RESEARCH ARTICLES

Migrant Integration: Case for a Necessary Shift of Paradigm

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Abstract. This article deals with the antagonism between the need for migrant communities to maintain their native culture and the necessity to integrate in the dominant community in order to achieve social harmony and socio-economic promotion. The article found that cultural isolation could alienate some migrants who may see in the establishment of the community organisation a way of leading a migrant life that requires neither increased contacts with indigenous groups nor specific training. The migrants find themselves locked in menial jobs and do not experience upward social mobility. The situation points to a need to rethink the management of community organisations and support systems.

Keywords: *migrant integration, community organizations, socio-cultural identities, Polish immigrants in UK*

Introduction and background

Attempting to maintain socio-cultural identities in the host country is not a new phenomenon among immigrants and minority ethnic communities. Such attempts are part of the struggle to retain a community's roots. There is evidence that many immigrant communities tend to settle in particular areas of the capital and other UK towns and cities (Bloch, 2002, Hack-Polay, 2006a) in order to strengthen ties between them, keep alive aspects of their culture and fight against acculturation. Migrant and ethnic communities have not been outside this general picture and some, such as the Polish community in the United Kingdom, have long been known for their strong linguistic and cultural survival. For the Poles, for instance, the generations that immigrated to the UK during the First and Second World Wars established foundations on which later generations built to keep Poland, the Polish language and culture alive abroad for decades.

A large number of the immigrants have been very successful citizens in the host countries (Robinson, 2000). In the fulfilment their citizenship responsibilities, Tabori (1972) believes that most feel indebted to the country of settlement and therefore work hard to demonstrate their worthiness as citizens. The Polish communities in the UK can be credited with a large degree of success (British Refugee Council, 2002; Hack-Polay, 2006b). However, some of the immigrants are left behind due to a number of factors which could include language acquisition and the degree and extent of exploitation of social networks available. For the less successful migrants, the lack of competence in the language of the host country often becomes a disabling factor. A number of researchers in the field of sociolinguistics have highlighted some major social and psychological factors impacting on the successful integration of migrants in the host environment. For Mitchell and Myles (2001, p.24), there are cognitive factors, e.g. intelligence, language aptitude and language learning strategies as well as affective factors, e.g. language attitudes, motivation and language anxiety, which have an important effect on the performance of the second language learner. Other authors such as Anthias & Yuval-Davis (1995), Solomos & Back (1996) and Brennan & McGeevor (1990), etc. have found that racism and socio-cultural boundaries could also be important cause.

The paper looks at the issue of the under-performance of groups of migrants from a more social perspective and considers the degree to which the availability of a large community network could have an impact on the socialisation process, particularly through language acquisition and participation in social and economic life in the host country. The article investigates the strategies employed by the Polish migrant community in south London to ensure language and cultural survival and the degree to which cultural and linguistic conservatism impacts on the development of a second language and economic opportunities, particularly among adult members of the community. Social and cultural conservatism or maintenance could be described as the relatively successful retention of particular social and cultural attributes by a minority community within a dominant group.

Migrant organisations are not separable from the life and concentration of people from different cultures who try to settle in an alien society. Migrant organisations represent a way of establishing or maintaining norms and values within a population of newcomers that share similar characteristics. Such organisations are important factors in the integrations of migrants. Omi & Winant

(1986:22) explain in a study of American society that "the key factor in explaining the success that an ethnic group will have in becoming incorporated into a majority society … is the values or norms it possesses". The assumption in Omi & Winant's research is that a group is incorporable only if they have particular values and norms could be disputable. In fact in the context of migration, many migrants may not have the opportunity to be affiliated with a group close to their original culture but through individual struggle integration is possible, alongside the struggle of other migrants with whom they may share little or no cultural ties.

Furthermore, evidence from other research namely Park (1950) suggests that other characteristics such as skin colour, physical appearance, etc., are likely to impact on the level and speed of integration of minorities in a dominant society. Park writes that "where races are distinguished by certain external marks these furnish a permanent stratum upon which and around which the irritations and animosities, incidental to all human intercourse, tend to accumulate and so to gain strength". Research in the integration of refugees in the United Kingdom has shown varying levels and degrees of integration of groups of refugees, which may have some racial foundations (Brennan & McGeevor, 1990; Clark, 1992). However, a key remark in Omi & Winant's point is applicable to sizeable groups that have the capability to erect themselves as a distinct category which they want to perpetuate. This is the case of Irish immigrants in the USA whose integration Park (1950) has described as successful and rapid compared to that of black people. It may also apply for instance to the Indian and the Somali communities, etc. in Britain that share both religious and other cultural practices.

In other cases, migrant organisations aim to represent a support group, a self-help initiative in order to support economic prosperity and welfare. These therefore do not necessarily strive to perpetuate or identifiable norms. It can thus, be established that migrant organisations may have two different aims: either to perpetuate particular norms and values or act as a brokerage for economic and social success and integration of its members who may be or may not be from the same cultural origin. Wagner & Obermiller's (2004:100) found four types of functions fulfilled by migrant ethnic organisations among American immigrants. These four types comprised organisations founded for social purposes, "to affirm their identity, to remain connected to their roots, and preserve their heritage".

Hack-Polay (2006a) has developed an interesting typology of migrant community organisations and their functions as presented in the table below.

Table 1: Typology of migrant community organisations

Type of organisation	Key function
Social community organisation	- welfare solidarity – assistance with employment-education guidance- social events (wedding, religious, dancing parties)
Cultural survival community organisation	- affirm identity

-retain connection with roots

-preserve heritage preserve language and religion |
| *Political community organisation* | Political mobilisation- national government in exile – lobbying of foreign powers |

Source: Hack-Polay, D D (2006) *Metaphors and narratives in exile: understanding the experiences of forces migrants in the UK*, doctorate thesis, Guildford, University of Surrey, December.

Many migrant groups could fall within these three categories. However, they differ from the degree of involvement in a particular type. The models followed by many migrant communities can be said to fall in the Immigrant-host framework of which Patterson (1965) is a strong advocate. She argues that the process of integration of an immigrant community involves both the host community and the newcomers to adapt to and accommodate a changing social and racial geography, although the immigrant group had more of the adaptation to do.

The support element centres around two broad themes: employment and social life. Members of migrant groups are aware of the difficulties that they face in those areas. Anthias and Yuval Davis (1995:77) stress the fact that migrants face various forms of exclusion and discrimination in employment. This justifies to a certain extent the flow of migrants within those community structures which can provide advice and some practical assistance to newcomers wanting to enter the job market or find some friendship.

Many migrant groups in Britain represent a vital social tool contributing to the healing and the integration processes. Community organisations fulfil many different functions. Such structures represent a focal point for new arrivals, as these are the places or milieus where they encounter the first humanly contacts, the first contacts that are meaningful, reassuring and hopeful. For Pfister-Ammende (1960) and Gordon (1964), the ethnic community reduces the culture shock experienced by immigrants as a result of sudden landing in the new society because it reduces disorientation while enabling a sense of identity. Many migrant community groups serve the interests of individuals from particular nationalities or ethnic origins.

In Greenwich, for example, the Somalis numbering around 9000 people, have set up several community organisations to meet the multiple needs of the multitude who live there. Somali organisations operating in Greenwich include the Somali Community Centre (Woolwich) the Somali Community Education & Employment Support and the Somali Refugee Action Group, which aim to provide welfare, educational, training, employment, health, cultural and religious support to their members.

The importance of community organisations is not arguable as they help migrants re-gain a smile and engage in 'normal' human interactions are socio-psychological dimensions that help refugees to get away from the perceived 'abnormal' nature of their new conditions, i.e. loneliness, isolation, speechlessness, depression, etc. in the early period following migration.

However, the role of the community organisation could be viewed from a different perspective which may not always be in the line of inclusion. In fact, instead of freeing the individual, the community organisation could alienate them, confining them to dealing only with people that look like them, speak their languages and dance their rhythms. Hack-Polay (2006a) found that those respondents who had friends among the indigenous population where able to develop language competence quicker and use their contacts to gain social promotion.

This finding highlights to a large extent the alienation that community or ethnic based groups could place their members in. Stein (1986) sees contradiction in the role of the ethnic organisation; while on the one hand, it smoothens the transition between being a citizen in their homeland and becoming refugees, the community organisation can also be seen as "dysfunctional, as a barrier that keeps

the refugee in an ambivalent position – midway to nowhere between the lost homeland and the new society" (Stein, 1986:17). Such practices help maintain the status of a divided society, which is not always the sole making of the indigenous population but, as Castles & Kosack (1973) found, could be a more complex problem that involves the deliberate subordination of migrant communities in labour, housing, education as well as discrimination against minorities. Usually, the first generations, and maybe the second, would almost be confined to similar micro-social groupings and only later generations could start to see openings through education, work and leisure attendance together with the indigenous young people.

The key finding of the research establishes that the larger the community of migrants from a specific culture is, the abilities they have to develop mechanisms for cultural and linguistic conservatism. These are invaluable ingredients of crucial importance when it comes to healing the social and psychological disruptions caused by migration but at the same time, in the long term, extensively sustained community paternalism could alienate more vulnerable community members and represent rather hindrance to social and economic integration in the new society, thus, necessitating a shift of paradigm from community organisations supporting migrants. The possible impact of social and cultural protectionism on the social and professional promotion among migrant communities in the United Kingdom has not always attracted an amount of literature commensurate with the problem and further research is fundamental for a greater understanding of the phenomenon.

METHODOLOGY

The research was done using participant observation and interviews to get information from 20 members of a Polish community in south London and the priest of community's Catholic Church. Participant observation in the research was covert and meant that attending the Polish church on Sunday and other cultural, social and religious events, the researcher was able to speak to pre-selected subjects, whose language competence who felt to be minimal but were in some form of employment. Rapport was developed with the target participants and the trust built enabled the subjects to invite the researchers for a number of private events which helped follow their social and professional lives. This meant that the

researcher did was they did, slept where they slept and ate and exchange social jokes with them. The interactions were conducted with the assistance of a Polish interpreter. In addition to data from observation, interviews were held with the Parish Priest and two elders. They provided additional historical and statistical information about the community. The interview with the Priest was crucial in understanding the philosophies behind the Polish community's organisation and support networks.

FINDING AND ANALYSIS

The observees

The observees were aged between 24 and 35 years. The average age was 27 years. This shows that the newcomers from the new European Union (EU) countries may be predominantly the young in search of work and a better life. There were 15 men and five women. Most of the observees (six in ten) came to the UK after the accession of Poland to the European Union in May 2004. They have therefore been in the country for over three years. The remaining respondents (40 per cent) have lived in the UK for well over three years, mostly between four and six years. These old-timers acknowledged that they were illegal immigrants in the UK prior to their country entering the EU.

The observees all had only a moderate knowledge of the English language, with only one having a basic understanding of the language. However, it was difficult to establish the true level of the observees because the language competence in each of the four main language learning areas (reading, writing, speaking & listening) varied for most individuals. For instance while Jarek's spoken English could be estimated to be at intermediate level, his writing was comparable to complete beginners. This meant that the observees did not have sufficient language abilities to converse in English. All were in employment. Ten of the fifteen men were in unskilled or semi-skilled employment, working in various capacities (plasters, plumbers, electricians, cleaners) on building sites around London. The remaining five men worked in catering (3) and delivery (2). One of the women worked in a hotel as a chambermaid, two as cashiers and two were childcare helpers in with private families. The high employment rate among the participants may suggest that the primary reason for coming to the UK was work. Such a choice

possibly made other activities such as studying less of a priority for many migrants. That denotes strong labour market participation among migrants.

Instruments of socio-cultural conservatism: community infrastructures

The Polish community in south London uses several strategies to maintain key social and cultural characteristics that form part of its identity. The most significant of those are provision of a church service, a Saturday school for children, a community centre, classes for adults, play group for babies and toddlers and a community newspaper. The significance of these activities or strategies is explained below.

The community centre

In the absence of reliable historical data about the community in Polish south London, I set out to have informal discussion with some elders and the priest in order to gather additional information to complement documentary sources. According to those informants, the community has existed there for over sixty years during which different generations have worked to maintain various activities geared at promoting polish language, culture and identity. The elders I spoke to have been part of the community for over thirty years and were able to narrate their experience of the setting. The community centre was set up via collection and donations from the founders. Many of the original members sometimes offered weeks of wages in order to purchase the building that house the community centre today. The community centre is composed of four large buildings: a four storey building where the priest and the care taker have their residence; another four storey building that houses the Polish Saturday school for children and adult classes; a large community hall and a church. The buildings are arranged in a rectangle shape, leaving a reasonable parking and play area in the centre. The complex attests the degree of meticulous organisation by a community striving for survival as a linguistic and cultural entity.

The priest who manages most of the activities was not sure exactly how many members were using the centre. Particularly, after the accession of Poland to the European Union in 2004, which allowed free movement of people from Poland into the EU, a large number of Polish immigrants have entered the UK. The

number frequenting the South London community centre has increased dramatically, with the church and the Saturday school now being largely oversubscribed. As a guide, the priest explained that there used to be about 80-100 people for each of the two Sunday services, but now there are not enough seats for all as an estimates 120-140 attend each service despite the number of Sunday masses being increased to three. The number of pupils on roll at the Saturday school has also nearly tripled, from 100 in 2006 to over 250 in 2007.

So, this is a growing community which continues to strive to maintain a certain identity through various means. The subsection below examines some of the key strategies used by the community for linguistic and cultural survival.

Religious and cultural instrument

The Polish Church is open every day and members can come for service or private prayers. As the priest resides on the premises, he can often be contacted if needed. The main church services (masses) are held on Sundays. Due to the capacity of the church as explained earlier, there are now three services, at 10 a.m., 11.30 a.m. and 6.00 p.m. The services are conducted in native langue and following the rites and rituals of the Polish Catholic church as it is practised in the country of origin. Members are not only old-timers but newcomers are now outnumbering more established members of the community at church services. After the mass every Sunday, the community hall is opened for members to congregate there for socialising and tea, biscuits, sweets and lunch are offered.

The significance of the church in culture maintenance is not arguable. It brings alive what Wiley (2001) called "connections to past traditions and the maintenance of ancestral languages". These connections are so strong that it seems as though they could only be expressed in the mother tongue. It is the expression of literacy as a social capital. In this sense, I would disagree with Carrington & Luke (1997) who suggest that literacy does not provide social success. Certainly in the case of this Polish community, members' practice demonstrates that literacy can have effects on other cognitive practices. The use of the native language in the context of the church is a tool for social and cultural action.

During the covert observation process, the researcher attended a number of cultural events, a Christmas party, children's ball as well as private barbeque parties in some of the observees' homes. In much of these instances the invitees

were predominantly Polish migrants, though a few people from different socio-cultural groups attended but were mostly accompanying spouses. A large national gathering of these immigrants takes place at the POSK, a multi-storey tower which represents the headquarters of the Polish community in the UK. Here many cultural events take place every year, including historical and cultural exhibitions, children's language and culture competitions, balls and World War II remembrance ceremonies. All these attest the power of the culture as an instrument of identity maintenance and self-segregation among migrant communities (Hack-Polay, 2006a; Durkheim, 1961; Malinowski, 1954).

Education instrument

A Saturday school operates within the community centre and is open to all children of Polish origin who live in the area, regardless of whether their parents attend the church or not. The Parish priest explained that the accent is placed on the widening of the community base that will serve as a core in the cultural maintenance initiative. The more pupils there are on roll the more extensive and stronger the community would be, providing more prospect for socio-cultural and linguistic survival and cultural revival. Within the Saturday school, language is therefore "both the medium and the message of education" The school seeks to develop the children's ability to speak the native language as well as know and understand the culture. The curriculum is thus based on the school curriculum in the native country.

Informal sessions offering educational guidance and employment advice are run once a week. This is to offer the support of the community to newcomers to enable to settle smoothly. There is often referral to some members of the community who may be working in places where there may be possible openings for the newcomers. Usually, if an established member helps a newly arrived person to find employment within their workplace, he or she would take responsibility to work closely with the new employee until they are settled and could coach another person into the job.

Some English classes provision is available to ensure community members are linguistically independent and could seek some integration with other communities. But these are not always structured and extensive; it is also believed that their language abilities will naturally increased in the workplace (Norton,

2000), which could, however, be somehow problematic given that newcomers often work with countrymen and women, thus getting minimum opportunities to practice the language. There are also recreational classes with Salsa lessons, yoga, polish traditional dance (Karolinka) and a choir. There is a social club within the community setting where people congregate to seek friendship.

Social networks: the mother and toddlers group

A mother and toddler group also operates within the community centre geared at developing friendship among Polish mothers but also among their children. The researcher visited the group during the research. During tea with the mothers, the researcher enquired with the playgroup leader about the reasons why many of these women were not attending their local playgroups operated for a multicultural audience. The leader joked: "you see, they are happy here; we drink tea together; we sing songs from Poland for our kids and we chat and gossip about some people together; we understand each other". The women would have benefited from the contacts with women from other migrants and indigenous groups in terms of improving their language skills, meeting new people and developing strategic alliances and network that could help in future life. However, they chose to come to the community centre's playgroup where they could the sense of feeling foreigners and some embarrassment, in the words of the playgroup leader.

Informational instrument: Community Newspapers

The community newspapers, 'Cooltura', 'Goniec Polski', 'Nowy Czas' and 'Panorama' are in Polish language and circulated through the church or in the community hall as means of providing comprehensive news to the community. At the end of each church service, community members get the paper free of charge from the community hall. A monthly bulletin is also produced and distributed free of charge. The papers ensure that vital religious and community information is available to all members of the community with no need for translation. While the newspaper is an essential element to build the community spirit, it could provide members who are not literate in English with an opportunity not to seek to read papers in English language. In fact, many members also purchase newspapers and

magazines in Polish language from a nearby shop, specialising in the sale of Polish products.

Instruments of socio-cultural conservatism: economic infrastructures

The availability of almost all vital services and a supportive community and social networks may not necessarily encourage individuals within the community to learn and mix with the host culture, and the observees in this research exemplify this situation. The acquisition of a second language usually represents a tool for social action. Mercer (2000), for example, argues that second language acquisition helps people to use the language to deal with many situations, to solve problems and to get things done successfully. However, in the case of the observees, it seems that learning the language (English) of the host society in which they have come to live would be an unnecessary activity particularly because they can complete the social action Mercer refers to without having recourse to English. In fact as one of the observees, Wojtek, explained:

> I can have most of the things I want within the Polish community here or in other parts of London. The church service is in Polish. It's really good. So I don't really need English. I need to work hard.

This attitude towards learning the host culture and language was not isolated among the observees. The existence of a strong Polish community with a church, shops, newspapers and community centre, play group school for kids, and even doctors and dentists could all be the adverse ingredients of second language learning. Aneta, a female respondent who worked as a childcare assistant for a Polish family espoused that view. She pointed out that

> There is a lot of work you can find without English. I work for a Polish family and that suits me because I can communicate with the lady and the kids and laugh together. They also come to the same church as me. It's a community thing.

Although Aneta, like many others, acknowledged feeling bad because she was not as competent in English language as she would have liked, she thought the possibility of making money quickly to take home was more tempting. Usually, spending months and or years learning English to be proficient was perceived by some as "a waste of time", in Jan's words.

Migrant financial services

Most of the areas in social life where one could need English, for the observees, the native language would suffice to deal with those situations. The existence of the Polish Bank PKAO in London is not there to help language acquisition. Community members can go to the Central London branch and open accounts without speaking English. Given the large numbers of Eastern European migrants who have come to the UK since 2004, some major British Banks such as Barclays and NatWest offer bank account in Polish language. Some estates agents have followed this trend. In addition, a number of money transfer agencies have emerged, which provide services exclusively to the migrants in their native language and transfer funds mostly to designated countries generating large numbers of migrants. At the same time, migrant communities have set mortgage lending services to assist those wanting to purchase properties, estate agents for those looking for rented accommodation and Polish law practitioners to assist with legal issues.

Migrant shops and supermarkets

There are numerous shops, supermarkets, beauty salons, etc., specifically set up for the Polish community. These are often operated by members of the community. However, with more migrants arriving in the UK (government estimates the number of Poles in the UK at about 1 million), business in this economic area has been booming and more actors have penetrated the markets. Traditional Asian and other corner shops around London offer a wide range of Polish products. At the peak of the research, the researcher attended a community cultural event at the Polish community centre in south London. As the researcher waved goodbye to friends, including three of the observees, they were heading to the local 'Polish shop' to get the usual supply of sausages, beers, sweets, etc., from Poland. It would seem to be a fact of newcomers using these economic entities due to language barriers, but for many in the community it becomes a way of life.

These sophisticated social and economic infrastructures built around the community leads to a certain self sufficiency. Members of the Polish community are able to operate in the new society with little knowledge of the language and the dominant culture. These, from the perspective of mutual and psychological

support, are significant in addition to enabling the community to safeguard their cultural roots. However, community self-sufficiency and cultural conservatism has a number of less positive consequences for individual members, the migrant community and the host society at large.

Consequences of migrant socio-cultural conservatism

Social and labour market participation: Parallel labour markets

The possibility of finding work without competence in English language has some repercussions on the types of employment the migrants could aspire to and obtain. The evidence from the research reveals that many migrants who do not develop competence in the host language, culture and social networks are likely to end up in unskilled employment or low paid menial jobs (Hack-Polay, 2008). Andrej, a helper on a building site said:

> As long as I can find some work to do, I'll prioritise work over other things. My primary reason for coming to England was to work and make money. Where I work, I am with many Polish people and I feel very comfortable with them.

As it can be seen, as long as the migrants can find work and fulfil the purpose for migrating, the need to learn and acquire the host language and culture is not felt. However, even for those like Iwona, a female respondent, who might feel "ashamed" (as she puts it) at not speaking English, there are other barriers to the motivation to learn English. She explained that

> I work long hours, from six in the morning to six o'clock in the evening over six days a week. When I come home I am exhausted and I can only eat and sleep. On Sunday, I need to go to church, I can't miss it.

The observees were unanimous that the long working hours and the labour-intensive jobs they do were also to blame in their not turning up to learn the language of the host country. Some of the observees, such as Agnieszka, have dropped out of language courses they enrolled on for this very reason coupled with the childcare issues they face due to the absence of the extended family network. Norton (2000), studying the case of language learning of immigrant women in Canada, found that confidence and anxiety as well as class and ethnicity were socially constructed and impacted on second language acquisition. However, while

the women studied by Norton thought against marginalization, the Polish observees did not feel a sense of marginalization given the size of their community through which they could lead 'normal social life'.

Self-sufficiency or self-imposed social exclusion?

All the observees reported that they mostly socialise with people from their community in South London or with members of Polish communities in other parts of London. Polish church services, Christmas parties, weeding, etc. were examples of social activities that the observees attended predominantly. This makes their living in the UK look like 'living in another country' within England, a world on its own. As Pawel, an observee explained:

> It's like in Poland. We play our music; we dance our dances; we drink our beer. It's really good. It really makes you feel at home.

Iwona explained it more profoundly when she talked about the Polish Christmas in South London. She said

> I can't miss it. And I can't go to English church because I need to understand everything. So even if the church wasn't here I would go to Willesden (West London).

It almost seems as though the respondents were not only happy but determined to live a life outside the dominant English language and cultural framework. This may not be conducive to second language learning because as Norton (2000) argues access to native social networks are crucial to second language acquisition but this was lacking crucially in the case of my observees. The observees fit in Mitchell & Myles' (2000) observation when they argue that "Few adult learners ever come to blend indistinguishably with the community of target 'native speakers'; most remain noticeably deviant in their pronunciation, and many continue to make grammar mistakes and to search for words, even when well motivated to learn".

Social shame (multi-cultural cultural avoidance)

Bogdan has no friend in the wider British community. When stopped by someone wanting he avoids them and does not respond. He says that's the best way when you live in a foreign country. When he needs crucial services that require

him to speak English, he has recourse to friends. But many admit, this make them feel uncomfortable but it is difficult to do something about it because going to college regularly will divert them from the priory purpose for migrating, which is to make money quickly and return home. However, many migrants eventually stay in the host country; many of those spend years preparing and planning for a future back home that they would no be part of. Many of the participants acknowledge the fears of have to remain in the host country and having to live with what could be described as perpetual social shame and multiculturalism avoidance (Hack-Polay, 2006a).

CASE FOR A SHIFT OF PARADIGM

Centrality of migrant organisations

Cultural and language maintenance are important and could represent a great cultural and economic asset. Not only can people engage in social actions and maintain their identity as a community, but there is much evidence that in the current globalising world, speaking more than one language could help in economic promotion. If identity is defined as "the way one sees one's own position and meaning in the world and also how one is identified by others", then the migrant community would face a dilemma. On the one hand they would see themselves as a strong community with a cultural identity but the outside world would continue to perceive them as foreigners and lacking literacy. They would then perhaps continue to be given "the low status, solitary jobs which no one else wants to do and this marginalization will limit their opportunity to practise English and also reduce their confidence and heighten their anxiety" (Norton, 2000).

For Rasool (2000) identity, in general and language identity specifically, is closely connected with broader social structures and historical processes. This, for the migrant observes in South London, has meant that their purpose of coming to the UK which was predominantly economic could not also be reconcilable with the 'wasting' of time on other 'secondary' things such as second language learning, particularly if they could still marginally participate in society and the labour market.

The use of ethnic languages as "vernacular literacy" (Martin-Jones & Bhatt, 1998) is empowering at a local level, but it is disabling for the community beyond

the locality. It is an acknowledgement that within a social or geographical space, there are several communities and parallel labour markets which operate alongside each other for various reasons. However, the observees in the research seem to be drifting into stronger conservatism as the community becomes more and more complacent in developing mechanisms for its members to acquire the English language and host culture which prevail outside of migrant networks. Persisting in such social isolation, the community runs the risk of depriving its members of intellectual, professional and multicultural developments on its doorstep. Norton (2000) has argued that in such cases, the community of immigrants could face economic disadvantage as its members are handed mostly the unskilled work, thus confining them to lower social classes. Bucholz (2003), in her study of 'nerd girls', coined the concepts of negative identity practice and positive identity practice. The former refers to situations where individuals attempt to distance themselves from a rejected identity; the latter refers to situations where individuals seek to construct a chosen identity. The observees in South London seem to be involved in negative identity practice, which is about rejecting the British identity.

However, the involvement in negative identity practice may not necessarily be to the advantage of the individuals and the community as earlier asserted. Sometimes hybridity could be a viable alternative which could provide more opportunities (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez & Tejeda, 2003). They argue that the meeting of cultures, hybridity, gives rise to a third space "in which alternative and competing discourses and positioning transform conflict and difference into rich zones of collaboration and learning because it increases the possibility of dialogue. Migrant communities could well benefit from a strategic positioning into this intersection space.

Partnership between government and migrant community organisations

If the government is serious about preparing migrants for citizenship then a necessary shift in strategy should occur. An indispensable part of such a shift is the search for partnership with community organisations, e.g. provide/fund English language and culture provision within the community organisation. The priest of the Polish community church explained that "we don't have enough money to do all this; we tried". The UK government is pushing to make speaking English a condition for gaining citizenship. But people cannot be forced to learn. Evidence

suggests that many are prepared to remain mere permanent residents if the conditions are enforced. This confirms that the way to get people to learn the host country language and explore the multiple benefits of multiculturalism is through dialogue between host government and migrant community organisations; through the release of adequate funding to finance integration activities within specific migrant groups but also encourage linkages and dialogues between different migrant communities. Partnership goes far beyond the mere concept of involvement. Partnership was one of the foundations of the Sure Start initiative. For Wolfendale (2000:8), partnership is about "consulting and including them (people) from the earliest planning stages, from service delivery to evaluation". This understanding of partnership implies working together to achieve a common goal, that of building a harmonious society. This means migrant community leaders should have a say in defining objectives and targets as well as establishing whether outcomes have been met. This will create a true and necessary cultural exchange that educates newcomers to be part of the tolerance and multicultural societal project.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This investigation has revealed that the migrant community uses a variety of strategies to ensure social and cultural conservatism, which in turn, is an aspect of the community's attempts to preserve its identity. The social infrastructure built around the community is so strong that it can be isolating, perhaps, alienating some community members. In a multicultural space such as London, members are increasingly being confined – or rather locked - into their small space, which denies opportunities to more vulnerable community members because of the little ability to engage in a dialogue with other communities and negotiate a strategic positioning. Social, cultural and linguistic isolation has had a negative impact on the degree to which the observees could achieve social promotion.

There is a learning point for all other migrant and ethnic communities, in the sense that they need to engage in a reflective exercise in order to establish whether their interests are better served as an isolated community or as a community that opens up, dialogues, and competes with others. Perhaps a more proactive role in trying to establish mechanisms that promote independence for all members outside of the community setting could be the way forward for migrant

groups in an era of massive immigration to Britain. While many migrants have done extremely well in the UK and demonstrated strong labour market participation (Hack-Polay, 2006b), those who have found it difficult to adjust to social and economic life in the foreign country deserve much help both from the host authorities and their community organisations. The UK Home Office's plans to forced migrants to learn English before they could qualify for citizenship may work only if migrant organisations are placed at the centre of the strategy and are sensitised to work with their individual members.

The research therefore points to the necessity of a shift of paradigm in the way ethnic and migrant groups and community organisations manage themselves in the host country.

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