

REFUGEES IN THE NETHERLANDS: EXPECTATIONS AND INTEGRATION CHALLENGES

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PREFACE

Studying *Management of Cultural Diversity* has brought me to a new haven of knowledge, broadening my scope of understanding to a world governed by globalization. This study has been conducted at a moment when issues of immigration and integration became challenges for Western European countries, and The Netherlands is no exception. Over a year, I have met individuals who have escaped their war-torn countries of origin looking for a safe haven and a new beginning. Their stories of escape struck me and their experiences raised my awareness about a different kind of life hardships. Yet, they were able to express themselves in an impressive way. Although the journey to this study has not been easy, the knowledge it provided me with is undeniably great. I hereby would like to thank every asylum seeker and refugee who allowed me to dive deep into his/her experiences in order to come up with the results outlined in the coming pages. I would like to thank the lawyer Stefan Koolen, who spent years defending human rights, for his contribution to this study. Furthermore, I couldn't have gone through this journey without the special assistance and supervision of dr. Massimiliano Spotti, and the enriching feedback of my second reader dr. Kutlay Yagmur. Finally, my gratitude to my family that has always been my source of inspiration, and my fiancé, Rita Polgár, who has supported and empowered me throughout the process of this research.

ABSTRACT

This book examines the impacts that preconceived opinions and beliefs of asylum seekers and refugees have on their life in the Netherlands, and how their attitudes towards integration do influence their life in the new host country. This area of research has been studied through collecting data from the field as well as reviewing official procedures that shape the experience of asylum seekers and refugees. Interviews have been conducted with Middle-Eastern asylum seekers and refugees, and a lawyer specialized in asylum cases. At the institutional level, the data collection process has involved studying policies and procedures of the Dutch authorities in terms of asylum and integration. The analysis of the data leads to recommendations to improve asylum policies and procedures as well as integration programs. This is thus an in-depth investigation into the motivations and attitudes of Middle East Third Country Nationals towards integration in the Netherlands, which might be of interest to fellow citizens, scholars, academics and policy makers alike. This book dives deep into a poorly investigated field of research, in that there is not much academic research done on the motivations of asylum seekers and their influence on the attitudes within the framework of the integration process.

Keywords: *Motivations, attitudes, integration, asylum seekers, refugees, discourse*

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I. INTRODUCTION

With the continuous influx of asylum seekers into Europe, the issue of integration remains extensively debated among the concerned authorities and institutions. In the Netherlands, despite the strict asylum policies and procedures, considerable numbers of asylum seekers still arrive to the country seeking refuge. Amid efforts to integrate those recognized as refugees within the Dutch society, questions arise regarding the preconceived opinions and beliefs of the refugees about the host country and the receiving society. Middle-Eastern third country nationals constitute a considerably large group of refugees in the Netherlands, and the intensifying conflicts across that region contribute to the increasing movement of migration. Every asylum seeker is believed to have developed a certain image of the Netherlands before departure from home country. Once they arrive to the Netherlands and apply for asylum, they undergo a set of procedures in a phase that may reconstruct their preconceived beliefs and influence their attitudes towards integration in the long run. This study delves into the motivations of Middle-Eastern asylum seekers and refugees, investigating their preconceived opinions and beliefs before arriving to the Netherlands and how these influence their attitudes towards integration after settlement.

Challenges associated with migration and integration are considered as products of globalization and super-diversity.

1.1. Globalization

Globalization is viewed as a process of transformation of local or regional

phenomena into global ones. It is deemed an ongoing process that implies integrity of local and regional societies and cultures through worldwide networks of exchange (Grabovszki, 2002). Sheila L. Croucher (2004) describes globalization as a process by which the people of the world are unified into a single society and function together. This process is a combination of economic, technological, socio-cultural and political forces. Zygmunt Bauman (1998) argues that globalization has become one of the 'words of our time' that is being used in various contexts and understood in different ways. "What appears as globalization for some, means localization for many others; signaling new freedom for some, globalizing processes appear as uninvited and cruel fate for many others." (Bauman, 1998: 4). In his 'Dictionary of Globalization', Andrew Jones (2006) defines the concept of globalization in terms of growing interrelatedness and interconnectedness of the various aspects of society. According to Gunter and Hoeven (2004), globalization, since its emergence in 1960s, has been remarkably associated with the ongoing flows of information and communication, which implies bringing societies closer together, but also causing marginalization to a considerably large part of countries and societies. Bauman argues that an integral portion of the globalizing processes includes progressive spatial segregation, separation and exclusion. In his study of globalization, Bauman finds immobility as an 'unrealistic option' in a world characterized by permanent change. According to him, being local in such a globalized world indicates a level of social deprivation and degradation. "The social dimension of globalization relates to the impact of globalization on the life and work of people, their families, and their societies. Beyond the world of work, the social dimension includes security, culture and identity, inclusion or exclusion from society, and the cohesiveness of families and communities." (Gunter & Hoeven,

2004: 5). Characterized by increased mobility and communication, the world, according to Jan Blommaert (2010), has remarkably moved from the usual community perspective to a more complex world of symbolically and materially interconnected villages, towns and neighborhoods. Such material or symbolic ties often take place in unpredictable ways. This shift has brought about “new opportunities as well as constraints, new possibilities as well as new problems, progress as well as regression” (Blommaert, 2010: 4). As such, globalization relates to the growing challenges of integration and migration across the globe, raising concerns regarding the issues of cultural identities and social cohesion in increasingly diversified regions. Globalization as a notion is considered a progressive integration of societies. Migration is viewed as one of the main characteristics of globalization, which emphasizes the configurations of remarkable differences across societies as immigrants occupy new cultural spaces in a host country (Zamora, 2002). As a process, globalization is associated with the increased interconnectedness across national borders and the augmented tendency towards international migration.

1.2. Super-diversity

The concept of super-diversity emerged in the last decade to address the greatly changing nature of global migration. According to Steven Vertovec (2007), the new forms of global migration have brought about a transformative “diversification of diversity” in terms of people’s movements, reflecting diverse ethnicities, countries of origin, languages and a multiplication of remarkable variables affecting how, where and with whom people live. Therefore, associating diversity only with ethnicity reflects a shortage in understanding other aspects that diversity implies, especially

with the increasingly changing nature of migration across the globe. In order to fully understand the complex nature of the current migration-driven diversity, other aspects of this phenomenon need to be taken into consideration by policy-makers, social scientists and the public. Vertovec points out that the additional variables to be recognized in terms of diversity include “differential legal statuses and their concomitant conditions, divergent labour market experiences, discrete configurations of gender and age, patterns of spatial distribution, and mixed local area responses by service providers and residents. The dynamic interaction of these variables is what is meant by ‘super-diversity’”. (Vertovec, 2007: 1025). The rise of super-diversity is viewed by Ulrich Beck (2011) as an inevitable result of global flows of migration, capital, information and risks. It is also associated with political and social challenges. According to Zetter (2007), the super-diversity of ethnic minorities and migrant groups encounters issues of public perceptions about cohesion, citizenship and national identity. The transition from diversity to super-diversity is viewed as a departure from the previously possible definition of migrants and refugees in a relatively clear way to a phase of complexity in terms of defining these groups. This increased diversity causes concerns regarding the mounting racial intolerance towards migrants across Europe (Zetter, 2007). The notion of super-diversity remains a complex one. As Beck argues: “We do not even have the language through which contemporary super-diversity in the world can be described, conceptualized, understood, explained and researched.” (Beck, 2011: 53).

1.3. Refugees and Asylum Seekers

The 1951 Geneva Convention of Refugees defined a refugee as someone

who has left his/her country of normal residence due to a well-founded fear of suppression and persecution, and is unwilling or unable to return. There is a large degree of confusion regarding the difference between an asylum seeker and a refugee. Both terms are often used incorrectly or interchangeably. On the one hand, an asylum seeker is someone who is looking for an international protection but whose application for refugee status has not yet been determined and his claim for refuge has not yet been recognized. A refugee, on the other hand, is someone who has already been granted status and recognized under the 1951 Geneva Convention. The Convention's definition of a 'refugee' is a person who: "...owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it." (UNHCR, 2007: 16). However, the definition of 'refugee' does not include other groups or individuals who emigrate their country of origin due to only war or other kinds of civil disturbance, natural disasters or famine in search for a better life. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) illustrates that economic migrants usually leave their country of origin voluntarily in order to look for better living conditions. If this kind of migrants chose for returning home they'll still enjoy protection from their government. Whereas refugees escape due to threats of suppression and are unable to return safely to their home countries under the same prevailing circumstances.

According to UNHCR, the refugees' figures have seen a dramatic increase between 1970s and 1990s, reaching a peak of approximately 18