African Migrants: Past and Integration in Birmingham

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to engage with theoretical issues of postcolonial condition and experiences of asylum-seekers and refugees' integration (African migrants, Portuguese speaking Africa countries – Luso-African) in the West Midlands, in particular Birmingham. My theoretical focus is upon the relationship between postcolonialism and integration. I argue that, in order to understand refugees' experiences of integration into British society, an understanding of their colonial memory, based upon an understanding of the intellectual narratives of postcolonial literatures, is a prerequisite. As such, this paper contends that the colonial past is important for our understanding of asylum-seekers and refugees, at least in part because their image and representation in the media is infused with the imagery of the past. I also argue that the asylum-seekers' integration into a community is hampered by their past colonial experience and what is more the host community's perception of them is based upon the UK experience as the former coloniser. Significantly, problems of integration result from a dualism which is established between the 'periphery', where the colonised are, and the 'centre', where the coloniser are located. The gap between the two is still wide and they remain suspicious of each other.

The paper views the colonial past as an integral part of the problem of integration for asylum-seekers and refugees in the UK. The debate on integration is linked to the geography and culture of the colonised countries. Much of the debate is driven by the question of difference, cultural characteristics and historical roots which go back to the colonial past.

Asylum-seekers and refugees remain a perennial and sensitive issue for political parties and the media in the UK[1]. Recently, a number of issues have emerged in relation to asylum and asylum-seekers in the UK, such as deportation[2], settlement[3], dispersal[4], integration[5], health[6], housing[7], education[8], justice and legal system[9] and welfare[10].

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[1] See Coole, C, "A Warm Welcome? Scottish and UK Media Reporting of an Asylum-seekers Murder", *Media, Culture and Society*, 24, (6), 2002, pp. 839-852.

[2] Richmond, A. H. "Refugees and asylum-Seekers in Britain: UK Immigration and Asylum Act, *Refuge*, 19 (1), 2000, pp. 35-41.

[3] Frost, D. "Racism and Social Segregation: Settlement Patterns of West African Seaman in Liverpool Since Nineteenth Century", *New Community*, 22 (1), 1996, pp. 85-96.

[4] Lal, T. et al. (edt.), "From Report to Refugee: The Politics of Asylum in Great Britain", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 10 (1), 1997, pp. 79-90.

[5] Banton, M. "National Integration in France and Britain", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 27 (1), January 2001, pp. 151 – 168, see also Baumann, G. The Multicultural Riddle: Rethinking National, Ethnic and Religious Identities, London: Routledge, 1999 and Alba, R. et al. (edt.), "Rethinking Assimilation Theory For A New Era of Immigration", *International Migration Review*, 31 (4), 1997, pp. 826-874.

[6] See Jones, D. et al. (edt.), "Refugees and Primary Care: Tackling the Inequalities", British Medical Journal, vol. 317, 1998, pp. 1444 – 14446, Bell, Andy, "Asylum Seekers: Need, Not Guilty", *British Journal of Health Care Management*, 6 (5), 2000, pp. 229-230 and Burnett, A. et all. (edt.), "Needs of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in the UK", *British Medical Journal*, 322 (3), 2001, pp. 544 – 547.

[7] Many refugees and asylum-seekers often live in shared and overcrowded accommodations with friends or relatives, see Zetter, R. et all. (edt.), "Sheltering on the Margins: Social Housing Provision and the Impact of restrictionism on Asylum Seekers and Refugees in the UK", *Policy Studies*, 20 (4), 1999, pp. 235 – 254, Bowes, A. et all. (edt.), "Tenure Preference and Housing Strategy: An Exploration of Pakistani Experiences", *Housing Studies*, 12 (1), 1997, pp. 63-84.

These issues are discussed in a variety of forum and research on asylum-seekers is also growing[11]. However, little attention has been paid towards asylum-seekers and refugees of their past colonial experience and how this affects their identity and integration in the "host community", a community which most of the asylum-seekers relate to in the context of their past colonial experience[12]. As such, this paper focuses upon a largely theoretical consideration of how the postcolonial condition and experiences of asylum-seekers affect their identity and integration into UK society: some consideration is given to the West Midlands and Birmingham in particular.

My theoretical focus is upon the relationship between postcolonialism and integration. I argue that, in order to understand refugees' experiences of integration into British society, an understanding of their colonial experiences, based upon an understanding of the intellectual narratives of postcolonial literatures, is a prerequisite. As such, this paper contends that the colonial past is important for our understanding of asylum-seekers and refugees, at least in part because their image and representation in the media is infused with the imagery of the past. I also argue that the asylum-seekers' integration into a community is hampered by their past colonial experience and what is more the host community's perception of them is based upon the UK experience as the former coloniser. Significantly, problems of integration result from a dualism which is established between the 'periphery', where the colonised are, and the 'centre', where the coloniser are located. The gap between the two is still wide and they remain suspicious of each other.

The paper views the colonial past as an integral part of the problem of integration for asylum-seekers and refugees in the UK. The debate on integration is linked to the geography and culture of the colonised countries. Much of the debate is driven by the question of difference, cultural characteristics and historical roots which go back to the colonial past, Duroselle argues: "all we know is that the original inhabitants of Western Europe white-skinned, barely touched by the Mongol invasions – or by Asia and African immigration until after the end of World II"[13].

As far as integration issue is concerned, there is a perception about the question of the 'others'. The paper argues that colonial experience is fundamental for our understanding

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[8] Salinas, C. *Refugee Engineers in the UK: A Study of Engineering Employers and Refugees Qualified as Engineers*, London: World University Service, 1997. Bryan, Beverly. "Learning School: Cross-Cultural Differences in the Teaching of English", *Changing English*, 3 (2), October 1996, pp. 201 – 207.

[9] Tuitt, P. *False Images: Law's Construction of Refugee, Law and Social Theories Series*, London: Pluto Press, 1996 and see also West, T. "Hopes Rise for Refugees But Act Stays", *Inside Housing*, October 4, 1996, 3.

[10] Cohen, S. et al. (edt.), *From Immigration Controls to Welfare Controls*, London: Routledge, 2001 and see also Blackemore, K. "International Migration in Later Life: Social Care and Policy Implications', *Ageing and Society*, 19 (6), 1999, pp. 761 – 774.

[11] Dunstan, R. *Slamming the Door: The Demolition of the Right to Asylum in the United Kingdom*, London: Amnesty International, 1996.

[12] See recent research carried out in Birmingham by Lewis, M. *Asylum: Understanding Public Attitudes*, London: Institute for Public Policy Research, 2005.

[13] Duroselle, J. *Europe: a History of its Peoples*, London: Viking, 1990, p. 17

of the integration problems in the current climate in the UK. It also acknowledges the problematic of integration issue among the new migrants, such as: Albanian, Serbs, Croats, Russian, Kosovan who have no colonial experience and those who have the experience, but have no direct historical link with the UK, such as Lusophone African countries – former Portuguese colonies. However, for the lack of space, these issues will not be discussed in this paper. To make issues of integration clearer, the West Midlands, Birmingham in particular will be used illustratively to show the public perception and attitude on the asylum-seekers and refugees. Most material used for Birmingham case is based on the media reporting, the local paper, Birmingham post. The paper will also draw upon debate based on two concepts: interculturation and hybridity. They are useful for theorising issues of integration, because the focus of the debate is not on celebration of difference, but rather on the process through which refugees pass in 'becoming' citizens, rather than presenting a static view of the refugee experience. Integration is seen as an on going process, rather than a static one which stops at the point when asylum-seekers and refugees become citizens of the host community. They address the impact of fragmentation of identity in the process of integration from both the host community and that of the asylum-seekers and refugees.

This paper is divided into four (three, the brief history and the lesson of pre-colonial integration is not included) parts. First, it will attempt to give general introduction to the concepts of interculturation and hybridity. Second, the paper argues that as far as integration of the asylum-seekers and refugees in the UK is concerned it is essential to understand the colonial past of both the colonised and the coloniser. The paper examines how the colonial past impinges on contemporary debates about the integration of the asylum-seekers and refugees. It argues the past is still being invoked in the current debate, and as a result, it is hampering the integration process. Third, the paper looks at the UK, particularly the West Midlands and Birmingham, as an example to illustrate this relationship between the past and the present. Overall then, the paper develops a strong theoretical exploration of three aspects of the asylum-seekers and refugees' experience: their own perception of the colonial experience; their view of the host community in the light of this experience; and how the host community's perception of asylum and refugees is affected by their role as the former coloniser.

1 - Discussion on Interculturation and Hybridity

The process of integration has been described in contemporary postcolonial literature, as: 'hybridity'[14]; 'glocalisation'[15]; 'creolisation'[16]; 'interstitiality'[17]; 'acculturation'[18]; 'interculturation'[19]; 'inculturation'[20]; 'assimilation'[21]; 'ganagoga'[22]; 'enculturation'[23]. In this paper I utilise the concepts of inetrculturation and hybridity interchangeably to describe the process through which refugees pass in 'becoming' citizens or integrated, rather than presenting a static view of the refugee experience, because in my view they provide a better theoretical grounding for engaging with integration issues.

There are two conceptual terms such as: interculturation and hybridity that will be applied in this paper in order to explain the process of integration. Both are contested terms and may be applied differently because of their variable meanings. They are anthropological terms, but I have opted to use them in this paper interchangeably, because they spell out clearly some of the problematic issues of integration process.

Interculturation implies the interaction between cultures, focusing particularly upon the freedom, respect, tolerance and mutuality that occur in this process. Interculturation is

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14 Young, R. J .C. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, London: Routledge, 1995 and see also H. Bhabha, *Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1995.

15 See Beck, U. *What is Globalization?* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000 and H. R. Wicker, From Complex Culture to Cultural Complexity, in P. Webner and T. Modood, (edts.), *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multicultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*, London: Zed Books, 1997, pp. 47-50.

16 Lingna Nafafé, J. "Guinea Bissau: Language Situation", Elsevier *Encyclopaedia of Language and Linguistics*, second edition, vol. 14, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005 and see also Hannerz, U. *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places*, London: Routledge, 1996.

17 Sofield, T. 'Globalisation, Tourism and Culture in South East Asia', in P. Teo, et all. (edts.), *Interconnected Worlds: Tourism in South East Asia*, Amsterdam: Pergamon, 2001, p. 106.

18 A. L. Kroeber, *Anthropology: Race, Language, Culture, Psychology, Prehistory*. New York and Burlingame: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1948, p. 425 and Winthrop, R. H. *Dictionary of Concepts in Cultural Anthropology*. New York: Greenwood, 1991, pp. 3, 82-83.

19 Kicza, J. Resilient Cultures: America's Native Peoples Confront European Colonization, 1500-1800, Washington: Prentice Hall, 2002.

20 Waliggo, J. et al. *Inculturation: Its Meaning and Urgency*. Nairobi: St. Paul Publications, 1986 and Schineller, P. *Inculturation: a Handbook*. New York: Paulist Press, 1991.

21 Crisp, J. *New Issues in Refugee Research: The Local Integration and Local Settlement of Refugees: A Conceptual and Historical Analysis*, Geneva: Global Commission on International Migration, 2004.

22 Almada, A. A. *TratadosBreue dosRejnos deguine*...op. cit., chapt. 2, fol. 16v. Ganagoga is an African term, Guinea-Bissau, used by the Beafada people to describe the process of Creolisation in the 16th century. In the Beafada's language it means a man who speaks all languages, as they do, he can cross the whole of hinterland of our Guinea and [talk] to whatever Negroes there may be, "chamado pellos negros ho ganagoga q querdizer nalinguados Beafares homë qfallatodas as linguas comodefeito asfallam. Epodeestehomë atravesar todo o sertao do nosso guine dequaes quer negros queseja".

23 Scudder J. and P. Mickunas, *Meaning, Dialogue and Enculturation*, Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1985.

clearly a temporal and spatial process[24]. Interculturation, therefore, is viewed as the locale of human spatial behaviour, where the existing culture amalgamates the new culture, without exhausting openness towards the others or capacity to allow, accept and further engage presences of the other. It also includes the capability of the host community or institution to influence and be influenced, beyond their current parameter of location and time. Interculturation emphasises the need for grater political and economic equality. It also emphasises the need for the newcomers to accept and to abide to the existing structure in the host community and a move towards functional and social integration. The functional aspects of integration are most obvious in the areas of education, language skills, housing, labour market participation and access to welfare benefits. Social integration involves improved participation by newcomers in social networks and the acquisition of social capital[25]. Hybridity is seen as a concept that involves the decentralisation of the dominant culture and its revitalisation by incoming cultures. It views the culture of the 'others' not as a distortion of the local culture, but as a focal point for a dialogue between cultures[26].

Unlike assimilation which aims at the transformation or even purification, of the cultural practices of the others, prior to their integration, hybridity aims to defuse the exclusivity of the dominant culture and demolish the wall between the imported and the receiving culture, between the hegemonical and the peripheral culture, between the "binary opposition of 'our' and 'their'"[27]. As Papastergiadis argues: "...[hybridity] stresses that identity is not a combination, accumulation, fusion or synthesis of various components, but an energy field of different forces"[28]. For the two to coexist and be active in the process of exchange there must be a transfusion. It is a conscious transfusion which is not threatened. Assimilation is invariably a term used to express a celebration of the Western capacity for integrating traditions of the 'other' into Western mindset; so

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[24] For detail discussion on time and space, see Hall, E. T. *The Dance of Life, the Other Dimension of Time*, London: Anchor Books, 1989.

[25] See Li, Y. (et al edts.), "Social Capital and Social Trust in Britain", European Sociological Review, 21, (2), April 2005, pp. 109-123 and Y. Li, "Social Capital and Social Exclusion in England and Wales (972-1999)", *British Journal of Sociology*, 54, (4), December 2003, pp. 497-526 and See also Y. Li, (2006) 'Social Capital, Ethnicity and the Labour Market', *Proceedings of International Conference on Engaging Community*, conference jointly organized by the United Nations and the Government of the State of Queensland in Australia (conference 14-17, Aug. 2005). www.engagingcommunities2005.org, he defines four areas of social capital a) ***bonding*** which is concerned with relations with one's neighbours – close friends - ethnic groupings and geographical proximity, b) ***bridging*** which is concerned with people's intimate relations with those beyond immediate family - beyond one's own ethnicity and one's own neighbours, c) ***linking*** which expresses the relationship between the hierarchy and the lower class, that is the people from hierarchy attempting to help those from lower rank, d) ***formal*** and ***informal social capital***, the former is civic associations and the latter deal with Neighbourhood attachment and informal social networks, pp. 4-12 and on social capital see also, R. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993..

[26] Bhabba, H. "Culture`s in Between", in David Bennett, *Multicultural States: Rethinking Difference and Identity*, London: Routledge, 1998.

[27] Sarup, M. *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World*, Edinburgh, 1996, p. 149.

[28] N. Papastergiadis,"Tracing Hybridity in Theory", in P. Werbner and T. Modood, (ed.,), *Debating Cultural Hybridity,Multi-Racial Identities and Politics of Anti-Racism*, London, 1997, p. 259.

desirable elements of the other are extracted and incorporated into the dominant culture. In a similar vein, multiculturalism in Britain has been criticised because its focus has been on the celebration of difference, rather than hybridity or interculturation[29]. This celebration has its history in the recognition of ethnic minority identities which was initially based on colonial stereotypical characterization: what Bhabba called 'the ideological construction of otherness"[30].

Hybridity is a mutable term which can take many different forms and has cultural, political and linguistic aspects. For this reason it becomes a contested term, depending on one's own ontological and epistemological position[31]. Young opposed the use of the term the postcolonial theorising, principally because of its origin in the history of miscegenation in the 19th century. For Young, the history of the term has been a negative one connoting Western superiority: therefore, it must be abandoned[32]. However, to do justice to Young's critique, we must understand the connection he is making between the past and the present. Young contends that we have not moved away from the past; this past is still present. To use the term hybridity would be to claim the ideology of the colonial past, an ideology of which postcolonial discourse is attempting to dismantle. For Bhabba, however, hybridity in the postcolonial condition is a useful concept to provide a theoretical basis for resistance and it can be employed politically in order to displace the dominant power; as a mode of subversion of the authority of the centre. Bhabba contends that postcolonial discourse mimics the dominant discourse and this produces a new cultural form that is appropriated by the dominant as well as the dominated. Hybridity for Bhabba is thus: 'interstitial passage between fixed identifications which opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy"[33]. According to Bhabba, the encounter between Europe and the others has created an inseparable bond - the dominant and the dominated live not so much in isolation, but in the field of interconnectedness. As such both can express their identity by constantly borrowing from each other. As a result, what is created from this process, as far as the coloniser and the colonised are concerned, is the 'third space of enunciation'[34], which is unclaimable: a no man's-land so to speak in which difference can be realised. He asserts that: "mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask...the menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority"[35].

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[29] See Rex, J. "The Segregation and Integration of Britain's Black Minorities", in The Ghetto and the Underclass, Aldershot: Avebury, 1988 and B. Pareth, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000.

[30] Bhabha, H. K, *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 66.

[31] Shcroft, B. et al, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. London: Routledge, 2003.

[32] Young, R. J. C. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity, Culture and Race*. London: Routledge, 1995.

[33] Bhabba, H. *The* Location...op. cit., p. 4.

[34] Ibid., p. 37.

[35] Ibdi., p. 88.

2 – The Effect of Past Colonial Experience on Colonised and the Coloniser

The study of the modern refugee and asylum-seekers community in Birmingham, or the West Midlands in general, requires a sound investigation of the colonial past. This past, it is argued, is enshrined with negative images and representation of the asylum-seekers and refugees. If we are to attempt to open the door to integration issues in the West Midlands, the past has to be deciphered. Of course, it should be born in mind that integration issues are not new:

> "'asylum' originally came from the Greek 'asylos', that which may not be seized or violated, and usually referred to a place that was sacred or magical, such as a temple. Those who took sanctuary in such a place put themselves under the protection of the gods and so out of secular control"[36].

Even in Birmingham itself, there has been a long history[37] of immigration and migrant communities. However, this paper cannot deal with this history given space constrains, rather my focus is upon Birmingham's postcolonial experience in particular. The groups of migrants arriving in Birmingham after the decolonisation were, primarily, although not exclusively, from Britain's former colonial territories in South Asia, the Caribbean islands and former colonies in Africa. This began as a voluntary process and resulted from direct British historical contacts with these countries[38]. These groups, historically speaking, were familiar with the English language and, to some extent, with British culture. There were issues these new immigrant groups encountered centred around housing, employment and racism[39]. However, more recently, the migrants new intake of asylum-seekers and refugees since had no direct history of the British Empire and consequently Birmingham has undergone a different process of restructuring to accommodate them. This group includes migrants from lusophone African countries, i.e. former Portuguese colonies, such as Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Angola[40], Cape Verde and São Tomé and Principe; Vietnam (1990); Sudan (1989); Somalia, Albanian, Iran, Bosnia (1993); Burundi (1993) and Afghanitan (2000).

In the decolonisation period, when the colonised countries gained independence from the British Empire, there was a new form of migration. Post-war reconstruction and rebuilding of British economy and labour shortage required a new labour force from overseas. These newcomers were mainly from the West Indies, India, Pakistan and

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[36] Schuster, L. "Asylum and the Lessons of History", *Race & Class*, 44, (2), 2002, p. 41.

[37] Birmingham had a long history of asylum-seekers and refugees such as: Jews (1851), Serbs (1914), Belgians (1919), Spanish and Poles (1939), see M. Dick, *Celebrating Sanctuary: Birmingham and the Refugee Experience 1750-2002*, Birmingham: Refugee Week Steering Committee, 2002.

[38] See Solomos, J. *Race and Racism in Britain*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993.

[39] Solomos, J. "The Politics of Racism and Immigration Since 1945", in P. Braham, *Racism and Antiracism: Inequalities, Opportunities and Policies*, London: Sage, in association with the Open University, 1992 and see also J. Rex, "The Segregation and Integration of Britain's Black Minorities", in J. Rex, *The Ghetto and the Underclass*, Aldershot: Avebury, 1988.

[40] See, Dick, M. *Celebrating*...op. cit.,

Bangladesh and the process of integration was manageable. This group was, crucially, a small number and could easily participate in the society: "until that time, people were granted refugee status under procedural Immigration Rules. Until the late 1980s the annual number of asylum applicants did not exceed 5,000 and so there was little demand for legislation to regulate their acceptance, entitlements or integration"[41]. Of course, there was racism and discrimination which was enshrined in the past colonial representation and misrepresentation of the 'other'[42]. This representation had its origin in the history of colonialism and eurocentrism[43]. A view recently echoed by Birmingham Tory Councillor John Lines:

> "We do not afford them [Gurkhas] citizenship. We pay them a pension to go back to Nepal. Yet some scallywag, some scumbag can jump on the back of a lorry, come over under the tunnel and never expect to work a day in his [expletive] life. And if he's been here for a time waiting for a decision, we give him automatic British citizenship. The world's gone [expletive] mad."[44]

However, according to the Local government watchdog, the Standards Board for England which requires councillors to treat people with respect at all times; states that Lines' statement has not been in break of a code of conduct. The local government code of conduct was "never intended to prevent members from being free to be highly critical on issues of concern to them"[45]. As one of the readers comment puts it:

> "We should as a country be taking care of our own & ESPECIALLY our service men & women, who have given So much to us BEFORE any other countries citizens are catered for, be them asylum seekers or not, then we should see how much money is left/space in housing available etc. before deciding if we can cater for asylum seekers or immigrants. I believe it is about time Britain began a period of inward looking after centuries of looking outward (as America did in the 20-30's)"[46].

Fanon contended that colonialism made compulsory, or superimposed, a sense of false and degrading existence on the colonised which they had come to internalise. Fanon here was reinforcing the essentialism between the 'white' and 'black'. This contradiction was enshrined in the binary opposition that those who had been under the system of

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[41] Schuster, L. and J. Solomos (2001) "Asylum, Refuge and Public Policy: Current Trends and Future Dilemmas" *Sociological Research Online*, vol. 6, no. 1, http://www.socresonline.org.uk/6/1/schuster.html. 2001, pp. 1-2.

[42] Said, E.W., *Culture and imperialism*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1993.

[43] Shohat, E. (ed.,), *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, London: Routledge, 1994 and Fanon, F. *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York: Evergreen Books, 1968.

[44] Birmingham Post.net, http://www.birminghampost.net/news/politics-news/2008/03/07/councillor-john-lines-cleared-over-scumbags-comment-65233-20576090/

[45] Ibid.

[46] http://www.publicservice.co.uk/news_story.asp?id=4939

colonialism were not regarded as human beings by those who colonised them: "for not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man"[47]. The psychological effect of this was that the colonised themselves accepted this distorted image 'colonising the mind'[48]. For Fanon, colonialism affects the colonised's world view, as reflected particularly in the use of colonialist language: "To speak . . . means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization"[49].

Colonialism brought with it the imbalance of power disadvantaging the colonised and coupled with that was the stereotyping which: "tends to occur where there are gross inequalities of power. Power is usually directed against the subordinated group"[50]. Derrida put forward the argument where there are binary opposites there are always relations of power between the Us/Them: 'we are not dealing with ...peaceful coexistence...but rather a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs...the other or has the upper hand'[51]. This imbalance of power is created and re-enforced by the new laws on asylums and refugees which have a clear bearing on the asylum-seekers' and refugees' process of inetrculturation. For the integration of refugees to take place in capitalist society like Britain, the past cannot be ignored because it is still manifesting itself in the form of race issue. As Gilroy states:

> 'Race' has to be socially and politically constructed and elaborate ideological work is done to secure and maintain the different forms of 'racialisation' which have characterized capitalist development. Recognising this makes it all the more important to compare and evaluate different historical situations in which 'race' has become politically pertinent[52].

The sense of alienation and stigma that colonialism entails still persist in the mind of those who come to the motherland as the colonised. The key point here is that it is not so much the real colonial past that is important, but, rather, how people were brought to think about what happened in the past. The *Other* are still being perceived in accordance with their the past and other continue to view themselves in this circular past.

The European colonial legacy is a legacy that the colonialised people cannot easily avoid, given that Europeans stayed in some countries for more than four centuries. This past has some bearing on the colonised identity and culture and continued to be debated issues,

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[47] Ibid., p. 110.

[48] See wa Thiong'o, N. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, London: Currey, 1986.

[49] Fanon, F. *Black*...op. cit., pp. 17-18.

[50] Hall, S. *Representation*...op. cit., p. 258

[51] Ibid.,

[52] Gilroy, P. *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*, London: Routledge, 1987, p. 38.

particularly in Asian, South American and African literatures. What is at stake is the impact of Western culture and thought on the colonised[53].

If the history of colonialism and thought could have remained as something in the past without the need to invoke or resurrect them in the present, if the disturbed past was forgotten and a shelter was provide for the consciousness of the colonised, then this past could be erased. However, since the colonial past is still invoked through media discourses[54] and representation, this will continue to make the colonial history an indispensable tool in defining the subjectivity of the colonised in the mother country. The colonised will continue to recall everything that has eluded and happened to them in the past as being stored in the present and as a reminder that time has not dispersed anything. Bhabba explains this paradox:

> Narratives of historical reconstruction may reject such myths of social transformation: communal memory may seek its meaning through a sense of causality, shared with pschoanalysis, that negotiates the recurrence of the image of the past, while keeping open the question of the future. The importance of such retroaction lies in its ability to reinscribe the past, reactivate it, relocate it, *resignify* it. More significantly, it commits our understanding of the past, and our reinterpretation of the future, to an ethics of 'survival' that allows us to *work through the present*[55].

The alienation and social exclusion faced by asylum-seekers and refugees are a constant reminder that the past is re-enacted, appropriated and manipulated to bring back under their control, all those elements that the past kept at a distance about difference and othering[56]. Any integration of the asylum-seekers and refugees requires an acknowledgement of, and reference, to the past.

History plays a major role in constructing and deconstructing one's identity. To make the claim that history is important for our understanding of the asylum-seekers and refugees' subjectivity in the mother country may appear far fetched, but it is a crucial one if there is to be genuine integration. It is a claim which aims to assert that the discourse of the past is continuous and that human consciousness, whether of the former colonisers or the former colonised is subject to all previous historical development and all their actions reflect the two sides of this system of thought[57]. In the process of integration the past and the present are dependent and this issue needs to be addressed.

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[53] See Cabral, A. *P.A.I.G.C. – Unidade e Luta, Textos Amilcar Cabral, No 2*. Lisboa: Nova Aurora, 1974 and see also Lingna Nafafé, J. "Guinea Bissau…", op. cit..

[54] Shohat, E, (ed.,), *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. London: Routledge, 1994

[55] Bhabba, H. "Culture…", op. cit., p. 35.

[56] For detail discussion British long history of controlling the entry migrants see, Kushner, T. and Knox, K. *Refugees in an Age of Genocide*, London: Frank Cass, 1999.

[57] Bhabba, H. "Culture...", op. cit.

Refugees' experience of integration in the West Midlands is based on issues of isolation and social exclusion. These conundrums as regards their integration cannot be analysed in isolation from history. Inequalities in ownership, the distribution of wealth, jobs, resources and power, cultural recognition and access to education have their antecedents in the structural inequality of the past and how refugees have been perceived by, and continue to perceive themselves in, the mother country. Integration is an economic issue and, therefore, social inclusion is inseparable from it. Integration, therefore, is a complex set of social issues, which includes: legal status and citizenship, and functional and social integration[58].

One salient characteristic of the inequality affecting asylum-seekers and refugees in the current climate inevitably brings with it an acute awareness of colonial history as a prerequisite for its interpretation and engagement. This historical consciousness has forced upon asylum-seekers and refugees an awareness of the ambiguity and anxiety it involves in the integration process. In addition, media reporting and its affect on public opinion has inflamed nationalist and fundamentalist reactions[59]. Much of this media representation of public views on asylum-seekers and refugees, is rooted in history. As such, history shapes our current cultural consciousness, therefore historical conscious should be fundamental to understanding the question of what the integration means in the UK generally and to Midlands particularly[60].

Refugees in their attempt to identify themselves with the process of integration often identify themselves with the mother country through language, even if they find themselves in a different geographical location. So, for example, Angolan and Guinean (Guinea-Bissau) people in the UK, always express their identity through the Portuguese language, even though they have their own mother tongue. By maintaining the language of the coloniser, they affirm their authenticity even though in a different mother country by adopting the language of their coloniser, even maintaining European names, rather than the identity of their country of origin. The stance is also political; it is an attempt to look for recognition, a recognition which would be difficult, if not impossible, if they retained their African identities alone[61].

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[58] Knops, A. 'Towards Social Participation Standards: The Potential of the Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey", *Scottish Executive Social Justice Annual Report*. Edinburgh. Scottish Executive, 2000.

[59] Bhabba, H. "Culture...", op. cit., see also J. Rex, "The Basic Elements of a Systematic Theory of Ethnic Relations", *Sociological Research Online,* vol. 6, no. 1, 2001, http://www.socresonline.org.uk/6/1/rex.html.

[60] For detail discussion on Birmingham ethnic population and postcolonial Birmingham economy see T. Slater, R. "Birmingham's Black and South-Asian Population", in A. J. Gerrard, et al (edts.), *Managing a Conurbation: Birmingham and its Regions*, Sudley: Brewin Books. 1996, pp. 140-155, see also Bryson, J. R. et al (edts.), "From Widgets to Where?: The Birmingham Economy in the 1990s", in A. J. Gerrard, et al (edts.), *Managing a Conurbation: Birmingham and its Regions*, Sudley: Brewin Books. 1996, pp. 156-168.

[61] See Cabral, A. *Return to the Source, Selected Speeches*, New York: Monthly Review, 1973, and *P.A.I.G.C. – Unidade*...op. cit., he took the view that European language, the Portuguese, is the best tool the colonised left us with which can be used to express our identity. See also N. Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, London: Currey, 1986. Thiong'o rejects this notion of adopting the English language as a language of express Kikuyo's philosophy.

3 – Birmingham Case: An Illustration

Refugees and asylum-seekers are perceived by the host community through the eyes of their past. Rex argues that the treatment of the migrant community has to do with their past in the colonies[62]. Here, I develop this view arguing that the past has, to some extent, affected the integration of the refugees in the UK and in the West Midlands in particular. Nationally, the refugees have been treated by the media as 'bogus'[63], 'ill', 'dirt'[64], 'illegal'[65], 'swamping us'[66]. The use of these terms are clearly reflected in the local press. So, the Sunday Mercury, a Birmingham based paper, states that:

> Mr Blunkett is also proposing to tag bogus asylum-seekers so that they cannot disappear into the community before they are sent home. Of the 2,700 Iraqis in the region currently applying to stay in the country, it is believed that just TEN have returned home since the war ended. The situation is the same among Afghan asylum-seekers, who are also refusing to leave the Midlands. There are currently 1,175 Afghans in the region still seeking asylum - more than a year since the war in their country[67].

The local press often reflects national fears which are then feed back into the local host community. However, the community has been attempting to question those grand narratives of the press, in particular that of Lines. Minnis states: "This sort of thing will tarnish the reputation of Birmingham. The comments were acting against equalities, reinforced stereotypes and could damage community relations"[68] (see power-point).

The national fear about asylum-seekers and refugees is interpolated into the local community partly, in terms of a claim of international authenticity, for example, making reference to the findings of international organisations, such as United Nations.

> The number of asylum seekers found homes in the West Midlands has rocketed by 44 per cent in just nine months. New figures obtained by the Sunday Mercury reveal those being housed in the region has risen from 6,930 to 9,975. Other cities and towns have also seen sharp rises in their refugee populations - putting strain on already stretched local authorities. As at the end of September 2002, the West Midlands was one of five regions with the highest population of asylum seekers in NASS accommodation. And Birmingham and Wolverhampton were among the top 10 cities in terms of

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[62] See Rex, J. "The Segregation…", op. cit.,

[63] Daily Start, 22nd May, 2002.

[64] The Sun, 14th February, 2003.

[65] Evening Standard, 24th September, 2002.

[66] The Daily Telegraph, 10th February, 2002.

[67] Sunday Mercury, Nov 30, 2003.

[68] Birmingham Post.net, http://www.birminghampost.net/news/politics-news/2008/03/07/councillor-john-lines-cleared-over-scumbags-comment-65233-20576090/

> numbers of asylum seekers. News of the increase comes a few weeks after the United Nations confirmed Britain is the most popular target country in Europe for refugees [69].

Conclusion

The integration of refugees is hampered by negative media reporting which also informs public perceptions. Lewis concludes after her research in Birmingham that: "a "hostile and frequently inaccurate national press has served to create and reinforce the public perception that asylum seekers have a negative impact on the UK's economy and society. It legitimizes existing hostility and creates an exaggerated fear of the impact of asylum seekers upon services and resources"[70].

The debate on the integration of refugees will continue to take centre stage in the UK and in Europe at large, because the refugees' economic status and will continued to be seen as a problem by the host community. Immigration is an issue when the others possess more visible symbols of difference, and these differences are focused upon by the host community backed by calls for integration. Much of the invoked anti-refugees or anti-asylum-seekers rhetoric is essentially based on difference, on identity, on myths of heterogeneous and on past colonial memories.

The complexity of the integration issue makes it a subjective topic of research and theoretically one can see it in a different light depending on the data available to the researcher. However, given an understanding of the intellectual narratives of postcolonial literatures which highlight the past and current climate with which asylum-seekers and refugees are viewed, this paper claims that their integration is hampered by the colonial past. Furthermore, it concludes that, because of the gap that exits between the 'coloniser' and the 'colonised', any meaningful integration is a one way street. The colonised living in the mother country have to adapt to the culture of the host community. Overall, the contention is that we need to recognize and understand importance of the colonial past and it affect on issues of integration if we are to move forward.

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69 Sunday Mercury, December 8, 2002.
70 Lewis, M. *Asylum*…op. cit., p. 47.