

M4C Collaborative Doctoral Award- Refugee Narratives: World University Service's Ethiopian and Eritrean Scholarship Programmes in the Light of Current Practice

Project Title				
Refugee Narratives: World University Service's Ethiopian and Eritrean Scholarship Programmes in the Light of Current Practice				
LEAD INSTITUTION				
Name of HEI institution	University of Warwick			
Lead regional city	Birmingham <input type="checkbox"/>	Coventry <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Leicester <input type="checkbox"/>	Nottingham <input type="checkbox"/>
PARTNER ORGANISATION				
Name of organisation	ReConnect			
Website URL	https://reconnectonline.org.uk			
THE RESEARCH PROJECT				
<p>Context and Timeliness</p> <p>The West perceives itself to be confronting a 'refugee crisis' where refugees are viewed as victims lacking agency, as risks to the host society and as resource burdens (Angouri et al, 2018). Refugee experience is often construed as static, and the refugee the pawn of external forces and legal frameworks. As Malkki noted (1996: 378), 'humanitarian practices tend to silence refugees', rendering them passive recipients of others' aid efforts. Refugee research also frequently adopts a structural, governmental, or legal focus which elides the long-term experiences of individual refugees themselves. This project enriches existing work by adopting a cultural-linguistic approach that, allied to rigorous historical study of an earlier refugee context, seeks to address this gap and draw out lessons for best practice today.</p> <p>The project focuses on a UK-based programme, World University Service's training scholarships for Ethiopians and Eritreans following conflict in these countries (examining the latter half of the 1970s through to the 1990s). Through collaboration with ReConnect, it aims to compare this historical perspective to the experience of refugees from Sub-Saharan Africa in the UK today. The research will give refugees a voice, analysing the process of their integration into the host society and culture. Specifically, given the educational character of the WUS programme, paralleled by ReConnect's work, the research will study the qualitative value of intercultural awareness and professional development as part of refugees' engagement with a host society. ReConnect's participation in this research is central to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understanding the contemporary policy moment; - The training of the student in professional refugee practice; - Facilitating a rehistoricized view of refugee experience as a dynamic personal, professional, and cultural negotiation. <p>Research Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How does WUS' educational and development focus compare to the vision of ReConnect? - Which particular needs arise: language, workplace practices, intercultural challenges? What insights thus emerge regarding best training practice? 				

- How does the provision of educational and training supports assist in successful resettlement, professional independence, and the validation of self-respect and dignity?
- How can working with an organization that, like ReConnect, prioritizes refugees' own engagement with training activities assist in the effective and egalitarian transfer of skills, beyond the problematics of traditionalist development agendas?

Methodology and Ethics

Refugees have multiple identities and deploy multiple coping strategies (Hovill 2016: 6), yet are frequently viewed as a homogenous group. Through cultural-linguistic analysis of interviews with refugees in tandem with archival research, this project will examine the complexity of their experiences, especially as regards cultural adjustment and professional development, through:

- Approximately 25 in-depth ethnographically designed interviews with beneficiaries of WUS and ReConnect, to understand settlement and adjustment challenges, professional concerns, the specific complexities of language and intercultural issues;
- Research in the WUS archive Modern Records Centre (MRC), Warwick, the National Archives, London (NA), and the Refugee Council Archive (RCA) to understand the policy frameworks for Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees in the 1970s-90s, and today;
- Interviews with former WUS staff and engagement with ReConnect colleagues;
- Narrative and linguistic analysis of refugee stories to understand their complexity, as well as the role of language and intercultural competence in refugees' career trajectories;
- Placement experience with ReConnect to grasp the social, economic and policy environments within which refugee professionals work.

Interviewees will be recruited through the professional networks of former WUS staff, notably Phillips, and through ReConnect. Participants will thus be connected to the organizations involved, and fully integrated into the collaboration. Care will be taken with ethical issues, including stress on the anonymous, voluntary nature of participation, and interviewees' ability to decline specific questions or withdraw at any time or avoid contentious issues without prejudice (see Ethics section 5).

Timetable

Year 1: Historical context Ethiopia and Eritrea; review of literature and policy contexts and archival research (MRC; National Archives Kew; Refugee Council Archive, University of East London). Introduction to WUS and ReConnect. Feb/March review and end-of-year PhD upgrade.

Year 2: Training in ethnographic interviewing; establish interview format, participant information, consent forms; seek ethics approval. Interviews with WUS former scholarship holders and staff, their evaluation, development of linguistic analytical frame. Mid-year review.

Year 3: Continued interviews with WUS, interviews with ReConnect beneficiaries and professionals. Transcription of interviews, compilation of analytical database of themes. Additional archival research as necessary. Planning public engagement activities. Mid-year review.

Year 4: Analysis of interviews, particular focus on narrative form and linguistic analysis, writing up and submission. Collaboration with ReConnect on policy insights. MRC exhibition and policy discussion with local refugee organizations in collaboration with main supervisor.

HOW TO FIND OUT MORE

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