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**Explaining Change in Established Migration
Systems: The Movement of Algerians to France and
the UK**

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Abstract

The geography of migration to Europe has changed considerably over the last decade. The Algerian migration system offers an example of the diversification that has also occurred for other migrant groups. Until recently Algerian emigration followed very firmly established patterns directed almost exclusively to France. Algerians now travel to a wide range of destinations. This paper explores the reasons for this diversification by considering the movement of Algerians to the UK and France. The most important reasons for the changes in emigration from Algeria can be found in Algeria itself where the prolonged conflict and its social and economic effects have considerably altered the context of emigration, affecting the profile of emigrants and their reasons for leaving. The changing situation in France has also contributed to these developments. France has always been the most natural destination for Algerians but since the beginning of the conflict migration to France has become much more difficult for Algerians. The changing profile of Algerian emigrants also means that they have less in common with the large settled Algerian community in France than was previously the case. The movement to Britain has arisen partly due to changes in Algeria and progressive exclusion from France but also for other reasons particular to Britain. This research found no support for the commonly held beliefs that Britain is attractive due to a favourable asylum system, the existence of settled communities or to particular political interest groups. Rather, Algerians come to the UK since it has few connections with Algeria at a governmental level and they perceive it to be more tolerant towards Algerian nationals. On a theoretical level this suggests that in certain circumstances social networks do not play as dominant a role as is sometimes thought in directing migration. These findings also have significant implications for attempts to harmonise policy at a European level. They suggest that the movement of asylum seekers from one European state to another is largely unrelated to differences in asylum systems.

1. Introduction

During the 1950s and 1960s large scale migration to Europe arose from historical, cultural or linguistic ties which had their roots in the colonial period. The resulting migration patterns have altered societies of Western Europe such that most countries now have significant ethnic minorities originating from their major areas of colonial influence. From the mid to late 1980s migration patterns to Europe have begun to diversify significantly. Migrants began to travel to and settle in countries with very little previous settlement and no historical, cultural or economic links. For example, Sri Lankans now travel to Switzerland (McDowell 1996), Colombians to Sweden (UNHCR 2002), Iranians to the Netherlands (Koser 1997), Angolans to Belgium and Ivorians to the UK (UNHCR 2002) in more significant numbers than ever before. These new communities are still small compared to communities of their co-nationals elsewhere in Europe but they are beginning to have an impact on the social and cultural landscape, at least at a local level. The thesis on which this paper is based sets out to explain this new geography of migration to Europe using the recent migration of Algerians to the UK as an example (Collyer 2002). This paper summarises the main findings of the thesis.

Many of these new national communities in Europe have grown up through refugee migration. The first priority for refugees is obviously to escape the situation of risk or persecution in which they (thy)Ts thesis 1 Tf0.0003 36 0.2503 Tw 10.02 0 0 10.20.037706.338I(recent)Tj10.02

2. The Background to Current Algerian Emigration

Until very recently the history of Algerian emigration was the history of Algerian migration to France. In 1990 the Algerian community in France was estimated at more than one million people (Khandriche et al 1999). This represents 97 percent of all Algerians living outside of Algeria (OECD 1992 quoted in Fassmann and Munz 1994). From 1990 onwards migration began to diversify as a result of the current conflict. Significant migration from Algeria to France began shortly before the First World War (Hifi 1985). Initially this migration was circular and the huge majority of emigrants returned to Algeria after a few years away (Gillette and Sayad 1984). In 1946 Algerians were allowed to circulate freely between Algeria and France (Stora 1992). Free circulation lasted until 1968, six years after Algerian independence. In the early 1950s and 1960s Algerian emigration began to grow rapidly. This growth was caused partly by the upheaval caused by the 1954-62 war with France but also by the tremendous demand for workers in the rapidly expanding French economy (Talha 1983; Sayad et al. 1991; Samers 1997). Emigrants tended to remain in France for longer and longer periods of time (Sayad 1977). France stopped all labour emigration in 1974, about the same time labour migration ended across Europe.

Algerian emigration continued after 1974, but it began to change. Labour migration had been almost exclusively male. During the 1970s women came to join their husbands through family reunion migration, signifying the increasing permanence of a migration that was initially thought of as temporary, by both the French and the Algerians involved. Between 1972 and 1982 the proportion of women grew from under 10 to more than 30 percent of the total Algerian community in France (Khader 1993). After 1974 Algerians could still visit France for short periods of time with relatively few restrictions, but they could not stay longer than the period allowed by their tourist visas, currently between one and three months. After labour migration ended the only significant ways for Algerians to

remain in France legally for a longer period were family reunion migration, student migration and seeking asylum. At this time it was relatively easy to remain without documents in France but the Algerian economy was booming and there was less economic incentive to leave the country than during the previous decade (Stora 1992). Following the introduction of 16Tj Tw 10.3.736

situation which provoked the riots of 1988 (Roberts 2003). Even though the violence has eased considerably the ensuing economic crisis and endemic official corruption have ensured that demand for emigration has continued largely unabated.

3. Patterns of Current Algerian Emigration

There can be no doubt that the main impetus for Algerian migration over the past decade has been the current conflict and its aftermath. Although emigration from Algeria has continued relatively uninterrupted for over a century the social

role of emigration and emigrants has continually developed (Sayad 1977). Current emigration differs from previous patterns in three significant ways; the predominance of asylum, the diversity of destinations and the profile of emigrants.

Figure 1 shows the tremendous rise in Algerian asylum seekers in Europe from 1992 onwards, wf £30w4r Tw 10.wT5cSaya534 663.4393v02

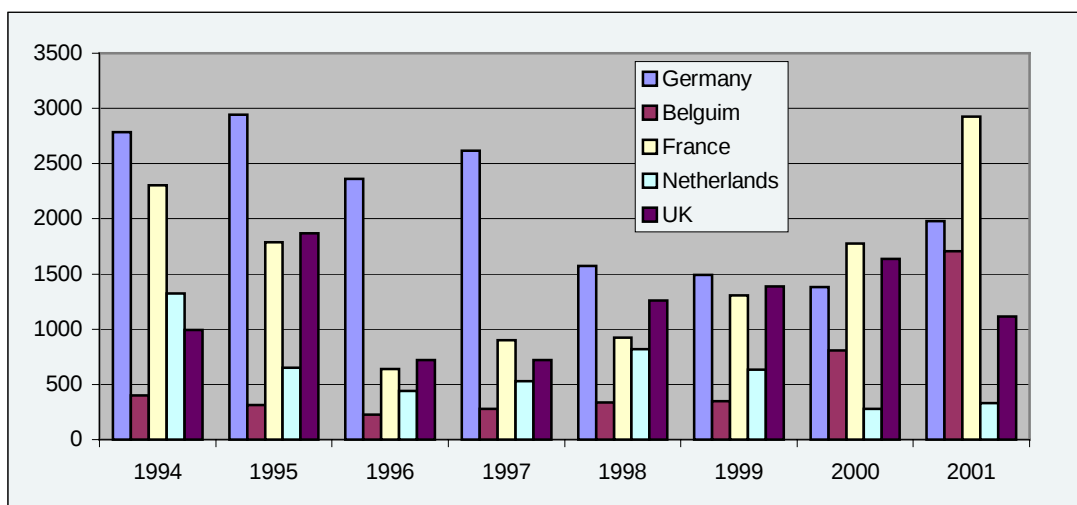


Figure 2: *Asylum requests registered by Algerians in the five European countries to have received most requests 1994 – 2001* (source UNHCR 2002)

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frequently not granted refugee status as, until very recently, the French body responsible for determining asylum claims, OFPRA, has not recognised non-state agents of persecution. Those Algerians who *are* fleeing state persecution are generally members of Islamic political parties or armed groups and they are not recognised either. This is a somewhat simplified characterisation of the French asylum system but it offers a partial explanation for the low recognition rate for Algerian

documented entry for Algerians. Undocumented migration poses fewer barriers to single women, though given the cultural constraints on the migration of

Algerians are not attracted to the UK by their positive impressions of UK asylum policy. The most powerful argument for this is the low level of information among Algerians, in both Britain and France, about British asylum policy. Since people know so little about it, it cannot be a significant attraction for them. No Algerian I interviewed was able to answer questions on fundamental aspects of asylum policy in Britain and France, such as the difference in the provision of welfare benefits or the comparative recognition rates for Algerian asylum seekers. This is hardly surprising given the difficulty of obtaining this type of comparative information, even for those working in the field. Information supplied by interviewees was inaccurate but there was certainly no pattern of systematic exaggeration of the benefits of the British system, which may have explained an attraction. Two Algerians interviewed in Britain even stated that in their view the provision of welfare benefits in France was more generous, but they had decided to come to Britain anyway¹⁰.

The second argument for the lack of importance of asylum policy as an attraction can be found in data from asylum claims in Britain and France. Although in some years Algerians clearly stood a better chance of obtaining asylum in Britain than in France this had no obvious effect on the movement of asylum seekers to Britain. A comparison of recognition rates for Algerians in France and Britain (Figures 4 and 5) shows that until 1998 Algerians had a very similar chance of being granted asylum in both countries. In 1999 the difference was very dramatic indeed, with over 70 per cent of Algerians in Britain granted asylum, compared to only four per cent in France.

¹⁰ The comparative situation in the two countries changes regularly. At the time of writing (March

family networks were not a significant reason for the migration of Algerians to Britain.

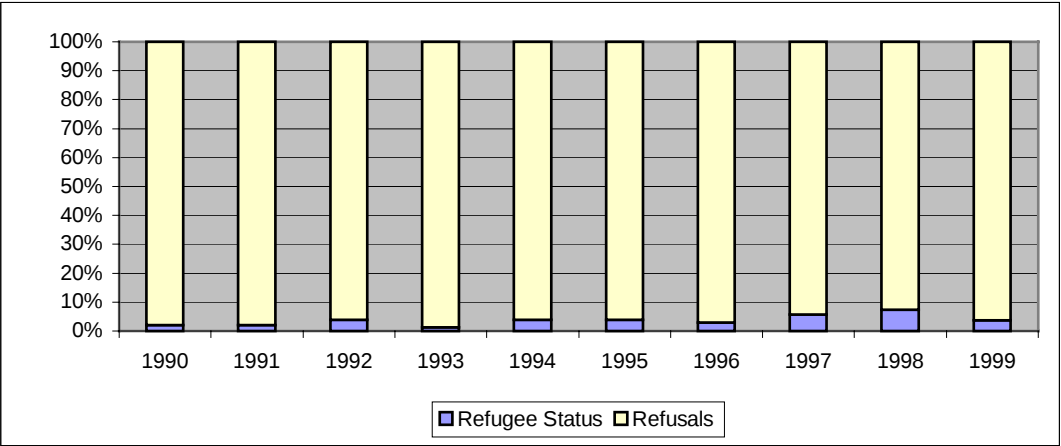
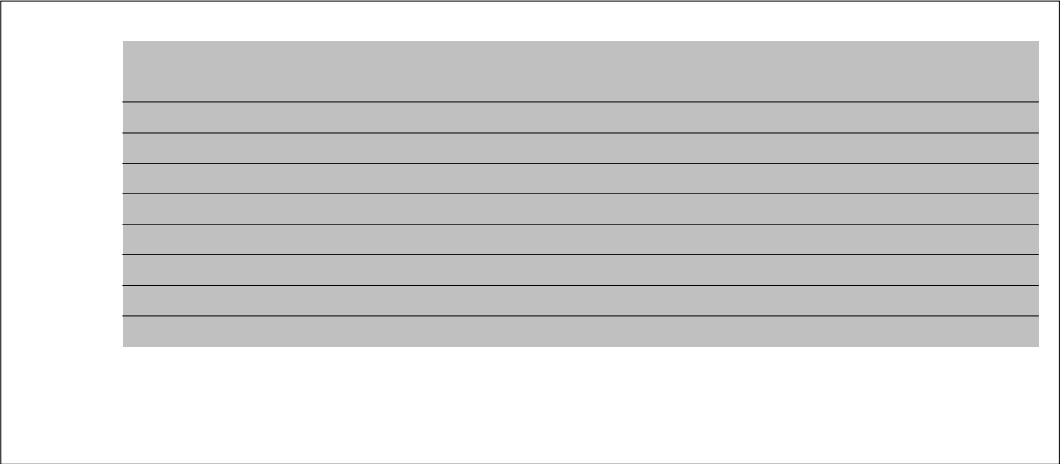


Figure 4: *Results of asylum applications by Algerians in France 1990 – 1999* (source OFPRA, personal communication 2000)



policy or by the presence of family groups in Britain, what explains this significant movement of people? A number of factors found by this research are common to other groups of asylum seekers and are very well known. The rest of this section will first focus on attractions which are perhaps more specific to the Algerian community before reviewing general attractions more briefly.



First, the choice of Britain is a result of the evolving profile of Algerian emigrants in the 1990s. As discussed in the second section, more Algerians are now better educated and it is most often the educated and employed who have the possibility to travel. These people also tend to have broader geographical horizons and they are more aware than previous emigrants of the possibilities of countries other than France. They are also more likely to speak English in addition to Arabic and French. This does not, of course, mean that they will travel to Britain, many Algerians I spoke to in France were very well informed about the situation in Britain and elsewhere, but still had no desire to live there. It does however make the possibility of living there more likely. As well as the highly educated the reverse side is that the comparatively less educated also have a reason to come to Britain. It is now 30 years since Algerian independence, the Algerian population is exceptionally young (75 per cent are under 30) and the memory of French rule is becoming increasingly distant. Increasingly, education is in Arabic rather than French and many young people speak no foreign languages at all. Rather than the extended options of additional languages, they have reduced options of none and no particular reason to go to any one destination more than any other. The languages of my interviews in Britain support this divergence. Interviews were conducted in English or French if interviewees were comfortable in those languages, Arabic if not; in Britain 5 interviews were in English,

of course, impossible to verify and are more interesting as a reflection of the perceptions of the individuals involved than as an indication of the reality of the situation. Even so, they do fit with a well-documented history of close involvement between the French and Algerian governments. The 1994 Franco-Algerian agreement included a highly developed

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research has demonstrated that fluctuations in emigration from Algeria since 1990 follow events in Algeria more closely than any European developments in immigration legislation. People leave because a threshold of tolerance has been reached and they hope that life may be better elsewhere. Attention to these 'root causes' of migration fluctuates with political fashions. However, it is clear that any long term solution to the situation requires that European states question their role in regional conflicts and human rights abuses, such as the Algerian crisis, which are the direct cause of most significant migration streams to Europe. An end to refugee producing situations currently appears to be a distant ideal. Most European states would claim to be working towards this goal but legislation tends to focus more on stopping the resulting movement of people than addressing root causes in any consistent and meaningful way.

Once people have left their homes, their migration to one or other European destination requires a different set of explanations. This research has also examined why many Algerians now travel to the UK instead of France. EU policy has made more vigorous attempts to address migration at this level; one of the aims of Dublin II legislation, for example, is to reduce the movement of asylum seekers from one European country to another. The second section has shown that many Algerians who claim asylum in Britain have travelled through France first; this is an example of the type of movement that the EU hopes to stop. Separate EU legislation aims to harmonise asylum policy across Europe also with the aim of reducing this type of movement. However, if asylum policy is not a significant cause of this movement, harmonising this legislation will have little effect. It may do something to correct the injustices of dramatic differences in recognition rates between member states, such as for Algerians in 1999 who were 10 times more likely to be granted asylum in Britain than in France (Figure 5), but current indications are that it is more likely to make the fortunate unfortunate than the reverse.

Two areas highlighted here pose particularly intractable problems for the ongoing harmonisation of asylum policy at the EU level; the effect of Member States' privileged bilateral relations with countries of origin and differential wage rates across the EU. First, bilateral relations between France and Algeria produced two significant reasons reported by Algerians for their motivation to move from France to the UK; the perception that they would face less racism in the UK due to the small Algerian population and their desire to escape the close contact between the French and Algerian governments. The continuing process of harmonisation of legislation has not addressed the influence of Member States' bilateral relations with countries of origin. At the start of the conflict in Algeria, the French government was very concerned about the possibility of the conflict spreading to Algerians in France (Morisse-Schilbach 1999) and this strongly influenced the way they responded to subsequent Algerian immigration. The British government did not share this concern since the Algerian presence in Britain was insignificant. France and the UK were able to respond to Algerian refugees in very different ways. Developing legislation will encourage a uniform European response to this type of refugee situation, where close bilateral relations of Member States are actually more important. Greater flexibility may be advantageous for both Member States and certain refugee groups.

The existence of differential wage rates within the EU is the second obstacle faced by ongoing harmonisation of asylum policy. This is a sensitive issue since governments increasingly point to any evidence that economic considerations motivated migration as evidence of an unfounded asylum claim, though there is no basis for this characterisation. Employment has always been a fundamental aspect of migration and there is no reason why refugees should behave any differently from other migrants when choosing a destination. This research has shown the considerable differences in wages and rates of employment between Marseilles and London. These differences pose one of the most powerful motivations

for secondary movement and they are not likely to disappear in the near future. Ironically, the EU has acted to prevent third country nationals displaying a level of mobility that it is simultaneously trying to encourage among EU citizens who have consistently resisted the temptation to leave their home states (Jilvena 2002).

7. Conclusion – The Future of Harmonisation

The view that asylum policy provides a motivation for migration informs continuing policy making at national and EU levels. This research does not support this view. The research has considered a number of factors responsible for the diversification of Algerian emigration,

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