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# Local press re-presentation and contestation of national discourses on asylum seeker dispersal

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This paper explores the importance of locality in understanding reactions to the policy of dispersal for asylum seekers in the UK. Using critical discourse analysis of local press for two case study locations – Leeds and Cardiff - the paper demonstrates that, despite ingrained national discourses on some aspects of asylum issues, notably the need for dispersal to facilitate integration and the avoidance of ‘ghettos’, there are still significant and important local differences in how the issues are framed and constructed. The paper argues that in terms of understanding discourses around asylum, it is essential to take into account local identity and local moral discourses on accommodating diversity. Furthermore, it is suggested that there is political potential in local discourses that challenge the dominant, supra-local, moral panic discourses.

## **Introduction**

Forced migration has become an increasingly significant form of human movement over the past two decades that has, since the mid 1990s, had major impacts on countries in the global north (UNHCR 2005; Berkeley, Khan and Ambikaipaker 2006). In the UK, a moral panic has been identified (Cohen 2002, Finney and Peach 2006) as asylum seeking has become a central component of the new migrations of the late twentieth century (Koser and Lutz 1998; Castles 2000). This paper explores the importance of locality in understanding reactions to a very localised element of recent UK immigration policy, the policy of dispersal for asylum seekers. The paper is concerned with how the local media negotiates, contests, manipulates and represents dominant, national asylum discourses and presents two case study examples that illustrate local discourses that adopt very different strategies for conceptualising the debates around asylum seeker dispersal. It is demonstrated that local discourses can co-exist with national ones, that the two can be mutually re-enforcing and that local discourses have the potential to challenge and resist national discourses. Drawing on notions of social construction of imagined community, the paper suggests that differences in local discourses can be usefully understood in relation to local identity.

## **The policy of asylum seeker dispersal in the UK**

Although past decades have seen a rise ‘in all categories of migrants, across the board’ (Glover *et al* 2001: 10), the social and political focus in the UK has very much turned towards asylum seekers (Salt 1993) with the issue being prominent in both the 2001 and 2005 General Elections. As a result, there has been unprecedented policy change nationally together with debate about European policy (Zetter, Griffiths, Ferretti and Pearl 2003): Acts relating to immigration and asylum were passed in the UK in 1993, 1996, 1999, 2002 and 2004 and the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Bill 2005 was introduced into Parliament in June 2005. The focus of both domestic and international policy has been twofold: firstly, to control the situation and particularly its illegal elements, and secondly, partly as a means to meet this primary objective, to further harmonise immigration and asylum policies within the EU (Castles, Crawley and Loughna 2003).

Throughout this time of ‘new migration’, political (Kaye 1994), media (Kaye 1998) and public (Lewis 2005) discourses on immigration and asylum have been predominantly hostile, viewing the issues as problematic. A persistent theme has been the sense of threat posed by the numbers of asylum seekers, which is heightened by the perceived deviancy of these

migrants (Finney and Peach 2006; Article 19 2003). This sense of threat from asylum has been intertwined with debates about citizenship and national security, and most recently terrorism. Simultaneously, political and academic concern has shifted from policy responses, policy implementation and service provision to the effects of these new migrations on British culture and society, with a focus on integration and social cohesion (Cantle 2002; Home Office 2005; Robinson and Reeve 2006).

In this context many European countries have re-assessed their policies for accommodating asylum seekers. The UK, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and Germany have all opted to 'spread the burden' by developing schemes to disperse asylum seekers (Robinson, Andersson and Musterd 2003; Boswell 2001; Wren 2003). The UK has operated dispersal since the 1930s for accommodating groups of quota refugees including Spaniards, Poles, Hungarians, Chileans, Vietnamese, Bosnians and Kosovans (Robinson, 2004; Robinson, 1989; Robinson and Coleman, 2000). However, the dispersal policy introduced in the Asylum and Immigration Act 1999 was the first time that dispersal had been written into permanent policy for the accommodation of *spontaneous* asylum seekers (Robinson, Andersson and Musterd 2003).

The policy was operationalised in April 2000 under the control of the newly formed National Asylum Support Service (NASS) of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate of the Home Office. The policy resulted from pressure on accommodation and resources in London and the south east of England. It means that all asylum seekers who request accommodation assistance are sent - dispersed – without choice about where they are located, to a 'cluster area' within one of eleven Dispersal Consortia around the UK, away from the south east. Social (government-owned) and private housing is used. Much research has been undertaken on various aspects of dispersal and there has been considerable criticism of the policy (see Robinson, Andersson and Musterd, 2003). However, little is understood about discourses that have emerged around the policy in areas where it has been implemented. Investigating these local discourses can contribute to debate about integration, social exclusion and the significance of the local in understanding ethnic relations and policy impacts.

### **Multiculturalism and community**

Ideas about multiculturalism, integration, assimilation and citizenship are still hotly contested (Malik 2005; Gilroy 2005) and debates that have been lively since the mid twentieth century

have been given a new sense of urgency by the 'war on terror' and its political and social ramifications. There is arguably a crisis of national identity and issues of accommodating diversity and conceiving of difference without hierarchy are unresolved (Gilroy 2005). Politically, following the urban disturbances in English towns in 2001 and 2005, that were widely perceived as 'race riots', the solution has been encapsulated in the notion of community cohesion (Cantle 2002).

The idea of community, however, is a 'chaotic concept' that has been many times re-conceptualised and re-theorised (Crow and Allen 1994). Most recently, community studies have focused on conflict, change and lived experience; communities as local networks of interaction; and pluralities of meanings and identities of communities (Cloke, Goodwin and Milbourne 1997; Day and Murdoch 1993; Aitken 2000). The social construction of place and scale, and experiences of place-based identity, have long been themes in geography and it has become accepted that identities are socially constructed at all scales; that they are flexible, multiple and hybrid. A 'community' is therefore not fixed and impervious but rather is constituted by interactions of social relations (Massey 1993). This poses a challenge for institutions that are conceived around and rely upon a sense of community, such as the local press. It is here that Anderson's (1991: 6-7) much-used concept of 'imagined community' can be useful: 'all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even them) are imagined...[they are] imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'. This is the ultimate aim of the local press; to successfully imagine a community to ensure its own commercial viability (Aldridge 2003).

Historically there have been many studies of community reactions to immigration that have focused on race (e.g. Rex and Moore 1967; Husbands 1983). In ethnic relations research the interest in locality has historically been framed around ideas of local conflict for resources. It has been found that attitudes towards immigrant or ethnic minority groups can be explained with recourse to local factors such as (perceived) effect on housing and neighbourhood (Rex and Moore's work in Sparkbrook in Birmingham) and also employment (Husband's study of the dockland communities of East London). This leads to territorial sensitivity and the construction of mental, or sometimes physical, boundaries between races.

Although attitudes to asylum seekers can be seen as inherently, if not explicitly, racialised (Hubbard 2005), asylum adds further dimensions to the issue of ethnic/cultural relations because of the forced nature of the migration and, subsequently, the forced nature of settlement through dispersal. Neither the migrants nor the receiving population have exercised choice to live in the same 'community'. Furthermore, the moral panic discourses that have surrounded the increase in migration for refuge in western Europe since the early 1990s create conditions that are not conducive to community cohesion (Cohen 2002). Indeed, hostile attitudes to asylum seekers have been widely documented (e.g. Fekete 2001, Kundnani 2002) and identified as 'the new popular racism' (Kundnani 2001). Asylum seekers have been constructed as deviant others (Kaye 1998; Pickering 2001) and discourses around asylum have given 'moral credibility to a politics of exclusion' (Smith 2004: 196) of which the dispersal policy, with its philosophy of 'spreading the burden', is a part (Robinson, Andersson and Musterd 2003).

The mixing of moralities of race and asylum creates hostilities that could threaten the right to asylum. Asylum seekers are seen as so very different, so very other and as such so very distant, that it becomes difficult to generate a sense for this distant other, or to be moved to respond to them (Barnett 2005). Even if there is support for the general concept of asylum, there are great problems transforming this impartial ethics of justice into a partial ethics of care (Smith 2004).

Othering of asylum seekers - the creation of boundaries and the exclusion of threatening difference - is most likely to occur where spaces are symbolically pure (Sibley, 1995), for example, where there is a clean, cohesive image of community (cf parallels with studies of rural racism such as Neal and Agyeman (2006) and Garland and Chakraborti (2004)). This can happen at a national scale where a threatening 'other' is drawn upon in order to sustain nationalist feeling (Billig 1995; Thompson and Day 1999; Cohen 1994; Jones and Desforges 2003); or at a local scale in resistance to some form of invasion, such as an asylum seeker accommodation centre (Hubbard 2005).

As well as boundary creation at a local level, negotiation of difference is important at this scale too. Although the national frame of racial and ethnic relations remains important, much of the negotiation of difference happens at a micropolitical level through everyday experiences and encounters (Amin 2002). Amin (2002: 960) recognises the importance of

both the super-scale, ‘the role of certain structural influences and national rules of citizenship and belonging that influence the ability of people to interact fruitfully as equals’, and the ‘local micropublics of everyday interaction’ in negotiating difference. Massey (2004) supports this view that there is power in the local to constitute, invent and co-ordinate the global.

Some qualitative research has explored the importance of locality in reactions to asylum. Local social issues have been found to strongly influence individuals’ attitudes in terms of their greatest concerns and the degree to which they feel negative towards asylum seekers (D’Onofrio and Munk 2004). Other studies have focused on ‘everyday prejudices’: how negative attitudes to others are produced and reproduced through everyday experiences and actions. Much focus has been placed on the contact hypothesis, first proposed by Allport (1958). This posits that contact between members of different groups has the potential to break down fears and anxieties and lead to greater understanding and tolerance (Pettigrew 1998). Research that has investigated relations between existing populations and newly arrived asylum seekers generally supports the notion that individual contact improves community relations (ECRE 2001; Blommaert *et al* 2003).

However, in the UK, asylum seekers are the minority group with which the white majority is least likely to have day-to-day contact (Valentine and McDonald 2004, Lewis 2005). Also, the type of contact is important: encounters must have ‘friendship potential’ if they are to result in positive attitude change (Pettigrew 1998). Prolonged contact such as working relationships have been found to be particularly effective in developing respect for minority groups (Valentine and McDonald 2004). However, generating positive inter-group relationships through work is very difficult for asylum seekers in the UK as they are not permitted to undertake paid employment (Craig *et al* 2004; Temple and Moran 2005). Furthermore, Valentine and McDonald (2004) argue that positive encounters do not have the same power as negative ones to produce generalisations.

### **National discourses on asylum and the role of the media in asylum debate**

Given the widespread hostility towards asylum issues and the lack of personal contact between asylum seekers and other residents, representations of the issues become increasingly significant and potentially influential (Kitzinger 1999; Lewis 2001; Miller and Philo 1999). Representation of race in the media has been a focus of study for three decades. The

overwhelmingly consistent finding of this body of research in Europe and North America has been that 'race' issues have almost exclusively been given negative news coverage; that racial minorities themselves have been stereotypically and negatively represented; that coverage of race has been limited to a small number of themes including immigration, crime, cultural difference and race relations; and that ethnic minorities have been underrepresented within all sides of the media industry (for example see Hargreaves 1995; Hall 1987; van Dijk 1988, 1991; Searle 1987; Law 1997; Bromley and Sonnenberg 1998; EUMC 2002).

Little research has focused on race in the local media. That which has been undertaken has found that themes of conflict and struggle perpetuate (Cricher, Parker and Sondhi 1975) and racial stereotypes of athlete, entertainer and criminal remain common (Ross 1998; Smith 1985). It is somewhat surprising that local media have received such little attention given their potential 'to have a greater impact in terms of local community relations' (Ross 1998: 231). Cross and Lockyer (2006: 275) comment that "scholarly myopia has obscured the particular 'concerns and sensitivities' of local newspapers; as if news agendas formed outside of the metropolis add little understanding as to how 'popular knowledge' is formed" and Aldridge (2003: 506) concludes that local newspapers "occupy a unique place in the local public sphere, with a real capacity to influence the terms of popular debate...critical scrutiny and self-questioning of how they position themselves is vital".

There have been some changes in race coverage over time: racism has become less blatant and stories have become set within anti-racism frames (Law 1997; van Dijk 1991; Stratham 2002). However, these discourses of equality and diversity have not been extended to all minorities: 'the general anti-racism tones of British press reporting on ethnic minorities were not extended to recent migration' (EUMC 2002: 46). Indeed, new immigrants, particularly asylum seekers, now receive 'the same type of stigmatising coverage which "Black" and "Asian" minorities received fifteen years ago' (Stratham 2002: 409). In recognition of this, and under pressure from organisations such as the Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees in the UK (ICAR) and MediaWise, in October 2003 the Press Complaints Commission issued guidance notes for covering asylum issues and expressed particular concern about the use of 'misleading or distorted terminology' (PCC 2003).

Immigration and asylum have been prominent in the British national media since the mid 1990s, at times constituting up to 55% of newspaper coverage (Stratham 1999). As with more

general 'race' issues, immigration and asylum have been treated in a negative way, constructed as problems or threats. Key themes have included the reduction of migrant rights, the burden on the welfare state and the dishonesty of migrants (Stratham 2002; Coleman 1996; Audit Commission 2000; McGloughlin 1999; Kaye 1998, 1999). The discourses that have been used are ones of problem and exclusion and have served to construct an 'us-them' framework with immigrants as 'the outsider within' (Koser and Lutz 1998; Philo and Beattie 1999; Article 19 2003; ICAR 2004) using 'old frames' of immigrants as a welfare burden and prone to deception (Law 1997; Holmes 1997). Binary logics are employed, setting bogus against genuine and illegal against legal, simplifying and dehumanising the debate into a moral panic (Cohen 2002) which serves to set political and social agendas (McCombs 1994; Lewis 2001) and legitimise repressive state responses (Pickering 2001).

We should not, however, paint a totally bleak picture of national media coverage of asylum, or suggest that there is not resistance to such discourses. *The Guardian*, for example, has run 'alternative' asylum stories and has an online special feature on asylum. The BBC's asylum day in July 2003 also attempted to broaden the debate. Perhaps the most varied and thoughtful coverage, however, has been found at a local scale (ICAR 2006; Article 19 2003). A study of local and minority ethnic press in London found that coverage of asylum, in contrast to national media coverage, was balanced, accurate, wide-ranging and likely to promote informed debate (ICAR 2006). Another study in Wales (Speers 2001) also found some local coverage to have been more positive than expected. Although relatively little attention has been paid to asylum and immigration in the local media, work that has been conducted has found the local press are important in setting the tone of the debate locally (ICAR 2004, 2006; Lewis 2005).

The role of local media in creating and strengthening community has long been recognised (Park 1929). Research has focused on the local media's role in political participation (e.g. Stamm, Emig and Hesse 1997; McLeod *et al* 1996, Freymeyer 2006), the local media as part of community communication networks (Smith 1985; Shah, McLeon and Yoon 2001; Ball-Rocheach, Kim and Matei 2001), and the local media's symbolic role in creating imagined community. It has been found that local media "actively work to develop a local identity" (Shah *et al* 2001: 471) in order to give themselves a distinctiveness in the market (Connell 2003, Aldridge 2003). In this way the local media police the moral boundaries of community



(Cross 2005, Cross and Lockyer 2006) and readers “come to understand their communities through representations in communications” (Shah et al 2001: 466).

Despite a relative neglect of local media in research, the significance of local news is without doubt. As Moeller has pointed out with regard to news stories in the USA, ‘one dead fireman in Brooklyn is worth five English bobbies, who are worth fifty Arabs, who are worth five hundred Africans’ (1999: 22). Despite the postmodern erasure of space-time differences and notions of global community and placelessness, Morley (1991) argues that the importance of locality is not diminished. Rather the reduction in time-space differences is overstated and operates at the level of over-abstraction rather than in empirical groundings. While this may be so, Franklin and Murphy (1998: 195) argue that ‘the localism of the local press is increasingly illusory’ as the industry adapts to changing politics, technology and markets. This raises very interesting questions about the nature and significance of local discourses on dispersal, a policy addressing a very international political and social issue – asylum – that has distinctly local implications.

### **Local press negotiation and contestation of dispersal discourse**

This section discusses how the local media negotiates, contests, manipulates and re-presents national discourses on asylum through an analysis of local press coverage of the dispersal of asylum seekers. The discussion uses two case study locations, Cardiff and Leeds. However, the themes and ideas also draw on empirical material from three other towns in England and Wales (Sheffield, Swansea and Barrow-in-Furness). The analysis here is of local press coverage but ideas are also informed by interviews with local residents, press workers, refugees and involvement in local refugee groups and organisations concerned with media coverage of asylum. Fieldwork was predominantly carried out in 2002 and 2003 and local press coverage is taken from the period January 1999-July 2001 (Finney 2004). This period is significant because it covers the development and initial implementation of the dispersal policy and the time when asylum applications and the accompanying moral panic were at their height.

In brief, Leeds and Cardiff are capital cities of their regions and both have long immigration histories. Leeds, in the north of England, has a population of 715,400, 8.15% of which is non-white. Cardiff, in south Wales, and the capital of that country since 1955, has a population of

305,400, 8.6% of which is non-white (ONS 2006). As an industrial centre, Leeds became home to many of the labour migrants who arrived in Britain in the mid twentieth century from the Indian sub-continent and the Caribbean. Cardiff grew as a vibrant seaport in the early twentieth century, exporting Welsh coal throughout the British Empire. Plentiful employment opportunities brought migrants from all over the world to work in the city (Robinson, 2003). Since 1999 the National Assembly for Wales has existed in Cardiff, holding legal responsibility devolved from Westminster on a range of Welsh social issues. At the time of this research dispersal had been operational in Leeds for twenty months and in Cardiff for nine months. Leeds had received 1,320 asylum seekers and Cardiff had received 555.

The local newspapers used for this research were the highest circulation daily papers in each location: *The Yorkshire Evening Post* in Leeds and *The South Wales Echo* in Cardiff. At the time of the research the daily circulation was 84,944 for *The Evening Post* and 61,757 for *The Echo* with household penetration of 25% and 27% respectively (Newspaper Society 2000). *The Yorkshire Evening Post* is part of the Johnston Press group and *The South Wales Echo* is owned by Trinity Mirror. Unlike national newspapers (Schlesinger 2006) local newspapers in Britain are rarely politically partisan (Richardson and Franklin 2004). However, it has been noted that *The Yorkshire Post*, the sister morning daily to *The Yorkshire Evening Post* has close identification with the Conservative Party (Richardson and Franklin 2004). All articles (including news, features and comment) related to asylum seeker dispersal published between January 1999 and July 2001 were collected from each newspaper. These were accessed using electronic catalogues, library archives and the catalogues and collections in the libraries of the local newspapers. In total, thirty eight articles were collected from *The Evening Post* and thirty six from *The Echo*, representing an average of around one article per month.

The approach taken to the analysis of the newspaper articles was broadly one of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA is the most macro-analytical discourse-analytic perspective, placing emphasis on the social and cultural processes and structures of discourse rather than on the details of language and language use (van Dijk 1994). CDA sees discourse as being 'socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned' and believes in its ideological effects (Wodak 1996: 15; Teo 2000). The emphasis is on understanding discourse in relation to social problems and above all to power (Wood and Kroger 2000). As such, CDA can be seen as a neo-Marxist approach, with a focus on both cultural and economic dimensions of power

relations and a belief that there is no strict separation between infrastructure and superstructure (Wodak 1996).

Within the CDA approach, both qualitative and quantitative analyses were undertaken. The qualitative concentrated on identifying themes and involved repeated reading of, and immersion in, the research material. The quantitative approach was based on Content Analysis and involved the coding of elements of text to identify patterns in such characteristics as time of publication, length of article, genre of article, vocabulary used, sources used and themes of articles.

Inter-coder reliability was tested and confirmed for two of the most subjective, yet important, categories in the Content Analysis: articles' representations of asylum seekers and articles' coverage of the policy of dispersal<sup>1</sup>. Intra-coder reliability was tested by random re-coding of articles to ensure consistency of coding.

The analysis investigated how the local newspaper discourses addressed the following questions:

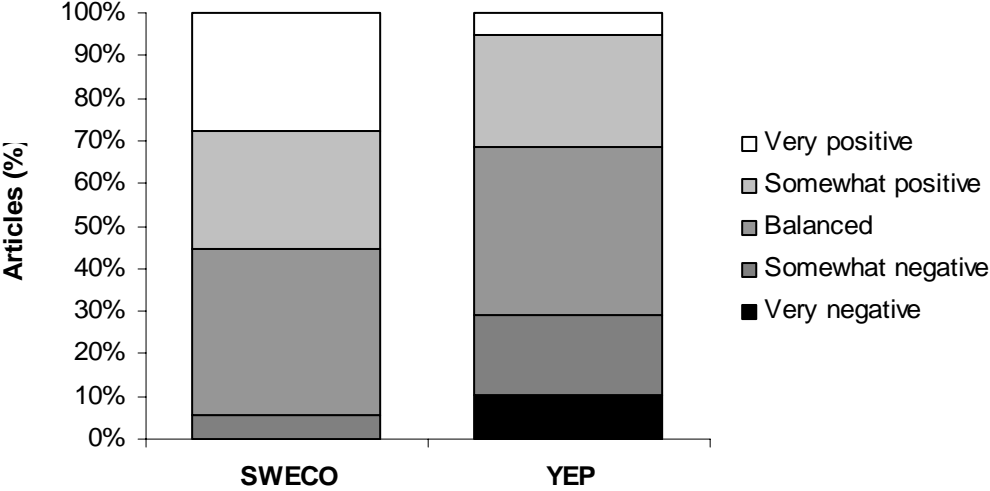
1. What is dispersal?
2. Why is dispersal necessary?
3. Who's being dispersed? Who are asylum seekers?
4. What problems will there be?
5. What benefits will there be?
6. How should our locality react?

Key themes have been drawn out of the analysis and these are used to structure the discussion below.

### ***Representations of asylum seekers***

The *Yorkshire Evening Post* (YEP) and the *South Wales Echo* (SWECO) represent asylum seekers and refugees in very different ways. Cardiff's local paper takes a far more positive stance towards asylum seekers than Leeds's (Figure 1). Asylum seekers are portrayed negatively in only five per cent of articles in the SWECO compared to almost thirty per cent in the YEP; and positively in fifty five per cent of SWECO articles compared to thirty per cent of those in the YEP.

Figure 1: Local press representations of asylum seekers

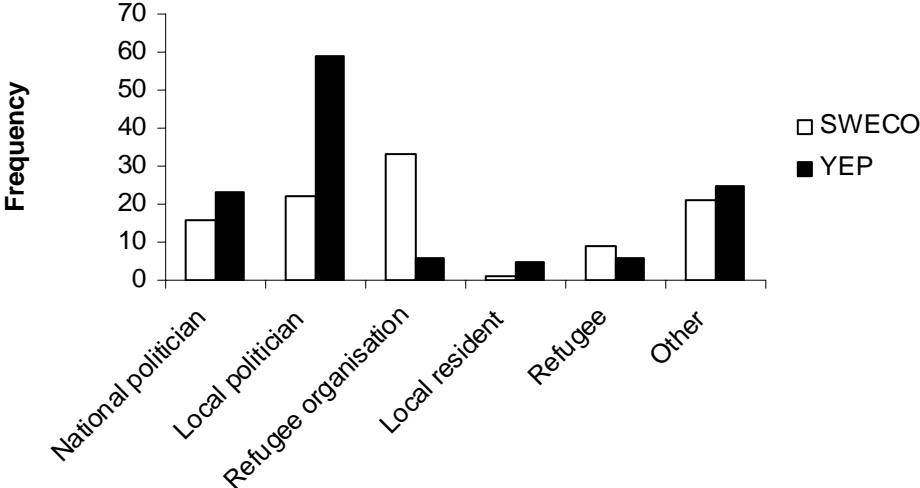


Similar differences can be seen when the use of numbers and terminology are examined. The SWECO sample includes twenty seven references to numbers of asylum seekers compared to forty references in the YEP, a quarter of which related to the cost of the dispersal policy to the locality. The terms ‘asylum seeker’ and ‘refugee’ are inaccurately used on twice as many occasions in the YEP (seventy instances) as in the SWECO (thirty instances). Water metaphors such as ‘flood’, ‘wave’, ‘tide’ and ‘swamp’ are used thirteen times in the YEP but only four times in the SWECO. Immediately we can see that there are considerable differences in the coverage of the two newspapers.

For both newspapers, the primary theme of the majority of articles is the dispersal policy and its local implementation. Seventy per cent of articles in each newspaper have more than one theme, indicating that dispersal raises many issues including UK asylum policy, direct and indirect costs of the policy, housing, service provision, conflicts for resources, conflicts between residents and newcomers and asylum seekers’ rights. There are differences, however, in the emphasis placed on different themes in each newspaper: asylum seekers’ rights is a theme in four SWECO articles but only one YEP article; causes of asylum seeking were discussed in four SWECO articles but not at all in the YEP; problems of numbers of asylum seekers was a theme in two YEP articles but no SWECO articles; and conflict for resources was a theme in two YEP articles but no SWECO articles. The YEP emphasises the problems associated with asylum seekers while the SWECO emphasises the experiences of asylum seekers and the contexts of their migrations.

Analysing the sources used by each of the newspapers helps us to understand these different thematic foci. Politicians, both local and national, were more frequently used as information sources and in direct quotations in the YEP than the SWECO (Figure 2). Indeed, local politicians were used as information sources on three times as many occasions in the YEP as in the SWECO. In fact, the most frequently used sources for the SWECO were refugee organisations and refugees themselves were quoted by the SWECO on as many occasions as national politicians. The sources used by the SWECO included Amnesty International, the (Welsh) Refugee Council and Cardiff-based organisation Displaced People in Action, helping to give voice to alternative perspectives on local asylum issues.

Figure 2: Sources used and quoted in local press articles



Given this overview of the differences in coverage, it is useful to delve more qualitatively into the types of discourse that distinguish the local newspapers. The YEP very much constructed asylum seekers as ‘other’ and stereotyped them as deviant and dangerous. The language used in the *Yorkshire Evening Post* deprives the migrants of any sense of humanity. For example, we’re told that Europe’s eastern borders ‘disgorged’ the migrants (YEP 9.2.99: 6), who are then ‘farmed out’ of (YEP 9.2.99: 6) or ‘decanted’ from (YEP 12.11.99: 22) the south east to ‘descend’ (YEP 25.1.01: 16) on Leeds. Asylum seekers are constructed as deviant and criminal: ‘without jobs or National Insurance numbers, crime must be a temptation’ (YEP 9.2.99: 6); ‘many will work illegally’ (YEP 12.2.99: 12); they will ‘exploit our hospitality’ (YEP 10.2.00: 10). Indeed, the discourse makes clear that ‘most in reality [are] economic migrants’ (YEP 10.2.00: 10).

The YEP's construction of asylum seekers as undesirable deviants applied not only to their arrival in the UK and dispersal to the regions. The threat was represented as continuing in their places of settlement. An article published on 17 August 1999 (p3), for example, claims that dispersal to Leeds is necessary because of 'violent clashes between refugees and residents...in which 11 people have been injured, many slashed with knives' in Dover. The article implies that such problems are simply going to be transported northwards. The following extracts illustrate the persistence of this discourse: '[there is] concern at the potential for disorder similar to that experienced in Dover' (YEP 15.10.99: 3); 'People in the village...were worried that the disorder experiences in Dover would be repeated here if the asylum seekers came to the village.' (YEP 19.11.99: 7); 'there was increased noise, disturbance and vandalism' (YEP 17.11.00: 7).

With article after article documenting resistance to asylum seekers' settlement, asylum seekers were represented as extremely undesirable neighbours. This is very much in line with national discourses that make asylum seekers the folk devils of the moral panic, drawing on established discourses of the problems of race and migration.

Only three articles from the YEP sample explicitly considered the conditions asylum seekers have had to suffer and the causes of their migration. Two of these were highlighting cultural events in the city (19.7.00: 34, 9.10.00: 14) and one spoke of asylum seekers fleeing terrible conditions but in the context of concern over location of dispersal accommodation (YEP 18.1.2000: 8).

The South Wales Echo chose a very different way to represent asylum seekers, very rarely presenting the more familiar negative stereotype. Rather, the representations went out of their way to challenge these. Asylum seekers were included as one of 'us' using the logic that Cardiff is a city of immigrants. We are told that 'without successive generations of asylum seekers, Cardiff would be an infinitely poorer place' (SWECO 7.3.00: 6) and that we should treat the new arrivals 'with compassion and respect' (10.4.01: front page).

An article in the *South Wales Echo* entitled 'Kardo is thanked for finding lost wallet' (5.5.01: 2) tells of how an asylum seeker who handed a lost wallet containing £200 to the police received thanks from the owner. The article is accompanied by a beaming image of Kardo

with his support worker and a local policeman and explicitly holds up Kardo as an example of trustworthy and law-abiding asylum seekers. The SWECO also makes the point of telling readers that asylum seekers are grateful for their reception and support (31.5.01: 3), countering stereotypical images of ungrateful scroungers. The SWECO challenges common perceptions, publishing myth busting articles on several occasions.

The SWECO also differs from the YEP in its use of feature articles (Figure 3). Two articles in particular, tell of the individual experiences of Salah Mohamed from Sudan and Dr Amin Barzanji from Iraq. These features give context to asylum seeking, give it a human dimension including through the use of images, and show the contribution asylum seekers and refugees are making in the UK. In a similar vein, the SWECO covered the story of a family reunion when an asylum seeker from Sierra Leone living in Cardiff discovered to his delight and surprise that his partner and children were living safely in London. The tale of the family's traumatic experiences and their joyful reunion gives a human face to often de-humanised issues (18.5.01: 5 and 19.5.01: 7).

Another example of positive representation of asylum seekers by the SWECO is its coverage of a local asylum seeker football team. This depicts asylum seekers as fit, sport-loving, educated, hard working and with community spirit and celebrates the multiculturalism that asylum seekers are bringing to Cardiff (Figure 4).

Figure 3: 'Fleeing from the fear of death' (South Wales Echo, 13.11.00): giving asylum a human face

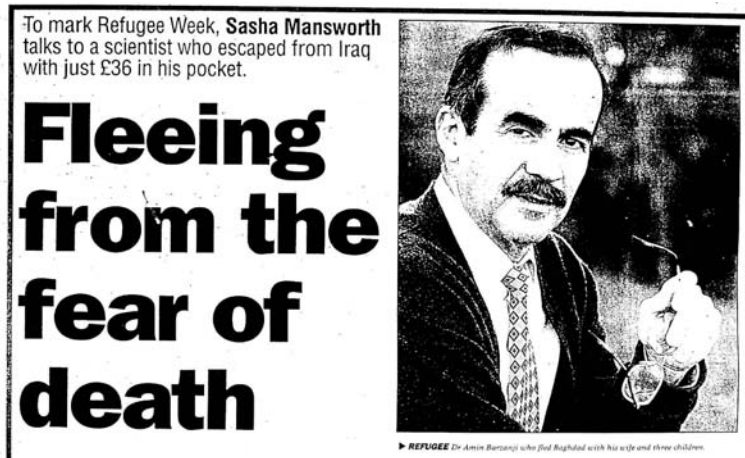
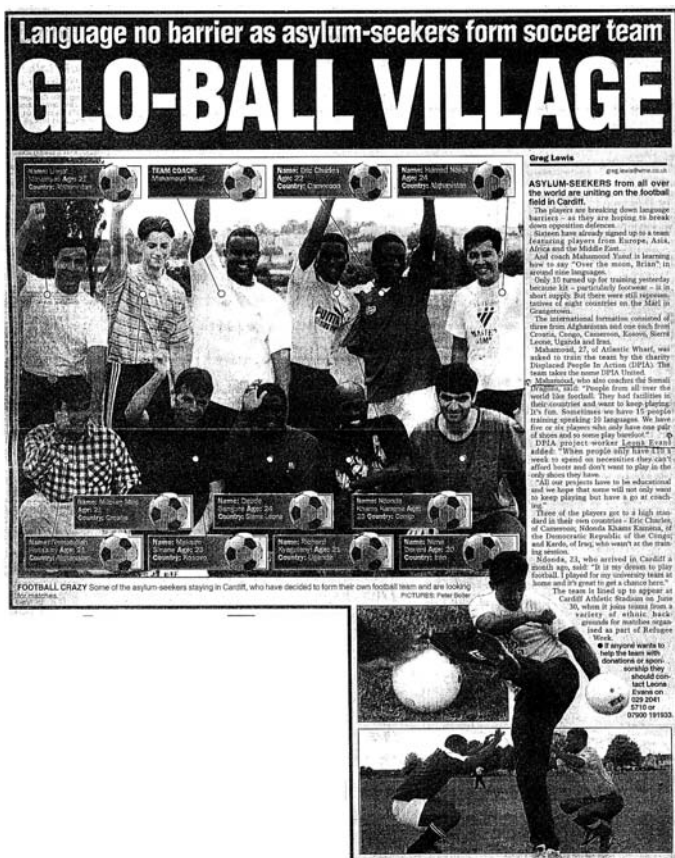


Figure 4: Cardiff's 'Glo-ball village' (South Wales Echo, 5.6.01)

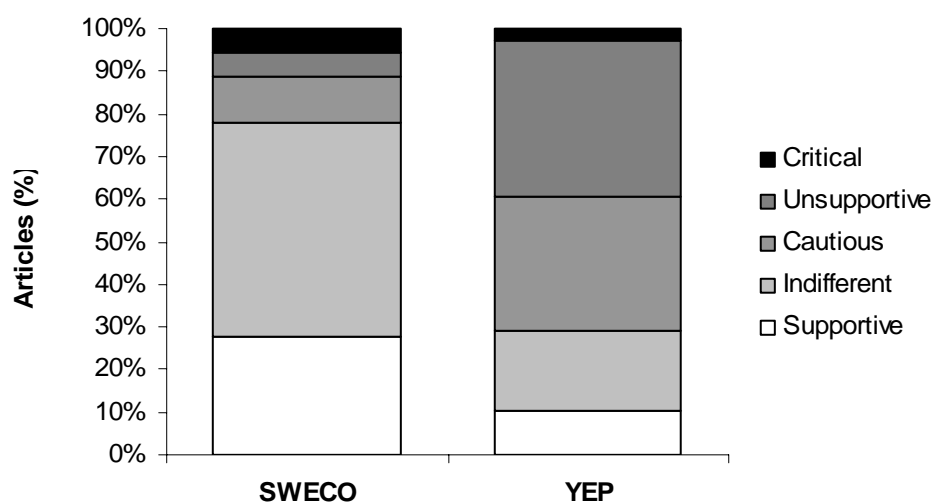




### *Problems and benefits of dispersal*

Local press discourses on dispersal of asylum seekers differ both from national discourses and from each other. Figure 5 indicates the stance that articles in the *Yorkshire Evening Post* and the *South Wales Echo* took towards the dispersal policy. It is immediately apparent that the SWECO's coverage was more supportive of the policy than that of the YEP. Almost thirty per cent of SWECO articles were supportive of dispersal compared to ten per cent of YEP articles; and only around ten per cent of SWECO articles were unsupportive or critical compared to forty per cent of YEP articles.

*Figure 5: Local press coverage of the dispersal policy*



Both discourses accept dispersal as a necessary, if undesirable, solution to the 'problem' of numbers of asylum seekers and the prevention of ghetto formation. This is in-line with national justification of the policy. However, the two newspapers explain the need for dispersal in different ways. The SWECO discourse is based on the idea that Cardiff has a duty to help those in need; whereas the YEP discourse is based around the necessity of relieving pressure on the South East of England (Figure 6). The SWECO therefore internalises or localises the need for the policy whereas the YEP externalises it, maintaining the discourse of problem and threat. The YEP discourse is illustrated well in the following extract:

Leaky as sieves, Europe's eastern borders disgorge a growing flood of persecuted minorities, displaced refugees and economic migrants.

For many of them Britain is first choice. Officially, two thousand a week arrive...thousands more – two dozen a day – also arrive illegally....

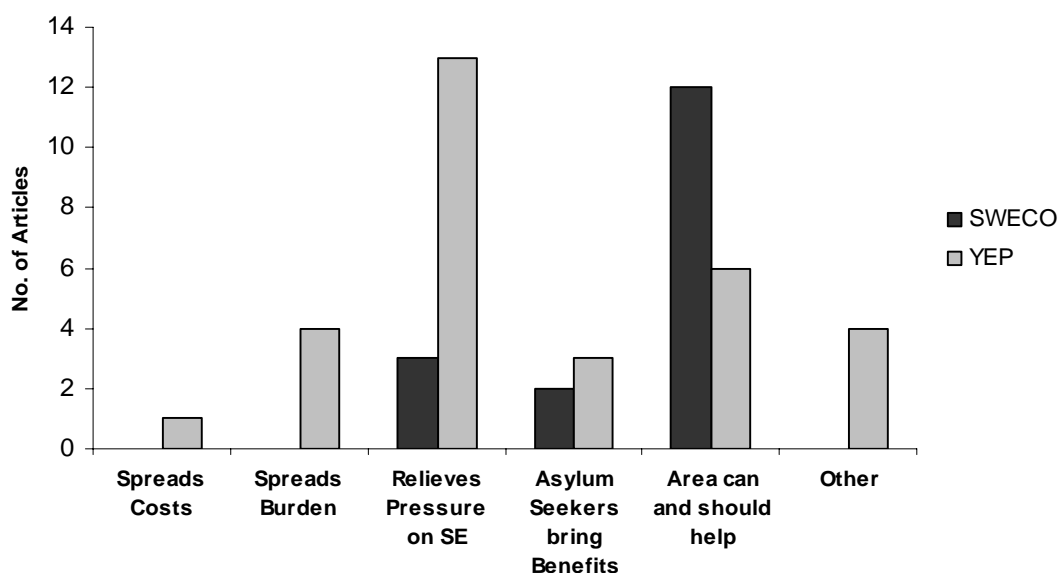
The Home Office talks tough, but the record numbers show such immigrants have little to fear. Britain remains a soft touch....It said it would tighten up tribunal procedures and speed up repatriation for bogus asylum seekers.

Yet now it brazenly plans to farm out thousands of asylum seekers to cities such as Leeds and Liverpool. Already Leeds has been conned into taking some 60 Kosovan refugees from London's Brent Council...

Without jobs or NI numbers, crime must be a temptation. Yet now we are being warned that thousands more may be settled in Leeds. This is not the answer. It is sheer defeatism, a recipe for social unrest.

(YEP comment, 09.02.99)

Figure 6: Local press explanations of the need for dispersal



Concern about dispersal is expressed by both the local newspapers including concern about costs for the locality, numbers being dispersed, the inefficiency of the system, availability of resources, availability and suitability of accommodation, the conditions for asylum seekers, potential hostilities between residents and asylum seekers and race relations. This variety is framed, however, within different discourses in the two newspapers. The YEP is dominated by negative coverage of the disorganisation of the asylum system and the detrimental effects for the locality in terms of costs, preferential treatment for asylum seekers and the changing ethnicity and culture of neighbourhoods; while it is much more common for the SWECO to

provide balanced commentary and to relate concerns about organisation and local effects to the experiences of asylum seekers.

The YEP is primarily concerned that there is disorganisation in the system at the national level and that the local authority is having to pick up the pieces: ‘the Government has failed to get a grip of the situation and local authorities are now having to deal with it’ (29.6.00: 2); ‘Leeds and other regional city councils are already welcoming many such people as the Government tries to disperse this growing human problem around the country. And it really is a problem of massive proportions. Britain is still perceived as an easy touch.’ (10.2.00: 10); ‘The council didn’t know until the last minute what type of asylum seekers they will be expected to take’ (9.12.99: 29). The YEP discourse stresses the need for local control, asserting the competency of the local in the face of a chaotic national situation: ‘By setting up a consortium to deal with refugee dispersal, we will be able to maintain local control over the process and ensure that they receive an assured standard of accommodation and service provision.’ (13.9.99: 8); ‘If councils had decided to sit back and do nothing, the Home Office would have carried on securing more and more private contracts to accommodate these people. By becoming a provider, we have more control over what happens.’ (29.6.00: 2).

The YEP also stresses the detrimental effects that dispersal will have on the locality. In particular, there is concern for the financial costs incurred (e.g. YEP 17.2.99: 6, 15.10.99: 3, 23.8.99: 9, 10.3.00: 2) and warnings that ‘local authorities must be given more funding’ (1.6.00: 5). Concern that asylum seekers are receiving preferential treatment is also a recurring theme (e.g. YEP 2.12.99, 12.12.00: 17). This YEP discourse is occasionally broken up with concern for asylum seekers – ‘it is not a good idea to put vulnerable, displaced people, who have been through a lot of emotional upset in their own countries, into an area which is already home to many vulnerable people’ – but even this is incorporated into the discourse of potentially detrimental local effects – ‘regeneration work to transform the area could be jeopardised if refugees moved in’ (YEP 18.1.00: 8).

Similar concerns are expressed in the SWECO but in the context of an entirely different discourse. There is balanced speculation about dispersal but concerns are tempered by repeated calls for people to ‘treat the refugees with compassion’ (SWECO 7.3.00: 13; see also 6.4.00: 10, 28.6.00: 11, 3.11.00: 10, 10.4.00: front page, 12-13). There are also some attempts to negate the detrimental local effects and instead propose benefits of dispersal. For example,

‘A welcome in the hillside?’ tell us that the numbers of asylum seekers being dispersed is too small to exert economic pressure and that refugees can help fill shortages of professionals in vital occupations (SWECO 11.4.01: 19).

### *Local identity and asylum discourse*

Interpretations of the differences in representations of asylum seekers and refugees and debates about dispersal can be illuminated by thinking about how each locality conceives of its own identity. Reactions to dispersal are inextricably tied up with contested ideas of local identity and sense of place. The YEP constructs Leeds as a city economically and otherwise in competition with elsewhere, particularly the South East of England. So, the city has been ‘conned’ into taking asylum seekers (9.2.99: 6), giving authorities in the south east ‘a bargain’ with cheap prices for accommodation (12.2.99: 12).

In contrast, Cardiff is created as a city that’s ‘proud to play its part in providing refuge’ (7.3.00: 13) as the capital of a nation with a ‘strong tradition of helping those in need’ (31.5.01: 6). ‘Cardiff has a tradition of looking after vulnerable people’ (10.4.01: front page) and so will offer a ‘warm Welsh welcome’ to asylum seekers (31.5.01: 3). Furthermore, Cardiff is ‘a more enlightened society with a proud history of welcoming the world to our doorstep and our heart’ (10.4.01: 6) and as such will treat the new arrivals with compassion and respect.

Such discourse is notably absent from the YEP coverage. However, it would be untrue to claim that there are no alternative perspectives put forward in this newspaper. However, these tend to be one-off articles relating to specific events that fall outside the established discourse. For example, we’re told about a project launch in which Leeds is held up as a pioneer in welcoming refugees (19.7.00: 34), we’re invited to an art exhibition depicting refugees’ experiences (23.10.00: 17) and we’re informed of the publication of a report that highlights Leeds as a good example of accommodating asylum seekers and refugees (30.6.01: 5). Yet such opportunities for creation of inclusive discourse are not taken up.

Indeed, the SWECO discourse has emphasised ‘we’ as being multicultural but the same is not evident in the YEP. The SWECO tells us ‘we’re all settlers’ (1.4.00: 22), that many of the problems of asylum are myths (10.4.01: 12) and that we can all live in a ‘glo-ball village’ (5.6.01: 10, Figure 4). In contrast, the YEP warns that ‘there are many nationalities’ that could

be placed in Leeds (17.11.00: 7) and reports on fears of asylum seekers being accommodated in various neighbourhoods: 'there were objections from over 20 local people worried about the impact on the area' (17.11.00: 7), 'the council is pleased the building will not become a hostel for the asylum seekers' (19.11.99: 7). The YEP discourse also perpetuates fears about problems of concentrations of asylum seekers, reporting that 'residents were assured that if asylum seekers did come to the estate, they would not be placed en masse into a single tower block' (YEP 3.2.00: 8).

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Our analysis of the representation of asylum seekers and the policy of dispersal in two local newspapers has shown that for certain dimensions of the asylum issue the dominant national discourse is not locally contested. An ingrained national discourse is particularly evident in the assumption of the need for asylum seeker dispersal and in the concerns about dispersal. This is heavily tied up with dominant thinking about the need for integration and avoidance of 'ghettos'. For these issues, the national and local media, political and public discourses are in alignment and it can be argued that, as Hubbard (2005) suggests, racial ideas about problems of concentrations of minorities, including the threat to nation (Billig 1995) and competition for resources (Rex and Moore 1967, Husbands 1983) are assumed and inherent. Repetition of these messages by a variety of agenda setters at a variety of scales serves to enforce the hegemony of these ideologies.

However, the policy of dispersal has been a mechanism for making asylum a local issue and has forced localities to think about asylum issues beyond the familiar boundaries of the moral panic (Cohen 2002). The examples of Leeds and Cardiff discussed here have shown that there are significant and important local discourses; that the issues are framed and constructed differently by the local press in different places.

Local discourses differ from the dominant national moral panic discourse to different extents and in different ways. The *Yorkshire Evening Post* is largely in line with national discourse in its representation of asylum seekers, but takes a local perspective on dispersal. The *South Wales Echo* challenges the national discourse on both representations of asylum seekers and coverage of dispersal. The *South Wales Echo* and the *Yorkshire Evening Post* therefore offer two very different perspectives, one that reinforces national stereotypes and one that challenges them; one that excludes and one that includes; one that thinks about accommodation

of asylum seekers as an opportunity and one that thinks of it as a burden. This difference is important because the approach taken has implications for the success of dispersal policies and for community cohesion.

The relations between national and local discourses can be thought of in three ways. Firstly, it is possible for the two scales of discourse to co-exist. The *South Wales Echo*, for example, demonstrates how philosophies of humanitarianism can co-exist with criticism of national and international policy, and with acceptance of the need for a policy of dispersal.

Secondly, local and national discourses can be mutually reinforcing. This is evident in both local newspapers in the assumption of the need for dispersal; and in much of the rest of the *Yorkshire Evening Post* discourse. The *Yorkshire Evening Post* discourse perpetuates the hostility that previous studies have found to dominate national discourse (Kaye 1998, Article 19 2003, Stratham 2002) thereby creating asylum seekers as other and alien to the community (Sibley 1995).

Thirdly, it is possible for local discourses to challenge dominant supra-local ones. The example of the *South Wales Echo* has shown that it is possible and commercially viable to challenge negative stereotypes. The positive and humanitarian-focused coverage in the *South Wales Echo* contests previous studies that have found persistent negative portrays (e.g. Stratham 2002, EUMC 2002, ICAR 2004, Ross 1998) and instead is consistent with recent work that highlights the innovative and sensitive reporting of local media (ICAR 2006). For Cardiff, the localising of asylum through the dispersal policy has created an opportunity for a node of stability in the national moral panic.

Having identified differences in the discourses of the *Yorkshire Evening Post* and the *South Wales Echo* it remains to speculate over the reasons for these differences. It is clear that local events, in this case asylum seeker dispersal, influence news content. However, how this content is (re)presented and managed may be affected by numerous factors related to external pressures (e.g. ownership of the newspaper, financial pressure), newsroom power structures and the influence of the editors, pressures of time and news-space, and the motivations and agency of individual reporters. It is beyond the scope of this paper to elaborate on these processes and this is done elsewhere (Finney forthcoming). However, what has emerged here is that how each locality conceives of its own identity may be one of the key reasons for

differences in representations of asylum. Reactions to dispersal are inextricably tied up with contested ideas of local identity and imagined community (Anderson 1991). Local communities have their own self-identities that the local press must reinforce and reflect if they are to be valued and their product is to remain commercially viable (Aldridge 2003).

In our two case studies, Leeds was constructed as a city of power and control, that was competing for influence with London and the south east, and did not want to be taken advantage of by these competitors. The discourse was therefore defensive and set within an English frame. The discourse in Cardiff was different. Wales has a different history of migration, views the 'race' issue differently, and has different flashpoints around migration, most notably the Welsh language and recent English in-migration (Robinson and Gardner, 2006). Moreover, in its imaginings, the Welsh nation is a community 'built on mutual understanding, harmony and tolerance amongst a highly cultured, moral and upright people...where reciprocity, integration and harmony are the cornerstones of community' (Williams 1999; 277). Although the reality challenges this self-perception (Evans 1991; Robinson and Gardner 2004; 2006), the important point is that, in their imaginings, the Welsh are familiar with persecution, are tolerant and are welcoming to foreigners. On top of this, Cardiff is constructed as an emerging and vibrant capital of the nation, that must reflect all that is best in Wales. So, in relation to asylum seeker dispersal, the discourse in Cardiff reflects this self-image by being welcoming, inclusive, and tolerant.

The possibility of challenge to the dominant, negative, national discourse makes the local particularly significant. Contrary to Franklin and Murphy's (1998) conclusions, localism of the local press remains important, at least in relation to how local identity is employed in reactions to immigration. Given that local discourse can be 'socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned' (Wodak 1996: 15), the positive discourse evident in Cardiff has political potential to shift the national and international lens on asylum and immigration from one of control and defence to one of opportunity and humanitarianism. There is potential here for the local to reinvent the national (Amin 2002, Massey 2004). There is also potential for such localised discourse to create a sense for the distant other that moves people to respond to that, mentally rather than physically, distant other (Barnett 2005). If national discourses and representations have the power to influence (Kitzinger 1999; Miller and Philo 1999), to set agendas and illicit political response (Lewis 2001; Pickering 1999), it is not unreasonable to suggest, as Aldridge (2003) does, that local discourses can also exert power. Studies of

reactions to such issues as asylum should not, therefore, ignore the local scale and local variations. In terms of understanding discourses around dispersal, taking into account local senses of identity and local moral discourses on accommodating diversity is crucial.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>Definitions for the categories for ‘representations of asylum seekers’ and ‘coverage of dispersal’ are as follows:

### ***Representations of asylum seekers***

Negative, Very: Talks about those asylum seekers who ‘cheat’ the system; focus on ways of getting round system; asylum seekers as unwanted and unwelcome; talks about crime.

Negative, Somewhat: Implies asylum seekers are problematic and a burden; associated with crime; derogatory terms used; suspicious and uncertain of asylum seekers.

Balanced: Refers to both positive and negative aspects of asylum seekers; gives each equal weighting; little judgment – factual.

Positive, Somewhat: Talks about asylum seekers with concern; links present arrivals to past successful arrivals eg. Kosovans, Poles, Jewish; talks about welcoming asylum seekers; gives reasons for asylum seeking; promotes humanitarian view.

Positive, Very: Talks about benefits asylum seekers and refugees can bring; talks about past benefits brought eg. In industry, culture; gives examples of asylum seekers’ experiences and reasons for needing refuge in UK; criticizes way asylum seekers are treated in the UK – calls for better treatment; challenges myths.

### ***Coverage of dispersal policy***

Very Supportive: Explicit praise for policy.

Supportive: Idea of dispersal welcomed; looking forward to receiving asylum seekers.

Indifferent: Factual, no judgments.

Cautious: Qualified support for policy.

Unsupportive: Focus on negative aspects of dispersal and its consequences eg. Pressure on services; negative results of dispersal eg. Conflicts reported.

Critical: Open criticism of policy; expresses failure of policy.



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