and constantly recurring phenomenon, such a view has not generally been accepted by the Government nor the public. Thus refugees continue to be perceived as a fleeting problem which can be largely ignored, or reduced to insignificance. Only when it is recognised that refugees form an enduring portion of the world's population are they likely to receive due consideration. For until this occurs, compassion fatigue as "yet another" refugee crisis appears is likely to be the outcome. Significantly, calls to accept that refugee situations are constantly developing, and should therefore be planned for, are occurring with increasing frequency (Jones, 1982; Black et al, 1993) and Demmett goes so far as to state,

*" large movements of people in desperate need of safety are going to continue for the foreseeable future from one source or another.... Plans for immigration [should] allow for a permanent category of asylum-seekers whose place on the labour market and in the provision of housing and services must be taken into account."*

(Demmett, 1994 p. 151).

This call identifies some of those areas in which provision for refugees and asylum-seekers have been lacking. This standpoint is, however, in direct opposition to Britain's standard response to refugees which has been described as relying on

*"a plethora of temporary measures designed to cope with transitory problems."*

(Jones, 1982, p. 49).

Although this was written in relation to refugees from Vietnam, the sentiments can arguably be applied to refugee policies (or the lack of them) in general. Likewise, the concern that there has been general failure,

*"to learn the lessons of the past, a failure to develop an institutional memory and a constant need, in connection to each new situation, to re-invent the wheel"*

(Jones, 1982, p.49)

is also generally applicable.

This brief introduction has illustrated that although Britain has a long history of providing sanctuary for refugees, concerns over the numbers involved have frequently arisen. Furthermore, the perception of refugees as a temporary anomaly has been identified as having a negative effect upon measures designed to assist refugees after their arrival in this country. While this has proved useful, in order to gain a greater understanding of the situation facing refugees in contemporary Britain, a more detailed

consideration of refugee arrivals since the interwar period is needed. However, given that the word refugee, and recognition as being a refugee, is now dependent on formal mechanisms, a basic understanding of the international agreements, which guide countries who consider applications for refugee status, is first required.

## **2.2 The creation of an internationally recognised refugee status**

Although nations, including Britain, have been *de facto* granting asylum for centuries, it was not until the twentieth century that internationally recognised agreements, relating to refugees and the granting of refugee status, were agreed upon. As such, it is only during this century that the concept of refugee and the granting of asylum have fully developed into that which is recognised today. Prior to this, the fate of refugees (for the concept of asylum seekers as a separate entity had not yet developed) lay entirely with the country to which they fled. Each state considered the cases of those who arrived in their territory individually, with no guidance from other countries or outside agencies. Indeed, for many people the act of seeking asylum merely necessitated moving across national borders to a foreign country where they felt safe. This was possible because of the lack of restrictions on international movements,

*"Throughout the nineteenth century there were no serious administrative impediments to the movement of persons between states..... Officials never asked travellers' nationality."*

(Marrus, 1985, p. 92).

While such a situation generally existed, exceptions did occur with regard to certain categories of people. For instance, Jews required 'sponsors' if they wished to resettle in Britain. However, despite an Aliens Act being passed in 1826 there was effectively unrestricted immigration until a further Aliens Act in 1905. The passing of this Act gave immigration officials the right to refuse entry to people who were deemed to be undesirable, either because they were deemed unable to support themselves and their families, were infirm or were criminals. However,

*"The principle of political asylum was reaffirmed... and an immigrant could not be refused entry if he could show he had been the subject of political or religious persecution."*

(Layton-Henry, 1992, p.7)

Indeed, for the majority it was only during and after the first world war that administrative restrictions to immigration, in the form of passports, developed. With the introduction of passports, the act of seeking asylum became more complicated and

required formal consideration by the government of the country in which the asylum seeker was requesting sanctuary.

It is however important to recognise that the term refugee was still, at this time, ill-defined and without a formalised meaning<sup>1</sup>. Individuals who fled persecution or who had lost their nationality were not guaranteed protection by any national or governmental body. For this reason, the creation of international agreements regarding the status of refugees, which provided formal guidance as to who were refugees, can be seen to be a significant development towards greater safety for those forced into exile.

### **2.2.1 The first international refugee organisations and the work of Fridtjof Nansen**

The early decades of the twentieth century were characterised by massive flows of refugees within eastern Europe and the surrounding states. Between 1915 and 1923 around 1,000,000 Armenians left Turkish Asia Minor (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1985) and war in the Balkans (1912 - 1913) and the Russian revolution (1917) also forced millions of people to flee their homes. The stress of receiving such huge numbers of people was immense and the sheer size of these involuntary mass migrations can be seen as the catalyst which led to the first international agreements regarding refugees.

In response to their pressurised situation, the leading refugee welfare agencies called a meeting in Geneva in 1921. Here it was decided to ask the League of Nations to appoint a High Commissioner for Russian Refugees. Such an appointee was to be responsible for co-ordinating the entire relief operation for the Russians, the largest group of refugees. The League of Nations responded favourably and on the first of September 1921 Fridtjof Nansen was appointed to the position. He came to be regarded as one of the most influential figures in refugee work and was to win the Nobel Peace Prize (1922) in recognition of his work on behalf of refugees. Writers such as Holborn (1975) and Zarjevski (1988) have credited Nansen with providing the world with a role model of how to treat refugees, and in many ways Nansen can be considered to be the founding father of the movement for an internationally recognised refugee status.

Perhaps Nansen's greatest achievement was the introduction of the 'certificate of identity', or so called 'Nansen Passport' which was issued to stateless persons. This

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<sup>1</sup> Based on popular rather than formal definitions (cf. 1.1) and including those who would now be defined as asylum seekers.

document solved one of the fundamental problems to face refugees, that of the lack of official documentation and representation. The Nansen passport, which was gradually recognised by countries all over the world, entitled refugees to representation and also acted as a travel document allowing its holders to travel across national borders. As such,

*"refugees of specified categories became the possessors of a legal and juridical status. Thus refugees, who were de facto and de jure stateless and without the protection or representation from their native governments, were provided with both by the High Commissioner for Refugees, who acted for them in a quasi-consular capacity."*

(Holborn 1975 p. 10)

Although this document was originally intended solely for Russian refugees, it was quickly extended to other groups such as the Armenians in 1924. However the world's response to refugees was to deal with each group separately and the fact that Nansen's position was as High Commissioner for Russian Refugees is indicative of this. Thus although refugees from certain conflicts could receive an internationally recognised status, and therefore receive protection, such an option was not available to the majority of people who were forced to flee persecution. Each group of refugees was seen as a separate problem, which only when it reached a critical level, was deemed to require a distinct solution.

Nansen died in 1930 but his work was continued in an office which took his name. In 1933, the Nansen Office drafted a convention relating to the international status of refugees. This was ratified by eight states and was seen as

*"a praiseworthy effort to continue Nansen's quest for a system of international protection for refugees."*

(Zarjevski, 1988 p.6.)

By 1933 refugees were beginning to flee from events in Germany and, in response to this new crisis, a separate office was established to assist them - The Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees from Germany<sup>2</sup>. This office therefore continued the tradition of dealing with each refugee crisis as a separate entity. It was not until 1935 that the first attempt to establish a more general refugee organisation occurred. The League of Nations amalgamated the Nansen Office with the Austrian and German Office to create a single Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (OHCR). However this

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<sup>2</sup>This was "later extended to refugees coming from Austria following its annexation by Nazi Germany" (Holborn, 1975, p.14)

new creation retained the limited remit and time constraints of its predecessors. As such, it was not a general office for refugees, but rather, a combined office for just two groups of refugees - the Russians and those fleeing the Nazi regime in Austria and Germany (Holborn, 1975).

The magnitude of events surrounding World War Two led to a series of rapid changes in the organisations which had been established to deal with refugees. While at the start of the war there were

*“more than one million refugees in various parts of Europe and Asia .... At the beginning of 1946, it was estimated that there were close to two million persons who had to be considered as refugees.”*

(Holborn, 1975, p.23 and p.26)

With such numbers it was hardly surprising that existing organisations were unable to cope. The sheer volume of numbers along with the ending of the League of Nations in 1946 led to the closure of the OHCR. Care of refugees was thereafter undertaken by the Inter-Governmental Committee on Refugees (IGCR), an organisation which had been established in 1938 with the specific purpose of facilitating

*“the exodus of refugees from Germany and Austria, and to seek resettlement for them.”*

(Holborn, 1975, p.18)

With the closure of the OHCR, IGCR's remit was extended rapidly, although its role as the primary organisation caring for refugees was to last only six months. In July 1947, the United Nations (UN) established the International Refugee Organisation (IRO)

*“as a non-permanent Specialised Agency of the UN.”*

(Holborn, 1975, p.29)

IRO superseded all previous refugee organisations and took responsibility for all aspects of the refugee process on a world wide scale - determination of status, care and resettlement or repatriation. Yet, despite being a UN agency, IRO was supported by only eighteen of the fifty-four UN member states and, as with previous refugee organisations, was a temporary creation. Within this context, despite commendable efforts, IRO was

*“unable to fulfil its task in the allotted period”*

(Holborn, 1975, p. 5)

and the eighteen contributing states felt unable to support the needs of refugees alone. In response, the UN referred the issue of a further international refugee organisation to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which in turn, initiated the establishment of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in January 1951.

Although again originally created for a limited period, just three years, UNHCR was later given an indefinite life span and became the first permanent international refugee organisation.

### 2.2.2 The United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees

One of the first actions of the newly formed UNHCR was to set about creating a formal definition of who should be recognised as a refugee. The United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (UNCRSR) was signed on July 28, 1951 and became the basis by which countries grant asylum today. The convention recognises as a refugee, individuals who have been recognised under any previous agreements, the International Refugee Organisation, or

*"any other person who is outside the country of his nationality, or if he has no nationality, the country of his former habitual residence, because he has or had fear of persecution by reason of his race, religion, nationality, or political opinion and is unable, or because of such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of the government of his nationality, or if he has no nationality, to return to the country of his former habitual residence."*

(Statute of UNHCR 11,

6b)

This definition effectively embodied previous measures which had been used to grant asylum in the preceding years. One crucial point is the importance placed on the fact that a refugee has suffered (or fears) personal persecution. Thus individuals who flee from their home countries because of generalised disturbances, be they of political, racial, or religious origin, are not automatically covered by the UNCRSR. They have to prove that persecution (actual or the risk of) has been personal.

While the statute continues to act as the general criterion by which individuals are recognised as refugees today, the UNCRSR itself had a number of significant limitations. Firstly, the Convention limited consideration to those individuals who had become refugees in Europe as a result of the Second World War<sup>3</sup>. Thus the tradition of seeing refugees as a temporary problem resulting from specific events continued.

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<sup>3</sup>Although individuals fleeing the Hungarian revolution in 1956 were seen as fleeing a situation that arose directly out of the events of the second world war and so were consequently recognised under the convention

Secondly, although the UNCRSR provided a definition of a refugee, countries which signed it were not legally bound to grant asylum to individuals who fitted the criteria laid down within the convention. For the ability to grant asylum

*"remains entirely the prerogative of governments."*

(Zarjevski, 1988 p.9)

Thus the strength of the UNCRSR relied wholly upon nations choosing to adhere to its principles. The UNHCR could then, and can now, only explicitly recommend that a person is granted refugee status. If a country is unwilling to do so, the UNHCR lacks the power to enforce its opinion.

Thirdly, in addition to only advising who should be recognised as a refugee, the UNCRSR provides no guidance as to the procedures which should be used when assessing claims for refugee status. This has resulted in a wide variety of procedures being adopted (between countries), frequently based on divergent interpretations of the convention. Thus, whether an individual is recognised as a refugee or not is, to a significant degree, based upon WHERE they apply for asylum, rather than solely upon the validity of their claim to have been (or the fear that they will be) persecuted.

While the latter two limitations remain in place today, the geographic and time limits of the UNCRSR were removed with the signing of the Bellagio Protocol on January 31, 1967. With the backing of the High Commissioner, the General Assembly of the UN accepted this Protocol, thus extending the possibility of Convention refugee status to individuals outside Europe and to those fleeing persecution from events after January 1951<sup>4</sup>. As such it has been argued that

*"the effect of the Protocol was to make the Convention a truly universal Magna Carta for refugees in all places and at all times."*

(Holborn, 1975, p.512).

However, while the Protocol undoubtedly increases the number of people who are eligible to apply for refugee status, nothing has been done to prevent nations which signed the Convention and Protocol from choosing to ignore the advice of the UNHCR. Additionally, guidance regarding how to process claims for refugee status has not been forthcoming from the UNHCR. Thus while individuals who have fled events after World War Two, and from places beyond Europe, can now apply to be recognised as refugees,

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<sup>4</sup>Under the UNCRSR, this had been the cut off date for determining if events were directly related to the second world war.

their fate still remains within the hands of the governments to which they apply for asylum.

### **2.3 Refugees in Britain since the inter-war period.**

The examination of the international agreements which guide Britain's policy towards the recognition of refugees goes some way to providing a context for a study of refugees in Britain. However, much can also be gained from an historical understanding of refugee arrivals since the interwar period. Such a historical context provides information on the backgrounds of refugees from various countries, and also helps to explain the British response to successive groups of arrivals. However, although the focus remains on refugees, any discussion of the period surrounding their arrival will, by necessity, involve a discussion of the asylum-seeking stage of the process. This is particularly true with regard to those who apply for asylum on or after arrival<sup>5</sup>. For this reason, this section of the chapter deals with both refugees and those applying for refugee status (asylum-seekers). It should also be noted that this review is not intended to be exhaustive, but instead provides a general overview.

#### **2.3.1 The major groups of refugees in this period**

Following the first world war, the movement of refugees to Britain occurred primarily as a result of the rise of Nazi and Fascist governments in Europe. Holmes identifies that

*"Europe witnessed a remarkable procession of refugees attempting to escape persecution, or governments which they found uncongenial"*

at this time and that

*"This movement was particularly a feature of the 1930's."*

(Holmes, 1988 p.116)

Indeed, the mid 1930's saw the arrival of refugees from Fascist rule in Italy and the civil war in Spain, while Britain had earlier given refuge to some of the estimated 1 million White Russians who fled the 1917 revolution in their country (Holmes, 1988). Following the rise of Nazi rule and domination in Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia, some 56,000 individuals (many of whom were Jewish) fled to Britain between 1933 and 1939.

The outset of the second world war itself saw the arrival of a further 100,000 refugees who fled the conflict on the European mainland. The nationalities of these refugees

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<sup>5</sup>Who after recognition of their refugee status are known as spontaneous refugees.

reflected those countries that fell to Nazi domination and included Norwegians, French, Danes and Belgians (Srinivasan, 1994). In addition, a large number of Poles also found sanctuary in Britain. Until 1940, the Polish government in exile and a large number of Polish troops were based in France, however with the imminent fall of France, General Wladyslaw Sikorski arranged for the Poles evacuation to Britain. This first large scale Polish arrival was soon joined by a contingent of 108,000 men who had sought safety in Russia following the German occupation of their country, but by 1941 were under threat once more (Holmes, 1988).

The reception that the refugees received in the UK was mixed, and was undoubtedly influenced by the fear of foreigners which the British government's policy of internment (for certain categories of foreign nationals) helped spread. In addition, with the full horrors of the Holocaust not yet known, there were many in Britain who were influenced by the anti-Semitic movements on the continent. A Mass Observation report on "Public Feeling about Aliens" in April 1940 concluded that there had been

*"a considerable increase of antagonism against the recently arrived Jews and refugees in particular"*

and noted that

**"IT IS BECOMING THE SOCIALLY DONE THING TO BE ANTI-REFUGEE".** *(original emphasis)*

(Quoted in Holmes, 1988 p, 187).

However, following the end of the war, with the revelations of Nazi atrocities and the need for reconstruction in the UK, Britain welcomed a considerable number of immigrants from amongst those who had become refugees on the European mainland. Although not strictly refugees, but rather persons displaced by the events of the war, the arrival of approximately 84,000 European Volunteer Workers between 1946 and 1949 (Levin, 1981) illustrates a shift away from the paranoia about foreigners that had helped to sustain anti-refugee feelings during the course of the war.

With the end of the war and the establishment of Soviet backed regimes in much of eastern Europe, it was perhaps unsurprising that many of those who had sought refuge in Britain were unwilling to return home. Arguably the largest portion were the Polish troops who had joined the Polish Government in Exile in London. By 1946 it was realised that the Poles were determined to remain in Britain and a decision was taken to form a Polish Resettlement Corps as a means to assisting in the transition to civilian life.

By 1949, when the Corps was disbanded, it had assisted some 108,000 individuals (Sword, 1988).

As a result of the same extension of Soviet influence, refugees reaching Britain during the 1950's and 1960's were predominantly individuals fleeing communism. Given the cold war climate at the time, and the buoyant economic conditions in Britain, these refugees and other immigrants were welcomed for their economic contribution (Layton-Henry, 1992). Following the death of Stalin in 1953 and the brutal Soviet suppression of the popular uprising in Hungary in 1956, 200,000 or two per cent of the Hungarian population fled the country (Marrus, 1985). Of these, approximately 20,000 found their way to Britain and about seventy per cent settled permanently (Srinivasan, 1994). Collating information from a number of sources and publications, Srinivasan concludes that

*"The Hungarians are seen as illustrative of a group which has been successful in terms of being housed and employed. They have found their way into mainstream society and today are effectively invisible."*

(Srinivasan, 1994, p. 4)

How much this success was due to their demographic characteristics (mainly young single men), and how much to their common European heritage is debatable, but it is clear that the Hungarians were not generally subject to the anti-refugee feelings that flourished during the war. A similar experience faced the 5,000 or so Czechoslovak citizens who made their way to Britain following the invasion of their country by Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops in August 1968 (Bravo, 1995). Both these groups had little difficulty in gaining refugee status from the British government. In the case of the Hungarians, their flight was seen (possibly for political reasons) to have been precipitated by events of the second world war and thus they were recognised under the UNCRSR; while the Czechs were amongst the first group of asylum-seekers to benefit from the removal of the time and location constraints of the Convention with the signing of the Bellagio Protocol in 1967.

The 1970's saw the arrival of three main groups of refugees, whose arrival and integration into British life was to prove much more problematic. This was due, in part, to their origins outside Europe and the worsening economic conditions in Britain at the time. On the fourth of July 1972 Idi Amin ordered the expulsion, within 90 days, of all Asians who did not have Ugandan citizenship, his aim was to Africanise Uganda (Dalglish, 1989). The majority of people affected by this decree held British passports

by virtue of their family origins in India, and thus the British government was obliged to accept them for resettlement. Agreements were reached with both India and Canada that some of those forced into exile<sup>6</sup> should go there, but the majority, approximately 28,000 came to Britain. All those destined for Britain arrived during the months of September, October and November in 1972. Although holding British passports, problems with resettlement were larger than had been anticipated. For example, of those who settled in Slough and Wandsworth, twenty per cent could not speak English and only twenty-one per cent retained their Ugandan employment classification when they registered with the employment offices. Indeed the employment offices designated one in three for unskilled factory work (Kuepper et al , 1975).

The second group of refugees to arrive during the 1970's were Chileans fleeing the military dictatorship and right wing government of General Pinochet. Approximately 3,000 individuals were granted refugee status between 1973 and 1979, many of whom initially stayed in reception camps (Bravo, 1995; Srinivasan, 1994). While this group was somewhat smaller than the other refugee groups to arrive during the 1970's, their situation was also different in that, in the long term, at least one third of the arrivals eventually returned to Chile.

Finally, the end of the decade saw the beginnings of the 'boat people' crisis in South East Asia. Although the situation in Vietnam had been difficult for some time, particularly following the fall of Saigon in 1975, it was only when the number of people leaving the country increased dramatically in 1979 (following border skirmishes with China and actions of the Vietnamese government to encourage the ethnic Chinese population to leave) that the international community took steps to deal with the problem in an organised manner. In July 1979 a conference was held in Geneva, at which pledges to resettle 260,000 refugees from Vietnam, to third countries were obtained. At this conference the concept of quota's was agreed upon, whereby instead of individually assessed refugee status, those fleeing Vietnam were granted refugee status *en bloc*. Britain agreed to take a "quota" of 10,000 individuals, while the US, France, Australia and Canada also agreed to take large numbers. This British figure eventually became around 22-24,000 including family reunification and natural increase (Dalglish, 1989, Jones, 1982).

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<sup>6</sup> Although widely described as refugees, the Ugandan Asians were not refugees in a legal sense. However, they do fall within popular definitions of "refugee".

The British involvement in the Geneva conferences and subsequent agreement to accept large numbers of refugees from Vietnam, was in a large part linked to the pressure which Hong Kong found itself under. As a British colony, the government was concerned about the huge numbers of refugees who were arriving in Hong Kong. Given the extremely high population density in Hong Kong, the potential for the territory to absorb the arriving refugees was negligible and as such, the only long term solutions open were the return of the refugees to Vietnam or their resettlement in third countries. Since the situation in Vietnam made the former seem highly unlikely<sup>7</sup> resettlement was the option promoted by Britain. Prior to the Geneva agreement Britain had accepted small numbers of refugees who had been rescued at sea by British registered vessels; however following the Geneva agreement new procedures for selecting individuals from the camps in South East Asia were implemented,

*"The United Kingdom's selection criteria were humanely drawn; making only three requirements:*

- (1) that the refugees wished to come to Britain;*
- (2) that in the opinion of the Voluntary agencies it would be possible for them to settle;*
- (3) that the refugees were not personally unacceptable.*

*Very few people who wished to come to the United Kingdom were rejected."*

(Dalglish, 1989, pp. 35-36)

Refugee arrivals in the 1980's were characterised by both their complexity and diversity. The range of countries from which refugees and asylum seekers arrived increased dramatically, with people fleeing from such diverse countries as Ghana and Poland. Between 1980 and 1987 some 79.5% of those seeking asylum in Britain arrived from just seven countries: Iran, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Poland, Ghana, Ethiopia and Uganda (Srinivasan, 1994). The situations that caused refugees to flee ranged from all-out war between Iran and Iraq, civil war between Tamil separatists and the Sinhalese government in Sri Lanka (Mayne, 1991) to political and religious persecution in Poland which only subsided after political changes in 1989 (UNHCR, 1997). The arrival of these refugees was complicated by the fact that they were not received under government quota programmes, but represented the start of the rapid explosion in

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<sup>7</sup> In all it is thought that around one million Vietnamese people (half of them ethnically Chinese) left Vietnam (Kurian, 1987).

spontaneous<sup>8</sup> arrivals that occurred at the end of the 1980's. In 1987 just 5,200 people applied for refugee status, but after a slight rise in 1988 (to 5,700), the numbers seeking asylum rose dramatically, reaching 16,500 in 1989, 30,000 in 1990 and 57,700 in 1991 (Heisler and Layton-Henry, 1993). Although uncertain, this may have been linked to political insecurity caused by the fall of communism around the world.

Although numbers applying for asylum fell in the 1990's, asylum seekers of varying nationalities continued to arrive in large numbers. For instance, around 24,500 people applied for asylum in 1992 alone (Binyon, 1993). In addition to arrivals from the developing world, people fleeing the civil war that has followed the break up of the former Yugoslavia began to reach Britain in increasing numbers. While many of these people arrived of their own accord, a small number have been admitted under a quota scheme operated by the British government (Binyon, 1993). Those admitted under this scheme receive assistance from the Refugee Council, while those who arrived alone or on privately organised convoys were not entitled to such assistance and had to make independent claims for asylum.

Although the above narrative is useful, in that it provides an introduction to contemporary refugees in Britain, greater contextual understanding can be gained from a consideration of the trends which these examples illustrate. The trends which can be identified are those of shifts in the balance between quota and spontaneous refugees; and changes in the countries of origins of the asylum seekers and refugees. Following a discussion of these, a brief consideration of their consequences, in the form of recent European Union responses, will occur.

### **2.3.2 Trends between quota and spontaneous refugees**

As already discussed, not all people arriving in Britain already held refugees status. Although many, such as the Vietnamese and some Bosnians, entered Britain as quota refugees, many more arrive under other categories and simply apply for asylum on or after entering Britain. These are the asylum seekers who, if granted asylum, become known as spontaneous refugees. Whether a person is a quota or spontaneous refugee has profound implications for their resettlement in this country, and the relative numbers of each category arriving can also be seen to have had an impact on the attitude of the

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<sup>8</sup>cf. Footnote 5

British government. It should however be noted that the two categories of spontaneous and quota refugees are not legally distinguished.

Quota refugees usually receive much more assistance on arrival in this country, since their arrival has been expected and can therefore be planned for. Although it would be wrong to suggest that adequate planning always takes place, the government is responsible for agreeing to accept quota refugees and they then know how many individuals to expect and when. Thus in the case of Vietnamese, Ugandan and some Bosnian refugees, knowledge of their impending arrival allowed the government to initiate programmes to assist them. One common feature has been the government's reliance on voluntary organisations to implement reception and resettlement programmes. In the case of the Ugandan Asians, the Ugandan Resettlement Board was established, while the refugees from Vietnam were cared for by The Ockenden Venture, Save the Children and the British Council for Aid to Refugees (BCAR) under the auspices of the Joint Committee for Refugees from Vietnam (Dalglish, 1989). The voluntary organisations involved in these operations and others take primary responsibility for housing the refugees on arrival and for helping them make the initial steps towards adapting to life in Britain, for instance learning English. While the success of such programmes has been questioned (e.g. Jones, 1982) the precedent for placing the burden of caring for refugees on voluntary organisations dates back to at least the interwar period.

During the interwar period, Britain operated a strict immigration policy that extended to those seeking asylum. Jewish refugees fleeing from the Nazi regimes in Europe could only enter this country after the British Jewish community undertook to cover all the costs and practicalities involved in assisting their resettlement<sup>9</sup>. As such, although not a quota in the traditional sense, the numbers able to enter Britain were strictly limited and it was not until 1938, in response to the events of the Reichskristallnacht, that Britain relaxed its immigration controls on those seeking asylum (Marrus, 1985). This reliance on the existing Jewish community to care for the refugees set the precedent by which successive groups of refugees accepted under quota agreements were to be cared for by voluntary organisations rather than the government itself.

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<sup>9</sup>A similar system had operated in the late nineteenth century when Jews required a 'sponsor' to gain entry to Britain.

Spontaneous refugees are those individuals who apply for asylum on arrival in Britain (and subsequently receive refugee status) and those who enter the country as, for instance, a tourist or visitor and subsequently ask for (and gain) refugee status. While this method of gaining refugee status predates quota mechanisms, in the years following the Second World War the numbers of people gaining refugee status via spontaneous applications were relatively small. Moreover, the majority of those applying were fleeing communist regimes and were therefore politically acceptable to the British government and people. As a result of this, applications for refugee status were generally processed quickly and without much fuss.

In comparison, the 1980's experienced a massive increase in the number of spontaneous applications for refugee status and this led to the virtual breakdown of the asylum processing system, with many individuals having to wait years for a decision (British Refugee Council, 1987; Bravo, 1995). As a result, the term asylum-seeker came into more common usage. Although the definition of asylum-seeker<sup>10</sup> remained static, previously it had been a highly transitory state which was largely unrecognised in everyday discourse. However with the period of asylum-seeking becoming longer, both the government and the public came to view asylum-seekers as a distinct group. Additionally, since asylum-seekers are subject to considerable restrictions, delays in determining their right to refugee status caused considerable distress for the individuals concerned. For the government, the crisis proved a vivid reminder that they had no control over the number of people applying for asylum in this manner.

The rapid increase in the number of spontaneous refugees can therefore, it is hypothesised, be seen as a driving force behind moves to tighten access to the determination process<sup>11</sup>. These moves must be viewed within the context of increasing numbers of asylum-seekers receiving negative decisions concerning their applications for refugee status. To a significant degree, these rejections are explained (and it is argued, were caused) by the view that most asylum-seekers are merely economically motivated migrants who are attempting to circumvent immigration laws. Undoubtedly, this is the view presented by the government and much of the media (Editorial, 1991; Butt, 1991). Yet while the government rejects the claims of most applicants, during the early 1990's

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<sup>10</sup>Someone who has made an application for refugee status

<sup>11</sup>This is discussed in 2.3.4

up to 65% of applicants<sup>12</sup> (Butt, 1991) were granted Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR). This perhaps indicates a recognition of the humanitarian needs of such applicants, for ELR status is a discretionary, non codified mechanism, used by the Government when

*“refugee status is not granted but the Home Office believes it would be wrong to force the person to return at the time.... [ELR] is given either because of the general situation in a country, or on an individual basis, normally for a year at first and then for two periods of three years. The person may apply for settlement after seven years of exceptional leave and this is normally granted.”*

(Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, 1993, p. 21-22)

As such it represents a kind of *de facto* rather than *de jure* refugee status.

The shift away from quota refugees is important since they arguably have an advantage over spontaneous refugees. As they are politically acceptable to the British government, evident from the fact that they have been admitted to Britain *en bloc*, assistance is more forthcoming. Additionally, as their refugee status has already been determined, the task of adjusting to life in Britain can begin immediately upon arrival and is often aided by the camaraderie that exists with fellow refugees. Spontaneous refugees, however, face delays in the recognition of their legitimate refugee status by virtue of having to undergo the refugee determination process after arrival in the country. Furthermore, since they arrive from many countries in an unorganised manner, organisations specifically designed to aid their resettlement rarely, or have time to, develop<sup>13</sup>. Since the government relies on voluntary organisations to deliver services to refugees, and only provides money to support quota refugees, the voluntary organisations do not have the resources available to provide similar services for spontaneous refugees.

### **2.3.3 Shifts from an East to West movement to a South to North movement**

Whereas the 1980's can be seen to be a watershed regarding the shift towards spontaneous refugees, the 1970's was the decade which first indicated a shift in the source nations for refugees entering this country. Prior to the 1970's the vast majority of refugees seeking to enter Britain originated in Europe, and as such, largely had a similar culture and ethnic identity to much of the indigenous population. However, during the late 1970's the arrival of Chilean, Vietnamese and Ugandan refugees indicated a shift

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<sup>12</sup>This figure has since dropped significantly

<sup>13</sup>Although where an existing community from the country of origin is present community organisations may have already developed. In such circumstances they often offer support to the refugees.

away from the traditional East to West movements that had previously dominated refugee movements, towards a South to North<sup>14</sup> movement which was to become one of the major features of refugee movements in subsequent decades. Although the refugee arrivals of the 1970's were characterised by quota refugees, the 1980's saw a massive upsurge in spontaneous refugees from the nations of the South.

Aided by cheap airfares (Fielding, 1994) and the spread of mass media, which facilitated an awareness of the North as a possible destination, people fleeing persecution in the South were for the first time able to consider seeking safety not merely on an international scale but at an intercontinental scale. Given that such asylum-seekers arrived spontaneously, and that their culture and ethnic identity was vastly different to much of the indigenous population of Britain, such people faced serious difficulties. On arrival, they rarely received assistance in an organised manner, and faced a long wait while their status was determined. Many lacked basic skills in English and given that some were illiterate in their own languages, or spoke even pre-literate languages, difficulties in learning English abounded (Dalglish, 1989). In addition to this, given the general anti-immigrant laws and rhetoric being undertaken in Britain, these individuals (be they refugees, asylum-seekers or those with ELR) also frequently faced racist abuse.

Finally, with the government's declared opinion that the majority of asylum seekers are merely economic migrants (Holmes, 1988), the fact that the majority of the asylum-seekers now arrive from developing countries is used to support this viewpoint. Scare tactics in the media and elsewhere (Layton-Henry, 1992) suggest that with the anticipated sustained population pressure in the nations of the South, and the economic gap between the nations of the North and South, ever increasing numbers of people will want to migrate to the nations of the North, including Britain. Given that legitimate means of labour immigration have been halted, the insinuation is that seeking asylum has become the preferred means of attempting to bypass restrictions. While, it may be true that many asylum-seekers do come from countries that are undoubtedly poorer than Britain, the government often conveniently fails to remember that many of these countries are in the grip of civil war, or similar disturbance. However, it is worth noting that the UNCRSR decrees that refugee status is only applicable if an individual has suffered, or fears, personal persecution. Thus flight from a war-torn country is, not in

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<sup>14</sup> cf. Chapter 1 footnote 5

itself, a criterion on which refugee status can be granted<sup>15</sup>. However, many individuals from such war-torn countries may well have a valid claim, having personal experience, or fear, of persecution (Mayne, 1991).

While this trend for the majority of asylum-seekers to come from the countries of the South continues today, a small, though significant development in the last few years has been the continuation of a movement from eastern Europe towards all member states of the European Union (EU). Although Britain has received fewer requests for asylum than other member states (particularly Germany), the dissolution of the iron curtain has facilitated a massive increase in the numbers of people attempting to leave the ex-communist states (Walker, 1993). In response to this, and more generalised increases in asylum requests, in common with other European countries, Britain has developed a list of countries, including many of the ex-communist states, as well as African countries, which it considers to be "safe". These are countries in which persecution is not deemed to be rife, and thus from which individuals will not be recognised as refugees (Levin, 1995). This is just one of many European Union wide measures to be adopted.

#### **2.4 European Union responses to increased requests for asylum**

While Britain has undoubtedly responded to the shifts towards spontaneous asylum-seekers and those fleeing the nations of the South by tightening refugee determination procedures, a broader consideration of European Union (EU) responses is also deemed appropriate here. As part of the EU, Britain is both influenced by, and contributes to, the debate concerning the rise in applications for refugee status across Europe. Moreover, while the EU's responses to rising claims for refugee status have primarily affected asylum-seekers, the resulting political and media rhetoric arguably affects the reception which recognised refugees receive.

Britain became a member of the European Union<sup>16</sup> on the first of January 1973. While refugee matters were not particularly pertinent during the early years of Britain's membership of the Union, with the massive increase in asylum claims which occurred in the latter part of the 1980's, the period came to be seen as the

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<sup>15</sup>Though it should be noted that quota refugee status is at odds with this, since it is not necessarily determined on an individual basis.

<sup>16</sup> Then known as the Common Market

*"decade of the refugee. [And] Asylum-seekers remain at the top of the European political agenda in the early 1990's."*

(King, 1994, p. 237)

Given that the granting of refugee status remains an issue for individual countries, and not the UNHCR, institutions which influence countries' attitudes are important. For Britain, the EU is one such institution. As such, EU measures and ideas regarding asylum and refugee issues have become increasingly important, and since its response can be interpreted to have become more severe, an awareness of these measures is indispensable. While an exhaustive consideration of all the relevant measures is not offered here, the intention is merely to introduce a number of measures as illustrations of the foremost concerns of the EU regarding asylum seekers and refugees. These concerns are concisely expressed by Demmett,

*"the British Government is not so far out of line with the other eleven governments, who are all taking the line that many asylum-seekers are economic migrants in disguise and that entry for asylum has somehow to be limited without breaching the obligations countries have undertaken in subscribing to the UN Convention on Refugees."*

(Demmett, 1994 p.150)

How far the governments are succeeding in this aim is contestable.

One of the enduring features of the EU has been the gradual abolition of internal borders between member states. As these ideas, and the measures<sup>17</sup> which implement them, have progressed, concern has grown that such freedom of movement could have profound implications for the asylum process. Given that the member states of the Union largely perceive asylum-seekers as economic migrants attempting to evade immigration laws, this concern is focused in two main areas. Firstly, asylum seekers would be able to lodge successive asylum requests in more than one of the member states, and thus effectively delay their removal from the common area if they received a negative decision. Secondly, since there is no harmonisation of interpretations of the UNHCR Convention between the member states, asylum seekers could effectively practise

*"Asylum-shopping"*

(Fernhout, 1993, p. 499)

in order to try and gain admittance to those member states with more liberal admittance criteria or the most generous allowances for asylum seekers and recognised refugees.

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<sup>17</sup> E.g. The Schengen Agreement abolished borders between France, Germany and the Benelux countries. Certain other members of the EU are now committed to joining the agreement.

In response to these perceived difficulties, in the run up to the abolition of internal borders, the European Union brought into operation a number of mechanisms aimed at determining which of the member states would be responsible for asylum claims and at limiting the number of asylum seekers reaching Europe. In effect the aim has been to compensate for the discontinuance of internal border by strengthening external ones, a strategy which has come to be known as 'Fortress Europe' (Gordon, 1989). One of the mechanisms implemented was the Dublin Convention of 15 June 1990. This convention resembled, and in many ways can be considered to be an extension of, the Schengen Agreement of 1985 (Fernhout, 1993). It contained

*"provisions on control at the outer frontiers, a common visa policy, carriers' sanctions, responsibility for dealing with requests for asylum, co-operation by police forces and mutual juridical co-operation and, finally, the mutual exchange of information within the framework of the Schengen Information System (SIS)."*

(Fernhout, 1993, p. 492)

These measures were aimed both at reducing the numbers of people seeking asylum within the Schengen area, and determining which of the states was responsible for individuals, who could make only a single claim for asylum within the common area. The Dublin Convention, while not being so comprehensive (it relates merely to determining which country is responsible for dealing with requests for asylum) is more complete in that it encompasses the whole of the European Union and not just the Schengen nations. Under the terms of the Dublin agreement, individuals can make a claim for asylum in only one member state of the European Union. Which state this is, is determined under a variety of criteria specified in the convention. This ensures that firstly, asylum seekers can not move from one member state to another in succession, making repeated claims for asylum, and that secondly, the situation where no country would accept responsibility for processing a claim could not arise. Where such situations did arise, refugees had become known as "refugees in orbit"<sup>18</sup>, a term which illustrated their status outside normal determination procedures.

In addition to the measures introduced under the terms of the Dublin Convention, many countries in the Union independently introduced some of those measures identified in the Schengen agreement, specifically those which aim to reduce the number of people seeking asylum. For instance, as early as 1987 Britain passed the Immigration (Carriers'

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<sup>18</sup> Article 29 (1) SIA; Article 3 (1) Dublin Convention

Liability) Act which exacts a monetary penalty of £2,000 per passenger from airlines that carry passengers who don't hold proper documentation for entry to Britain. As such, this measure illustrates how Britain has responded to internal political pressures ahead of the EU wide adoption of similar measures.

The Carriers' Liability Act has implications for asylum seekers, who by the very virtue of their need to flee persecution may have to travel without proper documentation. UNHCR themselves have expressed concern over this, stating that

*"in most cases a person fleeing from persecution will have arrived without the barest necessities, and very frequently even without personal documents"*

(UNHCR Handbook, 1988, para 196)

This situation is causing concern amongst both airlines (who face the fines) and refugee organisations (who fear that genuine refugees are prevented from entering the UK by airline staff seeking to avoid fines). Indeed it should be noted that the implementation of this legislation has particular significance in a British context, given that unlike other EU countries (except Ireland), carriers are generally involved in the arrival of individuals to this country.

The Immigration (Carrier' Liability) Act, along with the placing of visa requirements on nationals of countries from which large numbers of asylum-seekers come (e.g. Sri Lanka, Bosnia), are two of the ways in which Britain has adopted procedures that are against the spirit of the UNHCR convention. Thus, while nominally adhering to the ideas behind the UNHCR Convention, Britain has been introducing measures that contradict the nature of the agreement and act as barriers for individuals who wish to seek asylum in Britain. In particular the act of spontaneously seeking asylum in Britain has become much more difficult. Indeed, although not referred to specifically, Britain can confidently be included within the many states which the UNHCR criticised for adopting measures

*" which result in the denial of admission and hindering of access to procedures for determination of status. .... Visa regimes and stricter passport requirements have proliferated, with nationals of countries from which refugees regularly come, often being specific targets of these measures. Entry and access to full procedures has as a result become very much a function of prior authorisation, with discretion to allow entry on the basis of need considerably curtailed by visa enforcement mechanisms such as indiscriminate sanctioning of airlines for carrying improperly documented passengers. "*

(UNHCR, 1990, p3)

These two examples illustrate how membership of the European Union has had an impact on Britain's treatment of asylum-seekers both in a direct manner, through the signing of the Dublin Convention, and in an indirect manner, through the adoption of the Carriers' Liability Act which had its origins in the Schengen Agreement. Although Britain does not ascribe to the Schengen Agreement, and thus was not obliged to adopt this latter piece of legislation, the passing of the Act illustrates how ideas about refugees and asylum-seekers are becoming harmonised across the EU. With continuing moves towards a more united Europe, it would be reasonable to expect that events in Brussels will continue to influence the way in which Britain deals with requests for asylum and how British initiated measures may spread to other EU nations. The danger is, given that

*"the climate of Europe is against both a liberal European and individual state policy on asylum seekers and refugees"*

(Randall, 1994, pp. 230)

the adoption of additional mechanisms, which further undermine the spirit of the UNHCR agreements, is likely.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an introduction to refugees in a British context. The enduring nature of refugee crisis' has been illustrated, refuting the prevailing popular perception of refugees as a temporary phenomenon. In this manner, the importance of research and projects which focus on informing policies to deal with future influxes of refugees is demonstrated. Moreover, the importance of considering the experiences of refugees from the nations of the South is supported.

Beyond this, the discussion of the history of refugee movements into this country provides an introduction as to the refugee population of contemporary Britain, while the consideration of European reactions illustrates how refugees and asylum-seekers are perceived and the repercussion on both policy and public thinking. Building on this broad context, chapter three continues to consider refugees in general, but focuses attention on one particular element of the lives of refugees living in Britain. This focus concerns refugee labour force experiences, the subject which is the central concern of this thesis.

**Chapter Three**  
**The Labour Force Experiences of Refugees**

# The labour force experiences of refugees

## 3.1 Introduction

By providing a synopsis and critical review of refugee movements into Britain, chapter two introduced the reader to the scope, scale and nature of refugee settlement in this country. The aim of this, and subsequent chapters, is to explore one particular aspect of this settlement, namely the employment experiences of refugees who find themselves living in Britain. While the primary research conducted for this thesis will be introduced later, this chapter utilises a range of existing literature to introduce aspects and issues pertinent to a study of the employment experiences of refugees. Most notably, the aim is to inform the primary research through the development of a contextual and conceptual understanding of the subject.

As noted, the focus of this chapter, and the thesis in general, is the employment experiences of refugees. As a starting point, it is clearly necessary to justify such an emphasis. With regard to all individuals, and not just refugees, employment can be understood to play a crucial part in determining an individual's life experience. This occurs via the psychological meaning which is attached to employment. Indeed,

*“the essential psychological feature of the work role is that it locates the individual in a network of relationships with others: in his [her] work role he [she] has a defined place and function within a social system.”*

(Kelvin and Jarrett, 1985, p. 56).

Given this, employment can be understood to be fundamental to an individual's comprehension and understanding of the place he/she occupies in society<sup>1</sup>. It allows the individual to feel a valid and contributing member of their society and bestows an identity. As such, employment impacts upon both self perception and the perception of the individual by others.

With specific reference to refugees, employment has been identified as a key to successful resettlement (Phillips, 1989). Its central role in assisting refugees to adapt to life in a new country has been testified as extending beyond monetary returns which allow an individual to support themselves, to acting as a source of self-esteem and a reference point through which to re-establish an identity. As Dr Bui Nanh Ngui states,

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<sup>1</sup> It is recognised that non-paid work, for instance within the home or via voluntary work, may also perform a similar function. However, this research only considers employment (paid and voluntary) outside of the home.

*"Without a job you are nothing. This is true for everyone but more for refugees."*

(Von Bethlenfalvy, 1987 p. 446).

For refugees who have been stripped of their nationality, their livelihood, their friends, their home and in many cases their family, the overall impact can be understood to include a loss of identity. Thus, the ability to re-establish themselves through employment is seen to be crucial to a successful experience of resettlement. Employment can give the refugee a structure of relationships in which to insert themselves and can allow the re-establishment of an identity based upon their work role. Moreover, working reduces the chances of refugees (as individuals and a group) being perceived by both politicians and the public as 'spongers', those who rely on the state for all their needs. Instead, employment allows them to be seen to be making a contribution to this country.

In the light of this, it is unsurprising that a consideration of the employment experiences of refugees is seen by many commentators to be vital (British Refugee Council, 1987; Phillips, 1989; Von Bethlenfalvy, 1987; Crewe, 1992a), with a consensus appearing concerning the general lack of scrutiny and inquiry into refugee employment issues. Moreover, there have been many specific calls for additional research in this field. The British Refugee Council (BRC), in its publication "Settling for a Future: proposals for a British policy on refugees" (1987) recognises that there is a need to know

*"much more about Britain's refugee population... where they live, whether they are employed, unemployed or self employed"* (p. 21)

and Phillips (1989) takes this idea one step further by making a call for priority to be given to research into refugee employment and more specifically,

*"what leads to [the] fruitful employment of refugees."* (p. 137).

He also identifies that

*"a basic survey of where refugees are, what education and training they have received and what they are currently doing is important in every locality in which there are significant numbers of refugees."* (p.138).

Srinivasan (1994) continues the theme stating

*"As Field (1985) emphasises, the employment of refugees and the means of helping them in obtaining employment, represents a field where more research is needed. Levels of unemployment, strategies for employment, exploitation of the refugees' available skills through training programmes, are amongst the issues that need to be investigated and the data made available as an aid to policy formulation."* (p.14)

This last comment concerning using data to inform policy is important, since there often appears to be little governmental concern about the employment experiences of refugees when formulating resettlement policies (Dalglish, 1989). Indeed, data on the subject are often scarce (Phillips, 1989) and past policies have been condemned for their lack of consideration of potential employment experiences, instead focusing on housing. While understandable when considering short term needs, this has serious implications for employment experiences and Black et al. (1993) have specifically stated that

*“When resettling future quota refugees the UK government should attempt to match refugee settlement to the geography of economic opportunity rather than to the geography of vacant housing.”*

(p.1).

In common with other commentators (i.e. The British Refugee Council (1987), Phillips (1989) and Srinivasan (1994)), Black et al. (1993) also call for more research and this illustrates the common concern about the lack of material and research relating to refugee employment experiences. Also common to other commentators is a desire to inform future policy with research findings.

In the case of Srinivasan (1994) and Phillips (1989) in particular, although undefined as such, the implicit understanding extends beyond a concern merely for employment experiences, to one which encompasses a broader range of activities, namely training and searching for work. For although commentators and researchers rarely confine themselves to an investigation of employment alone, they normally introduce their work in terms of employment or employment and training experiences. It is argued here, that this presentation of research as relating to employment experiences can be misleading, since for some refugees employment itself is limited, and rather it is the associated activities of unemployment (incorporating searching for work) and / or undertaking vocational and educational training that dominate. If this broader view is accepted, as evidence suggests it should be (e.g. RTEC<sup>2</sup>, 1991), the need for a term which encompasses the elements of employment, unemployment, vocational training, search activities and other activities where the aim is to improve employment chances, becomes evident. The term suggested to fill this role is that of “labour force experiences”.

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<sup>2</sup> RTEC - the Refugee Training and Employment Centre - give figures of 1-35% working; 2-85% training/education and 45-93% unemployed for various refugee groups living in the CLINTEC (*The City and Inner London North Training and Enterprise Council*) area p.8.

The concept of labour force experiences has been developed from work on local labour markets which explains that

*"Of people of working age in any locality, a proportion will be economically active, (that is, in employment or seeking work) and they form the labour force."*

(Hasluck, 1992 p.45).

Building on this concept of the labour force, labour force experiences are deemed to refer to the employment and employment-related (i.e. job-seeking, training for employment and vocational education) experiences of individuals who are in work or seeking it. The term is used throughout the remainder of this thesis. It should also be noted that although specifically developed with reference to the experiences of refugees, labour force experiences is a term that has relevance for the wider population.

### **3.2 The labour force experiences of refugees**

Material relating to refugees in Britain abounds, both in terms of nationality-specific literature focusing on particular refugee communities (e.g. the Polish community by Sword, 1988; Zimbabweans by Connelly, 1979; Chileans by Joly, 1987 etc.) and material relating to specific subjects (e.g. a chronological account of refugee arrivals by Panayi, 1993; refugee children, Finlay and Reynolds 1987 etc.) With such a prolific amount of material available, Srinivasan (1994) provides a welcome summary. With regard to issues concerning refugee labour force experiences, both community-specific and subject-specific literature is of use when attempting to contextualise and conceptualise those experiences.

Much of the available material on refugee labour force experiences consists of reports commissioned by service providers, refugee groups or both. Examples include reports for The British Refugee Council (Agathangelou, 1988; Marshall, 1989 and 1992), various Training and Enterprise Councils (RTEC, 1991 - CLINTEC study), and refugee groups such as the Midlands Vietnamese Refugee Community Association (Tatla, 1990). Given the nature of these reports, primarily for practitioners, the level of conceptualisation of refugee labour force experiences was generally low, with content being dominated by a descriptive approach. While Agathangelou (1988) recognises this, and notably confines himself to description rather than interpretations, elsewhere arguably undue emphasis is placed on a small number of possible explanations for experiences - namely education and skills - at the expense of other possible factors (e.g. Frazer, 1988).

It should however be recognised that Marshall (1992) is an exception to this. He attempts to theorise refugee employment experiences by suggesting that after arrival in a country of settlement, refugees enter various stages of transition as they seek work. These stages are linked to fluctuating levels of morale. His model illustrates that initial disorientation, is replaced by optimism, then disillusionment and depression, before a trigger event will lead to renewed opportunities to re-evaluate their situation. This can then lead to redirection through training which may, or may not be effective in leading to employment for the refugee. Such a credible attempt to engage in theory is, however, rare in commissioned reports.

Beyond this criticism of reliance on description, much of the material appears to have limited relevance beyond its immediate context, with intra-group, temporal and spatial variations in labour force experiences receiving relatively little regard. Specifically, reports commonly refer to either one refugee group in one location (e.g. Ali, 1990 on Kurds in Haringey; Gurbash and Walker, 1991 on Vietnamese in Manchester; and Tamil Information Centre, 1991 on Tamils in Newham) or multiple refugee groups in a single location (e.g. Awiah, 1992 in Haringey; Clark, 1992 in Greenwich; and Benomar, 1987 in Camden). Rarely are past experiences given more than superficial attention.

While the nature of the afore-mentioned reports (as commissioned pieces of work) largely explains their focus on single locations or single groups, their potential to explain what leads to the fruitful employment of refugees is, arguably, circumscribed by their limited conceptual and contextual approach. Having said that, while general refugee literature abounds in Britain, it has been recognised that there is a lack of information and comment on the labour force experiences of refugees, especially in the long term. Indeed, almost all the reports available date from after 1987 when a pivotal conference, (organised by the British Refugee Council and the European Consultation on Refugees and Exiles) on *“Training and employment provision for refugees in Europe”*, was held in Surrey (Hirsch and Siadat, 1988). Therefore the contribution of these reports should not be underestimated. In short they go a considerable way to describing the labour force experiences of refugees, specifically illustrating the low levels of employment.

In addition to reports of research projects which focus on labour force related experiences, many more general research projects into refugees' lives in the UK contain a labour force element. For instance, Bloch, (1994) working in Newham; the Centre for

Inner City Studies (1992) in Lewisham<sup>3</sup> and Walsh, McFarland and Hampton (1994) in Lothian, examined employment and training along with a variety of other matters relating to living in Britain. Moreover, given the lack of government-held information on refugees, it is significant that two recent reports have been published by the Home Office, *Vietnamese refugees since 1982* (Duke and Marshall, 1995) and *The settlement of refugees in Britain* (Carey-Wood, et al., 1995), both of which explore employment, education and training along with other issues. Elsewhere, doctoral research by Hale (1991), alludes to the importance of location in affecting the labour force experiences of refugees, something which has hitherto received little attention.

While certainly adding to the depth of knowledge about refugee labour force experiences, and undoubtedly revealing the situation as one which merits concern, a consideration of these studies reveals a significant problem which is common to much of the literature. While Bloch (1994) examines refugees together with migrants, both Carey-Wood et al. (1995) and Walsh et al. (1994) fail to distinguish between the experiences of asylum seekers and people who have full refugee status. Such an approach has particular significance for labour force experiences given that the laws covering the rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to work are different. In particular, while refugees are not subject to restrictions, many migrants require work permits and asylum seekers are subject to strict rules which can often prevent them from seeking work for at least six months and sometimes longer. In addition to hindering a clearer understanding of refugee labour force experiences, the blurring of the distinction between migrants, those who have refugee status and those who await a decision regarding their application for asylum, has far reaching implications. The prevailing view is that the majority of asylum seekers are merely economic migrants attempting to avoid strict immigration laws (Holmes, 1988), thus a clear distinction between the groups is needed if refugees' rights to work are to be protected, and their access to work developed.

While individual research projects increase what is known about refugee labour force experiences, literature which conceptualises those experiences more generally is rare. The significance of context (Starr and Roberts, 1982) is frequently ignored and as already mentioned, much of the literature focuses on largely explaining labour force

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<sup>3</sup> It is also worth noting the predominance of London-based studies both in labour force specific and more general refugee research

experiences in terms of education and employment skills, with broader conceptualisations of the situation largely absent, or superficial. This is unfortunate, since work by various writers suggests that many other factors may also be at work. For instance Marshall (1992) suggests that an emphasis on pursuing education may be hindering, rather than helping, refugees who are seeking work,

*“By concentrating on gaining further academic qualifications rather than getting work experience, they may be putting themselves out of the UK job market”.* (p. 85)

In a similar vein, Van den Berg and Van der Veer (1992) point out that attempting merely to improve the education of unemployed people will generally result in a higher educated group of the unemployed, if other factors which govern access to employment are not also addressed. Consequently, the tendency of refugee labour force literature to focus on a small number of explanatory factors, or to only superficially consider a wider range of influencing elements, is an issue which needs addressing. Given this, the subsequent discussion will address issues of contextual importance to refugee labour force experiences, prior to presenting a conceptualisation of those experiences<sup>4</sup>.

### **3.3 Contextual themes**

A consideration of the contextual setting in which refugees are received, and subsequently live within, is vital to a fuller understanding of their labour force experiences. This is because to detach any discussion of refugee experiences, and the factors which influence them, from their contextual setting will provide only a simplistic understanding of how those experiences arose. The contextual themes identified as having particular relevance to this research are those of the political, economic, socio-demographic, and spatial setting into which refugees settle. These themes are closely connected and cannot be totally disentangled from one another; therefore the following discussion does not treat them independently.

#### **3.3.1 The national arena**

It has been stated that

*“the admission of refugees to Britain is inextricably linked to broader economic, political and ideological concerns on the part of the state about immigration and settlement. These concerns have been articulated in terms of “overpopulation”, shortage of state resources such as housing and welfare services, and the “problem of race*

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<sup>4</sup>This occurs in section 3.4

*relations” or “integration”..... In this respect, refugee admission does not take place in a politically or ideologically neutral context.”*

(Miles and Cleary, 1993, p.73)

Likewise, it is argued here, that refugee labour force experiences do not occur in a neutral context. Thus although consideration of the impact of this context on the labour force experiences of refugees is uncommon, it is argued here that it can have a profound impact upon their labour force experiences. Not only are the acceptance, reception and resettlement policies of the government a direct influence on labour force experiences, but these experiences, and policies, are also affected by the general political rhetoric of the country of resettlement. Thus in order to understand the potential influence of the political context, this political rhetoric must first be explored. While chapter two, to a large extent, provided details of political rhetoric about refugees' acceptance, the aim here is to extend this, with particular regard for labour force experiences.

In short, refugees have been politicised as being an economic burden, and asylum-seekers as potentially illegal immigrants. The economic argument about refugees dates back at least to the interwar period (Angell, 1939) and in the years preceding the Second World War, despite referring to the UK's traditional policy of helping refugees, the government claimed that for

*“demographic and economic reasons this policy can only be applied with narrow limits.”*

(Quoted in Wasserstein, 1984, p.73).

With mass unemployment, the chance that refugees would add to this was seen as enough justification for denying them entry. Thus, only those refugees that could support themselves or even help to alleviate unemployment by starting businesses were admitted. For example, industrialists with capital were allowed to enter Britain and were directed by the Home Office to the north and north-west regions of the country where unemployment was greatest (Hirschfeld, 1984). However, even with later concessions, the numbers of people granted asylum remained low considering Britain's position as one of the few remaining safe havens in war-torn Europe. This apparent failure of Britain to respond to the needs of the refugees was directly due to the Government's over-riding concern with economic matters.

The debate concerning the economic effect of refugees continues to this day. The prevailing position is that most asylum-seekers are actually economic migrants

attempting to circumvent Britain's immigration rules<sup>5</sup>. These rules themselves are seen as protecting British economy and society from the challenges of absorbing an influx of immigrants. This politicisation of asylum-seekers as potentially illegal immigrants has implications for refugee labour force experiences in that it can create a negative environment in which many refugees conduct their search activities.

While the political arguments about refugees focus on the economic cost of refugees and are thus currently largely negative, certain writers, including Black et al. (1993) suggest that

*“far from being a burden on host economies, refugees may stimulate economic growth in a variety of ways.”* (p. 1).

Indeed, the Refugee Council have called for a more positive view of the economic significance of refugees,

*“refugees should be seen as offering “value-added” to British society rather than bringing, or being problems..... Even if the economic hopes of the 1990's are a mirage there is no avoiding the CBI's definition of the UK workforce as “under-educated, under-trained, and under-qualified”. Very few refugees fit that description. Any who do arrive in the UK with such disadvantages would be only too willing to rectify the situation. Employers should not ignore this.”*

(Refugee Council Employment Working Group, 1991, preface)

Along similar lines, Crewe (1992a) also argues that a variety of socio-demographic factors have led to

*“the combined existence of labour shortages and high levels of unemployment [which] demand that appropriate solutions are devised in order to overcome such mismatches. It is clearly important that the solutions to these problems are the appropriate ones, and this must include an awareness of alternative labour markets, including refugee populations and the long-term unemployed”* (p.4)

She therefore calls for training programmes aimed at ensuring

*“existing skills are best utilised, latent skills are harnessed and new skills acquired.”* (p.4).

While the current political climate makes such a change in attitude seem unlikely, history teaches that it may not be totally unrealistic. During times of high unemployment such as now and during the interwar period, the perceived economic burden of refugees acts to restrict refugee labour force experiences. While refugees today are not legally prevented from seeking work - though they do face serious problems - during the economic

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<sup>5</sup> This was discussed in Chapter 2

uncertainty of the inter-war period refugees were subject to strict employment restrictions. However, during times of labour shortage, the reception of refugees and views of their labour force activities were vastly different,

*“Between 1946 and 1949, 91,151 “European Volunteer Workers” entered Britain to work in a restricted range of industries with a shortage of labour such as the National Health Service, farming, coal mining, and textile production.”*

(Panayi, 1993 p.105)

Such workers were chosen on the basis of their economic utility rather than humanitarian needs, thus illustrating the potency of economic concerns. Similarly, Polish troops who served under British command in the war were allowed to remain in this country following the fall of Poland to Soviet control. With the formation of the Polish Resettlement Corps, these servicemen were given employment and English training before being allocated a job. The scheme was eventually successful, although the unions did slow down the process by preventing entry to various occupations. By 1947 only 38,000 of the 108,000 registered members of the Corps had not been placed in employment and many of these were the more difficult cases of older men, invalids or professionals. In an attempt to help these men into employment pre-vocational courses were organised and officers were allowed to set up their own businesses (Sword, 1988). Panayi (1993) explains this acceptance of the Poles as being, in part, based on

*“the need for manpower to rebuild the economy damaged by war.”*  
(p.104).

It should however, also be noted that as contributors to the defeat of the Nazi's, these Poles were undoubtedly viewed differently from refugees arriving in Britain today.

It thus appears that direct links between the labour force experiences of refugees and the prevailing economic situation can be made, and be shown to have influenced political thinking. However, it would be wrong to believe that the resettlement of refugees has been reduced to an economic concern. Humanitarian concerns have remained; however economic considerations have rarely been absent. For instance, concerns by the British people, and some politicians in the early 1970's, that refugees from Uganda<sup>6</sup> would add to competition over jobs, lead to considerable public debate about the economic burden of accepting them for resettlement,

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<sup>6</sup> cf. Chapter 2, footnote 7.

*“initially, only 6 per cent of respondents in one opinion poll wanted to accept a large number of passport-holders, although this view softened considerably once the Asians were seen as victims of Amin.”*

(Panayi, 1993, p.106)

It could also be argued that media headlines such as *“Arriving for the jobs we won't take”* (Evening Standard 31/7/72) acted to help allay the economic fears of the population.

Thus, while economic considerations have influenced political thinking and action in the past, the likelihood of current thinking altering without a significant drop in unemployment is poor. Although Crewe (1992a) and the BRC (1987) may argue that the quality not quantity of refugees is important, this is a less persuasive argument. Moreover, other than politicising refugees on economic grounds, British governments have rarely acted to consider the longer term labour force experience outcomes of refugees. Indeed, the British government does not collect significant amounts of data on refugees after their admittance to the UK. Most notably, as happens in Canada (Neuwirth, 1993) refugees are not an identified group within the census, limiting the scope for large scale quantitative research. Beyond the commonly found One Year On Studies (Dines, 1972-3; British Refugee Council Resource Centre, n.d.), little enquiry has occurred into the labour force outcomes of refugees, particularly in the long term, and thus information is limited to anecdotal evidence. For instance, with regard to Jewish refugees who established businesses in Britain, the task of assessing the long term prospects of these firms has been hampered by the naturalisation process and the merging of businesses. These factors, along with the lack of government interest, makes the tracing of the fortunes of the entrepreneurial refugees and their businesses difficult. Despite this, authors such as Herbert Loebel (1984) are impressed by what they see to be the economic success of Jewish refugees. Therefore, although the Home Office has commissioned a number of reports (e.g. Carey-Wood et al (1995), Duke and Marshall (1995), Jones (1982)) on the situation of refugees in Britain, data and information are somewhat limited, particularly in relation to labour force experiences. It is this situation which contributed to the earlier calls for more research.

### **3.3.2 The local arena**

While the preceding discussion has focused on the national arena, it is also important to actively consider the local and spatial manifestations of policies adopted by the government. The emphasis which spatial considerations have had on refugee

resettlement and labour force related policies has varied throughout time. It has already been mentioned that Jewish refugees from the Third Reich were encouraged to establish businesses in areas of high unemployment; thus economic arguments acted to influence the spatial distribution of these refugees. Only a few years later, however, with regard to the Polish ex-servicemen, the emphasis was on securing employment, with little regard for spatial distributions and similarly the distribution of EVW was controlled by industries' needs rather than any real regard for spatial distribution. While both the policy of directing entrepreneurs to areas of high unemployment, and that of letting the availability of vacancies determine the spatial resettlement of refugees acted to the benefit of the economy and individual refugees, later concerns with the development of ghettos and public reaction to the arrival of refugees led to resettlement policies which arguably adversely affected the labour force experiences of refugees. With regard to this, the greatest discussion has occurred in relation to the refugees from Vietnam, primarily led by Hale and Robinson<sup>7</sup> (e.g. Hale, 1993; Robinson, 1993b; Robinson and Hale, 1989). In short, they have illustrated how a policy of dispersion based on housing, rather than labour force considerations led to refugees being resettled in areas of high unemployment. As Hale (1993) states,

*“The key to the success of the resettlement programme was seen to be participation in the labour market. However, there was no explicit policy to deal with this area. In addition, employment opportunities for the Vietnamese were constrained by the lack of relevant skills of the group, their lack of their education and their lack of English language ability (Frazer, 1988). Moreover, the situation was worsened by high unemployment rates in the British economy and the type of area in which the Vietnamese were resettled. Robinson (1985) found that 21 per cent of refugees were resettled in the North West, the region with the highest male unemployment rate, and a further 13 per cent in the West Midlands, which had the fourth highest unemployment rate. There was also no attempt to match the skills of individual refugees to appropriate labour markets.” (p.287)*

Such a policy is deemed to have contributed to high initial levels of unemployment amongst the refugees from Vietnam. While Hale's (1991) work on secondary migration has illustrated that subsequent migration has done little to alter the concentration of refugees in areas of high unemployment, her discussion of the factors which influence labour force experiences (and thus identification of areas for intervention) is similar to much research in that it focuses on a small number of influencing factors - employment

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<sup>7</sup> Their discussion is also often referred to by others - e.g. Carey-Wood et al. (1995)

training and English language skills (Hale, 1993). Despite this, her work has drawn attention to the influence of space upon the relative success of resettlement, and (to a limited extent) labour force experiences.

In the case of spontaneous refugees, they too are thought to be concentrated in areas of high unemployment. However, this statement is an informed rather than accurate assessment, based on the probable distribution of refugees and knowledge of unemployment in those areas. For as Carey-Wood et al. (1995) explain,

*“there is no systematic information on the geographical distribution of refugees across the UK. The only source of such information is the collection of case-files of asylum-seekers held by the Immigration and Nationality Department. These files remain in the IND after the decision has been reached on each case”* (p.14).

From these files, Carey-Wood et al. estimate that around 85% of spontaneous refugees settle in Inner or Outer London. Elsewhere Bravo (1995) claims that the London boroughs of Hackney, Lambeth, Camden, Islington, Haringey, Southwark, Greenwich and Lewisham are home to the most refugees. Since all these boroughs are known for their high unemployment, it seems likely that spontaneous refugees are concentrated in areas of high unemployment.

While the influence of living in such a high unemployment area may be assumed to be negative, as those living in such areas do not receive much informal information about jobs (Fass and Scothorne, 1990)<sup>8</sup>, the true picture may be more complex. The availability of social support (through access to other community members) and specialist support (via particular organisations) may also play a considerable role in affecting the labour force experiences of refugees<sup>9</sup>. Indeed, the benefits of access to these forms of support may offset (or possibly be perceived to offset) the disadvantages of living in a high unemployment area. This may be especially true for those refugees who develop their own businesses to cater for the ethnic market. Thus when considering the labour force experiences of refugees, the importance of the characteristics of their locality is thought to be considerable. Moreover, a consideration of the potential for locality to influence labour force experiences has implications in directing future refugee resettlement policies.

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<sup>8</sup>This idea is developed further in section 3.4.3.1

<sup>9</sup>These issues are discussed in some length in section 3.4.4

Thus in conclusion, this introduction to the influence that context can have upon refugee labour force experiences illustrates how important it is to consider contextual issues. For this reason, since the focus of this thesis is the refugees from Vietnam, chapter five provides further contextual and spatial distribution information relevant to a consideration of their labour force experiences.

### **3.4 Conceptualising refugee labour force experiences**

Having introduced the contextual setting for a consideration of refugee labour force experiences, it is now necessary to conceptualise those experiences further. This will assist in the development of a theoretical understanding of the subject. Drawing together both descriptive and more conceptual material from a wide range of literature, a variety of factors which are thought to influence experiences are considered.

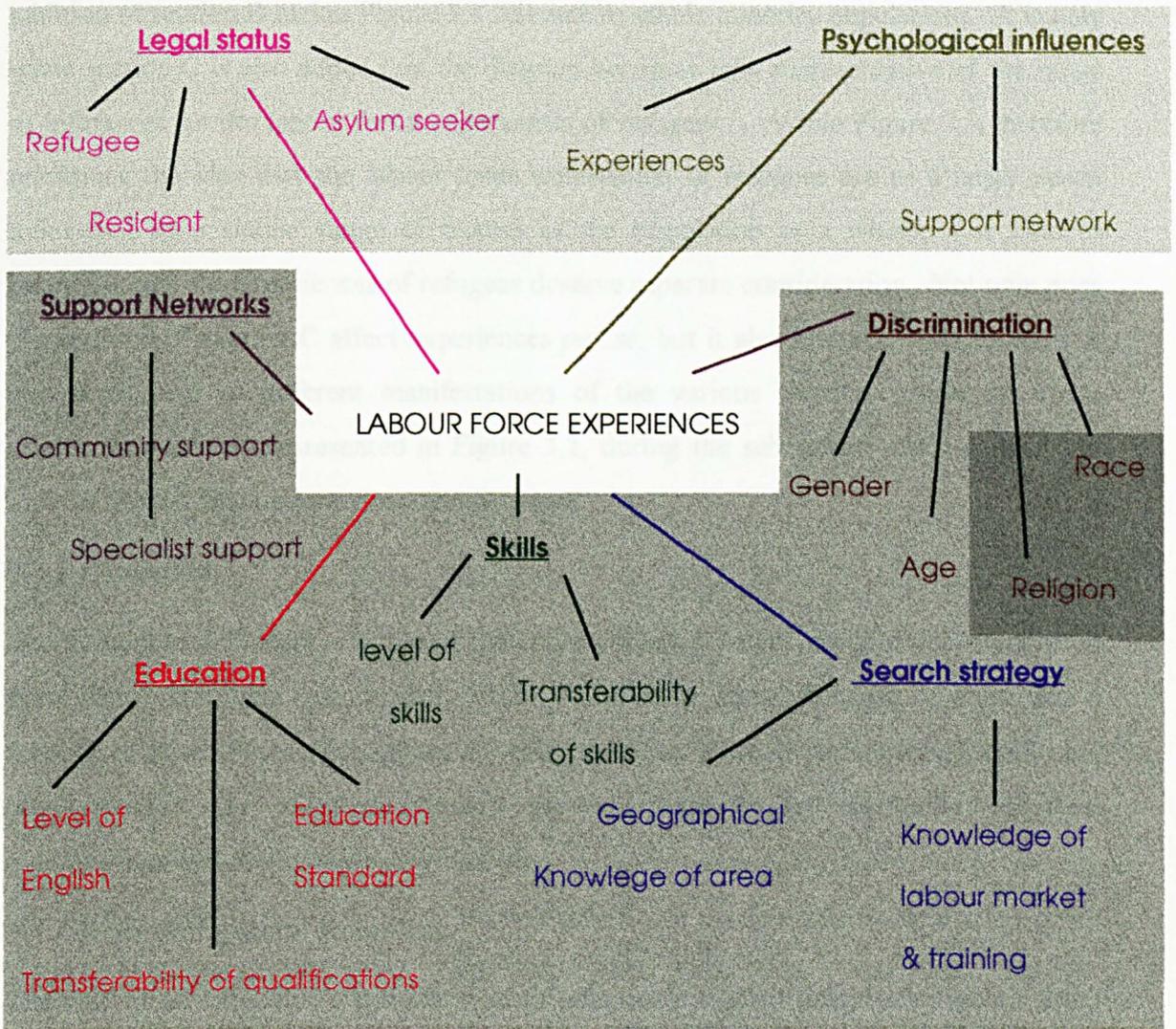
Figure 3.1 (overleaf) provides a visual representation of the range of factors which are thought to influence the experiences of refugees. Seven main areas of influence are considered - education, skills, search strategies, discrimination, psychological influences, support networks and legal status - as well as a number of sub-areas within each category.

While few of the ideas concerning factors which influence labour force experiences presented here are new, their application in refugee studies has often been haphazard. Research which tends to be practitioner based (i.e. conducted by service providers) frequently focuses on a few factors when attempting to explain experiences. Consequently policy recommendations also tend to focus on a small number of factors. While this is an understandable approach, it does, it is argued here, limit the development of an understanding of the complex nature of refugee labour force experiences. Thus, what is argued for here, is a holistic approach, one which recognises the multitude of influencing factors and their effect upon each other<sup>10</sup> and attempts to incorporate as many of them as possible.

Before embarking on the discussion of the various factors it is worth noting that while Figure 3.1 has primarily been compiled with reference to the labour force experiences of refugees, it also has relevance for other portions of the population. Indeed, section A represents factors which are thought to have an influence on all individuals, while the

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<sup>10</sup> Although this is considered in the subsequent discussion, such connections between the various factor groups are not visually represented in Figure 3.1



- A Factors which are relevant to all individuals
- B Factors which are relevant to ethnic minorities
- C Factors which are relevant to refugees

**Figure 3.1 : Factors affecting the labour force experiences of refugees**

addition of section B makes Figure 3.1 relevant to ethnic minority populations. It is only when section C is also added that the diagram becomes fully representative of the range of influences on the labour force experiences of refugees. While Figure 3.1 therefore reinforces the idea that the labour force experiences of refugees are to a large extent influenced by a similar range of factors as the population as a whole, it is vital to recognise that the experiences of refugees deserve separate consideration. Not only does the addition of section C affect experiences *per se*, but it also interacts with sections A and B to lead to different manifestations of the various factors. Although these interactions are not represented in Figure 3.1, during the subsequent discussion of the various factors, such interactions are discussed.

### **3.4.1 Education**

The influence of education is one of the factors which receives the greatest attention in the existing literature (e.g. Frazer, 1988). Under the broad heading of education a number of issues arise with regard to refugee labour force experiences. Specifically, these are the role of an individual's general education, the recognition of their qualifications and their standard of English.

#### **3.4.1.1 Level of general education**

The role of an individual's general level of education is often linked with labour force experiences, perceived wisdom is that poor education is associated with a propensity to experience unemployment and substandard employment. With regard to refugees, evidence certainly suggests that such a relationship exists. Indeed, in the case of Ugandan Asian refugees<sup>11</sup> resettled in Britain, unemployment was highest amongst the least well educated (Adams and Jesudason, 1984). However, while education levels may appear to explain high levels of unemployment amongst refugees, it is important to recognise that being a refugee and having a low level of education do not necessarily go hand in hand. Indeed, research suggests that many refugees are in fact highly educated. Carey-Wood et al. (1995) found that education levels prior to arrival in Britain were generally high

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<sup>11</sup>cf. Chapter 2, footnote 7

**Table 3.1 Levels of Education**

Highest level of education	Number	Percentage
University	91	35
Further education	33	13
Secondary level	99	38
Primary level	26	10
None	14	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>263</b>	<b>100</b>

(Carey-Wood et al, 1995, p.114).

Figures provided by Marshall (1992) suggest that an even larger proportion of refugees arrive with the highest levels of education. This suggests that high unemployment amongst refugees cannot therefore be explained by education levels. However, if the experiences of refugees from different places, and of individuals, rather than groups of refugees, are examined, it appears the influence of education levels may require further consideration. For while its effect may be limited for those groups of refugees who arrive with high levels of education (e.g. Jews fleeing Nazi expansion in Europe (Berghahn, 1988)), it should not be discounted as an influencing factor for those individual refugees who arrive with low levels of education. Moreover, amongst refugees from specific locations, low not high levels of education predominate. For instance, Robinson and Hale (1989) found that three quarters of refugees from Vietnam had finished their education prior to reaching secondary level. Therefore for some refugees, a low standard of education may well damage their labour force experiences in this country.

### 3.4.1.2 Recognition of qualifications

The non recognition of overseas qualifications is identified in most literature as playing a contributing role in affecting the labour force experiences of refugees. For although many refugees are highly educated on arrival in Britain, they frequently face difficulties in gaining recognition for their qualifications. As the Refugee Council Employment Working Group's document "Refugee Employment & Training: A positive policy for the 1990's" states,

*"It is clear that there are many deficiencies in existing arrangements for recognition of overseas qualifications gained by refugees and others, particularly if they have been gained in developing countries where English is not the first language. There are countless barriers*

*for adult refugees who may wish to seek entry to employment or to opportunities for Further and Higher Education. These are particularly frustrating for those with professional backgrounds or aspirations.” (1991, p. 9)*

Indeed, in research which considers the labour force experiences of refugees, many respondents refer to the difficulties which the non-recognition of qualifications has caused them. For instance Carey-Wood et al. (1995) comment on the lack of understanding respondents receive with regard for their qualifications, while a recent article by Saigol (1997) in the Guardian highlights the

*“frustration refugees feel when they arrive in the UK with the highest qualifications from their country of origin, only to find that these are not recognised.”*

For, it is often the case that when refugees do arrive with high qualifications, they are not able to use them. It can take a long time to gain any recognition for foreign qualifications, and often they are not accepted to be of the requisite standard. Thus, for instance, doctors who have practised for many years may be told they need to return to university to retrain before they will be allowed to practise in Britain.

While the level of difficulty depends not only on the country of origin of the refugee and their vocation, work by Marshall (1992) suggests that professional bodies may be taking a harsh line when it comes to accrediting foreign qualifications. A response from one accrediting body was

*“We are here to maintain standards and look after the interests of our members. It is not in our interests to make it particularly easy for others (from abroad) to get in.” (p.64)*

Thus refugees may also be faced with unnecessarily harsh barriers, or even discrimination, when attempting to gain recognition for their qualifications.

### **3.4.1.3 Standard of English**

Poor English skills are often identified as being amongst

*“the main barriers to employment”*

(Carey-Wood et al, 1995 p. x).

for refugees, with both the effect and magnitude of the influence of English skills being recognised. With regard to effect, if a refugee arrives in a country unable to speak the language of that country, the opportunities for successful labour force and general resettlement are restricted. With poor language skills, their ability to function in the host society will be limited and the likelihood of gaining effective entry into the labour force or training market will be diminished. Indeed, they may find themselves confined to

seeking opportunities solely within the ethnic sector. Thus improved English is seen to aid labour force experiences, with Tollefson (1989) arguing that

*“refugees with greater proficiency in English obtain employment more quickly than refugees with less proficiency.”* (p.338).

It should be noted that proficiency in English encompasses speaking, written and aural comprehension and writing, and that skills in the different elements of language can vary within individuals.

While a lack of proficiency can act to exclude individuals from opportunities as discussed generally above, it can also act to exclude people from the specific kinds of employment or training that require good communication skills. Thus those individuals with poor English may find their ability to use the vocational skills they possess are reduced, as potential employers are likely to favour a candidate whose native language is English. Additionally, difficulties in conveying their knowledge and experience due to language difficulties can contribute to this (Hirsch and Siadat, 1988). Thus even when they are capable of doing a specific job, their lack of English may prohibit them from securing a post. They may therefore be pushed towards employment that does not require much knowledge of English, for instance work in the manual or service sectors (Majka and Mullan, 1992). Moreover, where an ethnic sector is present, individuals with limited English may feel compelled to restrict their labour force participation to this sector, either as a positive (a desire to work in the ethnic sector) or a negative reaction (as a result of a lack of confidence about their ability to find work in the broader labour market) (Waldringer, Aldrich and Ward, 1990). It should also be noted that poor language proficiency may also act to limit opportunities for training, re-training or participation in education.

The magnitude of language difficulties varies from source country to source country, with refugees from some places being much less likely to be proficient in English (on arrival) than those from elsewhere. Certainly, for individuals who arrive from nations which have greater contact with the English speaking world, or indeed have English as a national language, it can be argued that language difficulties may be less prevalent. However, it is important to remember that the consequences of communication difficulties are felt at the individual level.

With regard to initial language difficulties, it is also worth noting that the speed at which individual refugees acquire English post-arrival in Britain can vary tremendously.

Contributing factors include prior exposure to English, familiarity with formal language acquisition methods and competition with other priorities, as well as access to language training. Indeed, the provision of language training alone is not guaranteed to lead to proficiency in English, especially if the appropriateness of the training is questionable. While the lack of language courses designed specifically for refugees has received some criticism (Hirsch and Siadat, 1988), courses which have catered for refugees are often characterised by their failure to improve language skills significantly. For instance, few of the Vietnamese refugees who left reception centres had achieved a decent basic knowledge of English, let alone that needed to hold down a job, despite the provision of language classes (Ainley, 1983).

In conclusion, although it has previously been suggested that education is given an excessive significance when developing an understanding of the labour force experiences of refugees<sup>12</sup>, its influence is not deemed to be negligible. Issues such as standard of education, recognition of qualifications and English language ability are important. However, rather than perceiving education as the primary factor for understanding refugee labour force experience, education is here seen to be one of many factors which need to be considered.

### **3.4.2 Skills**

Closely connected to ideas about education are those concerning skills<sup>13</sup>, and this is therefore an area in which literature related to refugee labour force experiences frequently engages. The level and applicability of the skills held by refugees are the two areas in which most discussion has occurred.

#### **3.4.2.1 Level of skills**

It is generally accepted that the level of skills held by an individual has implications for their labour force experiences. Indeed, unemployment is known to be highest amongst the least skilled portions of the population. Thus, for those refugees who arrive in Britain with limited skills, this adds to their difficulties concerning labour force activities. While a lack of skills limits the options for refugees seeking labour force activities, additionally, those sections of the economy which employ unskilled workers have

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<sup>12</sup>This idea was introduced in section 3.2

<sup>13</sup>The word skill is used to refer to proficiency in a trade or technique, usually acquired by training (Collins, 1989)

suffered most from the economic decline of recent years (Waldinger, Aldrich and Ward, 1990). This adds to the problems faced by refugees who are unskilled. It is within such a context that Crewe (1992b) calls for

*“skills courses which offer real skills training which is appropriate to the world of work.”* (p.2)

Indeed, such a request is common to many commentators on refugee labour force experiences. The prevailing opinion is that to increase the level of skills amongst refugees will reduce unemployment levels. However, the level of skills held by an individual is not the only way in which skills affect labour force activities. As Crewe (1992b) herself states, with regard to skills training,

*“a large component of this should focus on making existing skills relevant.”* (p.2).

#### **3.4.2.2 Skills transferability**

With labour markets and their demands being place specific, refugees often find that their skills, which were in demand in their country of origin, are redundant in Britain. This phenomenon - the non-transferable nature of skills - is what leads Crewe (1992a) to call for training which

*“ensures existing skills are best utilised, [and] latent skills are harnessed.”* (p. 4)

In short, the call is for training which will increase the transferability of skills and allow refugees to make use of their existing skills. For without such training, a significant under-utilisation of skills can occur.

While for some professionals (such as doctors or dentists) the problems are usually less severe given the universal nature of their vocation, for others (such as lawyers) whose skills are much more embedded within, and specific to, their country of origin, the problems can be considerable. As a caveat to this, technological differences can affect all professionals. Thus issues of skills transferability are added to the problems of getting qualifications recognised. Likewise, for individuals who previously held skilled, but not professional, jobs the problems of skills transferability are often considerable. This is frequently due to differences in technology and work practices.

While the transferable nature of skills can be understood as being dependent on the vocation of the individual, it is also influenced by that person's country of origin. While refugees who fled from countries with similar levels of technology to Britain suffer fewer

problems, those who arrive from underdeveloped countries may find their skills redundant due to technological advances in this country. Moreover, the greater the difference in technology between the country of origin and Britain, the more likely problems are to arise. In addition to this, if refugees arrive from countries which are socially and culturally very different from Britain, they may have skills for which there is no demand in this country, or at least no demand outside the ethnic sector. Indeed, when discussing the relative status of jobs, Marshall (1989) encountered positions such as

*“Communist party officials.. peasant farmers.. cow and wagon attendants.. plantation workers.. [and the] people who look after your bicycle so it’s not stolen”*

(adapted from Figure 3, p.15)

none of which are greatly in demand in Britain. The shift in the origin of refugees since the 1970’s, which saw a decrease in the numbers arriving from countries within Europe and an increase in the numbers arriving from the less developed nations of the South, has increased the likelihood of skills transferability being an issue for individual refugees. Indeed for refugees from some countries, the problems are particularly severe, with Dalglish (1980), for example, predicting that only 3.5% of the Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong camps had skills that would allow them to maintain their standard of living and support their families in Britain.

When refugees are unable to utilise their skills they are often compelled to seek work in unskilled positions. In addition to the psychological impact of losing one’s status, as already discussed, such unskilled positions are generally concentrated in those sectors of the British economy which are suffering most from economic decline. This downward occupational mobility therefore only increases the difficulties refugees have in securing employment.

### **3.4.3 Search strategies**

A further factor which is thought to influence labour force experiences is the way in which an individual seeks labour force activities (employment, training, education). This is recognised not only in general literature, but also by many commentators on refugee labour force experiences. However, work on refugees is sometimes limited in its consideration of the impact of search strategies, relying on basic distinctions between informal and formal search methods (Crewe, 1992a) and on the cultural precedents for such distinctions (Marshall, 1989). Indeed, it has often been recognised that refugees’

traditional methods of looking for employment may be inappropriate to the British labour market (Von Bethlenfalvy, 1987), with many commentators illustrating how informal methods of searching predominate amongst refugee groups (Crewe, 1992a; Fraser, 1988; Carey-Wood et al, 1995; Duke and Marshall, 1995). While these results are important, and have implications when encouraging refugees in their search for work, they are only part of the story concerning job search strategies.

In order to search effectively for work (or for training) an individual requires a range of attributes, skills and knowledge. Firstly, while informal methods of searching may yield results, they are dependent on the social networks in which individuals operate. Both the informal search method and the impact of these networks<sup>14</sup> may act to limit the scope of opportunities available. It is recognised that in order to conduct an effective search, both informal and formal methods should be used to maximise opportunities. Thus while research has shown that informal methods are well utilised by refugees, formal search methods, incorporating knowledge about job centres, training access points, and situations vacant columns in newspapers, as well as skills associated with application forms and interview techniques are less frequently used. This may be limiting the effectiveness of any search.

However, a consideration of the relative prevalence of formal and informal search techniques provides only a limited insight into the role that search strategies have in influencing refugee labour force experiences. For in order to make use of such techniques the individual requires considerable knowledge about their surroundings. This knowledge encompasses both knowledge of the labour force related market and a spatial element. While illustrating how a lack of such knowledge may impact upon labour force experiences, evidence to support the supposition that such a lack may be prevalent amongst refugees is also presented.

#### **3.4.3.1 Knowledge of labour and training markets**

Knowledge of employment opportunities is vital to being able to find work. For in order to

*“get a new job one needs to learn that it exists.”*

(Kelvin and Jarrett, 1985, p. 28).

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<sup>14</sup> This point is developed further in section 3.4.4.1

Generally such knowledge of a specific job arises only after a broader awareness of the types of jobs available within the labour market is gained. As Tony Marshall (1989) argues,

*"One clearly needs a knowledge of the types of industry and sorts of job available if one is going to change one's occupation and be successful in job-hunting". (p. 18).*

This is especially important to refugees who often have to change occupations on arrival in Britain due to the redundant nature of their skills. Yet research on refugees indicates that many may not have enough information regarding what kinds of employment might be available, and it is argued here that this may explain the lack of direction which has been found amongst refugees searching for work (e.g. Frazer, 1988). Indeed research by Marshall (1989) illustrates the lack of knowledge which refugees have about the British labour market. In response to the question

*"What do you think are the largest industries in Britain?" (p. 19).*

refugee respondents from Chile, Ethiopia, Iran, Poland, Vietnam and Sri Lanka gave disparate answers which varied greatly from the reality. As Marshall states,

*"it was here perhaps more than anywhere else that refugees in our study either had no idea or were completely misinformed." (p.18)*

This indicates that knowledge of the British labour market amongst refugees is often highly suspect, and it would be credible to consider that knowledge about training opportunities may also be equally lacking. Such poor knowledge has the potential to adversely affect the labour force experiences of refugees. However, while information regarding knowledge of the national labour market may be of some use, it is suggested here that knowledge of the local labour market would be equally, if not more, crucial since it is within their local area that most people look for labour force opportunities.

### **3.4.3.2 Spatial knowledge**

While the influence of knowledge of the labour market has received some attention in literature on refugee labour force experiences, issues of the spatial knowledge and context have rarely been mentioned. While the issue of spatial context has been touched on by Hale (1991)<sup>15</sup>, issues of spatial knowledge and activity spaces receive consideration here.

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<sup>15</sup>This was referred to in section 3.3

Despite the lack of attention in refugee related literature, it is argued that the relevance of spatial knowledge and activity spaces to labour force experience search strategies is undeniable, since search activities occur within a spatial milieu and not a spatial vacuum. While it may be fair to assume that most people know the area they live in fairly well, this may not hold true for refugees. This is because moving to a new country presents more difficulties than remaining within your own, as the landscape is likely to be constructed in an unfamiliar manner. This, in addition to the refugees sudden arrival in the UK, compounded by housing difficulties, language problems, the lack of existing community, transport problems and the trauma of their experiences, may result in a poor spatial knowledge of their surroundings. Additionally, this limited spatial awareness may be both caused by, and contribute to, a limited activity space. Indeed anecdotal evidence<sup>16</sup> supports the supposition that refugees may have limited interaction with, and knowledge of, their surroundings (in both a social and spatial sense).

The relevance of limited activity spaces to labour force experiences has been discussed in non refugee literature, with Fass and Scothorne (1990) identifying such small spaces as having an impact on search strategies. More importantly, they identify these issues as areas in which intervention could occur,

*"The job search area of many unemployed people is defined by the small area with which they are most familiar. This is particularly true of many of the current unemployed who have worked in very few locations and often only one. Only by helping them to extend the area with which they are familiar or to deal with strangeness itself, are these people likely to break out of a very confined set of opportunities. High quality public transport links can make a significant contribution to this process of 'breaking out'." (1990, p.20).*

If this is the case, and limited activity spaces (and a poor spatial knowledge of one's surroundings) do hinder labour force experiences, there would be profound implications for refugees, who may never have worked in Britain and arguably often have limited knowledge of their surroundings. However, it is likely that measures other than improving transport links would be required to assist refugees. Knowledge of their area is more likely to be limited by the factors listed above (including language, and cultural

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<sup>16</sup> Personal communication with Maria Bravo of RTEC at the British Association for Canada Studies / Social Policy Forum conference on Migrants and refugees: Issues of education / training and patterns of employment (held at Rushkin College, Oxford, Feb. 1995).

readjustment). However, whatever the reasons for poor spatial awareness, as Downs and Stea argue, in order to find a job one would still

*"need to learn the entire city."* (1977, p.215).

Thus with limited spatial knowledge and activity spaces, refugees' chances of securing employment or training would remain adversely affected. The total exclusion of spatial knowledge from research into the labour force experiences of refugees is therefore significant.

#### **3.4.4 Support networks**

In the previous discussion on search strategies, the role of social networks was introduced. The social networks in which people live their lives can have both positive and negative effects upon labour force experiences and these are issues which will now receive consideration. However, prior to engaging in this discussion, it is first necessary to place social networks within the broader context of support networks in general. Support networks can be understood to encompass both the informal support which individuals receive from the people they know (their social networks<sup>17</sup>) and the formal support which they receive from specialist services. Both these elements of support receive consideration with regard to their influence upon refugee labour force experiences.

##### **3.4.4.1 Community support**

It has been argued that the informal social support which individuals receive via their social networks can have a considerable impact upon their labour force experiences. This will be discussed with reference to general and migrant populations, prior to specific consideration of its impact on refugee labour force experiences.

With regard to the general population, it is widely recognised

*"that many workers find jobs through friends and relatives... [and] the patterns of social ties between individuals - may play an important role in determining labor market outcomes... workers who are well connected might fare better than poorly connected workers."*

(Montgomery, J. 1991, p. 1408).

In a British context, Wallman (1984) has illustrated that

*"members of a household have no access to ... employment unless someone has told them where it is available, how to get it and how to*

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<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that the term social networks is used in a general and not technical sense, to refer to the interactions which individuals have with people around them.

*do the work... the control of information therefore, controls livelihood.” (p. 30).*

The “*someone*” in such cases is often a member of the individual’s social network, a person they know, rather than a formal service provider. Thus, the composition and size of an individual’s social network becomes a governing factor in the value of information received. While the impact of the size of a social network, that is the number of people with which an individual maintains relationships, appears to be clear, it is not straightforward. For increased social interaction will only increase the amount of labour force related information available if the contacts themselves have access to such information. Thus while it is argued that increased contact with individuals who work will generally lead to increased information about labour force opportunities, if an individual’s social network is dominated by unemployed people, the number of contacts arguably becomes irrelevant, since the value of the labour force information they could offer is reduced. Indeed research has illustrated this point with particular relevance to unskilled individuals (Kelvin and Jarrett, 1985). Thus J. Montgomery’s (1991) comment about better connected workers should be understood to refer to the quality (in terms of the labour force information it can provide) and not the size of an individual’s social circle.

Moving on from the general discussion of social networks, work by Pohjola (1991) has examined the particular relevance of social networks to the migrant. He identifies that for individuals who arrive in a new location,

*“interpersonal interaction can soften the impact of new life situations through information and concrete help.”*

(Pohjola, 1991, p.435).

This can include information and help with securing favourable labour force experiences. While such interaction may be beneficial, he goes on to point out that if relationships are primarily sought with “*fellow countrymen*” the effect can be negative. For although such contacts provide a

*“connection to one’s background and cultural tradition,” (p. 438)*

they can also act to limit opportunities. By socialising primarily amongst people from their place of origin, individuals may be circumscribing

*“their possibilities to become socialised into their new environment. It defines the terms governing job opportunities, the dimension of social contacts, development of language skills, adjustment to the new environment, etc. and determines how one experiences one’s own identity. What happens is a sense of withdrawal from the norms and values of the new society accompanied by an identification with one’s*

*own native group. The social networks thus largely prescribe the possibilities a migrant has for building his or her life..... social relations, in helping the migrant to get a job, also socialize them into the types of jobs where migrants typically end up, i.e. the various ancillary and routine duties of the job market of the so-called second sector.” (p. 438-439).*

Thus the social networks of migrants, when dominated by fellow countrymen, can be understood to hinder labour force experiences. Moreover, research by Mullan (1989) suggests that the differential socio-economic success of various groups of migrants

*“is in part due to migrants’ societal infrastructure and the fact that available information and social networks are accessed and utilised differently by different migrants. Social position can be strongly influenced by a migrant’s ability to tap into a variety of informal networks.” (p.82)*

This strengthens the idea that broader social networks, which encompass “*extra-ethnic*” connections, are beneficial to migrants.

Applying these ideas to refugees, R. Montgomery (1991) supports the idea that reliance on an ethnic social network

*“retards adaptation to the host society (including economy and culture).... Another way of conceptualizing this is that in smaller communities (lacking enough immigrants to form a significant social network or ghetto), newcomers are forced into a “sink or swim” immersion situation” (p.102-103)*

which forces them to undergo extra-ethnic interactions. It is therefore suggested here that such interactions benefit the refugees as discussed earlier.

With regard to intra-ethnic relationships, if a country of resettlement does not already support an existing community from a refugees’ country of origin, any benefits of intra-ethnic interactions may be lessened. In particular, information which may aid in labour force search strategies may be lacking. However, the potential for intra-ethnic labour market experience must not be denied, with a considerable American, and an emergent European literature existing on the involvement of refugees in ethnic business (Black, 1993). Nevertheless, for refugees who do not have access to intra-ethnic social networks, it can be argued that dispersed settlement, which encourages extra-ethnic, interactions may be beneficial. The danger however exists that refugees will, using R. Montgomery’s analogy, sink rather than swim. It therefore appears that a scenario which encompasses both intra-ethnic and extra-ethnic social networks may benefit refugees. It is argued here that while the benefits of the former can be gained, the latter

may compensate for the opportunity constraining impact which Pohjola (1991) believes intra-ethnic social networks have.

#### **3.4.4.2 Specialist support**

With regard to formal support from specialist organisations, it is suggested here that the labour force experiences of refugees may benefit from the provision of refugee-specific support services. Indeed, it has been argued that

*“difficulties in accessing or adapting mainstream services have.. prompted the development of some separate services for refugees.*

(Carey-Wood, 1994, p.8)

Although the tendency is for such specialist services to operate within the voluntary and not statutory sector.

*“One example of this is the Refugee Employment and Training Centre (RTEC) set up by the Refugee Council in Brixton. RTEC provides advice, assessments and careers guidance to asylum seekers and refugees as well as employment training courses in a range of skills including job search, information technology, office skills, business administration and English language training (ESOL) There is also assistance in gaining work experience through work placements, Employment Action posts and working in the Refugee Council’s own Training Office. Other resettlement work on employment and training issues is usually conducted through refugee community organisations with the larger refugee agencies providing an information and training role.”*

(Carey-Wood, 1994, p.8)

The role that such projects play in influencing the labour force experiences of refugees has received relatively little attention in the literature, perhaps as a result of the single location nature of much of the research. Indeed, Robinson (1993c) has made a call for refugee research in the 1990’s to encompass

*“the study of institutions which are involved in refugee determination, reception and resettlement.”* (p.212)

It is argued here that refugee-specific labour force related projects, such as those discussed above, fall within this remit. Yet, to date, little research has considered that the existence of specialist support services in some areas, and not others, may well be having a differential effect upon refugee labour force experiences. For while some refugees will have access to support services which aim to meet their specific needs, others may be struggling to make use of mainstream services which are operated by people who do not fully understand the additional specific needs of refugees. It should

also be noted that the dispersion of refugees to varying locations may both limit access to such refugee-specific support services and hinder their establishment.

### **3.4.5 Psychological influences**

Closely linked to the ideas of support networks, in terms of both social networks and specialist services, is the notion of psychological influences upon labour force experiences. While support networks constitute one element of psychological influence, life experiences, particularly those concerning the events surrounding becoming a refugee, are also thought to have the potential to severely affect labour force experiences (Von Bethlenfalvy, 1987). Additionally, unemployment itself is known to affect psychological well-being (Warr, 1987). Moreover, these elements may not be isolated from one another, with interactions occurring and requiring consideration.

#### **3.4.5.1 Life experiences**

Becoming a refugee frequently involves traumatic events. Indeed, any fear of persecution which leads to an individual fleeing their country of origin could, in itself, be defined as traumatic. The ability of individuals to cope with this fear and the changes in their lives which result from flight varies, but mental health problems are known to be common amongst many refugees, with Von Bethlenfalvy (1987) identifying an often lengthy psychological adaptation period which can adversely affect labour force experiences. For some refugees, memories of witnessing

*“appalling events, including seeing their parents and siblings arrested, beaten, killed or raped”*

(Croall, 1995, p.6)

are combined with a

*“deep feeling of guilt that they’ve survived.”*

(Croall, 1995, p6).

These feelings, in association with the process of cultural adaptation, can manifest themselves in the form of mild, moderate or severe mental health difficulties. This, it is argued, subsequently affects the individual’s ability to engage in labour force activities. Additionally, whereas voluntary migrants can mentally prepare for life in the country of destination, refugees will often be dealing with more fundamental issues connected to personal survival and safety, adding to the psychological effect and subsequent impact on labour force experiences.

Since unemployment has been identified as being a major element of labour force experiences for refugees, it is important to also consider the psychological impact that it

can have on individuals. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, employment is recognised to be fundamental to an individual's comprehension and understanding of the place he/she occupies in society. It allows the individual to feel a valid and contributing member of their society and bestows an identity. As such, employment impacts upon both self perception and the perception of the individual by others. Contrasting with this, research into unemployment

*"has clearly established that in general being unemployed significantly impairs mental health. Conversely, obtaining a job quickly leads to improvement."*

(Warr, 1987 p.59).

Thus it must be stated that the labour force experiences of unemployed individuals, will often be affected by their unemployed status, via the associated psychological stress which occurs. Moreover, research has indicated that

*"stress and deteriorating health were correlated with time unemployed."*

(O'Brien, 1986, p.220)

suggesting that long term unemployment may be more damaging to mental (and physical) well-being than short term unemployment. This has implications for refugees who are known often to suffer from long term unemployment.<sup>18</sup>

#### **3.4.5.2 Support networks**

The role of support networks in affecting psychological well-being and thus labour force experiences also needs consideration. For it is believed that the support of friends, family, acquaintances and specialist service providers may do much to limit the damage caused by the psychological influence of both refugee experiences and unemployment. With regard to work with disadvantaged groups (not refugees) who participated in employment programmes, Wenzel (1993) has illustrated how the notion of job procurement self-efficacy can benefit from social and specialist service support. Self-efficacy is

*"confidence in one's capabilities to perform specific, challenging behaviors"* (p. 1471)

in this case, to secure employment. Perceiving that members of their social network and specialist service providers believed in an individual's ability to secure employment was shown to

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<sup>18</sup> Long term unemployment amongst refugees is frequently identified. For examples see Carey-Wood et al. 1995; Crewe, 1992a; Walsh et al. 1994

*“have facilitated self-confidence”* (p. 1488)

and have a positive impact on incentives to carry out activities beneficial to labour force experiences. Indeed,

*“social support promotes positive adjustment and development.. and it protects against the negative effects of stress”* (p.1473),

thus acting as a barrier against the stress outcomes of unemployment.

If these ideas are then applied to the specific situation of refugees (as in the work of Schwarzer, Jerusalem and Hahn, (1994)), the interactions between psychological health, unemployment, and support networks become clear. As Schwarzer et al. state,

*“Prolonged unemployment and a lack of support can result in impaired health”* (p.31)

which in itself impacts upon labour force experiences. For refugees who have fled their homes,

*“the corresponding psychological crisis may have a tremendous impact on [their] personality development, psychological functioning and health. Not only is it necessary to cope with daily hassles,.... but also the threat of long term unemployment and the need to build a new social network. Thus the [refugees] are disadvantaged not only by higher demands than previously, but also by their heightened individual vulnerability towards stress.”* (p. 32)

Thus the combination of refugee experience, unemployment and lack of social networks can cause severe damage to health, both psychological and physical, which in turn impacts upon the chances of improving labour force experiences. However, Schwarzer et al. (1994) go on to show how if employment can be secured, it is likely to lead to an increase in well-being (Warr, 1987). Additionally, they illustrate that even when unemployment continues, stress and resulting ill-health could be moderated by the existence of social support.

The previous debate on the psychological influences of refugee experiences, unemployment and support networks thus has implications when attempting to understand the labour force experiences of refugees. While these three elements need to be considered in combination, it is worth noting that cause and effect are not easy to discern. While unemployment can cause psychological damage, it can also be a result of mental ill health. Equally, the ways in which psychological conditions affect labour force experiences can be unclear, as can the links between physical and mental well-being.

### 3.4.6 Discrimination

Discrimination impacts upon labour force experiences both in a direct manner and as a result of its impact upon psychological well-being. While direct discrimination may prevent individuals from gaining access to specific labour force activities, the perception of being discriminated against may further reduce opportunities if individuals 'choose' to avoid situations in which they expect discrimination.

With regard to refugees, it is generally recognised that

*“one of the first things to note about the process of adaptation and integration of refugees and asylum seekers is that... many.. face considerable discrimination and exclusion. These processes can be observed... in fields as diverse as housing, education and employment.”*

(Black 1993 p.94)

While the obvious way in which individual refugees may encounter discrimination is in relation to their ethnic origins and thus direct racial discrimination, discrimination affecting the labour force experiences of refugees is not confined to that on the basis of race.

#### 3.4.6.1 Racial discrimination

It would however appear that racial discrimination can act as a significant perceived and actual barrier to labour force experiences, with Walsh, McFarland and Hampton (1994) illustrating how refugees from various ethnic backgrounds rate the influence of discrimination differently<sup>19</sup>. While 39% of their total survey identified discrimination as a barrier to employment,

*“approximately half the Iranians and all the Iraqis felt that they were unable to obtain employment because of discrimination.”* (p.29).

The suggestion is that refugees from Europe (Bosnia and Romania) suffer less racial discrimination since their ethnic origins are more similar to the majority of British society.

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<sup>19</sup> It should be recognised that refugees may be identifying discrimination, rather than their personal attributes, as a barrier to labour force experiences.

### 3.4.6.2 Discrimination on the basis of refugee status

While refugees whose ethnic origin differs from that of the majority of British society appear to be suffering from racial discrimination as it affects many ethnic minorities<sup>20</sup>, it can be suggested that refugees may also encounter discrimination on account of their status as refugees. Work by Van den Berg and Van der Veer (1992) recognises that people who find it hard to secure employment may be disadvantaged by discrimination based on the way in which they are perceived by potential employers. Thus, in the case of refugees, their status as refugees may be associated with a perception of psychological difficulties, language problems, cultural differences, work permit difficulties (particularly if the distinction between asylum-seekers and refugees is blurred) and appropriate work experience. Whether these difficulties exist or not, may become irrelevant if the perception is that they exist. Where this occurs, stigmatisation and discrimination may arise. Van den Berg and Van der Veer (1992), therefore make the argument that training and education may not assist refugees in improving labour force experience, if stigmatisation prevents a true consideration of an individual's characteristics. They therefore suggest that mediation programmes which encourage potential employers to consider applicants on their relative merits and not on existing perceptions would assist refugees to improve their labour force experiences.

### 3.4.7 Legal status

As a final point to consider, although it has been mentioned previously<sup>21</sup>, it is important to recognise the implications of legal status on labour force experiences. In short, while refugee status does not, in itself, limit employment or other labour force activity opportunities - refugees having the same rights as British citizens<sup>22</sup> - asylum-seekers and many other immigrants are subject to more sweeping restrictions and often require permission to work. Although this should not affect refugees, the media, employers and society as a whole often fail to recognise the distinction between those with refugee and

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<sup>20</sup> Although :- *"the PSI reports progress in the labour market by members of some ethnic minority groups. Evidence of continuing discrimination nevertheless abounds"* (Mason, 1994, p.304)

<sup>21</sup> See section 3.3.1

<sup>22</sup> Refugees are however unable to take employment in certain jobs which specify British nationality, such as the Civil Service (Carey-Wood et al 1995).

other status. The result of this can be discrimination against refugees who are seeking employment<sup>23</sup>.

Moreover, for refugees who wish to engage in education or training opportunities, difficulties with funding can arise due to the necessity to have established residency in a particular area in order to qualify for funding (Hirsch and Siadat, 1988). Thus while the legal status of refugee does not itself limit opportunities, the non-recognition of circumstances which are often associated with that status acts to limit access.<sup>24</sup>

In these ways, it is the political context of living in Britain which impacts upon the labour force experiences of individuals who have refugee status, rather than the status itself. Indeed, there are virtually no legal restrictions on labour force activities associated with refugee status.

### **3.5 Interactions between factors**

The preceding discussion of influences on refugee labour force experiences has largely taken a factor by factor approach, despite earlier assertions<sup>25</sup> that significant interactions occur between factors. While these interactions have often been implicit in the discussion, more explicit identification of the interplay between factors is required. For this reason, taking one factor of influence in particular, the links between this and the other influences on refugee labour force experiences are identified.

#### **3.5.1 Interactions involving support networks**

The role of support networks are thought to be considerable when exploring refugee resettlement in general, and refugee labour force experiences in particular. Given the opportunities for intervention in this area<sup>26</sup>, and refugee's own propensity to involve themselves in such networks<sup>27</sup>, it seems wise to place support networks centrally in this discussion of the linkages between various influences on labour force experiences. The links between support networks of both an informal (i.e. community based) and a formal

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<sup>23</sup>As discussed in section 3.4.6.2

<sup>24</sup> "refugees often have little control over where they live and are likely to be in temporary accommodation and, therefore, subject to frequent residential relocation" (Hirsch and Saidat, 1988, p.17)

<sup>25</sup>See section 3.4

<sup>26</sup>For instance via community development and/or the acceptance of clustered residential patterns etc.

<sup>27</sup>Illustrated by the concentration of refugees in specific areas as discussed in 3.3.2 and the establishment of refugee community groups across Britain.

(i.e. organisation based) nature are evident with each of the other influencing factors explored in this chapter.

For instance, formal support organisations can offer educational support, both in terms of assisting in the acquisition of English through classes tailored to the needs of refugees, and in the provision of additional subject support for refugee attending mainstream classes. Informal community support can act to negate the need for language skills via opportunities for employment within the ethnic sector. In both cases, these interactions between educational factors and support networks may lead to enhanced labour force experiences for refugees. However, it should also be recognised that close contact with people who speak your own language, and the opportunity for employment with fellow nationals, can have the opposite affect. For if sufficient contact (both socially and economically) with fellow refugees is available, the impetus to integrate into the wider society may be absent, thus limiting labour force experiences.

If the interactions between support networks and skills are considered, again both enhancing and limiting influences on labour force experiences can be hypothesised. Formal support services may offer opportunities for skills retraining that caters for refugees with specific language requirements, while they may also provide advice on accessing mainstream courses. The effects of this may be to improve refugees' access to the British labour market, although the areas in which training is available can be limited. Considering informal support networks, demands for ethnic goods and services within the community can provide an outlet for individuals whose skills are largely irrelevant to mainstream British society.

The interactions between the search strategies employed by refugees and support networks are also clear. Formal refugee support services can provide news of labour force related opportunities and their involvement may extend to offering advice and assistance on search strategies and application procedures. Informal support networks within the community can act both to alert refugees to the existence of opportunities, or if the networks themselves principally involve non working members, can limit awareness of labour force openings.

As an extension of the last point, the psychological influence of support networks may be to encourage a belief in positive labour force outcomes (via the success of community members and an awareness of opportunities), or more negatively, if few people have

succeeded, to spread the belief that the outlook is hopeless. In both scenarios the effect being to compound the prevailing labour force experiences.

Finally, support networks, both informal and formal, can act to protect individuals against the negative effect of discrimination on labour force experiences. While this may involve advice about combating discrimination from formal refugee services, it is probable that the greatest effect is likely to be via the provision of an ethnic labour market in which ethnic identity is an asset. Such a market can offer an alternative from a mainstream labour market in which discrimination is rife.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter has been to contextualise and conceptualise refugee labour force experiences with a view to informing research. Having established the need to use the term “labour force” rather than “employment” experiences, section 3.3 introduced the importance of context, while section 3.4 called for a holistic approach to understanding the labour force experiences of refugees. By attempting to consider the prevailing social, political and economic settings - both local and national - under which refugees arrive and subsequently live, together with the whole variety of factors which are thought to affect labour force experience<sup>28</sup>, a comprehensive insight into, and understanding of, those experiences is more probable. While it is unlikely that any particular research into refugee labour force experiences is capable of encompassing all the elements discussed in this chapter in detail, it is thought that a general consideration of the different elements will lead to a broader understanding of refugee labour force experiences.

Thus, the main assertion of this chapter is that there is a need to consider the multitude of influences (both contextual and conceptual) on refugee labour force experiences, rather than to focus on specific influencing factors at the expense of other influences. This, it is argued, should result in a more comprehensive understanding of refugee labour force experiences. Moreover, from such a broad-based understanding, the likelihood of forming effective policy recommendations is thought to be greater. With these arguments in mind, Chapter 4 sets out the detailed aims and objectives of this thesis on the labour force experiences of refugees. Having established the scope of this research project, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the methodologies adopted during the course of the research.

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<sup>28</sup> Summarised in Figure 3.1

**Chapter Four**  
**Primary Research Agenda and Methodology**

## **Primary research agenda and methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

A brief introduction to the aims and objectives of this thesis was given in chapter one. To reiterate, these included both descriptive work aimed at increasing what is known about the labour force experiences of refugees, as well as an exploration of those experiences, with a view to fostering greater understanding, and to informing future policies. Notably, the stated objectives include an exploration of refugee labour force experiences at an individual and community level, with a regard for spatial differences.

Having developed a conceptual and contextual framework (in chapter three) to inform research into the labour force experiences of refugees, a more detailed discussion of the primary research objectives is required. After clarifying the aims and objectives for the primary research, the choice of the refugees from Vietnam as the focus of the research will be discussed, prior to a discussion of the methods adopted during the research.

### **4.2 Research objectives**

The broad aims of the research remain to explore labour force experiences of refugees from the South who have been resident in Britain for some years. This, it is intended, will allow the development of policy recommendations regarding assistance offered to people who are currently being granted asylum in Britain. The idealistic objective of such recommendations is to improve the lives of refugees living in Britain via positive intervention in their labour force experiences.

The primary aim of the research is to gain a greater insight into the labour force experiences of refugees. However, before this aim can be addressed, initial investigation into where the refugees live<sup>1</sup> is required. Building on this locational information, descriptive data on labour force experiences are sought. Notably, given the development of the framework for understanding labour force experiences, data are sought not only on employment experiences, but also with regard to levels of economic activity, self employment, unemployment, job seeking activities and participation in training. Moreover, since the LFE framework suggests local economic circumstances and the presence, or lack of, various means of support (both informal from the community itself and formally from specialist, including community based, organisations) may affect

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<sup>1</sup>The need for such investigation having been identified by the British Refugee Council (1987) and Phillips (1989). See section 3.1

labour force experiences, an interest in the possibility of spatial differences in experiences is reinforced. Seeking evidence for such differences is therefore also part of the descriptive aims of the research.

Following these initial descriptive objectives, the research also aims to increase understanding of refugee labour force experiences, with a view to developing recommendations for future policy. As such, merely to describe such experiences is inadequate. An understanding of how those experiences arose is also required, if interventions are to be suggested. However, given that refugees' are seen as active participants in their own experiences, the focus here is on their understandings of their own experiences. Gaining an insight into this understanding is therefore, the second aim of the research. With regard to this objective, the LFE framework will act as a guide to the areas in which investigation are suggested.

Finally, also as an aid to developing policy recommendations, the research aims to impart information with regard to the refugees' own response to their situation. This will not only illustrate how pro-active refugees are, but may also provide ideas which could have broader implications for policy formation.

Thus, the research aims of this thesis can be summarised by the questions

- 1 Where do the refugees live?
- 2 What are their labour force experiences?
- 3 How do the refugees explain these experiences?
- 4 How have they reacted to their circumstances?
- 5 What are the policy implications when dealing with future refugees?

One further point which requires clarification is the scale at which these research aims are considered. While it is felt that information on individual refugees gives added depth to research, fear that the breadth of experience amongst refugees could be lost called for investigation at a national, local and individual scale. Thus, since a multi-scale approach, in which the scales of inquiry complement and support each other, is deemed appropriate, answers to the research questions are sought at all three levels<sup>2</sup>.

With regard to the subjects of the research, while some research in this field has considered refugees from a variety of countries simultaneously (RTEC, 1991; Walsh et al., 1994), concern that a consideration of many refugee groups would hinder an

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<sup>2</sup> For practical reasons the national scale of inquiry is however limited to questions 1, 2 and 5.

understanding of experiences<sup>3</sup> resulted in a decision to focus the research on refugees from a single country. Moreover, to conduct research on refugees of one nationality is not unprecedented (Ali, 1990; Tamil Information Centre, 1991). Thus, a multi-scale approach, which deals with refugees who fled the same country, is deemed most appropriate.

### **4.3 The choice of a refugee group**

Having decided to focus the practical research on refugees from a single country, a choice of refugees to study is required. As previously mentioned, the focus for the practical research for this thesis are the “refugees from Vietnam”<sup>4</sup>.

The decision to focus on refugees from Vietnam is based on both academic and personal considerations. In the case of the former, although the focus of detailed research in the immediate years after their arrival (Dalglish, 1980; Jones, 1982), most recent academic work on refugees from Vietnam has focused primarily on a review of reception policies (Hale, 1993) or their migration patterns (Robinson and Hale, 1989), with other aspects of long term adaptation to life in Britain largely ignored (exceptions include Crewe, 1992a). Moreover, while the recent Home Office study (Duke & Marshall, 1995) of refugees from Vietnam does examine a range of aspects of living in Britain, those refugees who arrived prior to 1982 (the majority) were not included. Therefore, relatively little research has been conducted about the longer term experiences of the refugees from Vietnam, particularly those who arrived prior to 1982. This is a significant omission which, it is argued, hinders the development of policy recommendations which address the long term experiences of refugees living in this country. The decision to focus on refugees from Vietnam therefore represents an opportunity to fulfil one of the stated aims of the research - to inform and develop policy recommendations with regard to the long term labour force experiences of refugees, particularly those from nations of the South.

This interest in the experiences of refugees from the nations of the South is particularly important given the growing proportion of individuals from such countries who are

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<sup>3</sup> It is known that the labour force experiences of refugees from different countries vary greatly (RTEC, 1991). It is believed that the role of contextual influences, as discussed in chapter three, may explain this. By focusing on refugees from a single country such contextual influences can receive greater consideration.

<sup>4</sup> See section 1.3 for this discussion and the definition of “refugees from Vietnam” as used in this thesis.

attempting to gain refugee status in this country<sup>5</sup>. Given this, the decision to focus on refugees from Vietnam becomes clearer, for not only are their long term experiences largely unresearched, but as one of the earliest large groups of refugees to arrive from the nations of the South<sup>6</sup>, they provide an extended period over which to explore the labour force experiences of such refugees. As such, a consideration of their labour force experiences fills a gap in research on refugees from Vietnam, as well as acting as an example of the experiences of refugees from Southern nations.

As a final academic consideration, it is necessary to briefly discuss the status of refugees from Vietnam as quota, rather than spontaneous, refugees. While this differs from the majority of people being recognised as refugees now<sup>7</sup>, there are a number of methodological advantages to dealing with a group of quota refugees. Firstly, quota refugees do not face legal restrictions on their participation in labour force activities<sup>8</sup>, and secondly, they illustrate formal government responses to refugees<sup>9</sup>. Finally, while data and information on all refugees are scarce, that on quota refugees is more readily found. This allows for contextual issues<sup>10</sup> to be more readily incorporated into the research.

It is deemed that these advantages, along with the long residence time of refugees from Vietnam (and thus the extended period over which to explore their labour force experiences), outweigh the fact that the refugees from Vietnam were recognised as such prior to their arrival in this country. While it is accepted that differences between the experiences of quota and spontaneous refugees are likely to occur, it was still felt that a consideration of the experiences of refugees from Vietnam would meet the aims of the research. Moreover, since Britain was home to around only 300 people from Vietnam prior to the arrival of those fleeing events during the 1970s (Duke & Marshall, 1995), the decision to include “family reunion” and “orderly departure” individuals within this thesis’ definition of “refugees from Vietnam”<sup>11</sup>, is supported. Importantly, the use of

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<sup>5</sup> See sections 1.2 and 2.3.3

<sup>6</sup> This was discussed in section 2.3.3

<sup>7</sup> Section 2.3.2 provides a discussion of the shift towards spontaneous refugees.

<sup>8</sup> See section 3.4.7 for a discussion of the implications of legal status on rights to work. Since spontaneous refugees will previously have been asylum seekers, their labour force experiences will have been affected by their status. By dealing only with quota refugees, the complexity of incorporating the influence of enforced non participation in employment can be avoided.

<sup>9</sup> Government responses to quota refugees are more developed than that for spontaneous refugees and as such illustrate resettlement strategies at their most developed. This results in an opportunity to assess the most developed form of response by the government to refugees.

<sup>10</sup> As discussed in section 3.3

<sup>11</sup> This is discussed in section 1.3

this definition means that there is no need to ask potentially indelicate questions about an individual's immigration status. Finally, while the choice of a single nationality group reduced the variety in experience, the choice of the refugees from Vietnam ensured that some degree of variety in experiences was retained. This was due to the diversity of life (including labour force) experiences found between refugees who had left the North and South of Vietnam (Marshall, 1989).

With regard to personal considerations, focusing on the refugees from Vietnam would utilise existing knowledge and experience with this group of refugees. Importantly, it was anticipated that existing connections with members of the Vietnamese community and The Ockenden Venture (one of the key charities involved in the resettlement of the refugees from Vietnam) could facilitate easier access to potential respondents.

#### **4.4 Research methods**

Having selected the refugees from Vietnam as the focus of the research, methods capable of meeting the research aims require identification. However, prior to a consideration of research methods, clarification on the type of data deemed capable of providing answers to the research questions is necessary.

It was apparent that with the introductory aim of locating the refugees; then the dual aim of both describing labour force experiences and understanding them, both quantitative and qualitative data were required. For example, while quantitative data on levels of unemployment aided the task of describing labour force experiences, an insight into how the refugees believed those experiences arose, and their understanding of, and reactions to them, was only gained through qualitative data. Thus, in response to the requirement for quantitative and qualitative data at three scales of inquiry (national, local and individual), a multi-method approach to the research was indicated. While the quantitative data were used in a largely descriptive manner, both to locate the refugees and to answer the second of the research questions - what are their labour force experiences? - the qualitative data had both a descriptive and explanatory role in relation to all the questions. Qualitative data provided 'factual' information where quantitative data was unavailable, as well as elucidating refugees' understandings, feelings and actions concerning their labour force experiences.

Such a mixing of quantitative and qualitative approaches is consistent with Julia Brannen's (1992) discussion of mixed method research, especially with regard to research in which there is a

*"pre-eminence of the qualitative over the quantitative"* (p.27).

In her explanation of the various forms such research can take, quantitative material

*"provide quantified background data... often derived from official statistics, such as census data"* (p.27)

which allows more intensive qualitative data to be contextualised. In research which aims to locate the refugees, then both describe and explore their labour force experiences, such a mixing of data types was appropriate.

Having identified the roles which the quantitative and qualitative data took in this research, a more detailed discussion of the methods adopted is needed. Taking first quantitative, then qualitative data, the research methods adopted are discussed in turn<sup>12</sup>.

#### **4.4.1 Quantitative research**

As previously noted, the primary aims of the quantitative data were twofold. Firstly to locate the refugees from Vietnam, and secondly to contribute to the formation of an answer to the question "What are their labour force experiences?". Each of these aims are dealt with in turn.

##### **4.4.1.1 Locating the refugees from Vietnam**

Prior to work by Hale (1991), evidence about the distribution of refugees from Vietnam in Britain had been wholly inadequate. Collating records from Refugee Action and the Ockenden Venture, Hale (1991) compiled a data set which contained details of 3101 families containing 12,500 individuals. These records covered

*"approximately 57% of the total Vietnamese population in this country. For each household, a series of chained addresses was established, ranging from first resettlement address between 1979 and 1982 to the last address in March, 1988."* (pp. 249-250)

This data set formed the basis of an analysis of secondary migration as experienced by the refugees from Vietnam. As such, Hale provided the first detailed information regarding the changing nature of the location of refugees from Vietnam in this country<sup>13</sup>. Building on this work, this thesis aims both to update the information about the refugees

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<sup>12</sup>It should be noted that all research methods underwent a pilot stage prior to inclusion in the research in their described form.

<sup>13</sup>This is discussed in chapter 5

whereabouts and to extend the proportion of refugees included in the analysis. The instrument for this was the 1991 census.

Although refugee status was not recorded in the 1991 census, birthplace was; notably individuals “Born in Vietnam” can readily be identified at all scales of inquiry (e.g. national to enumeration district). Given that prior to the arrival of the refugees from Vietnam only around 300 people from this country were resident in Britain (Duke and Marshall, 1995), the assertion presented here is that virtually all individuals identifying themselves as “Born in Vietnam” fall within the definition of refugees from Vietnam as used in this thesis. Indeed, the numbers identified as Born in Vietnam (20,119) are broadly consistent with an estimate<sup>14</sup> of 24,000 refugees from Vietnam settling in Britain by 1992. Additionally, 95% of the group identified in the census were either ethnically Chinese or Other Asian, presumably Vietnamese, further strengthening the argument that they are refugees from Vietnam. For these reasons, and based on the precedent set by Neuwirth (1993), a decision to utilise the census as a source of quantitative data on the refugees was taken.

Having accepted the census as a source of data on the refugees, opportunities to map their residential location across Britain were taken. The location of the refugees was mapped at national and county scales, and at district and ward levels for areas of concentration. As such, this work complements Hale’s (1991) by extending the number of refugees on which residential location data are available, and providing a later date for that information. In the context of this thesis, details of residential location provide a starting point from which to examine refugee labour force experiences across Britain.

#### **4.4.1.2 What are the refugees’ labour force experiences?**

Quantitative data relating to this question are rare, however identifying refugees from Vietnam in the 1991 census provided certain opportunities. Information relating to labour force experiences, in which those born in Vietnam were identifiable, included census tables indicating levels of economic activity, the population in employment, employees, the unemployed and the industrial sectors in which people work. Unfortunately, these tables are only available at a national (British) scale. While this limited the availability of direct labour force experience data on the refugees to the

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<sup>14</sup>Sources are Jones (1982) and Duke and Marshall (1995). The “missing” 3,000 refugees are thought to be accounted for by those arriving after the census was taken and those who were born elsewhere (for instance China or Hong Kong).

national level, given a detailed knowledge of where the refugees lived, other pertinent data could be examined. For instance, general unemployment rates gave an indication of the local economic circumstances in which the refugees experienced labour force activities, while the size of the local ethnic Chinese population denoted a possible source of community support<sup>15</sup>. Since this data was available at all scales of inquiry, the circumstances in districts and wards known to be home to large numbers of refugees from Vietnam were examined, thus adding contextual detail to the refugees' experiences.

#### **4.4.1.3 Census media and access arrangements**

It is worth noting that the census is accessible via a number of different media. In this research three media were utilised, the *1991 Census Ethnic Group and Country of Birth Reports (volume 1 and 2)*, *Supermap* and *SASPAC*. Whilst most people will be familiar with the *Census Reports*, familiarity with *Supermap* and *SASPAC* may be less common and they thus deserve a brief introduction. *Supermap* and *SASPAC* are both census-specific computer packages which assist in the task of locating specific data generated by the census.

*Supermap* is a commercial package in which census data are held on a CD-ROM in the form of spreadsheets which can be interrogated. The application is WINDOWS based and also includes map generating capabilities. As such, *Supermap* is a quick and relatively easy tool with which to find census data and display it. However, although the spreadsheets provided in *Supermap* are adequate for many users, the complete census is not available. With specific reference to this research, *Supermap* does not allow for the identification of the refugees from Vietnam.

In order to gain computer access to the full range of census data, including that on the refugees from Vietnam, the *SASPAC* package was used. *SASPAC* stores census data in a highly compressed format and is operated via the Manchester Computer Centre's CS6400 computer. Interrogating the package with a command language allows for specialised data, such as that on the location of refugees from Vietnam, to be extracted. Given the compatible nature of this data, it was then imported into *Supermap*.

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<sup>15</sup> See chapter five for a discussion of the links between the broader ethnic Chinese and refugee from Vietnam communities.

As a final note on the census, a brief discussion on how the data was dealt with is required. Given the rather complex procedures for collating the data<sup>16</sup>, the descriptive task assigned to quantitative data, and the emphasis on the qualitative aspects of the research, only simple manipulation of the data for summary and display purposes were conducted. In the main these tasks are conducted either within *Supermap* or using *EXCEL* software.

#### 4.4.2 Qualitative research

While the quantitative research for this thesis was primarily concerned with locating the refugees from Vietnam, describing their labour force experiences at a national level and providing contextual data on the areas in which they lived, the qualitative research aims were more complex. These aims were to provide labour force experience data at a local and individual level and to provide answers to the questions

How do the refugees explain their experiences?

How have they reacted to their circumstances?

As such, qualitative data was sought at a local (community based) and individual level on the experiences of refugees, their understanding of those experiences and their reactions to them. Thus while chapter three has introduced a theoretical framework for understanding refugee labour force experiences, hence meeting the

*“task of the social scientist to give some theoretical account of social life”*

(Hughes, 1990, p. 96)

It is only with

*“the observation of what the members of society do or have done”*

(Hughes, 1990, p. 97)

that the empirical research and the task of exploring experiences in more detail began.

From the variety of qualitative methods available, a decision to utilise personal interviews as a data collecting technique was taken. Such interviews were seen as a means of gaining not only ‘factual’ information, but primarily of accessing the

*“subjective meanings and motives”*

(Smith, 1994, p. 491)

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<sup>16</sup> *SASPAC* was used in batch mode which required an adequate knowledge of the command language to be developed. Additionally, although data from *SASPAC* could be imported into *Supermap* this required complex transformations.

with, and through which, individuals understand their experiences. With regard to who should be interviewed, the requirement for local level information on both experiences and refugee reactions to their circumstances needs addressing, before a consideration of the requirements for individual level data.

Given the presence of refugees from Vietnam in a number of locations, and an interest in possible spatial differences in experience and reactions, access to local data from as many communities as possible was desirable. Since the dispersed nature of the communities<sup>17</sup> prevented extensive interaction with communities, it was necessary to gain access to a knowledgeable person in various locations. The theoretical work had already identified the potentially important role of support networks, including formal refugee support services and such services also represented a refugee response to their circumstances. For these reasons Vietnam refugee support organisations were seen as ideal places in which to seek knowledgeable people.

The Vietnam Refugee National Council provided a list of 39 Vietnamese Community Associations around Britain. The locations of these associations were mapped<sup>18</sup> showing a close relationship with the areas in which the refugees lived. Although some refugees live far from a VCA, and others are denied access, or choose not to use them (Girbash, 1991, suggests 17% living in Manchester do not use the VCA), it was decided that the staff of these associations would be appropriate sources of local information. Since no other community groups were known, self-selection by the groups themselves became the criteria for inclusion in the research. All 39 groups were invited to participate, each receiving a letter of invitation and information leaflet which can be seen in appendix 4-1. The result was 27 interviews<sup>19</sup>, half with workers at Vietnamese Community Associations inside, and half outside, London<sup>20</sup>. Given the research emphasis on labour force experiences, in the 6 community groups who operated a formal employment development project, the worker responsible was interviewed, elsewhere interviews were with general community workers, or group chairmen. As a matter of organisation, the interviews outside London (referred to as the provincial interviews) were conducted and underwent initial analysis, prior to the London phase of the research.

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<sup>17</sup> This is discussed in some detail in chapter 5

<sup>18</sup>For London associations *GEOPLAN in association with the Royal Mail (1993)* and *Ordinance Survey (1965)* were used to locate them at a ward level.

<sup>19</sup>Two of these were with organisations not on the list who were contacted via snowballing. Of the 13 groups on the list who did not participate, only four declined to participate, convenient interview dates could not be arranged with two more, and contact was not established with the remaining 6 despite extensive effort.

<sup>20</sup> The term London refers to an area covered by the old Greater London Council.

The requirements for personal level qualitative data necessitated interviews with individuals. Similarly to the earlier argument concerning a focus on refugees from a single country, a decision was made to focus the individual interviews on people who were currently experiencing a shared labour force outcome. This provided some consistency in experience, thus placing the emphasis on gaining a depth of understanding of how those shared experiences arose, rather than seeking an insight into a broader range of current labour force outcomes as experienced by members of the community. This was felt particularly appropriate given that gaining a broad insight into community experiences was the aim of the association interviews.

Having decided to focus the interviews on individuals who shared similar labour force outcomes, a decision as to the criteria for selection was needed. Interviews based on personal experiences were conducted with 14 association workers, 13 of whom had already been interviewed in their role as spokespersons on community labour force experiences.

The decision to focus attention on the personal experiences of this group, as opposed to those of, for instance, restaurant workers, shop owners or the unemployed, was based on two main considerations. Firstly, the community workers were significant members of their communities, acting as role models, and facilitating access to services and experiences for members of the community. If the characteristics of these people could be identified, policy implications for identifying and training such people amongst future groups of refugees could be made.

The second reason for focusing on community workers was more pragmatic. Preparatory work for the research had indicated that gaining the trust of ordinary community members would necessitate prolonged and intimate involvement with the communities. For the pilot stage of the research, this involvement included providing English support to community members one evening a week for 18 months and attending community cultural events such as Vietnamese New Year. Even with such involvement, access to an interpreter, and tri-lingual<sup>21</sup> invitations were sent to community members, the recruitment of ordinary refugees from Vietnam proved extremely problematic. While other researchers (Crewe, 1992a; Frazer, 1988) have overcome such difficulties by employing members of the community as research assistants, a desire to conduct interviews in multiple locations and financial constraints prohibited the use of such a

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<sup>21</sup>English, Cantonese and Vietnamese.

strategy in this research. At the same time, initial contact with a small number of Vietnamese Community Associations indicated that they would be likely to participate, and it was probable that some community workers would agree to discussing their own experiences.

When telephone arrangements were made for the community experience association interviews, the possibility of interviews concerning individual experiences was broached. This invitation was repeated on arrival at the association and 14 workers agreed to discuss their own experiences.

Having specified who the respondents for the research were, it is now necessary to consider the interview and analysis techniques utilised. The techniques in use with both community and individual interviewees are essentially the same and are thus discussed together, though the analysis procedures occurred separately and are discussed in different chapters<sup>22</sup>.

#### ***4.4.2.1 Data Collection***

Having obtained an agreement to participate in the research, arrangements to conduct interviews were made. In all cases, the interviews were conducted at the premises of a Vietnamese community group. On arrival at an interview location, brief notes on the nature of the premises were made - these varied from open plan shared offices, to front lounges in instances where community groups were operated from workers' homes.

Having met the interviewees, a further verbal explanation of the research was given, along with an invitation to ask any questions. Furthermore, assurances of confidentiality and encouragement to refuse to answer specific questions should they choose, were also given prior to the commencement of the interview. Having gained confirmation that the respondent wished to participate, permission to record the interview was requested. The majority of respondents agreed, and only 7 community and 2 individual interviews were not taped. In these cases, permission for extensive notes to be made was obtained.

As previously stated<sup>23</sup> personal interviews were conducted, though the specific form of those interviews requires further consideration. Specifically, the interviews were conducted as focused interviews which Nachmias and Nachmias (1981) describe as having four characteristics,

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<sup>22</sup> Chapters 6, 7 and 8 are derived from the community experience interviews, while chapter 9 deals with individual experience interviews.

<sup>23</sup> See section 4.4.2

*“1 It takes place with respondents known to be involved in a particular experience*

*2 It refers to situations that have been analysed prior to the interview*

*3 It proceeds on the basis of an interview guide specifying topics*

*4 It is focused on the subjective experiences regarding the situations under study.”*

(p.189)

These characteristics matched the needs of the research given that, (i) all respondents were refugees or worked with the community, (ii) the LFE framework and census material had begun the process of analysis, and (iii) the discussion was to relate to labour force experiences, (iv) particularly subjective understandings of those experiences. Furthermore, given the cross-cultural nature of the research, focused interviews were thought most appropriate, as they allowed for flexibility in how questions were posed. This was felt to be particularly important given the varying English ability amongst respondents<sup>24</sup>, all but one of whom spoke either Vietnamese or Cantonese as a first language. Additionally, irrespective of language ability, there was a need to be sensitive to differing cultural and life experiences, which could often have been traumatic given the respondents situation as refugees. For these reasons, the flexibility of the focused interview was thought to be vital, since it would allow the researcher to react to the particular circumstances of individual respondents, their language abilities and sensitivities.

The focused interviews were based upon interview outlines which are reproduced in appendix 4-2 (community interviews) and 4-3 (individual interviews). These outlines were informed by the research questions<sup>25</sup>, the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 3 and a consideration of other research dealing with similar issues (e.g. Crewe, 1992; Frazer, 1988; Tatla, 1990; RTEC, 1991). For instance, the discussions about community members' labour force experiences during community interviews aimed to provide material for the research question “what are refugee labour force experiences?”. Subsequent probing for further details to add to an understanding of how the refugees explain these experiences was guided by the topics identified in Figure 3.1 and the contextual information about the locality. Information about what services the community association offered illustrated refugee reactions, while that on funding gave

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<sup>24</sup> In the case of two community experience interviews interpreters were engaged to assist in the interview process.

<sup>25</sup> See section 4.2

an indication of the difficulties overcome to offer such services. The progressive focusing of the interview topics is common to much research, while a precedent for relying on community leaders to provide such information can be seen in RTEC (1991).

With regard to the individual interviews outline (appendix 4.3), the proforma of personal information was seen as a rapid means of gaining factual information relevant to the research. It was loosely based on the questionnaires that are common to much research in this field (Girbash, 1991; Crewe, 1992c), although the topics covered were more limited given the desire to utilise personal interviews as the main means of data collection. The discussion of individual labour force experiences was guided by the knowledge that this information would later be “investigated”<sup>26</sup> with the aid of forms developed from the job history charts used by Wallman (1984). As with the community interviews, the discussion about labour force experiences progressed to include the topics identified in Figure 3.1.

In keeping with the focused interview technique both the individual and community interview outlines acted as *aide memoirs* rather than strict schedules. Indeed, the order in which the topics were discussed was largely controlled by the respondents and they were encouraged to add anything else they felt was important. The interviews lasted for between half an hour and two and a half hours depending on the time available given the community workers responsibilities. Given these responsibilities, and that interviews were conducted in the workplace, it was not uncommon for interviews to be temporarily suspended while respondents dealt with telephone calls or visits by clients. Although this interrupted the flow of the interviews, it gave the researcher a greater insight into the work conducted by the community groups.

#### ***4.4.2.2 Analysis procedure***

Although plenty of literature exists concerning the use of qualitative research strategies (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Nachmias & Nachmias, 1981), the manner of analysing qualitative material depends largely on the individual. However, there is some consistency with regard to the processes undertaken in qualitative research with all researchers following similar processes, although procedures vary greatly. In short, although all researchers collect, organise and assess their data, it is the manner in which they do these tasks that differs. Given this, the need for a definite data management

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<sup>26</sup>See section 4.4.2.4

strategy and a clear methodology (as discussed by Huberman and Miles, 1994) is evident. With regard to this research, the management of the research data can be understood to have consisted of five distinct stages, namely, “Collection”, “Processing”, “Investigation”, “Speculation” and “Review”. These five stages were carried out separately with regard to individual and community interviews. Furthermore, it should be noted that the community interviews collected from groups outside London underwent an initial period of analysis prior to conducting interviews in London. The data collected here were subsequently analysed before the further round of joint Speculation and Review.

While the collection of the data, via interviews, has already been discussed, the remaining four stages of data management will now be considered.

#### ***4.4.2.3 Processing***

“Processing” refers to the transformation of the raw data, the tapes and notes of interviews, into a format which would enable analysis to continue. Primarily this consists of transcribing tapes and / or rewriting notes made during interviews. With regard to the interviews, given that accent and language difficulties arose, a conscious decision was made to transcribe the interview tapes at the first opportunity. This generally meant within two days of the interview being conducted. The result was that the interviews were still fresh in the mind and this undoubtedly assisted in the task of transcription.

With regard to transcription, it should be noted that a simplified transcription was made. Given that the research seeks to investigate respondents’ knowledge and understanding of their circumstances, and not their use of particular words or phrases, full and complete transcripts were not required. Thus, where the accent and unusual phraseology used by some respondents, caused difficulties, a simplified transcript was made. The aim of the simplification was to aid subsequent analysis by ridding the transcripts of superfluous material. Specifically, comments made by the researcher, where the aim was merely to confirm what the respondent had said, were excluded. This does not refer to comments made to confirm or extend opinions, but merely to those where language or accent difficulties prevented an immediate recognition of the words used.

#### **4.4.2.4 Investigation**

The “investigation” of the interview transcripts and notes refers to the procedure adopted for determining the content of the interviews or, the manner of coding. Although the previous conception of the labour force experiences framework precluded a wholly inductive approach to this coding, a conscious effort was made to

*“Let coding categories emerge from the data.”*

(Pfaffenberger, 1988 p.28).

Having re-read each interview over a matter of two days, each interview transcript underwent a detailed process of coding whereby every paragraph in the transcript was coded on the basis of the topics it covered. Since frequently more than one topic occurred in a single paragraph, as many topics as occurred were given. In practical terms this meant the margin of each transcript contained codes for all topics under discussion. A note was also made of each topic as it arose. At the same time as doing this, each paragraph of a transcript was allocated a location marker to aid subsequent identification.

On the basis of the list of topics identified in the transcripts a review of topics occurred. This took the form of brain storming, during which broader topics or sub themes were identified. Having identified these sub themes, a process of formally ascribing topics to the appropriate sub theme was undertaken. Thus, for example, all topics relating to funding (e.g. sources of funding, funding applications, funding cuts, funding limitations on work etc.) were collated together under a sub theme of funding. It should be noted that the ascription of a certain topic to a particular sub theme did not preclude it from being ascribed to other sub themes as well. Any single paragraph could occur in any number of topics, which in themselves could be ascribed to a number of sub themes. Having completed this coding exercise, an *EXCEL* file was compiled for each sub theme listing occurrences of relevant topics. Details of topics, codes and location markers were entered into these files sequentially, although subsequent manipulation by *EXCEL* allowed occurrences of each topic to be clustered together. This allowed easy identification of all paragraphs relating to any particular topic. Appendix 4-4 contains a page from one of these *EXCEL* files.

As already stated, the identification of topics was conducted across provincial and then London community interviews (the whole data management procedure was conducted independently for provincial and London community group interviews followed by

subsequent additional joint speculation and review, and then finally repeated for the interviews with individuals). The emphasis was therefore on a cross-case rather than within-case basis (Huberman and Miles, 1994). Given the prior existence of the conceptualisation of labour force experiences, the aim was to try and identify the underlying forces behind experiences to determine if the conceptualisation was useful. Thus although the uniqueness of each case was important, it was also important to see if any generic processes were at work in all the cases (Huberman and Miles, 1994). With this aim the cross-case approach to coding and subsequent stages of analysis was particularly relevant.

With regard to the interviews about individual labour force experiences, an additional form of “investigation” was undertaken. Although the cross-case approach was retained, gaining a clear comprehension of the individuals’ experiences was felt to be particularly vital. To aid this, and the subsequent speculation and review process, labour force career forms, similar to the job history chart’s used by Wallman (1984), were completed from the information gained during the interview. Appendix 4.5 contains an example of these labour force career forms.

#### ***4.4.2.5 Speculation and Review***

Having created *EXCEL* files for each sub theme, the task of analysing data in detail could begin. Taking each sub theme in turn, the *EXCEL* files revealed which topics were mentioned most frequently. Starting with these most common topics, all paragraphs relating to each topic were re-read and subsequently written about. At this point it is important to refer to the work of Laurel Richardson (1994) with regards to the use of writing as a research tool, rather than as a means of merely reporting research findings. Richardson states that although individuals, myself included, are generally taught

*“not to write until I knew what I wanted to say, until my points were organized and outlined.... I will argue.. it ignores the role of writing as a dynamic, creative process.... Students are trained to observe, listen, question and participate. Yet they are trained to conceptualize writing as “writing up” the research rather than as a method of discovery.”*

(pp. 517)

With little experience of analysing qualitative research data, the use of writing as a research tool appealed. If writing about the topics under consideration was a

*“a way of “knowing” - a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship with it.”*

( pp. 516)

In this way, writing about the topics revealed what the researcher “knew” about the data gained in the interviews. By reflexive re-reading of interviews and re-writing about them, this knowledge was refined. Thus “speculation” can be understood to represent the initial writings, with “review” describing the subsequent process of re-reading (both writings and transcripts) and re-writing. While such an approach to analysis may be uncommon, it was thought to be appropriate. Indeed, given that qualitative research has been defined as

*“one of subjective understanding ..... the primary goal, an ability to emphasize, communicate and ( in some cases) emancipate....”*

(Smith, 1994 pp. 491)

the use of writing, which is in essence a means of communicating understandings, as a research tool, is justifiable. In this way, initial writings communicate unrefined thoughts and ideas to the researcher allowing subsequent reappraisal and clarification, and thus ideas to mature with each successive writing.

This process of speculation and review via writing was undertaken with all topics within each sub theme. Thereafter, the process did not cease, with successive re-readings and re-writings occurring until the versions which appear in subsequent chapters arose.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

The data management and analysis procedures described in this chapter ensured that the aims and objectives of the research were met. Quantitative data helped to describe the labour force experiences of refugees from Vietnam, while interviews with community leaders and individuals expanded upon this, and also contributed to an understanding of how those experiences arose. Notably, focusing on the “voice” of the refugees themselves ensured that the human aspect of their experiences was not obscured or lost<sup>1</sup>.

It is however, important to acknowledge the shortcomings of the “voice” heard within this thesis and to briefly expand upon some points made earlier, namely, the use of VCA workers as ‘knowledgeable people’, the relationship between VCA workers and their communities, the use of interpreters, and the privileged position of the respondents.

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<sup>1</sup> Thus avoiding the customary error of refugee studies as discussed in section 1.3

As previously noted, the voice heard within this thesis is not that of the majority of refugees from Vietnam, but that of association workers. These workers acted as 'knowledgeable people' by supplying information about the communities they served. As such, information was not gained directly from the community, but rather through a spokesperson who acted as an intermediary. Although 26 of the 27 VCA respondents were themselves refugees from Vietnam (and thus part of the community), this role as an intermediary deserves recognition, particularly in light of the relationship between VCA workers and the communities they serve. It must be acknowledged that the role of intermediary offered respondents the opportunity to control the flow of information to the researcher and the researcher undoubtedly received a filtered view of the communities' labour force experiences. A view which ensured the respondent's agenda for the interview could be met. This agenda potentially involved portraying the community in a favourable light, offering explanations for their shortcomings and extenuating the purpose and role of the community associations. In particular, given the often paternalistic relationship between VCA workers and the communities they serve, an agenda which served to 'protect' the community was a distinct possibility. Additionally, it should be remembered that all respondents had experience of seeking funding for VCA activities and thus of portraying their communities as the 'deserving needy'. These points should be remembered when reading subsequent chapters, although their influence should not be over estimated. Respondents did not know in advance what they would be asked during the interviews and it is likely that the researcher's own experiences and sympathetic demeanour would act to divert respondents from adopting a purely defensive stance during the interview. Indeed, although some respondents initially held a defensive position this rarely persisted as the interview progressed. Moreover, not all comments made by respondents reflected the communities in a positive manner.

It should also be recognised that two of the VCA interviews were conducted with the aid of an interpreter. Both occasions, shared the same circumstances - the respondents understood English, but were not confident about speaking it. As association chairpersons' they therefore arranged for their VCA interpreter to be present during the interview. Although it is recognised that translation adds another filter to the data collection process, many difficulties common to use of interpreters did not arise. The respondents' clearly controlled the situation and as they largely understood both the

researcher's questioning, and the interpreters translation of their reply into English, on occasions they added points of clarification or corrected their colleague's translation. Additionally, one respondent actively encouraged the interpreter to contribute their own views to the interview.

It is also important to consider the validity of the information collected during interviews. Specifically, qualitative data was sought in relation to the question 'What are the labour force experiences of refugees from Vietnam?'. Respondents were encouraged to describe both community-wide, and their own, labour force experiences, which enabled a composite picture of experiences at a local, community and national level to be developed. This picture has both strengths and weaknesses. The picture is not based on quantifiable facts or measurements, but rather on the interpretations of individual respondents. It reflects their view of the labour force experiences of refugees from Vietnam, rather than a notional objective view of reality. As such, the perceptions of the labour force experiences presented in this thesis, belong, principally, to the respondents (who with one exception were all refugees from Vietnam). Although their view does not necessarily reflect reality, it is what has shaped their reactions. Since this thesis also seeks to determine how the refugees have reacted to their labour force experiences, this view of those experiences is, it is argued here, the most important one to consider.

Finally, it should be remembered that the VCA workers who took part in this research hold privileged positions within their community. They, with few exceptions, speak good English; are employed, well educated, articulate and well informed people<sup>2</sup>. While this makes them admirable 'knowledgeable people', they are not representative of the wider community of refugees from Vietnam. VCA workers have labour force career histories which differ greatly from those experienced by the wider population of refugees from Vietnam. Their views may be shaped by these disparate experiences, and reflected in the story they tell. Conceivably, given the privileged position of the VCA workers, they may unfairly judge the experiences of others against their own successes, or alternatively, feel compelled to justify their own position. These possibilities should be borne in mind.

Acknowledging these issues concerning the 'voice' heard within this thesis, the subsequent five chapters utilise the described research procedures in order to explore the research questions in relation to the refugees from Vietnam

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<sup>2</sup> See chapter nine for biographies of 14 of the respondents.

- 1 Where do the refugees live?
- 2 What are their labour force experiences?
- 3 How do the refugees explain these experiences?
- 4 How have they reacted to their circumstances?

It is, however, only with the concluding chapter that broader considerations relating to all refugees are returned to. Additionally, it is at this point that the final research question

What are the policy implications when dealing with future refugees?

will be considered.

Chapter Five  
Refugees from Vietnam

# **Refugees from Vietnam**

## **5.1 Introduction**

It will be recalled that this thesis focuses on refugees from Vietnam living in Britain. Before considering the data gained during interviews in subsequent chapters, this chapter considers the refugees' situation and circumstances. It draws both on published literature (key sources include Dalglish, 1989; Jones, 1982; Hale 1991; Duke and Marshall, 1995), and new analyses, conducted for this thesis, of the 1991 census. As such, this chapter reports both substantive research findings, and a review of published literature. The questions addressed include who were the refugees, where did they come from and why? How were they received? Where do they live now? And what is known about their labour force experiences?

## **5.2 An introduction to the history of Vietnam**

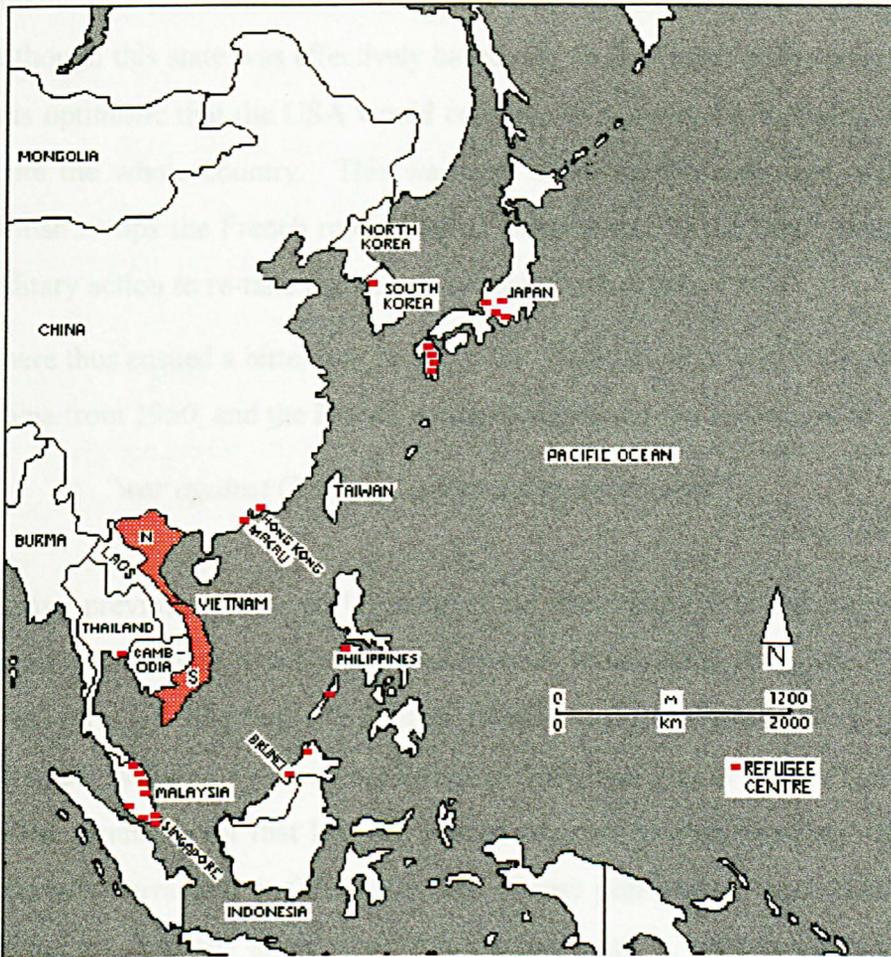
Vietnam is situated in South East Asia, being bordered by China to the North, Laos and Cambodia to the West, and the South China Sea to the East and South (See Figure 5.1). While the North and South portions of the country are dominated by impressive delta's (the Red River Delta and Mekong Delta, respectively), Vietnam's westerly borders are shaped by mountains. In order to understand why refugees fled the country, a basic understanding of its history and ethnic diversity is required.

Much of Vietnam's history has been shaped by its involvement with other states and particularly its determination to gain self rule. Historically, the greatest influence on Vietnam has been from the Chinese, who dominated and ruled the country for much of the period between 111 BC and 1427 AD (Duiker, 1983). However, following the defeat and withdrawal of the Chinese in the winter of 1427, Vietnam became self governing and remained so for some 300 years.

Vietnam's status as an independent nation was lost during the 19th Century when France became the colonial power. Between 1858 and 1893 France conquered much of South East Asia, and along with neighbouring Laos and Cambodia, Vietnam became known as the French Union of Indo-China (Diski, 1995).

While opposition to French rule was ever present, it was only with the second world war that it became effective. With Japan gaining power after France's surrender to Germany in 1940, Ho Chi Minh, who had been exiled in the 1930's for opposing the French, returned to establish the Vietminh, a league for Vietnamese independence that was

## ASIA AND THE PACIFIC



Sources: Adapted from Mapson File; McCarthy, J. E. (1980) Encyclopaedia Britannica

Figure 5.1 Location of Vietnam (also showing refugee camps)

dominated by the communists. Backed by the USA, the Vietminh led the fight against the Japanese and with the end of the second world war, a nationalist coalition led by the communists proclaimed the Democratic Republic of Vietnam as an independent state. Although this state was effectively based only in the North of the country, Ho Chi Minh was optimistic that the USA would continue to support the Vietminh and enable him to unite the whole country. This was not, however, the case, and with the backing of British troops the French re-established colonial rule in the South before embarking on military action to re-take the Vietminh-held North (Diski, 1995).

There thus ensued a bitter war between the Vietminh who were supported by communist China from 1950, and the French who had persuaded the Americans to join them in their

*“war against Chinese Communist expansionism.”*

(Diski, 1995, p. 21).

Having previously received US military aid, the Vietminh found themselves fighting an opponent who was now 80% funded by their former allies (Dalglish, 1989). However, even with US backing, the French fared badly and despite early gains against the Vietminh, suffered a convincing defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. This battle proved to be the turning point that led to a French decision to abandon South-East Asia. Peace talks were arranged at Geneva in July of that year and an agreement was reached to divide the country along the 17th parallel until a general election could lead to unification. However, before such elections could occur, anti-Communists in the South held a referendum which resulted in the declaration of a Republic of Vietnam. The Vietminh retaliated with the formation of a guerrilla National Liberation Front in the South (Duiker, 1983) and the result was renewed hostilities with, by 1961, the re-entering of the Americans on the side of the South (Kurian, 1987).

American involvement in the war between North and South Vietnam was to last until 1975, though as early as 1968 the US was considering withdrawing from the conflict (Dalglish, 1989). The death of Ho Chi Minh in 1969 did nothing to halt the war and with the Americans beginning a gradual withdrawal in the same year, a conventional invasion of the South began, culminating with the fall of Saigon in 1975. This signalled the conquering of the South by the communists and precipitated a flow of refugees fleeing communism.

### 5.2.1 Ethnic diversity

While the arrival of communism in the South of Vietnam is often thought of as the precursor to the refugee crisis in the country, another factor was also highly significant. This factor was ethnicity.

By the 1950's, about 85% of Vietnam's population was ethnic Vietnamese (Duiker, 1983). Over sixty other ethnic groups were represented, and outside the mountain regions by far the biggest group were the ethnic Chinese. Estimates of their numbers vary with Duiker stating some 1.5 million (Duiker, 1983) and Dalglish fixing the figure at around 3.1 million (Dalglish, 1989).

Given the centuries of rule by the Chinese, the presence of a large ethnic Chinese population is not surprising, although Duiker (1983) asserts that most had arrived relatively recently during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Most of the ethnic Chinese lived in urban areas and were engaged in commercial activities; however in the North of Vietnam some

*“were fishermen, dockworkers, or coal miners, and a few were engaged in rice farming.”*

(Duiker, 1983, p.4).

From precolonial times the ethnic Chinese population had retained a distinctive identity from the wider Vietnamese society and this continued into the 1950's, although a policy of gradual assimilation was enacted in the North. However, by 1969, with the death of Ho Chi Minh and the Communist invasion of the South, reports of discrimination against the Chinese increased markedly in the North (Dalglish, 1989).

While the unification of Vietnam under communism was a key event which triggered a massive flow of refugees, significant, especially for the large ethnic Chinese population, was the deterioration in Sino-Vietnamese relations which culminated with an invasion of Vietnam in 1979 (Edholm, 1983). Relations between Vietnam and its former ally China had deteriorated after Vietnam invaded Cambodia in 1978 in retaliation for border incursions by forces loyal to the dictator Pol Pot (Diski, 1995). Since China supported Pol Pot, they retaliated against Vietnam's actions by invading. For the ethnic Chinese population these events were

*“the turning point, after which there was no possibility of remaining in Vietnam..... They had to leave; they were forced out... the Chinese lost their jobs, Chinese schools were closed, whole factories were shut down... whole towns had been abandoned.”*

(Edholm et al, 1983, pp. 7-8)

As such, the exodus of ethnic Chinese from Vietnam represented an expulsion of the population rather than an escape (Dalglish, 1989). With regard to the means of leaving Vietnam, boats became the most popular means of departure (hence the term “boat people”), with many of those from the North of Vietnam reaching Hong Kong.

It can therefore be concluded that the exodus of refugees from Vietnam comprised of people fleeing two separate sets of circumstances. In the South, most of the refugees chose to leave rather than live under communism, the ethnic Chinese population was effectively expelled from throughout Vietnam after 1978/79. While the flow of refugees fleeing communism was significant, in terms of the refugees from Vietnam who reached Britain, it was the expulsion of ethnic Chinese that was more important. Thus, while most of the refugees reaching the USA fled the communist take over of the South, Dalglish (1989) has shown that only 10% of the refugees reaching Britain fled from the South, and that 77% were ethnically Chinese rather than Vietnamese. This largely relates to the proximity of North Vietnam to the British colony of Hong Kong.

### **5.2.2 International reactions to the refugee crisis**

In the initial period during which significant numbers of refugees fled Vietnam (i.e. 1975 following the fall of Saigon), amongst the international community it was the USA who primarily reacted to the crisis. They admitted 130,000 refugees in just two weeks in 1975 (Jones, 1982). America’s response was unsurprising given that they, amongst the international community, had most involvement with Vietnam, and that it was their withdrawal that placed American-supported Vietnamese at risk with the arrival of the communists. Large numbers of refugees also reached France, a situation that can be explained by the colonial links between the two countries. Britain by contrast accepted just 32 refugees from Vietnam during 1975, although it did permit 300<sup>1</sup> already in the country to remain (Hunt, 1985). As such, Britain’s role during the first wave of refugee movement (that primarily influenced by a desire to escape communism) was negligible.

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<sup>1</sup>It is generally recognised that only 300 people from Vietnam were resident in Britain prior to the arrival of the refugees.

Britain's involvement in the fate of refugees from Vietnam remained minor until large numbers of ethnic Chinese began to arrive in Hong Kong from 1978 onwards (Dalglish, 1989). Thus its involvement only increased during the second wave of refugees to leave Vietnam, caused by the effective expulsion of the ethnic Chinese population. Until this time, Britain's involvement had been confined to accepting 100 orphan children evacuated from Saigon by the *Daily Mail*, and to allowing those rescued at sea by British boats such as the "Wellpark" to come to Britain (Hunt, 1985). However, with the massive increase in people fleeing Vietnam after 1978, Britain's role in the crisis increased dramatically, primarily because its colony Hong Kong had become a key destination for the refugees (Dalglish, 1989<sup>2</sup>).

During 1979 Britain allowed 1,400 refugees from Vietnam to come to this country as they had been rescued at sea by British registered ships. Additionally, under pressure from both the UNHCR and the governor of Hong Kong, in January of that year Britain agreed to accept a quota of 1,500 refugees from camps all over South East Asia (Jones, 1982). The term "quota" referred to the fact that Britain agreed to accept a pre-determined number of people who had already been recognised as refugees by the UNHCR. These quota refugees already had refugee status prior to arriving in Britain and entered this country under internationally recognised schemes. As such, their situation differed significantly from that of most refugees who have to apply for asylum individually after their arrival in Britain (Duke and Marshall, 1995). The main implications of the refugees' situation as quota refugees, was that the British government both selected the refugees and knew how many would be arriving and when. The government therefore knew of their imminent arrival and to some extent were able to implement procedures to assist in the reception and resettlement of the refugees. Such a situation is not generally the case with non-quota refugees whose arrival is not controlled by the government.

The quota refugees from Vietnam were chosen under what were, in Britain's case, very accommodating criteria, with virtually no person asking to come to Britain at that time being rejected (Dalglish, 1989). Nevertheless, it should be noted that few refugees had Britain as their first choice of destination, and Britain generally received refugees who had been rejected by other countries who applied stricter quota criteria (Edholm, 1983).

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<sup>2</sup> Dalglish (1989) puts arrivals in Hong Kong at 11,544 for the period 1975-1978 and 74,377 during 1979 alone.

Given the volume of refugees arriving in camps all over the South-East Asian region, and especially in Hong Kong, the numbers involved in Britain's first quota were fairly insignificant and the situation in the region continued to deteriorate. In response, in July 1979, the UNHCR held a conference in Geneva at which it elicited a commitment by 23 countries to accept a total of 260,000 refugees from Vietnam for resettlement (McCarthy, 1980). At the same time, despite still denying it had any control over those fleeing, the government in Vietnam agreed to try and stop the exodus of people fleeing by boat (McCarthy, 1980). Britain's contribution to the commitment by the international community to help the refugees was to announce a further quota of 10,000 refugees to be admitted from the camps in Hong Kong (Jones, 1982). This thus marked the beginning of Britain's role as a major resettlement country for refugees from Vietnam.

While the 1979 quota of 10,000 refugees comprised the largest single commitment by the British government to accept refugees from Vietnam, the total number who came to Britain far exceeds this figure. Based on figures from Jones (1982) and Duke and Marshall (1995), the total number of refugees from Vietnam who settled in Britain is estimated at around 24,000, of which 16,000 arrived between 1978 and 1982 (Jones, 1982) and almost 8,000 arrived between 1983 and 1992 (Duke and Marshall, 1995). Of this 24,000, approximately half were accepted into Britain as part of one of the three "quotas" created by the government (i.e. 1,500 announced in January 1979; ii. 10,000 announced in July 1979 and iii. 2,000 announced in 1989 (Duke and Marshall, 1995)), the remainder comprising additional family reunion cases<sup>3</sup> and people rescued by boat. While not part of the quota system *per se*, these people did not have to apply for refugee status on arrival in Britain, they too being admitted into Britain under specific schemes.

In the case of family reunion, individuals who had close family living in Britain could apply for settlement, either from the camps around South East Asia or directly from Vietnam under what is known as the Orderly Departure Programme. This programme allowed for regularised emigration from Vietnam and was a measure instigated by the international community and Vietnam to try and reduce *boat* departures (Duke and Marshall, 1995). While some of the 10,000 quota were strictly family reunion candidates rather than refugees, they were included in the count of the quota. Later

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<sup>3</sup> Some of whom entered Britain directly from Vietnam under a scheme called the Orderly Departure Programme. This was a mechanism agreed by the UNHCR and Vietnam aimed at allowing controlled emigration and thus reducing the need for people to flee by boat. Family reunion cases are people allowed to join close family members already resident in Britain.

family reunion candidates were accepted on stricter guidelines (generally only as the spouse or dependant children of refugees already in Britain), but were not included in any fixed quota; thus the numbers granted access to Britain were not controlled *per se*. With regard to people rescued by British-registered boats, they too were not subject to quotas, since as early as 1978

*“an undertaking was given that all refugees picked up by UK-registered ships would be given permission to settle if no other country would agree to take them within 90 days”*

(Dalglish, 1989, p. 1).

Thus, for those rescued, being picked up by a British-registered boat effectively meant automatic admittance to Britain. This only altered in 1988, when for the first time refugees from Vietnam were required to prove that they, as individuals, met the definition of a refugee as determined by the UNHCR, namely someone

*who is outside the country of his nationality, or if he has no nationality, the country of his former habitual residence, because he has or had fear of persecution by reason of his race, religion, nationality, or political opinion and is unable, or because of such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of the government of his nationality, or if he has no nationality, to return to the country of his former habitual residence.”*

(Statute of UNHCR 11, 6b).

Prior to this date, all those fleeing Vietnam had been automatically accepted as refugees.

### **5.2.3 Characteristics of the refugees from Vietnam reaching Britain**

It has already been stated that the refugees from Vietnam comprise people from two different ethnic groups who largely left Vietnam for different reasons. The ethnic Vietnamese generally fled the communist take over of the South of Vietnam, whilst the ethnic Chinese were forcefully expelled following the breakdown of the relationship with China in the late 1970's. There were of course ethnic Vietnamese who left the North<sup>1</sup> and ethnic Chinese who fled the South<sup>2</sup>, but these account for a smaller proportion of the total.

Those reaching Britain prior to 1983 were largely ethnic Chinese (70%) and predominantly came from the North of Vietnam (62%) (Jones, 1982). They were

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<sup>1</sup> For instance ethnic Vietnamese women with ethnic Chinese husbands (Edholm et al, 1983)

<sup>2</sup> For instance ethnic Chinese who had property confiscated after the communist take over of the South (Edholm et. al. 1983).

generally young, with over 70% being below 30 years of age and 46% actually being below 20 (Jones, 1982). Generally they did not speak English on arrival and acquisition of language skills was slow. With regard to their occupational background, only 15% had held professional or skilled non-manual jobs in Vietnam, and while 42.2% were classified as being skilled manual workers, many held skills which were not applicable to the British economy (Jones, 1982). This is evident in table 5.1 which shows the most common jobs previously held in Vietnam by refugees arriving as part of the 1,500 quota of January 1979 and the 10,000 quota of July 1979 (Hale, 1991).

**Table 5.1 Most common jobs held in Vietnam**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Description</b>
1	Mechanic
2	Seamstress
3	Carpenter
4	Fisherman
5	Teacher
6	Potter
7	Lorry Driver
8	Cook
9	Noodle Maker
10	Construction Worker

(Source Hale, 1991, Table 5.5 p. 208)

While the demand for noodle makers is obviously not great in Britain, jobs such as fishermen, construction workers etc. would be based on technology very different to that used in Britain, thus limiting opportunities for employment after resettlement. It is also worth noting that the majority of refugees arriving prior to 1982 came from poor areas, both rural and urban (Duke and Marshall, 1995).

The characteristics of those refugees who arrived after 1982 are significantly different from the earlier arrivals. Only 19% were ethnic Chinese and equal numbers came from the North and South of Vietnam. Twenty-eight percent had held professional, managerial or skilled non-manual jobs in Vietnam and the majority had lived in urban areas. However, like the earlier arrivals the majority of the refugees were young, with 80% being below 40 when they arrived in Britain and very few speaking English on arrival (Duke and Marshall, 1995). The reasons for the difference between the

composition of the early and later arrivals are not altogether clear. Additionally, while it has been claimed that most of the refugees arriving after 1982

*“were family reunion cases and joined relatives already settled in the UK.”*

(Duke and Marshall, 1995)

their entry under family reunion criteria seems contradictory to claims by Diski (1995) that by 1981

*“nine out of ten boat people were ethnic Vietnamese, economic refugees in search of a more prosperous life. It is estimated that 700,000 people left Vietnam in the mid-eighties.*

(Diski, 1995, p. 8)

As such, the likelihood of their gaining family reunion entry as relatives of the largely ethnic Chinese earlier arrivals is in doubt.

It should be noted that about half of those refugees arriving in Britain after 1982 had spent time in refugee camps in Hong Kong with most having been there for at least 3 years (Duke and Marshall, 1995). While most of the earlier arrivals had also spent time in Hong Kong camps, the length of time spent there was generally shorter. Moreover, the earlier arrivals had generally been allowed to seek work in Hong Kong, while later arrivals had often been confined in closed camps.

The characteristics of the refugees from Vietnam who came to Britain are important since they have undoubtedly influenced the way in which the refugees have adapted to life in Britain. For instance, a majority of the earlier arrivals were ethnic Chinese from North Vietnam. As such they, like the other residents of North Vietnam, had lived under communism since the end of the second world war and thus had limited experience of life in a market economy like Britain's. They had lived in a country torn apart by war, and additionally were a persecuted minority, who were eventually expelled from their home land (Hale, 1991). This may have left them with a fear of government bureaucracy.

With regard to those who fled later, primarily from the South of Vietnam, they had had communism imposed upon them following the invasion by the North and had also suffered from a prolonged period of war which had left their country devastated (Diski, 1995). Many of the South's professional population had left with the Americans, half the population had been displaced and the economy was in ruins (Diski, 1995). Indeed, by the mid-eighties inflation was running at 700% per annum (Diski, 1995). As such, the

lives of people left in Vietnam after the end of the war were harsh, with economic as well as political hardships. Many of those reaching Britain had spent years in camps such as those in Hong Kong and had experienced a long period of insecurity while they sought the right to resettle in a western country.

### **5.3 Reception and resettlement in Britain**

With very small numbers of refugees from Vietnam arriving in Britain prior to 1979, the government did not take responsibility for operating reception and resettlement procedures for them. This duty was undertaken by the British Council for Aid to Refugees (BCAR), along with the Ockenden Venture who had been caring for orphans in Saigon and had taken responsibility for them after the Daily Mail airlifted them to Britain (Dalglish, 1989). The government only agreed to take financial responsibility for reception and resettlement operations after they announced the 10,000 quota in July 1979. By this time, BCAR and the Ockenden Venture had been joined by Save the Children Fund (later Refugee Action), and in order to co-ordinate what was to become a major reception and resettlement programme, the Home Secretary set up the Joint Committee for Refugees from Vietnam (JCRV) in October 1979. This was not unexpected since during the arrival of the Ugandan Asians earlier that decade, the government had created the Ugandan Resettlement Board to co-ordinate the reception programme (Kuepper, 1975).

Although the government accepted financial responsibility for the refugees from Vietnam, the running of the reception and resettlement programme remained within the charitable field, being operated by BCAR, the Ockenden Venture, and Save the Children. The aims of the reception and resettlement programme were identified in a memorandum by the Home Office to the Home Affairs Committee sub-committee on Race Relations and Immigration in 1985 and were

*“to bring the refugees to the UK and after an initial period (originally envisaged as 3 to 4 months) of teaching and reorientation in a reception centre, to settle them throughout the United Kingdom. During their stay in reception, the refugees would be taught basic ‘survival’ English, receive medical screening, learn about life and opportunities in Britain and be found a suitable home. Thereafter, with the help from members of support groups and any special facilities the responsible agencies might be able to provide, the Vietnamese would have access to the same services as other members of the community.”*

(Dalglish 1989, pp. 64-65)

The key elements of this were the initial use of reception camps, the subsequent dispersal of the refugees throughout Britain, the reliance on charities and volunteers, front loading of support into the initial period after arrival, and the lack of long term specialised services for the refugees. Each of these elements will now be briefly discussed.

Refugees from Vietnam arriving in Britain were housed in one of 46 reception centres in which they were supposed to receive those services outlined previously. Initially, it was intended that the length of time in these centres would be limited to about 3 months but this proved too optimistic and many refugees spent a prolonged period in the centres awaiting suitable housing (Dalglish, 1989). Problems arose from the lack of suitable translators, given that Britain had no existing community from Vietnam from which it was possible to recruit people with appropriate language skills. This exacerbated problems, as did organisational difficulties and the general consensus amongst commentators (e.g. Jones, 1982; Dalglish, 1989; Hale, 1991) has been that the centres largely failed to meet their objectives. One measure of this is that few of the refugees managed to develop 'survival' English while in the centres (Hale, 1991).

While dispersal was favoured by the government as a means of reducing the burden of accepting the refugees in any one area (Jones, 1982), given that offers of housing determined where the refugees could be resettled, the desired distribution in clusters of 4 - 10 families per location was never achieved, with significant numbers settling in Britain's key cities. (Hale, 1991). Thus, while many refugees were given housing in dispersed locations, a considerable proportion were placed in London and Birmingham. Moreover, given that the refugees were housed in vacant properties, it was unsurprising that many encountered poor living conditions after being offered housing in areas of high unemployment and deprivation (Robinson and Hale, 1989).

The reliance on charitable organisations to operate the reception and resettlement programme has been an enduring feature of Britain's response to dealing with refugees. In the case of the refugees from Vietnam three charities - BCAR, the Ockenden Venture and Save the Children - participated in the programme, with each charity working in different parts of Britain independently (Edholm, 1983). Although the Joint Committee for Refugees from Vietnam (JCRV) was meant to co-ordinate the activities of the charities, significant differences in how they operated occurred. Moreover, it was

*“ a feeling of rivalry rather than co-operation which appears to have characterised agency relationships. One opportunity to have improved the level of inter-agency communication would have been for the co-ordination body of the programme, the Joint Committee for Refugees from Vietnam (JCRV), to have played a more prominent and direct role in the running of the programme rather than simply act as a meeting place for general discussion.”*

(Jones, 1982, pp. 49 - 50)

However this was not the case and the operation of the reception and resettlement programme has received a considerable amount of criticism. With regard to the programme as a whole, the use of

*“voluntary agencies [meant] their influence on policy and on the actions of local authorities and other statutory bodies would be limited. They had no power to obtain services they felt the refugees needed..... This situation would be made worse if three distinct voices were heard from the agencies rather than one representing the programme as a whole.”*

(Dalglish, 1989, p. 66)

Furthermore, in addition to the programme itself being operated by charitable organisations, the charities themselves relied heavily on volunteers. Following the initial reception period, the charities depended on local volunteers to offer support to the refugees in their new homes. While this kept costs low, it led to significant problems. Firstly, few of the volunteers knew anything about the background of the refugees from Vietnam, nor about how to access the statutory services on which they were now supposed to rely (Edholm et al, 1983). This meant that the needs of the refugees were not being met. Secondly, although offers of support flowed in initially, very soon

*“compassion fatigue .. set in. Support was not maintained, but the work still had to be done.”*

(Edholm et al, 1983, p. 14)

This resulted in the burden of supporting the refugees falling on a very small number of people who were effectively good-willed amateurs.

Linked to the policy of relying on volunteers to support refugees who had been resettled out of the reception centres, was the idea that the refugees should have their needs met by existing statutory services, as among the rest of the population. Investment in the specific needs of the refugees therefore primarily occurred in the reception period, with few resources being available for the resettlement part of the procedure. While in theory existing services were responsible for meeting the refugees' needs, in reality these needs

often went unmet, with existing services lacking the finance and expertise to assist the refugees. For instance, access to language classes varied considerably, with those refugees who had been resettled in dispersed areas away from big cities finding access a particular problem (Edholm, 1983). Since finance for refugee-specific classes was not available after resettlement, many of the refugees lost out when existing classes were either unavailable or unsuitable. This 'front-loading' of resources into the initial period after the arrival of the refugees has received criticism. For instance, Dalglish (1989) commented that

*“Reception centres can only be part of the process of helping refugees to settle in their new county and it seems doubtful whether it is realistic to concentrate the majority of resources in this area - neglecting the longer-term needs of people trying to adjust to a new society.”* (p. 75)

A final observation on the reception and resettlement programme implemented for the refugees from Vietnam is that while the programme operated for those refugees who arrived as part of the 10,000 quota, those who arrived later (after 1982) did not automatically go to reception centres, many of which closed after they had processed the quota refugees. Indeed Duke and Marshall (1995) suggest that half of those arriving after 1982 went directly to stay with relatives already living in Britain and eventually two-thirds joined existing households.

#### **5.4 Secondary migration and issues of ethnicity**

A major feature of the refugees from Vietnam has been their high level of mobility in the years following their arrival in Britain. As early as 1982 Jones had identified that

*“one of the most interesting outcomes of the United Kingdom programme will be to see how permanent the initial dispersal proves to be..... the refugees have had only limited choice in their areas of resettlement. In addition there is no established Vietnamese community of any size to act as a magnet for future migration. Nevertheless, it is quite possible that, as in the USA, localised Vietnamese communities will develop in the larger cities.”* (p.5)

Work by Hale (1991) has illustrated that this has indeed been the case, with the refugees from Vietnam exhibiting a level of mobility surpassed only by the Bangladeshi community. This has resulted in the population of refugees from Vietnam becoming concentrated in Britain's large cities, primarily London, at the expense of those smaller towns and cities in which they were initially given housing.

A consideration of the reasons behind the refugees' participation in secondary migration suggests that

*“mobility appears to be strongly social in character”*

(Hale, 1991, p. 362)

with the refugees often moving in order to reduce their isolation from other refugees from Vietnam. Thus, despite having no pre-existing community of people from Vietnam<sup>6</sup> to act as a magnet, the refugees appear to have rejected their dispersed locations, choosing to congregate in certain locations, especially London. Indeed,

*“a very large proportion of the Vietnamese now reside in communities with their family and kin and can call upon the assistance of community associations for help with matters pertaining to housing, employment and social services.”*

(Hale, 1991, p. 434)

Furthermore, it appears that the links of compatriotism have outweighed material benefits, with the refugees living in areas which suffer significant deprivation, for instance Southwark.

With regard to the issue of ethnicity and origin, although the population of refugees from Vietnam is divided between a majority who are ethnic Chinese, primarily from the North, and a minority who are ethnic Vietnamese, primarily from the South, it has been suggested that there are

*“no obvious divisions within the Vietnamese community between the ethnic Chinese and Vietnamese or those from the North and South.”*

(Dalglish, 1989, p. 105)

However, while the community itself may place greater emphasis on their country of origin rather than their ethnic background, ethnicity is important given that shared ethnicity may facilitate access to resources external to the national group. The potential significance of this is increased by the lack of any existing Vietnam national population prior to the arrival of the refugees. Given that the majority of refugees from Vietnam are ethnic Chinese and a majority speak Cantonese, it can be suggested that although there was no existing Vietnam community into which the refugees could integrate, there were opportunities for interacting with the wider ethnic Chinese population. However while Hale (1991) suggests that interactions between the refugees from Vietnam and the

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<sup>6</sup> Prior to the arrival of the first refugees from Vietnam, Britain was home to around only 300 people (Hunt, 1985) from Vietnam.

ethnic Chinese population may not be as significant as some commentators believe, evidence that refugees do interact with the ethnic Chinese population, for instance finding employment with them (Dalglish, 1989), is clear.

## **5.5 Where do the refugees live now?**

As identified in section 4.4.1.1, one of the aims of this thesis is to update Hale's (1991) work on the whereabouts of the refugees from Vietnam and to extend the proportion of the refugees included in the analysis. The instrument for this is the 1991 census. It should be remembered that this thesis defines those recorded in the census as born in Vietnam as refugees.

### **5.5.1 Population characteristics**

A total of 20,119 individuals are identified in the census as born in Vietnam. As such they represent just 0.04% of the British population (54,888,844). In terms of the proportion of males to females, there are equal numbers, while the British population as a whole contains more women than men.

A consideration of the population age structures of those born in Vietnam and British populations reveals considerable differences in their composition. This is illustrated in Figures 5.2 and 5.3 (see over). The population age structure of the refugees from Vietnam is skewed towards those aged 10 to 39, with the proportion of the population in each five year band exceeding 8%. In contrast, in the British population no single age group exceeds this figure. While the British population structure represents a largely natural age based distribution, that of the refugees from Vietnam has been greatly influenced by their migration history. The concentration of the population in the age groups 10-14 to 35-39 is not unexpected given the population's refugee experience. With the majority of refugees arriving between 1979 and 1982, by 1991 - the date of the census - few of these arrivals would be less than 10 years old, hence the significant under-representation of those under 10 in the population. Those few children who do fall into these youngest age groups would have been born in Vietnam and admitted to Britain at a later date, either with full refugee status or under the family reunion scheme. The under-representation of those aged over 45 (particularly evident when compared with the British population) is also probably attributable to the experience of becoming a refugee. Given the difficult nature of the flight from Vietnam, it would be expected that

Figure 5.2 The Refugees from Vietnam - Population Structure

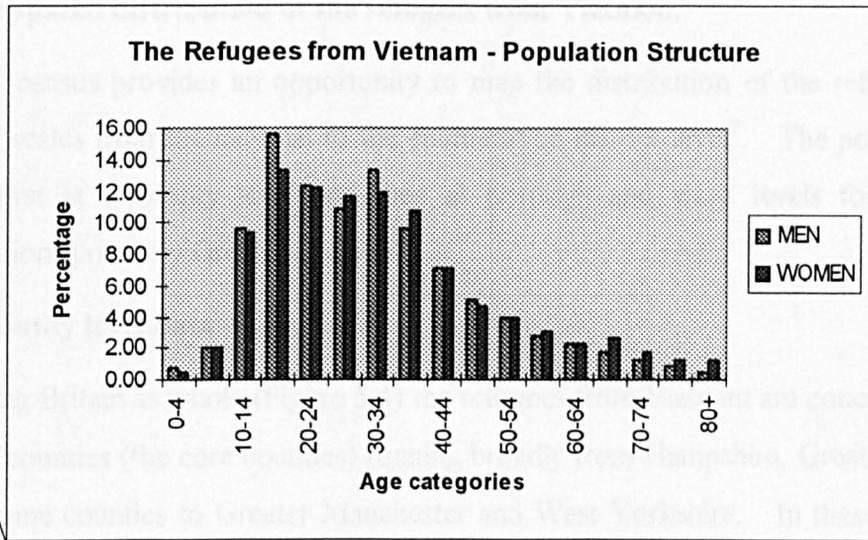
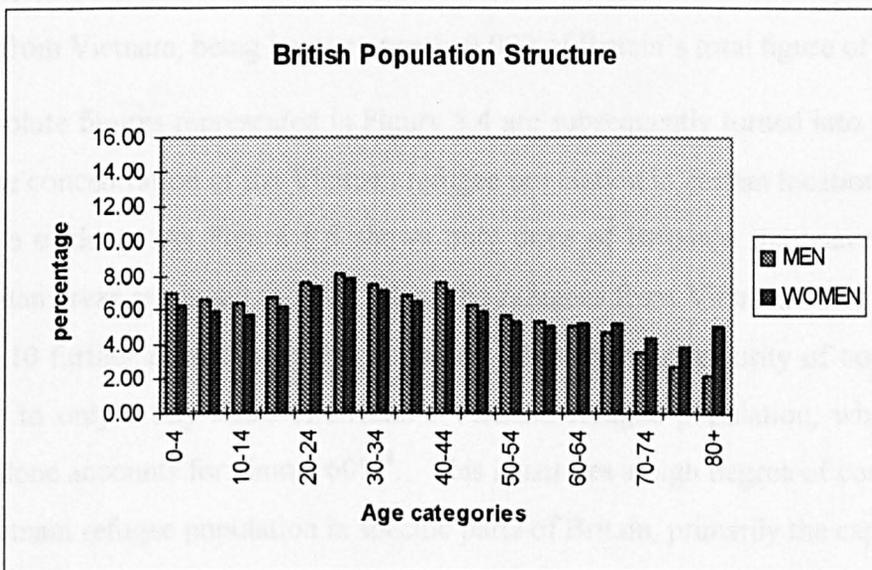


Figure 5.3 British Population Structure



most people fleeing would be relatively young. It is probably as a result of this that there are comparatively few elderly people in the refugee population.

### **5.5.2 The spatial distribution of the refugees from Vietnam.**

The 1991 census provides an opportunity to map the distribution of the refugees at a variety of scales from the national to the enumeration district level<sup>7</sup>. The population is mapped first at a county level and then at borough and ward levels for areas of concentration (primarily Greater London).

#### **5.5.2.1 County level data**

Considering Britain as whole (Figure 5.4) the refugees from Vietnam are concentrated in a band of counties (the core counties) running broadly from Hampshire, Greater London and the home counties to Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire. In these counties, the population of refugees from Vietnam exceeds 100 persons while elsewhere, with the exception of Avon and Lothian, smaller numbers are resident in each county. However, within the core counties the population of refugees varies significantly, with most counties having between 100 and 300 residents and only Inner and Outer London, the West Midlands, Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire exceeding 500 refugees each. Moreover, of these areas it is Inner London which stands out as the key location for refugees from Vietnam, being home to nearly 9,000 of Britain's total figure of 20,119.

If the absolute figures represented in Figure 5.4 are subsequently turned into percentage shares, the concentration of the Vietnam refugee population in certain locations becomes even more evident. As Figure 5.5 shows only three of Britain's sixty-seven county / metropolitan areas are home to over 5% of the refugees from Vietnam living in Britain, with just 10 further areas having 1% or more. Thus the vast majority of counties (54) are home to only a tiny share of Britain's Vietnam refugee population, while Greater London alone accounts for almost 60%<sup>8</sup>. This illustrates a high degree of concentration of the Vietnam refugee population in specific parts of Britain, primarily the capital.

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<sup>7</sup>This data was extracted from the census data set held at Manchester.

<sup>8</sup>This level of concentration in the capital is unusual, matched only by the Japanese and Filipino communities.

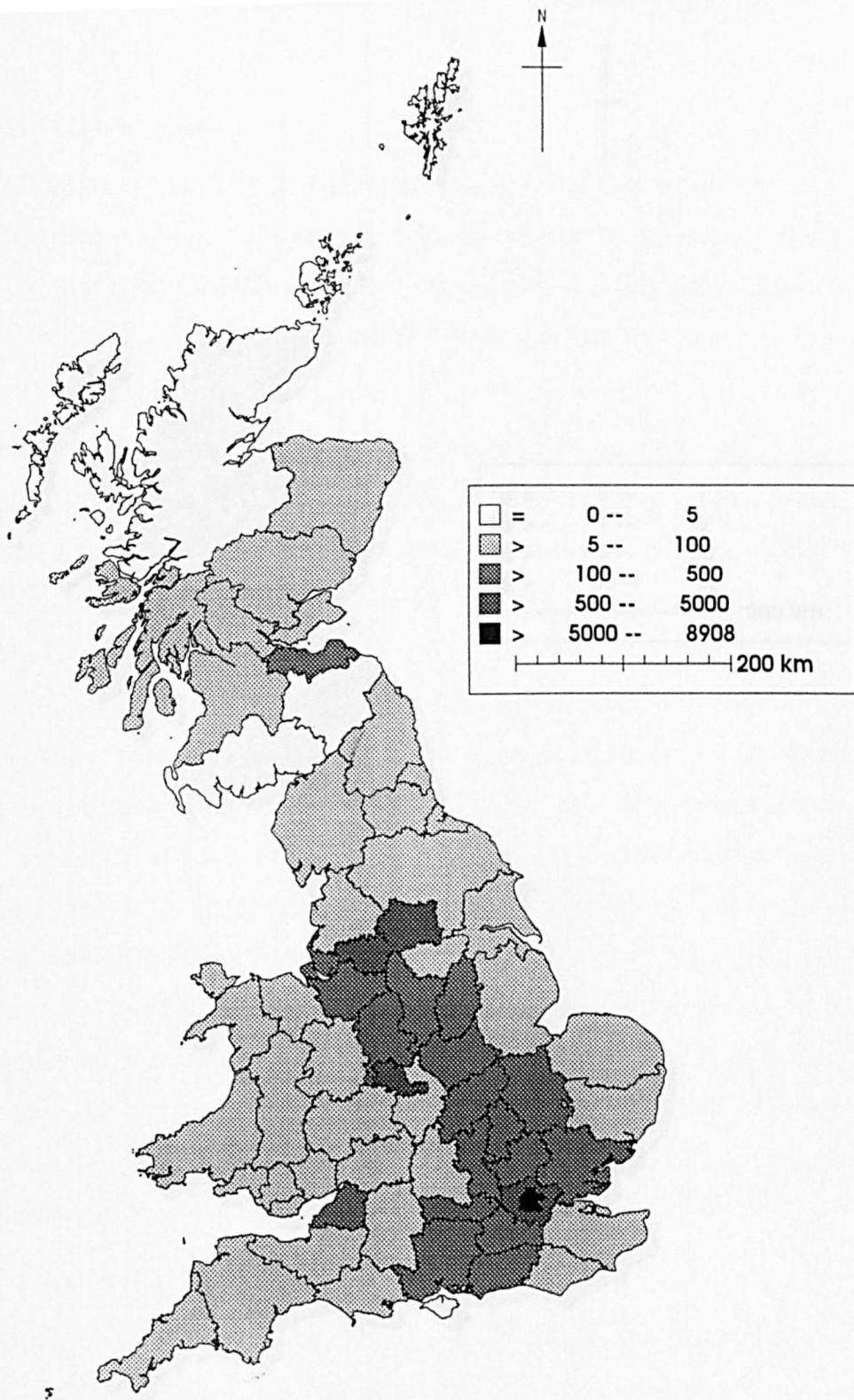


Figure 5.4 Vietnam Refugees in Britain

1991 LBS/SAS statistics © Crown copyright 1991 All rights reserved

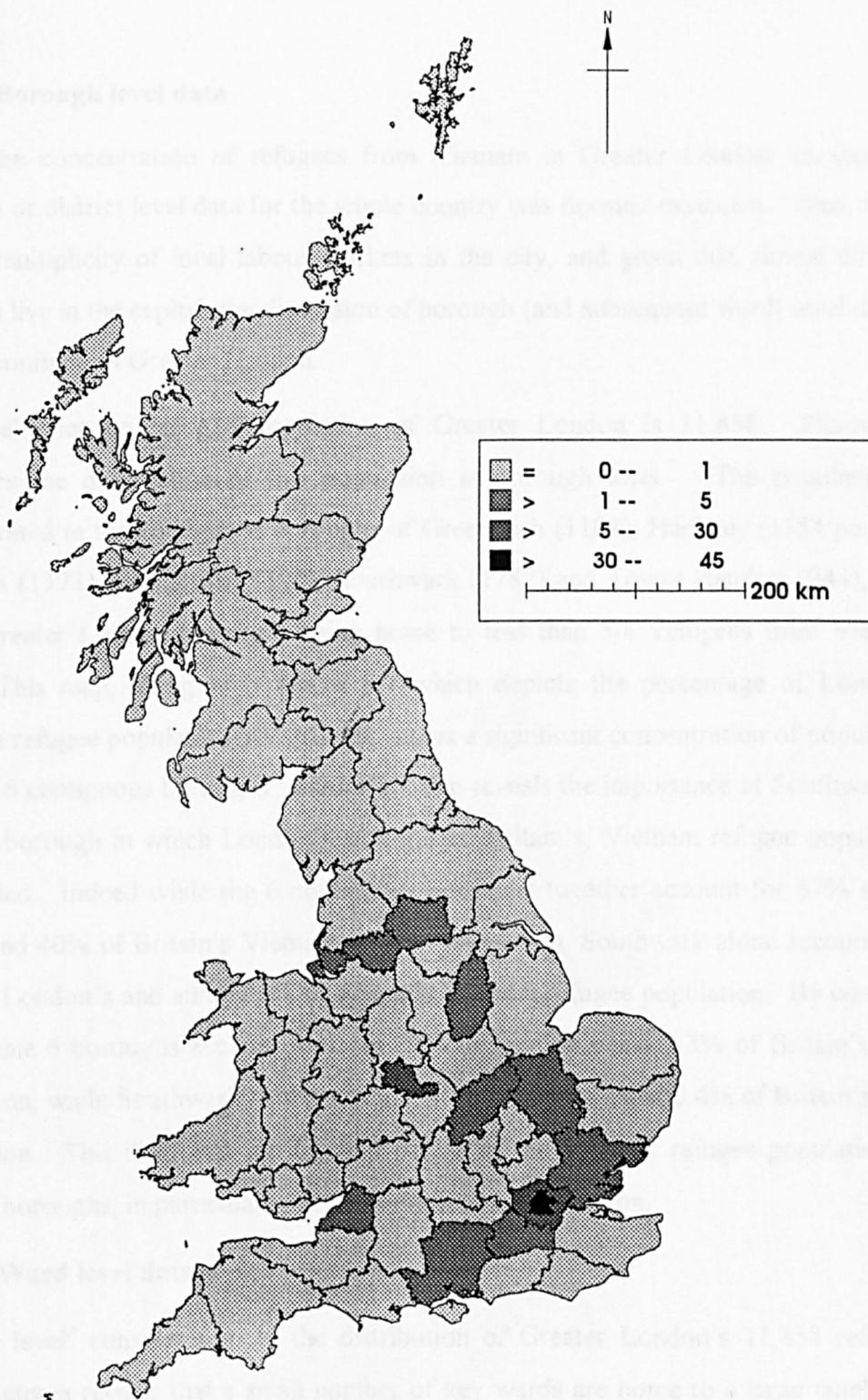


Figure 5.5 Vietnam Refugees in Britain  
(percentage share)

1991 LBS/SAS statistics © Crown copyright 1991 All rights reserved

### **5.5.2.2 Borough level data**

Given the concentration of refugees from Vietnam in Greater London, to examine borough or district level data for the whole country was deemed excessive. Thus, based on the multiplicity of local labour markets in the city, and given that almost 60% of refugees live in the capital, the discussion of borough (and subsequent ward) level data is largely confined to Greater London.

The total Vietnam refugee population of Greater London is 11,858. Figure 5.6 illustrates the distribution of this population at borough level. The population is concentrated in the contiguous boroughs of Greenwich (1109), Hackney (1354 people), Lambeth (1373), Lewisham (1394), Southwark (1782) and Tower Hamlets (944), with other Greater London boroughs being home to less than 500 refugees from Vietnam each. This map, along with Figure 5.7 which depicts the percentage of London's Vietnam refugee population by borough, shows a significant concentration of population in these 6 contiguous boroughs. Figure 5.7 also reveals the importance of Southwark as the key borough in which London's, and indeed Britain's, Vietnam refugee population has settled. Indeed while the 6 contiguous boroughs together account for 67% of the city's, and 40% of Britain's Vietnam refugee population, Southwark alone accounts for 15% of London's and almost 9% of Britain's Vietnam refugee population. By contrast, these same 6 boroughs account for only 19% of London's and 2.3% of Britain's total population, while Southwark is home to just 3% of London's and 0.4% of Britain's total population. This illustrates the focused nature of the Vietnam refugee population on specific boroughs, in particularly Southwark, in Greater London.

### **5.5.2.3 Ward level data**

A ward level<sup>9</sup> consideration of the distribution of Greater London's 11,858 refugees from Vietnam reveals that a small number of key wards are home to a large number of the refugees. This is shown in Figure 5.8 which shows that in 9 key wards the population of refugees from Vietnam exceeds 200 individuals. Together these nine wards account for 22% of Greater London's (and 12% of Britain's) Vietnam refugee population. Meanwhile, in 520 wards the refugee population is less than 10 people, indeed in 212

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<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that the City of London is treated as a ward for the purposes of this discussion. No detail on the refugees from Vietnam is lost by this as none are resident within the City.

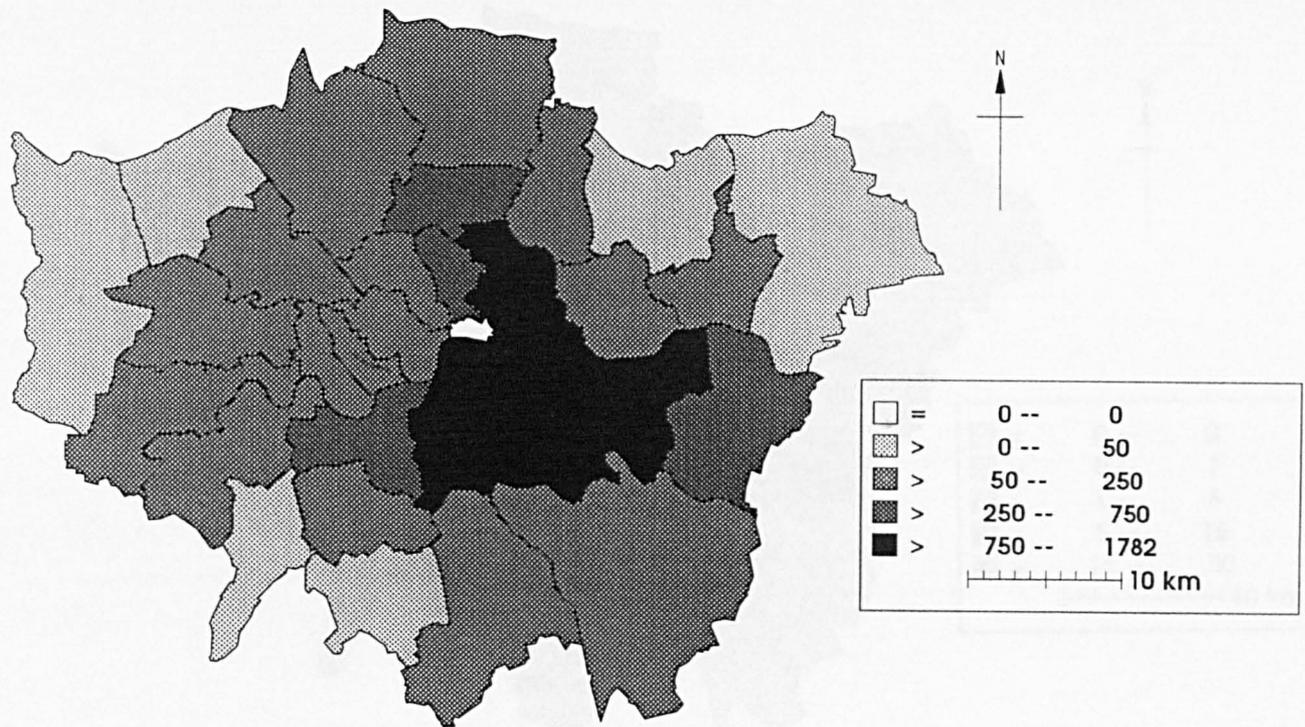


Figure 5.6 Vietnam refugees in London Boroughs

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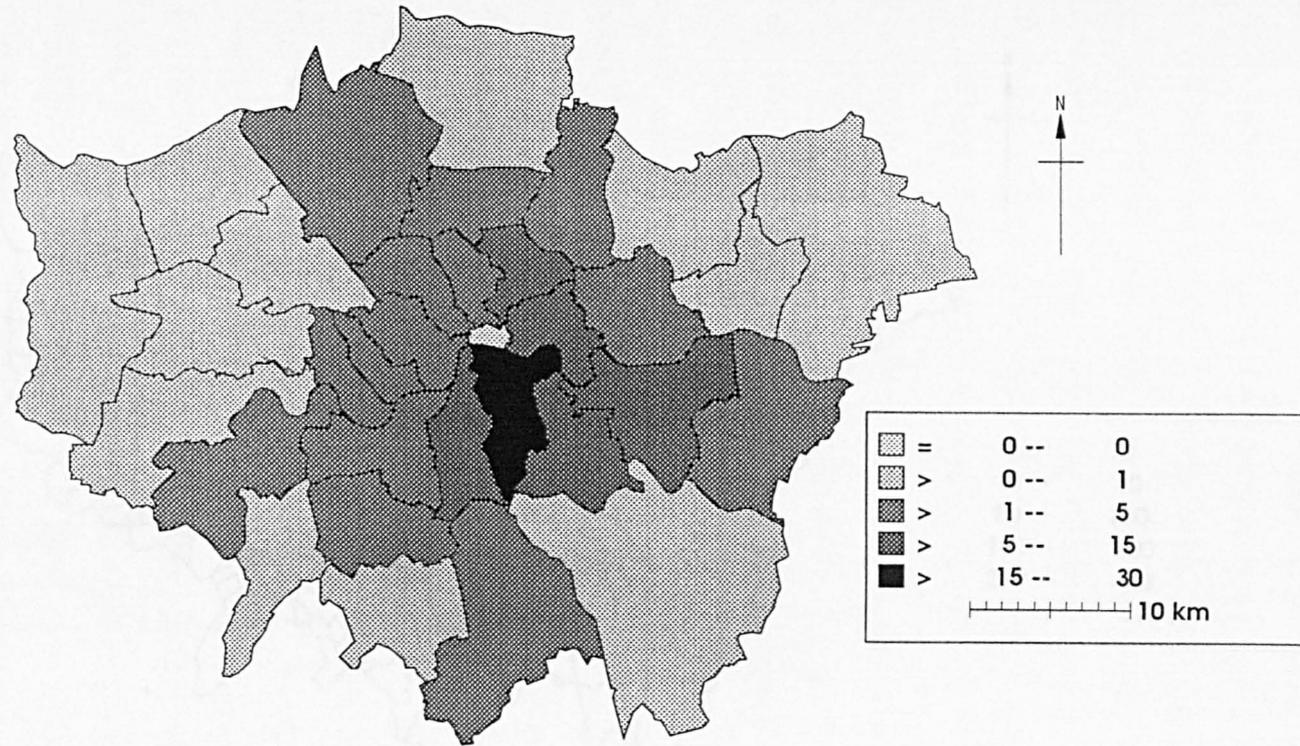


Figure 5.7 Vietnam refugees - Percentage share by borough  
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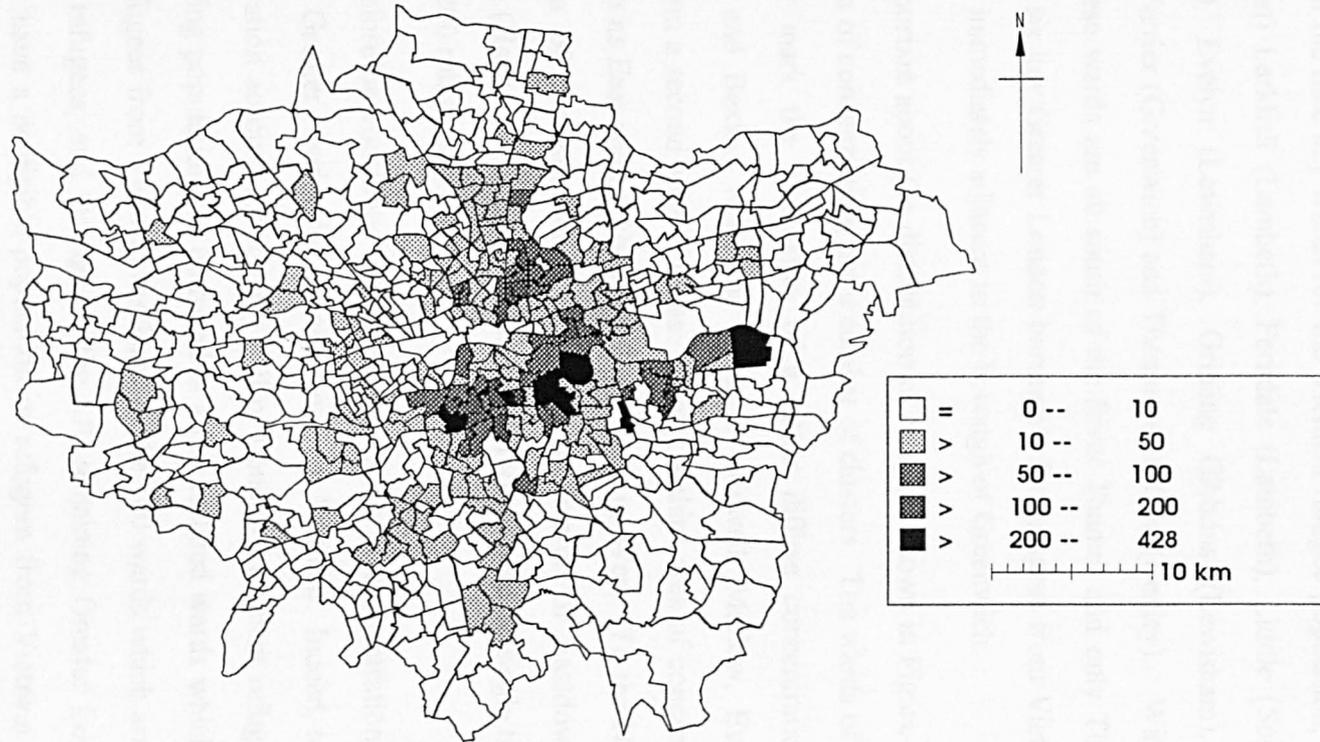


Figure 5.8 Vietnam refugees in London Wards

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wards no refugees from Vietnam are present. This indicates a significant degree of concentration of the Vietnam refugee population in a small number of Greater London wards.

Focusing on the nine key wards for the Vietnam refugee population, these are (running west to east) Larkhall (Lambeth), Ferndale (Lambeth), Liddle (Southwark), Marlow (Lewisham), Evelyn (Lewisham), Grinling Gibbons (Lewisham), Milwall (Tower Hamlets), Ferrier (Greenwich) and Thamesmead East (Bexley). With the exception of Milwall, these wards are all south of the River Thames and only Thamesmead East is outside the six key Greater London borough's for refugees from Vietnam<sup>10</sup>. This ward is however, immediately adjacent to the borough of Greenwich.

What is important about the distribution of refugees shown in Figure 5.8 is that there is not one area of concentration, but a number of clusters. The wards of Thamesmead East and Ferrier mark the boundaries of a rather diffuse concentration of refugees in Greenwich and Bexley, while the wards of Milwall, Marlow, Evelyn and Grinling Gibbons form a second area of focus. Finally, a third area of concentration is bounded by Liddle to its East and Larkhall and Ferndale to its West. To the North of the river, a further area of concentration (centred on the wards of Eastdown (Hackney) and Haggerston (Hackney)) can also be identified, though here no single borough is home to more than 200 refugees.

It can therefore be concluded that these four areas of concentration represent the key locations in Greater London for the refugees from Vietnam. Indeed, together these areas of concentration account for roughly half of London's resident refugees from Vietnam. The remaining population can be found in a few isolated wards which have between 50 and 100 refugees from Vietnam resident, in the 180 wards which are home to between 10 and 50 refugees, and throughout the 530 remaining Greater London wards which individually have a negligible population of refugees from Vietnam (1198 refugees in total). This marked concentration in a limited number of areas is reflected by an index of segregation of 60.6

#### **5.5.2.4 Conclusion**

The analysis of the 1991 census has illustrated that the population of refugees from Vietnam is concentrated in specific areas at a variety of scales. Despite a policy of

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<sup>10</sup> See 5.5.3.1

dispersion adopted by the government, the Vietnam refugees have congregated in specific areas of Britain. For instance, almost 60% live in Greater London, one in every eleven refugees resides in the London borough of Southwark, and at a ward level over 2% of Britain's refugees from Vietnam live in Liddle. This ward is characterised by council flats and maisonettes and is situated between Peckham High Street and St George's Way.

If locations outside of Greater London are considered, similar evidence of concentration in specific districts and wards is also present. Certainly in those areas in which such data were reviewed (West Midlands, Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire and Northampton), in terms of Vietnam refugee population, key districts (Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, and Northampton respectively) were evident. Additionally, in Birmingham and Manchester, which are home to significant numbers of refugees (1402 and 512 respectively), a ward level analysis also identified key wards - Handsworth and Cheetham.

While the results of the 1991 census analysis have extended the proportion of refugees for whom location data are available, and provided a more recent date for that information, they are largely comparable with those produced by Hale (1991) in her work based on charity records. Hale (1991) locates 54.8%<sup>11</sup> of Vietnamese households within the Greater London functional region on the basis of data from 1986, 1987 and 1988, while the census shows almost 60% are living in Greater London in 1991. These figures are not that different and given that Hale states that

*“the Vietnamese are becoming progressively more concentrated over time”*

(p.267)

the difference may be indicative of the later date of the census.

If the situation at a borough / district level is considered, more direct comparisons can be made since both Hale and the current research utilised Greater London boroughs as the unit of study. While Hale used Local Labour Market Areas outside Greater London, this is less of a problem since the population is concentrated within the capital. Thus Table 5.2 (overleaf) lists the key areas at this scale in which the refugees from Vietnam lived in the late 1980's and early 1990's. The degree of correlation between the two sources supports the validity of using the census and also illustrates that by the 1991 census,

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<sup>11</sup> Hale, 1991. Table 6.12, p. 268

**Table 5.2 Places of residence for refugees from Vietnam - key borough / districts**

Rank	Borough or District	
	1991 Census	Hale (1991) based on figures for 1986, 1987, 1988 <sup>12</sup>
1	Southwark	Birmingham
2	Birmingham	Manchester
3	Lewisham	Southwark
4	Lambeth	Lambeth
5	Hackney	Greenwich
6	Greenwich	Bexley
7	Tower Hamlets	Tower Hamlets
8	Manchester	Islington
9	Haringey	Lewisham
10	Islington	Waltham Forest
11	Bexley	-

Manchester's position had fallen. Indeed, only 512 refugees from Vietnam were resident there at this time. The only other significant differences are the rankings achieved by Bexley and the total absence of Waltham Forest from the census list of top boroughs; indeed it fell to 14<sup>th</sup> amongst Greater London boroughs. This however fits with Hale's comment that

*"the Vietnamese are congregating in specific boroughs within inner London."*

(p. 281)

The census list certainly supports this with only 1 of the top 5 boroughs being elsewhere. If the scale of enquiry is now focused on the ward, Birmingham is an area in which both sets of data are available. Again the degree of correlation is high with both the 1991 census and Hale agreeing that Handsworth stands out as the ward with the greatest number of refugees in the district. However, while Hale lists Handsworth, Aston, Soho and Ladywood as the wards with the greatest number of Vietnamese households, and Sandwell as a relatively unimportant 13<sup>th</sup><sup>13</sup>, the census indicates that while the top three remain the same, Sandwell's position has risen to fourth. This however fits in with Hale's assertion that

*"the area has become an overspill area for the adjacent ward of Handsworth"*

(p.322)

in recent years.

<sup>12</sup> Hale, 1991 Table 6.15, p. 278

<sup>13</sup> Hale, 1991 Table 6.26, p. 321

### **5.5.3 The distribution of Vietnamese Community Associations (VCA)**

Given the perceived importance of support networks, including the support offered by specialist refugee groups, and the decision to utilise Vietnamese Community Association workers as knowledgeable people, it is necessary to establish that such associations are located within easy reach of the majority of refugees from Vietnam. Having mapped the distribution of the population, the locations of the 39 associations provided on the from the Vietnam Refugee Council were also mapped. It should be noted that both the census data and this list date from 1991.

#### **5.5.3.1 VCA locations - County level**

As might be expected, the location of community groups was closely connected to the population distribution. Figure 5.9 (overleaf) identifies those counties or metropolitan areas in which one or more Vietnamese Community Groups was operating in 1991. As is evident when this is compared to Figure 5.5, all those areas with a 1% or more share of Britain's Vietnam refugee population (200 people) housed a community group. It can therefore be suggested that this is the customary population threshold which is required in order for a community group to operate. However, there are five exceptions, with Derbyshire (163 people), Leicestershire (162), South Glamorgan (85 people) Kent (84 people), and South Yorkshire (74 people) also having community associations. While Derbyshire and Leicestershire only just fall short of the customary threshold, the presence of associations in South Glamorgan, Kent and South Yorkshire can not be explained in terms of the populations they serve.

While Figure 5.9 illustrates which counties / metropolitan areas have at least one Vietnamese association, Figure 5.10 (overleaf) displays the relationship between population levels and the number of community groups present. As is evident, in general terms the number of groups increases with the level of population. Those areas with more than one group are Inner London (12 groups), Outer London (5 groups), Hampshire (3 groups), Essex (2 groups) and the West Midlands (2 groups). In all these locations (except Hampshire), the minimum threshold of 200 people per community group is met. However in Hampshire this is not the case and three community groups seems excessive<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Later interviews revealed that these three groups had previously been one association which had subsequently split due to transport difficulties. The presence of the original group would be more in line with the population figures.

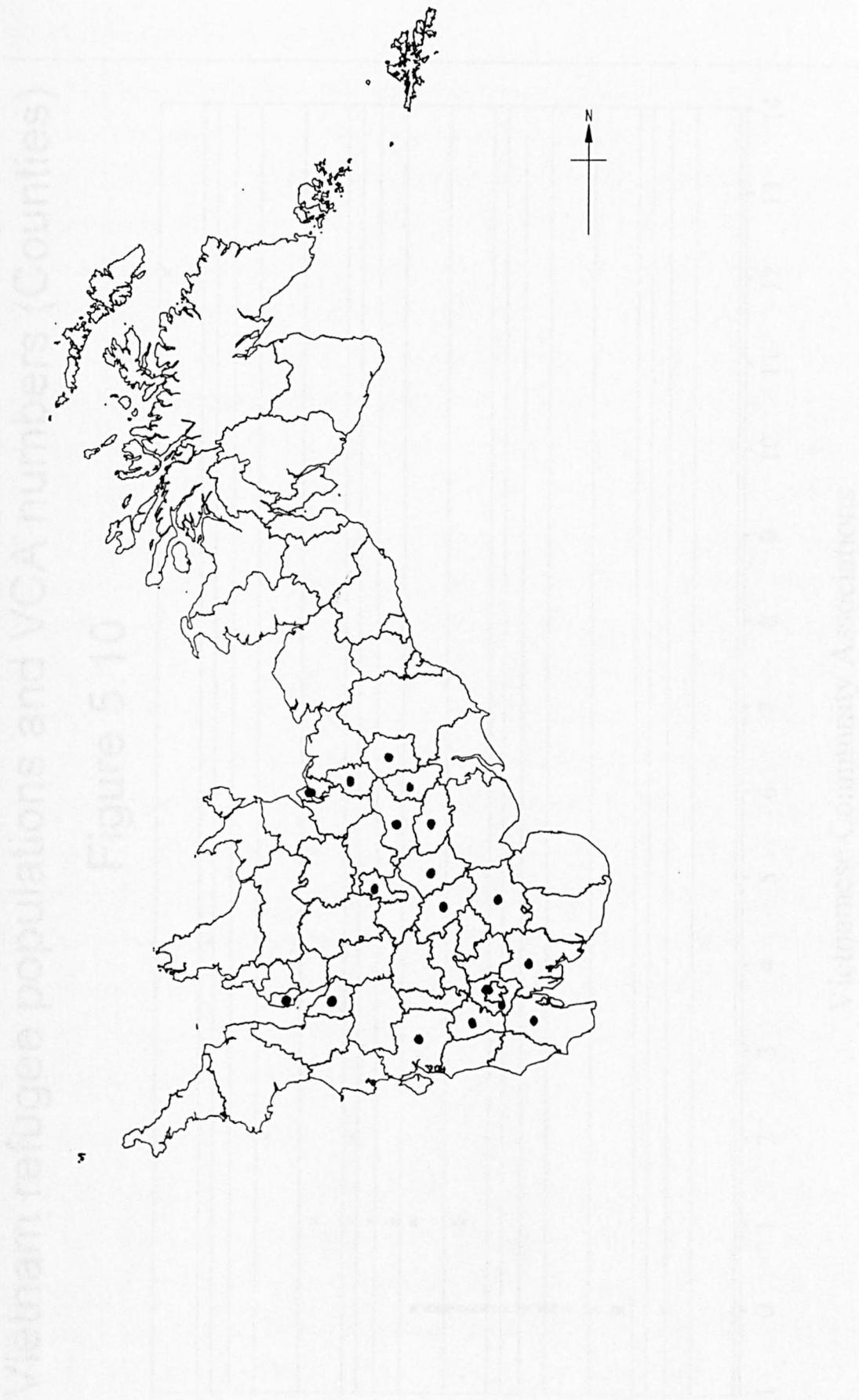
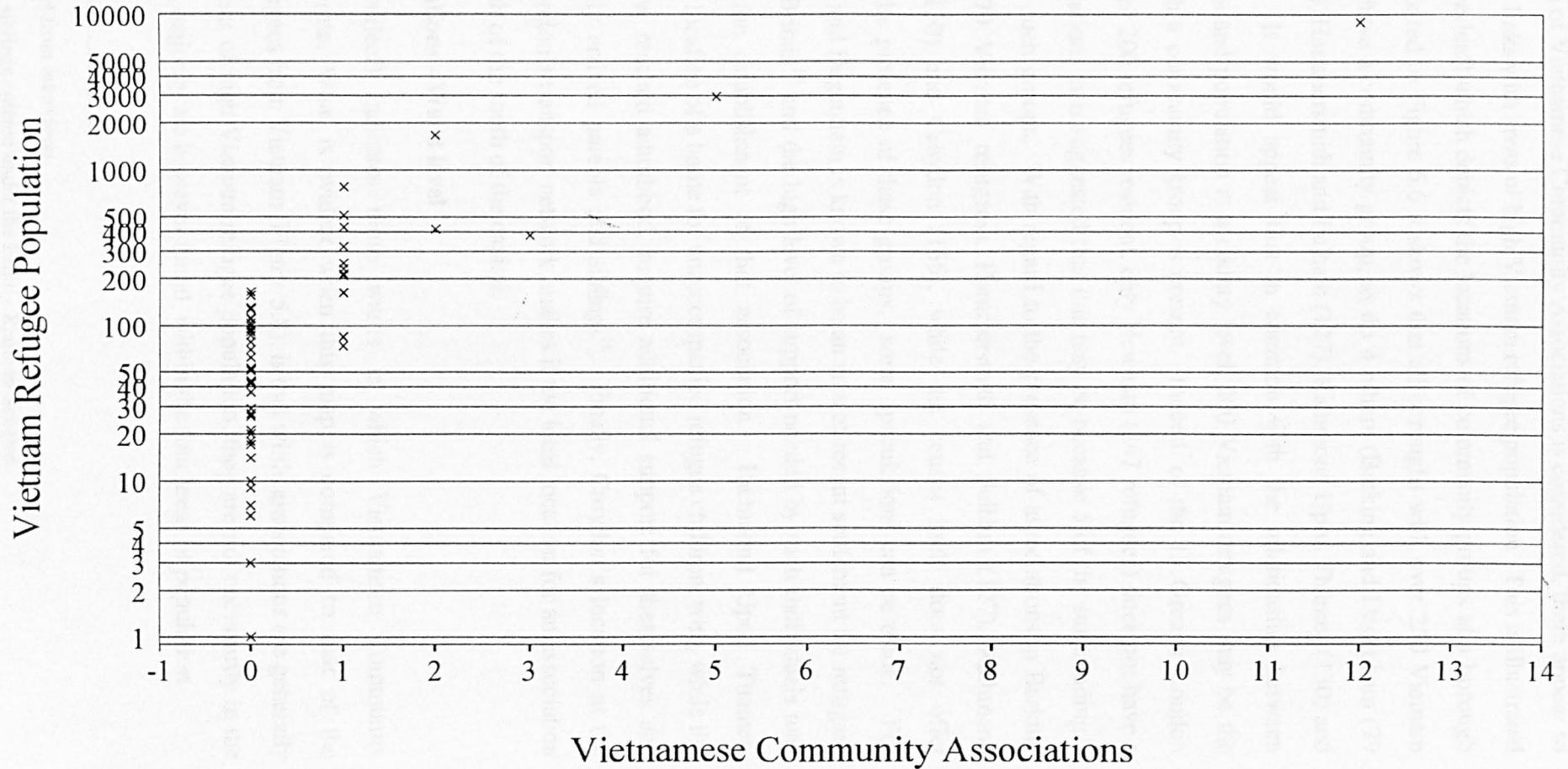


Figure 5.9 Counties / Metropolitan areas in which one or more VCA operate  
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# Vietnam refugee populations and VCA numbers (Counties)

## Figure 5.10



### **5.5.3.2 VCA locations - Borough level**

When the location of Vietnamese Community Associations is considered, there appear to be generally close links with areas of high Vietnam refugee population. This is illustrated in Figure 5.11 (overleaf) which depicts the locations of community groups at a borough scale. When compared to Figure 5.6 it shows that all boroughs with over 250 Vietnam refugee residents have a community group, as do 4 others (Barking and Dagenham (79 Vietnam refugees), Hammersmith and Fulham (127), Richmond Upon Thames (130) and Croydon (166)). It would appear that in common with the relationship between community groups and population at a county level, 200 Vietnam refugees may be the threshold at which a community group is present. Indeed, of the 13 Greater London boroughs with over 200 refugees resident, only Newham (247 refugees) does not have a community association. It is suggested that this may be because 5 of the surrounding 7 boroughs operate such groups. With regard to the presence of associations in Barking and Dagenham (79 Vietnam refugees), Hammersmith and Fulham (127), Richmond Upon Thames (130) and Croydon (166), while the census itself does not offer explanations for the presence of these groups, some speculations can be made. For instance, Barking and Dagenham is known to be an area of recent settlement for refugees newly arrived in Britain<sup>15</sup> and the high level of support needed by such individuals may have influenced the establishment of that association. Richmond Upon Thames, meanwhile, is the location of a home for unaccompanied refugee children, who, while the majority have now reached adulthood, require additional support for themselves and their more recently arrived parents and siblings<sup>16</sup>. Finally, Croydon's location at the heart of South London's transport network, makes it the ideal location for an association which serves much of the south of the capital.

### **5.5.3.3 VCA locations - Ward level**

Figure 5.12 (overleaf) indicates those wards in which Vietnamese Community Associations operate. What is evident when this map is compared to that of the population of refugees from Vietnam (Figure 5.8), is that while associations are generally found close to areas of high Vietnam refugee population, they are not necessarily in the same wards. The majority are however found within the four areas of population

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<sup>15</sup> Information gained from interviews.

<sup>16</sup> Many parents and siblings entered under the Family Reunion Scheme.



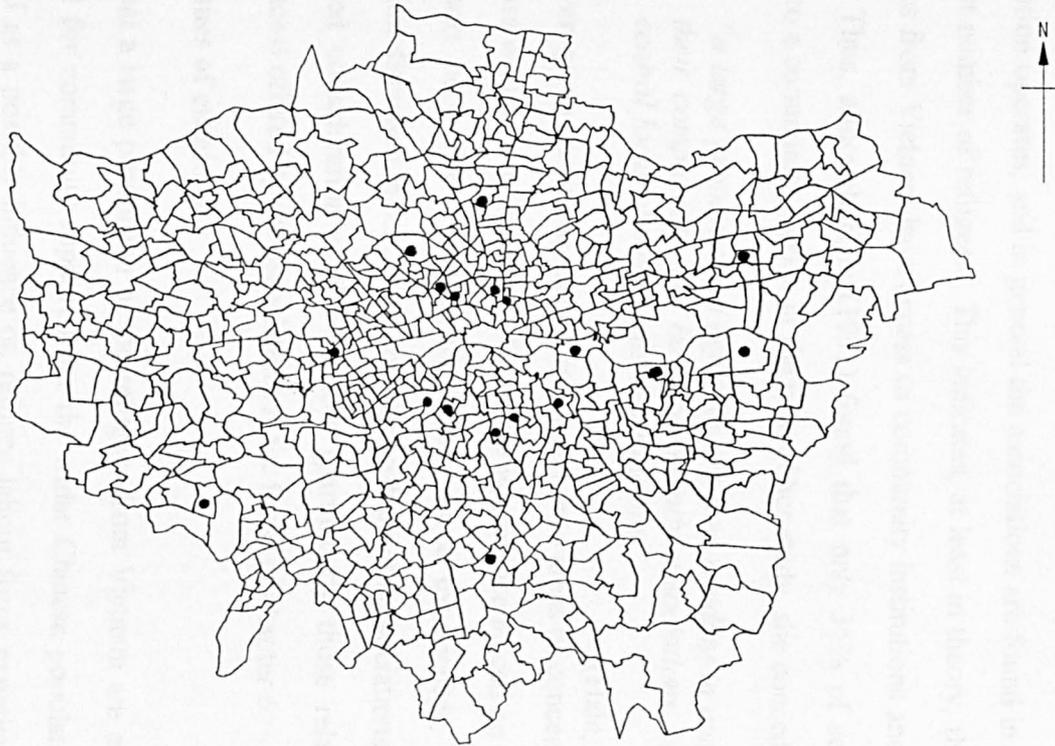


Figure 5.12 The location of VCA in London Wards

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concentration identified from Figure 5.8. Additionally, those elsewhere can be related to areas of lesser concentration, particularly near wards which are distant from the four main areas of population focus.

#### **5.5.3.4 VCA locations - Conclusion**

The preceding discussion has shown that Vietnamese Community Associations are indeed found in areas of high Vietnam refugee population. This relationship is evident at a county, borough and ward or sub-borough level. Indeed, nation-wide over 70% of refugees from Vietnam live within a borough or district in which a community association operates, and in general the associations are found in or near wards with the greatest number of refugees. This indicates, at least in theory, that the vast majority of refugees from Vietnam have access to community institutions and the support they may offer. Thus, although Hale (1991) found that only 35% of secondary migrants had access to a community worker at the time of her study, she concedes that

*“a large proportion of refugees are now residing in communities with their compatriots and have community associations which form the central focus of their social environment.”*

(Hale, 1991, p. 428).

Moreover, given continued secondary migration to areas of concentration, it is likely that this figure would have increased. Given the importance placed on the potential influence of support networks in influencing labour force experiences, the concentration of population discussed in 5.5.2, and its relationship with associations is significant. Indeed a detailed consideration of the services (particularly those relating to labour force experiences) offered by the associations is the focus of chapter 6.

#### **5.5.4 Issues of ethnicity**

Given that a large proportion of the refugees from Vietnam are ethnically Chinese, the potential for community support from the wider Chinese population in Britain can be identified as a possible influence on refugee labour force experiences. This source of support was thought to be potentially crucial given the lack of any existing Vietnamese community prior to the arrival of the refugees. The 1991 census was therefore examined with a view to identifying if the refugees from Vietnam live in areas which are also home to significant Chinese populations. It should however be noted that since many of the refugees from Vietnam are ethnically Chinese, there is an overlap in the groups, and ethnic Chinese Vietnam refugees are included within those identified as ethnic Chinese.

They do however constitute a small proportion of the latter. This discussion deals with county and ward level distributions<sup>17</sup>.

#### 5.5.4.1 Ethnic Chinese - County level.

As Figure 5.13 (overleaf) shows the ethnic Chinese population in Britain is distributed through the whole of the country. When this is compared to Figure 5.4, it is evident that those areas with the greatest Vietnam refugee population are also home to large numbers of ethnic Chinese people. Indeed if counties / metropolitan areas are ranked in terms of their Vietnam refugee population, those counties at the top generally also have high rankings in terms of their ethnic Chinese population. This is illustrated in Table 5.3. The anomalous position of Northamptonshire in the refugee list is a function of the presence of a reception centre in the county.

Thus, even when it is remembered that some of those who are refugees from Vietnam will have claimed Chinese ethnic identity, and will thus be included in both columns, it can be seen that the refugees from Vietnam generally live in counties with a high ethnic Chinese population. This, therefore presents them with a potential opportunity to become involved in any business activities or support services operated by the wider ethnic Chinese population.

**Table 5.3 Key locations of residence for refugees from Vietnam and Ethnic Chinese**

County / metropolitan area	Vietnam refugee population (Rank position)	Vietnam Refugee population	Ethnic Chinese population (Rank position)	Ethnic Chinese Population
Inner London	1	8,908	1	28,348
Outer London	2	2,950	2	28,231
West Midlands	3	1,670	4	6,107
Greater Manchester	4	781	3	8,323
West Yorkshire	5	514	8	3,852
Northamptonshire	6	428	28	1,323

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<sup>17</sup>Borough level data is not discussed since the ward level data provides a more detailed level of analysis.

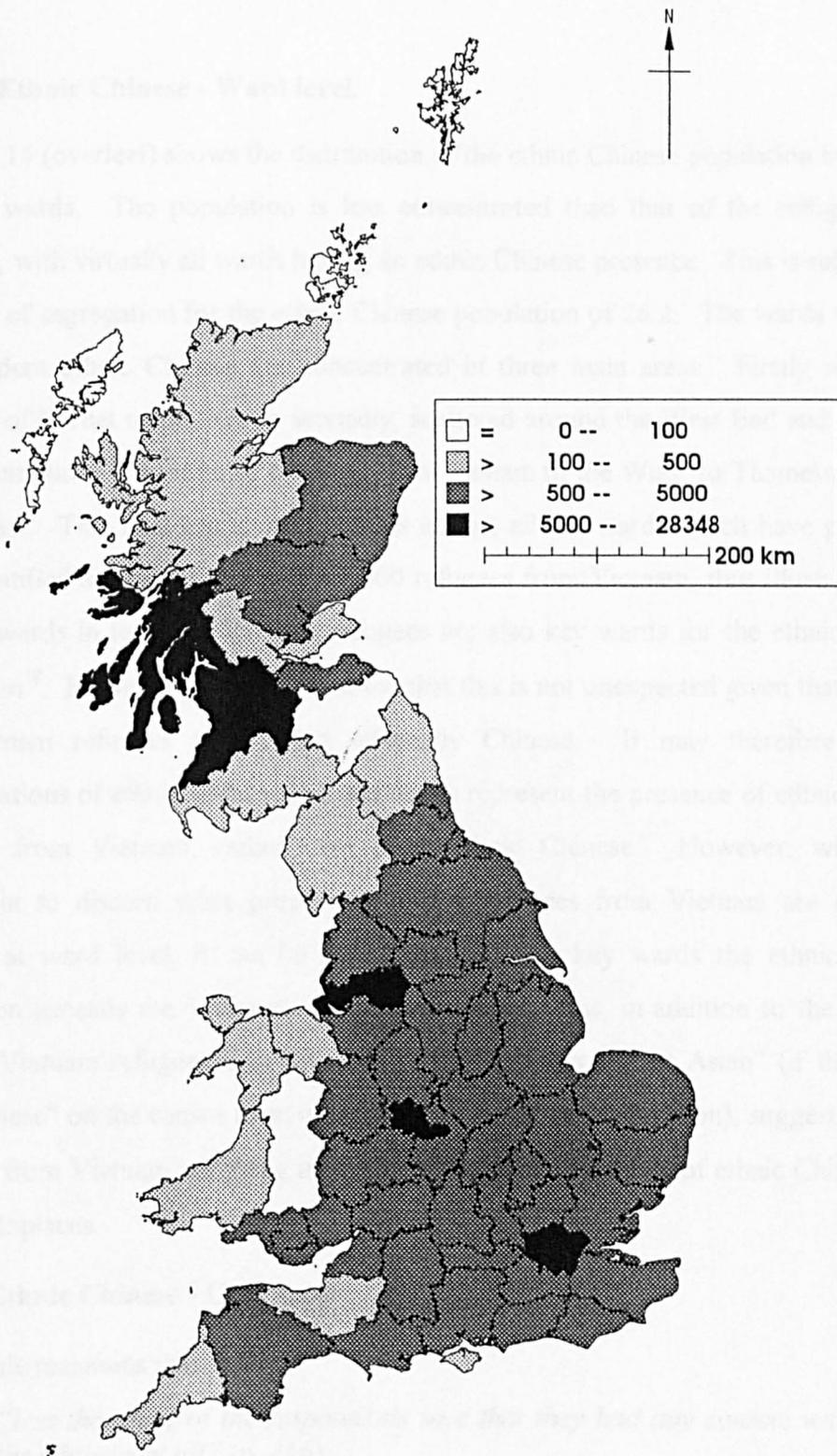


Figure 5.13 Ethnic Chinese in Britain

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#### 5.5.4.2 Ethnic Chinese - Ward level.

Figure 5.14 (overleaf) shows the distribution of the ethnic Chinese population by Greater London wards. The population is less concentrated than that of the refugees from Vietnam, with virtually all wards having an ethnic Chinese presence. This is reflected by an index of segregation for the ethnic Chinese population of 26.2. The wards with over 200 resident ethnic Chinese are concentrated in three main areas. Firstly within the borough of Barnet to the North; secondly, scattered around the West End and finally, in a non-contiguous line south of the river, from Balham to the West, to Thamesmead East in the East. This final group incorporates almost all the wards which have previously been identified as being home to over 200 refugees from Vietnam, thus illustrating that the key wards in terms of Vietnam refugees are also key wards for the ethnic Chinese population<sup>18</sup>. However, it should be noted that this is not unexpected given that many of the Vietnam refugees are in fact ethnically Chinese. It may therefore be that concentrations of ethnic Chinese in these wards represent the presence of ethnic Chinese refugees from Vietnam, rather than other ethnic Chinese. However, while it is impossible to discern what proportion of the refugees from Vietnam are ethnically Chinese at ward level, it can be stated that in all 9 key wards the ethnic Chinese population exceeds the Vietnam refugee population. This, in addition to the fact that half the Vietnam refugees may have been categorised as “Other Asian” (if they wrote “Vietnamese” on the census form in response to the ethnicity question), suggests that the refugees from Vietnam are living in wards with large populations of ethnic Chinese with other birthplaces.

#### 5.5.4.3 Ethnic Chinese - Conclusion

While Hale maintains that

*“less than half of the respondents said that they had any contact with the Chinese at all”* (p. 416)

the census analysis shows that the potential for such contact, at least in terms of spatial proximity, exists for many more of the refugees. Indeed in general, areas of high refugee population are also areas of high ethnic Chinese population. This is certainly the case at broader scales of enquiry, and even at the ward level, the ethnic Chinese population exceeded that of the refugees from Vietnam in all key wards. While overlaps in

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<sup>18</sup>However, many wards with a significant ethnic Chinese population are home to virtually no refugees from Vietnam.

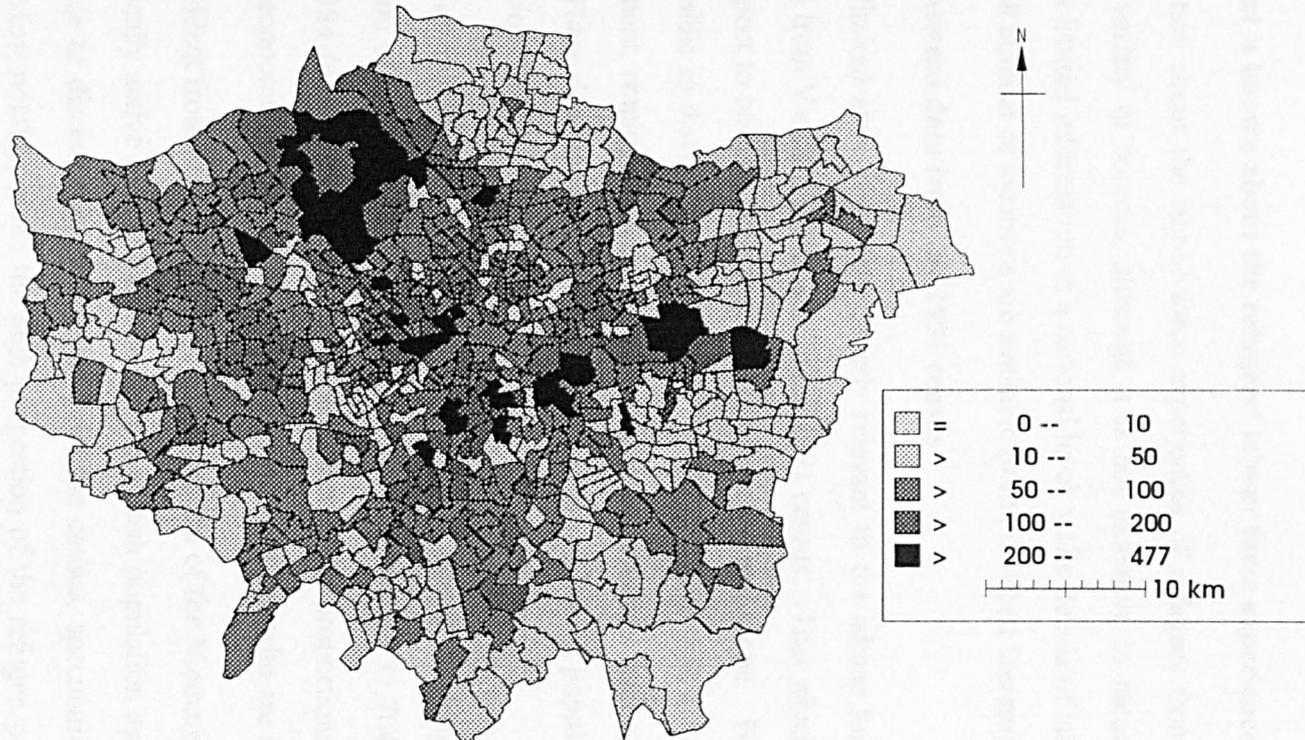


Figure 5.14 Ethnic Chinese in London Wards

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definitions add some confusion to this, it has also been shown that taking those ethnic groups which account for almost all refugees from Vietnam (Chinese and Other Asian), the refugees account for no more than 60% of these populations. As such, the ethnic Chinese population may offer the refugees a source of social support.

## **5.6 What is known about the refugees' labour force experiences?**

Information about the labour force experiences of refugees from Vietnam is available from a variety of sources, although it is not extensive in nature. The 1991 census provides limited information at a national level, while details of labour force experiences in a small number of locations are available from published literature.

### **5.6.1 National data from the 1991 census**

Only a limited amount of data directly relevant to the labour force experiences of the refugees from Vietnam is available in the 1991 census. That which is available is limited with respect to both its scale (national figures only) and scope. However, from the data it is possible to discern figures relating to levels of economic activity, the population in employment, employees, the unemployed and the industrial sectors in which the refugees work. These data can be compared to those for the British population and a number of observations made.

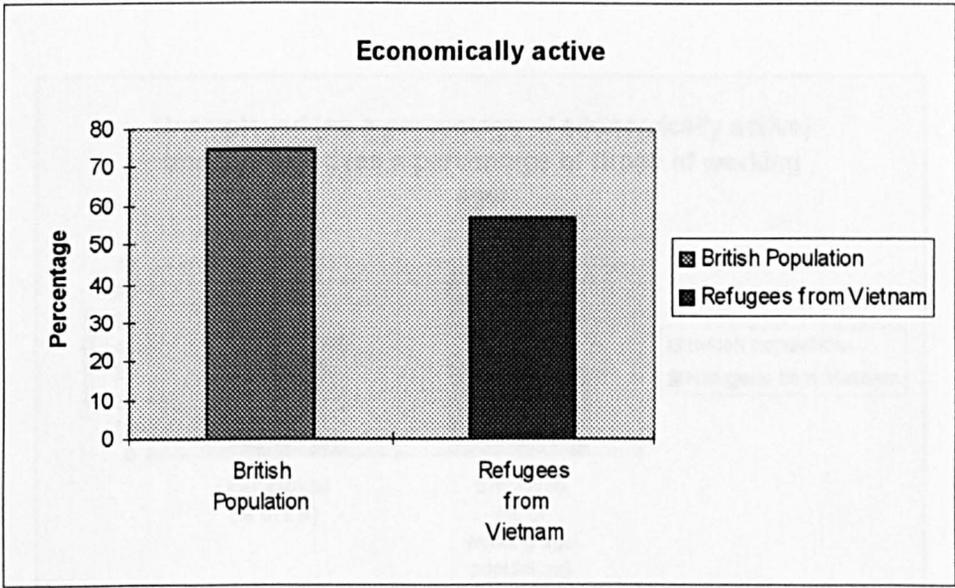
A total of 16,515 out of 20,119 (82%) refugees are of working age<sup>19</sup>, while for the population of England, Scotland and Wales the figures are 35,704,408 out of a total of 54,888,884 (65%). Figure 5.15 (overleaf) shows the proportions of these populations that are economically active, that is those of working age who are in work or seeking it.

As is evident from the graph, a smaller proportion of the Vietnam refugee population is economically active than is the case for the British population as a whole. While it is impossible to discern reasons for this from the census, speculative suggestions can be made. Most notably, given the high proportion of the refugee population that is aged 15-24 (32.6% as opposed to 20.2% for the British population), and a propensity amongst this age group to be involved in education, it is possible that the discrepancy is partly due to a larger proportion of the refugees from Vietnam being involved in education than is the case for the British population. However, while education levels

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<sup>19</sup>16-60 for women and 16-65 for men.

Figure 5.15 Economically active

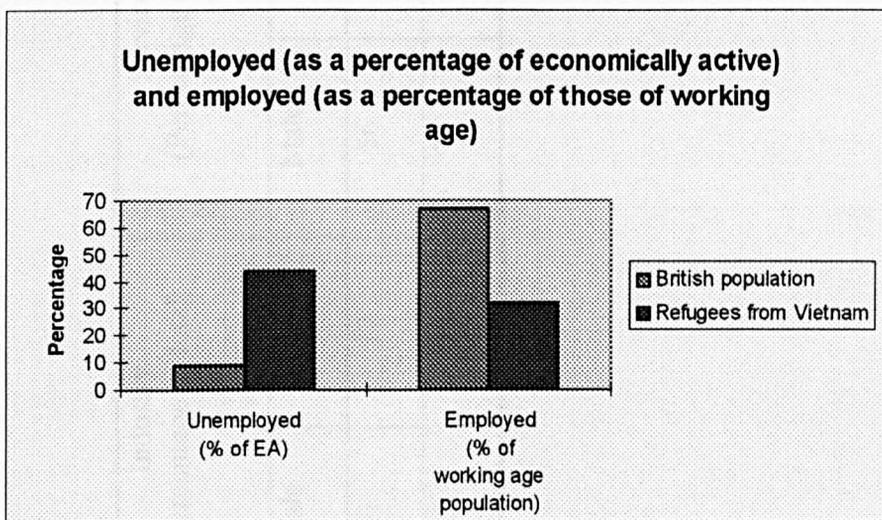


may be one explanation, it would be unwise to underestimate the influence of other factors such as ill health or family commitments.

In addition to identifying that portion of the population that is economically active, levels of unemployment and employment are also available. From the data, it is possible to calculate two separate measures for both the Vietnam refugee and British populations. The first measure is the unemployment figure, that is the proportion of the economically active population who are unemployed. The second measure is the proportion of those of working age who are in employment, irrespective of their economic activity status. The difference between these measures illustrates how those not unemployed can not be assumed to be in employment. Both measures are illustrated for the British and Vietnam refugee populations in Figure 5.16 (overleaf).

As is clearly visible, the level of unemployment is significantly higher and the proportion employed, significantly lower amongst refugees from Vietnam than in the British population. With regard to unemployment, levels amongst the refugees are almost four times that of the British population, while only 32% of those of working age are employed. These figures indicate that unemployment is a serious problem for the refugees and that employment is a minority labour force experience. For most refugees their labour force experience in 1991 was not one of employment.

Figure 5.16



On the strength of the image presented in Figure 5.16, an attempt was made to produce a dependency ratio for the British and for the Vietnam refugee populations. This measures how many non-working people each working person has to support. As such, it integrates both economic activity and unemployment levels into a single measure. Although theoretical and flawed by the inherent assumption that refugees from Vietnam live only with other refugees from Vietnam, the results are useful in summarising the differing dependency situation in the two populations. Calculations produce a figure of 1:3.81 for the refugees from Vietnam and 1:2.30 for the British population. Thus each refugee from Vietnam who holds a job has to support on average nearly 3 others, while in the general population the figure is only 1.3 others.

With regard to the employment circumstances of those refugees who do work, only limited data are available. For instance separate figures for self employment are unavailable. However, of 5278 refugees in employment, only 4240 are employees, leaving 1038 (19.7%) who are not. It is therefore possible, though not certain<sup>20</sup>, that this figure represents those who are self-employed.

The final section of data directly related to labour force experiences is that which links country of birth to industrial sector for 10% of the population. Table 5.4 (see over)

<sup>20</sup>No separate figures for the numbers self-employed and on government schemes are available.

**Table 5.4 Survey of industrial sector**

	Total Persons		Agriculture (Percentage of total)		Industry (Percentage of total)		Services (Percentage of total)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
British Population	1,299,702	1,024,702	3	0.01	41	17	56	83
Vietnam Refugees	267	161	0	0	23	15	77	85

illustrates the relevant figures for both the British population and the refugees from Vietnam. Just as for all birthplace groups, what is evident in the table is the increased importance of the service sector for the refugees from Vietnam. While the percentage of female refugees engaged in work in the service sector is only marginally greater than that for the British female population (85% as opposed to 83%), for refugee males the difference is more significant. Indeed, while only 56% of British working males are employed in the service sector, the figure for Vietnam refugee males is 77%. This difference is primarily due to the reduced level of refugee male involvement in the industrial sector, probably as a result of the refugees arrival at a time of decline in this sector.

### **5.6.2 Published literature**

Given that the focus of this thesis is on the labour force experiences of refugees, particularly those from Vietnam, it is important to consider what the extant literature says about such experiences. In general, while much research into the refugees from Vietnam mentions elements of labour force experiences, only a few documents deal with the issues in any detail. However, taking both employment-specific literature and more general literature on the refugees from Vietnam, certain details can be gleaned.

During the initial reception and resettlement period, finding the refugees employment was not a priority, possibly because the majority of refugees from Vietnam arrived during a period of high unemployment in Britain. Thus, although participation in the labour market was recognised as being a pre-requisite for successful resettlement (Hale, 1991), the programme prioritised finding accommodation rather than employment. Only after resettlement did most of the refugees receive any help with regard to finding employment (Jones, 1982). However, there were no clear guidelines about offering the refugees assistance with regard to securing employment and even the rules on registering for work were applied haphazardly. As Edholm et al (1983) remarks,

*“It was generally understood that, after six months in this country, the refugees of working age had to register for work. Information to this effect was, or should have been, given to all refugees when they were in the reception centres, and to support groups. However, this rule was by no means universally applied. In some areas refugees were required to register for work when they were in the reception centres..... in other areas the signing on process took place on resettlement, regardless of the length of time the individual had been in this country; and in others it was waived for a year. In several places the local employment offices agreed that refugees should not have to*

*sign on until their English was sufficient for them to be able to register for work.”*

(pp. 17-18)

Moreover, since the policy of dispersal meant that resettlement locations were governed by the availability of vacant housing, the refugees tended to be resettled in areas of high unemployment where the indigenous population was trying to leave. This location in deprived areas has been seen to be a detrimental influence on the refugees' labour force experiences (Robinson and Hale, 1989).

With regard to the refugees' experiences, early research indicated that in the initial years after the refugees had arrived in Britain, unemployment was a significant problem. For instance Jones (1982) found that only 16% of the refugees had a job at the time of his survey, and of those working, the majority were employed in manual work, primarily of a semi-skilled or unskilled nature. Similarly, Edholm (1983) records comments about life in Britain such as

*“cold weather, no jobs.”*

(p. 41)

More recently, Hale (1991) records employment amongst the community of refugees from Vietnam at 25%, again being dominated by manual work. Likewise, with particular regard to refugees arriving after 1982, Duke and Marshall (1995) state that only 21% were employed, and that 70% had never had a job in Britain.

With respect to place specific research (Crewe (1992) in Nottingham, Joly (1988) in Birmingham, Fraser (1988) in Leeds and Bradford, and Girbash (1991) in Manchester), a similar portrayal of labour force experiences is evident, with current<sup>21</sup> employment figures of 27% in Nottingham, 20% in Birmingham, and 20% in Manchester. In Leeds and Bradford, respondents were asked if they'd ever had a job, not whether they were currently working, and this elicited a response which indicated 31% had worked at some time since their arrival in Britain. As such, it appears that throughout Britain, unemployment is a serious problem for the refugees from Vietnam. Additionally, as with the national scale research, the locality specific studies indicate that those who do work are concentrated in the unskilled and semi-skilled sectors.

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<sup>21</sup> At the time each survey was conducted.

### 5.6.3 Unemployment in areas of high refugee residence.

Robinson and Hale (1989) have already commented on the concentration of refugees in areas of high unemployment and the detrimental effect of this on their labour force experiences. With the detailed map of the population's distribution provided from analysis of the 1991 census, evidence of this can be extended. While a consideration of county level unemployment amongst the general population is largely meaningless, that of unemployment at a district and ward level gives some indication of the state of the local labour market in which the refugees may be seeking work.

In general the boroughs in which the refugees have settled experience a high level of unemployment. Table 5.5 shows this with regard to the six contiguous boroughs which are home to 67% of London's Vietnam refugee population.

**Table 5.5 Unemployment in key London Boroughs**

<b>London Borough</b>	<b>Vietnam refugee population</b>	<b>General Unemployment</b>
Southwark	1782	18.2%
Lewisham	1394	14.4%
Lambeth	1373	17.1%
Hackney	1354	22.5%
Greenwich	1109	13.3%
Tower Hamlets	994	21.8%

Source: 1991 census

General unemployment in these boroughs is clearly very high and significantly exceeds the national figure of 9.4% and even the Greater London figure of 11.6% (Inner London 15.9% and Outer London 8.9%). Indeed in two cases unemployment is more than double the national figure. Although these figures tell nothing of Vietnam refugee experiences directly, they are a clear indication of the labour circumstances in which they seek work. Being resident in areas of such high unemployment must have an influence upon the refugees' labour force experiences.

Additionally, when unemployment levels are considered in districts outside Greater London, a similar pattern to that seen in the capital emerges. In Manchester and Birmingham general unemployment reached 18.7% and 14.3% respectively. However, in Leeds and Northampton unemployment was lower at only 9.2% and 6.9%. Nevertheless, if boroughs and districts across England<sup>22</sup> are considered, then 76.9% of

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<sup>22</sup> Just 3% of Britain's Vietnam refugees live outside England.

refugees do live in boroughs or districts which have an unemployment level greater than 9.4%. In fact, 25% actually live in boroughs or districts with an unemployment level which more than doubles this figure.

Considering ward level data, Figure 5.17 (overleaf) portrays general unemployment levels for Greater London wards. Unemployment is frequently above the national average of 9.4% within the capital, especially within Inner London. With regard to those areas in which the refugees from Vietnam are concentrated (see Figure 5.8) in all four areas of concentration discussed earlier, the wards have an unemployment level above 9.4%. Indeed, many wards, especially around the Larkhall, Ferndale and Liddle concentration, and also near the concentration North of the river (concentrated on Eastdown and Haggerston), have unemployment levels at more than twice the national average. This illustrates that even at a ward level Vietnam refugees are concentrated in areas in which unemployment is prevalent.

Outside of Greater London, ward level data was examined for the districts of Manchester and Birmingham - these being the only districts to be home to more than 200 refugees from Vietnam. The 512 refugees resident in Manchester were found to be concentrated in the wards of Cheetham and Central, with general unemployment rates of 32.7% and 34%. In Birmingham the refugee population (1402 people) was concentrated in Handsworth, Soho, Sandwell and Aston. While Sandwell has an unemployment rate of 15.3%, unemployment in these other key wards is between 25% and 33%. It is therefore evident that the concentration of refugees in areas of high unemployment is not confined to Greater London. As such, strength is added to the argument that the refugees' labour force experiences may well have been influenced by their concentration in areas which

*“are likely to constrain... economic life chances.”*

(Hale, 1991, p. 409).

## **5.7 Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter has been to introduce the refugees from Vietnam by providing a range of information about their background. This has included a brief review of the circumstances which led to their flight from Vietnam and arrival in Britain, their spatial

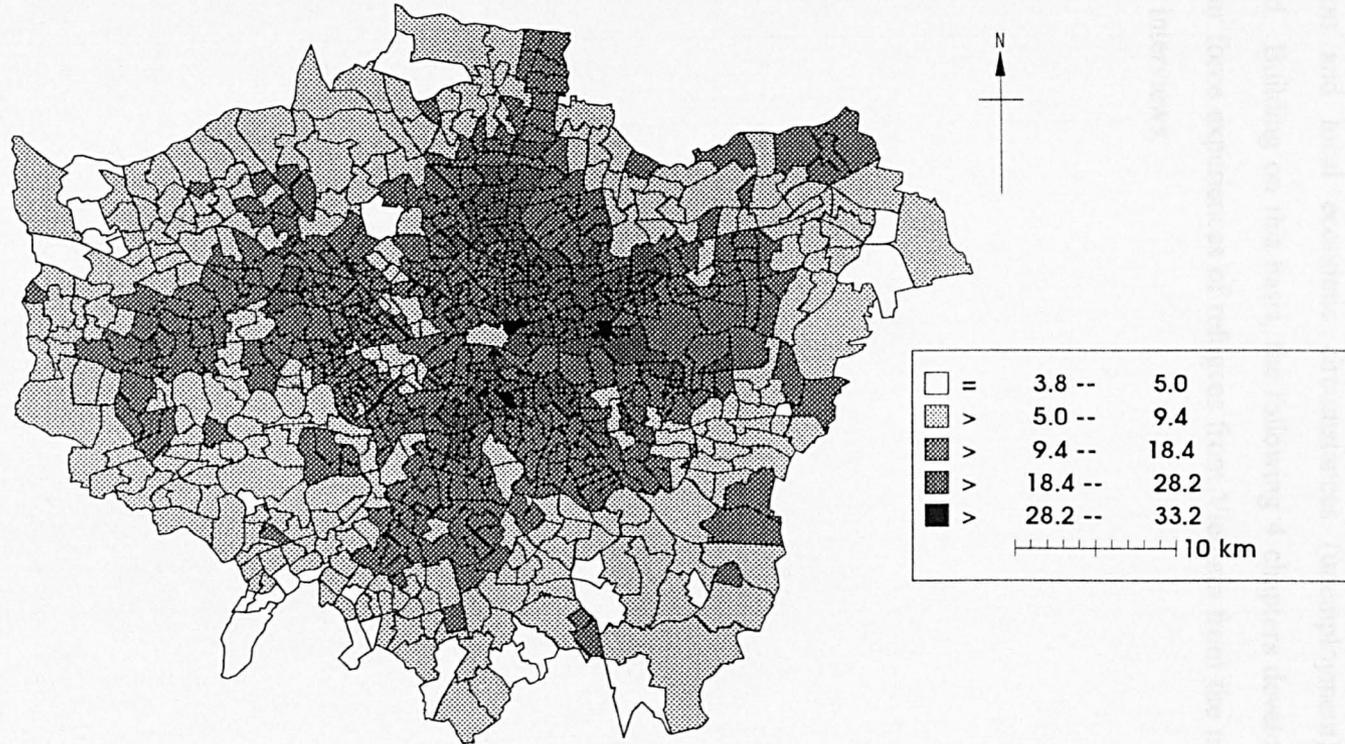


Figure 5.17 Levels of unemployment in London Wards  
 1991 LBS/SAS statistics © Crown copyright 1991 All rights reserved

distribution and their labour force experiences. Factors identified as having the potential to affect labour force experiences<sup>23</sup> - access to the support services offered by Vietnamese Community Associations, interaction with the wider ethnic Chinese population and local economic circumstances (unemployment) - have also been discussed. Building on this basis, the following 4 chapters develop further insight into the labour force experiences of refugees from Vietnam from the material gained during personal interviews.

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<sup>23</sup> See figure 3.1

**Chapter Six**  
**Vietnamese Community Associations**

## Vietnamese Community Associations

### 6.1 Introduction

Many studies have suggested that community groups operated by refugees assist in the task of adapting to life in a new country (Carey-Wood, 1994; Duke and Marshall, 1995). Such groups provide a wide range of services, assisting with social difficulties and providing a focus for the communities. They are also known to provide services to help refugees who want to improve their labour force experiences (Carey-Wood, Duke, Karn and Marshall, 1995). It is therefore unsurprising that research into the experiences of refugees from Vietnam, frequently makes reference to Vietnamese Community Associations (Crewe, 1992a; Dalglish, 1989; Duke and Marshall, 1995; Frazer, 1988; Girbash, 1991; Hale, 1991; Joly, 1988). Access to these associations is generally described as good with, for instance, 83% of Vietnam refugees living in Manchester being aware that the city had an association from which they could receive support and 70% of those people finding the association's help useful (Girbash, 1991). It would, however appear that associations in London are able to offer more services to refugees from Vietnam than those found elsewhere, and that this may have influenced people to move to the city (Hale, 1991). Nevertheless, while research into the experiences of refugees from Vietnam acknowledges the presence of Vietnamese Community Associations, they have rarely been a focus of interest.

This chapter focuses on Vietnamese Community Associations (VCA). Dealing with VCA both within and outside London, the aim is to provide an insight into their general organisation. This will then provide a context in which the subsequent interviews with community workers can be placed. Moreover, community associations are of interest in their own right, since they arguably form a major source of assistance for refugees from Vietnam. Specifically, they are located in key areas populated by the refugees<sup>1</sup> and provide them with a range of services, including, of particular interest to this thesis, employment development services. As such, their role within the refugee community is thought to be significant. Indeed, as community groups can be viewed as both sources of community support (via facilitating access to other refugees) and specialist support (via formal assistance programmes), they constitute a specific kind of support network. As support networks have been identified as being of potential importance to labour

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of this see previous chapter, particularly section 5.5.

force experiences<sup>2</sup>, any discussion of such experiences will benefit from the inclusion of a consideration of the activities of community associations.

The insight into the community groups takes the form of an introduction to their funding arrangements and their work. An accompanying appendix (6.1) reproduces the list from which community groups were identified<sup>3</sup>, and participating associations are identified within the text. As a starting point, a discussion of the establishment of the associations occurs, though it should be noted that throughout this chapter comments refer only to those VCA that participated in the research; details on other associations are not discussed nor should they be readily inferred.

## **6.2 The establishment of Vietnamese Community Associations**

In the 18 years since the refugees from Vietnam began to arrive in Britain, many VCA have been established<sup>4</sup>; 26 of these will be discussed here. While some of these associations date from early in the resettlement period, others have a much shorter history. This is illustrated in Table 6.1 (overleaf) which indicates establishment dates and other details for VCA located in London. Groups elsewhere will be considered later.

Table 6.1 shows that the Vietnamese Community Associations in London were established during three broad time periods. Four opened within a couple of years of the first refugees settling in Britain, and unsurprisingly they are located in areas in which large numbers of refugees were initially resettled after leaving the reception centres (Hale, 1991). It can therefore be argued that their establishment was largely influenced by the needs of refugees who had recently left these centres. Discussions during the interviews supported this and the initial social function of the associations, as meeting places, was stressed. The survival of three of these associations has since been assured by subsequent secondary migration into the areas they serve. Indeed, these three serve the boroughs of Southwark, Hackney and Lambeth, all of which were identified as key boroughs during the census stage of the research.

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<sup>2</sup> As discussed in section 3.4.4

<sup>3</sup> Two associations - The Ockenden Venture in Birmingham and VETEC were contacted via snowballing and do not appear in the list.

<sup>4</sup> The Vietnam Refugee National Council provided a list of 39 associations (compiled in the early 1990's).

**Table 6.1 The establishment of Vietnamese Community Associations in London**

<b>Established</b>	<b>Association name (<i>current size</i>)</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Early Period (1979-1983)</b>	Southwark Vietnamese Refugee Association ( <i>Medium</i> )	Area of initial settlement <sup>5</sup> . Key Borough <sup>6</sup>
	Vietnamese Refugee Community in Croydon ( <i>Small</i> )	Area of initial settlement. This association is also within walking distance of the Home Office Immigration and Nationality Department.
	Islington & Hackney Vietnamese Community ( <i>Medium</i> )	Area of initial settlement. Hackney is a key borough.
	Lambeth Community of Refugees from Vietnam ( <i>Large</i> )	Area of initial settlement. Key Borough
<b>Mid Period (1984-1988)</b>	Vietnamese Refugee Project in Greenwich ( <i>Large</i> )	Area of initial settlement. Key borough. Substantial in-migration <sup>7</sup>
	An Viet (Hackney) ( <i>Large</i> )	Area of initial settlement. Key borough. Substantial in-migration
	West & North-West London Vietnamese Organisation ( <i>Small</i> )	Substantial in-migration.
	VETEC <sup>8</sup> (Vietnamese Training and Employment Centre, Southwark) ( <i>Large</i> )	Area of initial settlement. Key borough. Substantial in-migration
	Southwark Vietnamese Chinese Refugee Community ( <i>Large</i> )	Area of initial settlement. Key borough. Substantial in-migration
<b>Late Period (1989 onwards)</b>	Wandsworth Vietnamese Refugee Community ( <i>Small</i> )	Continued in-migration <sup>9</sup>
	Barking & Dagenham Vietnamese & Chinese Association ( <i>Small</i> )	Continued in-migration
	Vietnamese Community Association in South West London ( <i>Small</i> )	Imminent closure of existing Save the Children Fund programme led to establishment of this association

Key: *Small* = 1-2 paid workers; *Medium* = 3-4 paid workers; *Large* = 5+ paid workers

With regard to the association in Croydon, while serving an area in which refugees were initially settled, Croydon has not experienced subsequent in-migration of the same magnitude as areas served by the other early London associations. Indeed, by 1991 the borough of Croydon was home to only 161 refugees from Vietnam<sup>10</sup>. This is below the

<sup>5</sup> As identified by Hale (1991) fig 6.3 Addresses on resettlement p. 270

<sup>6</sup> Key borough in terms of the size of its Vietnam Refugee population - Chapter 5 and Hale (1991).

<sup>7</sup> Hale (1991) identified 1982-1984 as the key years for secondary migration amongst refugees from Vietnam, with London as a common destination. Community Association interviews support this as a period of in-migration for this borough.

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that this is a specialised association which deals primarily with Employment development work.

<sup>9</sup> Community Association interview suggests steady growth of population as impetus for establishment of this association

<sup>10</sup> Census analysis.

figure of 200 which has been suggested as the customary threshold necessary to support an association<sup>11</sup>. It is therefore suggested that the continued existence of this association may be related to other factors than the size of the population in the borough. While Croydon's good transport links have previously been mentioned, the proximity of the Home Office's immigration department may also act to encourage refugees from a wider area to utilise the services of the Croydon association.

A further five Vietnamese Community Associations were established in London between 1984 and 1988. Four are situated in what have become key boroughs for the refugees from Vietnam, while all five serve areas which experienced substantial in-migration of refugees from other areas. This in-migration is thought to be an influential factor which led to the establishment of the community groups. Evidence from Hale (1991) identifies 1982-1984 as the peak years of mobility for refugees from Vietnam, with London as the favourite destination; and workers at the four associations link their establishment to the influx of refugees during this same period. Moreover a leaflet published by An Viet explicitly states,

*"An Viet was set up in 1986 in Hackney to cope with the needs and problems created by the secondary wave of migration which brought Vietnamese to London from the provinces."*

Thus further supporting the conviction that associations such as this were founded as a result of secondary migration, and specifically as a result of the consequent increased population levels in parts of London. As the respondent in Croydon explained,

*"we start to have different communities in different areas..... they start to realise the number of people that need help. And they realise that... when they had one [VCA], there was so many people that came for help they feel that they needed more and more".*

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the borough with the largest number of refugees, Southwark, is the location of the only specialised community association (focusing on employment and training).

During the latest phase of VCA establishment (1989 onwards) just three associations were formed in London. Workers from those in Wandsworth and Barking & Dagenham, both connect the formation of their associations with continued in-migration of refugees from elsewhere in Britain, and in the case of Barking & Dagenham from refugee camps abroad. This therefore is a continuation of the process identified during the middle period of VCA formation. By contrast, the creation of the association in South West

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<sup>11</sup>See discussion based on figure 5.10

London is related to the imminent closure of an existing Save the Children Fund project which has been supporting families who have been reunited with their refugee children (who originally arrived in Britain unaccompanied). Save the Children were aware of the vacuum of support the closure of their project would have, and thus

*“Over the last two and a half years we try to set up a Vietnamese Association to help those Vietnamese people in South West London. At first we got them involved to see what they wanted to do, what sort of needs they wanted to be met... and by the end of December 1994 all the paper work was completed and we send them to the Charity Commission to get the charitable status for us.”*

This association was therefore initiated by one of the charitable organisations which was responsible for resettling the refugees from Vietnam. While the only such case amongst the London VCA, an examination of the forces behind the creation of associations in the provinces uncovers similar cases which will be discussed shortly, however a brief discussion of the current size of the London associations first occurs.

With regard to the London community associations, all those within previously identified key boroughs are classified as medium or large on account of the number of paid staff they employ. Similarly, associations classed as small are found in boroughs which are home to smaller numbers of refugees from Vietnam. There therefore appears to be a relationship between the number of refugees from Vietnam in the area surrounding an association, and the number of staff it can afford to employ. Thus, not only are the locations of associations linked to the distribution of refugees from Vietnam<sup>12</sup>, but the size of that population appears to determine the number of staff employed.

Having dealt with community groups in London, a similar consideration of provincial<sup>13</sup> VCA now occurs. Table 6.2 (overleaf) indicates the location, establishment dates and current size of the provincial community groups who participated in the research.

Of the five community associations established in the early period (1979-1983) all are located in areas of initial settlement as identified by Hale (1991). As in London, these associations were founded in order to support refugees who had recently left the reception centres. While some had close links with the organisations responsible for reception and resettlement (particularly the Birmingham project which was actually operated by one of these charities - The Ockenden Venture), others developed because

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<sup>12</sup> As discussed in section 5.5.3

<sup>13</sup> The terms provincial refers collectively to VCA situated outside of London.

of a vacuum of support. Indeed, often the associations were established by key individuals

**Table 6.2 The establishment of provincial Vietnamese Community Associations<sup>14</sup>**

	<b>Association (<i>current size</i>)</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Early Period (1979-1983)</b>	Northern Refugee Centre (Sheffield) ( <i>Small</i> )	Area of initial settlement
	Avon Vietnamese Refugee Community ( <i>Small</i> )	Area of initial settlement
	Vietnamese Refugee Community in Cambridge ( <i>Medium</i> )	Area of initial settlement
	South Wales Vietnamese Community Project (Cardiff) ( <i>Small</i> )	Area of initial settlement
	Ockenden Venture (Birmingham) <sup>15</sup> ( <i>Large</i> )	Area of initial settlement. Project operated by charity responsible for resettlement.
<b>Mid Period (1984-1988)</b>	Vietnamese Refugee Community in Northampton ( <i>Small</i> )	Area of initial settlement
	Midlands Vietnamese Refugees Community Association ( <i>Large</i> )	Area of initial settlement. Independent Vietnam refugee operated association
<b>Late Period (1989 onwards)</b>	Association of Refugees from Vietnam in Basildon ( <i>Small</i> )	Association formed to help reduce out-migration to London.
	Vietnamese Community Association in Surrey (Woking) ( <i>Small</i> )	Independent Vietnam refugee association based in an area previously served by the Ockenden Venture.
	Coventry Vietnamese Community Support Group ( <i>Small</i> )	Association formed to help reduce out-migration, particularly to London.
	Portsmouth Vietnamese Community Association ( <i>Small</i> )	Association formed after the closure of a Hampshire wide association
	Wirral Vietnamese Association ( <i>Small</i> )	Association formed at instigation of ethnic Chinese community worker.
	Derby Vietnamese Community Association ( <i>Small</i> )	Independent Vietnam refugee association formed when Refugee Action expanded its operations to refugees of all nationalities
	Manchester Vietnamese Refugees Community Association ( <i>Small</i> )	Recently formed association. Replaces collapsed association.

Key: *Small* = 1-2 paid workers; *Medium* = 3-4 paid workers; *Large* = 5+ paid workers

<sup>14</sup> The terms used in this table are the same as in table 6.1. Additionally Nottingham does not appear in this list as the information was not available.

<sup>15</sup> This project is operated by the Ockenden Venture not the refugees, although most of its staff are refugees from Vietnam.

who found that they were the refugees main source of support after leaving the reception centres. This was certainly the case in Sheffield where the feeling was that

*“reception centres would say ... the job is not really to ... help the family after they had settled down.”*

Thus refugees who were unable to cope alone had to turn elsewhere for support. They primarily turned to one ex-reception centre worker, and it was he who decided to establish a community group. As the current worker explained, the aim of the association was

*“to help them with their problem, a centre should help them to become stronger, is a place for them to get together.”*

Thus, as with many London VCA, the social function of the associations as a meeting place, was stressed. In all the associations which were established in this early period, both in London and the provinces, the impetus for their creation was the presence of a large number of refugees from Vietnam who required support after leaving the reception centres. Their actual formation arose either from the actions of the charities responsible for resettling the refugees or, more commonly, the actions of key individuals who found themselves acting as the main source of support.

During the second phase of VCA formation, only two associations were created in the provinces. Given that secondary migration away from areas of dispersed settlement and towards areas with more refugees from Vietnam (particularly Birmingham and London) was underway, this is not unexpected. The establishment of the VCA in Birmingham may be related to the increased population of refugees from Vietnam who were migrating to the city, while for Northampton the prevalent argument of VCA being established because of a lack of support appears to be the case. However, while the increased Vietnam refugee population of Birmingham may be one argument for the creation of a second association in the city, another factor also appears to have been important. When questioned as to the reasons why a second VCA should be formed literally next door to the first, the establishment of the Midlands Vietnamese Refugees Community Association was explained in terms of, what can be considered to be, the community's wish for a greater degree of self-determination. Specifically, although the

Ockenden Venture was already operating an association, members of the community felt the need to establish a

*“pure Vietnamese community centre”*

in which they could run their own affairs without the input of the charity responsible for their resettlement in the city. The creation of this association therefore represents a desire for self-autonomy.

The final period of VCA formation (1989 onwards) saw the establishment of six associations in the provinces, whose formation arose from a variety of factors. Given that the refugees from Vietnam had become concentrated in specific areas by this time, particularly in specific boroughs of London, it is somewhat surprising that so many new associations were formed in the provinces during this period. However, while it may be assumed that secondary migration to areas of concentration, and thus reduced population levels in residual areas, would make the establishment of further VCA less likely, this was not always the case. For example, the association in Basildon was founded with the specific aim of reducing secondary migration. As the worker explains,

*“Before, used to be lot of people move out of Essex, but now we got a community.. we provide services to the people and there is a lot of people now they feel safe and confident to live in Essex. No more people moving out.”*

Thus in Basildon, and similarly in Coventry, the creation of the VCA can be seen as a reaction to the secondary migration of local refugees to areas of concentration; a response that aims to stabilise population levels by providing increased levels of support for the community. Moreover, according to community workers, this objective is being met, with the VCA encouraging people to remain, rather than move to seek support within areas with greater numbers of refugees (and the associations found in such areas). The interview material therefore adds weight the conclusion already drawn by Hale (1991), that

*“the presence of such an association in the area of resettlement reduces the propensity to migrate”. (p.357)*

Meanwhile, elsewhere other factors led to the formation of community groups in areas which are home to relatively few refugees from Vietnam. In Woking, after many years of relying on the Ockenden Venture for support, the refugees from Vietnam decided to establish their own VCA. Although this may appear to indicate a wish for greater self-determination, it is worth noting that the association is still operated from within offices owned by the Ockenden Venture. Thus the level of independence is open to question.

However in Derby, the creation of the VCA can more clearly be linked to a wish for greater self-determination and autonomy. Although refugees in the area were receiving support from another of the resettlement charities (Refugee Action), a change in its remit which extended its responsibilities from the refugees from Vietnam to refugees of all origins, led to the decision to create an organisation which would be run by, and deal solely with the refugees from Vietnam. The desire for a Vietnam refugee operated association also led to the creation of the Wirral group, though here the refugees had previously been reliant on the local Chinese support group, rather than a resettlement charity, for assistance.

In Hampshire transportation problems as a result of serving the whole county from one base led to the closure of an old association and the formation of smaller, more local groups<sup>16</sup>. The creation of the Portsmouth Association thus represents the continuation of support rather than its instigation. Similarly the same is true of the Manchester Association, though here support had previously been available from an association which had collapsed due to internal disputes.

It can thus be concluded that of the six provincial VCA established in the later period, two arose in order to try and combat out-migration, while the other four represented a continuation, rather than instigation, of support, though such support became more Vietnam refugee orientated with the establishment of the VCA. This is a somewhat different situation than that in London, where of associations formed in this later period, only that in South West London was allied to an existing source of support.

With regard to the current size of VCA in the provinces, those in Birmingham are large, while elsewhere (with the exception of Cambridge) they are all small. This suggests that the conclusion drawn from the London material, that association size is related to the size of its local Vietnam refugee population, also generally holds true in the provinces.

In conclusion, this review of the establishment of Vietnam Refugee community groups has illustrated that while some areas benefited from the existence of an association early on, other areas only gained such support, especially Vietnam operated support, fairly recently. Moreover, the reasons behind the creation of associations differ both with time and location. To summarise there were two main periods of establishment throughout Britain (the early years of resettlement and a more recent period), with the addition of a

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<sup>16</sup> Only the Portsmouth Association participated in this research.

significant middle period in London. Association size appears to be related to the size of population it serves and secondary migration has influenced the establishment of associations both in London and the provinces, particularly in the mid and later periods of VCA formation.

### 6.3 The funding arrangements of Vietnamese Community Associations

Prior to considering the work of community associations an introduction to their funding arrangements is required. During the course of interviews with workers at all associations the subject of funding was discussed, frequently being introduced by the respondents. It would appear that the funding of VCA activities (including that for Employment Development Work) is a major concern and can have severe repercussions. An insight into the financial situations under which VCA workers operate is therefore crucial.

A candid description of the funding situation of associations might include the words haphazard, disjointed, temporary and outcome related. Such a statement is supported by evidence collated from interviews. Discussing the funding of VCA is not a simple matter since it varies greatly both spatially and temporally. However, the intention here is to give a flavour of the financial difficulties which face VCA workers. As an introduction Table 6.3 lists the variety of sources from which various VCA have obtained funds.

**Table 6.3 VCA Sources of Funding**

Local County and City Councils	The Home Office
Charities	Borough Councils
The Community Programme	The Ethnic Minority Grant Scheme
Social Services	The European Social Fund
The Employment Department	Single Regeneration Budget
TEC's	Donations
The Urban Aid Programme	VCA commercial activities

It should be noted that no single VCA receives funds from all these sources, indeed the various programmes and grant schemes mentioned did not all run simultaneously. In many cases, at their conception associations received no, or extremely limited, funding and operated on an almost entirely voluntary basis. This sometimes meant operating from the home of a key person and this was often accompanied by associated problems,

*“In the beginning we started we find it difficult, we have no funding, we have no skill and we have no experience and we have no confident.”*

However over time it was usual for the associations to obtain funding to formalise their operations<sup>17</sup>. This initial funding sometimes originated from a specific source for a named purpose. While any funding was welcomed, the difficulties of receiving money for a named purpose, rather than allowing the VCA to decide how to spend its resources was one that has constantly faced all community groups. This means that associations generally have to apply for separate funding for each of the distinct aspects of their operations. In Cambridge for example,

*“We got funding, bits and pieces ..... So like myself for instance, I just get the main salary, the travelling expenses, and setting up cost. Anything that I would like to provide the service I will have to seek funding elsewhere. And also for any project that I identify to help, then I also have to seek funding elsewhere. I believe that through my experience that without any special project geared towards the particular needs it is not much of a use I'm being here.”*

Since additional funding is constantly being sought in order to implement projects a major part of a VCA worker's time is spent in completing funding applications, detracting from the time available to carry out work with the community. This situation is then compounded by certain features of the funding situation. Firstly, under the terms of most funding programmes from which grants are obtained, funding is only available for a limited time period, usually 1 to 3 years. Sometimes repeated applications are allowed, but some grants are non-renewable. This results in money being available one year and not the next, placing workers and those who make use of VCA facilities in a situation of uncertainty. Additionally, changes in government schemes from which VCA may expect to receive grants mean that workers frequently have to contend with changes in application procedures, or more disturbingly may find themselves ineligible even to apply. The following extract from the interview at the Islington & Hackney association illustrates many of these concerns,

*“L6: After every year we got to renew the post, the contract or whatever. Like over the last few years we've had some funding for training, but “this year due to some cut backs, sorry next year we won't have that sort of funding for training”. So we got to find a source of funding from elsewhere. Maybe from the charitable trusts or some... in a way we've got to raise the funding ourselves.*

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<sup>17</sup> However, funding levels have meant that some associations remain unable to rent formal premises and continue to operate from a household base (e.g. Association of Refugees from Vietnam in Basildon).

*K: Do you think that having changes in the funding all the time causes problems?*

*L6: Yes, I would say so because after the EMG [Ethnic Minority Grant Scheme] comes the SRB [Single Regeneration Budget] and to me I think the SRB is only for, you know for big fish or big companies or big institutions. Even those big institutions like Islington Council and Camden Council, they partner, they have some sort of partnership last year, and even they fail... they bid for the SRB but they didn't succeed. And this year they succeeded, they got the SRB, but like small fish like us, small Vietnamese community, or any small ethnic minorities organisations, it is very unlikely for us to succeed.*

*K: Do you think that a major part of your job time is taken away because you always have to reapply for funding rather than doing the job itself?*

*L6: Yes, to a certain extent yes. Because if the same like every year it is easier for us, but it keeps changing so sometimes when you are in the job it is not stable. It can cause some sort of confusion for you and the way you are thinking about the job and you know in a way it is not secure."*

The comment made here on the replacement of the Ethnic Minority Grant Scheme by the Single Regeneration Budget is particularly apt given that of all the VCA visited in the course of this research only one, VETEC, the specialised employment centre in Southwark, had managed to secure funding from SRB sources. This contrasts strongly with the situation under the EMG scheme, when associations were generally successful in attracting funds.

The demise of the EMG therefore presented a serious problem for the financial situation of many associations. Under the SRB grants are targeted at specific areas, rather than at certain groups in society. Associations based in locations which were not granted SRB money are therefore unable even to apply for money which in theory "replaced" the EMG. Even where SRB money was allocated to an area, association applications for funding generally failed. Deprived of the targeted resources for ethnic minorities, most associations were unable to compete effectively against a broad spectrum of projects seeking funding. It is therefore significant that the only association to gain SRB funding (VETEC) is located in the borough / district with the largest population of refugees from Vietnam in Britain (Southwark). Arguably it is only in this borough that the population of refugees from Vietnam is of a sufficient size to be able to compete successfully against a whole range of SRB bidding projects. The disadvantages of dispersion and advantages of secondary migration to areas of concentration thus become apparent with reference to seeking funding for community-based projects.

Displeasure at the operation of Single Regeneration Funding was widespread amongst respondents, with comments by various community group workers suggesting that the replacement of the EMG with the SRB was influenced by a desire to deprive the ethnic minorities of access to funding. The respondent at South West London association stated,

*“L10: So for example in here as you seen so many changes within the government policy in terms of funding to ethnic minority groups. Look at the new fund they call the Single Regeneration Budget, who will be applying for that? ..... What kinds of games does the government trying to do? They are stupid, all right they play about that we are stupid, but we know what they are trying to do.*

*K: They make it impossible?*

*L10: Impossible to get any penny.”*

While at Manchester the comment was,

*“Not many councils funded employment projects, the ones you come across were funded by the Ethnic Minority Grant, so when the, the Ethnic Minority Grant stop and now there is no reason why these projects can be assisted.”*

Complicating the matter still further is the fact that even when grants were awarded to associations, their continuation was often reliant on the projects achieving quantified results. While this feature, often referred to as “outcome related funding”, is designed to ensure that value for money is being achieved, it places a great deal of pressure on association workers. On the Wirral, their project had

*“7: ... three years funding, or supposed to be, but the problem is we have quarterly targets to meet and we are not meeting the targets, we get warning letters and probably funding withdraw, so we are all on tenterhooks,*

*K: So funding is a major problem. So are these targets in terms of getting people onto training courses or into jobs?*

*7: Different categories, there are targets for ESOL training, vocational training and employment, so we have to find the right number of people every month, every quarter meet the target, .... its just the pressure that you have to meet these targets that gives you the worry.”*

In addition to filling quotas on courses, many employment development projects have targets to meet in terms of getting people into employment. While it is generally recognised that “outcome related funding” is a necessary step, many workers felt that the criteria under which they are assessed failed to recognise their achievements. In particular, the slow speed at which many VCA clients progress frequently means that based on funding criteria, they are not deemed to have made progress at all.

Consequently such individuals do not count towards funding targets. Even more disturbingly, a number of community workers expressed concern over the influence of outcome related funding on outside training bodies such as colleges,

*“ Well the mainstream services... they do have targets to meet, so they tend to ignore or try to give excuses to not offer a placement, somebody they don't think is going to achieve something.”*

This results in disadvantages for refugees on two fronts. Firstly they can be discriminated against in their attempts to gain access to mainstream courses, while secondly, community group operated activities designed to aid them are facing closure due to a bias towards easily quantifiable results. An EDW project would usually have targets to meet in terms of the number of people it assisted in finding work, yet the problems of many refugees are so severe that the progress they make goes unrecognised by funding bodies. This is because such progress generally does not lead to employment in itself, but rather to a starting point. Because it does not lead to an easily recognisable and quantifiable result (i.e. a job) such progress is frequently unseen by funding bodies, and thus VCA receive no credit. For example, speaking English and being able to mix with the general population are undoubtedly assets in seeking employment, however progress on these grounds is not generally recognised by funding bodies. This is despite the fact that significant number of refugees from Vietnam do not have these abilities,

*“Their rate of learning is very very slow..... [and they can't] socialise outside their own home.”*

Given the difficulties involved in gaining grants from formal funding bodies, it is not surprising that many associations are in part reliant on donations and financial assistance from charities. While the amounts involved vary, such sources are characterised by the changeable nature of the support they are able to offer. Thus associations, while grateful for the aid they receive, continue to face financial insecurity. It is therefore perhaps surprising that only one of the associations, An Viet in Hackney, had made serious attempts to become self reliant in terms of financing it's own activities through a commercial concern. As they explained,

*“we have the Vietnamese canteen downstairs. It is now become very popular, not only for Vietnamese but also for local people and local staff, office staff around Hackney, they come to use the canteen. And aim is now and in the future, to become finance self sufficient, we don't need to apply for grant from the council, or somewhere because we try to do something positive and to be independent. That is our aim ..... At the moment the council give only part time grant. And we use our own resources to put the part time into full time.”*

An Viet must be commended both for its attempt at self reliance, and also for the example that it sets to community members. In addition to providing jobs, it would seem reasonable to expect the venture to have a self efficacy influence upon the community of refugees, encouraging individuals to extract themselves from state benefits and / or develop self employment. The lack of similar projects based in other associations was at first puzzling, however, when the size of the premises used by the various groups was considered, a plausible explanation emerged. An Viet was unusually fortunate to be housed in spacious premises, courtesy of the local council. Ingenious use of this extra space and the tapping of a local demand for their services enabled them to establish a viable commercial outlet. The premises used by other associations were blatantly unsuitable for similar enterprises given their usual nature - single offices in shared accommodation.

Although only one association had managed to break into the world of business directly, the ingenuity of workers has resulted in some groups securing funding for their activities via contracts with mainstream services. In this manner they have been able to offer services directly to their usual client group on behalf of, for example, the social services. An example of such a contract is a day care centre for elderly refugees from Vietnam. While many VCA operate luncheon clubs on one or more days a week (generally funded by grants), only the Southwark Vietnamese Chinese Refugee Community had secured a contract to operate a full time centre for the elderly members of the community,

*“We got five days a week now, we operate five days a week. It become a day centre now and we got only half a part time to deal with the whole community and then we develop and we got a centre manager of the day centre now, we got a part time centre worker and we got the kitchen staff, its very big change now.”*

It can be hypothesised that their success in gaining this contract may be due to the fact that Southwark houses more refugees from Vietnam than any other area in Britain. As such, Southwark social services would have within their clientele a sufficiently large number of elderly refugees from Vietnam to warrant them awarding a contract for a distinctive Vietnam refugee day centre. This not only provides a vital service to the elder refugees, but also provides employment for a number of people. Grant aided luncheon clubs are rarely able to do this since their grants generally cover the cost of food only.

A common feature of securing funding that has been alluded to frequently during the course of this discussion is that of competition. Associations frequently find themselves

in the position of applying for funding where it is not their need *per se*, but rather their need relative to that of other funding applicants, that is assessed. The limited resources of funding bodies, be they TECs, local councils or funding programmes results in a situation where deserving applicants are excluded by the relative need of others.

There is also a suggestion that the relative size of a community may have an affect and this appears to be important, particularly for associations which serve smaller numbers of refugees. Indeed, given that associations in areas with more refugees are able to afford more staff than those in other areas, this is supported. It is in any case, the view of some respondents who felt that the dispersed nature of the refugees and their small community size resulted in a situation where funding bodies are able to effectively ignore their calls for support. This therefore being a particular criticism of the policy of dispersion which resulted the scattering of the refugees around Britain. In particular, this phenomenon appears to operate with regard to local or city councils, larger communities attracting more council funding than smaller ones, for example the Southwark case just discussed. Certainly some respondents suggested that the lack of support for smaller communities was due to the lack of influence they exerted over council members as a result of their limited size.

Finally, although receiving attention in section 6.4, a brief introduction to the consequences of limited funds is appropriate. The funding of VCA is characterised by its temporary, disjointed nature. The main consequences of this are that associations are generally restricted in their activities, and any projects (such as Employment Development Work) that do go ahead are likely to be accompanied by financial insecurity. This restricted funding means that associations are frequently unable to offer the necessary assistance to their clients and are forced to prioritise needs. This results in a situation where immediate needs are prioritised while activities designed to alleviate need in the long term (be it of what ever nature) are sidelined. While such a focus on immediate problems is understandable, it does little to assist the long term prospects of refugees. With regard to the constant threat of the withdrawal of funding, this results in considerable stress for both clients and workers. Workers are constantly aware that their jobs are in danger and this is graphically illustrated in this extract,

*“in November 1993, with funding for 3 full time workers and one admin. worker. And a year after that because of a lack of funding one worker had to go. And now you can see, Ta Phuong<sup>18</sup> the full time*

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<sup>18</sup>All names are aliases

*worker, myself and Louise the part time worker, and by the end of this month, which is another few days, Phuong and Louise will go. Only me to stay here."*

For clients of associations, the uncertain future of the organisations and their projects means added anxiety. Since in some ways it appears that many clients rely on the VCA to facilitate their lives, the threat of the removal of this resource causes considerable distress and worry. It is with these circumstances in mind that the following discussion on the role of VCA should be viewed.

#### **6.4 The role of the Vietnamese Community Associations**

Based on the interviews at various community associations around Britain, the aim here is to consider the role that VCA play in the communities they serve. This is achieved via a consideration of their declared aims.

##### **6.4.1 Association general aims and activities**

Interviews with community workers revealed a general consensus about the role that the associations play in providing services to the refugees from Vietnam. While there was often a desire to fill a social need for clients, by providing a focus for community and cultural events, the prime function of such groups appeared to be in providing basic social services, along with access to translation and interpretation facilities. The following dialogue with two workers at Bristol illustrates the wide ranging services that are typically provided by community associations,

*"K: What do you see as the association's main role, what do you see its work as?"*

*5B: Support networks really, any Vietnamese who wants any problem sorting out relating to welfare, health, education, employment, training, benefits, housing benefits, DSS,*

*5: Immigration, Family reunion, interpreting,*

*5B: Translating,*

*5: Like if they want someone to help them to go to the council because they don't speak English we will go with them, and I think we do everything.*

*K: Anything they need?"*

*5: ANYTHING! If they want us to write a letter, to help them to write a letter to the Home Office asking for their family to come here for a visit, we will write, we will take them to the solicitor if they want to buy a house, and they need someone to help them with the solicitor, mostly to interpret, our job, we do everything, everything!*

*5B: And even if an elderly person whose English is so basic it's virtually negligible, they might come with their mail unopened, and ask us to open it, wouldn't they because their English is so..*

*5: We always help... get divorced, would be possible, this is true we help people with everything, divorce, getting married,*

*5B: Funerals,... anything you can think of! Absolutely anything to do with living and existing and resettling into mainstream society."*

This illustrates not only how wide ranging the services provided by the VCA are, but also suggests that for some individuals the VCA is their first port of call for all their needs. This idea is supported from comments made by many of the community workers who were interviewed<sup>1</sup>. These workers believe that reliance on the associations by community members is in many cases significant. This reliance arises not only from the provision of VCA services to clients, but also from the associations role as a facilitator of access to mainstream services. As the community worker from Woking explained,

*"This is why it is very important to have a community association, so that they can act as a link with the disadvantaged member and the social services, so if they need help they can get an interpreter and so get access."*

Though such a view of the association's importance may be influenced by the respondents employment as a community worker, community associations do appear to be assuming a full social services function for many of their clients, both through their own activities and also by enabling clients to utilise mainstream social services.

The suggested reasons for significant reliance on the VCA by their clients are numerous, starting with the fact that many of the refugees from Vietnam lack

*"the language to deal with their problem or enquiry."*

However, going beyond this simple explanation for reliance on the associations, many community workers stressed that any language difficulties suffered by community members are only part of the problem. Of equal or greater importance is the lack of any mainstream provision suited to the particular needs of the refugees from Vietnam. Provision of suitable and appropriate courses to aid in the acquisition of English language skills were thought to be generally scarce, and the adaptation of social services to account for the varying needs and circumstances of the refugees is a rarity. Thus even if interpretation services were easily available, meeting the needs of the refugees would remain merely a target for most mainstream social service providers. This results in refugees continuing to see the community associations as their first, and main, source of assistance for a whole range of matters. While some of the community workers

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<sup>1</sup> While it is recognised that the community workers are presenting their interpretation of the role of VCA within the community, and that this interpretation may differ from that of ordinary community members, it is the workers viewpoint which is being explored in this thesis.

thought this justified a greater investment in VCA by social services and councils, such investment was largely unforthcoming. Indeed in many cases, community workers believed that the social services failed to fully acknowledge their own reliance on the associations to provide services to community members. As one worker explained, with regard to mainstream social services,

*“I just think they tend to ignore the fact that there is a fairly large community within Northampton and Northamptonshire with specific problems and difficulties and a large language difficulty. But they, whether they don't feel the community is large enough to justify employing somebody who speaks Vietnamese, or whether .... they simply regard Ms Nguyen<sup>20</sup> as a convenient avenue of escape for the problems they have.”*

the result is that the social services turn to the association when they encounter a client from Vietnam. The way in which social service departments tended to rely on the staff of VCA to enable them to deal with clients from Vietnam was a matter of concern for many of the community workers. While the most common concern was that the burden of paying for such assistance fell on the association rather than the social services themselves, one community worker in Manchester expressed a deeper and more controversial opinion, namely that community groups should not be involved in providing social services at all, but should instead focus exclusively on community and cultural activities. The opinion of this worker was that social services should not view ethnic or refugee communities as external to their general clientele, and that meeting their needs should form an integral part of the social services remit. Consequently VCA should not be involved in providing social services; this should be the job of the social services themselves. In addition to voicing the theoretical argument that social services should provide services for all the population in their area, rather than effectively excluding a portion of it (e.g. refugee and ethnic communities), this worker felt that utilising the VCA was not the best, or most cost efficient, way of delivering services to the refugees from Vietnam. The worker expressed concern over the duplication of services that occurs when services are provided to each ethnic or refugee community separately, and that the community associations may be employing people on the basis of their language skills rather than their suitability to provide a substitute social service facility.

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<sup>20</sup> All names are aliases. Ms Nguyen works for the VCA in Northamptonshire.

Consideration of these points raises the question of whether relying on VCA to provide social service assistance limits the options for refugees from Vietnam. Because VCA are generally small concerns<sup>21</sup>, instead of being able to seek expert advice from a variety of staff, all problems are likely to be dealt with by a single individual, or at best, a few people (this is especially true outside London and Birmingham. Virtually all other VCA employ less than 3 staff). This not only limits access to expert advice but also encourages dependency on the association. As many community workers explained, refugees frequently do not understand the “system” in Britain. It could be argued that if they continue to rely on the associations to find answers to their problems they will never need to learn this system. Evidence to support this concept of perpetual dependency on the community-based services is visible in the interviews with the community workers themselves. Having listed the services provided to refugees at his centre, one community worker went on to explain,

*“they come here because since the centre opened, I myself have provided all these services, I mean people, they know the place, and easy for them to come here to explain, and they know we will deal with whatever you know they think they need.”*

While he may feel justifiably proud in providing a comprehensive service to his clients, it could be argued that if the clients were given the language skills and knowledge to allow them to make use of mainstream services, their long term independence would be improved. This would however require a commitment on the part of social services to provide for the needs of this client group and on community workers to facilitate such independence. Furthermore, it would seem that it is rarely a considered tactic of the community workers to ensure that community members remain reliant on the associations, but rather a matter of economy (it being cheaper in the short term to provide an individual with an answer than train them to find it themselves). Indeed, the level of awareness and appreciation amongst VCA workers that they may be creating a dependency problem was low and only one worker talked of specific attempts to reduce the dependency of community members,

*“we provide an interpreter, but only in an emergency. We don’t provide, like if you have a problem with the DSS, we not going to take you there like we used to do in the first place. But not now, you stay here for 5, 6 or 7 years and you can do it on your own now. That is the way to let them know that we are not here all the time to help you. After 10 years some people don’t even speak a word of English. And I don’t think that if you want to help your own people, not because if*

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<sup>21</sup> See Table 6.1 and 6.2

*they got a problem and they come to you and you say YES I can help you, I take you there, I take you there. NO that is not the way to help them. You help them in the first, but not after 7 years, after 8 years! That is not good enough, you provide a dependency for them to rely on you all the time, we are not like that."*

Despite having focused on the role that community associations play in providing social services to their clients, it is important to remember that all the VCA also provide cultural and community services for the refugees from Vietnam. Although these services are often restricted by lack of finance, the associations act as a meeting place for the refugees and generally manage to arrange celebrations for community festivals. Given the high level of unemployment amongst the community, such a function is vital to ensuring that the degree of isolation felt by individuals is kept to a minimum. Cultural events, such as Vietnamese New Year, also act as a way of retaining the cultural heritage of the refugees and passing this on to those refugee children who have little or no experience of such events in Vietnam. As one community worker explained, an important part of VCA work is

*"to be able to encourage the youngsters, the young generation to understand the background of the culture, the Vietnamese culture."*

With many of the community workers mentioning that a generation gap exists between adults and children, cultural events are seen as one means by which to encourage the younger generation to feel an integral part of the community. Mother tongue classes also featured in the programmes of most VCA since it was recognised that part of the reason for the "generation gap" was the communication difficulties that arose when children and parents used different languages,

*"the thing is the younger generation is more integrated into the society, some of them, the majority of them don't even speak Vietnamese, that is the problem. So within the family already the communication causing problem."*

Thus the role of the VCA can be seen to be two fold, firstly as a provider of social service functions and to facilitate access to mainstream social services, and secondly as a cultural and social centre for the refugees from Vietnam. While the former usually takes precedence due to the level of need within the community, the latter is also a significant element to the work of the VCA.

#### 6.4.2 Employment Development Work

The focus of this research concerns the labour force experiences of refugees. Having explored the role that VCA play in providing general services to their clients, it is opportune now to concentrate on the employment development aspect of their work. This can be seen to be a specific element of the social service work that associations carry out. Employment development work (EDW) encompasses a wide range of activities such as careers advice, job search workshops, matching clients to vacancies, assisting with interview techniques and encouraging clients to partake in activities and training that aim to improve their employment prospects. While all participating associations identify that EDW is of importance for their community, (this is not surprising given the high levels of unemployment amongst refugees from Vietnam in many areas), the degrees to which they undertake such work varies considerably. Table 6.4 summarises the level of employment development provision amongst the 26 participant community groups.

**Table 6.4 Employment Development Work at Vietnamese Community Associations**

<b>Level of EDW Provision</b>	<b>London VCA</b>	<b>Non London VCA</b>
Formal EDW Project in operation	4	2
Access to an EDW project whose clients specifically include refugees from Vietnam	2	2
Informal EDW only (including VCA who previously had a formal EDW project)	7 (3)	9 (4)

What is interesting about this table is that although only a minority of VCA currently operate formal projects, the level of provision has previously been much higher. While in some areas the closure of an EDW project can be linked to its success and a reduction in unemployment primarily due to a move into self employment (e.g. Bristol where unemployment is now about 8% following the opening of 26 catering establishments), in other areas this is not the case (e.g. in Wandsworth unemployment remains at about 80%). It would therefore appear that the degree of success of a project had only a

marginal effect on its chances of survival. The reasons for this are inextricably linked to the funding programmes under which the projects were financed as discussed earlier.

While Table 6.4 provides a summary of employment development provision, further comment on this is needed. In the first instance the focus is on those areas in which distinct EDW programmes operated, either as a part of the association, or separately. In each of the areas served by these associations the employment work was carried out by dedicated staff whose job was to provide assistance to members of the community who wished to improve their employment prospects. In six associations<sup>22</sup> the project was specific to refugees from Vietnam, while in four further associations,<sup>23</sup> an external project recognised the clients of the association as a distinct client group. As a result of having a dedicated worker for the EDW in these locations considerable assistance was available to individuals who wished to improve their employment prospects. Notably, assistance was available for all employment-related activities, from encouraging an active response to the idea of pursuing employment or training activities to attending an interview with a client. The following extract shows the comprehensive and continuing assistance that a dedicated EDW programme can offer to its clients. When describing what the job entails, this Cambridge worker explained that it

*“is mainly everything and everything. Not just provide counselling, we have to provide information, advice, support, continual support, advocacy. In other words, if somebody comes in here and is interested on moving on and getting into a training, at first I would have to have an informal chat to see what they would like to do. Then try to get some information on all the training that is geared to their needs, then I will explain to them this is how it will take you, or this it will be, or where you can get on afterwards. So things like that we, and later on it is up to the person to decide what they want, when they decide what they want I just apply, or help them to fill in the application form, with the writing and a support letter to the training provider. And try and be persuasive for them to offer a place. And if they offer a place I also go with my client for the interview. In other words provide them with a bit more confidence and sometimes I also be with them in the interview itself, so giving the interviewer a bit more understanding, a more sympathy to this client of mine.”*

What should be noted from the preceding extract is that the role of employment development work is not to force or coerce individuals into participating in training or

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<sup>22</sup> Midlands Vietnamese Refugee Community Association; The Vietnamese Refugee Community in Cambridge; Islington & Hackney Vietnamese Community; Lambeth Community of Refugees from Vietnam; An Viet (Hackney); VETEC (Southwark).

<sup>23</sup> Southwark Vietnamese Chinese Refugee Community; Northern Refugee Centre (Sheffield), Wirral Vietnamese Association and Vietnamese Refugee Project in Greenwich.

searching for work, but rather to facilitate access to training and employment at the client's request. This was a familiar idea that was voiced by many of the community workers interviewed for this research. Although encouraging participation was acceptable and seen to be a part of EDW, the approach was to allow clients to retain self-determination with regard to their employment-related activities. Thus above, the phrase "*it is up to the person to decide*" is used, while another worker explained that

*"we help people who want to find a job"* .

This approach can be considered to be different from that used by the job centres and the employment department where the emphasis is on requiring individuals to participate in training or searching for work and demanding evidence of this. Thus it is clear that as well as adopting a different approach to EDW than that of the statutory services, programmes catering for the refugees from Vietnam offer a much higher degree of assistance both in terms of moral support and practical help. As one worker explained, the EDW workers job is to

*"improve access, to raise their awareness about training opportunities, job opportunities and get them confident"* .

While much of this is achieved via an advocacy role, all those associations with a formal employment development project also operated training courses themselves or arranged for local colleges to offer them on their behalf. While the most popular of these were basic English classes aimed at facilitating future access to mainstream courses, vocational courses were also common. These frequently linked English tuition with vocational training and were popular with the refugees. However due to the limited funding (a subject that will be discussed later in detail) and resources of the VCA, such courses were generally confined to a few limited areas, most frequently catering and sewing, although business advice and courses were also widely offered. This has the disadvantage of maintaining the refugees in those sectors of the employment market where they are currently often exploited<sup>24</sup>. Nevertheless, a few associations did manage to provide a wider range of training opportunities, for instance at Islington & Hackney Vietnamese Community,

*"we identify their needs, so the main problem for them is the language. So that's why we set up some of these courses in the colleges tailored to their needs. Apart from that we did set up some training courses as well like the car mechanics, the hairdressing course. The car mechanics... they call it the beauty and manicure course, the forklift,*

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<sup>24</sup> See subsequent two chapters.

*the forklift operator, and the approved driving instructor, so, so far we got those courses running on here at the moment.”*

While not all projects were able to offer such a range of courses, it was generally recognised that a wider choice of courses was desirable. The reasons offered for the limited scope of some vocational courses was that courses needed to attract a minimum number of students before they could run. In areas where the number of refugees from Vietnam was not so large, or where participation in EDW was low, the only courses able to attract sufficient numbers were those of a catering, sewing or business nature.

Moving on to discuss areas served by associations who did not operate formal EDW projects or have direct access to such a project, it would be misleading to believe that the absence of a formal project means a dearth of development work. Despite being unable to provide a formal programme of support for people wanting to improve their employment prospects, the general consensus amongst community workers was that if someone approached them for assistance they would attempt to help. In some cases this manifested itself with employment-related work being incorporated into the general work of the association, as illustrated in this response from the worker at Northampton,

*“At the moment we are very restricted. There are no specific employment projects as such. As I said earlier we do try and foster links with employers and we have been successful with a couple, I mentioned the Burton group, they do in fact employ a large number of the community. Both permanent and full time jobs, but as I said there are no specific projects to develop employment.”*

In other cases, limited assistance was only available to individuals who specifically asked for it. Given the lack of a formal EDW project, the level of priority given to such requests varied between the different community groups. Their responses can be understood to be indicative of the degree of pressure the association workers were under to provide general social service assistance. Where the pressure of work was highest (as a result of need and the number of workers available) requests for help to write a C.V. etc. may have been sidelined by more immediately pressing requests (for instance with a medical or housing problem).

A further feature of EDW activities amongst associations was their reliance on volunteers. Where a formal project operated, it was usual for only 1, or at most 2 people, to be employed<sup>25</sup> and for these to be assisted by a variety of volunteers. In those VCA without a formal project reliance on volunteers was also common. The most

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<sup>25</sup>Given the total number of staff employed by associations (See table 6.1 and 6.2) this is not unexpected.

frequent activities that all volunteers undertook was in providing English language support. While a few volunteers were native English speakers, many were refugees themselves; additionally it appears that unemployment was widespread amongst all volunteers irrespective of whether they were a refugee or not. Although the dedication of volunteers is commendable, the question of the standard of support they are able to provide must be asked.

As a final comment on the employment development activities of associations around Britain, it would seem wise to try and assess what degree of success such projects are achieving. Table 6.5 (overleaf) links details of reported unemployment levels with EDW activities. It should be noted from this table that high unemployment is the category most frequently reported, indeed only 5 associations (those in Surrey (Woking)<sup>26</sup>, South Wales (Cardiff), Portsmouth, Derby and Bristol) did not report high unemployment. All formal employment development projects, both internal and external to the associations are found in areas reporting high unemployment. However, it should be recognised that the

**Table 6.5 Employment Development Work and reported levels of unemployment**

<b>Level of EDW</b>	<b>Reported Unemployment - High</b>	<b>Reported Unemployment - Medium</b>	<b>Reported Unemployment - Low</b>
Formal Project	6	0	0
Access to an EDW project which recognises the specific needs of refugees from Vietnam	4	0	0
Informal EDW only	5	1	3
Informal EDW now, but formal EDW in the past	6	0	1

<sup>26</sup>Unemployment reported is at a medium level, all other associations listed here reported low levels of unemployment

clients of most associations reporting high unemployment do NOT have access to formal employment development work<sup>27</sup>, though half had such access in the past<sup>28</sup>. It is therefore very difficult to see any direct relationship between levels of unemployment and the activities of EDW projects. The location of current employment projects in areas of high unemployment can be understood to be a function of need, but with only one of the seven associations which had operated such projects in the past (Bristol), not currently registering high unemployment, the utility of such projects is open to question, though whether this has been due to a lack of success or a subsequent deterioration in the situation is unclear. Moreover, with three out of four associations reporting low or medium levels of unemployment never having had an employment project, such projects do not appear to be a pre-requisite for lower levels of unemployment. Other influences must have been in operation<sup>29</sup>.

In conclusion, although evidence about the effect of employment development projects on employment is mixed, it is clear from the interviews that less tangible benefits are achieved when a community has access to an Employment Development project. As the Islington & Hackney worker explained,

*“I think it is a great help for the Vietnamese community if we got a special employment training project. Emm because when we first started the employment training project, first set up, even though we are Vietnamese and we did write to them to send them a questionnaire enquiring about their background, their qualifications, their aspirations, and when they come up to... when we visit them at home, we did have some difficulties, because the Vietnamese, their mentality, they are quite reserved and introvert, and probably, maybe most of the people from the north, maybe because they were living under the communist regime for quite a long time, so you know, they think that if you come up to them and asking about their private affairs or you know matter, they usually they have a tendency not to get close to you or to say, not to confess everything to you. Maybe that way they were living, the experience they were living under the communist regime, but slowly, slowly, little by little they open their hearts to us.”*

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<sup>27</sup> Derby Vietnamese Community Association, Vietnamese Refugee Community in Croydon, Southwark Vietnamese Refugee Association, Barking & Dagenham Vietnamese & Chinese Association, Vietnamese Community Association in South West London, Vietnamese Refugee Community in Northampton plus those listed below.

<sup>28</sup> Wandsworth Vietnamese Refugee Community, Manchester Vietnamese Refugee Community Association, West & North-West London Vietnamese Organisation, Association of refugees from Vietnam in Basildon, The Ockenden Venture (Birmingham), Coventry Vietnamese Community Support Group.

<sup>29</sup> Chapter 7 discusses these other influences.

This illustrates how even if a project's success at helping individuals to secure employment or training is marginal, it can play an important role in increasing the contact individuals have with support agencies. By encouraging refugees to discuss their difficulties, the EDW workers can be considered to be helping individuals to begin to help themselves. Although a small advance, this could encourage individuals eventually to have the confidence to make use of mainstream support services and establish more contact with the wider society. Both of which can be stepping stones to greater participation in the labour market. As the worker from Birmingham says,

*“we have to go with them step by step”.*

## **6.5 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the purpose of this chapter has been to offer an insight into the organisation, funding arrangements and work of the VCA which have participated in this research. While largely informative, the aim has been to provide a broad background in which the subsequent discussions of the labour force experiences of refugees should be placed. Without a comprehension of the issues and factors that have been presented here, the discussions (in subsequent chapters) of labour force experiences would lack a general contextual setting. As such, the danger would be that comments made by the VCA workers could be misinterpreted, or would lack clarity.

**Chapter Seven**  
**Labour Force Experiences in Provincial Britain**

# Labour force experiences in provincial Britain<sup>1</sup>

## 7.1 Introduction

Having provided an introduction to the working of Vietnamese Community Association's in the previous chapter, the intention here is to focus attention upon the labour force experiences of refugees from Vietnam who live outside of London. As indicated in chapter 5, these refugees form 40% of the population of refugees from Vietnam living in Britain, and, with the exception of those living in Birmingham, they are all resident in counties which are home to less than 1,000 (and frequently less than 400) of their compatriots<sup>2</sup>.

As mentioned in chapter 4, this discussion of refugee labour force experiences is based upon interviews with community workers at 15 associations<sup>3</sup>. As such, the material presented here represents the views of those community workers; views which while well informed, are influenced by the workers' position as an integral part of the community. This partiality is recognised. However, the associations visited serve counties which are home to over 60 percent of Britain's non-London Vietnam refugee population. As such, the discussion relates to a majority of those who live outside of the capital, and the expertise of community workers to comment upon the local labour force situation is accepted.

This discussion of refugee labour force experiences in the provinces begins with comments about levels of unemployment and self-employment, before considering employment experiences in some detail. Subsequently, barriers to employment are considered prior to further reflection on self employment experiences. Finally, concluding comments which identify the salient aspects of the labour force experiences of refugees living outside of London are made.

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<sup>1</sup> I.e. Those not in London, see section 1.4.

<sup>2</sup> See section 5.5.2.1

<sup>3</sup> Northern Refugee Centre (Sheffield), Midlands Vietnamese Refugee Community Association (Birmingham), Ockenden Venture (Birmingham), Derby Vietnamese Community Association, Avon Vietnamese Refugee Community (Bristol), South Wales Vietnamese Community project (Cardiff), Wirral Vietnamese Association, Manchester Vietnamese Refugees Community Association, Vietnamese Refugee Community in Northampton, Portsmouth Vietnamese Community Association, Vietnamese Community Association in Surrey (Woking), The Vietnamese Refugee Community in Cambridge, Nottingham Vietnamese Project, Coventry Vietnamese Community Support Group, Association of Refugees from Vietnam in Basildon.

## 7.2 Levels of unemployment and self-employment

Given that published research on the employment experiences of refugees from Vietnam has related to a few specific places (Nottingham; Leeds and Bradford, Manchester and Birmingham<sup>1</sup>), a vital part of the research was to establish experiences of un/employment in the populations served by the provincial VCA. This provided information on a range of locations for which such information was not available in the census, nor in published material. As an introduction to the discussion of labour force experiences amongst the communities, Table 7.1 (overleaf) summarises the comments made by community workers concerning levels of unemployment in the areas they served.

As can be seen from Table 7.1, there is tremendous variation in the level of unemployment experienced in the areas served by different associations. Indeed, figures given range from 8 to 80 percent. This leaves no doubt as to the variety of experiences occurring at different locations throughout Britain and serves as a warning that generalisations about the experiences of refugees from Vietnam may be more misleading than informative. However, unemployment estimates do not alone reveal labour force experiences. Someone who is not unemployed may not necessarily be employed, and to infer a high employment rate in areas of low unemployment may be inaccurate. The numbers of people in training needs to be taken into account<sup>2</sup> and beyond that a distinction must be made between those people who are employed and those who are involved in self employment. Table 7.2 represents a summary of the self employment situation in the same provincial VCA areas.

Together Tables 7.1 and 7.2 illustrate an apparent connection between levels of unemployment and self employment. Three out of four areas with low unemployment have a very high level of self employment<sup>3</sup>, while none of the areas with very high unemployment has more than a small amount of self employment. Additionally, the Woking based VCA which reported a medium rate of unemployment also reported a high level of self employment. It would therefore appear that low unemployment is to a large degree a function of a high self employment rate.

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<sup>1</sup>Crewe, 1992; Frazer, 1988; Gurbash and Walker 1991; and Tatla, 1990

<sup>2</sup>Only small numbers of refugees were engaged in full time training at all locations included in this research.

<sup>3</sup>Derby, Bristol, Cardiff, the exception being Portsmouth.

**Table 7.1 Unemployment levels reported by provincial VCA**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Comments about the unemployment situation</b>
Sheffield	<i>"I will say the figure of unemployment in the community is still pretty high. Your talking about 80%, 70%-80%"</i>
Birmingham	<i>"I can not say you know how many percentage, but quite a big number"</i>
Birmingham (Ockenden Venture)	<i>"a handful are working"</i>
Derby	<i>"A small number unemployed"</i>
Bristol	<i>In Avon the % of Vietnamese unemployed is very very low, incredibly, lets say about 8%</i>
Cardiff	<i>"just about, very small amount, I can say about 10% actually unemployed, unemployed like have no job" (6,2,A,3)</i>
Wirral	<i>"there are lots of unemployed Vietnamese people around"</i>
Manchester	High unemployment within the community
Northampton	<i>"at least somewhere in the region of about 75% of the working age community aren't actually working"</i>
Portsmouth	<i>"Very few people are unemployed at the moment"</i>
Woking	Within Woking it would be about 30-40%, but with a higher unemployment rate in Guildford
Cambridge	<i>"as far as we're concerned it is about 65%"</i>
Nottingham	Respondent only been in post 3 days when interviewed. Alternative source (Crewe, 1992) suggests very high unemployment.
Basildon	<i>"85% of people are unemployed"</i>
Coventry	High level of unemployment

**Table 7.2 Self-employment levels reported by provincial VCA**

Location	Comments about the level of self employment
Sheffield	Low level. <i>"is not really popular because you know the working hours are so ridiculous, I mean it's abnormal working hours!"</i>
Birmingham	<i>" quite a few people start their own business"</i>
Birmingham (Ockenden Venture)	<i>" Yes a few"</i>
Derby	<i>"Most people here are self employed, they got like their own business, they run take away or restaurant. And you know the van"</i> [mobile businesses]
Bristol	<i>"We have about 23 or 24 take aways, Chinese, Vie .... they called Chinese Take Aways, and that is why the Vietnamese, the rate of unemployment for Vietnamese in Avon is quite ....is low! Compared with other cities"</i>
Cardiff	<i>" I can say about 80% of the people in the community own take aways"</i>
Wirral	Population of about 200 people. <i>" There are 7 families already in the chip shop business"</i>
Manchester	Some self employment
Northampton	<i>"There are some people in the community, and it's a fairly small number, who do have their own businesses, and again they are largely in the food business, take aways"</i>
Portsmouth	Low number, <i>"I think just about 1"</i>
Woking	Many of those who are employed are actually self employed
Cambridge	<i>"They do have about 3 as far as I know. Some also move away to set up their own business,"</i>
Nottingham	Crewe (1992) suggest 3% of those working as self-employed
Basildon	<i>"very few, just a few families"</i>
Coventry	There are about 10 take aways operating in Coventry that are run by members of the community.

### 7.3 Employment experiences

Before considering employment experiences in detail, it is important to note two things. Firstly, evidence from both the 1991 census<sup>7</sup> and interviews with community workers, suggests that only a minority of refugees from Vietnam actually hold jobs. This means that any discussion of employment will relate to a small number of people. Moreover, given the apparent relationship between unemployment and self employment, any comments relating to employment with an employer are by definition applicable to an even smaller proportion of the refugees from Vietnam.<sup>8</sup> Readers are therefore reminded that the following discussion relates to a relatively small number of people.

Table 7.3 (overleaf) summarises the types of employment that feature most prominently amongst those members of the Vietnam refugee community who are employed. The most important source of employment for members of the Vietnam refugee community appears to be the catering industry, and more specifically the “Chinese” take away and restaurant business. All community workers mentioned that this was a sector in which members of their community were employed. The reasons behind the dominance of the Chinese catering industry as a source of employment are numerous and relate primarily to the limited requirement for English language skills, the need for Oriental cooking skills and the desire / willingness by the employers to employ the refugees. As one respondent explained about refugees from Vietnam, the

*“ catering trade is easiest job they can do.”*

Many, especially the ethnic Chinese majority, can communicate in Cantonese the main language of the Chinese community in Britain<sup>9</sup>. Thus the refugees from Vietnam have found themselves in a favourable position when competing for posts in the Chinese catering establishments that exist all over Britain. Over time, some of these people have gone on to establish their own, so called, Chinese take aways and these refugees from Vietnam now constitute a further (though small) source of employment for their fellow refugees.

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<sup>7</sup>See section 5.6.1

<sup>8</sup>This is true for all locations except Portsmouth, where a majority of people working are employed rather than self-employed. Details of this case will be brought out during the discussion.

<sup>9</sup>The refugees live in areas of ethnic Chinese residence. See section 5.5.4

**Table 7.3 Types of employment amongst refugees from Vietnam**

Type of work	Mainstream - Manual	Mainstream - Non Manual	Ethnic community - Manual	Ethnic community - Non Manual
<b>Catering industry</b>	x (general catering)		X (e.g. Chinese Catering)	
<b>small businesses</b>	x (e.g. Shop work; mechanics)	x (e.g. office workers)	x (e.g. shop work; hairdressers; )	
<b>big businesses</b>	x (Production line work; warehouse work)			
<b>VCA employees</b>			x (e.g. cleaner)	x (e.g. Community workers; office workers)
<b>Professional</b>		x (e.g. Doctor; social workers; computer programmers)		x (e.g. acupuncturists)

Any discussion of employment experiences would not be complete without a consideration of the working conditions that people find themselves in. Indeed this was a subject that many of the respondents introduced during the interviews. Although it was recognised that the Chinese catering industry was a major source of employment opportunity<sup>10</sup>, concern was expressed about the poor working conditions that are frequently associated with the trade. Specifically, concern over low pay and long hours was clear. Going beyond what the respondents said about English skills not being needed for such employment, it is also worth considering whether working in the Chinese catering industry further inhibits the acquisition of English language skills. It is conceivable that due to both a lack of time to attend English classes and the lack of any need for improved English for the job itself, that employment in the sector may be

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<sup>10</sup>With the possible exception of in Portsmouth.

hindering language development. If this is so, the prospects for individuals being able to move out of the industry may be damaged and they may find themselves tied to the poor conditions which are inherent to the catering industry.

The lack of job security offered by this industry was also mentioned by some community workers. Small businesses are notorious for their failure rate and given the present harsh economic climate, redundancies have occurred when some Chinese catering businesses have been forced to close. Secondly, even when the business survives job security can be poor. For instance, on the Wirral, the community worker explained that many refugees from Vietnam had initially found work in the Chinese catering industry, only to be displaced by Chinese immigrants who were willing to work for lower wages. This she thought,

*“reconfirm my experience that the Chinese employers in the catering trade, that they prefer Chinese worker.”*

The small nature of most Chinese catering businesses also had implications for promotion prospects. Given that they are frequently family run concerns employing only a small number of other people, the promotion prospects for employees are poor. Thus for those refugees from Vietnam who manage to secure a job in this industry, the chance of progressing up the job ladder is slight.

While working in the catering trade is the most frequent kind of manual work that individual refugees from Vietnam engage in, a significant number work in other sectors. For discussion, the experiences of these people have been split into three spheres, those of small businesses, big businesses, and Vietnamese Community Associations.

For Vietnam people working in manual posts in small businesses, the most common jobs are as shop assistants, mechanics, sewing machinists and hairdressers etc.. While people hold these types of jobs in areas served by all the provincial VCA, distinctions can be made between a minority who work in the mainstream, and the majority who work within the ethnic sector. Importantly, this distinction appears to have a spatial dimension. While those who work in the mainstream are located in all areas, employment within the ethnic sector is more common in those locations with a larger numbers of refugees from Vietnam. In particular, such employment, like the population, is focused in Birmingham, while in Manchester the refugees have been able, to a limited extent, to access the ethnic sector supported by the large Chinese population in the city. This is because it is only in those areas where the population is of a sufficient size to

support ethnic enterprises, or an existing sector based on a similar ethnic identity exists, that such opportunities for employment within an ethnic sector arise. In the absence of a population threshold sufficient to support ethnic enterprises, such additional employment opportunities, outside of the mainstream, do not exist.

The importance of access to an ethnic sector is clear as some people would be unable to secure the same job in the non ethnic labour market. Talking about a client, the community worker in Birmingham explained,

*“ he is a very good hairdresser, but he cannot do it because he is shy of speaking English, that’s why he is still working for Vietnamese, with Vietnamese, doing Vietnamese hair, but he can not get out and get a job with the English community.”*

Thus while the ethnic market provides opportunities for individuals who have limited English, it is primarily those individuals who have better English that are able to obtain employment in the non ethnic labour market. Given that this tends to be the younger members of the community, a situation has arisen whereby only in locations with a significant ethnic sector (primarily Manchester and Birmingham) have older members of the community generally managed to secure employment. Elsewhere, manual employment in the mainstream is largely the preserve of the younger generation.

With regard to those people who have secured employment within big businesses, this too illustrates a spatial dimension. Only in Northampton and Portsmouth did community workers indicate that members of the community had secured jobs with large employers. In Northampton, a number of individuals have found work with companies such as Burtons and Safeways, in both cases largely on the distribution side. Employment within these companies seems to have developed from a casual and part time basis. As the Northampton community worker explained, Burtons have

*“ been delighted with the members of the community who have gone in because they find them hard working and keen and conscientious and they are quite keen to take on more. So there is an ongoing thing, a lot of them start off purely as casual jobs or part time jobs, but then they find that they become permanent. The same thing is true at Safeway, but it tends very much to be on that sort of level only.”*

Just why individuals have made progress into this line of work in Northampton and not elsewhere is unclear, but it should be remembered that although this is a success for the Northampton community, unemployment remains at about 75 percent.

The other location in which people have secured employment in large businesses is Portsmouth. Portsmouth remains an exception as it is the only location served by a provincial VCA to report both low unemployment and low self-employment. Rather than self employment providing the main means of employment as in other areas of low unemployment, the refugees from Vietnam here mainly work in factories. As the community worker explained,

*“The employment situation at the moment is OK, it is not very bad, not a lot of people are unemployed. Most of them work at IBM, McMurdock, in Portsmouth, that is the electronic factory.”*

The explanation for the unique experience of the refugees from Vietnam in Portsmouth is unclear, but the respondent suggested that people have found work because

*“if one person is working there and if there is a vacancy they tell their friends and also because it is, they do like assembly line work, they don't need to have like high qualifications, or, it is easy for them to get in.”*

Thus the importance of a knock on effect seems to be high both in Northampton and Portsmouth, with a favourable view of a small number of workers leading to the employment of more members of the community. It also suggests that the problem facing the refugees from Vietnam may be primarily in gaining a job and not in maintaining it. However this comment needs qualifying. While it may be true that employers appear to be happy with the standard of work of the refugees from Vietnam and thus rarely sack them, their jobs are still often relatively insecure. It is therefore vital that the success of the community in Portsmouth at gaining employment be put into perspective. The comment of the respondent that the employment situation is OK *“at the moment”* is instructive since it introduces the idea that job security in this industry is poor. Indeed, further discussion with the respondent revealed,

*“the job in IBM and McMurdoch only temporary, nobody can be permanent working there. So at the moment it is OK, but like later on ..... because that is an American company and the contract, is to renew the contract every year. Short term contract, so at the moment is OK.”*

Thus the apparent success of the Vietnamese residents of Portsmouth must be tempered by the ever present threat of un-renewed contracts. It is therefore necessary to remember that the situation in Portsmouth is at best insecure, and at worst a temporary aberration on the more common experience of high unemployment.

Beyond those individuals who work in both small and big businesses, a varying number of people in each area served by the Vietnamese Community Associations work for the associations themselves. While in some locations the nature of this work is voluntary, in all locations at least one person, and frequently more, are in paid employment with the VCA<sup>11</sup>. The nature of this employment falls into three broad categories, community workers, auxiliary staff (cleaners, care takers etc.), and support staff (secretaries). In general, the larger the refugee community from Vietnam in the location served by the VCA, the larger the number of staff<sup>12</sup>. While the associations undoubtedly provide employment opportunities, these are frequently insecure jobs due to the reliance on gaining adequate funding<sup>13</sup>.

Those people who work for the VCA as community workers, generally have good English and are often highly educated. Given the prominence of refugees from North Vietnam in the British population<sup>14</sup>, it is perhaps surprising and significant that most of those employed in community worker type roles are from South Vietnam. It would appear that some of these individuals entered this type of work soon after their arrival in Britain due to their superior English skills, while other, younger people, have found their way into this field after an education in Britain. In these cases, it was sometimes due to a desire to help their fellow refugees, but also sometimes as a result of failure to secure employment in the mainstream UK job market<sup>15</sup>. While employment within the VCA represents success in the job market, it is important to realise that the opportunities for employment in this avenue are severely limited by its very nature. There is only limited scope for increasing the numbers of people employed by the associations. Furthermore, many of the respondents recognise that they are outside the mainstream employment market and that their experiences will not necessarily help them into other kinds of employment. As one respondent says,

*“I don’t really think I am on the mainstream.”*

For individuals with few skills or little English, the associations offer limited opportunities for employment as auxiliary staff. While this is only true in those locations

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<sup>11</sup>See Table 6.2

<sup>12</sup>See section 6.2

<sup>13</sup>See section 6.3

<sup>14</sup>See section 5.2.4

<sup>15</sup>These issues are discussed at some length in chapter 9

where the association inhabits its own offices, here opportunities for work exist for a few people. For these few individuals, jobs in the associations such as cleaning or as care takers, offer a chance to escape from the intense competition that exists for such jobs in the non ethnic (mainstream) employment market.

In the case of support staff (secretaries etc.) employed by community groups, many of these also come from the community itself due to the need for Vietnamese / Cantonese language skills. However, due to the nature of the work in associations and the need to communicate with outside organisations such as funding bodies, DSS, Social services etc. these individuals are frequently bi-lingual with good English skills. A fair number of these people were educated in Britain and for some of them the job in the association was preceded by secretarial work in the mainstream.

To turn to the final area of employment identified in Table 7.3, that of professional work, it would appear that relatively few people have managed to secure these types of jobs. While a few individuals have managed to re-establish themselves in the professions they had in Vietnam, problems regarding recognition of experience, re-qualification and English skills have prevented many from gaining a job at a similar standard to that which they held in Vietnam. As one community worker explains,

*“we got a problem, which is experience, knowledge, qualification is not accepted in this country, we always have a problem, is mainly English barrier. I mean, you know, doctor, social worker from Vietnam, or nurse, or teacher, when they come over here they had to learn English again, and even if they speak English all right in Vietnam, over here you need time to relearn it, to practise as well. So that’s the problem for people to get jobs ..... and again when you go to get a job they always ask for experience, what experience you have in Vietnam, would they accept over here? NO, so that is a problem”.*”

While this is a major problem for those refugees who arrived in Britain as adults, some of those who arrived as children have pursued their education to a professional level and of these, a few have obtained professional posts. However, unfortunately many still find that qualifications do not necessarily lead to employment.<sup>16</sup>

For those individuals who practised traditional ethnic professions in Vietnam, the outlook is a little brighter as fewer British people have knowledge of these professions. Therefore competition for the posts is less severe, though yet again such businesses have

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<sup>16</sup>See section 7.3

a tendency to be located in areas where large numbers of refugees live. In particular, as explained by one respondent,

*“there are a couple of acupuncture practitioners that we have over here and people like that, that continue to try and do that business over here.”*

However, while there is less competition for these posts, language problems and a limited demand for their services beyond the ethnic population, means that for some there are

*“limited degrees of success.”*

To conclude this section on the employment experiences of refugees from Vietnam, the kinds of jobs that are most common in the community are unskilled jobs that provide poor prospects, poor stability and low pay. Significantly, these are also the jobs for which there is the greatest competition within the British economy. While this is partially alleviated by the concentration of refugees from Vietnam in the ethnic labour sector, competition with the broader Chinese population continues and poor working conditions prevail. Additionally, in areas where the population is of an insufficient size to support an ethnic sector, opportunities appear to be constrained. Only in a few areas have the refugees entered mainstream employment in significant numbers. Moreover, for many of the refugees from Vietnam, employment does not mean economic self reliance, but rather, represents a continuation of the hardships encountered during unemployment.

#### **7.4 Barriers to employment.**

Given the identified high levels of unemployment experienced by refugees in the areas served by provincial VCA<sup>17</sup>, a detailed understanding of the barriers that face individuals attempting to enter the employment market is crucial. While the previous section on employment acts as an introduction to many of the barriers that face individuals, this section deals in detail with this subject. While primarily led by the content of the interviews, links between the discussion here and that surrounding *Figure 3.1: Factors affecting labour force experiences* are clear.

A significant portion of each of the interviews with community workers related to the barriers which face individuals seeking employment. It became clear that all the respondents saw the standard of a person’s English to be the most important factor

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<sup>17</sup>See Table 7.1

affecting employment experiences. Although all the respondents mentioned this, the level of further detail given varied between respondents. However, the general opinion expressed in the interviews is represented by the respondent who said,

*"Everytime the language was the governing factor"*

#### **7.4.1 The pivotal role of language skills**

When a person's English was seen to be poor the effect on their access to employment was thought to be considerable, both due to direct effects and the interaction between poor language skills and other factors which act as barriers to employment.

Poor English was thought to not only limit the chances of finding any job, but to have a considerable effect upon the types of work that were available to the refugees. At the initial stage of looking for a job, a lack of English was perceived to be a barrier that prevented individuals from even becoming aware of job opportunities. The ability to be able to read English was seen to be necessary to being able to make use of job centres and without it, the job centres merely became places at which benefits were claimed,

*"if they wanted to go to the job centre and they were unable to speak English very well, or read English very well, they would find it impossible or virtually impossible to get any assistance there to help them out..... If they have to sign on they will go in every fortnight on their signing day to sign on, and that is as far as it goes. There may be one or two, whose command of English is sufficiently good that they will scour the vacancy boards and what have you, but the vast majority of them just don't do that. They just sign on and leave."*

Thus for those members of the community whose English is poor (and from discussions with the respondents this appears to be a large proportion of the community), the option of looking for work via the job centres (and correspondingly other job search methods that rely on the ability to read English, such as newspapers etc.) is ruled out. As such, the relationship between language skills and search strategies is evident.

The standard of English an individual has, was also seen to have a direct impact on the types of jobs that they could reasonably expect to apply for. With poorer English, most people could only expect to find manual work, which by its very nature requires a less comprehensive knowledge of English. This was often irrespective of their previous occupational status in Vietnam.

The type of manual work that individuals within the communities ended up doing, fell into two main categories. Firstly, many people overcame the problem of insufficient English by seeking work only in the Chinese catering industry where their existing knowledge of Cantonese put them in a stronger position to find work. For these individuals, the existing ethnic Chinese community thus acted as a support network through which they could avoid the disadvantages of their poor English language skills. Alternatively, in both Portsmouth and Northampton, the community had managed to gain access to manual work in factories or warehouses. In these cases, utilising informal community support networks amongst fellow refugees from Vietnam; where the employment of a few, initiated access for others. Thus in both situations, a lack of English skills combined with community support led to employment in specific types of work.

In the case of people finding work in the Chinese catering industry this was clearly seen by most respondents to be as a result of the lower English language requirements of this type of work. However, it was also often closely associated with a lack of appropriate skills for the British economy. The comment of one respondent illustrates this common concern,

*"when they arrived here they couldn't really get jobs in the normal environment, so they end up working for the..., because the majority of them are Chinese ethnic, so they speak Cantonese as well, so they end up working in take aways when they arrive, because it is the only trade they can really do."*

This extract also (implicitly) reveals another aspect of the prevailing effect that language can have upon the employment opportunities available to any given individual. For although the majority of refugees from Vietnam in Britain are ethnically Chinese, a significant minority are ethnically Vietnamese<sup>18</sup>. For some of these, the option of looking for work in a Chinese run establishments may not exist if they do not have the necessary Cantonese language skills. This illustrates how varying opportunities can exist for members of what may initially be regarded to be a singular population - the refugees from Vietnam. The population is not homogenous and the potential to make use of the existing ethnic Chinese community does not exist for all.

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<sup>18</sup>See section 5.2.4

The second type of manual work that refugees from Vietnam have made some inroad into is factory and warehouse work. For instance, in Portsmouth many members of the community work in factories involved in assembly line work. Here the need for superior English skills is reduced by the repetitive nature of the work. As long as they can *understand* English the task can be learnt quickly,

*"they teach you testing the chip in the computer...., it is easy, they just train them for one day and they can do it."*

This illustrates how it is the ability to *understand* English that allows a person to function in a job, though it should be noted that the inability to communicate effectively, either in speech or writing, may prevent a person from gaining a job which they are capable of doing. With regard to those working in Northampton, the explicit distinction between the abilities of writing, speaking and understanding English were drawn out. The community worker stating that for manual jobs in a warehouse setting

*"written skills are not particularly important. The ability to speak English may not be that important, certainly that you understand English is fairly significant. But that doesn't seem to be a problem."*

So far it has been illustrated how English ability affects both the awareness of job opportunities and the types of jobs which individuals can realistically apply for. The impact of language is, however, much more pervasive. The formal process of applying for a job was identified by many respondents as a further area in which language skills act as a barrier to employment. Initially, the barrier of completing an application form must be overcome, and beyond that, individuals have to overcome the prejudices of potential employers towards those for whom English is not their natural language. As one respondent explained,

*"I think there is little doubt that a lot of employers when faced with somebody who may not have particularly stunning English, either written or spoken, may well use that as an excuse [not] to shortlist, or even consider them for a job."*

With English ability being perceived as the most important factor acting as a barrier to employment by the majority of respondents, it is hardly surprising that the belief in the effect of English, is as important as any actual effect of language skills. If an individual believes that their English ability acts as a barrier to their finding employment, they will act accordingly, applying only for those jobs that they see as requiring limited language proficiency. Thus the relationship between language skills and psychological influences is also evident. At all stages of the job seeking process, from deciding what kind of

work to look for, to facing an interview, respondents believe that poor English acts as a barrier to employment.

#### **7.4.2 A multiplicity of other influencing factors**

While all the respondents see the standard of a person's English as having a profound effect upon the chances of gaining employment, it would be simplistic to state that English is the only barrier to employment. Indeed the relationship between level of English and various other factors has already been identified. What has become clear from the interviews with respondents is that there are a wide range of factors acting as barriers to employment, of which English can be seen to play a decisive, but not exclusive, role.

Many of the respondents' comments supported the ideas above and the following exchange is indicative of this,

*"I: The employment I would say, very difficult for the community. If I had to go back to the ability of individuals, most people settled in Sheffield, they didn't have a good education and some of them I would blame, the advice wasn't good enough for people to be aware of the situation. Not really any advice available and also you get the wrong advice, and people think, didn't realise job was so difficult to get because of the advice only come from, even the previous workers, work with the reception centre and plus when they set up like family friends and all the advice that you know, say don't worry, you will get a job, just concentrate to learn to speak English first, but of course English doesn't help you to get a job,*

*K: It's not the only thing that stops people getting a job?*

*I: No. Didn't explain how job chooses in this country.*

*K: About how to actually apply for a job?*

*I: Yes, so really people living, at the beginning with of a dream, they say well I say will get something, realise, thinking of different, you know changes in about a year or two, people realise can't learn the language. They know they can't get anything to do, and even now I will say the figure of unemployment in the community is still pretty high. You're talking of about 80%. 80% 70-80%"*

This extract supports the idea that good English does not automatically lead to employment, as well as introducing some of the other factors that were suggested by respondents as having an influence on access to employment. Namely, prior abilities, educational achievements, advice and job searching strategies. It also highlights the way

in which there was a general lack of emphasis put on the task of finding employment when the refugees first arrived from Vietnam<sup>19</sup>.

On arrival in Britain, support to find work was generally scarce and many refugees were led to believe, if only they learnt English, a job would be forthcoming. This is something that was mentioned by many of the respondents and the fact that few employment development programmes were established until the late 1980's supports this.

The mention of the individuals' prior abilities and educational background was something that appeared frequently during the interviews. Many of the refugees from Vietnam came from the North of Vietnam and consequently often had only a limited education<sup>20</sup>. This was seen not only to affect their employment prospects directly, but also to have a profound impact on their ability to learn English and partake in other vocational training. One respondent went further to explain the educational differences between those who fled from the North and the South,

*"in the South, we are, we got education, so that's why we come over here, we are always learning opportunities to learn English.....they got the basics already in Vietnam, when they come over here, they use the opportunity to learning....But in the North it is different, I don't say this like racism, but usually in the North because they've been war. they live under communism for a long time...they are hard working, but they, they've no knowledge of education, that's the reason when they come over here they didn't bother to go for training or go for education..... the thing is they can't write, they have a lack of education. That's the reason they find it very hard in learning."*

Thus, the educational background of a person, is seen to play an important role in acting as a barrier to employment both in a direct means, and also via its effect on an individuals ability and motivation to learn English. It is therefore hardly surprising that for many people the combination of poor English and a limited education have combined to form a significant barrier to employment. Even for those few who had a decent education and associated qualifications and skills, the problem of requalification and the recognition of prior experience was to prove a significant hindrance in their search for work.

While education itself has a profound effect on employment prospects, the level of skills within the community is also seen as pervasive in its actions as a barrier to employment. Already alluded to, is the general lack of education, but the lack of skills and more

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<sup>19</sup>See section 5.6.2

<sup>20</sup>See section 5.2.4

specifically transferable skills was mentioned by many respondents as a hindrance to employment,

*"A lot of them just had no skills at all! No that's not true, ..... a lot of the people I saw were fieldworkers, fishermen, farmers, now great, but in the middle of Birmingham!, what are you going to do with that? You know what I mean, So yes they might have good skills but they are not transferable."*

Again, this lack of transferable skills was something that was made worse when the person involved had limited English abilities. The following comment about this, from the community worker in Cardiff, being indicative of many,

*"the normal English person, at least if they are not trained to do anything, at least they speak the language. But for the Vietnamese in this area, they can't speak the language enough to go on the mainstream employment."*

Thus, the combination of a lack of skills and poor English resulted in a severe barrier to employment, that for many people was thought to be insurmountable and self-perpetuating. Without skills one could not get a job, and thus one had no experience of work in Britain to offer a potential employer as evidence of your abilities, however meagre these may be. This lack of work experience also affected those members of the community who did have skills to offer.

The self-perpetuating nature of this problem was thought to be especially true when it is considered that provision for people with such difficulties was scarce and often unsuitable. While the average English person without skills can at least receive training while unemployed, for those with limited English and Skills, the options are restricted. As explained by the Cambridge employment development worker, if

*"your English is not good enough you cannot attend the job centre, you cannot go to training, you cannot do this, you cannot do that. The only thing you can do is go to English class, but English classes ESOL class provided, it is not relevant to looking for work! "*

Frequently, the only option for the refugees from Vietnam was a general English class that failed to appreciate that the primary purpose of taking the class was to improve employment prospects. Often the language taught was inappropriate to the task of searching for work or holding down a job. Additionally, few classes were designed for people who had only a limited command of reading and writing in ANY language and a limited experience of a formal learning environment.

Going beyond a general English class, for those people who wanted to enrol on a skills based course, provision for inadequate English was rare and only in a few places (e.g. Birmingham) were integrated skills and language courses available. Furthermore, in these days of outcome related funding for courses, the Cambridge worker went so far as to suggest that her clients were being denied access to appropriate courses, in case they damaged the course providers' success rates. A problem linked directly to outcome related funding for all. As she says,

*"Well the mainstream services ..... they haven't got much experience working with people with basic English, they have people who are attending mainstream service with a bit of, what you call it, require a little bit of English support but they totally forget that there are other groups who need basic skill to move onto any of the mainstream service providing. And also they do have targets to meet, so they tend to ignore or try to give excuses to not offer a placement, somebody they don't think is going to achieve something."*

What is clear from these extracts is that many respondents felt that the mainstream services failed to offer suitable assistance to the refugees from Vietnam. Services for the unemployed were thought to be inadequate for those with limited English, and it was generally felt that the needs of the respondents' clients were often ignored.

As was suggested in the previous extended extract, the way in which people look for work is yet another means by which some of the refugees from Vietnam experience a barrier to employment. While the impact of limited English on search strategies has already been discussed, other issues now receive consideration.

On arrival in this country the refugees were given limited advice on how to approach searching for work. As a result of this they face hardships in finding an appropriate job. In Birmingham, the comment was made that

*"they had different ways if looking for work in Vietnam, they have a system, for example, whereby if you have a friend you take him in for 6 weeks in your company free of charge, or free of pay, and if he is good enough then the boss takes him on. Many a time they tried to put that to me here, but people like Rover group, don't work that way."*

Additionally, a British education was not always accompanied by appropriate search strategies,

*" a lot of graduates..... even they came to me all the time for help with application forms, and how do you prove yourself, how do you sell yourself, you know what graduate forms are like, they're like a book, all levels come to me, because even if they had the ability to read and write, often they didn't know how to approach an employer."*

A lack of understanding regarding the accepted ways of "selling" oneself to an employer, was thus thought by some of the respondents to hinder their clients search for employment. This could be considered a tragedy for those individuals who had expended considerable time and effort gaining qualifications, yet for whom successfully finding a job was still a sought after goal.

The effect of age on the chances of an individual finding work was something that was mentioned extensively by the majority of the respondents. Arriving in Britain as an adult was seen to be one of the factors that contributed to unemployment amongst the community. For such individuals, statutory education provision was unavailable and the opportunities to learn English and gain qualifications were, at best limited and, often unrealisable due to family commitments and other constraints. The affect age was thought to have on individuals was primarily related to difficulties involved in attempting to re-enter education and training, and thus being unable to improve their employment prospects. Even in Portsmouth where unemployment amongst the community was low, the comment was made,

*“some people it is not very old, not very young, it is difficult for them to find a job, because they can’t study, can’t start study again so that why they have no qualifications, so it is difficult for them.”*

As previously mentioned, the problems relating to age were harder to overcome in those areas which lacked an ethnic sector labour market.

Talking about the unemployed within her community, the worker based in Cambridge explained how many of the barriers affecting refugees combine to cause serious hindrance to those who arrived in Britain beyond school age,

*“A majority of those group fall between the age of 25 to 50, majority of them, the most difficult and also with the family and children, young children. Their English is very basic, and the problem with language and the resources in the mainstream, they don’t provide more appropriate courses of training geared towards these basic needs, so people just stay where they are.”*

With problems such as those previously mentioned, the chances of an individual successfully finding work were seriously reduced and many respondents saw this as having a considerable effect upon the motivation of people to actively seek work. In some areas this was seen as a serious problem and it appeared that in those areas where unemployment within the community was at its highest, motivation to search for work was perhaps at its lowest. While for the majority of respondents, comments on a lack of

motivation to search for work were accompanied by a sympathetic view of the reasons behind this, a few respondents condemned individuals who lacked motivation.

First, to introduce the prevailing view about a lack of motivation affecting those looking for work. Respondents claimed that many people felt the effort involved in undergoing language training, then skills training, was excessive when at the end of the day, they would only be at the same level as a potential English employee and would then encounter employers who were more likely to employ an English person anyway. While this could be interpreted as the perception of racism amongst the general British population, a worker in Birmingham explained that an employers desire to hire someone with "natural" English, as opposed to someone with "learned" English, should not be seen as racism, but merely as a matter of economics. What ever the reason, the belief that employers favour natural English speakers was thought to be one of the factors that stopped individuals from applying for jobs. A lack of confidence in ones ability to secure a job, was therefore seen as a reason behind a general lack of motivation to apply for posts. For instance in Northampton, despite the fact that members of the community had achieved a measure of success gaining employment in Burtons and Safeways, it was explained that,

*" I think a lot of people in the community feel, that when they do see a job, there is little point applying because they won't be considered."*

Going beyond this, a number of respondents linked this lack of confidence, and motivation, to the relationship between benefit levels and the wages available to unskilled workers. Typical was the comment made by the worker in Nottingham,

*"For example, like the family, the gentleman is 40 years old, he got at least about 3 or 4 children in the family. How much he earn for a week, in income support he earn quite a lot. And if he is working I think without a skill, he won't earn a job like £200 after tax. That's why the reasons they learn English, but the reason they can't get a job. The benefit is not much different. Think about it, that's the reason, sometimes you encourage them, I'm not talking about the young people. I'm talking about the middle aged, like 30 years, 30 something, when they apply for a job, they happy to look for a job, but it's not like professional job, it's like unskilled job. But the thing is unskilled job you don't get about, after tax 150. Really hard to get it because a lot of competition to get that. So that's one of the reasons they didn't really bother to take a job with low pay."*

Thus when faced with competition for unskilled work, the perception held by many of the respondents' clients was that they were in a losing situation from the outset, and thus

the effort required in order to reach this losing position was not justified. While this is indicative of the sympathetic opinion voiced by the majority of respondents, a few took a harder line which condemned individuals for relying on the state for their income. Interestingly, such views tended to occur in locations where levels of unemployment were low, as were the numbers of refugees from Vietnam. For instance in Bristol, people who relied on state benefits for their income were thought to be lazy and even an embarrassment to the community,

*"But here a family with 2 children, if they are not skilful they will have a manual job and they will work 40 hours, and the salary is only about £10, £20 higher than the loan [Dole], so some people, not only Vietnamese, English people as well, say WHY? 40 hours a week for £20 or £30 more than the dole, therefore RELAX! And this is so. Anyway this is England, this is like a heaven for people."*

The failure of the policy of dispersal adopted by the government in regard to the refugees from Vietnam was seen by this respondent to be partly responsible for these negative attitudes towards work,

*"all the Vietnamese organisations except me, my organisation, condemn the policy of, they call it the dispersal policy, scatter the Vietnamese all around the country, but with me, I think, I feel that the dispersal has the advantage and the disadvantage. If the Vietnamese live in a small city and only a few family, I think they will find, they will have not much difficulty in finding a job, in my experience I have visited quite a few families who live in remote, far from the big cities, all of them, 99% have got jobs..... Like when I live in Bath there are only three families in Bath. If I am lazy, I can not be lazy because English people come to my house and offer me to do this thing all the time. So very difficult. But if they live and other people don't work, they might ask them WHY I work and I receive money similar, I mean not much more than the loan [Dole]. I mean only £20 more than the loan [Dole]."*

The situation of a lot of refugees from Vietnam living in close proximity was thought to encourage the development of this dependency culture, where it was unacceptable to work when benefit levels gave a comparable standard of income. Although he recognised the reasoning behind the lack of motivation to work, the Bristol worker was critical of people who choose to rely on the state when he thought they could work and support themselves. It should be noted however, that living in Avon, where the general unemployment level was not so high, and as someone with a professional background and an existing knowledge of English on his arrival in Britain, this worker was always in

a superior position to be looking for work than the average person arriving from Vietnam.

This mention of the state of the local economy in the respondent's area is an ideal opportunity to comment on the effect that the economy was perceived to have upon the employment prospects of individuals. While only mentioned explicitly by a small number of respondents, the state of the British economy, was an underlying subject in many of the interviews. Comments on the difficulties facing all British residents involved in the job market were common. For instance in Birmingham the comment was made,

*"I don't think the job situation itself is getting any easier, I mean, I understand now that most companies are offering year to year contracts, no matter where you are. I think the Vietnamese as a race, it gets easier, as a job market I don't think it does. We could do with a war couldn't we?"*

While he believes that as more and more refugees from Vietnam enter the employment market having been to school in Britain the situation will become easier, the worry remains that any improvement may be outweighed by the continued degradation in general employment conditions. His droll comments about the need for a war are not only a reflection of his opinion about the state of the British economy, but also give some insight into the lack of any previous experience of unemployment by the refugees from Vietnam. Vietnam had been at war for over 20 years and as such, any slack in its economy had been taken up by the armed forces. Thus for refugees from Vietnam, the experience of unemployment in this country was, for many, novel. This undoubtedly has had an effect upon their ability to cope with, and extract themselves from, the state of unemployment that many of them find themselves in today.

To return to the matter of motivation to seek work and engage in training with a view to improving employment prospects, another reason that was suggested was the degree to which an individual continued to suffer from mental trauma. When one considers the events that led to the flight of the refugees from Vietnam and their subsequent admittance to Britain, it is perhaps surprising that only a few of the respondents (those in Nottingham, Birmingham and The Wirral) specifically mentioned the effect that mental trauma can have upon an individual's employment prospects. For those who mentioned this subject, the general feeling was that the mental trauma of those experiences and subsequent separation from country, family and even identity, had a profound effect on

all parts of a persons life in Britain, including their employment prospects. Typically, as this respondent explained,

*" you are going to get people who are from split families, families who are living in Vietnam with say one of them over here. I've heard of people who haven't seen their mother or father, or their wife for like 7, 9 years, it's not a healthy picture, a lot of them, by nature are very gentle people. very unaggressive, very grateful for whatever you do for them, I don't think they, they really have the know how or the belief to go forward."*

To expand upon this, in Nottingham the point was made that the refugees from Vietnam,

*" lost everything in Vietnam. They lost confidence because the war going on in their lives, 'cause they live under the war quite long time..... The war and the losing, the lose, they left over, it's like my friend they left their parent at home, the family, they never see them again, how you feeling you lost somebody there. I mean when you are feeling very bad, very hard for you to get involved in something. So some of my friend they left. I'm lucky because I got my family here, my parent here. But the others they not, they lost. They lost everything, they got no chance to go back home and see their parents, very hard chance. That's why their feelings, very hard to get involved in something, and the thing like, very hard for them to get a job, even it involve like training, they don't bother."*

Thus for these few respondents, the continued mental anguish, that their clients experienced was thought to be a barrier to those individuals actively seeking employment. While it could be considered that the events behind the mental trauma occurred over a decade ago in many cases, it appeared that for many individuals the trauma continued. It is important to realise that some of the respondents' clients had relatives who are still in refugee camps awaiting either resettlement or repatriation. Beyond this, the effects of two decades or more of war, the actual flight from Vietnam and the subsequent period awaiting resettlement, combined with the anguish of family left behind is not something that all individuals are able to put behind them. In addition, the normal depression that is associated with experiences of long term unemployment and readjustment to a new country and culture, means that for some individuals the task of searching for work was impossible.

In addition to the lack of motivation at the individual level, while some respondents gave praise to the work of the job centres, a few respondents felt that job centres were apathetic towards the needs of the unemployed refugees from Vietnam, and that their behaviour acted as a further barrier to individuals gaining access to employment. Specifically, some respondents claimed that the employment services had effectively

given up on their clients and no longer required them to actively seek work. While they recognised the multitude of problems faced by their clients, it was felt that the attitude of the job centre staff, did nothing to encourage the clients, and effectively legitimised their lack of motivation. In Northampton,

*" the benefits agency, .. they don't really put as much pressure on older members of the community to find work, as they perhaps do on English people, British people."*

It would appear however, that this criticism was directed at the staff of specific job centres rather than a more general condemnation of the employment service as a whole. Indeed, certain respondents (for instance in Bristol) had considerable praise for the staff at their local job centres.

As a result of the multitude of problems and barriers facing members of the Vietnamese community in their search for employment, levels of unemployment in many areas were excessive. More importantly, it appears that of the unemployed, a high proportion of people have been unemployed for a long time, indeed, in many cases individuals had never worked in Britain despite the fact that they had arrived here as adults and had been here up to 14 years. As one respondent correctly stated,

*" they have been out of work for so long in many cases, that I doubt that any employers are going to be necessarily interested."*

Thus the fact of their unemployment becomes a further barrier to their gaining a job and adds to the considerable problems facing individuals attempting to enter the employment market.

While in certain locations (particularly Northampton and Portsmouth) it appears that individuals have been able to overcome the factors that appear to act as insurmountable barriers to individuals in other areas, it should be noted that in many cases, the degree of this "success" in the employment market needs to be tempered by the very nature of the employment that is being gained. While the securing of a job is a matter of hope, the quality and stability of that job should also be considered. Many of the barriers to employment that have been discussed are barriers that not only ensure that access to jobs is difficult for individuals, but also that the types of jobs that people do secure are those that are recognised as being in the lower echelons of the job market.

## 7.5 Experiences of Self employment

The extent of self employment amongst the Vietnam refugee community in areas served by the provincial VCA has previously been introduced<sup>21</sup>. To reiterate, while for 9 locations the numbers involved in self employment, as a proportion of the community, are relatively low, in Woking a larger proportion are involved, while in Bristol, Cardiff and Derby the proportion is high or very high, reaching up to 80% of the working age population. Much of this self-employment revolves around the catering industry, the most common business being Chinese take aways<sup>22</sup>.

With such variation in the numbers of people engaging in self employment, an understanding of the mechanics involved in deciding whether to establish your own business is vital. Why should it be that in some areas, such as Derby,

*“most people .. are self employed”*

while in the majority of areas, for instance Sheffield and Portsmouth, very few people have taken the route of running their own businesses? As a first step to offering an answer to this question it is necessary to understand why those who have taken this step chose to do so.

The attractions of self employment are clear, especially considering the difficulty that most of the communities experience in finding employment. When finding a job appears to be an unobtainable goal, the option of establishing a business and thus creating your own employment opportunities is attractive. In Cardiff, this explanation was supported, as the respondent explained her clients choose self employment because it made use of the few skills they had. They

*“don't see any alternative. And because they can't speak the language they can't do anything else. Because they don't talk to people in this kind of job, they stay in the kitchen, they can hire people on the counter who can speak, or even their children can help at the counter, so they don't speak any English at all”.*

However, a desire to establish a business may not lead to self-employment unless sufficient capital is available to establish the enterprise. Since one of the major barriers to becoming self employed is a lack of capital, it is interesting to see the various strategies used to overcome it. For instance, in Derby, in order to alleviate the need for

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<sup>21</sup>See table 7.2

<sup>22</sup>See table 7.2, especially comments made in Bristol, Cardiff and Derby.

capital to establish a business, most people are involved in running take aways from mobile vans. Not only does this reduce overheads, but it gives the businesses access to a larger potential population of customers. However in Bristol, the strategy has been to work in an existing Chinese take away or restaurant, see how they are operated, accumulate savings, and then establish your own business. In particular, it appears that it was common to move to London,

*“to work over there and when they have got enough money they come back here and open take away restaurant.”*

Thus it appears that in areas of high self employment the initial barrier of finding the funds to establish the business have been overcome. Further discussion with the respondents revealed that in Bristol and Cardiff there had been a specific programme to encourage the establishment of businesses. As the Bristol worker explains,

*“ a few years ago we have a full time, we call it a development worker ..... so he help to set up business, he help people how to buy shop, to negotiate to buy shop, and how to apply for permission from the council, because to open the shop.”*

This extract illustrates not only the numerous bureaucratic hurdles involved in establishing a business (and the help that a programme can offer) but also the fact that many businesses established by the communities are relatively recent phenomena. In all locations where there is a high level of self employment it appears that most of these businesses have only been running since the late 1980's. While in Bristol and Cardiff this can be linked to the influence of development programmes, in Woking and Derby no such programmes existed and the increase in self employment appears to have been spontaneous.

It has previously been suggested that there is a direct link between a high level of self employment and a low level of unemployment<sup>23</sup>. While this may conceivably be an ecological fallacy, there is evidence that suggests that the relationship does exist. For example, in Cardiff,

*“back in the late 1980's, at that time I remember in the statistics it was 90% unemployment.”*

Yet since the establishment of a project that aimed to encourage self employment,

*“I can say about 80% of the people in the community own take away.”*

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<sup>23</sup>See section 7.2

To change from a situation of 90% unemployment to one of about ten percent in so short a time is clearly due to the development of self employment in the community. Evidence from the other areas of high self employment suggests similar drops in unemployment have been due to increased self employment.

Although the establishment of a programme seems to have a significant impact on the numbers of people starting their own businesses, it is suggested that instead of generating interest in self employment, such programmes merely facilitate the operation of existing ideas. Indeed, published studies (e.g. Crewe, 1992) suggest a high level of desire by refugees from Vietnam to become self employed. Thus while, development programmes may facilitate self employment, occasionally, as in Derby and Woking, it can arise without such assistance. The Derby respondent explains one possible reason why the desire for self employment is high,

*“One thing about Chinese [Chinese ethnicity] people, they don't like to work for, to be employees, you know Chinese people, they wanting, the thing is, working for people, is like a slave yourself. That's why, they, I think for many generations they are used to working for themselves rather than work for other people.”*

However, it is equally as likely that for many people it is not so much the cultural attraction, as a desire to escape unemployment, that leads to self employment. This desire to escape unemployment can be increased when individuals see the success that people from Hong Kong have achieved in the catering industry. Additionally, the desire to offer a positive role model to their children may be encouraging some people to take the step of moving into self employment. Again, this was a suggestion made by the Derby respondent,

*“they've been living here as income support for long long time and they started to open a business for themselves. I think they are challenged to be, with the Chinese people, because they themselves are Chinese and they don't want to be relying on the government and to go along with income support for the rest of their lives. And also they look at, besides their children grow up and they set out example, to help their children to run, or to start to, getting their like into one of the business person, or like career in their lives.”*

However, while in Derby and Woking the lack of a development programme has not hindered the development of self employment, in the majority of locations, this is not the case. It would appear that in these other areas where no formal programme to encourage the community into self employment exists, far fewer people make the move to running their own businesses. While this could be used as reasoning behind a demand

for more self employment development projects, caution is needed. Encouraging self employment should not be used as a substitute for assisting refugees from Vietnam to gain access to the mainstream employment market. Indeed it appears that in the one area where employment as an employee is the norm (Portsmouth), self employment is at a low level. It could therefore be suggested that in many cases self employment only occurs at a high level when alternatives do not exist, and assistance to establish businesses, or novel solutions such as the use of mobile business, is available (e.g. Bristol and Cardiff and Derby). If employment with an employer had been available, desire for self employment may not have been so high.

However, even for those locations where opportunities for alternative employment is scarce, providing assistance to move into self employment is not necessarily the answer. Not only is self employment not suitable or desirable for everyone, but the fact that someone is running their own business does not necessarily mean that they are economically successful. All those respondents who had large numbers of clients who were self employed commented on this.

It would appear that many of those that run their own Chinese take aways work incredibly long hours for little return. In Bristol, it was explained,

*“If they have a less salary they rely on income support, but at the moment because of the recession and because of the hot weather, business is very bad, some people they work like 14 hours a day, but they receive like nothing, no money at all, all on expenses, the employee, the taxes, the tax.”*

From discussion with other respondents in areas of high self employment, it seems that this is a common picture, with families having to rely on income support to supplement the income that they gain from their businesses. With such a picture it is hardly surprising that some people take the attitude that self employment is not a viable option.

While many people maintain businesses at a subsistence level, it is important to note that some individuals have made a considerable success of running their own businesses. Some of the examples that I was given related to take away businesses, but others related to those people who ran businesses in other sectors. For example, although as a proportion of the Vietnam refugees in Birmingham, few were self employed, the actual number was quite high and this included some successful retail and mechanical enterprises who benefited from the existence of a development project,

*“we had a couple, who wanted to open a shop, they had no job, they had nothing to offer as a guarantee against a loan, and we did a business plan through local self employment centres round here, and bit by bit we built up a lovely business plan and to cut a long story short, we got them a shop! Well, we got them a hell of a loan! Which bought a shop and all the goods and I believe its apart from Wing Yip which is the biggest Chinese one round here, but that's the other side of the city centre, I'm talking here, there is nothing for Vietnamese shopping, and with a community of 4,000, you think they are onto a winner, they've been going steady for about 2 years now, I'm not saying they're making a fortune but there doing well, and that was a real godsend. There is another Vietnamese guy who runs a garage, he probably has two by now, but to be fair he would have done it anyway, he is a one off, he's got the confidence to believe, the language, he is an excellent mechanic, he's got certificates up to his eyeballs, drives a BMW, he would have done it anyway.”*

The latter half of this extract illustrates how important personal characteristics and skills are to the running of a business. To merely help individuals to establish a business does not mean that they will be able to operate it effectively. For those people who arrived in Britain with little education and transferable skills, the ability to cook allows them to run one side of their businesses, but problems can arise with the paper work side of managing a company. While assistance programmes can help, the situation can become worse when these end. For instance, in Bristol the community worker explained how the closure of the development project led to difficulties with VAT,

*“like Peter [the development worker] when he was employed, working in our office, he spend most of his time, outside, he went to the take away shop and find out, and help them with the VAT, because Peter was very good at accountancy, but not now”*

Finally, to turn to the effect that a dispersed population can have on the level of self employment in a community. Two of the VCA areas with high levels of self employment (Bristol and Cardiff) serve a population of refugees from Vietnam that are widely dispersed. Both respondents from these VCA mentioned that this had a positive impact on the establishment of take away businesses and the chances of other employment. Although the VCA in South Wales is based in Cardiff, the people it serves are

*“spread out... wherever they can get a business running..... often run it in the smaller valley .... places you can think it is cheaper to get business..... I think that is one of the core of the employment aspect in the area, because as you know, if everybody live in Cardiff and they will have to fight for one job, so I mean if they scatter to where employment is available I think that is very important part of their lives.”*

Similar comments were made in Bristol.

In conclusion, levels of self employment vary greatly over the areas served by the provincial Vietnamese Community Associations. The reasons seem in part to relate to the existence of programmes designed to encourage self employment, but also to the lack of any real alternative sources of employment. Additionally, in Woking and Derby, the move to self employment has occurred without the benefit of a formal assistance programme. While the development of self employment may at first appear to be the cure to long term unemployment, the drop in levels of unemployment in some areas can be misleading. Certainly, a reduction in unemployment from 90% to 10% in a matter of 8 years is highly commendable, but closer examination reveals the continued financial hardship that many business owners face.

## **7.6 Conclusion**

The examination of labour force experiences in areas served by the provincial Vietnamese Community Associations illustrated a variety of experience that had not been anticipated. The limited published research into employment experiences in Nottingham, Leeds/Bradford, Manchester, and Birmingham<sup>24</sup> all concluded that employment levels were low, with self-employment not featuring strongly. Additionally, national data from the 1991 census also indicated that unemployment was relatively high. While this picture was confirmed, and identified in other locations (e.g. Sheffield and Coventry) it was somewhat of a surprise to learn, that in Portsmouth, Bristol, Cardiff and Derby, unemployment was as low as that for the general population.

All four locations are home to relatively small numbers of refugees, and are of a similar size, however it would be wrong to attribute their low levels of unemployment to these characteristics, for in each location different circumstances led to people being able to enter the labour market. While in Portsmouth, employment had been found in factories, in the other three self employment dominated, though the route into it differed. Development programmes assisted in Cardiff and Bristol, but in Derby it was the novel solution of mobile Chinese take aways that overcame the principle barrier to self employment, that of capital outlay. Moreover, while in Derby customers could be actively sought given the mobility of the enterprises, in both Cardiff and Bristol a similar

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<sup>24</sup>Crewe, 1992; Frazer, 1988; Girbash and Walker 1991; and Tatla, 1990

result was achieved by the dispersed nature of the refugees and their take aways. Both situations allowing members of the community to start similar businesses which would not compete with each other.

If the experiences of those who are employed by an employer are considered, employment in the catering industry appears the most common, however, in all fields a majority of employees are unskilled, poorly paid and in insecure jobs.

Throughout the discussion, the importance of ethnicity on labour force experiences (and its implications for accessing support networks) has been clear. The Chinese catering industry remains the largest employer of refugees from Vietnam, while for those self employed this is also the most common form of enterprise. Where an ethnic sector can be supported by the community, it has evolved (Birmingham), providing opportunities for all, but especially those members of the community who do not speak good English. Elsewhere, the wider Chinese community has provided opportunities for some (e.g. Manchester and the Wirral) though evidence of the tenuous nature of this was given in the Wirral. Ultimately the reliance of the refugees upon their ethnic background has been illustrated in all locations, be it to secure work in the ethnic sector (e.g. Birmingham, Cardiff etc.), to gain access to mainstream employment (Northampton and Portsmouth), or to provide support during unemployment (Sheffield, Coventry etc.).

Finally, a brief comment on the links between the discussion in this chapter and that on labour force experiences in chapter three, is necessary. Many of those elements identified in chapter three as having the potential to influence labour force experiences (see sections 3.3 and 3.4, especially figure 3.1) were evident when talking to community workers. The importance of understanding the refugees' background, and the socio-economic circumstances into which they settled, was clearly identified by respondents as having an influence on labour force experiences. Moreover, those factors identified in figure 3.1 were the source of considerable comments from respondents. The impact of interactions between the various factors, for instance level of English and access to support networks, proving important in the respondents explanations of refugee labour force experiences.

Chapter Eight  
Labour Force Experiences in Greater London

## Labour force experiences in Greater London

### 8.1 Introduction

Having introduced labour force experiences in locations served by provincial VCA in chapter 7, this chapter considers the experiences of refugees from Vietnam who live within Greater London. These refugees constitute the majority of those living in Britain, and are primarily found in inner London, especially the boroughs of Hackney, Lambeth, Lewisham, Tower Hamlets and Southwark<sup>1</sup>. In total, interviews were conducted at 12 Vietnamese Community Associations<sup>2</sup> within Greater London, and it is these interviews from which this chapter draws material. As with chapter 7, the material presented here is based on the views of the community workers who were interviewed. Undoubtedly such views are coloured by the respondents own experiences as members of the community of refugees from Vietnam.

The structure adopted in this chapter is similar to that used with regard to refugees living outside of London. The discussion begins with comments about levels of unemployment and self-employment within the capital, before considering employment experiences in some detail. Subsequently, barriers to employment are considered prior to further reflection on self employment experiences. Finally, concluding comments which identify the salient aspects of the labour force experiences of refugees living within Greater London are made. It should be noted that the emphasis in this chapter is on identifying those elements of labour force experiences that differ in London from elsewhere. Once again, the links between the ideas formed in chapter 3, and those leading from discussions with community workers, are clear.

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<sup>1</sup>See section 5.5.2.2

<sup>2</sup> An Viet Foundation (Highbury & Islington), Barking & Dagenham Vietnamese & Chinese Association, Vietnamese Refugee Community in Croydon, Vietnamese Refugee Project in Greenwich, Islington & Hackney Vietnamese Community, Lambeth Community of Refugees from Vietnam, Vietnamese Community Association in South West London, Southwark Vietnamese Chinese Refugee Community, Southwark Vietnamese Refugee Association, VETEC (Vietnamese Employment and Training Centre, Southwark) Wandsworth Vietnamese Refugee Community, West & North West London Vietnamese Organisation. It should be noted that although these names appear to indicate ethnic affiliations (either as Vietnamese or Chinese) all the associations were keen to stress that they actually served all refugees from Vietnam irrespective of their ethnic origins.

## 8.2 Levels of unemployment and self employment

Continuing the task of identifying labour force experiences at a local level, Table 8.1 records comments made by community workers concerning levels of unemployment within the areas they serve.

**Table 8.1 Unemployment levels reported by London VCA**

Location	Comments about the unemployment situation
N&NW London	They believe that unemployment is at about 90%
Wandsworth	Unemployment amongst the borough's refugees from Vietnam was thought to be in the region of 80%
Southwark	Unemployment is high..., definitely more than half the adults are not in a job.
Southwark (2)	<i>" most people are unemployed"</i>
Croydon	<i>"Percentage is quite high"</i>
Islington & Hackney	<i>"When we first started the project, the figure of unemployment was.. about 80%..... I think the figure of unemployment would be less now"</i>
Greenwich	Unemployment amongst the community is very high, approaching 70%
Lambeth	<i>"We suffer a high level of unemployment .... It is varied between 75% to 80%"</i>
Barking and Dagenham	<i>"I think it is about 75%"</i>
South West London	<i>"A high proportion of Vietnamese adults are long term unemployed"</i>
An Viet (Highbury & Islington)	<i>"Officially I think it is about 60%"</i>
VETEC (Peckham, Southwark)	<i>"that the unemployment among our group is remarkable high. It is 75% unemployed."</i>

What is evident from this table is that levels of unemployment throughout London are consistently high. All the community workers based in the capital report Vietnam refugee unemployment to be greater than 50 percent and although there is variation between locations, this is slight compared to the variation that exists between the various provincial VCA<sup>3</sup>. This suggests that the variety of experiences may be less in the capital than elsewhere, with high unemployment being a common experience in all areas served by the London VCA. However, care is needed. Discussions with the community worker at An Viet (Highbury & Islington) indicated that details provided on unemployment may be misleading. Having previously stated that unemployment was around 60 percent, in response to a question comparing the situation within and outside London, the following exchange occurred,

*L11: In general the people try to say that it easy to find job in London, is true, but as I explain to you, they don't want to declare tax. But actually they have something.*

*K: So people can come to London and be claiming benefits and then it is easier for them to find sort of marginal, cash in hand work.*

*L11: Yes .... officially I think it is about 60%.*

*K: But quite a few of those people are sort of working as well.*

*L11: (Nods head).*

This suggests that unemployment may be lower than the figure previously given due to opportunities for clandestine work which occur in London. This should be borne in mind and is an issue which will be returned to later.

Having noted comments about unemployment levels, Table 8.2 (overleaf) provides details concerning VCA worker perceptions of the level of self-employment in their local areas. While unemployment levels are consistently high in all areas for which information was available, Table 8.2 illustrates that self employment is not evenly distributed throughout London. While half the community workers believe only a small number of their community to be self employed, in Southwark, Croydon, Hackney, Lambeth and Islington,<sup>4</sup> more people are said to be operating their own businesses. Thus, just as outside London, levels of self

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<sup>3</sup> See table 7.1 which indicates that unemployment figures for the provincial VCA range from 8 to 80 percent.

<sup>4</sup> Reports from workers at Southwark Vietnamese Chinese Refugee Community, Vietnamese Refugee Community in Croydon, Islington & Hackney Vietnamese Community, Lambeth Community of Refugees from Vietnam, An Viet, and VETEC.

**Table 8.2 Self-employment levels reported by London VCA**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Comments about the level of self employment</b>
N&NW London	There is no self employment in the community at present although lots of people would be interested
Wandsworth	A small number of individuals have established their own businesses
Southwark	There is thought to be relatively little self employment
Southwark (2)	<i>"A lot of people start up the business.... but they start elsewhere, not in the borough"</i>
Croydon	<i>"There are quite a lot of people who are self employed... But the percentage is not that high"</i>
Islington & Hackney	<i>"We got three people who set up clothing manufacture.. clothing factories and two of the... as well catering take aways or restaurants"</i>
Greenwich	A small amount of self employment
Lambeth	<i>"Many. Popularly people from the North of Vietnam. They manage this in order to settle down, for example take away, restaurant, shop, but not in the technical sector"</i>
Barking and Dagenham	<i>"some of them got the business, take away, Chinese take away"</i>
South West London	<i>"Not many people, people in this area self employed, very rare"</i>
An Viet (Highbury & Islington)	<i>"Quite a lot of clothes making factory owned by Vietnamese"</i>
VETEC	<i>"So far VETEC has helped set up three new off the ground businesses to be added to the formation of 16 we had done in the past" (Annual report 1995 page 5)</i>

employment vary from location to location. This variation is not however associated with low levels of unemployment as in Cardiff, Bristol and Derby.

### **8.3 Employment Experiences**

Having introduced labour force experiences in London via a brief discussion of unemployment and self employment levels, attention is now focused on exploring experiences of employment in more detail. As previously mentioned, the focus of concern is on how these experiences differ in London from elsewhere, however as in chapter 7, it should be noted that any discussion of employment experiences refers to a minority of individuals.

With regard to employment experiences of refugees from Vietnam living in London, the scope of employment is, in many ways, similar to that revealed by interviews at provincial VCA. To reiterate, the majority of jobs held fall into the manual sector, with few individuals holding professional jobs. In addition to this, a large number of all jobs held by community members were sited within what can be called the ethnic sector. Indicative of this for manual work, was the Chinese catering industry, while in terms of professional jobs, work for the various community associations featured prominently. Interviews with community groups in the capital suggest a similar situation with regard to manual work,

*“most Vietnamese, the unemployed Vietnamese refugees, when they find jobs, most of them usually go for like manual work. For example like catering, a few of them would go to a better, higher job, but I would say just a few.”*

While this focus on catering work is common throughout Britain, the situation in London has greater complexity. Firstly, within the capital there is a strong spatial pattern to such employment. While discussions with provincial associations indicated that the Chinese catering establishments in which their clients found work were mostly dispersed<sup>5</sup>, although London does have dispersed establishments, there is a large concentration of Chinese restaurants in the Chinatown area of the city bordering Leicester Square. It would appear that these Chinese restaurants attract Vietnam refugees from a large area of London. Individuals travel from Wandsworth to work in the area, while the An Viet respondent explained, some of his clients travel from Islington

*“to Chinatown to wash dishes.”*

The attraction of travelling relatively long distances to work in Chinatown was explained by the Croydon community worker who felt that many of her clients,

*“will only work in a surrounding with their own people because they are scared to speak up and to speak English.”*

In this context, “own people” included not only other refugees from Vietnam, but also people from the wider Chinese community. Indeed, it was felt that the majority of those working in Chinatown were working for the wider Chinese community, rather than other refugees. Thus, it would appear that especially for those refugees

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<sup>5</sup>Especially in those locations without a significant population of refugees or ethnic Chinese (i.e. everywhere except Birmingham and Manchester)

from Vietnam, of ethnic Chinese origins, Chinatown offered an important source of employment opportunities. This can be explained, in part, in terms of the ability to speak Cantonese. In discussions with the worker at the Southwark Vietnamese Chinese Refugee Community, the issue of ethnicity as an influence on employment opportunities was raised,

*L4: "because you need to speak the language. If you speak only Vietnamese it is quite difficult for you to get a job in a Chinese speaking restaurant. Otherwise you have to contend with a very low job, you can't do the job if you don't speak the language, and they don't like you to speak English.*

*K: They prefer you if you speak Cantonese?*

*L4: that's right".*

Thus for Cantonese speaking refugees from Vietnam, Chinatown offers a source of employment with Cantonese speaking employers. For those refugees from Vietnam who do not speak Cantonese (primarily the ethnic Vietnamese), the opportunities for work were reduced.

The second important way in which opportunities for catering work differ in London to elsewhere is in relation to restaurants operated by refugees from Vietnam. The opportunities for the establishment of such restaurants appears to be much greater in the capital than elsewhere. While outside London catering establishments owned by refugees from Vietnam tend to be scattered, take away or mobile in nature and marketed as "Chinese", in the capital this is not necessarily the case. Here, particularly in Chinatown, refugees from Vietnam run eat-in restaurants, of which some are described as Chinese, and some Vietnamese. This concentration is, in part, because of the presence of a large refugee population in the area to support such enterprises and secondly, because of the attraction of Chinatown as a place to experience oriental food. All refugee operated restaurants benefit from the reputation of Chinatown, while those who market themselves as Vietnamese stand out from the majority and attract customers seeking an oriental meal with a difference. Indeed a walk through Chinatown reveals a number of specifically Vietnamese restaurants.

Isolated Vietnamese restaurants were also seen in other areas of London (e.g. Peckham and Islington) and these seemed to be successful due to their exploitation of a particular niche in the market. For example, one isolated restaurant in Islington had

*“become very popular, not only for Vietnamese, but also for local people and local staff, office staff.”*

However, while a number of respondents talked of specifically Vietnamese restaurants, it should be noted that such establishments are not numerous

*“Vietnamese restaurant is not a lot in this country, is mostly Chinese restaurant.”*

Having said this, it would appear that where such establishments exist they provide a source of employment to the refugees from Vietnam. This is illustrated by the following exchange,

*“K: And do those people who run those businesses tend to employ other Vietnamese people?”*

*L11: Yes. They all Vietnamese, or at least ... 80% Vietnamese or 90% Vietnamese and maybe 10% from outside.”*

Thus, Vietnamese catering establishments are an additional source of employment for refugees from Vietnam, which primarily exists in London. Outside the capital, opportunities for working in a such restaurants or take aways are negligible as few, if any, have been set up.

It is however important to note that refugees from Vietnam have been able to establish Chinese restaurants and Take Aways in all areas of Britain. While those in London tend to be in Chinatown and employ other refugees as staff, a majority of those elsewhere in Britain are family run, and thus while providing work for members of the family, rarely employ other members of the community.

Any restaurant owned by a refugee from Vietnam, regardless of whether it is Chinese or Vietnamese in nature, can be seen to be a potential employment opportunity for fellow refugees. However, the existence of distinctly Vietnamese restaurants in London may have added importance. In addition to creating more jobs *per se*, by exploiting the market for Vietnamese rather than Chinese food, the existence of Vietnamese restaurants may be providing job opportunities for a different section of the community of refugees from Vietnam. It is thought that Vietnamese restaurants are operated by ethnic Vietnamese, rather than ethnic Chinese, refugees from Vietnam. Given this there is an increased likelihood of the *lingua franca* of the restaurant being Vietnamese and not Cantonese. The chances of a ethnic Vietnamese refugee being taken on by one of these establishments would be greater than if they were in competition with ethnic Chinese people for a job in a

Chinese restaurant, be it owned either by a refugee from Vietnam, or any other ethnic Chinese person. Given the previous comment about refugees who do not speak Cantonese having fewer opportunities for employment in a Chinese restaurant or take away, then Vietnamese restaurants may be providing ethnic Vietnamese refugees, with an important source of employment. As such Vietnamese establishments are concentrated in London, this would suggest that for ethnic Vietnamese refugees, there may be more job opportunities in catering in the capital than elsewhere.

While the predominant feature of manual employment for refugees from Vietnam throughout Britain is that of catering work, London differs from other locations in that major opportunities exist for alternative forms of manual work within the ethnic sector. Discussions with the London VCA revealed that considerable numbers of their clients were involved in the clothing industry. Only in Nottingham, has clothing previously been suggested as a major source of employment (Crewe, 1992) for refugees from Vietnam, and there the emphasis was on home working. The pattern of employment in the London clothing industry shares one important feature with that of the catering industry in the capital, namely that it appears to be concentrated in a particular area of the city. While Chinatown acts as a focus for employment in the catering industry, the London borough of Hackney performs the same role in terms of the clothing industry. Indeed, similarly to the catering industry, refugees are willing to travel a long way to find work in this sector. For instance, people commute from Barking and Dagenham,

*“some of them work for the factory sewing, sewing factory, a lot of them. Yes. But in this area it is difficult, maybe have to go to Hackney.”*

One further important point about the clothing industry is that

*“Quite a lot of clothes making factory owned by Vietnamese.”*

Thus the tendency for refugees from Vietnam to seek and find work with fellow refugees, or Chinese employers, is common to both the clothing and catering industries. While the attractions of Chinatown are clear, it is worth noting that Hackney has one of the largest populations of refugees from Vietnam in Britain<sup>6</sup>. It is therefore not that surprising that it has become a centre for employment within

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<sup>6</sup>See section 5.5.2.2

Vietnam refugee owned establishments. This is an issue that will be discussed in more detail when self employment amongst the community receives further consideration.

While the attraction of Chinatown (catering) and Hackney (clothing) as sources of employment can in part be explained by language and ethnicity, it is also important to recognise the role played by other factors. It would appear that a lack of alternative employment opportunities in the areas in which the refugees from Vietnam live, is crucial to encouraging individuals to seek work elsewhere. Thus the suggestion is, that many of the people who travel to work in Chinatown or Hackney do so because opportunities are severely limited in their local area. Indeed, as the respondent at VETEC (Peckham, Southwark) explained,

*“In this area, is most deprived area in the country, look like poor, difficult for looking for job in the area.”*

Thus while Chinatown can be seen to be acting as a magnet for refugees from Vietnam seeking employment in the catering industry, and Hackney for those seeking employment in the clothing industry, the economic situation of the area in which they live, is also acting to push them towards these areas. It can therefore be stated that it is the combination of these push and pull factors that are acting to make these two locations so important as sources of employment for refugees from Vietnam throughout Greater London. Elsewhere, in locations served by the provincial VCA, while the push factor is similarly present, local pull factors are largely absent, and this may explain why for many, London holds such attraction.

While the clothing and catering industries are undoubtedly the most important in terms of opportunities for manual work for the refugees from Vietnam in Greater London, it would be misleading to believe that other areas of work are negligible. Indeed it would appear that refugees living in London have succeeded in breaking into areas of manual work that were rarely mentioned in discussions with provincial community workers. In particular, mentions of car mechanics were more frequent in the capital. Additionally, opportunities for shop work and employment as cleaners can also be noted to be greater in London than elsewhere.

However, it is worth noting again that the majority of refugees from Vietnam working in manual jobs are employed within the ethnic sector. The major advantages of this are the chance to work in a job where good English is not

required and to be working with people who share a common background either as refugees, or as members of the same ethnic group. Both these points are important as they create a situation where the refugees are competing for jobs which the general population is not attracted to. Whether such a situation has arisen through choice, or because the refugees feel excluded from the general employment market, will be examined in more detail when barriers to employment are considered.

Turning away from manual work, in common with employment experiences outside London, the VCA in the capital indicated that professional type employment was relatively rare within the communities they served. As respondent in Croydon stated,

*“I know two guys who are 32 this year, that study... that came from Oxford and Cambridge. And they are earning £50,000 job, and I was looking up to them, I was saying if only there could be more of you! But those are like 1 out of a 100 or even 1 out of a 1000. That can't be compared to the numbers of people that been unemployed.”*

Significantly, even when referring to less prestigious non manual type employment, this respondent felt that the numbers of refugees from Vietnam involved were small,

*“the percentage is actually in employment, is in office work, is very little.”*

While this picture was generally confirmed during the interviews with all the London communities, it would be misleading to suggest that no refugees from Vietnam held professional jobs in the capital. Although, few in number, such jobs have importance, not only in monetary terms for the individual, but also as role models for younger members of the community. As the Croydon worker said *“I was looking up to them”*.

Those professional jobs that members of the community do hold can be split into two main categories, those held inside and outside of the community. With reference to the latter, examples given by community workers included book keeping, engineer, driving instructor, and managerial work. It would appear that people who were able to obtain such employment were assisted either by previous qualifications and experiences in Vietnam (although here the issue of requalification becomes important), or because they had successfully been through the British education system. Where this was the case it was often thought that such people,

*“adapt easily to the British culture, because they are educated in this country, and they can mix easily with the British society. And also they got very high qualifications.”*

However, for those who brought professional qualifications or experience with them to this country, in common with VCA respondents outside London, the feeling was that such experience did not guarantee employment and that many individuals had to

*“switch their career”*

on arrival in the UK, frequently to a less prestigious form.

The second form of professional employment held by refugees from Vietnam is that which is within Vietnamese Community Associations and similar organisations. Employment in this sector consisted largely of community worker posts of one sort or another. With the large number of VCA in London, greater opportunity for this sort of employment exists in the capital than in other cities, where the norm is for a single VCA<sup>7</sup>. However, the size of the refugee from Vietnam population in London, as compared to other cities, means that competition for such posts is likely to be stronger rather than weaker. It is also worth noting that the number of posts in different VCA varied greatly<sup>8</sup>. The Barking and Dagenham worker commented on this, explaining that while he was the only worker in his association, others employed more,

*“in Tower Hamlets, they got three workers.... and in Greenwich they got 5 workers”*

While more of the London associations were able to employ an increased number of staff, together those interviewed employed less than 50 people<sup>9</sup>, illustrating the limited nature of opportunities for employment in this field.

In common with workers at provincial VCA, job security in the London associations was low, and reliant on funding. This meant that there was a fair degree of movement between posts, with some individuals holding posts simultaneously at two community groups<sup>10</sup> and others having held posts at various provincial VCA before moving to the capital. Also in common with workers at provincial associations, London community workers came from a variety of employment backgrounds. Few

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<sup>7</sup>See Table 6.2, Only Birmingham has two associations

<sup>8</sup>See Table 6.1

<sup>9</sup>The corresponding figure for the provincial associations is 35 despite the fact that 3 more VCA were visited in the provinces than in London.

<sup>10</sup>The worker at the Barking and Dagenham Vietnamese & Chinese Association also ran the East London Association for Refugees from Vietnam which had only recently been established.

had any experience of social work in Vietnam, rather they tended to be people who had held high status jobs in Vietnam and who had become influential on arrival in Britain due to their superior ability to speak English. Many had worked primarily within VCA or other refugee organisations since their arrival in Britain.<sup>11</sup>

It can therefore be stated that the VCA in London act as an important source of professional employment opportunity for members of the refugee community. Indeed, in the majority of associations all employees are from Vietnam. Only at An Viet in Islington was there a stated aim to employ a mixture of refugees from Vietnam and British people,

*“Our policy is here.... in the past and now or in the future, we would like to have one Vietnamese staff, one English. So we can work together from each other, to learn each other about the way to run the community and also to ... easy for us to communicate with the outside.”*

More usual, was for all employees to be from the refugee community, or for a single British person to be employed, generally as a secretary.

Having introduced the scope of employment for refugees from Vietnam living within London, a return to the question posed earlier, about possible opportunities for clandestine work, is indicated. This issue relates particularly to manual work. To reiterate, the suggestion was made that many people who claim to be unemployed, are in fact working. Given the predominance of catering and clothing factory work amongst the refugees from Vietnam, this is not implausible. Both industries are renowned for their poor working conditions and their exploitation of workers. In addition, piece or temporary work, which are also a feature of these industries, lend themselves easily to “cash in hand” casual employment. As the earlier quote insinuated many refugees from Vietnam may be involved in working illegally while claiming benefit, thus masking a low unemployment rate. However such a controversial statement needs further explanation,

*“The reason is as you know, a family with 3 or 4 children's, they get £100 per week, they get £60 housing benefit and everything free, so with them it is not easy for them to get a job with £300 per week, or 250..... some other reason is they can find some work without paying tax, for instance to go to Chinatown to wash dishes, job very slave job, but at least they can earn some more money and also to spend their time, otherwise to stay at home to watch television, is crazy, is to become crazy! And also they can have some work in the clothes*

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<sup>11</sup>The personal experiences of some of these workers is the focus of chapter 9

*making factory to get even 25 pence to make a shirt or a skirt, but they work very hard from 7 O clock in the morning until 9 or 10 or 11 in the afternoon, it depends on the demand of the factory, and they work very long time to get about £20 per day or £10 per day. And to help them to improve their life in this country..... the jobs, they not declare tax because it is not permanent. Some time the employer ask them to do one day a week, or two days a week, or clothes making factory ask them to, not always have permanent income.”*

This quote not only offers explanations for such clandestine activities, but also illustrates the marginal nature of their benefits. Thus casual employment may be a common means amongst the refugees of supplementing their income from state benefits. While this is irregular, it is understandable given the marginal nature of the employment that is found, and the difficulties associated with long term unemployment. To return to an earlier point regarding the visibility of refugees from Vietnam in London, the concentration of workers in specific locations and industries (catering in Chinatown and clothing manufacturing in Hackney) may act both to mask, and attract, such clandestine employment. The likelihood of the DSS spotting an illegal worker must surely be reduced if they are working in an area which is remote from where they live, and the worker is surrounded by others from the same ethnic background. Thus if the figures relating to unemployment are exaggerated, it is only at the expense of the informal economy, which, it is claimed, is highly marginal both in terms of its job security and wages. As a final point on this matter, it should be noted that this issue was only raised by the community worker at An Viet, who, significantly revealed these details only

*“because it is academic research.”*

The dangers of assuming that casual work amongst the community is common are clear when information has arisen from a single source. However, it was felt important that this issue be raised. Given the extremely sensitive nature of this type of information, it is understandable if details of casual work have not arisen in other interviews either because respondents are not aware of it, or because they choose to suppress it to protect community members. The other option, that casual work does not occur in areas served by other VCA, is a possibility, but I believe that it undoubtedly does occur, although the level is uncertain. I also believe it likely that although individuals from areas served by other associations are involved in casual work, this work would probably be based within Hackney or Chinatown.

While it is anticipated that casual work is available in London, this may not be the case in areas served by the provincial associations. In particular, it is thought that the opportunities for casual employment may be closely linked to the ethnic sector. Where such a sector is small or absent, as in most areas served by the provincial VCA, casual employment opportunities may therefore be limited. Thus the absence of any comments about such irregular activities from these associations should not be interpreted in the same way as with regard to London community groups.

A final point on the scope of employment of refugees from Vietnam in London, is to return to the question of whether there is a common experience of employment throughout the city. Certainly, since the employment opportunities that the community take up are spatially differentiated, both in terms of manual and non manual work, this could be in doubt. However, instead of some VCA serving areas of high unemployment and others serving areas of low unemployment, there seems to be relatively little difference between areas. Equally, the kinds of employment that community members from different areas are involved in varies only marginally. What can be said is that for many, there appears to be a common experience of “travelling to work” for both manual and non manual workers. This is strongly the case in terms of the catering and clothing industries, respectively to Chinatown and Hackney<sup>12</sup>, while for non manual workers, the various VCA attract workers from a wide area. It is also worth noting that even when refugees are able to secure employment outside the ethnic sector, it is still common to travel considerable distances to work. For instance, people have been known to travel from Peckham to places

*“like Gatwick Airport or Crawley.”*

It is therefore possible to conclude that general experiences of employment are similar across the capital, with the proviso, that some people have to travel considerable distances to find work. Interestingly, such travel patterns did not emerge as an issue when experiences outside of London were being considered.

#### **8.4 Barriers to employment**

As in the case of the provincial VCA interviews, a significant portion of each London community worker interview was spent discussing the barriers to

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<sup>12</sup>Although it is recognised that Hackney is an area with a high population of refugees from Vietnam and if these choose to work in the clothing industry in particular travel to work may be minimal.

employment that are faced by refugees from Vietnam. Additionally, many of the barriers identified had previously been identified amongst factors thought to influence labour force experiences<sup>1</sup>. In general it can be stated that the workers in London strongly agreed with workers elsewhere in identifying the same sorts of barriers to employment. Those differences that did occur primarily relate to the operation of such barriers within the London setting, and the intention here is to focus on this, rather than to merely repeat what has been discussed previously.

Firstly with regard to the effect that poor English skills has on employment opportunities, it would appear that, as outside the capital, substantial numbers of refugees from Vietnam have considerable difficulties with English. These difficulties not only inhibit an individual's chances of finding employment but also affect every aspect of their life. As one respondent explained,

*“every problem they got follow from their language problems.”*

The pivotal role of language skills is common to refugees living throughout Britain, with access to decent housing, health care, education and training all being inhibited by a person's poor English. While a shared experience, there do however appear to be certain advantages to living in the capital. As has already been stated, the majority of employment opportunities that have been taken up by the refugees are sited within the ethnic sector, primarily in catering and the manufacturing of clothes. Living in London, rather than other locations, offers the refugees greater opportunities of finding employment within this ethnic sector. Not only does the larger size of the refugee from Vietnam population lead to opportunities for work from within the refugee community, but the substantial Chinese population of the capital and their business success presents further avenues of employment opportunity. Thus while the problem of English exists in London, its effect as a barrier to employment is moderated by greater opportunities for employment that do not require English skills. As explained by a respondent in Southwark,

*“if you say the truth, because of the language problem they can find a job in their own community, like working in a restaurant, because they can only speak their language.”*

It is merely a matter of the greater size of this community that acts to moderate the difficulties that poor English is accompanied by. Given the comments made earlier

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<sup>1</sup>See section 3.3 and 3.4, especially figure 3.1

about refugees from Vietnam being able to work in Chinese establishments if they speak Cantonese, there is a clear argument for understanding “*their own community*” to include not only other refugees from Vietnam, but also, to a certain degree, the wider Chinese community. Given the Chinese ethnicity of the majority of the refugees<sup>14</sup> and their ability to speak Cantonese, it certainly appears that many are seeking, and finding, work within the market for Chinese employees that is generated by establishments in Chinatown and elsewhere.

The greater size of the community in London not only moderates the employment problems that refugees face, but also has implications for their social welfare. Many of the provincial associations identified isolation as a major problem for clients and a lack of English was thought to be a significant factor in contributing to this, although it must also be noted that isolation itself was thought to be one of the determinants of poor English. The concentration of refugees in London means that individuals are much more likely to be able to meet with people who speak the same language as themselves and who have had similar experiences. While this alleviates isolation in an immediate sense, it is important to note that the size of the refugee community may lead to the perpetuation of isolation from the general population. The Islington and Hackney community worker explained,

*“because the Vietnamese, their mentality, they are quite reserved and introvert.... if you are Vietnamese it is easier for you to approach those people, than you know for foreigners, I would say like British or other ethnic minorities.”*

Since the greater size of the community offers opportunities for both social and economic activities within the community, individuals may be discouraged from making social contacts with the general population, or from seeking employment in the mainstream. The danger of this, is that the refugees will become ghettoised in terms of their social contacts and employment. These two aspects are interlinked when it is considered that many people find work not through formal means, but through their own social contacts,

*“friends introduce them, more than they come to the job centre.”*

Given the poor working conditions within the ethnic employment market, both in terms of wages and job security, the danger is that the ghettoised nature of their

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<sup>14</sup> See section 5.2.4

social and employment contacts will unite to confine the refugees to a marginal position in the economy.

While the refugees can not be blamed for their reliance on their own community, when in many cases they are excluded from the mainstream by a multitude of barriers<sup>15</sup>, as explained in Croydon, it nevertheless appears that many refugees in London

*“see this society as a foreign country to them.”*

Those who are unemployed,

*“basically they have their own small world inside their own home”*

which may also extend to include social activities with other members of the community or at the VCA. While for those who are employed within the ethnic sector, isolation continues due to the lack of interaction with the general population. This isolation within the ethnic sector has profound implications, since as well as having a monetary function, employment can be understood to be an activity during which,

*“you learn from each other, you learn from what’s happening in society.”*

Since employment within the ethnic sector acts to segregate individuals from the wider society it fails to perform this function, and therefore such work does little to increase knowledge of British society for refugees from Vietnam. Unfortunately, such a process is self perpetuating since lack of contact with general society encourages reliance on the ethnic sector, while reliance on the ethnic sector discourages contact with general society. The process of being part of a large population of refugees (and for many, a large ethnic Chinese population) in London can therefore be seen to be, on the one hand, supplying greater opportunities for social interaction and employment, while on the other hand acting to confine individuals to the ethnic sector and thus limiting interaction and opportunities with the wider population. It should however be noted that as in only a few cases has the isolation of living in a provincial area of Britain led to successful integration into the mainstream, the advantages of being part of a large London based community are significant.

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<sup>15</sup>As discussed in section 7.4

A lack of transferable skills was one of the elements that was identified by both London and provincial community respondents as a barrier to employment. It does nevertheless appear that there are greater opportunities for overcoming this barrier in the capital than elsewhere. These opportunities occur through possibilities for retraining. The larger size of the Vietnam refugee population and consequently of many of the London VCA, means that training and retraining courses are sometimes available within the associations. While few provincial VCA were able to provide training on site (the norm being to refer individuals to other training providers), a number of London community groups operated training schemes themselves<sup>16</sup>. In addition, some were able to establish courses specifically for their community in local colleges. For example in Islington and Hackney,

*“The thing is that the Vietnamese refugees in our area as well as the one in London, the main barrier, the barrier is the language barrier, the main problem for them is the language barrier..... So that’s why we set up some of these courses in the colleges tailored to their needs. Apart from that we did set up some training courses as well like the car mechanics, the hairdressing course, The car mechanics, they call it the beauty and manicure course, the forklift, the forklift lift operator, and the approved driving instructor, so, so far we got those courses running on here at the moment.”*

The advantages of such courses, either at the associations or at local colleges, are that language difficulties can be minimised. Thus while in other locations around Britain, refugees commonly have to struggle on courses with no or limited language support, for refugees in the capital there are greater opportunities for gaining a place on a course that, not only offers language support, but also is specifically designed to meet the needs of members of the refugee community. The fact that these courses are specifically for refugees from Vietnam and are frequently taught by members of the community also acts to attract participants who, due to a variety of factors, may not have attended a mainstream course. Thus in the case of retraining, for manual occupations in particular, living in London is advantageous as specialist support from within the community is more likely to be available. Indeed, the community worker in South West London went so far as to condemn the government’s dispersion policy on account of the effect that dispersion has on the development of within community support systems,

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<sup>16</sup> Lambeth Community of Refugees from Vietnam, Islington and Hackney Vietnamese Community, An Viet, and VETEC.

*“here we got the dispersal policy of the British Government so Vietnamese... and the housing conditions... so the Vietnamese population scattered everywhere, very tidily, not enough to build up, because the British government try not to set up a ghetto or something like that, so they want to disperse. And the Vietnamese community, or refugee community depend on the mainstream, but it would help them benefit because they tend to be isolated and they got no support, so that is another reason why there are a lot of unemployed people.”*

It is worth noting that, being based in Teddington, this worker is on the periphery of Greater London. It would appear, that while for the purposes of this research this association was classed as a London VCA, it may have been more appropriate to have included it within the provincial VCA. At the margins of the city at least, interaction with more central associations and the community of refugees from Vietnam was uncommon. It is therefore worth noting that while in central areas the refugees living in London appear to act as a single community<sup>17</sup>, a few peripheral London VCA<sup>18</sup> are excluded from this, and the benefits associated with a large community. Surprisingly, this appears to be more of an issue in some peripheral VCA than others<sup>19</sup> and distance from the centre (geographic and in terms of refugee populations) does not explain this totally. It is therefore possible to state that London does not just have one community of refugees from Vietnam, but rather has a larger one based in the areas of high refugee population surrounding Hackney and Southwark, and a number of much smaller ones on the periphery. Given the funding situation in which most associations find themselves, services to the refugees are frequently limited to those living in the immediate area and thus the combination of this and distance act to exclude many refugees in peripheral areas from the benefits of living in London. The confusing thing about this conclusion is that comments made by the various VCA about unemployment levels do not seem to support this. Thus unless one accepts that reported unemployment figures for the areas around Hackney are masking involvement in the informal economy, reduced access to a large refugee population and the services offered by larger, more central VCA, would appear not to be disadvantageous.

A further factor that was identified by London and provincial community workers as a barrier to employment is racism. This is undoubtedly a problem for some people,

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<sup>17</sup>Particularly those living in the key boroughs for the Vietnam refugee population as identified in section 5.5.2.2 (Greenwich, Hackney, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark and Tower Hamlets).

<sup>18</sup>Particularly the Vietnamese Community Association in South West London

<sup>19</sup>For instance the association in Dagenham has closer links than that in Teddington.

particularly those living in more peripheral areas, and this is illustrated by this comment made in South West London,

*“With the young Vietnamese people who are educated in here, language problem is not a great deal, if they got education in here. However when they go for interview for a job there is some kind of hidden agenda, sort of discrimination, which is very difficult to prove. And the chance to get the job compare to the other British counterpart is very small.”*

This supports the idea that discrimination on the grounds of race is a greater problem for those individuals who try to break away from the catering or clothing industries. For those who seek work in these sectors of the economy the impact of discrimination is, if anything, positive. However, in the case of individuals seeking mainstream employment, their ethnicity acts as such an effective barrier that

*“their job prospect is very poor.”*

However clear-cut this picture of discrimination appears, it is vital to remember that discrimination does not only occur in the work place and it is not merely an issue of two races. Discrimination can affect all aspects of an individual’s life and have a profound effect on their whole outlook to life. While it could be argued that in the London environment with its multi racial character, refugees from Vietnam are less likely to be the targets of racism, this could be misleading. While the multiracial nature of the city may offer some measure of invisibility to the refugees from Vietnam, this brings its own problems, that are no less damaging than direct discrimination. The following quotation from Croydon depicts this,

*“you rarely hear Chinese people complain, they don’t speak up, it’s like if they need help, if there was more communities that could stick together and get to parliament and say there is a problem here, but because Chinese people, they don’t speak up, so therefore people only see them like people who are always behind someone, shadow, always following another culture. And people never ask them, why don’t they find employment? People always say these people, all they want is free money, come here eat and food, but they don’t think about people, they been through so much, they come here, they haven’t really given a chance to be part of society really. ‘Cause in this society really, mainly see black and white or maybe Asian as in yellow. But when you mention Chinese there is not a lot of, I would say news on them. Not a lot of information for them, Not a lot of places they feel they are in priority, they have priorities or the rights to.”*

It is worth noting that this respondent used the term “Chinese” to talk of her clients who were all refugees from Vietnam. While this could be interpreted as evidence to

support the idea that many refugees from Vietnam are effectively operating within the ethnic Chinese economy and society, it is also worrying as it is a graphic illustration of how in many ways the refugees from Vietnam, particularly in London, are being denied an identity. Given the Chinese ethnicity of many of the refugees, and, to the casual observer at least, the indistinguishable nature of Chinese and Vietnamese peoples, refugees from Vietnam are frequently seen as Chinese. With the well known success of Chinese people in the business world, this has the effect of masking the difficulties of the refugees from view. They are seen as Chinese people whom common conceptions hold to be successful in business and education, financially stable, and part of a close knit community. While such attributes are enviable, ascribing them, mistakenly, to refugees from Vietnam does more harm than good. At least for those refugees that live outside of London, especially for those in areas with a low Chinese population, this mistaken identity is less frequently made.

Long term unemployment is a further factor that was identified as a barrier to employment both in the capital and elsewhere. Although it is easy to forget, given the detail on employment experiences offered in this chapter, many, if not most, refugees from Vietnam are unemployed,

*“some even unemployed since we first came here, that is in 1979, 1980, it is more than 15 years ago and they still unemployed.”*

The problems associated with long term unemployment are common to all areas of Britain, namely, a lack of recent experience, a lack of references, a feeling of worthlessness and hopelessness, and severe financial hardship. Indeed, it is a recognised phenomena that it is easier for someone in work, than for an unemployed person, to find a job, with the length of unemployment increasing the disparity. While long term unemployment and its allied problems occur within London, many refugees in the capital appear to be burdened with an additional problem, that of short term employment. While initially appearing to be contradictory in nature, the problems of long term unemployment and short term employment do in fact go hand in hand. Not only are they accompanied by similar problems, but it appears that they support each other, long term unemployment acting to push people towards short term employment opportunities. The degree to which the refugees from Vietnam are involved in short term employment is not clear. However, statements made earlier about casual work could indicate that many people may be involved. If this is

the case then individuals may be escaping long term unemployment, only to experience the same problems as the result of short term employment.

Finally, to reiterate, this section on barriers to employment in London should not be read in isolation. The majority of barriers to employment identified in this research do not appear to be place specific and occur both within and outside of London. While the focus in this section has been on those factors that do appear to operate differently in London than elsewhere, it is vital that the other factors identified by provincial community workers are not forgotten. In order to aid memory and to support the idea that most barriers to employment identified at provincial VCA occur similarly in the capital, Table 8.3 has been constructed ( shown overleaf).

### **8.5 Self employment**

The extent of self employment amongst refugees resident in areas served by the London Vietnamese Community Associations has already been introduced<sup>20</sup>. It has been shown that the occurrence of self employment is not evenly distributed throughout London,<sup>21</sup> neither in terms of the locations of the businesses nor the place of residence of owners. The focus here will be on exploring the reasons behind this.

As a first step towards understanding this spatial concentration, the areas in which it occurs must be clearly identified. Hackney and Chinatown are the two main areas in which self employed refugees from Vietnam have established their businesses. As has previously been stated, Hackney is a focus for the manufacturing of clothes and Chinatown for catering. While some of the businesses in these areas are operated by refugees living in the vicinity, there are many individuals who have established a business in the area, but live some distance away. Significantly, these individuals generally live in areas served by certain community associations. In particular, those associations in Croydon, Islington, Hackney, Lambeth, and Southwark have been most successful in encouraging self employment amongst refugees. In order to develop a full picture of self employment amongst the refugee community, it is important to explore not only the spatial concentration of the businesses, but also the spatial concentration of the owners of these businesses.

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<sup>20</sup>Table 8.2

<sup>21</sup> See section 8.2

**Table 8.3 Barriers to employment**

Examples of Barriers to employment identified by provincial VCA	Evidence of occurrence in London from London VCA
Prior abilities and educational background	<i>“over there in Vietnam, they don't require, like sometimes you don't need to have a qualification or training, but over here, the paper, the qualification is quite essential if you are to get a job you got to have the qualification, the NVQ”</i>
Job searching strategies, including means of approaching an employer and interview technique.	<i>“for example, you are member in interview panel, you are boss, you want to recruit somebody, if a stranger turn up, a foreign student turns up, and what he trying to say to you to try and convince you how good he is or she is. But you look at him and you say why he talking a lot? Why he moving head up and down? Why he talking to me, he doesn't look at me? Turn his head away. I think that any foreign student or any who been in this country are unable to fit the image, I think it is likely they don't get a job”</i>
Age	<p><i>“K: But for the adults, then you are quite pessimistic?</i></p> <p><i>L10: Yes, I don't think there is any chance that they can find a job because when you get older....</i></p> <p><i>L10B: They getting older, 40, 50 and more.</i></p> <p><i>L10: I don't think for them.”</i></p>
Family commitments	<i>“Another factor is because when you escape from Vietnam you bring your family, mostly we escape with our family, and your first priority is the survival of your family”</i>
Lack of motivation	Lack of motivation results in people <i>“closing themselves behind closed doors each week”</i>

Examples of Barriers to employment identified by provincial VCA	Evidence of occurrence in London from London VCA
Competition with the general population	<i>“The thing is that it is a very competitive situation here and also one other thing is that they can make a project in school, they can get qualifications, but unfortunately it is the communication skills they do not have this. They can not express the way that the British ones, so the employer fail them during the interview”</i>
Dependency culture	<i>“I must say that the welfare system in this country makes the Vietnamese in general or the other, I don’t know, become lazy or don’t want to work”</i>
The effect of the local economy	Lambeth has:- <i>“one of the highest unemployment in the whole London. I think it is about 18 to 19%, so we are living in the centre of the high unemployment anyway in the whole London, so anyway therefore the Vietnamese here suffer high unemployment”</i>
Mental trauma	<i>“they are Vietnamese refugees, like they been through so much and really they feel they don’t belong anywhere, they feel like they don’t really have a country of their own”</i>

The concentration of companies owned by refugees from Vietnam into Chinatown and Hackney can be seen to be clear evidence of the operation of an ethnic market effect. The case of Chinatown has previously been discussed<sup>22</sup>. The phenomenon of Hackney, as a centre of refugee enterprise, shares many features with that of Chinatown, however there are important differences. Firstly although both areas can be seen as focal points for the community, where Chinatown’s attraction is bound up with it’s blatant character as a centre of Chinese life, although Hackney has one of the highest populations of refugees from Vietnam of any area of Britain<sup>23</sup>, it is not predominately Vietnamese in character. Thus the nature of self-employment in

<sup>22</sup>See section 8.3

<sup>23</sup> See section 5.5.2.2

Hackney (the manufacturing of clothing) is not dependant on a visible presence. The reasons behind the convergence on this industry in this location is therefore less clear than in Chinatown. However discussions with VCA workers support the idea that an ethnic market effect is occurring,

*“K: Do you think that there are a lot of differences between the different areas of London. I mean I know you work in Lewisham as well?”*

*L6: (Pause) Yes, I would say so because, like in Hackney you got quite a lot of clothing factories than others areas in London. And like, maybe because in that area there are a lot of Vietnamese families living there and the area is quite good for business, especially they got some sort of open markets where a lot of ethnic minorities, well when I say ethnic minorities like black people, like Indian or Jamaican or Vietnamese go there, like Chinese go there. Maybe, probably a lot of people like to set up their business in the Hackney area.”*

It appears that in Hackney, it is the presence of a large population of refugees from Vietnam (to act as both employees and customers) and opportunities for less formal business arrangements (i.e. in street markets) that attract entrepreneurial refugees. Indeed, living in such an ethnically mixed area may be having a positive self efficacy effect. Seeing other ethnic groups succeeding in business may have encouraged refugees from Vietnam to consider establishing their own enterprises, and following on from this, the success of one refugee business is likely to have encouraged others. Not only is there a feeling that if they can do this, so can I, but the accumulated business knowledge and expertise within the community becomes a resource. While self employment was rare amongst the clients of the community worker in South West London, he explained how a large community can lead to self employment,

*“something very important go without other community group, when they settle, they settle together in a kind of a group, that will help them to help themselves, a kind of competition and motivation. Kind of self help, like in California, or in America or in Australia, because the Vietnamese, they gather together in a kind of a group like that. So they can do business with themselves, help them to live very good.”*

It is worth noting that this respondent saw the government’s dispersal policy as acting against the development of successful refugee business communities in Britain. While this argument is supported in many locations outside London, and indeed in many London areas, the level of the Vietnam refugee population in Hackney seems to have allowed a business community to have developed. Just why

this business community developed here rather than in Southwark (which is home to the largest number of refugees from Vietnam<sup>24</sup>) is however unclear.

While it has been argued that both the catering and clothing manufacturing self employment are spatially concentrated, it is important to remember that other forms of self employment are present within the Vietnam refugee community, although to a lesser degree. These enterprises, for example, car mechanics, bakers, dry cleaners, cleaners, newsagent and ethnic supermarket owners, are less spatially concentrated, although they do show some tendency to occur in areas with larger Vietnam refugee populations. They are also affected by the location of certain VCA. As previously mentioned, the spatial concentration of self employment amongst the Vietnam refugee community in London occurs not only in terms of the location of businesses, but also in that of the entrepreneurs themselves. For although some entrepreneurs establish their businesses in the area they live in many do not, choosing to locate elsewhere. Speaking in Southwark, one respondent remarked,

*“a lot of people start up the business. Like there is a bakery, there is a bakery about 6 years ago in this borough, and then various machinists, who are dress making factories, small ones, but they start somewhere else, not in this borough.”*

While the concentration of businesses has been explained in terms of an ethnic market effect, the concentration of entrepreneurs appears to be focused around a small number of community associations. Moreover the entrepreneurs are concentrated around the 4 London VCA which provide a formal and discrete employment development programme within their project<sup>25</sup>. Such programmes provide encouragement to individuals to move into self employment and offer services such as,

*“training, like we did the business in conjunction with Islington Chamber of Commerce and Islington Council. Lately we done the basic book keeping.”*

It would therefore appear that as outside of London, the presence of a Employment Development Programme within an association has a direct effect on the level of self employment within the community it serves.

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<sup>24</sup>c.f. 22

<sup>25</sup>c.f. 15

## 8.6 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to explore the labour force experiences of refugees from Vietnam living in London. While many of their experiences are similar to those of refugees living elsewhere in Britain, there are important differences. Unemployment levels vary sharply in areas served by the provincial VCA, with four areas (Bristol, Cardiff, Derby and Portsmouth) achieving very low figures, yet in London all the associations report unemployment in their communities to be in excess of 50 percent. Thus the reputation of London having greater job opportunities than elsewhere is put in question. This must however be viewed along side the possibility that clandestine work is more readily available in the capital than elsewhere.

In common with provincial areas, refugees from Vietnam living in London are largely reliant upon the ethnic sector for both employment and self employment opportunities. The common perception being that the greater size of the community in the capital allows more refugees

*“to work in the Vietnamese community rather than in the mainstream.”*

While the low levels of unemployment found in Bristol, Cardiff and Derby are a result of working in the community rather than the mainstream, it is still the case that in absolute numbers London *does* provide more ethnic sector jobs for the refugees than elsewhere. Moreover, it provides more choice within the ethnic sector than elsewhere, with opportunities for employment, rather than self employment, being greater, and opportunities in trades other than catering. In particular, the importance of the clothing industry in the capital should not be underestimated.

Although working refugees in London are more likely to be employed (not self employed) than refugees any where else in the country<sup>26</sup>, many London community workers still believed that the way forward was to rely on community operated enterprises to generate further employment opportunities,

*“one thing I think is very important for the refugee, what they have to try to get is into a kind of business, small business. To help the community in the future.”*

Thus in London, as in many other locations, the community appears to be resigned to the fact that they are marginalised and excluded from mainstream employment opportunities. It is anticipated that any improvement in the situation will have to be

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<sup>26</sup>Other than in Portsmouth

achieved from within the community. Given the greater size of the community this may be possible as the larger London VCA are able to attract more funding than elsewhere. Indeed, London has more Employment Development Programmes than elsewhere and these do appear to have influenced the establishment of Vietnam refugee owned businesses. However the problem remains that those living in more peripheral areas are denied access to such facilities.

Finally, although current unemployment and self employment levels in London indicate that certain provincial areas<sup>27</sup> have better labour force experiences, many VCA workers continue to ascribe to the idea that

*“London, it is a big capital you see, so it is likely for you get job easier than in the outskirts or outside London or in the other counties.”*

Moreover, going beyond labour force experiences it would be unwise to underestimate the social and psychological advantages to be gained from living in a larger community of refugees from Vietnam.

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<sup>27</sup>Notably, Bristol, Cardiff, Derby and Portsmouth.

Chapter Nine  
Individual Narratives

## Individual Narratives

### 9.1 Introduction

Having reviewed the labour force experiences of the refugees from Vietnam in previous chapters, a more detailed examination of experiences at an individual level is now appropriate. Such an examination furnishes a greater understanding of the labour force experiences of individuals, and allows further consideration of the factors which influence their careers. Finally, it focuses attention on individuals, ensuring that the personal impact of forced migration on labour force experiences is understood.

Previously, the types of employment which feature within the Vietnam refugee community have been discussed<sup>1</sup>. Building on this general discussion, interviews which primarily focus on individual experiences are considered here. Based on interviews with community workers, the discussion relates to a particular section of the community, one which is felt to be particularly appropriate<sup>2</sup>. However, it should be noted that the material in this chapter refers primarily to those individuals who participated in the research. Its applicability to other VCA workers is not known, and should not be readily assumed.

### 9.2 A profile of the respondents

A total of 14 interviews, focusing on individual experiences, were conducted with workers at various VCA throughout Britain. Before considering individual labour force careers, a summary profile of the respondents is given.

In terms of gender, the split was equal, with half the respondents being male and half female. With regard to age, six respondents were below 35 while eight were older. However, only a single male was aged below 35, and only 2 females were over this age. Given the age differences between the workers, those aged over 35 (hereafter referred to as older respondents) and those below 35 (the younger respondents) are considered separately. This relates primarily to the differing lengths of time that they have spent in the labour force. Table 9.1 (overleaf) provides basic bibliographic information on the respondents. An introduction to Vietnamese names appears in Appendix 9-1.

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<sup>1</sup>See section 7.3, especially table 7.3 and section 8.3

<sup>2</sup>For a discussion of the choice of non-ancillary community workers as the focus of attention in this chapter see section 4.4.2

**Table 9.1 Younger Respondents**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Origins</b>	<b>Arrived in Britain (aged)</b>	<b>Camp location and length of time</b>	<b>Vietnam - Primary Occupation</b>
BUI Hue	Female	25	Vietnamese	Mid Vietnam	1983 (13)	Brunei (3 months)	School (disrupted and helped in family business)
TRUONG Van Ha	Male	32	Vietnamese	South Vietnam	1986 <sup>1</sup> (22)	N/A	School (severely disrupted)
NGUYEN Thi Phuong	Female	34	Vietnamese	South Vietnam	1987 (25)	Singapore (3 months) then Hong Kong (6 months)	School (severely disrupted) and entertainer
Mai TON	Female	30	Vietnamese	North Vietnam	1986 <sup>1</sup> (20)	Hong Kong (4 years)	School (disrupted). Planned to go to university
Huahua CHEN	Female	24	Chinese	North Vietnam	1981 (9)	Hong Kong (5 years)	Helped on family tea stall
XiaoLi WU	Female	28	Chinese	South Vietnam	1979 (11)	Hong Kong (3 months)	School (disrupted)

<sup>1</sup>Entered Britain under the Family Reunion Scheme

**Table 9.1 Older Respondents**

Name	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Origins	Arrived in Britain (aged)	Camp location and length of time	Vietnam - Primary Occupation
TRAN Thai Linh	Female	37	Vietnamese	South Vietnam	1984 <sup>1</sup> (25)	N/A	Book keeper
TRINH Dung	Male	37	Vietnamese	South Vietnam	1980 (22)	Philippines (7 months)	Fashion Industry (family business)
Lam VO	Male	58	Vietnamese	South Vietnam	1979 (42)	Hong Kong (3 weeks)	Pharmacist and Army
PHAM Tong	Male	50	Vietnamese	South Vietnam	1982 (35)	Hong Kong (A few months)	Army (front line)
Tim PHAM	Female	48	Vietnamese	South Vietnam	1988 <sup>2</sup>	Guam (2 months)	Model and Medical Sales Representative
LE Tri Dien	Male	59	Vietnamese	South Vietnam	1981 (45)	Thailand (6 months)	Army
Changling ZHAO	Male	42	Chinese	North Vietnam	1980 (26)	Hong Kong (1 year)	Various temporary manual jobs
Wei Guo LI	Male	53	Chinese	North Vietnam	1980 (38)	Hong Kong (2 years)	Civil servant - Board of Education

<sup>1</sup> Entered Britain under the Family Reunion Scheme

<sup>2</sup> Tim PHAM went from the refugee camp in Guam to the USA. She lived there for 13 years before emigrating to Britain.

With regard to education, experiences differed by age group. All the younger respondents had their education disrupted because of the events in Vietnam and, for some, time spent in refugee camps in South East Asia. Of this younger age group, three of the six respondents had arrived in Britain before the age of 16 and thus had participated in the British school system. All had participated in further or higher education before seeking permanent employment. Two had gone on to attend university in this country (TRUONG Van Ha and Huahua CHEN). Both following courses with a high IT or Business content. Of the remaining four, two undertook B.T.E.C. (business and IT) courses at colleges of further education (BUI Hue and XiaoLi WU), while the remaining respondents had taken a succession of short courses. These included further G.C.S.E's, IT and business classes. It is therefore clear that the standard of education amongst these respondents was not only relatively high, but also illustrated a strong bias towards business.

With regard to the older respondents, aged over 35, only one of the eight (PHAM Tong) had not attended university in Vietnam. The subjects studied varied, although vocational courses, such as Law, various Science based courses and Education predominated. PHAM Tong had spent his entire Vietnam working life in the Army. After their arrival in Britain, all the older respondents underwent a period of further education, although the variety of courses taken was wider than for the younger workers. Initially, while some of the older workers participated in English classes, others (Lam VO, Tim PHAM and LE Tri Dien) were already fluent on arrival in this country. Significantly, a number of those who did study English gained mainstream qualifications (O level English), having progressed beyond ESL classes<sup>3</sup>.

With regard to non language courses, two of the older respondents followed re-qualification courses with a view to gaining employment in the same professional field in which they had worked in Vietnam. Lam VO hoping to regain work as a pharmacist and Wei Guo LI as a teacher. In both cases, a year-long course of study led only to partial requalification and both workers chose not to undertake a second year of re-training.

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that all those who were interviewed for this section of the research were fluent in English.

While TRAN Thai Linh undertook a business / management courses (B.T.E.C. or M.Sc.) on a full time basis, similarly to the younger workers, a number of the others participated in various short courses which also often had a business or IT focus. Additionally, Changling ZHAO and PHAM Tong followed taster courses designed for the unemployed. Finally, TRINH Dung choose not to pursue his education beyond ESL classes since he was then,

*“at the age of 23,[and] I thought there is no way I am going to stay at school or college anymore!”*

Thus it was evident that the older workers were also generally educated to a very high level. While the nature of their work undoubtedly attracts those with a higher education, it is worth noting that reports suggest that only 2.5% of the refugees from Vietnam had received a university education in Vietnam (The Refugee Council, n.d.). On the evidence of the respondents interviewed for this research, it appears that employment within a community association became an option for some of these highly educated refugees.

The final part of this brief profile of the group is in reference to the jobs held by the respondents. Given that the targeting was of non ancillary VCA workers, most of the workers held similar jobs. Indeed, of the fourteen, ten were general community workers. The remaining four respondents held jobs with a specific role within their VCA, three being Employment Development Workers (TRINH Dung, XiaoLi WU and LE Tri Dien) and NGUYEN Thi Phuong being a financial officer.

### **9.3 Labour force career histories**

Given the differing lengths of time spent in the labour force, the following discussion on the career histories of respondents examines older and younger respondents separately. The approach is largely chronological.

#### **9.3.1 Older respondents**

Given their age and date of departure from Vietnam (1975 - 1984), the older workers were all adults prior to arrival in Britain, and as such had held jobs in Vietnam. The range of jobs held by these workers was considerable<sup>4</sup>, varying from assisting in a family

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<sup>4</sup>See Table 9.1

business, through skilled manual trades to professional posts. In addition, as might be expected, the Army featured strongly, particularly amongst the men currently aged over 50. Like LE Tri Dien, PHAM Tong and Lam VO had also been in the army

*“for a very long time..... because it was war time.”*

In general it can be stated that the older workers had held employment in Vietnam which was commensurate with their educational levels, either in a civilian or military setting. While those in the military held senior positions, those who worked in a civilian setting tended to have jobs which involved a considerable amount of responsibility. For instance, Wei Guo LI had been responsible for helping to implement government education policy. Specifically,

*“from 1975, when the country unite, the South they have a different system, so the North government has to send us in there to say some change in the South system.”*

Only TRINH Dung and Changling ZHAO had not held professional posts in Vietnam, but as both left in their 20's this may have been because of their youthfulness. Changling's Vietnam career involved

*“doing a lot of different things. I've been a carpenter, builder, working in a farm.”*

While such an employment history might seem unusual for a university graduate, it would be unwise to underestimate the influence of the war upon employment chances, particularly for those of Chinese ethnicity (as in this case). Moving from job to job, may have been a reaction to this. However, this was not a reason suggested by Changling who chose to rationalise his choice of employment with the remark,

*“the reason I do that, I like travelling.”*

As a final note concerning the Vietnam phase of labour force experiences for these respondents, unemployment was rarely mentioned. While this is not to suggest that unemployment did not exist, its relevance, for these respondents, was minor, at least until the North and South were united in 1975. Until this time the respondents generally remained in stable employment or moved easily from one position to another. Yet after 1975, for some, the situation appears to have deteriorated. However, the majority of respondents chose to skim over this period of their lives during the interviews, perhaps as a result of the traumatic nature of the years between reunification and their flight from Vietnam.

Having made a decision to leave Vietnam, the respondents found themselves in various refugee camps scattered throughout South East Asia<sup>5</sup>. While the majority of refugees from Vietnam entering this country did so via camps in Hong Kong (Dalglish, 1989 and HMSO, 1995) the respondents in this research had spent time in a variety of the camps in the region<sup>6</sup>. The length of time spent in these camps varied between three weeks to around two years. While those who were resettled outside the region within weeks of arriving in the camps<sup>7</sup> did not participate in labour force related activities in the camps, those who remained for a longer period of time undertook various activities. While for some, the acquisition of English took precedence, where the local government allowed it, some respondents chose to seek work. This was not unusual, with research by Dalglish (1989) indicating that in Hong Kong in 1980,

*“These camps were open and refugees housed in them could take up employment. Some 73 per cent of those refugees over 14 years of age found employment.” (p. 33)*

With regard to the respondents in the current research, the types of jobs sought and found while in the camps were significantly poorer (in terms of status, conditions and wages) than those held in Vietnam, although this is perhaps not surprising. Given the perceived temporary nature of the stay in the camp and restrictions on the type of employment allowed in some locations, the respondents appeared to take the pragmatic view that any job would do. Specifically, the respondents chose not to seek skilled or professional jobs, but rather to concentrate on finding unskilled manual work either in factories or in the service sector. None had difficulty in finding work and given the nature of this type of employment, it is not surprising that it was found via informal means, generally

*“just by looking around ..... I go there and ask and that’s it!”*

(Changling ZHAO)

In Thailand, where work outside the camp was forbidden, LE Tri Dien became actively involved in assisting his fellow refugees by acting as a

*“voluntary interpreter, teacher”*

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<sup>5</sup>With the exception of TRAN Thai Linh who came directly to Britain under the family reunion programme.

<sup>6</sup>See Table 9.1

<sup>7</sup> These were generally people who had been rescued at sea. This was significant in terms of opportunities for resettlement since Britain agreed to resettle all those rescued by British vessels.

using his superior knowledge of English to benefit the refugee community.

While these comments illustrate a variety of labour force experiences in the refugee camps, the underlying impression is one of an unwillingness to remain idle. All the respondents who remained in the camps for more than a couple of weeks became involved in labour force activities of one sort or another, be it English classes, acting as voluntary workers or finding paid employment. This indicated a strong desire to remain active and was evident despite their primary goal of securing resettlement in a third country. In subsequent discussions, this characteristic will receive further consideration.

Arrival in Britain saw six of the older respondents spending time at reception centres, while the remaining two went directly to live with family members who were already living in this country. As already mentioned TRAN Thai Linh arrived under the family reunion programme directly from Vietnam and thus did not have any experience, labour force related or otherwise, of camp life. However, the other older respondent who did not experience a British reception centre, Tim PHAM, was originally resettled from a refugee camp in Guam to the USA, before choosing to migrate to Britain in 1988. Thus her labour force career history is significantly different from the other respondents in that it includes experiences in the USA. Significantly, following a short period working as a seamstress, which supported further studies, Tim found herself in mainstream professional employment. She worked in a bank and then became an air stewardess. The rarity of such success was recognised by Tim herself when she explained,

*“it is very rare that oriental people can get a job in a big airline in America... because, various reasons, you know the language and we are short, simple things like that. And it's very difficult training that you get through, that you have to get through. So I was quite pleased, I was one of the three Vietnamese that worked for Eastern Airlines, that is out of 7,000 staff, actually 7,000 flight attendants.”*

Thus, for Tim, her arrival in this country followed a successful experience of resettlement in the USA. As will be discussed later, this appears to have had a significant impact upon her labour force career history in Britain.

Returning to those older respondents who initially resided at reception centres in Britain (for between two and seven months), this period was characterised by a focus on securing suitable housing and improving their English, rather than seeking employment. The respondents generally received little job seeking or career advice while in the reception centres, only gaining help if they actively sought it. Perhaps unusually amongst

refugees, Lam VO had a clear idea about what he thought he needed to know about working in Britain and thus was able to ask for specific assistance,

*“I ask Refugee Action to find out about the possibility of requalifying and they wrote a letter to the Pharmacy Society in London. And afterwards I contacted them.”*

However, for the majority of the respondents such assistance was unavailable and only Lam and Wei Guo LI received specific advice about pursuing a career while in the reception centres. This illustrates the low priority that employment had in the reception programme.

The lack of readily available general advice was particularly worrying given that knowledge of Britain, let alone the employment opportunities it might offer the respondents, was very poor on arrival. This was despite their high levels of education. While Lam had studied some English literature (and evidently American literature!) at University and had an awareness of British pop music,

*“I knew about Emily and Charlotte Bronte, I know about Mark Twain, I know about Charles Dickens ..... And we knew everything about the Rolling Stones, Beatles... they always play Beatles song or something like that, rock and roll.”*

Even his knowledge of employment opportunities was scarce. This meant he was reliant on the reception charity (Refugee Action) being able to put him in touch with the Pharmacy Society. His only consideration while in the reception centre (and for some time after) being to requalify and resume his career.

More commonly, the respondents explained that their knowledge of Britain was very scarce indeed, due to the fact,

*“before 1975 there was no Vietnamese community in the UK. At that time they had only a few hundred students and the embassy, that is all, but no more than that. So people back home, they don't know things about UK. The only thing they know that it is a smoky country. A cold smoky country!”*

(LE Tri Dien)

Given this situation, and the priority placed on securing housing, it is not surprising that when individuals did think about what they might do after leaving the centres, their ideas were often unfocussed. As Dien stated, he decided to look for

*“any kind of work”*

since he had no real idea what was possible. This appears to have been a common difficulty since the respondents had been given no information about job opportunities in Britain while in the refugee camps in South East Asia. Disturbingly, this oversight was sometimes compounded by the flawed image of the employment situation in Britain. Indeed, it was generally only after their arrival that the respondents gradually became aware that unemployment was a serious problem,

*“we think out there, abroad, always jobs. We can get. ...we watch tele, we watch films, always jobs over there. But we didn't realise when we come to England that the supply they go through, not a job a lot, unemployment rate up.”*

(TRINH Dung)

Thus it can be concluded that the initial period spent at the reception centres had only a limited positive impact on the labour force careers of the respondents. Indeed, for the majority, the only labour force related activity undertaken at the centres was to study English. However, given respondent's comments, and details in published literature, even the usefulness of this is questionable. None of the respondents managed to become

*“job ready” as specified in policy guidelines”.*

(Hale, 1991, p.228).

It was only after the respondents had been allocated housing outside of the reception centres, that labour force related activities were more actively pursued. However, after resettlement specialist provision for the refugees was limited to that offered by local volunteers, and assistance in gaining employment appears to have been largely limited to an encouragement to undergo further education. Certainly, while a small number of those who had resided in reception centres initially sought employment, all entered education of one sort or another within a few months of being allocated housing.

As one of few refugees to speak English prior to arrival in Britain, for LE Tri Dien, the initial period of education in Britain took the form of a vocational rather than language course. As he explained,

*“when I first arrived here my concern was to forget everything. Rebuild my life, pick up my life”.*

Finding a job was part of this strategy, but although he was willing to take any kind of work he soon realised that he didn't have

*“any formal qualifications in this country [that he'd have] .. to build a life from the beginning, from the scratch.”*

Thus despite having had a university education and army career in Vietnam, Dien decided that he should start

*“with a very simple thing in order to get back.”*

He therefore decided to enrol upon a City and Guilds course in Electronics. This illustrates a determination to adapt and succeed in the British labour market.

For those who entered the country with limited or no English, such as Changling ZHAO, lessons in the reception centres had not resulted in sufficient English to start seeking work. Recognising this himself, and following the advice of a local volunteer, Changling decided to enrol at college to improve his English before starting to seek employment. As he explains,

*“It was James, he was working with the refugees you understand..... he was aware that ..... the next step would be colleges.”*

The support of the volunteers was therefore crucial in encouraging Changling to pursue his English studies. The experiences of other respondents also illustrate that local volunteers were influential in encouraging further education. For those with better English, college was promoted as a means of either requalifying or gaining recognised qualifications, while for others it was a means of improving their language skills. While it was frequently the respondents themselves who recognised the utility of this, local volunteers and, on occasion job centres, also adopted a similar stance. Living in Bath, Lam VO,

*“ tried to find jobs, any jobs, but the job centre and English people [who] sponsor me say I should improve my English and try to [requalify]. And the job centre at that time said they couldn't find job, so try to study.”*

Lam felt that both the job centre and the volunteers recognised his professional experience, but they knew that without British qualifications he would stand little chance of securing employment. For Lam attending college therefore represented a positive step. However, it had its limitations, since assistance with learning about the British labour market was not forthcoming, and for others, nor was any sort of professional careers advice. Indeed for many of the respondents, encouragement to attend college was the only assistance they received. Help with other aspects of improving their labour force opportunities, for instance how to look for work in Britain, was largely absent.

While Lam was able to secure a place on an appropriate requalification course, other respondents found that the decision to return to college lead to additional difficulties.

Specifically, Changling ZHAO found that no colleges in Sheffield offered appropriate language courses. The

*“college concentrated on foreign students and they didn’t have .. part time courses available for local ethnic minority groups.”*

While Changling was able to overcome this by negotiating with the college,

*“they didn’t have an ESL course .... they haven’t got any part time and I can’t study a full time course because I got a family. I don’t think I can get a grant just doing English. So I need to have a part time course [in order to claim benefits]. But they were quite sympathetic to me, they say well keep quiet, stay in the classroom full time.”*

This was somewhat unusual. While a credit to his perseverance, this case readily illustrates the difficulties which could arise when refugees were expected to rely on mainstream education services which were not equipped to meet their needs.

Following their initial period of further education in Britain, all the respondents chose to begin actively seeking work. While LE Tri Dien found that his City and Guilds qualification and better than average English assisted him in finding a job,

*“I have to find myself so I send my C.V. ....I worked there for two years, Electronics servicing.”*

He was the only one of the older male respondents to find work quickly. For the rest, their period in education could be viewed as less than successful, especially if it was meant to have been a preparation for future employment. Most notably, both Lam VO and Wei Guo LI, who undertook professional requalification courses did not go on to find employment in their old careers<sup>8</sup>. Indeed, neither fully requalified. As Wei explained, the first year of his teacher requalification course resulted in him gaining

*“O level in English and Maths, but they [wanted] to send me to Leicester University for learning, but I didn’t go, I’m too old. Then after a while I come back ... to look for a job.”*

This statement illustrates a concern which was evident during many of the interviews with the older respondents. Perhaps as a result of the combination of their age, the presence of their families, their general desire to re-establish themselves, or financial considerations the respondents talked of a desire to begin earning a living. Although recognition of the importance of education was evident, the respondents who had spent time in British reception camps seemed generally unwilling to commit more than a year

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<sup>8</sup>As a pharmacist and a teacher respectively.

to education, preferring instead to begin actively seeking employment. While it is worth noting that this initial period in education improved English language skills, and thus the utility of undertaking further education to improve language skills must be recognised, the thought of pursuing additional educational training did not immediately appeal to the older male respondents.

The case of the two older female respondents, TRAN Thai Linh and Tim PHAM, who both went directly to live with their families on arrival in Britain, was slightly different. While Tim's case will receive further consideration later, in contrast with the older male respondents, Linh did not limit her initial experience of the British education system to around a year. Instead she pursued a succession of courses over a period of four years starting with basic English and leading to a B.T.E.C. business course. While it could be surmised that resettlement directly with her family (and the resulting stability), may have contributed to this situation, it should also be noted that although Linh had held a professional job in Vietnam, she had only graduated from university about a year before leaving Vietnam. Thus her relative youth, and direct entry to Britain from Vietnam may also have contributed to her willingness to extend her studies. Furthermore, the link between her professional experience (as a book keeper) in Vietnam and the B.T.E.C. business course she pursued are clear.

Having stated that the older male respondents all chose to start seeking employment after about a year in education, it is necessary to consider the kind of jobs they found. However, since the focus of this research is on labour force, and not merely employment experiences, their activities between leaving college and securing employment also require further consideration.

All the older male respondents were registered as unemployed following the completion of an initial period of education in Britain. While this period of education had led to improved English skills for all, few of the respondents (other than LE Tri Dien) had developed a clearer idea of what kind of employment they would seek. This is indicative of the lack of careers counselling received by the respondents. Moreover, while Wei Guo LI and Lam VO had received some counselling and subsequently enrolled on requalification courses, these had been unsuccessful and the initial period of education had led to more, not less, uncertainty about what they might do.

Given the combination of continued uncertainty about what employment opportunities to seek, yet an eagerness to find a job, it is worth considering the different approaches adopted by the respondents in response to their situation. Two of the respondents became involved in services offered by mainstream providers to the British unemployed population. Changling ZHAO following a Wider Opportunities course and PHAM Tong a TOPS course. Neither man gained experience in a field they felt suited to and equally both failed to find employment on completing their course. In both cases, the success of these training programmes was undermined by circumstances which were specific to the refugee circumstances in which the respondents found themselves. Namely learning in a foreign language (English), adjusting to life in Britain and coping with the separation from immediate family, to name a few mentioned by the respondents. The fact that neither course was designed for refugees, or even recent immigrants to Britain, meant that the respondents were not able to benefit fully. Thus the lack of specific specialist labour force assistance for the refugees is, once again obvious, for reliance on mainstream services did little to help the respondents.

Moreover, without appropriate specialist careers advice, Changling followed one inappropriate course by seeking entirely unsuitable training. Talking about the period after his Wider Opportunities course he states,

*“I did apply for a training course... it was to work in hospital, as a hospital porter. To work in the theatre, handling you know, knives and forks [he laughs nervously]. I was accepted, actually accepted for the training course, and [pause] eh [pause] the day they ask me to start the training, then I suddenly realised that for some reason I say no.*

*K: Do you remember why you turned it down?*

*“I remember why I turned it down. It never bothered me before. The fact that in Vietnam, during the war, seen blood, even dead bodies a lot, and all that. It never bothered me at all, I think. I don't know why it suddenly started. I don't think I would like to face seeing blood again. You know if you are working in the theatre, you know, you are bound to see this every day. And I didn't like to face this again. So that's why I turned it down.”*

It is entirely possible that had Changling received some form of careers advice, he would have realised at an earlier stage that his experiences in Vietnam meant he was emotionally unsuited to this line of work.

The absence of specialist assistance for the refugees and inability of mainstream services to meet their needs increased the importance of the role of local volunteers. While a

majority of respondents felt they received little help from these local volunteers, the so-called sponsors, a minority felt their assistance was substantial. For example, Lam VO talked of help in hearing about job opportunities,

*“English sponsor, the English sponsor look at the newspaper and came to my house if there was a job they thought suitable for me.”*

It would appear that this contact with his English sponsor was significant since Lam eventually heard about a pharmacy post at a hospital near where he lived. He applied for and was offered the job, although for circumstances which will be discussed later he never took the post. Thus for him, the role of the volunteer sponsors should not be underestimated.

For another respondent, TRINH Dung, assistance came not from English sponsors, but from other refugees from Vietnam. Aware that few people from Vietnam living in Birmingham had jobs, but that a friend in Bury St Edmunds did, Dung chose to migrate in search of work soon after he completed a basic ESL course. As he explained,

*“knowing that one of my friends had a job.... I phone him up and say “You able to get me a job?” he say “why not you come up here and see what happen”. And when I did go up there, there was not a job. So I, because it was on a trading estate, so I knock on a few firms, even myself not good at English at the time, I knock at the firms and ask for personnel officers. “I need a job” and things like that, “any vacancy” .... A few application forms then, and I got a few offers, and I accept one job as a factory worker.”*

In this case it was perseverance, a willingness to accept any job and the advice of a working friend that led to employment, rather than use of mainstream services. Interestingly, migration so soon after resettlement as in this case, is also evidence of the massive secondary migration amongst the community identified by Hale (1991).

With regard to both Lam VO and TRINH Dung, it is also worth noting that both heard about the vacancies via informal rather than formal means. This illustrates how important contact with people who are aware of such openings is. Assistance from mainstream service providers had nothing to do with either man's identification of the job opportunity, instead it was contact with “ordinary” working people that proved instrumental in securing an offer of employment.

As was stated earlier, the experiences of the two women in this group of respondents were somewhat different to the men. TRAN Thai Linh choose to remain in education

for a longer period of time, and this evidently paid dividends. On completing her B.T.E.C. course she was able to find a job directly related to her studies,

*“It was in an office, in an accounting company, I work with figures eight hours a day.”*

While her acquisition of British qualifications undoubtedly assisted her in gaining this position, the time spent at college had meant that Linh had developed a sizeable group of friends and acquaintances. This proved important when it came to seek employment as is illustrated by the fact that she found the job

*“through friends. Because she was leaving, so I work instead of her.”*

While Linh’s experience of the British mainstream education service was therefore positive and did lead to employment, it should still be recognised that her job was significantly lower in status than that she had held in Vietnam. Additionally, it should not be forgotten that it was only around five years after her arrival in Britain that she found this job.

The experiences of Tim PHAM have already been identified as unique amongst this group of respondents. Having lived in the USA for 13 years before choosing to migrate to Britain, her situation on arrival here was somewhat different. Not only was she fluent in English, but she had also acquired a considerable amount of work experience in the US. As such she had little difficulty finding a job in a bank, although she also suffered a drop in status from her previous jobs. As she explains, it was

*“easy for me because I have many years of .. experience... but .. employment in the UK only want people like 16, 17. They pay them very low money. Because although I get the job easy with my experience, they didn’t want people my age.”*

This comment raises an issue that was alluded to by other respondents. Even though Tim’s experience was recognised, she was only offered employment at a much lower level, despite holding banking qualifications from the USA. Thus she had to take a significant drop in her income. For those respondents who had first to learn English, then gain a recognised qualification before standing a chance of securing employment, the investment, in terms of time, resulted in relatively minor financial and job satisfaction returns. Indeed they were unlikely ever again to attain employment at a status commensurate with that which they had held in Vietnam. Given this situation, it was perhaps unsurprising that many of the older respondents were unwilling to devote more

than a year to education after their arrival in Britain, preferring instead to take their chances in the job market.

The discussion of the types of labour force activities the older respondents found themselves in after an initial period of education illustrates a number of points. While, the previously discussed unwillingness to remain idle is very evident, there is also a sense of frustration that their activities frequently failed to result in the desired outcome, a good (or for some, any) job. For instance, neither Wei Guo LI nor Lam VO requalified despite following requalification courses. Both would have needed to spend a further year studying before they would receive British qualifications which would allow them to resume their careers as a teacher and pharmacist. At that time, so recently after their arrival in this country, they saw such an investment as excessive. Yet with hindsight Lam admitted,

*“I should have accepted the job at the hospital and work over there for one or two years, improve my English and come back and resit the examination. I am, I make a very big mistake.”*

Many others remain unemployed, while those few who secured employment in the same field in which they had worked in Vietnam experienced a drop in the status of the work they did.

Given this context of a labour force experience which was dominated in the early years of resettlement either by unemployment, inappropriate training or a low status job, it is now necessary to consider how the respondents came to work in their present positions within the VCA. As a first point it must be recognised that while some of the respondents had been employed by community groups for a considerable length of time (>13 years), others had become involved more recently.

Four of the older respondents had been involved in working for Vietnamese Community groups for between 12 and 13 years. While there are a number of similarities in the way in which they became involved in VCA work, there were also differences. While Changling ZHAO and Lam VO had spent their career working for a single organisation, LE Tri Dien and Wei Guo LI had both worked for various associations. For all four, their involvement with the community groups began relatively soon after their arrival in Britain.

In the case of Changling and Lam, government funding (in the form of Manpower Services Commission / Community Programme money) led to the establishment of a

community organisation in the areas in which they lived<sup>9</sup>. Even before this, both men had become a source of informal support for their respective communities as a result of their superior English language skills. Thus with the establishment of the associations, they were obvious candidates for employment. As Changling explains,

*“before the job started I was quite actively involved with the community. At that time my spoken English was not that good, but just to manage a little as a volunteer, going round and helping people who still have a problem with the spoken language. So you know that how I get the job, when the centre open, I was offered.”*

Since he was officially unemployed at this time (although he was studying part time) the offer of a paid job was too good to miss and he therefore dropped his studies to begin working full time as a paid community worker. It must therefore be considered that some of those who became community workers did so because of their failure to secure alternative employment, though Changling’s commitment to the community is still evident. However for Lam, an active decision to reject mainstream employment was required. Having just been offered a job as a pharmacy assistant in a local hospital he explains,

*“I was going to sign the contract and suddenly we receive money from the MSC, Manpower Services to run the office. And the Vietnamese community say if I work for the hospital there will be no one! Because at the time most Vietnamese here are from North Vietnam and their English is zero, so they need someone who can speak a little English. I was in the army so I have some American advisors so I can at least speak a little bit of English. So I started working here and I didn’t sign the contract.”*

Thus his feeling of duty towards the community overcame his desire to resume his career in pharmacy. Indeed, as has been discussed earlier, Lam admitted to having some regrets about the decision he made.

This feeling of duty towards community members was common to many of the respondents. Indeed, for LE Tri Dien, this sense of duty led him to give up his job in electronics to engage in community work. Although his City and Guilds qualification had led to a job which

*“I love.. , but the problem.. I left because I felt that the work for the community is more important.”*

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<sup>9</sup>Sheffield and Bristol respectively

This indicates a strong commitment to assisting his fellow refugees, a commitment that is also evident in the fact that despite securing only a short contract to work with this organisation, Dien chose not to return to the electronics industry but to migrate around the country seeking further employment with refugees from Vietnam.

*“I move from one job to another because I want to be employed, I want to be useful.....when I work [for the community] I can set an example to my countrymen.”*

This experience of working for a variety of Vietnamese organisations was not unique, Wei Guo LI also worked for a succession of associations and indeed was instrumental in establishing a number. Thus both men participated in secondary migration (as identified by Hale (1991)) for employment purposes. Their many years working for the community being accrued at various locations. It must also be recognised that while for both men it was job insecurity that necessitated these moves, Changling ZHAO and Lam VO (who remained in the same VCA throughout their careers) also found their jobs insecure. For they too were employed on short term contracts.

The other four older respondents had been employed by a VCA for between two to eight years. After an extended period of unemployment influenced by family commitments, PHAM Tong formalised the informal support he had been offering refugees from Vietnam in Coventry with his appointment as a community worker eight years ago. However, the remaining three older respondents had been employed within their VCA for a shorter time and had held jobs prior to their formal involvement with Vietnamese associations.

Following a period of employment in a bank, Tim PHAM, who had previously lived in the USA, chose to resign and work for the community association in Cardiff. She offered a number of motivations for this,

*“this is much more money, more interesting, it’s worthwhile and very rewarding.”*

This illustrates both her views on working for the community and suggests that these were not rewards which she gained as a bank employee. From this statement, along with a further comment about her employment experiences,

*“I think .. you have to .. believe in what you are doing, and the important part, you have to LIKE what you are doing”,*

it is possible to surmise that she felt undervalued in her previous job. Indeed, despite holding USA banking qualifications and having experience, she had only been given a

relatively junior position in the British bank. Such a feeling of undervalue, associated with her positive experiences of providing voluntary support to refugees from Vietnam may well explain her decision to leave her job and take the VCA position. Furthermore, it should be noted how she heard about the VCA position,

*“actually I was head hunted.”*

This blunt admission succinctly expresses not only her own situation, but also those of many more of the respondents. For as has already been shown, many of the respondents were asked by the refugee community to take jobs in community organisations as they became available.

While Tim moved directly from the bank to her community job, both TRINH Dung and TRAN Thai Linh had experienced some periods out of work before gaining employment within a refugee association. Thus, as with Changling ZHAO, it can be argued that it was the failure to secure other work, that led to their employment within a community association.

For Linh, it was unemployment which originated in discrimination that encouraged a move to community based employment. Working in an office she found that

*“the line manager is discriminate, ...but I don't want to tell the managing director about it. I just left. I just tell him that I move away and that I don't want to go, I can't work here anymore.”*

It is worth noting that living in Portsmouth, Linh was very much a visible minority amongst a white population. Once unemployed, on hearing about the opportunity of employment within the community, Linh decided to apply,

*“one of my friends, they told me.. there was a vacancy.... I like .. dealing with people, I like to talk to people, and also I feel the job very flexible, very reliable, dealing with people, communicating with people, that's what I like.”*

Thus, it is possible to surmise that given her experiences of discrimination in mainstream employment and subsequent unemployment, Linh was attracted to the VCA by an opportunity for increased security - both in terms of a wage, and in the lessened threat of racial discrimination. Indeed, in Portsmouth, the community association was likely to be one of the few situations in which Linh's racial background would be unquestionably accepted. It is also worth noting that, like for many of the respondents, news of this opportunity arose from informal, rather than formal sources.

Similarly to Linh, TRINH Dung's move to employment in a community association can be interpreted as being as a result of failure to secure suitable employment elsewhere. However, his route to community worker was both more protracted and circuitous than that of any of the other older respondents. Originally resettled in Birmingham, Dung had gone to Bury St Edmunds to seek employment. After this he worked in a succession of factories situated in different towns across England<sup>10</sup>. He rationalised this as a specific strategy which he had adopted to enable him to integrate into British life,

*"the main thing is that I prefer working with English, so I can learn more experience. I always wanted to integrate myself into English community more than stick with my own people.. Because of the cultural side, I am old enough to know what my culture is and to act with them, but not to stay with the community all the time."*

However, after a number of years of this type of employment, he sought something more challenging. Given a family background in self employment, Dung decided to leave the chicken factory in Ipswich and enter business for himself,

*"I set up my own business, I go through Enterprise Agency .. I go it by myself, so I set up my shop, it's running for over two years."*

This business was selling his own designer knitwear and although it was a financial success, living in Ipswich began to place a series of strains upon Dung and his family. Although he had initially felt that it was good to integrate into the wider English community (and still stresses the positive side of integration), as time progressed, his isolation from other refugees from Vietnam became an increasing problem.

*"You look back to the entertainment side. And you think "OH GOD" there is no Vietnamese around, no Chinese around here to socialise with, all around you is English! And I thought I feel a bit like I need friends around to talk to, to share problem, so I move back."*

While his move back to Birmingham alleviated the social isolation<sup>11</sup>, efforts to re-establish his knitwear business failed. Dung attributed this to the different economic and social compositions of Birmingham and Ipswich. With the collapse of the business, he resorted to a series of jobs within the ethnic sector of the labour market, taking jobs which are popular with refugees from Vietnam<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>The locations and jobs he did included the following. Bury St Edmunds (making typewriter ribbons), Liverpool (in a sweet factory) and Ipswich (in a chicken factory).

<sup>11</sup>See Figure 5.4 and section 5.5.2.4. The West Midlands has the greatest population of refugees from Vietnam outside of London.

<sup>12</sup>See table 7.3

*“I follow the working environment .. of the Vietnamese people.... some them like to try to work in factory, machinist, making clothes. So I join up to work for three months. But I thought NO, this is no good, I can't consider myself sitting there by a sewing machine and doing it. So I get out and get a job, I could not believe it, I go and work for a Chinese restaurant!”*

Neither of these jobs lasted long, and following the failure of another attempt at self-employment, Dung decided to formalise the voluntary work he had been doing with the community,

*“I always helped the Vietnamese people... So I always think helping my people is the main thing. So I go out any time they want me. So when I came down here, I thought OK, lets go back to work for the Vietnamese, there's a post and I apply and I get it.”*

While the formalisation of his activities could be considered a wise move, Dung himself admits that he found himself in this line of work

*“because other things had failed.”*

Having discussed the labour force careers of the older respondents, that of the younger community workers is now considered.

### **9.3.2 Younger respondents**

Any discussion of the labour force careers of the younger respondents, must begin with a consideration of their education experiences. Although all the younger respondents had experienced disruption to their education in Vietnam, not all arrived in Britain as children. While three respondents (BUI Hue, Huahua CHEN and XiaoLi WU) were amongst the first group of refugees to come to Britain and arrived as children, the other three (TRUONG Van Ha, NGUYEN Thi PHUONG and Mai TON) entered Britain at a later date as young adults.

The education of those who arrived as children had been severely disrupted. For Huahua CHEN, her family's flight from Vietnam when she was four and subsequent 5 years spent in a refugee camp awaiting resettlement, resulted in her arriving in Britain having had virtually no formal education. Other than English classes provided in the camp in Hong Kong, she had never been to school. For XiaoLi WU and BUI Hue, attending school in Vietnam had been possible, although the war resulted in disruption. For both women, this disruption continued with the flight from Vietnam and time spent in refugee camps, although both came to Britain after only a few months wait. Finally, while their arrival here heralded the beginning of a stable education for all three women, the wait to

be resettled out of the reception camps resulted in an initial period of further disruption to their education.

It should not be assumed that because the three women left Vietnam as children that their labour force careers only began after their arrival in Britain. While XiaoLi WU had not worked in Vietnam (despite being the oldest of the three women), both Huahua CHEN and BUI Hue had assisted in running family businesses. As Huahua explains, she worked from when she was

*“four years old. Selling tea in the street, those miniature stores. Helping my mum.”*

Hue also remembers helping her parents run a business until

*“later on my father in jail. Everything go with him, the government has taken away and then we down to nothing.”*

When asked about employment within the refugee camps, only XiaoLi had worked, being employed in a factory as a packer, a job she had been told about by friends. The importance of these experiences of employment at a young age is difficult to assess, although it is possible that they did help to instil a work ethic and expectation of working into the respondents.

Given their age on arrival in Britain, all three women spent a considerable time within the British education system. The advantages of this are clear, for not only did they gain British qualifications, but they also became fluent in English relatively quickly due to their close and extended contact with English speakers. While this improved their English skills and helped their studies, it also led to the respondents taking an active role in supporting their families. As Huahua explains,

*“my family have lots of problems with admin. work, lots of arrears, lots of mix ups. Lots of rent arrears mix up.... every time I ring up, knowing English.”*

This assistance to her family extended beyond acting as family spokesperson to financial support. An element itself which was aided by Huahua's interaction with English people,

*“we used to be in a group, you know with all my English friends, we all go job hunting together..... my first job I was .. shy, I actually had to be encouraged by a friend to go in and get the job. But luckily my first job, I chose McDonalds which is the easiest to get in.”*

Thus her friendship with English classmates encouraged her to look for work in the same way that other teenagers did. Huahua suggested this herself, although she did add a caveat;

*“Due to my background I am more determined than they are... that is the only difference.”*

Expanding upon this, she states that all the children in her family tried to find work in order to supplement her family’s income, which was solely derived from benefits.

For BUI Hue socialising with English people as a teenager also proved influential in forming an entry point into the British labour force. She explains that within two years of arriving she had two part time jobs in addition to pursuing O levels. While she actively sought the second of her jobs, the first arose by chance,

*“One day I help my friend in cafe shop... after that, my boss, he employ me straight away... I work for him for 6 years.”*

Thus it would appear, that although these women suffered a considerable amount of disruption to their early education’s, their involvement in the compulsory British education system proved successful. This success was not only in terms of academic achievement, but also in that it acted to guide the respondents into the part-time labour market.

The other three younger respondents arrived in Britain as young adults between 1986 and 1987. TRUONG Van Ha and Mai TON came under the family reunion scheme, while NGUYEN Thi Phuong arrived with refugee status. Similarly to the other younger respondents, Mai, Ha and Phuong all had their education disrupted while in Vietnam, although for Mai this disruption did not prevent her from completing her secondary education before fleeing from North Vietnam to Hong Kong. However, for Ha and Phuong, who both lived in South Vietnam, the disruption to their education was more severe, and neither completed school despite remaining in Vietnam beyond school leaving age. Phuong explains,

*“I was very good at school... I stopped learning just because when the North Vietnamese took over the South. You know I love school so much. But you know again, they told me I had to learn the politics as well... that’s why I was fed up.. I couldn’t learn politics, so I left school.”*

It is therefore evident that disruption to education was not confined to the period of war itself, but continued for many years after. Phuong’s comment reveals that the fall of the

South to the Northern Vietnamese resulted in considerable ideological changes for education in the South<sup>13</sup>. The introduction of Northern political teachings into schools was significant and Phuong's decision to leave school in protest was a result of this.

With regard to employment in Vietnam, all three respondents had been involved in family businesses, although the degree of involvement varied, primarily as a result of the amount of time spent in education. Since disruption to schooling had been less for Mai her involvement in the family business was minor as her time was occupied by school. Additionally, she left Vietnam shortly after leaving school at 16. However, with more disruption to his schooling Ha became actively involved in running the family coffee shop from a young age and continued with this until he left Vietnam aged 22. Phuong's experiences were broader, encompassing a range of activities in a variety of family businesses. Most notably, as a young child she was employed as an entertainer, travelling to Laos and Cambodia with a family show. Later her involvement became more mainstream, assisting in a number of shops, before becoming self employed.

*"I had my own restaurant and I ran it myself."*

While Ha arrived in Britain directly from Vietnam, and Phuong spent only 9 months in a refugee camp, Mai lived in a closed Hong Kong camp for four years. During this time she worked in the camp nursery school. Having initially concentrated on learning English, she heard about the job from some friends and was successful in gaining the post.

By the time of their arrival in Britain, these three respondents had gained a range of employment experiences, including that of working in a family business. All had been active participants in the labour force for a number of years.

By 1987 all six younger respondents were resident in Britain. Following the completion of their compulsory education, Huahua CHEN and XiaoLi WU both embarked on a single (1 year) A level course before progressing to B.T.E.C. courses in the business field. The other respondent who had attended school in Britain, BUI Hue, moved directly from school to a similar B.T.E.C. course. The choice of business / IT B.T.E.C. courses by all three women is worthy of some consideration. Given a history of participation in family-run businesses in Vietnam, an interest in business is unremarkable.

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<sup>13</sup>It should be remembered that one of the older respondents, Wei Guo LI, was involved in implementing these changes.

Indeed, family influence was mentioned by Huahua as having a direct bearing on her decision to undertake a business course,

*“I did A level art and textiles and all sorts, all to do with design. And that’s where my mum influenced me into business. She says that providing you are rich, I could open a boutique for you, but if not I hope you have enough part time money to set up your own boutique.... And .. even though I am really interested in art and design, I realise how big the society is and how big the business world is. And computing start to come in at that time and I realise that if I want to have a career that will go far and satisfy my potential, I should pick something that has a vast market. And that is business. I realise that fashion uses doesn’t have the background to be in it. ‘Cause a lot of talented fashion designers never really got famous did they?”*

It would therefore appear that for all three women, parental influence directed them towards, or at least encouraged a move into, business courses, although information about B.T.E.C. primarily came from school. Careers counselling and open days were mentioned as sources from which they became aware of the courses on offer. However, the nature of the information available must be questioned since XiaoLi found the course to be significantly different to what she had expected,

*“At the time I think computer may be interesting so I go for that. But half way through I found it just boring! Well, it’s nice for practical terms, but in learning the theoretical is not my type to be honest. I like something practical so I choose to drop out.”*

Consequently she left after the first year of a two year course and started to seek work. While XiaoLi therefore entered the full time labour market without a B.T.E.C. qualification, both Huahua and Hue completed their courses and thus had qualifications to support their search for work. Indeed, Huahua followed the B.T.E.C. course with a degree in Business Administration.

The kinds of employment found by these women will be considered simultaneously with those of the other younger respondents. It is therefore necessary to first consider the initial labour force activities of those other respondents after their arrival in Britain. On arrival, NGUYEN Thi Phuong, Mai TON and TRUONG Van Ha all spent an initial period (upto 2 years) learning or improving their English. Ha and Mai went immediately to live with their families<sup>14</sup> and followed a succession of formal courses. Phuong initially

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<sup>14</sup>The entered Britain under the family reunion scheme

lived in a reception centre before moving in with an English man<sup>15</sup>. She never attended English classes and learnt the language informally.

Given that the older respondents generally started to actively seek work after a single year, it is interesting to consider why these younger respondents felt able to spend longer perfecting their English. While their age may have had some influence, the inference is that settlement in a family situation resulted in a greater awareness of the importance of mastering English before seeking work or further studies. In addition to this, settlement with their family was likely to have provided an element of financial and emotional support which was conducive to them furthering their language and education.

While Ha chose to study for GCSE's and A levels on a part time basis, both Phuong and Mai eventually found themselves on training courses for the unemployed. For Mai, the Manpower Services Commission offered the opportunity to undertake an office skills course, while Phuong underwent a similar programme under the auspicious of Employment Training. While training for the unemployed had proved to be a largely negative experience for the older respondents, both Mai and Phuong perceived greater benefits from their experiences. A consideration of these experiences thus leads into a wider discussion of the types of employment found by all the younger respondents.

After mastering English Phuong spent four months on Employment Training learning general office skills including typing and administration duties. For her, the ET programme initially proved highly successful since it led to her first job in Britain. As she explains,

*“the people where I trained, they recommended me to the boss. That I was very good to do the admin. work and so on. That’s why I got that place.”*

Although Mai was not so fortunate, in that her training course was followed by a period of unemployment, the course did allow her to gain skills which shortly afterwards led to a job. Having also learnt office skills, Mai was encouraged by a British friend to enrol at an agency, and having passed their typing test, she was soon offered work. Thus for both women, the experience of mainstream training courses for the unemployed was positive. The difference between these experiences and those of the older respondents is open to discussion, although it would appear that not only did the women receive

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<sup>15</sup>They continue to live as man and wife.

training in a field in which there was a larger demand for workers<sup>16</sup>, but the prevailing economic conditions also benefited the women to a greater extent. Additionally, the assistance of a British person was evident for both women, in the form of a friend for Mai and the training staff for Phuong.

Mai's experience of using an employment agency in order to gain work was not unique amongst the respondents. XiaoLi WU, who went to school in Britain, signed up with an agency following her decision to abandon her B.T.E.C. course. In searching for a job which would use the practical skills she'd gained during her year at college, XiaoLi sought office work. Since she was aware of office agencies she quickly approached one and was offered work. When asked how she knew about such agencies she replied,

*"I looked to find out a lot of information. So in my house I got loads of leaflets and things like that."*

Thus, in XiaoLi's case, it was her general search for information that led her to the agency rather than the prompting of another person.

Both Huahua CHEN and BUI Hue completed B.T.E.C. business courses after attending school in Britain. While growing up in this country, both had also become actively involved in the labour market, holding part time jobs while continuing their studies. Thus their involvement in labour force activities extended a long time prior to their beginning to search for a full time job. As Huahua explains, for her family the work ethic was especially strong,

*"I didn't want to become a statistic. And I normally get angry... When I was young, or when we all came here my family suffer a lot. Racism, within the area, within our school, within every environment that we were in, we suffered it. Few, even black and Indian people say to us "go back to your country" and I say to myself "who are you to tell me?" You know? And its from then on I says, that I am not going to be one of those that they're going to say is a typical refugee, that has to walk into a social security department. I was determined, my whole family was, my parents brought us up in a way to make us see it differently. They say that the government has brought us here but we not going to live off them. We are going to earn our own living just like we did in Vietnam, but its harder then and we manage it. So even here we can, and basically I would say that the most important thing that made us the way we are now is the bringing up by my parents."*

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<sup>16</sup> Changling ZHAO and PHAM Tong had done car mechanics and painting and decorating respectively, on their courses for the unemployed.

Given such an approach and attitude it is perhaps unsurprising that Huahua was determined to pursue her education further (she followed the B.T.E.C. course with a degree in Business Administration), yet continue to work part time.

For Hue the B.T.E.C. course also led university, although unlike Huahua, she did not continue with the course. A year into her degree Hue decided to leave, although previous B.T.E.C. work experience meant she was able to find a job quickly. Unfortunately, redundancy followed within months due to the collapse of the BCCI Bank. Hue then became actively involved in voluntary work, being employed firstly to work with Old Age Pensioners (OAP), before taking a job in a school. When asked about her motivations for taking these posts, Hue revealed that she was drawn to working with elderly people as her own Grandma had been

*“left behind [in Vietnam] and she died a few years later when I left. And when I see the old people I remember my grandma.”*

She also referred to helping others who, like her, had difficult lives,

*“when I am young I always dream to help people because I have a difficult background like them.”*

It was thus the combination of an altruistic outlook and the distress of losing her Grandma that led to Hue doing voluntary work with the elderly. However, after a year Hue was invited to apply for a job in a school. During a social event she met the Head Teacher of a local school and was asked

*“to apply to become a support teacher.”*

She therefore left the OAP project and worked within the school for a further two and a half years. Finally, it is worth noting that in both the OAP and school projects Hue was involved with the general community and not the community of refugees from Vietnam.

After completing his A levels, TRUONG Van Ha was eager to find a job and decided against continuing his education in favour of seeking work. Living in London, after only a short period of unemployment, Ha found work in a

*“small translation express company. And my job was as a courier and general office assistant.”*

When asked about how he found this job, Ha explained that it was

*“through a friend. I had a friend who was English and he introduces me to the company.”*

In many ways Ha's experiences were similar to those of BUI Hue who was also helped to find work by her English acquaintances. Indeed, for many of the younger respondents it would appear that the contact they achieved with members of the British community proved influential in assisting them to find their first jobs. This was certainly the case for Ha, Mai, Huahua, Hue and Phuong. This has been evident in much of the preceding discussion and illustrates how integration, or at least significant interaction, with the British community had a positive affect upon the labour force experiences of these younger respondents.

Having examined the early experiences of the younger respondents, it is now necessary to consider how they came to be employed by Vietnamese community groups. In common with many of the older respondents, working for a community group can be understood to be the formalisation of past activities for some of the younger interviewees. For instance, Huahua's comments indicate that as a child she supported her family by providing language support, acting as family spokesperson, and financial support through part-time jobs. This assistance extended beyond her immediate family even while she was at school. As she explains, her family sought help from a local English volunteer who recognised that Huahua was

*“very talkative, and very eager to help people and he say whether I want to work voluntarily translating, so I did... I actually enjoyed it..... if I have more advantage than other people I just can give something back to them.”*

Thus, in common with many of the older respondents, Huahua's involvement with a VCA was not her first step towards providing support for her fellow refugees. From an early stage she felt obliged to offer support to other members of the Vietnamese community. Huahua's involvement with her present community group arose while she was at university. Following the successful completion of her B.T.E.C. course, she enrolled for a Business Administration degree, and decided to continue working for the community. Learning of the association, she approached them and was employed on a part time basis, though as she explained,

*“I will be applying for full time at the end of the summer when I graduate. That also depends on whether they have the finance to employ me on full time.”*

While Huahua's involvement with the association thus arose from an early commitment to the refugee community, for BUI Hue this commitment only developed following more

recent events. During her year at university, she went on an university Vietnamese Society trip to Vietnam. This had a profound effect on Hue and she has subsequently

*“got deeper into the Vietnamese society.... At the moment I am waiting for the Vietnamese government to give me permission to go back.”*

Meanwhile she heard about a job opportunity within a Vietnamese organisation and following the encouragement of her friends successfully applied. She sees the job as

*“a very big step for me to get close to.. Vietnamese Society.”*

Thus in her case, the visit to Vietnam has acted as a catalyst for her greater involvement with the Vietnamese community, both in the UK and in Vietnam. What is significant in this case, is that until these events, Hue’s experiences of life in Britain appear to have been dominated by strong links to the wider British society, rather than the community from Vietnam. Specifically, she held a number of part time jobs outside of the ethnic sector and talked often of “English” friends. Indeed, even her return to Vietnam was instigated by an “English” friend. It would therefore appear that the visit to Vietnam acted to re-establish the Vietnamese element of her identity. Only after this occurred did she take an active role in the community. This appears to have become a significant element in her life for, going beyond the personal perspective, she talked of encouraging other people from Vietnam to become more

*“involved in the Vietnamese culture.”*

While employment training had initially proved successful in helping NGUYEN Thi Phuong to find a job, similarly to Hue, the collapse of the BCCI bank led to redundancy. Although she had worked for two years, Phuong found it difficult to find another job and was unemployed for nearly two years. However, this is not to say that she was inactive. In common with many of the older respondents, Phuong was unwilling to remain idle and filled her time actively looking for work via mainstream sources such as newspapers and the job centre. Additionally she undertook a series of evening classes, including professional financial qualifications. As she explains,

*“My ambition. I like to do the accounts... I wish in the future for 10 years more time, things like that, I will learn, learn, learn. And I wish to have an office myself to do with chartered accountants.”*

The evening classes, were therefore, in pursuit of this aim. Unlike the majority of the respondents, Phuong’s involvement with her compatriots did not arise due to a feeling of commitment to the community. Indeed, she admits that financial considerations were paramount in leading her to work for a Vietnamese organisation,

*“to be honest with you, we are realistic, because the salary to work for the community is very high compared with companies and things like that. I mean if I haven’t got a job here, I would go to find somewhere else, I mean I like to work for the English companies a lot because I learn a lot from them as well. But at the moment I got stuck, because if you compare the salary, of course you stay here to get the money.”*

Expanding upon this, Phuong explained that prior to joining the VCA, despite living in Birmingham<sup>17</sup>, she had little contact with other people from Vietnam,

*“suddenly I heard that we have a Vietnamese community around here, so my friend asked me will you come to the Vietnamese community to look for a job. Then I came here and it was an English gentleman who worked here and he helped me and he say we have a job at this place, would you like to apply for it? I say yes and I just tried and I just got it.”*

She had never envisaged working for the community prior to this.

Although TRUONG Van Ha had found work relatively quickly after completing his A level, his job with the translating company lasted just seven months before he was also made redundant. Redundancy, it would therefore seem, was a common experience amongst the younger respondents, with Phuong and Hue also suffering the same fate. Thus when the respondents were able to find work, they suffered a degree of insecurity, something that has been discussed with regard to the older respondents experiences of working for the community. Having lost his job, Ha quickly secured another post, this time as a baker. Again, friends were influential,

*“a friend told me about the bakery and so I just went there and asked the manager to give me a job.”*

However, he soon realised that he was unsuited to the work and after only four months made the decision to leave and resume his education. Having experienced two fairly manual jobs, he had become determined to attend university with the view to eventually obtaining a more professional type job. While such sentiments are commendable, graduation has, as yet, not led to the type of work envisaged by Ha. As he explains,

*“After leaving university I got no job at all. I been looking for a job since then and I’ve been trying to do many things, like you know, doing part time course and like voluntary work<sup>18</sup>.”*

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<sup>17</sup>See figure 5.4. Birmingham is home to the largest population of people from Vietnam outside of London.

<sup>18</sup>It should be noted that Ha is the only respondent to be working on a voluntary basis within a VCA.

This voluntary work has been within the community from Vietnam, helping out where ever necessary and assisting others who have poorer English. His involvement in the community centre arose partly through a desire to assist fellow refugees, but in practical terms was also an attempt to avoid the boredom which is often associated with unemployment. While actively trying to improve his chance of finding work by pursuing part time studies, unemployment has led Ha to lower his expectations about what kind of paid work he might eventually find,

*“Before I finish my degree course I used to dream of having a nice and well paid job, but now because, I think I should be a bit more realistic about the job situation. I can’t expect too much.”*

While Ha recognises that graduate unemployment is a problem which faces many individuals, he does feel that his situation is more difficult than most. Specifically, he sees discrimination (on the basis of ethnicity and acquired rather than natural English) as the main reasons for this.

After completing the Manpower Services Commission training in office skills Mai TON initially found work through an agency. The English friend who had introduced Mai to this agency continued to her offer support and after some months, she heard of a vacancy in a stationery store and encouraged Mai to apply, this helping her to secure more permanent employment. As has been illustrated in the previous discussion, the assistance of English friends and acquaintances can be of benefit to individuals from Vietnam, and for Mai this was certainly the case. Following a year at the stationery store, Mai was eager to move on and was advised by her friend as to which companies were the best to work for. In particular, she remembers being advised against working for Toys ‘R’ Us and positively encouraged to apply to Boots the Chemist.

This proved to be sound advice since after taking a job with Boots, Mai was offered the chance to receive “in store” training to become a Computer Sales advisor. Mai stayed with Boots for two years before reaching the decision that she didn’t want to be a sales assistant anymore, preferring to look for work of a more socially useful nature<sup>19</sup>. It was at this point that the assistance of her English friend became less important and connections within the community of refugees from Vietnam living in London took precedence as Mai found work in a community organisation. However, while this work filled her desire for a more rewarding job, it was only part-time and Mai had to seek

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<sup>19</sup>This was a comment made by Mai herself.

additional part-time work to supplement her income. She thus chose to combine sales work with the community job. After two years of this arrangement, through her work Mai heard that the community association in Woking was seeking a full time community worker. She applied and was successful, finally being able to leave the sales post.

Similarly to Mai, XiaoLi WU found her first full time job via an agency. Having grown up in Britain, XiaoLi appeared to have developed a sound strategy for finding work, using a variety of methods. Having decided to abandon her B.T.E.C. course she initially looked for office type employment by going to

*“the employment service, and register with all agency available which is providing office work.... Also look in the newspaper, but I rarely apply through the newspaper....Also from the circular.”*

As previously stated, one of the agencies proved successful and provided XiaoLi with work for a considerable length of time. However, in the long term, XiaoLi decided that she wanted something more challenging. With a family background in self employment both in Vietnam and in Britain, the establishment of a business appealed to XiaoLi. Together with her brother, she decided that she wanted to open an Oriental Gift Store in Northampton and so she

*“went to the enterprise agency, to employment services, the PYBT, the Princes project, I also get a grant from them - Princes Youth Business Trust. And I also enter competition with Live Wire, so I get a lot of support from all these organisations as well.”*

Such enterprise illustrates not only a strong character but a profound knowledge of the institutions involved in aiding small businesses. Yet, although successful in establishing her business, XiaoLi quickly lost much of her interest in the venture and began to look for a new project,

*“The first thing is I love challenging job. Well, process of setting up is nice, but just be at the counter to serve, is not my type. So I decided to, then this, then I saw the advertisement.”*

This advertisement was for a community worker job in the Cambridge VCA. XiaoLi applied and was granted the job. Returning for a moment to XiaoLi's superior knowledge of the support systems available to small businesses, she was asked whether growing up in Britain explained her understanding,

*“not necessarily true, no, what I’m, the majority of my knowledge is come from, because everywhere I go I love to pick up leaflets and read them through. So I think it is more individual, not just because you grown up in this country you will know the system, how the system works. And I find some of my clients also been very well educated, but they haven’t got a clue of what going on, or what facility available. But in my case I love to seek information.”*

Her explanation illustrates that it is an eagerness to actively pursue something and to seek the information needed to do so, that is important, rather than merely having grown up in Britain

As a closing comment, while non of the older interviewees were looking for alternative employment, some of the younger respondents hoped to eventually leave the employment of the community associations. Although job satisfaction was generally high, ambitions for the future for some of these respondents extended beyond the realms of the association, with self employment featuring strongly. While this is perhaps a virtue of their age, it is also suggested that the prospect of many more years (while of working age) in Britain has encouraged the consideration of further opportunities. However, given the predominance of commitment to the community, it would seem likely that even if such a move occurred, giving assistance to others from Vietnam would remain an important aspect of the respondents lives.

#### **9.4 Discussion and conclusions**

Consideration of the labour force experiences of the older and younger respondents illustrates a number of themes which are common to both groups, as well as some experiences which relate primarily to one or other age group. The aim here is to identify these themes and expand upon them.

Both age groups of respondents primarily consisted of individuals who were well educated, either in Vietnam, or after their arrival in Britain. Only one of the older respondents did not have a university degree, and all the younger respondents participated in further or higher education after their arrival in Britain. Given that the majority of refugees from Vietnam are not highly educated<sup>20</sup>, this is significant. The respondents are atypical of refugees from Vietnam and their present role as community leaders has undoubtedly been influenced by this.

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<sup>20</sup>2.5% had been university educated (The Refugee Council, n.d.)

Prior educational achievements assisted the older respondents in their acquisition of English, which in turn resulted in other refugees depending on them after they had left the reception centres. It is also suggested that a good education, and the wider experiences which are associated with it, may have allowed these refugees to adapt more readily to life in Britain, than most. For the younger respondents, success in education also led to improved English and assisted them in finding employment. However, for both groups, it must be recognised that the employment they have secured in Britain is generally not at a level which might have been expected given their qualifications. In particular, if employment prior to their positions within the Vietnamese Community Associations is considered, none of the respondents had gained that which was commensurate with their qualifications. It may therefore be that employment within the community represented, for these respondents, their only realistic opportunity to gain (and maintain) employment at a level appropriate to their qualifications.

With regard to the assistance offered to the refugees after their arrival in Britain, older respondents did not generally receive help which could aid in their integration into the British economy. Few received careers advice or training on arrival and, after resettlement help in seeking employment was rare, primarily being limited to advice to enter further education. By comparison, those younger respondents who arrived as children were successfully integrated into the foundation stage of the economy, the education system. Moreover, those that arrived as adults also successfully entered education, something which was rarer amongst the older respondents. It would thus appear that while the older generation were effectively left to make their own labour force decisions without assistance, the younger respondents received continued support and careers advice (both formal and informal) via their schools or colleges.

The implications of the varying amount of careers assistance received by the older and younger respondents had ramifications for their subsequent careers. Most notably, while the older respondents tend to have had labour force histories dominated by involvement in the ethnic sector<sup>21</sup>, many more of the younger respondents had held mainstream jobs at one time or another. Indeed, for all but one<sup>22</sup>, their first employment in the ethnic sector had been within a community association. Thus it would appear that access to

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<sup>21</sup>The main exception being Tim PHAM, who until her employment in the community association had previously only held jobs in the mainstream.

<sup>22</sup>The exception being XiaoLi WU, who had ran an Oriental Gift Shop with her brother.

continued careers advice from outside the community led to a greater involvement in mainstream labour force activities for the younger respondents.

Informal contacts also proved influential in directing the labour force experiences of both the older and younger respondents. None of those interviewed had secured employment via job centres, and although a few had utilised employment agencies, it was predominantly informal sources that led to jobs. This is significant as it illustrates the role that informal support networks have in providing access to information about employment opportunities. While for the most part, the older respondents relied on contacts within the refugee community (hence their greater involvement with the ethnic labour market), prior to their involvement with the community associations, the younger respondents had received more assistance from British people. This help was frequently crucial in alerting them to job opportunities and as a result, all the younger respondents had been employed in the mainstream sector. While their present posts within the VCA indicate that they also had access to information sources within the community, these younger respondents may not be tied to the ethnic sector in the same way that many of the older respondents appear to be.

However, for both the older and younger respondents, it must be recognised that employment within the VCA, represents (to varying degrees) a withdrawal from mainstream employment. This occurred either as a result of failure to gain entry to the mainstream labour force, or followed a retreat from the difficulties associated with mainstream employment (discrimination, the undervaluing of skills and qualifications, redundancy etc.). As such, while providing an income and self-esteem, it does not perform one of the important roles of employment for refugees, that of immersing them into the wider society.

Common to the majority of respondents, irrespective of age, was a strong commitment to assist other members of the community of refugees from Vietnam. Only NGUYEN Thi Phuong did not indicate her desire to help the community as a motivation for working within the VCA. Amongst the rest, working for the community associations was generally an extension of earlier informal activities which benefited the community. This determination to help others can be understood to be an extension of the determination to succeed that was present in all the respondents. All actively pursued self-betterment, and willingly engaged in activities which they believed would assist them. This can be seen in terms of their pursuit of education, training and employment

and the willingness to migrate around Britain in search of work. It must however be noted, that the younger respondents generally illustrated a greater willingness to participate in activities from which a delayed, rather than immediate, benefit could be expected. Nevertheless, certain individuals (in both age groups) did leave courses prior to their completion. This was not an entirely negative experience as the refugees displayed a considerable degree of flexibility in adapting to their new surroundings and frequently described and rationalised such “failures” in positive terms.

However, since employment within the VCA has been recognised to represent a retreat from the mainstream employment sector, it could be argued that having secured such employment, the respondents have limited their attempts at self-betterment to that within the community. While this is certainly the case with many older respondents who recognise that they would have great difficulty outside the ethnic sector, some of the younger respondents remain optimistic that they will return to mainstream employment.

In conclusion, this discussion of the labour force experiences of refugees who work within the Vietnamese Community Associations has provided a personal insight into the lives of people who come to live in Britain as a result of persecution. While a particular section of the community, these association workers experiences are as valid as any others. As such, a discussion of their careers adds depth to this study of the labour force experiences of refugees from Vietnam.

**Chapter Ten**  
**Summary and Conclusion**

## Summary and Conclusions

### 10.1 Introduction

The purpose of this thesis has been to explore and understand the labour force experiences of refugees living in Britain, with an emphasis on the longer term experiences of those who arrived from less developed countries. In particular, the focus has been, firstly on describing, and then understanding, the labour force experiences of refugees from Vietnam, the majority of whom arrived in Britain between 1979 and 1982.

Via a consideration of the labour force experiences of refugees from Vietnam, at a national, community and individual scale, this thesis adds to the “*very limited store of knowledge*” (Robinson, 1993a, p. 231) that exists about refugees living in Britain. In particular, following novel analysis of the 1991 census, it describes in new detail the experiences of refugees from Vietnam living in different locations. This detail is primarily furnished by the voices of Vietnamese Community Association workers, and provides the basis for greater understanding of refugee labour force experiences. Moreover, the empirical research supports the new conceptual framework for understanding refugee labour force experiences, as presented in chapter three.

Nevertheless, prior to a review of the main findings of the research, it is important to recognise the interesting issues which could not be fully addressed. While original, the use of the 1991 census in this thesis has only dealt with a proportion of that possible. With distribution data on the refugees from Vietnam available at county, district / borough, ward and enumeration district level for the whole of Britain, the exploration of where the refugees lived in 1991 could be extended considerably. Similarly, further analysis of economic data could provide greater contextual detail. However, it should be remembered that while this research utilised both quantitative and qualitative methods, the emphasis has been on the latter.

With regard to the qualitative research, the reliance on Vietnamese Community Associations and their workers has not been without disadvantages. Although the community workers proved admirable “knowledgeable people”, the inability to gain access to ordinary refugees (and subsequent decision to interview community workers about their individual labour force experiences<sup>1</sup>) resulted in an absence of ordinary refugee voices. The views and experiences of ordinary refugees have been reported (by

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<sup>1</sup>See section 4.4.2

community workers), rather than heard first hand, while the voices of the small number of refugees living apart (either socially or spatially) from the community have been almost totally absent. Although unfortunate, such omissions were inevitable with the adoption of a research strategy which focused on community workers. However, with no practical alternatives to gaining access to the community, these workers have provided a far-reaching insight into the labour force experiences of refugees from Vietnam.

## **10.2 Main findings**

The main aim of this thesis - to explore and understand the labour force experiences of refugees living in Britain - was achieved through a consideration of four main questions. The preceding chapters have provided answers to these questions, which can now be summarised.

### **1. Where do the refugees from Vietnam live?**

Hale (1991) identified that refugees from Vietnam were concentrated in large conurban centres, particularly London and to a lesser degree Birmingham and Manchester, with few refugees living in Britain's smaller towns and cities. The analysis of the 1991 census, which provides details on a larger proportion of the refugees, confirms this pattern. Moreover, because of its later date, the census analysis shows that the phenomenon of secondary migration to areas of concentration is continuing. By 1991 almost 60% of the refugees lived in Greater London, with the only other locations to be home to significant numbers of refugees being Birmingham and Manchester. In all three cities, the refugees are concentrated in specific inner city boroughs and wards. Elsewhere, only small numbers are resident, with many areas of Britain being home to no refugees from Vietnam.

In common with many ethnic minority groups, the refugees from Vietnam have shown a tendency to congregate in specific areas. This can be seen at all scales of enquiry (county, borough / district, and ward). Moreover, the areas in which the refugees are concentrated are characterised by a high ethnic Chinese population and a high level of unemployment amongst the population as a whole. Thus, while the refugees generally live in close proximity to their fellow refugees, and to the ethnic Chinese population, they are frequently situated in locations with poor economic circumstances.

## 2. What are the labour force experiences of refugees from Vietnam?

Employment is a minority labour force experience for refugees from Vietnam. In 1991 national unemployment amongst community members stood at 46%, compared to a figure of 9.4% for the general population. However, significant differences in unemployment levels were reported by community workers at Vietnamese Community Associations around Britain. London appears to have a relatively uniform high level of unemployment, although opportunities for clandestine work were mentioned. Outside the capital unemployment varied. While most locations reported high unemployment, Bristol, Cardiff and Portsmouth did not. In the first two this was a function of high levels of self-employment, while in Portsmouth many members of the community were employed in large factories. It can therefore be suggested that national figures mask considerable spatial variations in unemployment levels.

A consideration of the employment experiences of refugees from Vietnam reveals a number of salient points. A majority were engaged in manual work, the catering industry proving particularly common. It should, however, be noted that the range of manual employment found by community members was greater in London than elsewhere. Indeed, the clothing industry was a significant employer in Hackney, London. It is also important to note that where access to an ethnic labour market existed, this was where the majority of working refugees were employed. The ethnic labour market was in some cases refugee in origin, but more commonly was predominately ethnic Chinese in nature. Refugees living in London were willing to travel considerable distances to find work within the ethnic sector, while elsewhere the absence of such a sector was frequently reflected in extremely high unemployment rates. It was noted that older refugees in particular were entrenched within the ethnic labour market. It is however, important to acknowledge the anomalous position of refugees in Portsmouth who were chiefly employed in large, American-owned, factories.

Relatively few community members had found non-manual employment and, as with those in the manual sector, those who had predominantly worked within the ethnic sector. Examples of such employment included working for Vietnamese Community Associations, and in traditional professions such as acupuncture.

The importance of self-employment to the community of refugees from Vietnam was spatially differentiated. Within London, refugee owned businesses were concentrated in

Chinatown (catering enterprises) and the borough of Hackney (clothing enterprises). However, the owners of these businesses generally lived in other areas of the capital, frequently in boroughs in which VCA operated employment development programmes encouraging self-employment. Outside the capital, informants in most locations reported low levels of self-employment, the exceptions being Bristol, Cardiff and Derby where catering enterprises had been established. In Bristol and Cardiff employment development programmes were identified as instrumental in leading to massive levels of self-employment (80%). In both cities the strategy adopted by the refugees was for each family to open a take-away in a different area or outlying town / village. This was seen as a means of avoiding internal competition within the community and almost certainly reflects existing practice in the Chinese community. In Derby, the emergence of self employment could not be attributed to any employment development work since no such project had operated. Moreover, the strategy adopted here was different, the refugees choosing to operate mobile take-away services both to reduce overheads and increase the potential market for their product.

Finally, a consideration of the labour force experiences of the community workers themselves illustrated some important points. Evidence for secondary migration, as described by Hale (1991), and shown in the work on the 1991 census presented in this thesis, was present in the labour force career histories of respondents. While some moved in order to find work (e.g. Wei Guo LI and LE Tri Dien), moves related to a desire for the social advantages of living in close proximity to other refugees were also identified (e.g. TRINH Dung). Given the high levels of unemployment in those areas which are attracting migratory refugees, it would appear that the social incentives to migrate are equally, if not more, important.

A further element of the respondents' labour force experience was that of insecurity. Some of the respondents had been made redundant, and all felt the effects of funding restrictions in their current posts. The threat of redundancy due to irregular funding for the VCA's appears to be ever present. Yet despite this, a majority are committed to maintaining a service to their clients. It can also be noted that a number of respondents (TRINH Dung and BUI Hue), reacted to insecurity in mainstream employment by seeking work within the ethnic sector. This is not to say that the ethnic sector provides greater security, but rather there is easier access to employment opportunities within the sector.

### 3. How are these labour force experiences to be explained?

The workers at Vietnamese Community Associations offered many explanations for the labour force experiences of refugees in their locations. Amongst these, contextual factors, such as the refugees' own prior experiences, and the circumstances in which they came to Britain, were frequently mentioned. Moreover, the housing-availability-led policy of dispersion, adopted by the British government, received considerable condemnation from a majority of respondents. In particular it was felt that this hindered the development of community and made the provision of services to the refugees difficult. Acceptance that local economic circumstances often increased the labour force difficulties of refugees was also present, although the social advantages of living amongst other refugees were so great as not to deter migration to deprived areas. Indeed, a common opinion was that it was better to be unemployed amongst other refugees, than to be unemployed and socially isolated. As such, the argument proposed in chapter three, that refugee labour force experiences do not occur in a neutral background, but rather are influenced by socio-economic and political circumstances, is supported.

With regard to the individual factors that were thought to influence labour force experiences (summarised in Figure 3.1), all proved significant to at least one, and frequently all, respondents. This was true both at a community and an individual level. The initial claim of this thesis, that published research in this field over-emphasises the role of English language abilities in explaining refugee labour force experiences, was shown to be somewhat harsh. Indeed, respondents believed the role of language skills to be pivotal to understanding labour force experiences. However, a crucial caveat to this was that the central role of language skills did not exclude the influence of other factors. Thus, those refugees with good English continued to experience negative labour force outcomes. Indeed, the experiences of the community workers, who all spoke good English, yet found themselves entrenched within the ethnic sector, illustrated this. Thus, while the community workers did not underestimate the importance of improving language skills, it was recognised that intervention was needed in a variety of spheres if labour force experiences were to be improved. Moreover, it was also recognised that interactions between factors (for instance, having poor English and few skills in an economically depressed area) had the greatest effect. In the light of this, intervention in

only one area (language) was unlikely to have a great impact unless it was supported by intervention in other areas. Thus intervention was also needed with regard to clarifying legal status, offering psychological support, developing support networks, improving education and skills, and in developing effective search strategies and anti-discrimination practices. This list is not exhaustive.

The lack of effective labour force assistance to refugees on arrival in Britain was seen to have played a significant part in determining their subsequent experiences. With little careers guidance, English tuition which was poor and rarely recognised employment as a prime objective, and a paucity of knowledge about the British labour market, few refugees were successful in gaining employment quickly. Without assistance in these areas, for many refugees, the result has been long term unemployment. Where employment has been found, this has tended, as noted, to be within the ethnic sector.

Finally, it can be concluded that evidence from the interviews with refugees from Vietnam supports the framework for understanding refugee labour force experiences, as presented in chapter three. This framework, which encompasses the influence of contextual factors (such as the local and national economic situation, and the resettlement policies applied to refugees), with the influence of individual factors (summarised by figure 3.1), represents a basis from which to understand, and thus intervene in, refugee labour force experiences. Its principal service is to demonstrate the complexity of influences which act on refugee labour force experiences and encourage their consideration by practitioners, policy makers and researchers.

#### 4. How have the refugees from Vietnam reacted to their labour force experiences?

On arrival in Britain, the refugees had only minimal control over where they settled. Hale (1991) has previously illustrated how they reacted against this by massive secondary migration, primarily to the bigger cities where concentrations of refugees from Vietnam quickly developed. A consideration of the refugees' responses to their labour force experiences also illustrates their position as active participants in those experiences. In the absence of formal or sustained assistance by the resettlement agencies, the refugees have had to rely upon their own community as a primary means of support and advice. The importance of informal community networks in facilitating access to employment and training has been illustrated, and could conceivably have contributed to the refugees' predominant labour force location within the ethnic sector. It would,

however, be wrong to underestimate the factors which have acted to exclude the refugees from mainstream employment opportunities. Beyond the informal support offered by the community, the establishment of Vietnamese Community Associations, and more specifically, employment development programmes within such organisations, is further evidence of the refugees' reliance upon their own community.

Given that many refugees from Vietnam are ethnically Chinese, the importance of the ethnic Chinese population, when considering the labour force experiences of refugees from Vietnam, should also not be underestimated. While Hale (1991) maintained that interactions between the refugees and the wider ethnic Chinese population had been overestimated, evidence from both the census analysis and interviews conducted for this thesis suggests otherwise. Not only has the analysis of the 1991 census shown that the refugees now live in areas of high ethnic Chinese population, but respondents reported that success at accessing employment opportunities has been greatest within the ethnic Chinese sector. Thus, although the refugees are a relatively exploited sector of ethnic Chinese employees, the wider ethnic Chinese population has provided opportunities for employment. Additionally, it should be recognised that the wider ethnic Chinese population, with their entrepreneurial success, has provided the refugees from Vietnam with a role model of how they might improve their own labour force experiences. This is evident both in the high level of desire for self-employment within the community, and in the aim of community associations to establish or maintain development programmes designed at supporting self-employment.

At an individual level, significant travel to work patterns, particularly in London, and a willingness to migrate in order to seek both work *per se* and the support offered by larger communities and the associations which serve them, indicate considerable adaptability. Moreover, the significant moves into self-employment seen in certain locations, and the high levels of desire for such activities identified elsewhere, indicate a willingness to create employment opportunities when access to mainstream employment is effectively denied. Thus, while high unemployment, and more specifically, high levels of long term unemployment, have been identified as a dominant feature of the labour force experiences of refugees from Vietnam, this does not necessarily indicate an unwillingness to work. Indeed, even where a lack of motivation was identified by respondents, the conviction was that positive schemes and encouragement would lead to greater participation.

### 10.3 Policy recommendations

On the basis of increased knowledge about Vietnam refugee labour force experiences, as provided in this thesis, policy recommendations aimed at improving the labour force experiences of all refugees can be made. As such, the final question posed in this thesis, *“what are the policy recommendations when dealing with future refugees?”* can be answered.

It is in the first instance necessary to repeat the many calls for more research in this field. The more that is known about the labour force experiences of refugees, the greater the opportunities for positive intervention. With contextual factors having been shown significantly to influence experiences, there is a need for information on the experiences of many more groups of refugees, all of whom will have been affected by different contextual influences. Moreover, the evidence presented in this thesis, that the labour force experiences of refugees from Vietnam are, up to 18 years after their arrival, being significantly influenced by their refugee experience, shows that a concern with the long term experiences of refugees is necessary. For this reason, the call made by Robinson (1993a), for extended and continued research into the long term experiences of refugees living in Britain, is supported. The conceptual framework for understanding refugee labour force experiences, as presented in chapter three, is proffered as a guide, though not a prescription, to issues and influences meriting consideration in such research.

Following the utilisation of the 1991 census in this research, an optimistic (though probably unrealistic) call to identify refugees in successive censuses is made. While the particular circumstances of the refugees from Vietnam enabled their identification within the census, the identification of refugees from other countries is more problematic, or impossible. Moreover, as the length of time since the arrival of a group of refugees increases, identification problems grow, making the provision of a refugee-identifying census variable important for future research. It should however be recognised, that while such a variable would significantly aid research, two dangers exist. Firstly, it could dangerously perpetuate the status of ‘refugee’, and secondly the availability of aggregate statistical data would encourage research which, by focusing on numbers, ignores the lived experience.

Based on the specific experiences of the refugees from Vietnam, a number of recommendations with regard to future refugees can be made. Of foremost importance is the need for recognition that refugee labour force experiences can not be explained by the influence of a single, or even a few, factors. They result from a complex set of circumstances (introduced as the contextual influences in chapter three) and a multitude of individual factors (illustrated in Figure 3.1) which result in discrete labour force outcomes for individual refugees. While, it is therefore highly unlikely that we will ever fully explain such outcomes at the individual level, an understanding of the impact of certain elements is possible, and should guide policy.

The policy of dispersing quota refugees has been shown to have so many negative effects, and to have been rejected so forcefully by the refugees (as evident by their continued secondary migration), that it should not be applied to future quota refugees. Moreover, any decision about where refugees should be resettled should be based on factors central to both housing issues and labour force experiences.

Given the importance of community-based support, where an existing community is present, it should be accepted that this is where the refugees are likely to gain most support. Where no community exists, such as for the refugees from Vietnam, the benefits of proximity to communities who speak the same language, or who share a common ethnicity, should be recognised. However, it is possible that if the refugees from Vietnam had not been dispersed throughout Britain, they may have developed their own support mechanisms at a quicker pace, thus reducing the need for reliance on the wider ethnic Chinese population. In either case, it is important to encourage the development of community support mechanisms, both in relation to labour force experiences and other settlement issues. As such the establishment of refugee community associations should be a priority and should receive funding. Resettlement into housing should not mean the withdrawal of support mechanisms, and community associations can provide a focus for accessing support.

Secondly, support for labour force experiences should be central to the settlement process, with locations with poor economic circumstances being avoided if at all possible. It is, however, recognised that areas with poor economic circumstances are likely to have an available stock of cheap housing, generating conflict between the need to provide housing and employment opportunities. Advice on labour force experiences should begin as soon as it is known that refugees are to be resettled in Britain in the case

of quota refugees, or on arrival for spontaneous refugees. It should be built into a planned response procedure for arriving refugees. Details of existing skills and experience should be collected and realistic advice regarding appropriate opportunities given by appropriate professionals. While the provision of English classes is crucial to those refugees who do not speak English on arrival, all refugees will need to be informed about the British labour market, and more specifically about local circumstances and opportunities for people with their particular professions. For individuals whose skills are not appropriate to the British labour market, they should be identified quickly and integrated language and vocational training provided. To delay labour force advice until after the acquisition of language skills or housing is unacceptable.

Refugee community associations should act as the focal point for employment development work. In the early days of resettlement this should be via the provision of language training and information about the British labour market. Refugees who already speak English should be encouraged to work alongside trained careers counsellors and employment officers to ensure the rapid transfer of knowledge to refugees. However, as soon as feasible, refugees should be integrated into mainstream courses and services, though crucially, support from the community association should continue. This would maximise the support from the community while ensuring that the refugees also develop links with the wider society. Such links have been shown to be crucial if mainstream employment outside of the ethnic community is to be obtained.

These proposals would need significant funding and expertise in order to be effective. In the first instance, it needs to be recognised that refugee situations are constantly developing and need to be planned for<sup>2</sup>. With a formal response mechanism in existence, the constant requirement to re-establish assistance for refugees would be removed. Centrally available funding for assisting refugees would reduce the burden on individual authorities, thus removing one of the justifications for dispersal. This funding needs to recognise that the resettlement process is ongoing and thus money will need to be available for some time. Indeed, with the ever-present reality of refugee arrivals, there is a strong argument for a permanent body with responsibility for all aspects of refugee determination and resettlement. While requiring investment, the long term benefits of reducing unemployment amongst refugees will pay dividends.

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<sup>2</sup>See section 2.1

Additionally, refugees should be assisted in the resettlement process by a team of experts, well versed in the complexities of labour force experience and wider resettlement issues, rather than a hastily assembled group of well meaning volunteers. Such a team could be based at the Refugee Training and Employment Centre in London, from where it could offer continuing support to refugee community associations around Britain and be accessible to the large number of refugees (both spontaneous and quota) who are resident in the capital. Spontaneous refugees should be directed to the team on their arrival in Britain. In cases of the planned arrival of quota refugees, the team should be consulted regarding appropriate resettlement locations, and then provide an individual assessment of the refugees' existing skills, and support in establishing a community association with the services outlined earlier.

Finally, a public education programme aimed at increasing understanding of the experiences of refugees needs to be provided. The public, and employers and education providers in particular, need to recognise the potential that refugees offer. While added support is often needed in the early years of their resettlement in Britain, refugees can become an asset to this country if given the chance.

#### **10.4 Possible future directions**

Opportunities for continuing and extending research are ever present, and possibilities for developing the research further should be acknowledged. Additional scope for analysis of the 1991 census has already been identified, and other national datasets, such as that compiled for the Labour Force Survey, may also allow for further description of the labour force experiences of individual refugees from Vietnam. Indeed, in the light of the failure to access ordinary refugee voices, this would appear profitable. Moreover, when planned developments in the Labour Force Survey, which will allow longitudinal analysis, occur, the benefits of such research would increase. It is however, recognised that only a very small number of refugees from Vietnam are likely to be identified within the Labour Force Survey.

With regard to the community of refugees from Vietnam, the experiences of their children - the second generation - are an area in which the research could be extended. With the experiences of the younger and older respondents differing, and the community as a whole placing great emphasis on the success of their children, it would appear important to assess how the family heritage of persecution, flight and refugee status,

impacts on the labour force experiences of those born in Britain. In particular, given the scarcity of information on the descendants of previous groups of refugees, it would seem wise to observe and follow those currently entering the labour market.

The conceptual framework for understanding refugee labour force experiences (presented in chapter three) is viewed as developmental rather than complete, and as such is open to elaboration and extension. For instance, in its present form, the influence of disability on labour force experiences is absent. Yet refugees are not exempt from impairment and chronic health problems, or their effects on labour force experiences. As such, a programme of research, informed by the conceptual framework, but focused on the particular experiences of disabled refugees, has the potential to provide both insight into experiences, and to extend the framework.

Finally, while this thesis has focused upon the experiences of refugees living in Britain, further insight into the labour force experiences of refugees may be gained by comparative research with other countries. For instance, with regard to the refugees from Vietnam, comparative research on labour force experiences in Britain, France and the US may be indicated. Certainly labour force experiences for refugees from Vietnam, differ in these countries and, as such, comparative research may have the potential to furnish additional policy recommendations.

## **10.5 Conclusion**

Refugees are a constant feature of the world's population and Britain should expect to continue to be a destination for refugees from all over the world, including from nations of the South. As such, plans for their arrival, reception and resettlement should be in place. While the first step is to acknowledge that these refugees will come, the second is to stop viewing them purely as a source of economic cost. For if economic considerations bear too much influence, the danger is that Britain will fail to offer protection to those in need, or limit assistance to the right of residence alone. Both are currently in evidence.

While the example of the refugees from Vietnam appears largely negative, other evidence has shown that refugees from similar countries to Britain fare economically well (e.g. Jewish entrepreneurs), while immigrants from very different countries can also do well (e.g. Hong Kong Chinese). With a little help and commitment, it is entirely possible that future refugees from the nations of the South can be assisted to reach their full economic

potential. Indeed, the determination and self reliance of the refugees from Vietnam, in the light of an absence of support from the government and wider society, bears witness to the potential they have to succeed. Moves to self-employment when encouraged by employment development programmes, the educational success of the younger generation, and the success of individuals, illustrate how the refugees are no lost cause. With appropriate assistance, they are keen to develop their labour force experiences and contribute to the economy of this country. They deserve this help, as do all other refugees, now and in the future.

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## Appendices

## Appendix 4.1

# UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD



**Geography Department**

Geography Building  
Winter Street  
Sheffield  
S10 2TN  
Tel: 0114 2768555 ext. 4948  
E-mail: K.Roberts@Sheffield.ac.uk

[Date]

[Vietnamese Community Association Address]

Re: Employment experiences - research request.

Dear [Contact name],

I am a PhD student based at Sheffield University, currently conducting research into the employment, unemployment and training experiences of people who have arrived in the UK as refugees. As a result of my previous experiences, I have decided to focus my research on the Vietnamese community in the UK, and I am writing to you to enquire about the possibility of your organisation becoming involved in my research. For your information, I have included a separate sheet which introduces my research project and provides details of my background.

In order, to develop an insight into the experiences of people from Vietnam in all parts of the UK, I hope to visit as many of the Vietnamese Community Associations as possible (to date, I have visited associations in Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Derby, Sheffield and the Wirral). During such visits, I would like to talk about the development of the association, the employment experiences of the local Vietnamese community, and to discuss any employment development work conducted by the association.

Should you wish to be involved in my research, I wondered if it would be possible to arrange a mutually convenient date and time to visit you. If you are able to help me, I would be very grateful.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Ms Keri Roberts.

**Keri Roberts**

**Sheffield University**

### **The Research Project**

Employment and training amongst the refugee populations of the UK

Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), this research aims to address the issues of refugee experiences of employment and training in the UK. Given the high levels of unemployment amongst refugees and the identified lack of research in this area (British Refugee Council, 1989) the intention of the research is to extend the current limits of knowledge relating to refugee employment issues. The aim is not only to increase the level of knowledge about refugee experiences of employment and training, but also to offer some explanations for the observed trends. This, it is hoped, will provide an insight into possible means for improving the employment prospects of refugees.

The practical research focuses on the experiences of one refugee community, the Vietnamese, at a number of levels. Aggregate data on the community's employment experiences has been extracted from the census and this will provide the broad context for the research. In addition, interviews with Vietnamese Community Associations are planned, in order to gain an insight into evolution of these organisations, their role in employment development initiatives and local circumstances. Finally, it is hoped that a small number of Vietnamese respondents will agree to be interviewed, to allow the refugees own perception of their employment life histories to be revealed.

### **My background**

Following completion of a degree, I spent seven months as a full time volunteer at Kilmore House, the Ockenden Venture's residential home for disabled refugees. This experience provided a practical introduction to refugee resettlement issues and also acted as an introduction to the experiences of Vietnamese people in the UK. Since leaving Kilmore I have remained in touch with the residents and staff and, when possible, visit to offer short term voluntary help.

After leaving Kilmore, during a visit to Hong Kong and the Philippines, I was able to arrange interviews with staff at UNHCR and the American Embassy's refugee resettlement programme. These talks offered a valuable insight into the background behind the resettlement of refugees to the west and cumulated in an invitation to visit refugee camps at Morong and Palawan in the Philippines.

Since October 1993, I have been a PhD student at Sheffield University. On my arrival in the city, I contacted the Northern Refugee Centre and quickly became involved in their education programme as a volunteer tutor.

## Appendix 4.2

## **Interview Outline - Interviews with Vietnamese Community Association Workers**

### **Topics to be discussed during the interview :-**

The history of of refugees from Vietnam in this area.

The association and what it does.

Community labour force experiences in this area.

Employment development work by the association.

Links to other service providers

Funding arrangements.

Additional comments?

Availability of Annual reports / Other printed material.

## Appendix 4.3

## Interview Schedule

Top Sheet to be detached and filed securely to ensure anonymity

Identifier Code (I.C)
-----------------------

Contact details:

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Date and Location of Interview: .....

Length of interview: .....

Other Persons present:.....

Name of Interpreter if used :.....

Personal Information

- 1. City of residence .....
- 2. Year of birth .....
- 3. Ethnic Identity Chinese / Vietnamese / Other .....
- 4. Place of origin N. Vietnam / S. Vietnam / Other .....
- 5. Camp Location .....
- 6. Duration in camp .....
- 7. Date of arrival in UK .....
- 8. Reception centre .....
- 9. Duration in centre .....
- 10. Current labour force status .....
- 11. Currently living in a household with how many other
  - Employed Adults .....
  - Unemployed Adults .....
  - Homemakers .....
  - Retired Adults .....
  - Students .....
  - Children .....



Self Assessment of Language Skills

12. Language of preference Cantonese / Vietnamese  
Other .....

13. Preferred language:-  
Written ability Excellent / Good / Adequate / Poor / Nil  
Reading ability Excellent / Good / Adequate / Poor / Nil

14. Other languages :-

Language .....  
Spoken ability Excellent / Good / Adequate / Poor / Nil  
Written ability Excellent / Good / Adequate / Poor / Nil  
Reading ability Excellent / Good / Adequate / Poor / Nil

Language .....  
Spoken ability Excellent / Good / Adequate / Poor / Nil  
Written ability Excellent / Good / Adequate / Poor / Nil  
Reading ability Excellent / Good / Adequate / Poor / Nil

Language .....  
Spoken ability Excellent / Good / Adequate / Poor / Nil  
Written ability Excellent / Good / Adequate / Poor / Nil  
Reading ability Excellent / Good / Adequate / Poor / Nil

**Ensure that English ability is discussed.**

Have you ever attended English classes? Yes / No

If Yes For How Long? .....

Are you attending English classes now? Yes / No

Education History

15. Formal education in Vietnam                    Yes / No    (if No go to Q. 18)
16. Number of years in Full time Schooling in Vietnam .....
17. Description of post school education in Vietnam

- .....
18. Formal education in the UK                    Yes / No
19. Education history for UK

Course	Description	Full / Part time	Duration	Qualifications Gained
				Continued?

## **Interview Outline - Interviews concerning personal experiences**

### **Topics to be discussed during the interview :-**

Labour force experiences of refugees from Vietnam living in Britain.

Own labour force experiences, in Vietnam, in camps, in Britain (includes jobs, training, unemployment).

Knowledge of employment opportunities in Britain - on arrival and now.

Search strategies (general)

    Search strategies (use of family and friends)

    Search strategies (use of specialist services).

Discrimination.

Use of skills.

## Appendix 4.4

Category	Code	Interview	Page	Section	Paragraph
Fund raising	1	1	2	B	2
Fund raising	1	1	2	B	3
Fund raising	1	1	3	A	2
Fund raising	1	1	3	A	3
Fund raising	1	1	3	A	3
C.P money	2	1	2	B	3
C.P.money	2	1	3	A	2
Council money	3	1	3	A	3
Council money	3	2	4	B	3
Council money	3	3	4	B	1
Council money	3	4	5	A	2
Council money	3	5	2	A	5
Council money	3	5	6	A	4
Council money	3	5	6	A	5
Council Money	3	5	6	B	2
Council money	3	6	1	A	3
Council money	3	6	4	B	4
Council money	3	9	1	A	1
Council money	3	9	2	A	3
Council money	3	10	3	A	1
Council money	3	11	3	A	3
Council money	3	12	1	B	2
Council money	3	12	2	A	1
City council money	3	12	2	A	1
Council money	3	12	7	B	1
Charity money	3	12	9	A	4
city council money	3	12	9	A	4
Council money	3	13	2	B	1
council money	3	12	9	A	4
Council money	3	1	8	B	2
Charity money	4	1	3	A	4
Charity Money	4	1	3	A	5
Charity Money	4	10	3	A	1
Charity money	4	11	3	A	3
Charity money	4	12	1	B	2
Funding body	5	1	5	B	2
Funding worries	6	1	8	B	2
Funding worries	6	5	6	A	8
Funding worries	6	7	6	B	3
Funding worries	6	7	7	A	1
Funding worries	6	9	5	A	1
Funding worries	6	13	2	B	2
Temporary nature	8	1	8	B	2
Temporary nature	8	2	5	A	1
Temporary nature	8	3	4	B	3
Temporary nature	8	3	4	B	4
Temporary nature	8	3	4	B	5
Temporary nature	8	3	5	A	1
Temporary nature	8	5	6	A	6
Temporary Nature	8	5	6	A	7
Temporary Nature	8	6	1	A	3
Temporaty nature	8	7	6	B	3
Temporary nature	8	8	1	A	1
Temporary nature	8	10	3	A	2

## Appendix 4.5

Primary Occupation in Vietnam

.....

.....

.....

British labour force career history

Job or activity	Description - What do & where?	How got involved?	Who helped you get involved	Dates	Why did you leave / stop?	What else going at that time?

## Appendix 6.1

## **Vietnamese Community Associations**

Avon Vietnamese Refugee Community  
Barking and Dagenham Vietnamese and Chinese Association  
Association of Refugees from Vietnam in Basildon  
Bexley Vietnams Project  
Thamesmead Vietnamese Community Service  
Midlands Vietnamese Refugee Community Association  
The Vietnamese Refugee Community in Cambridge  
Vietnamese Refugee Community in Camden  
South Wales Vietnamese Community Project  
Coventry Vietnamese Community Support Group  
Vietnamese Refugee Community in Croydon  
Vietnam Refugee National Council  
Derby Vietnamese Community Association  
Association of Refugees from Vietnam in Essex  
Vietnamese Community Association in Farnborough  
Vietnamese refugee Project in Greenwich  
An Viet Foundation  
Community Centre for Refugees from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia  
West & North West London Vietnamese Organisation  
Islington and Hackney Vietnamese Community  
Lambeth Community of Refugees from Vietnam  
Leeds Vietnamese Community Association  
Leicester Vietnamese Community Association  
Vietnamese refugee Community in Lewisham  
Merseyside Vietnamese Association  
Manchester Vietnamese Refugee Community Association  
Vietnamese Refugee Community in Northampton  
Nottingham Vietnamese Project  
Portsmouth Vietnamese Community Association  
Northern Refugee Centre  
Southampton Vietnamese Community Association  
Southwark Vietnamese Chinese Refugee Community  
Southwark Vietnamese Refugee Association  
Vietnamese Community Association in Surrey  
Tower Hamlets Community of Refugees from Vietnam  
Wandsworth Vietnamese Refugee Community  
Wirral Vietnamese Association  
North London Vietnamese Support Group  
Vietnamese Community Association in South West London

## Appendix 9.1

## Vietnamese Names

This appendix provides a brief introduction to the naming system used by many people from Vietnam. Although all the names used in chapter 9 are aliases, they are authentic. This appendix, and the alias names, were compiled with the assistance of members of a Vietnamese e-mail discussion group (VNFORUM@saigon.com).

### Vietnamese Names

Approximately 80% of ethnic Vietnamese people share one of a small number of family names. The most common of these names are:-

Nguyen; Tran; Le; Trinh; Vo; Vu; Pham; Huynh; Hoang; Cao; Truong; Dinh; Bui; Ngo; Ta; Ton.

As a general rule, when writing the name of an individual, the family name will appear first. However, some people from Vietnam have adopted the western tradition of placing their family name last. This can cause confusion and for this reason, in this thesis, all family names appear in capital letters.

The given name takes the form of 2 or more names of which the last is most commonly used for everyday purposes. The use of Thi and Van or Quoc as middle names generally indicate the gender of the person (Thi = female; Van or Quoc = male). While the practise of using these middle names is common in older generations, it has been abandoned by some younger people. Identifying the gender of an individual is therefore sometimes reliant on their last given name.

While some of these names are male (e.g. Hung; Dien; Thanh) and some female (e.g. Yen; Mai; Binh); there are a selection of names that can be both male or female (e.g. Phuong; Dung; Linh). While confusion over gender is in part alleviated by the use of the tonal marks that are part of the Vietnamese language (e.g. Phu+o+ng = male or female and Phu+o+.ng = female; Dung = female and Du~ng = male), the use of these marks in a western context is not consistent. The gender of all respondents is indicated in Table 9.1

### Chinese Names

None of the respondents identifying themselves as ethnically Chinese had Vietnamese names. For this reason, these respondents were given Chinese aliases names. The family name follows the given name.