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The Impact of Hong Kong on Margaret Thatcher's Racist Vietnamese Refugee Policy

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Abstract: This dissertation explains why the British government, in 1979, resettled Sino-Vietnamese refugees regardless of Margaret Thatcher's initial inhospitableness towards them. Based on original research conducted in the United Kingdom's National Archives, the dissertation's findings are used to engage with academic debate on who and what directs refugee policy change. Thatcher's hostility towards the Sino-Vietnamese refugees is uncovered to be due to personal racism and a fear of restrictive public opinion. Her views were formed by decades of animosity towards black and minority ethnic immigration in Britain by politicians and parts of the public. Meanwhile, Britain's decision to relocate the refugees is discovered to be a consequence of territoriality. Hong Kong was, at the time, a British colony and Britain's eventual involvement in the Indochinese crisis was to aid Hong Kong's own refugee crisis. After the analysis, case studies of other refugee groups are used to make comparisons with the Sino-Vietnamese. These studies prove that legislation can influence refugee policy whilst international pressure and politics are proven to only guarantee success to nation-states that have strong international powers.

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Introduction

The Relevance of History

“The Prime Minister went on to say that there would be riots in the streets if the Government had to put refugees into council houses. She acknowledged, however, that Hong Kong had a dreadful problem”¹

Margaret Thatcher’s rise to ascendancy in 1979 could only but emerge from what was a turbulent phase in British history. By the end of the 1970s, Britain had endured a decade of continuous austerity, fading international prominence and racist public disapproval of New Commonwealth immigration. These ordeals proved to be the noose upon which Labour and Conservative governments were hung. As a consequence, after her electoral victory on 4 May 1979, Margaret Thatcher aimed to confront these afflictions. The result, as is famous, was sixteen years of Conservative rule. This dissertation does not intend to reiterate the importance of the year 1979 in Margaret Thatcher’s political career. Instead it aims to highlight the magnitude of one overlooked event that year in particular: the response of Thatcher’s Conservatives to the Sino-Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong.

Although academics have studied the British resettlement programme of the Sino-Vietnamese refugees generally, the details of this particular incident have been mostly unexplored.² No-one seems to have examined why the British government agreed to increase their rate of acceptance for Sino-Vietnamese refugees when, initially, the Prime Minister herself was openly and avidly hostile to them. This gap in academic research is unfortunate as such an investigation holds great potential. Not only could it uncover what influenced refugee policy in Thatcher’s era but it promises to disclose the factors and actors behind policy throughout history. By comparing the treatment of refugees by the British government of 1979 to that of the contemporary United States’ government and previous British administrations, this dissertations intends to achieve just that.

The hope is that the findings produced will also be relevant enough to refugee dilemmas of today and the future. If they are, they can be used to help us understand and resolve these dilemmas. In

¹ United Kingdom National Archives (UKNA), Prem 19/129, Note for the record: Vietnamese Refugees, 14th June 1979.

² For a good overview of the British resettlement programme of Sino-Vietnamese refugees, see Tony Kushner and Katharine Knox. 1999. *Refugees in an age of genocide: Global, National and Local Perspectives during the Twentieth Century*, London, Portland: Frank Cass.

September 2015, an almost identical refugee policy — to the one studied in this dissertation — was announced. David Cameron, the British Prime Minister, had made public that his government planned to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees in Britain over the next four years.³ This is almost an exact repetition of the resettlement quota Thatcher made public in 1979. Syrian refugees, like the ‘boat people’, also faced perilous journeys to reach their countries of first asylum only to be turned back.⁴ Both events, additionally, happened at a time of high public focus on immigration and after almost a decade of austerity and high unemployment levels.⁵ The past is evidently still highly pertinent to what we encounter today. I believe that if we were to draw parallels between the two, in order to grasp the continuity and change in government response, we can better shape our future discourse and comprehension when analysing any refugee policy.

Structure and Methodology

The primary sources used in this dissertation were consulted in the United Kingdom National Archives in Kew, London. This thesis will begin with a theoretical section in which there will be summaries and critical analyses of theories on who drives refugee policy change. After this, in order to fully establish what could have influenced Margaret Thatcher and the government’s decision-making, the background to her election victory and a short examination of her own character will be supplied. Finally a historiography of the Indochinese refugee crisis and the British government’s reaction to it will be provided.

Afterwards, a detailed dissection of why Margaret Thatcher initially refused to accept any Sino-Vietnamese refugee arrivals will be provided. Following on from that will be the section that then examines what caused the British government to alter its original commitments to resettling Sino-Vietnamese refugees. Both sections aim to give a wider explanation of what factors could affect governmental refugee policy microcosmically.

The subsequent sub-section will compare the British response to the Indochina refugee crisis with that of the United States. The dissertation will then make another comparison by examining the reaction of prior British administrations to Hungarian refugees in 1956 and the Ugandan Asians in

³ “UK to accept 20,000 refugees from Syria by 2020.” 7 September 2015. *BBC*. available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-34171148> (accessed on 29/10/2015).

⁴ Rose Troupe Buchanan. “Refugee crisis: Hungary closes Croatian border to refugees 'from midnight'.” 16 October 2015. *The Independent*. available at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/refugee-crisis-hungary-closes-croatian-border-to-refugees-from-midnight-a6697071.html> (accessed on 29/10/2015).

⁵ Alan Travis. “Net migration to Britain hits new high of 336,000.” Thursday 26 November 2015. *The Guardian*. available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/26/net-migration-britain-new-high-ons-immigration> (accessed on 7/12/2015).

the early 1970s. The aim here is to establish if there are certain factors and actors that have dominated British refugee policy.

Who Directs Refugee Policy?

Ultimately, by looking at why the Conservatives in 1979 reversed their initial decision to refuse to resettle the Sino-Vietnamese refugees, this dissertation's focus is on what creates refugee policy change. Much of the discussion on policy change lingers on the issue of who directs it. With multiple influential parties potentially directing policy at various times, at different intensities and in contrasting conditions, academics seem to be at odds with each other over who and what truly are the real authorities in creating policy change.

In the past, public opinion has been perceived as typically restrictive towards immigration.⁶ Public opposition to immigration is also regarded as a determining factor in policy change due to its ability to establish whether political parties win elections or not.⁷ Shamit Sagar, for instance, believes the Tory party's swing in electoral victory from 13 per cent in 1966 to 53 per cent in 1970 was due to their adoption of a restrictionist manifesto in order to better reflect the public's restrictionist attitudes.⁸ However the scope of public opinion's influence also extends beyond elections. Christopher Rudolph observes this occurring in the 1970s when British immigration policy, under pressure from public opinion, became restrictionist solely towards the immigration of black and minority ethnicities (hereafter referred to as BME).⁹

Such popular restrictionism is caused by a dislike of outsiders and is generally stimulated by fear of what ramifications immigration might inflict on the majority population on a collective level rather than a personal one.¹⁰ This means popular restrictionism focusses on how immigration impresses on issues such as the national economy and, most importantly, cultural identity.¹¹ Collectivism can often lead to the type of racism seen in 1960s Britain when New Commonwealth immigration faced

⁶ G P Freeman. 1995. "Modes of immigration politics in liberal democratic states." *The International migration review* 29(4), pp. 881-913, p 886.

⁷ Andrew P Cortell and Sysyan Peterson. 1999. "Altered States: Explaining Domestic Institutional Change." *British Journal of Political Science* 29(1), pp.177-203, pp 184-5.

⁸ Shamit Sagar. 2003. "Immigration and the Politics of Public Opinion." *The Political Quarterly* 74, pp.178-194, p 180.

⁹ Christopher Rudolph. 2002. "Security and the Political Economy of International Migration." *Working Papers*, pp 1-56, p 26.

¹⁰ Lauren McLaren and Mark Johnson. 2007. "Group Conflict and Symbols: Explaining Anti-Immigration Hostility in Britain." *Political Studies* 55(4), pp.709-732, p 714.

¹¹ See Citrin, Green, Muste and Wong (1995), Burns and Gimpel (2000), Ivarsflaten (2005), McLaren (2003) and Lahav (2004) for greater discussion on this topic.

strong public disapproval.¹² In refugee history, the episode of the Kenyan Asians arriving to Britain is a clear example, that will be briefly explored later, of public restrictionism guiding official refugee policy.

The media, too, has been recognised by some academics as having a major role within policy change. Koch-Baumgarten and Voltmer categorise the various related theories put forward by academics as: influence theory (where the media tell the politicians what to think) and agenda-setting theory (where the media tell the politicians what to think about).¹³ Agenda-setting theory has been further developed by Robert Entman who explains that the media do not only set the agenda for what politicians think but they also set the agenda of and therefore shape what the public think.¹⁴ As Matthew Gibney attests, this was the case with the Kosovar refugees of the late 1990s who received unrivalled media attention and thus changed the course of various states' refugee policy.¹⁵

Another theory has been devised by Phil Orchard who asserts that refugee policy change occurs due to norms, regimes and fundamental institutions. Orchard believes fundamental institutions, such as international law and popular sovereignty, internationalised refugee problem-solving. Refugee problem-solving was then overseen by regimes such as the UNHCR. These regimes subsequently helped states comprehend the norms that that were created as a guide to solving refugee problems.¹⁶ Changes to norms are forced by norm entrepreneurs who are identified by Orchard as any actor who wants to introduce, change, or replace norms to aid their areas of interest.¹⁷ Norm entrepreneurs are most effective during a crisis when dramatic changes in refugee flights renders existing refugee policies inapplicable.¹⁸ In these situations, norm entrepreneurs lobby various actors in politics which, in the UK, only consist of a few individuals. Orchard believes these individuals

¹² Robert Ford. 2011. 'Acceptable and Unacceptable Immigrants: How Opposition to Immigration in Britain is Affected by Migrants.' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37(7), pp 1017-1037, p 1020.

¹³ Bryan D.Jones and Michelle Wolfe. 2010. "Public policy and the mass media: an information processing approach." In Katrin Voltmer and Sigrid Koch-Baumgarten. *Public Policy and Mass Media: The interplay of mass communication and political decision making*. New York and London: Routledge, pp 17-44, p 17.

¹⁴ Robert M Entman. 1989. "How the Media Affect What People Think: An Information Processing Approach." *The Journal of Politics* 51(2), pp.347-370, p 361.

¹⁵ Matthew J Gibney, 1999. "Kosovo and beyond: popular and unpopular refugees," *Forced Migration Review* (5), pp.28-30.

¹⁶ Phil Orchard. 2014. *A Right to Flee*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p 21-3.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, pp 33-37.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p 33.

are, usually, only the Prime Minister and those within the Foreign Office as they decide individual and mass refugee policy.¹⁹

In international relations, states set norms that legitimise the actions of other states. Orchard writes that states most commonly use ‘socialisation’ to compel other states to change policy. Socialisation involves any lobbying that does not use coercion or the offering of material incentives, although those methods are used as well.²⁰ Cornelius and Rosenblum have expressed similar thoughts and have argued that migration has been used in the past as a form of foreign policy where sending and receiving states use cooperation over migration as a bargaining tool for bilateral relations.²¹ Orchard, however, also recognises international organisations (IOs) as being important entrepreneurs in policy change and claims that IOs such as UNHCR use their rational-legal authority and specialised knowledge to achieve policy change too.²² He uses the example of the UNHCR expanding its own mandate in the 1970s to prove his point.²³

Yet Orchard does not mention what occurs when international politics affects refugee policy change. There is a vein of thought that believes states are “instrumentally rational” and “narrowly self-interested,” and pursue actions that benefit them. The acceptance of refugees by states attempting to bolster their own goals can therefore be a method of embarrassing foreign rivals. Rejecting asylum seekers can often be a way of protecting the image of foreign allies.²⁴ In these instances, the effectiveness of regimes is debatable.²⁵ States do not pay much heed to international norms, on these occasions, unless it suits their own concerns. The US has been known to do so before, even if there were humanitarian grounds for adhering to the requests of inter-governmental organisations.²⁶

Of additional importance is the fragmentation of the state: the state has various actors within it who can change policy. Ceron is one academic who maintains that intra-party politics is very significant

¹⁹ *Ibid*, pp 39-40.

²⁰ *Ibid*, pp 42-3.

²¹ Wayne A Cornelius and Marc R Rosenblum. 2005. “Immigration and Politics.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 8(1), pp.99-119.

²² Phil Orchard. 2014. *A Right to Flee*, p 41.

²³ *Ibid*, p 201.

²⁴ Marc R Rosenblum and Idean Salehyan. 2004. “Norms and Interests in US Asylum Enforcement.” *Journal of Peace Research* 41 (6), pp. 677-697, p 679.

²⁵ Eytan Meyers. 2000. “Theories of International Immigration Policy-A Comparative Analysis.” *International Migration Review* 34(4), pp.1245-1282, p 1266.

²⁶ Marc R. Rosenblum and Idean Salehyam. 2004 “Norms and Interests in US Asylum Enforcement.” p 684-5.

in policy change. Intra-party politics involves members of a political party dividing into factions in order to compete for policy change within the party. The scholar avers that this often results in parties having to generate policy change in order to satisfy all members of their own party.²⁷ This can only occur, Ceron insists, if the authority of the decision-maker is weak.²⁸ However, as demonstrated by Bonjour's study on Dutch migration in the 1970s, there can also be internal politics in the state. In the case of internal politics those who are not senior political figures, civil servants for instance, can have a similar affect on policy change.²⁹ Therefore we need to be aware that both intra-party politics and internal politics are instrumental in policy change.

Thus academic thought is conflicted on who directs refugee policy and scholars provides a large selection of actors who could generate refugee policy change. This section has managed to recognise several such influences: public opinion, the media, norm entrepreneurs, states themselves and state actors. Unfortunately, with such an array of actors, their reasons for attempting to influence policy change can only be clear in each individual instance. This dissertation will therefore not only attempt to establish who directs policy change but also explain why.

Britain and Thatcher's Conservatives in 1979

Austere and With No International Role

As a Prime Minister famed for promoting tight fiscal policies, the ten years prior to Thatcher's election created an ideal environment for her to push forward her free market reforms. Britain had, by the time of her appointment, become part of a global recession created by the oil crises of the early and late 1970s.³⁰ Within the recession the nation was one of the worst affected countries: in 1979, it had only the seventh highest GDP per head of population amongst EEC member states.³¹ Correspondingly, Britain struggled to maintain the low unemployment levels of the 1950s and 1960s

²⁷ Andrea Ceron. 2012. "Bounded oligarchy: How and when factions constrain leaders in party position-taking." *Electoral Studies* 31(4), pp.689-701, p 698.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p 699.

²⁹ Saskia Bonjour. 2011. "The Power and Morals of Policy Makers: Reassessing the Control Gap Debate." *International Migration Review* 45 (1), pp 89-122, p 111.

³⁰ Richard Coopey and Nicholas Woodward. 1996. "The British economy in the 1970s: an overview." In Richard Coopey and Nicholas Woodwards (eds). *Britain in the 1970s: the troubled economy*. London: UCL Press, pp 1-33, p 6-8.

³¹ Margaret Thatcher. 1993/1995. *Margaret Thatcher: The Autobiography*. London: Harper Press, p 282.

as the number of unemployed people rose by 60% in the 1970s.³² By 1979, the official unemployment rate was 1.25 million — amounting to four per cent of the work force.³³

Britain's international role was consequently severely impeded: the 1970s became an unstable period for the country's foreign affairs.³⁴ By 1972, Britain forfeited territorial control in key areas such as Somalia, Malta and Libya and, by 1979, defence expenditure declined to become 4.6 per cent of Gross National Product.³⁵ British international allegiances suffered too as relationships with foreign countries widely varied within the 1970s. The Conservative British Prime Minister Edward Heath, for instance, joined the EEC in 1973 only for the successive Labour government to then ask for a renegotiation of EEC membership terms in 1975.³⁶ The Labour government afterwards, led by Harold Wilson, took interest in cooperating with the United States in order to improve Soviet relations. These efforts collapsed by 1977.³⁷

Thus, when the Conservative Party won the general election in 1979, the new government inherited an already strained relationship with the Soviet Union and had no strong international allegiances to rely upon. As a result, the British were unlikely to have much of a say in international politics. The country's declining economic fortunes, on the other hand, laid the setting for a hostile public reluctant to accept refugees who might be perceived as a threat to their nation's financial prospects.

Pre-Occupied With BME Migration

To add to Britain's difficulties, immigration was still a concern for politicians and the public alike. By the end of the 1970s, Britain had faced decades of mass immigration, subsequent public unrest and, ultimately, racial agitation. The threat of the National Front at the 1979 elections exemplifies how immigration persisted as a theme for national debate.³⁸

³² Richard Coopey and Nicholas Woodward. 1996. "The British economy in the 1970s: an overview." p 2.

³³ Geoffrey Howe. "Hansard, Economy: 1979 Budget (Howe 1)." 12 June 1979 <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/109497> (accessed on 29/10/2015).

³⁴ Michael J Turner. 2010. *Britain's International Role: 1970-1991*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, p 29.

³⁵ Malcolm Pearce and Geoffrey Stewart. 2002. *British Political History: 1867-2001 Democracy and Decline*. London and New York: Routledge, p 641 and Michael J Turner. 2010. *Britain's International Role: 1970-1991*, p 23.

³⁶ See Turner (2010) p 10 and Allen (1998) p 183.

³⁷ Margot Light. 1990. "Anglo-Soviet relations: political and diplomatic." In Alex Pravda and Peter Duncan. *Soviet-British Relations since the 1970s*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp 120-147, p135.

³⁸ John Solomos. 2003. *Race and Racism in Britain*. Palgrave Macmillan. p 179.

To trace where racism towards immigrants in Britain came from, it is important to look at what occurred in the 1950s. After the Second World War, large-scale BME immigration from countries such as the West Indies and Pakistan, otherwise known as the New Commonwealth, occurred. This sparked notable public outrage. White immigration, which numerically surpassed BME immigration, in contrast received scant attention. In 1958, public resistance to New Commonwealth immigration climaxed with the 'race riots' in London and Nottingham.³⁹

The Conservative government, in recognition of the public's displeasure at BME immigration passed the Commonwealth Immigrants Act in 1962. This marked the beginning of a series of legislation acts deterring immigration of citizens mostly from the New Commonwealth who had previously arrived in the country unabated.⁴⁰ Under the act, citizens of the whole Commonwealth could now only enter the country in accord with labour demand. The Conservatives argued that overpopulation, poor race relations and the threat immigrants posed to British employment made such legislation necessary.⁴¹

Yet Dennis Dean argues that race relations were of particular concern to the Conservatives in this instance. He observes that the mistake of a previous Conservative government, which ignored public dismay in 1945, remained in the minds of the Tories when forming the Commonwealth Immigration Act. As support for the party in the 1960s remained vulnerable, tight immigration control of "coloured peoples" was therefore seen as a populist demand that needed to be met to win votes.⁴² Home Secretary Richard Butler himself targeted the reduction of the "flow of West Indian immigrants" but intended to present the legislation as a protection for native employment issues.⁴³

The party consequently restricted the immigration of New Commonwealth citizens by introducing labour vouchers. These measures limited New Commonwealth immigration which was mostly composed of unskilled labour. Old Commonwealth immigration, however, consisted predominantly of skilled labour and was therefore not restricted. The Conservatives, by using labour vouchers in

³⁹ Randal Hansen. 1999. "The Kenyan Asians, British Politics, and the Commonwealth Immigrants Act." *The Historical Journal* 42(3), pp.809-834, p 833.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p 816.

⁴¹ Robert Miles and Paula Cleary. "Migration to Britain: Racism, State Regulation and Employment." In Vaughan Robinson. *The International Refugee Crisis, British and Canadian Responses*, pp 57-75, p 66.

⁴² Dennis Dean. "The Conservative government and the 1961 Commonwealth Immigration Act: the inside story." *Race & Class* 35(2), pp.57-74, p 61-2.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p 63.

their policy, were therefore able to contain immigration without being overtly racist. Butler, in Cabinet papers, acknowledged this when he said that “We must recognise that, although the scheme purports to relate solely to employment and to be non-discriminatory, its aim is primarily social and its restrictive effect is intended to and would, in fact, operate on coloured people almost exclusively.”⁴⁴

The Labour government that then replaced the Conservatives in 1964, in spite of their earlier hostility to the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, retained the Act and in 1968 created a second Commonwealth Immigrants Act. This was after a period of lower net migrant inflow but increased arrival of Old and New Commonwealth immigrants. This Act was written due to pressure from politicians incensed by the arrival of Kenyan Asian refugees, despite the fact that they held British passports.⁴⁵ Acting Prime Minister, James Callaghan, supported by public opinion and Labour’s traditional supporters, immediately pushed through the legislation needed to dismiss the right of the Kenyan Asians to enter the UK.⁴⁶ Due to the bill, British arrivals were limited to entry quotas and the 1968 quota was set at 1,500 immigrants annually.⁴⁷ 200,000 Kenyan Asians were left “effectively stateless” as a consequence.⁴⁸

Only two years later, a Conservative government won its election with a manifesto proclaiming that the party would implement “strict immigration control.” Soon after, they authorised the Immigration Act of 1971 in which freedom of movement by Commonwealth citizens to the UK was diminished even further. Right of abode in Britain, under this Act, was only granted to ‘patrials’: those with parents or grandparents born in Britain.⁴⁹

The background to the Immigration Act of 1971 was similar in its reactionary nature to that of the 1961 and 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Acts. Enoch Powell, prior to the 1971 legislation, pressurised the government to reform immigration. This led to the Conservative election promises of remaining tough on immigration and, Callum Williams argues, eventually, the instigation of the Immigration Act itself. Restriction of immigration proved difficult as general Commonwealth immigration was at a low level by the 1970s and the Prime Minister, Edward Heath, wanted to enter

⁴⁴ Quoted in *Ibid*, p 68.

⁴⁵ Robert Miles and Paula Cleary. “Migration to Britain: Racism, State Regulation and Employment.” p 67.

⁴⁶ Randal Hansen. 1999. “The Kenyan Asians, British Politics, and the Commonwealth Immigrants Act.” p 812.

⁴⁷ Robert Miles and Paula Cleary. “Migration to Britain: Racism, State Regulation and Employment.” p 67.

⁴⁸ Randal Hansen. 1999. “The Kenyan Asians, British Politics, and the Commonwealth Immigrants Act.” p 810.

⁴⁹ Robert Miles and Paula Cleary. “Migration to Britain: Racism, State Regulation and Employment.” p 68.

the EEC which would have resulted in unrestricted intra-European migration.⁵⁰ Joining the EEC provided economic benefits to Britain but the Commonwealth, specifically the Old Commonwealth, was also financially important. That being so, restricting the flow of immigrants from either of these two sources risked endangering important relationships.⁵¹

The remedy to these restrictionist difficulties was the limitation of Commonwealth immigration to Britain to 'patrials'. This meant that 70 per cent of Australians and 90 per cent of New Zealanders could still enter Britain. This saved the country's relationship with the Old Commonwealth and also left EEC membership unblemished. Immigration reform was thus achieved. This all, however, came at a cost to New Commonwealth immigrants who were less likely to have 'patrials' in their families.⁵² Williams argues that this was not done with racist intentions as the government had passed severe restrictions on the immigration of white Rhodesians too. Instead, he believes it was carried out due to the economic need to appease the EEC and the Old Commonwealth whilst populist fears of immigration problems had to be calmed.⁵³

Racist fears from the population did not, however, desist thereafter. Although calmer, these fears were still very much alive in 1979. One poll measured that by 1979, around a third of voters expressed that legislation passed to create equality for all ethnicities was unwelcome.⁵⁴ In addition, as discussed, the National Front had begun to amass notable support. The far-right wing political party achieved respectable results in local elections in 1976 and in the London local elections in 1977.⁵⁵

Correspondence between Labour ministers on 27 March 1979, a day before the infamous Labour loss in a vote of no confidence, makes clear that this populist restrictionism was still present in political offices. In the letters, the ministers, having discovered that a research paper on British immigration had been finally finished, were found to be mulling over its release. They felt the paper could be detrimental to their popularity even if it reported a drop in the total number of persons

⁵⁰ Callum Williams. 2015. "Patriality, Work Permits and the European Economic Community: The Introduction of the 1971 Immigration Act." *Contemporary British History*. Advance publication, p 513.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p 515.

⁵² *Ibid*, p 526.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p 527.

⁵⁴ Shamit Sagar. 2003. "Immigration and the Politics of Public Opinion." *The Political Quarterly* 74, pp.178-194, p 181.

⁵⁵ John Solomos. 2003. *Race and Racism in Britain*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. p 179.

from the New Commonwealth accepted for settlement in Britain.⁵⁶ The ministers ignored this figure as the paper additionally predicted that the population of those of New Commonwealth ethnic origin was destined to increase substantially by 1991.⁵⁷ The exchanges that followed between the ministers then revealed further disquiet about such information's potential damage to Labour's election prospects.⁵⁸

Therefore the Conservatives returned to power at a time when British immigration history was still pertinent for governmental policy, which, as will be made clear later, Margaret Thatcher understood. There is much that still has to be said about this topic, however. British immigration legislation has clearly been guided by racism. There has been a focus on BME immigration and an absence of attention on white immigration, particularly from 'Old Commonwealth' countries, throughout British history.⁵⁹ This was even though in the early 1950s, for instance, Irish immigration measured at around 60,000 a year. This was a higher intake than the intake of immigrants from the New Commonwealth.⁶⁰ Thus, targeting BME immigration was not because immigration itself was a problem.

Moreover, from the 1950s, there was a continuous decrease of net inflows into Britain. In 1966 immigration figures fell to 51,000 people from 75,500 in 1964.⁶¹ This continued to drop to the point that more people emigrated from Britain in the 1970s than immigrated into the country. Greater emigration than immigration, according to Miles and Cleary, had generally been the case in Britain since 1945.⁶² In this time, both sides of the political spectrum, as we have seen, passed restrictive immigration policies targeting particularly BME immigration. This again indicates that immigration more generally was not the problem that governments were targeting. Instead, restrictive British

⁵⁶ "Mr Ennals has put to you a re-draft (at Flag A) of the paper on the growth of the New Commonwealth and Pakistani population which you saw in an earlier form before Christmas and very much disliked. I have put in some suggestions for changes to it which would, I hope, reduce the damage its publication could do... This comes back to us at an unwelcome time, and in my view should not be published if there is an immediate prospect of an election." UKNA, Prem 16/2100, Letter to Prime Minister, Projections of the New Commonwealth and Pakistani population, 16 March 1979. Also see UKNA, PREM 16/2100, Home Office's Control of immigration statistics fourth quarter and year 1978, 26 March 1979.

⁵⁷ UKNA, PREM 16/2100, Projections of the New Commonwealth and Pakistani population, S H F Hickey to N Sanders, 26 March 1979, p 4.

⁵⁸ "If we lose tomorrow, there can be no question - in my view - of this being published during the campaign. If we win, then it should go out quickly. Agree both points?" UKNA, PREM 16/2100, Note from NJ Sanders to Mr McCaffrey Ms Arnott for OPCS publication, 27 March 1979.

⁵⁹ Robert Miles and Paula Cleary. "Migration to Britain: Racism, State Regulation and Employment." p 66.

⁶⁰ Zig Layton-Henry. 1994. "Britain: The Would-be Zero-Immigration Country." In James Hollifield, Phillip Martin and Wayne Cornelius. *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp 273-297, p 274.

⁶¹ Robert Miles and Paula Cleary. "Migration to Britain: Racism, State Regulation and Employment." p 68.

⁶² *Ibid*, p 68.

immigration policy was typically intended as a way to maintain or ameliorate relations with a restrictionist public.

Williams does argue that the Immigration Act of 1971 provides us with incidences where white immigrants were restricted by legislation. He also argues that BME immigration in the Act was targeted for economic reasons. However this would only prove that the Immigration Act of 1971 was an exception, not a rule. That the Commonwealth Act of 1968 was passed in a week due to the impending arrival of Kenyan Asians implies that this legislation in particular was designed for racist reasons. The same can be said for other acts, such as the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act which similarly targeted BME immigration explicitly for “race relations” purposes.

This means British immigration policy is inevitably cyclical in nature as governments succumb to racist public pressure to pass racist legislation. There seems to be no concern with governments or the restrictionist public if those arriving are refugees or not and by 1979 immigration of BME ethnicity clearly still provoked restrictionist attitudes from members of the public. What will be of interest now is to see if a restrictionist public forced similar results from Thatcher too.

Conservative Ideology in the 1970s

After losing their incumbency to Labour in 1974, the Conservatives began to reshape their party’s policy and in 1975, Margaret Thatcher became the party leader. Their Conservative policy statement in 1975, *The Right Approach*, clearly emphasises that their party’s main goals were to reinvigorate the economy, ensure Parliamentary rule of law, extend house ownership, secure family life, improve education and increase British military security.⁶³ Immigration did not feature among these key objectives and it only played a minor part in the paper. However, when mentioned, the strain it placed on British labour was identified as a key concern. Immigration was therefore deemed to be “much too high” with the Conservatives proposing to cut it in order to allay public concern.⁶⁴

The Conservative general election manifesto for 1979 followed a similar path by maintaining that these same priorities still existed for the party. One difference in the manifesto was the addition of restoring incentives for “hard work”, as a Conservative key aim. Immigration again only took up a

⁶³ The Conservative Party. “The Right Approach.” 4 October 1976. *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. available on <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/109439> (accessed on 29/10/2015). pp 8-9.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, pp 47-8.

small part of the manifesto as the Conservatives noted their support for racial equality while simultaneously assuring the public that immigration fears would be tackled. The British Nationality Act was proposed in the manifesto as a countermeasure to immigration alongside other general immigration controls that would consequently, they believed, create better race relations in the country.⁶⁵

Regardless of its relative absence from Conservative manifestos, some scholars contend that British immigration policy had evolved in the late 1970s to present ethnic minorities as a threat to the way of life and culture of white citizens.⁶⁶ Paul B. Rich argues that Tory discourse reflected a desire to create a British identity where national hegemony was key.⁶⁷ Rich asserts that the Conservative party identified ethnic groups and other minorities within inner cities as harmful to British hegemony.⁶⁸ The passing of the 1981 British Nationality Act was seen as further proof of this. It eliminated remaining migration rights for primarily poor, BME groups from Britain's former colonies. Even Hong Kong was affected when Conservative policy-makers decided to halt possible inflow of BME migrants from the colony.⁶⁹

This occurred at a time when the Conservatives did not face much demand for expansionary reform as the settled migrant population was still relatively small and strongly aligned to the Labour party. Labour market demands were also met so businesses did not require expansionary legislation.⁷⁰ On the other hand, the threat of the National Front was deemed to be so large that the Tories attempted to draw in their sympathisers in order to stifle the party in the lead up to the 1979 election.⁷¹ The use of the words 'British nation' and 'British character' are also believed to have been adopted by the Conservatives in order to stem the tide of the National Front.⁷²

⁶⁵ The Conservative Party. "Conservative General Election Manifesto" 11 April 1979. *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. available on: <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/110858> (accessed on 29/10/2015.).

⁶⁶ John Solomos. 2003. *Race and Racism in Britain*, p 174.

⁶⁷ Paul B Rich. 1986. "Conservative Ideology and Race in Modern British Politics." In Zig-Layton Henry and Paul Rich. *Race, Government & Politics in Britain*. Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press, pp 45-72, p 46.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p 69.

⁶⁹ Robert Ford, Will Jennings, Will Somerville. 2015. "Public Opinion, Responsiveness and Constraint: Britain's Three Immigration Policy Regimes." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41(9), pp.1391-1411, p 1403.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p 1402.

⁷¹ John Solomos. 2003. *Race and Racism in Britain*, p 179.

⁷² *Ibid*, p 177.

Yet, as argued in the section prior to this one, racist legislation was enacted throughout British history without real regard to actual immigration statistics. Thatcher's government was not revolutionary in its racial biases but instead was following similar patterns to earlier incumbencies by picking on ethnic immigrants for public opinion reasons as well as to stave off the assault of the National Front. Therefore, evidence now indicates that the Conservatives would have been extremely restrictionist, with racist proclivities, in 1979 towards immigration.

Thatcher: A Populist Regarding Immigration

Race was never, according to Thatcher, a predominant issue in her policies. She believed that capitalism was "colour-blind" and that individuals were worthy of respect as "*individuals*," which rendered the far right group National Front as socialist to her. Contrary to this, however, Thatcher also believed that large New Commonwealth immigration had apparently "transformed large areas of Britain in a way that the indigenous population found hard to accept."⁷³

She repeated similar sentiments in her autobiography where she belittled politicians preaching "the merits of tolerance" whilst "poorer people, who cannot afford to move...watch their neighbourhood changing and the value of their house falling."⁷⁴ Thatcher, therefore, duplicated the words of her predecessors by claiming to not be racist whilst advocating limitation of specifically BME immigration.

This was probably what led to her choice of words in her infamous Granada TV television interview at the end of January in 1978. During the interview, Thatcher claimed Britain would be "swamped" by those of other cultures arriving from the NCWP. Her solution was a simple end to immigration. Her poll ratings subsequently improved at the expense of the National Front's own popularity. The interview was regarded as a political success.⁷⁵

It has since led to various conclusions from scholars. Bale and Partos do not see it necessarily as a reaction to public antagonism. Instead, they felt that it was a genuine announcement of Thatcher's disposition towards immigrants that happened to be in line with Conservative and public opinion on

⁷³ Margaret Thatcher. 1993/1995. *Margaret Thatcher: The Autobiography*, p 222.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Zig-Layton Henry. 1986. "Race and the Thatcher Government." *Race, Government & Politics in Britain*. Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press. p 73-99. p 75.

New Commonwealth immigration.⁷⁶ Zig-Layton Henry augments these views when he argues that Thatcher knew her promises to end immigration were unfeasible as she could not deport the black population already in Britain.⁷⁷ Eric J Evans made a similar analysis when he commented that: “Those expecting an incoming Conservative government to impose stringent immigration controls [after the interview], however, would be sorely disappointed. Thatcher was playing politics rather than embracing populism.”⁷⁸

In addition to the Granada Interview, Thatcher had other moments that bring into question her disposition to other ethnicities. For example, in 1976, Thatcher personally opposed the Race Relations Act. She also stood against Conservative participation in the Joint Campaign Against Racialism.⁷⁹ When the Scarman Report of 1981 called for action against racial disadvantage, John Solomos believes that she then failed to lead the government to strengthen the 1976 Race Relations Act.⁸⁰

It is Solomos who then argues that her actions had racist overtones. He believes her swamping statement was a way to defend the interests of the white British majority against the claims of minority communities. Thatcher’s rhetoric, in Solomos’s view, was designed to create a divide between immigrants and the majority as she portrayed immigrants as detrimental to the majority’s localities, schools and cultural heritage. He compares her rhetoric to those of extreme right wing movements.⁸¹

Yet it seems unlikely that Thatcher can be presented as racist in an uncomplicated way. Supposed racist actions such as her standing against the Race Relations Act could have derived from her dislike of governmental intervention. As a famous interview with *Woman’s Own* attested to, she disliked the concept of society being relied upon to help the individual.⁸² The Race Relations Act, to her, could have been an example of the type of social intervention via the government that she disliked. Additionally, racist behaviour would have endangered the vote of ethnic minorities which

⁷⁶ Tim Bale and Rebecca Partos. 2014. “Why mainstream parties change policy on migration: A UK case study – The Conservative Party, immigration and asylum, 1960–2010.” *Comparative European Politics* 12(6), pp.603-619.

⁷⁷ Zig-Layton Henry. 1986. “Race and the Thatcher Government.” p 75.

⁷⁸ Eric J.Evans. 2004. *Thatcher and Thatcherism*. London and New York: Routledge, p 5.

⁷⁹ Zig-Layton Henry. 1986. “Race and the Thatcher Government.” p 74.

⁸⁰ John Solomos. 2003. *Race and Racism in Britain*, p 65.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p 189.

⁸² Margaret Thatcher. “Interview for *Woman's Own* (“no such thing as society”)”. 23 September 1987. *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=106689>.

she often needed. Thatcher, for instance, had attempted to lure the vote of the Asian community as is evidenced by her commemoration of Indira Gandhi's visit to Britain not too long after the Brixton riots in 1981.⁸³

Similarly, immigration, as the Conservative 1979 election manifesto indicated, was not the principle focus of her campaign. Paul B. Rich argues that what the Tories were attempting to establish was a hegemonic Britain based on a threatened middle class elite who were unaffected by immigration. This would be achieved with free market reforms. Thatcher's concept of British identity — as exhibited by the Conservative policy statement *The Right Approach* — was therefore “in terms of a ‘spirit of trade’ and self-reliance,”⁸⁴ not principally ethnic purity.

Instead, publicly, Thatcher can be best labelled as an opportunist in relation to migration policy. She was openly restrictionist or expansionary with regard to immigration according to popular demand and what would win her votes. When voters seemed hostile to Thatcher, she reacted by promoting the restriction of immigration. Thus, when she made her comments on Granada TV, it was most likely to assure the white majority that she shared their opinions on immigration in order to win popularity. When she wanted votes from the Asian community, she consequently portrayed herself as a supportive public figure to win their favour too.

Thatcher's own personal views are more difficult to discern: at the very least she seems to have been unaware that her desire to restrict New Commonwealth immigration had racist implications. This is possibly because such a view was deemed acceptable to many at the time. The least we can say from her history is that she was not an advocate of BME rights.

Thatcher: Striving for International Prominence

Thatcher's period as Opposition Leader led to her continuously promoting the interests of Britain internationally. In a speech at Kensington Town Hall in January 1976, she expressed dismay at Britain's faded presence: “Throughout our history, we have carried the torch for freedom. Now, as I travel the world, I find people asking again and again, “What has happened to Britain?””. She finished the speech by reiterating her party's stance: “The message of the Conservative Party is that

⁸³ Paul B Rich. 1986. “Conservative Ideology and Race in Modern British Politics.” pp 45-72, p 65.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p 57.

Britain has an important role to play on the world stage.”⁸⁵ In spite of these intentions, once elected, Thatcher’s ability to enact international action with Britain often disappointed.

Nowhere was this clearer than with Thatcher’s confrontations with the Soviet Union. The Prime Minister’s preference for increasing pressure on the Soviets was made clear as of her appointment to office. On ascendancy, she commenced the abandonment of détente, condemned Soviet actions in Afghanistan and Poland and encouraged British athletes to boycott the 1980 Moscow Olympics.⁸⁶ Yet, most public criticism of the Soviets by Thatcher proved to be not much more than empty rhetoric. In 1979, the Americans, using economic sanctions, decided to punish the Soviet Union for invading Afghanistan. The Thatcher government failed to match their actions. The Cabinet at the time had recognised the need to grow exports to alleviate their current financial woes and therefore was only able to pass weak sanctions. This even led Peter Carrington, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Secretary of State, to say that the British sanctions were “unlikely to cause the Russians major difficulties or embarrassment.”⁸⁷ Historian Michael Smith reflected from such situations that “when the fighting of the ‘new cold war’ or other conflicts threatened concrete British interests, the government was prepared, despite the Prime Minister’s instinctive pro-Americanism, to fight tooth and nail to prevent them being damaged.”⁸⁸

When it came to allegiances, as alluded to, Thatcher is known to have been more sympathetic to the United States than to Europe.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, Thatcher’s first two years of office were Jimmy Carter’s last two years as President of the United States and the two did not share a close relationship.⁹⁰ In fact, it is questionable if Thatcher had any strong foreign allegiances at all: she prioritised the economy in her first term as Prime Minister leaving foreign matters to Peter Carrington.⁹¹ Accordingly, the Conservatives, under Thatcher, did not at first have much direction in foreign policy. Although it seems that they may have wanted to include themselves in international discussions and affairs, evidence seems to suggest that their interests were limited.

⁸⁵ Margaret Thatcher. “Speech at Kensington Town Hall (“Britain Awake”) (The Iron Lady)” 19 January 1976. *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. available at: <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=102939> (accessed on 29/10/2015).

⁸⁶ Michael J Turner. 2010. *Britain’s International Role: 1970-1991*, p 101.

⁸⁷ Daniel James Lahey. 2013. “The Thatcher government’s response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, 1979–1980.” *Cold War History* 13(1), pp.21-42.

⁸⁸ Michael Smith. 1988. “Britain and the United States: Beyond the ‘Special Relationship?’” In Peter Byrd (ed). *British Foreign Policy Under Thatcher*. Oxford, New York: Philip Allan/ St Martin’s Press, pp 8-35, p 16.

⁸⁹ David Allen. 1988. “Britain and Western Europe.” In Michael Smith and Steve Smith (eds). *British Foreign Policy: Tradition, Change & Transformation*. London: Hyman, pp 168-193, p 176.

⁹⁰ Michael Smith. 1988. “Britain and the United States: Beyond the ‘Special Relationship?’” p 12.

⁹¹ Paul Sharp. 1997. *Thatcher’s Diplomacy: The Revival of British Foreign Policy*. Macmillan Press Ltd, p 30.

The Indochina Refugee Crisis

What Led to the Crisis and What Was The International Response?

It is worth detailing the enormity of the Indochina crisis in order to provide the context to the UK's response as well as the response of other nations. There were in fact four separate, large waves of refugees in the 1970s with each one stretching the resources of several Indochinese countries at the same time.

To chronicle these waves, it would be best to start with the momentous month of April 1975: the month Saigon fell to North Vietnam and forced American soldiers to vacate the country after their tortuous, well-documented war. It was also a month that marked the point when the first large wave of refugees began to leave their home country: the ethnically Vietnamese. 130,000 refugees, previously associated with the democratic South Vietnam regime, were resettled by the US in a matter of two weeks. Some others fled soon after by boat and, by the end of 1975, around 10,000 had arrived in neighbouring countries.⁹²

In the same month communist revolutionaries, the Khmer Rouge, after years of fighting, managed to take over Cambodia and rename it Democratic Kampuchea. The mass atrocities that followed prompted thousands to leave the country. In December 1977, refugee flights continued when Vietnamese military infantry and artillery assaulted the country. When the Vietnamese withdrew, in early January 1978, around 60,000 Cambodian refugees fled with them. This added to the 60,000 Khmer and Chinese-Cambodian already in Vietnam.⁹³

On 25 December 1978, the Vietnamese once more attacked Cambodia forcing many of its inhabitants to flee to countries such as Thailand.⁹⁴ The Vietnamese then entered Phnom Penh for a final time, on 7 January 1979, and installed a government led by Heng Samrin.⁹⁵ The UNHCR estimates that only 34,000 Cambodians managed to escape into Thailand from 1975 to 1978 but

⁹² "The State of The World's Refugees 2000: Fifty Years of Humanitarian Action, State of the World's Refugees." 1 January 2000. UNHCR. available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/4a4c754a9.html> (last accessed on 29/10/2015). p 81.

⁹³ *Ibid*, p 92.

⁹⁴ UKNA, Prem 19/129, General Kriangsak Chomanan to Margaret Thatcher, 14 June 1979.

⁹⁵ W. Courtland Robinson, 1998. *Terms of Refuge: The Indochinese Exodus and the International Response*. London and New York: Zed Books Ltd, p 33.

another 20,000 went into Laos and 170,000 to Vietnam.⁹⁶ These refugees escaped their country over land.

The third wave of refugees began to leave in May 1975, when a communist victory in Laos was all but certain. The US responded to the victory by having their transport planes carry about 2,500 Hmong, who fought for the US, out of their mountain stronghold in Laos, into Thailand. Many Laotians had already left before this by fleeing along the Mekong river. By December 1975, Laotian refugees in Thailand numbered 54,000, of whom all but 10,000 were Hmong.⁹⁷ Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo note that before 1981, when the amount of refugees fleeing Laos fell sharply, almost one-tenth, or 300,000, of the total Laotian population had left. This was twice the rate of the outflow of Vietnamese refugees.⁹⁸

Finally, from 1976, a fourth group of refugees began emerging from Vietnam. These refugees were mostly formed from a group of people known as the Hoa, or the Sino-Vietnamese, who were of ethnic Chinese origin. They originally fled not because of 'communist oppression' but because of the effects of the government's tight control of the economy after 1975.⁹⁹ These refugees fled by land and boat to neighbouring nations. Western countries, Kushner argues, were happy to resettle them in order to further demonise communism.¹⁰⁰ Conditions for the Sino-Vietnamese however deteriorated and between 1977-78 the Hoa began to lose their jobs and businesses whilst Chinese schools were closed and travel became restricted.¹⁰¹ Many Hoa decided to consequently flee over land to China which on 12 July 1978, after receiving more than 160,000 refugees, sealed its land border.¹⁰²

The amount of Sino-Vietnamese who left by boat totalled to 61,729 by the end of 1978 and were spread out in nine countries; 46,286 were in Malaysia, 4,810 in Hong Kong and 3,608 were in Thailand. A large accumulation of refugees throughout Indochina had therefore built up. The

⁹⁶ "The State of The World's Refugees 2000: Fifty Years of Humanitarian Action, State of the World's Refugees." 1 January 2000. UNHCR. available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/4a4c754a9.html> (last accessed on 29/10/2015). p 92.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p 97.

⁹⁸ Aristide R Zolberg, Astri Suhrke and Sergio Aguayo. 1989. *Escape from violence: conflict and the refugee crisis in the developing world*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p 168.

⁹⁹ Tony Kushner and Katharine Knox. 1999. *Refugees in an age of genocide: Global, National and Local Perspectives during the Twentieth Century*. London, Portland: Frank Cass, pp 307-8.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p 311.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p 308.

¹⁰² W. Courtland Robinson, 1998. *Terms of Refuge: The Indochinese Exodus and the International Response*, p 30.

British government estimated that 136,000 refugees arrived by land into Thailand and Vietnam alongside the 200,000 in China.¹⁰³ This was regardless of the fact that by January 1979, 149,000 Indochinese refugees had been resettled with America and France having taken more than 110,000.¹⁰⁴

When China finally invaded parts of Vietnam in February 1979, it resulted in the Vietnamese government actively expelling Hoa inhabitants which created another exodus of Sino-Vietnamese refugees.¹⁰⁵ By July 1979, 50,000 refugees had crossed into China, bringing the Chinese refugee total to a quarter of a million.¹⁰⁶ This exodus worried Vietnam's neighbours.¹⁰⁷ Hostility towards the Chinese was common in the region: in 1965 the Indonesian government killed 300,000 ethnic Chinese, for instance.¹⁰⁸ Many Indochinese countries reacted to these concerns by pushing new arrivals back to the sea. Malaysia refused 4,959 refugees in 1978, for example.¹⁰⁹

Thailand was a country that encapsulated the magnitude of the crisis. It had been on the receiving end of the exodus of more than 160,000 Laotian refugees since 1975. In addition, 375,000 Khmer and ethnic Vietnamese had fled Cambodia during the Pol Pot years whilst an estimated 150,000 Cambodians had crossed, successfully and otherwise, into Thailand since January 1979.¹¹⁰ In early 1979, Thailand also therefore reacted to larger flows of refugees with more push-backs.¹¹¹ In the first six months of 1979, Thailand's House Refugee Affairs Committee reported that 154,925 Cambodians had fled to Thailand. By the end of June, 108,719 had been pushed back.¹¹²

The flow of Vietnamese boat people similarly increased in this period. From March to June, boat arrivals within the Indochina region totalled 148,105. Twice the amount of people had arrived by boat than had been resettled since 1975. By the end of June, Malaysia was home to 75,000 boat

¹⁰³ UKNA, HO 376/199, Cabinet Official Committee on Community relations and Immigration: The Indochina Refugee Problem, Note by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, March 1979.

¹⁰⁴ W. Courtland Robinson, 1998. *Terms of Refuge: The Indochinese Exodus and the International Response*, p 32.

¹⁰⁵ Tony Kushner and Katharine Knox. 1999. *Refugees in an age of genocide: Global, National and Local Perspectives during the Twentieth Century*. p 308.

¹⁰⁶ W. Courtland Robinson, 1998. *Terms of Refuge: The Indochinese Exodus and the International Response*, p 40.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p 40.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p 32.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p 42.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p 52.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, p 43.

¹¹² *Ibid*, p 52.

refugees, Hong Kong 59,000, Indonesia 43,000, Thailand 9,500, the Philippines 5,000, and smaller numbers were scattered in at least half a dozen other countries.¹¹³

Following a meeting in Bali at the end of June 1979, the foreign ministers of the five-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) issued a joint communique, warning that they “have reached the limit of their endurance and have decided they would not accept any new arrivals”.¹¹⁴ At the beginning of the Indochinese exodus in 1975, not a single country in the region had acceded to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol which meant that none of the countries officially resettled the refugees.¹¹⁵ By the late 1970s, they were refusing to even temporarily allow them on their lands.

At this point, resettlement countries had absorbed 197,000 Indochinese refugees (not counting the 130,000 evacuated to the United States or the 235,000 in China), of whom 180,000 had gone to four countries : America, France, Australia and Canada. The United States, in particular, was still looking to further ‘internationalize’ the burden-sharing.¹¹⁶ A conference was eventually deemed necessary to solve the crisis. The Geneva conference was thus held on 20 and 21 July 1979 between multiple major countries.

At the conference, it was agreed that resettlement should proceed on a larger and faster scale. Worldwide resettlement pledges increased from the 125,000 places in May 1979 to 260,000 for 1979 and 1980. The United States doubled its monthly resettlement quota from 7,000 to 14,000 refugees to bring its annual total up to 168,000.¹¹⁷ Canada raised its pledge dramatically from 8,000 to 50,000 resettlement places by the end of 1980. Australia committed to take an additional 14,000 on top of the 22,000 they had already resettled. France had taken in more than 50,000 by mid-1979 but agreed to take 5,000 more boat people and Germany pledged 10,000 places.¹¹⁸

Financial pledges to the UNHCR at the conference amounted to about \$160 million in cash. The UNHCR’s main aim was to help Thailand and, of the 452,000 Indochinese resettled in 1979–80,

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p 50.

¹¹⁵ “The State of The World's Refugees 2000: Fifty Years of Humanitarian Action, State of the World's Refugees.” 1 January 2000. UNHCR. available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/4a4c754a9.html> (last accessed on 29/10/2015), p 83.

¹¹⁶ W. Courtland Robinson, 1998. *Terms of Refuge: The Indochinese Exodus and the International Response.* p 52.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p 53.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p 54.

nearly 195,000 came from the camps in Thailand.¹¹⁹ International resettlement, thus increased from a rate of around 9,000 per month in the first half of 1979 to around 25,000 per month in the latter half of the year. Between July 1979 and July 1982, more than twenty countries resettled 623,800 Indochinese refugees.¹²⁰

The conference also led to Vietnam agreeing to restrict ‘illegal’ boat departures, arresting thousands of those attempting to escape the country. Almost overnight Vietnamese boat arrivals in the region plummeted, from 56,941 in June to 17,839 in July and 9,734 in August. In the last quarter of 1979, arrivals averaged only 2,600 per month. That decline, coupled with the substantial increase in worldwide resettlement numbers, persuaded the ASEAN countries to accept boat people once again.¹²¹

Britain and the Indochina Refugee Crisis

For the majority of the refugee crisis, the British government remained uninvolved. When British ships, bound by international obligations, started to rescue groups of Vietnamese refugees between February 1977 and October 1978, the government began to take notice. The refugees on these ships, when docked in countries adjacent to those they were fleeing from, were not allowed to disembark by local governments.¹²² The British therefore resettled them back in Britain. The UK finished the year 1978 as the sixth highest country in terms of numbers of resettled Vietnamese refugees. The fifth highest - Germany - resettled nearly twice as many refugees.¹²³

It was in 1979 that the British government diverted more of its attention to the issue when the amount of refugees rescued sharply increased.¹²⁴ In January, the Labour government’s response was to announce an intake of 1,500 Vietnamese refugees to Britain. 1,000 came from Hong Kong, 250 from Thailand and 250 from Malaysia. The issue was the source of debate in February in the

¹¹⁹ “The State of The World’s Refugees 2000: Fifty Years of Humanitarian Action, State of the World’s Refugees.” 1 January 2000. *UNHCR*. available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/4a4c754a9.html> (last accessed on 29/10/2015). p 92.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, p 86.

¹²¹ W. Courtland Robinson, 1998. *Terms of Refuge: The Indochinese Exodus and the International Response*, p 58.

¹²² Tony Kushner and Katharine Knox. 1999. *Refugees in an age of genocide: Global, National and Local Perspectives during the Twentieth Century*. p 309.

¹²³ UKNA, HO 376/199, Cabinet Official Committee on Community relations and Immigration: The Indochina Refugee Problem, Note by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 14 March 1979.

¹²⁴ Tony Kushner and Katharine Knox. 1999. *Refugees in an age of genocide: Global, National and Local Perspectives during the Twentieth Century*. p 306.

House of Lords with anti-communism the focal point of the furore.¹²⁵ Resettlement and aid did not however expand further than the already announced quota.

When the Conservatives took the reins of government on 3 May 1979, the Vietnamese issue did not demand immediate attention. This is proven by the initial informal Cabinet meeting at which improvement of the economy was seen as the most urgent task.¹²⁶ By the end of the month, in fact, there is evidence that the Tories did not want to accept the refugees at all. A large part of government correspondence revolved around discovering if maritime laws or international refugee laws could be negated in order for British ships to avoid having to rescue the refugees. This was done at the request of Thatcher.¹²⁷ It was eventually seen as a source of too much embarrassment in the international world for the British to attempt such an action.¹²⁸

By the start of June 1979, the British government committed to a volte-face turn on the issue, which is the focus of the dissertation. Thatcher herself requested Kurt Waldheim, Secretary General of the United Nations, to call for the Geneva Conference of 20-21 July 1979. Britain disclosed before the conference that it would accept 10,000 Vietnamese refugees specifically from Hong Kong and pledged to offer £5 million of financial support to the UNHCR. When the refugees arrived in Britain, the government relied on voluntary services to support them. The refugees were then dispersed around the country.¹²⁹

The commitments made at the conference did not, once again, offer a considerable solution to the crisis in comparison to other nations. British resettlement policy between 1975 and 1990, according to American figures, only resettled 1.1 per cent of all the south-east Asian refugees. Other countries resettled much more: America took in 54 per cent, in this time period, equalling 889,974 people, Canada took 113,149 and Australia 128,540 refugees. Even in terms of refugees resettled per capita of population only Italy took less than the UK.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, p 310.

¹²⁶ Margaret Thatcher. 1993/1995. *Margaret Thatcher: The Autobiography*, p 264.

¹²⁷ UKNA, HO 376/ 200, T.G Harris to Bryan Cartledge, Vietnamese Refugees, 30 May 1979.

¹²⁸ UKNA, HO 376/ 200, J.S Wall to Bryan Cartledge, Vietnamese Refugees, 30 May 1979.

¹²⁹ Tony Kushner and Katharine Knox. 1999. *Refugees in an age of genocide: Global, National and Local Perspectives during the Twentieth Century*, p 313.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p 312.

Why Was Thatcher Hostile and What Reversed Her Initial Decision?

Why Was Thatcher Hostile?

Public Opinion and Racism

Several weeks after Margaret Thatcher's election victory on 4 May 1979, state documents recorded her opinion on the refugee crisis. She was aghast at the possibility that Sino-Vietnamese refugees might be resettled in Britain. In a meeting on the 29 May 1979 at 10 Downing Street about the Sino-Vietnamese refugees, Margaret Thatcher is recorded as saying that "there would be political trouble if the UK accepted the Roach Bank refugees."¹³¹ The meeting was called in the wake of the arrival of a ship - the *Roach Bank* - to Hong Kong's waters. Refugees onboard the ship wanted to disembark. As the ship originally made its first port of call at Taiwan where it was refused entry, Thatcher was adamant that Taiwan was where the refugees should have disembarked. In the meeting she emphasised that the British government had to at least appear to be trying to stand up to the Taiwanese before it accepted the refugees.¹³² She concluded the meeting by saying that the refugees could not be allowed into Britain as the country was already occupied by two million immigrants.¹³³

When the Taiwanese refused to resettle the refugees from the *Roach Bank* once more, Thatcher expressed her dissatisfaction a second time. In a meeting with her ministers, on 2 June, she said: "it would be unacceptable to British public opinion to take them [the refugees] on the basis of no response from the Taiwanese whatsoever - unless, that is, they failed to reply to a second message."¹³⁴ In this same discussion the following was also disclosed: "she [Thatcher] was fearful of UK public opinion if we were to take the refugees from off a non-UK territory. It would be more acceptable if the refugees were to go to Hong Kong first and then be airlifted."¹³⁵ Nine days later Thatcher, in a letter to Head of Housing Policy in the Greater London Council, wrote that finding

¹³¹ UKNA, PREM 19/129, Note of a meeting at 10 Downing Street at 1445, 29 May 1979, p 1.

¹³² *Ibid*, p 3.

¹³³ *Ibid*, p 5.

¹³⁴ UKNA, PREM 19/129, Vietnamese Refugees - the Roach Bank, 2 June 1979, p 1.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, p 2.

accommodation for the refugees was another source of difficulty for local authorities and Britain generally.¹³⁶

It was the immigration figure of two million that most concerned the Prime Minister, however. In another discussion, on 11 June 1979, between William Whitelaw — Deputy Prime Minister and Home Secretary — and herself, she stated that she could not accept any distinction between immigrants and refugees. For this reason, she contended that the refugees should not be allowed into the country. The consequence, she believed, of resettling refugees in British council houses, would be “riots in the streets.”¹³⁷ Her solution was to rely on other countries, indicated by her request for a list that provided the “relevant population densities of the various receiving countries.”¹³⁸

On 15 June 1979 Margaret Thatcher once more utilised the two million figure as a reason to refuse the refugees. She persisted to fuse immigration and refugee policy together, claiming that if the UK were to accept refugees — who she preferred to immigrants — they had to cut down on the level of immigration into the country. In the meeting she expressed her belief that the public were generally restrictionist and again diverted attention to other countries by asking if they too accepted as many refugees as the British.¹³⁹ Even as late into the crisis as July, Thatcher struggled with the idea that refugees should be accepted in Britain. Here, her rationale was that it was “wrong” for immigrants to receive council housing whilst “white citizens” would not.¹⁴⁰ She concluded the meeting by stating that she preferred European refugees such as Poles and Hungarians who were more likely to assimilate into British society than the Sino-Vietnamese.¹⁴¹

Before the Prime Minister’s involvement, employees at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) had already begun discussing the possible difficulties of resettling the refugees. One civil servant, on 24 May 1979, revealed his anxiety to one colleague, stating that: “Appendix II shows the unpalatable choices with which we are faced in providing shelter for refugees and the criticisms we shall face in doing so!”¹⁴² However, others found other reasons to not resettle the refugees. A Memorandum from the Secretary of State for the Home Office (HO), distributed on 29 May 1979,

¹³⁶ UKNA, PREM 19/129, Prime Minister to George Tremlett, 11 June 1979.

¹³⁷ UKNA, PREM 19/129, Note for the record: Vietnamese Refugees, 14 June 1979.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ UKNA, PREM 19/130, From the Private Secretary to J.S Wall, Vietnamese Refugees, 15 June 1979, p 2.

¹⁴⁰ UKNA, PREM 19/130, Note for the Record, Vietnamese Refugees, 9 July 1979, p 3.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p 4.

¹⁴² UKNA, FCO 40/1097 To R J T McClaren from L M Davies, 24th May 1979, Accommodation: Vietnamese Refugees.

described how accepting too many refugees would impede on the finances of the HO and other departments, possibly even cutting into the contingency reserve. The Secretary consequently expressed grave concerns about being more involved in the reception and resettlement process.¹⁴³ Shortly after the *Roach Bank* arrived near the shores of Hong Kong, a meeting was convened in which the Home Secretary attended. In it, it was divulged that members feared such occurrences could result in refugees directly arriving in Britain. The problem was that it would cost the country dearly at a time in which they were attempting to make cuts.¹⁴⁴

Nonetheless, the Iron Lady was not the first politician to refuse the refugees because of high immigration in Britain. We only have to look at the Labour government before her to see similar rationale being applied. In November 1978, in a record of a phone call made by the Malaysian Minister of Foreign Affairs to David Owen, the Secretary of State for the FCO, one can see that the Malaysians requested the British to resettle some of the refugees present in Malaysia. The Labour government rebuffed them; Owen claimed that Britain was still coping with the Ugandan Asian exodus and large numbers of Indian and Pakistani immigrants to resettle refugees.¹⁴⁵

David Owen's remarks remind us that immigration fears were not uncommon in politics regardless of political allegiances. BME immigration was especially on Owen's mind. He did not mention Old Commonwealth immigration nor the several thousand Latin American refugees in the 1970s as obstructions to resettling refugees from Indochina.¹⁴⁶ That he brazenly told a foreign politician that BME immigration posed a limit for the British response, signifies that he believed other countries, such as Malaysia, would comprehend supposed British immigration difficulties.

Whether Owen believed his own remarks cannot be established in this context. However it is relevant and clear that Thatcher continued in the same vein. Perhaps in Thatcher's mind, therefore, the Ugandan Asian crisis — where the public reacted with hostility towards the refugees — remained prominent. Yet, taking into account Thatcher's history, the fear of public opinion most likely stemmed not just from the Ugandan Asian crisis but from decades of BME immigration. After all, for Thatcher to squash the National Front she had to sway their sympathisers. Thatcher, like the other previously mentioned state actors, evidently felt resettling refugees would threaten her job

¹⁴³ UKNA, PREM 19/129, Refugees from Vietnam, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Home Department, 29 May 1979.

¹⁴⁴ UKNA, HO 376/ 200, Note of meeting held on 30 May 1979 between Home Secretary and those listed, 30 May 1979.

¹⁴⁵ UKNA, FCO 58/1452, Record of a call by the Malaysian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tengku Rithauddeen, on the Secretary of State: Thursday, 23 November at 5.00 PM in the House of Commons, 4 December 1978.

¹⁴⁶ See Kushner and Knox's (1999) chapter: Refugees from Chile.

which was to fulfil her electoral promises, much like Heath once did. Ever the populist in terms of immigration, Thatcher's actions signify that meeting public opinion was the dominant factor behind her refusing the refugees.

As someone who was also a famous monetarist, it is interesting that Thatcher never raised the issue of resettlement costs in the documents. She only alluded to the national economy in terms of the impact it had, as well as immigration, on the public. In terms of how her reaction stands in British history, Thatcher's attempts to change British immigration legislation to solve the crisis, discussed in the previous section, is remarkably reminiscent of the reactions of previous politicians. By denying the Sino-Vietnamese and even admitting in private that white refugees — the Poles and Hungarians — were more appealing to her, Thatcher also displays racist beliefs. This is the other reason she dismissed the refugees. It is unlikely that this was the prevailing factor as it is only mentioned once in the archival material consulted. Nevertheless, all of this means that Thatcher managed to continue the established racist immigration policies of British politicians.

What Reversed Her Initial Decision?

Public Opinion and Intra-Party Politics

Although she argued fervently that the public were hostile to immigration, it was often proven to Thatcher that they were not. The public were therefore used as one of several reasons to resettle the refugees. There are a few civil servants who documented that this was the case but it was the Cabinet ministers, who had combined to push for refugee resettlement, that insisted upon refugee resettlement to Thatcher personally. This approach, an example of intra-party politics, eventually proved to be successful in achieving some policy change.

In the previously mentioned meeting at 10 Downing Street on 29 May 1979 we can see many intra-party arguments evolving. The meeting was attended by the Lord Privy Seal, Ian Gilmour, the Deputy Prime Minister and Home Secretary, Willie Whitelaw, and Foreign and Commonwealth Office Secretary of State, Peter Carrington. When the Prime Minister claimed, as previously written, that there would be political trouble for accepting the refugees, Carrington, in fact, disagreed by suggesting that turning the boat away would bring “even worse press.” Ian Gilmour added to this by also recommending that they accept the refugees immediately and gracefully as

opposed to later “under pressure.” Willie Whitelaw agreed too as “the public relations aspect of the high proportion of children on board weighed very heavily with him.”¹⁴⁷

Carrington, on 8 June, continued his previous arguments. He informed the Prime Minister that lobbying other countries to receive the refugees had failed and it was time to resettle the *Roach Bank* refugees in order to avoid “further” public criticism.¹⁴⁸ Willie Whitelaw on the 14 June stated that it would not be “impossible” for the British to accept the refugees; accommodation could be provided by, he exemplified, converting barracks.¹⁴⁹ On 15 June, when Thatcher asked if other countries also picked up large numbers of refugees it was Murray MacLehose, the Governor of Hong Kong, who informed her that they did but that, as it was the policy of other countries to automatically resettle refugees picked up by ships, foreign ships received less publicity than UK ships.¹⁵⁰

A letter from D F Murray, an employee of the FCO, on 25 June furthered Carrington’s claims. When discussing what numbers to propose to the UNHCR, Murray advised that the British government should propose a quota of 5,000 refugees. Yet, he also conceded that public opinion, according to media reports, would even view figures above 5,000 as favourable.¹⁵¹ A document provided by Carrington further contests Thatcher’s arguments as it quotes statistics that demonstrated that Britain actually did not have an overwhelming immigration problem. In fact, the statistics showed that Britain had been mostly facing negative net annual migration since 1946.¹⁵²

In July, in a meeting, the Prime Minister suggested cutting down on immigration, particularly on the admission of dependents, to allow refugees into the country. The Home Secretary disagreed with her. He informed her that the UK was bound by the terms of the 1971 Immigration Act and therefore no reductions to immigration were feasible. In the same meeting, previous to this, Carrington had recalled his visit to Hong Kong’s refugee camps which he described as a disturbing experience. His judgement, following the voyage, was that Britain had to submit a sufficiently large quota of refugee resettlement places to the Geneva conference if they were to avoid the British press and the international community condemning them. This was followed by William Whitelaw

¹⁴⁷ UKNA, PREM 19/129, Note of a meeting at 10 Downing Street on 29 May 1979 at 1445, To discuss the problem of Vietnamese refugees, 29 May 1979, p 1.

¹⁴⁸ UKNA, PREM 19/129, Carrington to Prime Minister, Vietnamese Refugees, 8 June 1979.

¹⁴⁹ UKNA, PREM 19/129, Note for the record: Vietnamese Refugees, 14 June 1979.

¹⁵⁰ UKNA, PREM 119/130, From the Private Secretary to J.S Wall, Vietnamese Refugees, 15 June 1979, p 2.

¹⁵¹ UKNA, FCO 40/1101, Vietnam Refugees, from D F Murray, 20 June 1979.

¹⁵² UKNA, PREM 119/130, Lord Carrington to Thatcher, Vietnamese Refugees, 25 June 1979.

claiming that the British press alongside the minister's received correspondence was in fact supportive of the refugees. William Deedes - the editor of the *Daily Telegraph* - had similar convictions on the British media's stance and added that at a meeting of the party's Home Affairs Committee, there were requests to increase the British intake of Indochinese refugees.¹⁵³

Wille Whitelaw on 9 July proceeded to advocate for the resettlement of Sino-Vietnamese refugees. He notified Thatcher that housing the UNHCR proposed quota of 10,000 Indochinese refugees was not unachievable as long as the rate of arrivals was controlled. Since October 1978, he said, half of the refugees were resettled in long-term housing whilst he felt Britain could receive "about 3,000-4,000 refugees a year in the accommodation now available."¹⁵⁴ G I Deney, a civil servant of the HO, in a letter repeated similar sentiments on the 10 August when he claimed that: "With the reception accommodation in use after the Sibonga and Roach Bank exercise and assuming an average stay in reception of six months, we calculated that the accommodation could cater for between 3 and 4,000 a year and that this meant that there should be no particular problem in admitting 10,000 refugees over a period of three years."¹⁵⁵

Therefore, the Prime Minister had multiple ministers insist to her that public opinion was positive and that the national economy could bear resettlement. The positivity of the media towards possible resettlement of the refugees and the likelihood of international pressure if the refugees were not resettled were also used as arguments to convince Thatcher. These factors indisputably determined the opinions of those involved in intra-party politics at the time of the *Roach Bank* and *Sibonga* ordeals. However, were the arguments made by the ministers enough to persuade Thatcher? Were the aforementioned factors the reasons the ministers eventually also recommended the 10,000 resettlement quota to Thatcher?

In order to answer these questions it is necessary to establish that the 10,000 resettlement quota and Britain's immersion into the crisis were two separate events. The clearest indication of when Thatcher entangled Britain in the Indochina crisis, on an international and therefore effective scale, was when Thatcher appealed to Waldheim, the Secretary General of the UN, to call for the Geneva conference on the refugee problem on 31 May 1979. When Thatcher requested the conference, there is no evidence within the documents that prove she felt that would result in resettling refugees.

¹⁵³ UKNA, PREM 119/130, Note for the Record, Vietnamese Refugees, 9 July 1979, p 1.

¹⁵⁴ UKNA, PREM 119/130, Letter to Prime Minister from William Whitelaw, 9 July 1979, p 1.

¹⁵⁵ UKNA, HO 376/229, From G I De Deney to Mr Peach, Vietnamese Refugees - Co-ordination and planning arrangements, 10 August 1979.

Instead, she could have believed a conference would simply lead to the involvement of foreign countries in solving the crisis. Britain's official decision to resettle the refugees with a 10,000 quota came much later, on 12 July 1979.¹⁵⁶

Concerning the first event, documents as late as 9 July 1979 show that, even though she had been told otherwise, Thatcher still believed that the public would be unhappy about resettling refugees. Yet, by this point, she had already asked Waldheim to organise the Geneva conference and therefore decided to embroil Britain in the crisis. That members of her state were still arguing for the resettlement of the refugees after 31 May means that Thatcher was not thoroughly convinced by intra-party politics when calling for the conference. Additionally, that these arguments were made also simply demonstrates that Thatcher had not yet been convinced to resettle the refugees at all.

With respect to the second event, it does seem that intra-party politics did effect Thatcher's eventual decision to resettle 10,000 refugees. Various ministers assured Thatcher that a 10,000 resettlement quota was the right contribution to the Geneva Conference. Thatcher, herself, does not appear to mention any such figure and undoubtedly does not want the refugees. The most likely answer therefore is that, in resettling the refugees, Thatcher succumbed to the demands of her colleagues. The reasoning behind proposing such a quota from state actors does not differ from those used during the arrival of the *Roachbank* and *Sibonga*. However, regardless of this, as argued later, the quota was framed to solve Hong Kong's refugee problems. It was also Hong Kong that led Thatcher to request for the Geneva conference.

Finally, it is pertinent to also highlight that no other member of the party or government demonstrate similar racist inclinations as Thatcher. This only serves to further underscore that her own personal racism was relevant in the denial of the Sino-Vietnamese refugees.

The Media

As attested to in the theory section of this dissertation, the media is often regarded as an influential presence in policy change. Archival documents researched for this dissertation did reveal that some members of parliament held an interest in what reception the media gave to their policies. Yet the concern of these ministers did not reflect what the majority of the documents in the archives

¹⁵⁶ UKNA, PREM 119/130, JS Wall to Bryan Cartledge, 12 July 1979.

depicted. Instead, archival documents frequently portrayed the government as a powerful manipulator of the news for the benefit of national interest.

Manipulation of the media by the government is evident early into the Indochina refugee crisis as can be seen from a letter written on 17 May 1979 by John Margetson, Britain's ambassador for Vietnam. In the letter, Margetson wrote of how the Vietnamese government was using propaganda to blame China for the exodus of Sino-Vietnamese people. He intended to stop it and wrote recommendations to the FCO as to how it could do so. He believed that the British government would benefit from pillorying Vietnam through the press so that they could estrange the non-aligned countries from Vietnam.¹⁵⁷

The Prime Minister, in an attempt to help Hong Kong, made similar orders to Margetson's recommendations in late May. She instructed her administration to direct maximum publicity to Vietnam's organised, profit-making exodus of refugees.¹⁵⁸ Almost identical directives to coordinate the press then proceeded into the summer: in June, MacLehose and Thatcher, in one letter agreed that world opinion needed to be made "aware of the scale of the refugee problem." To achieve this, the Prime Minister suggested that the press, from a summit in Tokyo, should be persuaded to journey with Carrington to Hong Kong. In Hong Kong the Prime Minister expected the reporters to amass greater coverage of the refugees. MacLehose and Thatcher intended to include French journalists among this gathering so as to gain more coverage globally of the refugees, particularly in France and non-aligned countries in the South East Asian area.¹⁵⁹

Numerous archival documents continue in this vein as various government officials request for there to be greater coverage dedicated to the Vietnamese atrocities. The Prime Minister of Singapore, for example, felt it was necessary to greater highlight the atrocities and asked if he could do so on his visit to the UK. Thatcher had no objection to his request.¹⁶⁰ D.F Murray, a civil servant at the FCO, also felt that the media had to increase their negative depictions of Vietnam.¹⁶¹ At the start of October, a New Zealand civil servant even wrote to the FCO claiming that his government had funds available to secure more publicity from journalists from countries that could resettle refugees.

¹⁵⁷ UKNA, FCO 58/1752, J W D Margetson To D F Murray, Vietnamese Refugees, 17 May 1979.

¹⁵⁸ UKNA, FCO 58/1752, To Immediate Hong Kong (Governor) from FCO, Vietnamese Refugees: Publicity for Vietnamese Official Involvement, 31 May 1979.

¹⁵⁹ UKNA, PREM 119/130, From P Lever To N Sanders, Vietnamese Refugees, 27 June 1979.

¹⁶⁰ UKNA, PREM 119/130, From the Private Secretary, The Prime Minister's Discussion with the Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, at 10 Downing Street on 20 June 1979: South East Asia and the Vietnamese Refugees, 20 June 1979, p 2.

¹⁶¹ UKNA, FCO 58/1752, From D.F Murray, Indochina Refugees - Criticism of Vietnam, 1 June 1979.

He finished by claiming that he expected good coverage of the refugees in Hong Kong to continue in New Zealand as the public were interested in the subject.¹⁶²

One document of note describes how the media were manipulated in Hong Kong when a ship containing refugees, named the *Huey Fong*, sailed to the colony's shores. It is a candid document and serves as an example of how governments handled public relations generally. The report, published by the Security Branch of the Government of Hong Kong, retold how the government created an information policy that was aimed at generating support from the media and the public for the return of the *Huey Fong* to Taiwan.¹⁶³ This information policy revolved around the Security Branch and their attempts to counteract refugees — onboard the *Huey Fong* — spouting “propaganda” about being malnourished. One counteractive measure involved Hong Kong's administration considering jamming the *Huey Fong*'s radio communications. For another, the administration actually brought journalists and photographers to document the government's “humane” treatment of the refugees. The document finished with Hong Kong's government asking the FCO on 3 January 1979 to “issue guidance to overseas posts based on material provided from Hong Kong.” This indicates that the British were at the very least capable of similar actions.¹⁶⁴

There were, however, two occasions, noted in the last section, in which media pressure did seem to concern ministers of the Cabinet. The first moment of concern for the ministers was in response to the arrival of the *Sibonga* to Hong Kong. The *Sibonga* did seem to attract a lot of press attention and this, in all likelihood, helped attract Thatcher's notice. Regardless, it is questionable if this influenced official refugee policy. Due to the ship's British registration and its arrival at Hong Kong, a British colony, Thatcher would have had to deal with the ship as a matter of British policy in spite of media pressure. Bad press did not prove to change Thatcher's stance with the *Sibonga* anyway. On 29 May when she was warned of public relations difficulties because of the *Sibonga*, Thatcher still delayed resettling the refugees in order to find alternatives.

The second occasion in which Cabinet ministers appeared apprehensive was in a meeting regarding the UNHCR's proposed resettlement quota for Britain. On 9 July Cabinet ministers proposed that the British should accept the 10,000 UNHCR quota partially to avoid bad press. How Thatcher felt about their arguments, however, is hard to discern. In the meeting, she does not express any unease

¹⁶²UKNA, FCO 40/1108 Vietnamese Refugees in Hong Kong, Mr D Ford, 5 October 1979.

¹⁶³ UKNA, FCO 40/1092 The “Huey Fong” Affair, From M K O Simpson-Orlebar to Mr Leahy, Mr Murray, Mr Cortazzi, Sir A Parsons, 9 March 1979, p 13.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p 14.

at the possibility of critical publicity. Furthermore, if Thatcher was worried, it could have been just as much because of the ministers' arguments that rejecting the 10,000 quota would have brought a poor international reaction. As a consequence, it is not easy to identify if negative publicity here influenced Thatcher.

Nor would it be characteristic of her: Thatcher often seemed to be apathetic about negative publicity. This was made clear in a meeting in June at which Carrington confronted Thatcher and conveyed to her that he was worried the British public were unhappy with the government's response to the refugees. He believed *The Economist's* criticism of their campaign served as proof of this. Rather than displaying alarm at such negative publicity, Thatcher's response was to simply dismiss the publication as biased.¹⁶⁵ On top of this, as this section has proven, the majority of documents imply that the government felt that it could manipulate the press, which indicates that it would not necessarily be disheartened by unsympathetic coverage.

These displays of government disdain confirm the media's position as a tool for politicians. Although the media was occasionally used to comprehend public opinion, it had no real impact on policy change. In the end, it was used by the British administration to criticise Vietnam and to manufacture support for its refugee programme.

Territoriality: Hong Kong

Regarding the crisis, it was undoubtedly mitigating Hong Kong's problems that motivated Thatcher and her party most. Hong Kong was still a British colony at the time and its governor, Murray MacLehose, played a large role in drawing the attention of the British to Hong Kong's refugee difficulties.

The governor had reason to, his colony was suffering from high population density due to mass Chinese immigration before the appearance of Sino-Vietnamese refugees. By the end of March 1979, 175,000 Chinese immigrants had arrived in Hong Kong in the space of 16 months. At this point there were, on top of this, 16,000 Sino-Vietnamese refugees.¹⁶⁶ Two months later, at the end of May, the Sino-Vietnamese total doubled to around 30,000 and then reached 66,688 on the 7

¹⁶⁵UKNA, PREM 19/129, Vietnamese Refugees - the Roach Bank, 2 June 1979, p 4.

¹⁶⁶UKNA, FCO 40/1094 Head 52 - Miscellaneous Services, New Special Expenditure Subhead "Maintenance of detainees".

August.¹⁶⁷ The combination of both groups of people made it difficult for the colony to deal with the Indochina refugee crisis effectively. When the *Sky Luck* arrived to Hong Kong in March 1979, there was such a lack of accommodation in the colony that Hong Kong's officials had to detain the passengers onboard.¹⁶⁸

The result from this was an unsatisfied Hong Kong administration and public. As early as March 1979, measures were made by the government in Hong Kong to quell the public by directing publicity so that it seemed as if the refugees were only arriving temporarily.¹⁶⁹ In a record of one meeting, on 31 May 1979, Hong Kong's Financial Secretary is quoted as saying that the Hong Kong population had had enough of the Sino-Vietnamese who he believed were not integrating well. The public's contempt for the refugees had grown so large that they, apparently, preferred refoulement of the refugees to resettling them. The Financial Secretary proceeded to claim that the public assumed that the United Kingdom would help them if they remained patient with the crisis.¹⁷⁰

Hong Kong did look to the UK to aid them. However, it was the arrival of one British-registered ship carrying refugees, the *Sibonga*, to Hong Kong on 23 May 1979 that truly sparked British interest in helping the colony. A day prior to the *Sibonga's* arrival, a telegram from staff in the FCO reported that they believed the British had to rescue the refugees to reassure Hong Kong, to comfort its public and to exhibit to the international world their responsiveness to the crisis.¹⁷¹ A background note by the Home Office on the *Sibonga* published on the 24 May remarked that although the British could constitutionally refuse the refugees onboard, they would be delaying the inevitable. To add to this, if the UK were to lobby other countries to assist Hong Kong, the background note insists that they also had to accept the refugees.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷UKNA, FCO 40/1095, Lord Privy Seal's Working Lunch With Mr Sonoda: 22 May, 22 May 1979 and UKNA, PREM 19/604, My TELNO 1086: Vietnamese Refugees, from MacLehose to INFO Immediate Wellington, 7th August 1979.

¹⁶⁸ UKNA, FCO 40/1092, From Hong Kong to Priority F.C.O, Telegram Number 356, Vietnamese Refugees: SITREP M.V. "Sky Luck," 12 March 1979.

¹⁶⁹ UKNA, FCO 40/1093, Memorandum for Executive Council Camps to Accommodate Vietnamese Refugees, For discussion, 13th March 1979.

¹⁷⁰ UKNA, FCO 40/1098, Record of Conversation Between the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and the Hong Kong Financial Secretary Held at the Foreign and Commonwealth office at 4:00 pm, 31 May 1979.

¹⁷¹ UKNA, HO 376/199, M of S, FCO, to Timothy Raison MP, M of S, re: Vietnamese refugees on the Mt Sibonga, 22 May 1979.

¹⁷² UKNA, PREM 19/129, Background Note, Vietnamese Refugees on the m.v. Sibonga. Immigration Aspects, Home Office, 24 May 1979.

In the case of the *Sibonga*, Thatcher reached the conclusion to resettle the refugees onboard the ship based on the recommendations of the FCO and Home Office.¹⁷³ However, with the arrival of another ship, the *Roach Bank*, Thatcher displayed greater motivation to deal with the refugee crisis herself. In response to the *Roach Bank*, on the 29 May 1979, Thatcher called for a meeting with her ministers at which she ordered several of them to find out what legalities could be changed to release the UK from the refugee burden they faced in Hong Kong. She also asked the FCO to recall the Governor of Hong Kong, approach the US administration to take some of the *Roach Bank* refugees and push Waldheim for an international conference on the Indochinese refugees.¹⁷⁴ By the 31 May, having received negative replies to her legal enquiries, Thatcher officially gave instruction for her administration to provide full help to the government of Hong Kong.¹⁷⁵

The meeting on 29 May is pivotal as it signified the point at which the UK began involving themselves in the refugee crisis. The timing of this event was not coincidental. The doubling of Hong Kong's refugee population by the end of May would have heightened the sense of a crisis in the colony. At this point, in Britain, advocacy by the ministers for refugee resettlement was unsuccessful: Thatcher had remained unmoved by the propounded concept. Her orders on 31 May to help Hong Kong specifically, however, show that in spite of her steadfastness for resettlement, Thatcher was concerned with meeting the colony's needs. Thus, the UK's immersion into the crisis was directly linked to its colony.

Thereafter, the British were guided by their ministers who decided to exert international pressure on other countries. Internal politics and intra-party politics additionally meant pressure was placed on the British government too. This was best exemplified in a telling telegram from Hong Kong to the British FCO, in May 1979. In the telegram, D.C Wilson, political advisor to Murray MacLehose, communicated Hong Kong's fear that the US would resettle less refugees than initially expected. The American impact on the Hong Kong crisis would therefore be unsubstantial at a time when space for the refugees was limited and public hostility was large. Hong Kong subsequently asked for the UK to take more refugees in order to assure the colony's public and draw in American aid.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ UKNA, PREM 19/129 Press Notice, Annex C, 29 May 1979.

¹⁷⁴ UKNA, PREM 19/129, Vietnamese Refugees, Private Secretary to J.S. Wall, 29 May 1979, p 1.

¹⁷⁵ UKNA, FCO 58/1752, To Immediate Hong Kong (Governor) from FCO, Vietnamese Refugees: Publicity for Vietnamese Official Involvement, 31 May 1979.

¹⁷⁶ UKNA, FCO 58/1764, D.C Wilson to M K O Simpson-Orlebar, Vietnam Refugees, 24 May 1979.

Pressure from Hong Kong persisted past this. On 3 July MacLehose encouraged Britain to accept the UNHCR proposed quota of 10,000 refugees as he felt it would help stop any further criticism. The governor even suggested merging the UK and Hong Kong's pledges to form a 20,000 quota. This combined quota, the governor believed, would assure Britain if it failed to fulfil its own refugee allocation. This was as MacLehose had offered for Hong Kong to take more than half of the refugees in the case of British non-fulfilment. MacLehose's desire was to ensure Britain's participation in order to create a successful outcome in the conference.¹⁷⁷

When the Geneva conference was finally held, Britain and Hong Kong acted to ensure that Hong Kong was given as much attention as possible. MacLehose, before the conference, made sure that Hong Kong's delegations were amongst those sent from the UK to Geneva.¹⁷⁸ At the conference itself, the British government announced that it had decided to allocate the 10,000 quota to Hong Kong's refugees specifically. Carrington's speech, in the conference, also concentrated solely on the predicament of Hong Kong. He declared that Hong Kong had "one third of all boat refugees in camps in South-East Asia," which ignored the fact that the majority of refugees in the area had left their countries by land.¹⁷⁹ Less than a year later, in a letter to the Secretary of State for Trade, Carrington revealed that the basic intention in announcing a quota of 10,000 refugees at the conference was to ease the burden on Hong Kong.¹⁸⁰

After the Geneva conference, the archival documents show that fear of internal politics and international pressure is what drove the British to then realise its full quota. In a letter from Home Office staff member, G I de Deney, it is written that the UK never publicised that their 10,000 quota was to be spread over three years. De Deney explained that there was apprehension that such a proposal would upset the Hong Kong public. He then alleged that the British rate, at the time of his writing 500 a month, would not be fast enough for Hong Kong and would result in renewed pressure from the colonial administration or the UNHCR.¹⁸¹ Once it had been discovered that the British could take a faster rate of acceptance for refugees from Hong Kong, they did. The Home Secretary, in a letter to the Prime Minister, justified increasing their rate as a way to keep pressure

¹⁷⁷ UKNA, PREM 19/130, UN Conference on Indochinese Refugees, From Hong Kong to Immediate FCO, MacLehose, 3 July 1979.

¹⁷⁸ UKNA, PREM 19/130, Delegation for the Geneva Meeting on Indochina Refugees, To Bryan Cartledge from J S Wall, 9 July 1979.

¹⁷⁹ UKNA, PREM 19/604, Speech by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, The RT Hon The Lord Carrington, At Geneva, Friday 20 July 1979. See earlier statistics in background section to see proportion of refugees that fled by land and boat, 20 July 1979.

¹⁸⁰ UKNA, HO 376/231, From Carrington to Secretary of State for Trade, Vietnamese Boat People, 21 April 1980.

¹⁸¹ UKNA, HO 376/229, From G I De Deney to Mr Peach, Vietnamese Refugees - Co-ordination and planning arrangements, 10 August 1979.

on other countries to continue accepting refugees. To not do so, he felt, would lead to confrontation from the UNHCR, Hong Kong, voluntary organisations and the opposition party.¹⁸²

Once the quota was fulfilled, the British appeared to feel that their role in the crisis was finished. In November 1980, Carrington wrote a letter in which he recounted MacLehose asking the British to resettle 5,000 more refugees; Carrington believed that it was too much. Carrington also felt a new quota would need approval from the Cabinet. The FCO minister was of the opinion that this would be unsuccessful. He concluded by saying that he would be “very willing to duck the issue” as long as he could.¹⁸³ Another letter, in November 1980, divulged that the Home Secretary believed that he would not have the resources to accept more refugees.¹⁸⁴ He believed that the extra £5 million needed to accommodate such refugees during a time of housing shortages and unemployment would be too much and would open the Home Office to criticism.¹⁸⁵

By this point, the refugee crisis had already evolved to overshadow the events in Hong Kong. By January 1980, Thailand had an estimated one million refugees around its borders. In response, the Thai government began closing their centres and borders once more.¹⁸⁶ International institutions and national governments kept their focus on them. Boat refugees, in comparison, had already decreased in numbers; the number of boat people arrivals in Hong Kong fell in the second half of 1979. Hong Kong, by the end of 1979, had around 2,000-3,000 arrivals a month. This was the same rate they had before April 1978.¹⁸⁷ At the same time, as alluded to in the documents, Britain was facing graver domestic problems than it had the year before. By 1980 the country’s economic output was falling sharply while unemployment was rising at a steady 100,000 job losses per month.¹⁸⁸ Therefore, it is unlikely that Britain would have been willing to support Hong Kong any more.

¹⁸² UKNA, PREM 19/604, Vietnamese Refugees: Home Secretary to Prime Minister, 28 December 1979.

¹⁸³ UKNA, HO 376/231, Vietnamese Refugees, From Carrington, 15 November 1980.

¹⁸⁴ UKNA, HO 376/231, Vietnamese Refugees, Mr E Ehad to Mr Woodfield, 11 November 1980, p 1.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p 2.

¹⁸⁶ The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights. 1989. *Refugee Denied: Problems in Protection of Vietnamese and Cambodians in Thailand and the Admission of Indochinese Refugees into the United States*. p 20.

¹⁸⁷ Ramses Amer. 2011. “The boat people crisis of 1978-9 and the Hong Kong experience examined through the ethnic Chinese dimension.” In Yuk Chan. *The Chinese/Vietnamese Diaspora: Revisiting the boat people*, pp 36-52, p 36.

¹⁸⁸ Malcolm Pearce and Geoffrey Stewart. 2002. *British Political History: 1867-2001 Democracy and Decline*. London and New York: Routledge. p 523.

To further measure Hong Kong's salience, it is important to hark back quickly to the Labour government prior to Thatcher's Conservatives. Hong Kong was significant for this administration as well. In January 1979, as outlined in a telegraph from Owen to MacLehorse, the Labour government lobbied other governments to accept refugees from Hong Kong.¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, when ASEAN countries wanted to leave Hong Kong out of their potential processing centre, the FCO told the ASEAN countries that the UK would not give financial support to their idea if they did not include Hong Kong.¹⁹⁰ The Labour quota of 1,500 refugees was even confirmed by another Home Office employee, M. Simpson-Orlebar, to have been due to Britain's "special responsibility" for Hong Kong.¹⁹¹ This low quota, regardless of the Labour government possessing a similar disposition to Hong Kong, further stresses the noteworthiness of the *Sibonga, Roach Bank* and the doubling of the refugee population in Hong Kong.

By exploring the British response to refugees arriving to the Anglo-French condominium, the New Hebrides, one can also establish what a "special responsibility" is for the British. The New Hebrides, regardless of its connections to Britain, was refused help with its possible refugee influx: it was told, in a telegram from the FCO, that it had the devolved power to help itself.¹⁹² To add to this, even though they were ex-colonies, the British did not provide as much help to Malaysia and Singapore as they did to Hong Kong. Hence, only remaining colonies appear to have been "special" for the British. This contrasts with the French who refused to pillory Vietnam in the Geneva conference partly because it was a past colony.¹⁹³

Hong Kong's part in the refugee crisis means that Britain's enduring colonial connection was the largest motivator for its involvement in the Indochina crisis. The significance of this is that Hong Kong was considered a priority over public opinion, by Thatcher, even if she thought that public opinion was overwhelmingly against any support for refugees. Thatcher's prioritisation here should not be underestimated. The Prime Minister, as seen in this dissertation's background section, greatly valued public opinion on immigration. Carrington's disclosure that the 10,000 quota was designed to aid Hong Kong should also not be undervalued. This revelation contradicts many of the arguments the minister used in intra-party politics and indicates that even the Cabinet ministers that

¹⁸⁹ UKNA, FCO 581/1749, Owen to Immediate Governor Hong Kong, Telegram No 53, 16 January 1979.

¹⁹⁰ UKNA, FCO 40/1094, To Mr Saleh Basarah from Cortazzi, 2 May 1979.

¹⁹¹ UKNA, HO 376/198, Mr M Simpson-Orlebar to Mr Cortazzi, Indochinese Refugees, About the further 1,500 refugees, 10 January 1979.

¹⁹² UKNA, FCO 58/1751, From FCO To Canberra, Telegraph Number 2, 27 February 1979.

¹⁹³ UKNA, PREM 19/130 Indochina Refugees: French Attitudes Telegram Number 422, 12 July 1979.

squabbled with Thatcher desired to help the colony. The internal politics, finally, that was driven by MacLehose did put pressure on Thatcher after calling for the conference. However, his inability to force the British to resettle more refugees in 1980, shows that his pressure was not strong enough to change minds within the British government.

International Pressure and Politics

Alleviating Hong Kong's difficulties proved to be a double edged sword. Not only did the British government have to pressurise other countries to increase their own intake of refugees from Hong Kong but it had to, as a consequence, maintain its own quota to satisfy others. If it failed to complete its quota there was a fear that pressure would be exerted on it.

International pressure was placed on Britain before the Geneva conference. The Americans began exerting pressure on Britain soon after Thatcher's election. In May, America's Ambassador Clark was reported in an FCO document to have administered pressure on the UK to accept more refugees from Hong Kong. Britain replied at the time that it had too much immigration to take more refugees.¹⁹⁴ This denial reflects the importance of the *Sibonga*, the *Roach Bank* and the doubling of Hong Kong's refugee population once more.

As seen before, it was after these events that the British took a more active interest in the refugee crisis. Soon after, their lobbying interests became much more active. On 1 June 1979 the FCO sent a message to China claiming that it was in the interest of both economies to prevent Hong Kong's demise.¹⁹⁵ The FCO then sent out orders to its staff to lobby countries that could apply pressure on Vietnam, accept more refugees or increase their contribution to UNHCR funds. In the telegram, Scandinavia, other non EEC countries, Latin America, Japan and a few Arab countries are named as targets for lobbying.¹⁹⁶

When countries in Indochina, other than Hong Kong, tried to command influence on the handling of the refugee crisis — by refusing ships with refugees from disembarking and expelling refugees — the British only considered this a problem in terms of how it related to Hong Kong. The Lord Privy Seal, reported that the refusals of Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand to accept more refugees, was a problem only in how it placed more pressure on the colony. The belief was that the expulsion of

¹⁹⁴UKNA, FCO 40/1095, From I C Orr to P Morgan, Vietnamese Refugees and Immigration in the UK, 10 May 1979.

¹⁹⁵UKNA, FCO 40/1098, From FCO to Immediate Peking, Immigration and Vietnamese Refugees, 1 June 1979.

¹⁹⁶UKNA, FCO 40/1098, From FCO to Immediate Hanoi, 1 June 1979.

refugees would sway the public in Hong Kong to pressurise its government to give up its 'humane' policies towards the refugees. The Lord Privy Seal also felt that the expulsions would make the British intake look inadequate. This only fuelled his desire to apply more pressure on Waldheim to call an international conference.¹⁹⁷ That the British already requested for a conference negates any belief that ASEAN push backs dragged the British into the crisis. International pressure, thereupon, was not effective on Britain outside of Hong Kong's efforts.

After asking for the Geneva conference, Britain continued to lobby other countries but it had little success. On 12 June 1979, Ambassador Clark, for example, is reported in a telegram to have believed that Thailand was not far from saturation point for refugees unlike Malaysia which already was.¹⁹⁸ His assistant even described Thailand as "vital to US interests." Additionally, a document that detailed US policy named "US Policy Towards South East Asia," on 18 June, claimed that they were interested in the Vietnamese from the South who went to Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand, not the North Vietnamese who went to Hong Kong. This was especially the case as Hong Kong's problems were recent and their refugees only accounted for one-sixth of "the potential registrable refugee population in the area."¹⁹⁹ Following telegrams from the British asking the Americans to change their stance regarding Hong Kong's refugees, on 18 June a Washington telegram finally stated that they would give a higher quota to Hong Kong due to the recent arrivals on its shore.²⁰⁰ Eleven days later, however, MacLehose sent another telegram to the FCO; America had failed to increase its intake as promised, instead they gave a larger quota to Indonesia and Malaysia.²⁰¹

The Geneva conference posed itself, consequently, as a more hopeful, large lobbying exercise for the British. Britain even tried to steer Australia, the US, Canada and "perhaps France," towards "a common approach to the conference."²⁰² However, Waldheim, the UN Secretary General, appears to have denied this from occurring as he wanted: "to preserve the essentially humanitarian nature of the conference."²⁰³ The conference itself had mixed results for the British in its effect on the

¹⁹⁷ UKNA, PREM 19/130, Vietnamese Refugees, To Bryan Cartledge from S J Gomersall (Private Secretary to the Lord Privy Seal), 18 June 1979.

¹⁹⁸ UKNA, PREM 19/129, To Immediate FCO from Washington, Refugees: Proposals for a conference, Telegraph number 1413, 12 June 1979.

¹⁹⁹ UKNA, FCO 40/1100, US Policy Towards South East Asia, 18 June 1979.

²⁰⁰ UKNA, PREM 19/130, From Washington to Immediate FCO, Telegram Number 1566, Vietnamese Refugees, 18 June 1979.

²⁰¹ UKNA, PREM 19/130, To Immediate Foreign and Commonwealth Office from Hong Kong, My TELNO 867: US Programme for Refugee Resettlement, 28 June 1979.

²⁰² UKNA, PREM 19/130, From FCO to Immediate Canberra, Telegram number 313, 9 July 1979.

²⁰³ UKNA, PREM 19/130 From FCO to Immediate Canberra, Your TELNO 398: Indochina Refugees, 11 July 1979.

international community. Although Carrington remarked that it persuaded countries that were neutral to criticise Vietnam,²⁰⁴ the UNHCR's recommendation to help refugees in countries other than Hong Kong would have been a defeat for the FCO.²⁰⁵ A member of the UK UNHCR mission in Geneva even complained to the UNHCR about the organisation's advice to resettle refugees from countries other than Hong Kong.²⁰⁶

Britain's lack of success is explained by the superior international pressure of the Americans who were driven to bring in the help of other nations into the crisis. In the lead-up to the conference, the Americans first restricted the admission of refugees into the United States to only 4,000-5,000 a month and then refused to even carry out emergency evacuations from the region in order to place pressure on others.²⁰⁷ One State Department official is said to have claimed that if America did continuously resettle Indochinese countries, "other countries will just sit back and do nothing."²⁰⁸

America's desire for international cooperation on the crisis goes back to 1975. In that year, an American diplomat, Philip Habib, when asked what would happen if 200,000 Vietnamese were evacuated from Indochina, expressed the wish that they would be spread across the world. When it came to it, Canada only resettled 2,000 from Guam and another 1,000 were taken by France or other European countries; the prevailing sentiment at the time was that the refugees were an American responsibility.²⁰⁹

Since then, the United States' main concern was for Thailand, for whom, in 1975, the country's representative for the UNCHR stated that an "effective response of the international community as a whole," was needed. That year, America contributed \$8.6 million to UNHCR for their programme for Thailand and resettled 10,000 refugees who were in Thailand.²¹⁰ As shall be discussed to greater detail later, the United States' politics in the Indochinese region ensured prioritisation of Thailand continued and for this reason, the predominance of Thailand in the Geneva conference meant the conference was a success for the US, not the UK.

²⁰⁴ UKNA, PREM 19/130, B.S Cartledge to J.S Wall, Geneva Conference on Refugees from Indochina, 28 July 1979.

²⁰⁵ UKNA, PREM 19/130, From UK MIS (Macinnes) Geneva to Priority FCO, Resettlement of Vietnamese Refugees from Hong Kong, Telegram Number 388, 1 August 1979.

²⁰⁶ UKNA, PREM 19/604 From UKMIS (Macinnes) Geneva to Priority FCO, Resettlement of Vietnamese Refugees from Hong Kong, Telegram Number 388, 1 August 1979.

²⁰⁷ James R Kurth. 1979. "Refugees: America Must Do More." *Foreign Policy* 36, pp.12-19, p 13.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p 14.

²⁰⁹ W. Courtland Robinson, 1998. *Terms of Refuge: The Indochinese Exodus and the International Response*, p 58.

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, p 22.

After the conference, the British continued placing pressure on countries to uphold their pledges or take more refugees from Hong Kong. In a reply to a British telegram presumably telling them that they had to do more of the latter, a Swedish ambassador told the FCO that current Swedish intake from the Indochina area matched the UNHCR's instructions (they were resettling refugees from Indonesia and Malaysia.) The Swedes went on to defend their stance as they felt that it was an apolitical judgement and they wanted to build a reputation with the UN.²¹¹ What they were defending themselves from is apparent from another telegram. When the UNHCR recommended that the Netherlands should select its refugees from Malaysia, Malcolm Fraser, the Australian Prime Minister, contacted them to remind them that their obligations were also to take refugees from Hong Kong.²¹²

By 11 October 1979, reports suggest that the US highlighted countries other than Hong Kong as important. In a UNHCR session, Ambassador Clark announced that the fighting in Kampuchea was causing a very serious refugee problem.²¹³ In late December Mr Pell, Congressional Adviser to the United States Delegation, complained that there was a great disparity between the amount of refugees the US accepted and how many other nations accepted.²¹⁴ He then directed attention, as well, to other Indochinese countries receiving refugees: "Mr. Pell (member of the United States Senate), Congressional adviser to the United States delegation, said that although world sensitivities had been aroused by the plight of the boat people, the situation of the larger number of refugees who had come overland, and of the problems facing Malaysia and Thailand, should not be overlooked."²¹⁵ The subsequent overlooking of Hong Kong by the US is explained by the fact that by early October 1979 an estimated 100,000 Cambodians were living in two sprawling encampments in Thailand. Further south, by mid-October, were an additional 30,000 Cambodian refugees.²¹⁶

Therefore, international pressure can be a factor for state actors to consider in refugee policy. In these instances, Britain has exercised international pressure on other countries but other countries have also exerted international pressure on Britain. Yet, its salience is debatable. Not all major

²¹¹ UKNA, FCO 40/1105, Your TEL NO 355 to Canberra: Resettlement of Vietnamese Refugees from Hong Kong, 27 Jul 1979.

²¹² UKNA, FCO 40/1105, Your TELNO 335 to Canberra: Resettlement of Vietnamese Refugees from Hong Kong, 31 July 1979.

²¹³ UKNA, FCO 40/1108, Statement of Ambassador Dick Clark to UNHCR Session, 11 October 1979.

²¹⁴ UKNA, HO 376/198, Mr MacInnes to Mr P Morgan FCO, 29 December 1979, p 32.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ W. Courtland Robinson, 1998. *Terms of Refuge: The Indochinese Exodus and the International Response*, p 68.

countries changed their approach to the crisis in response to pressure. America, for instance, was already resettling large amounts of refugees and persisted to consider Thailand and Cambodia its priorities, regardless of British interference. France did not sever normal diplomatic ties with Vietnam, either in 1975 or in 1979 when its allegiances were questioned.²¹⁷

International pressure only shaped how many refugees the British resettled from Hong Kong. It did not immerse Britain in the Indochina crisis: attempts by the Americans to lobby for British participation prior to the *Roach Bank* and *Sibonga* episodes were unsuccessful. Apart from international pressure being used by state actors to set a 10,000 quota, the British still opted to take refugees from Hong Kong, even if international focus was on other countries. To add to this, the quota of 10,000 remained unvaried until it was fulfilled. This means that any other attempts to pressure the British failed.

International politics was similarly insignificant. It transpired during the crisis due to the presence of the Soviet Union in Indochina, specifically in Vietnam, meaning the British often accredited the exodus of refugees to Soviet manipulation. They expressed yearnings to lambast the communists for it. Keeping in trend with their general international performance in the 1970s, however, the British did not expand on their rhetoric and no evidence shows that the refugees were used as political tools.

Britain's disappointment with the Soviet Union's relationship with Vietnam was made clear close to the Geneva conference by Thatcher. In a meeting with Waldheim, the UN Secretary General, the Prime Minister pointed out that the conflicts in Indochina revolved around communism and that "every procedural device should be employed in order to put the Western point of view across."²¹⁸ William Whitelaw was also of similar opinion, in July 1979 he stated that accepting the refugees would be to protect them from a "brutal Communist tyranny."²¹⁹

However, if Britain desired to become enmeshed in the politics of the area, logic would decree that they would have called for the conference earlier than they did and that they would have offered to resettle the refugees earlier than they did. Communist influence in the region had been publicly debated about since February 1979 yet the conference and the resettlement quotas came much later.

²¹⁷ *Ibid*, p 145.

²¹⁸UKNA, PREM 19/130, Note of the Prime Minister's discussion with the United Nations Secretary General, Dr. Waldheim, at 10 Downing Street, On 12 July 1979, p 1.

²¹⁹UKNA, PREM 19/130, Letter to Prime Minister from William Whitelaw, 9 July 1979, p 2.

Furthermore, Thatcher never labelled the resettling of refugees to Britain as acts of anti-communism. Her anti-communist stance regarding the Geneva conference was targeted at stopping the expulsions of the refugees. To add to this, Carrington once described the lampooning of Vietnam in the conference — in which communist China participated — as successful not because of how it might have embarrassed a communist country but in how it forced Vietnam to make concessions in its expulsions of the refugees.²²⁰ Nothing therefore suggests that the government relocated the refugees in order to aggravate their communist rivals.

This all only serves to accentuate Britain's expected disengagement in international relations. For the previous ten years, the country's international power had been fading. In the new government, Thatcher delegated her responsibilities for foreign affairs to Carrington due to her disinterest in the matter. To expect this government's policy to change due to international pressure or international politics would therein have been ill-considered.

Non-State Norm Entrepreneurs

During the Indochina crisis, the government was repeatedly pestered by various actors who had no direct relation to policy making. Impressively, the government managed to restrain itself from submitting to outside demands. In this case, the government prioritised national interest above the interests of outside parties.

The shipping industry was a dominant norm entrepreneur in the archival documents. Their lobbying began as early as 30 May 1979. They often had direct contact with the government and therefore presented themselves as quite a powerful lobby. T.G Harris, the private secretary for the Trade Security of State, wrote to Thatcher's own private secretary Bryan Cartledge to represent the interests of the shipping industry. One of his first letters to the Prime Minister displayed hope that a scheduled discussion with the shipping industry would help clear uncertainties over the refugee crisis and its relationship with the industry. He finished by implying that some in the shipping industry were so damaged by the ordeal that they were thinking of not assisting refugees anymore.²²¹

²²⁰UKNA, PREM 19/604 B.G Cartledge to J.S Wall, Geneva Conference on Refugees from Indochina, 28 July 1979.

²²¹UKNA, FCO 40/1097, T.G Harris to Bryan Cartledge, Vietnamese Refugees, 30 May 1979.

When commenting on the *Sibonga* and the *Roach Bank*, Bruce Grant, a journalist, reported that some Hong Kong officials believed the new Conservative administration was obliged to offer quick asylum to the refugees stranded on the ships. This was because the chairman of the company owning the ships was a member of the House of Lords and the situation was costing his firm well over \$5000 a day.²²² This member of the House of Lords was most likely Lord Inverforth who, in T G Harris's letter, also complained to Thatcher about the effect of the crisis on charterers.²²³

Such reports led Peter Blaker, an official in the FCO, to believe that the government might be pressurised to reimburse ship owners.²²⁴ Yet, when a meeting occurred between the Secretary of State for Trade with the General Council of British Shipping (GCBS) on 5 June, the Secretary of State for Trade made sure that the shipping industry knew they had to assist refugees legally. He also informed them that financial assistance during the Indochina crisis was unlikely. Moreover he told them that the government could not offer an open-ended commitment for rescuing refugees due to immigration problems. The reaction was predictably negative with Mr Swire, Vice President of the GCBS, believing they would lose business due to these problems.²²⁵ Very similar events also reoccurred later, on 14 June.²²⁶

Even though the British Geneva conference resettlement quota intended to include refugees rescued by British vessels, the decision not to give an open-ended commitment to the shipping industry there reinforces the importance of Hong Kong. The lack of such a commitment meant that the British were not primarily concerned with aiding British vessels when calling for the conference soon after the arrival of the *Sibonga* and *Roach Bank* on Hong Kong's shores. The conference was instead called for because Hong Kong was inflicted with refugee difficulties. Additionally, it is worth noting that at Geneva a resettlement programme for refugees rescued at sea by merchant ships known as DISERO (Disembarkation Resettlement Offers) was created. However, the British did not partake in it.²²⁷

²²²Bruce Grant. 1979. *The Boat People: An 'Age Investigation.'* Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, p 70.

²²³UKNA, FCO 40/1097, From Lord Inverforth to Margaret Thatcher, Vietnamese Refugees, 30 May 1979.

²²⁴UKNA, FCO 40/1098, To Lord Privy Seal, Vietnamese Refugees, 4 June 1979.

²²⁵ UKNA, FCO 40/1099, Secretary of State for Trade Office minute, Note of the Secretary of State's Meeting with the General Council of British Shipping (GCBS) Held at 17.00, 5 June 1979.

²²⁶ UKNA, PREM 19/129, Vietnamese Refugees, from A J Butler to T G Harris, 14 June 1979 and UKNA, PREM 19/129, Secretary of State for Trade office minute no: 873/x, Note of the Secretary of State's meeting with the General Council of British shipping (GCBS) Held at 17:00, 5 June 1979.

²²⁷ W. Courtland Robinson, 1998. *Terms of Refuge: The Indochinese Exodus and the International Response*, p 66.

Other norm entrepreneurs groups, too, were as ineffective in policy change. Sir Leslie Kirkley, Chairman of The Standing Conference on Refugees (SCORE) asked Peter Blaker if SCORE could join the Geneva conference as “observers and lobbyists.” He also enquired if they should try to improve public relations. Kirkley did not appear to receive a reply to his initial request and the offer to improve public relations was rejected as Blaker thought it would be too late to do so.²²⁸ The International Committee for the Red Cross also pressed the state, in a bulletin, to find solutions to the refugee crisis.²²⁹ However, there is no mention of this request driving the government to react. There was a letter from a bishop in Leeds which requested that the government help the refugees but Thatcher simply saw the Geneva conference as a sufficient enough solution to his appeal.²³⁰

The UNHCR requested more assistance from the British in the crisis. As early as 25 May 1979, they requested for the British to contribute more resettlement places to Indochina as well as financial pledges.²³¹ The quota of 10,000 was also put forward to the British by the UNHCR and, after the conference, the UNHCR were named as one party the British did not want to provoke by not fulfilling their quota obligations.²³²

Yet, it was the British who called for the Geneva conference, not the UNHCR. It was the British who pushed for public criticisms during the conference even though Waldheim preferred them not to. It was also the British who took the majority of their refugees from Hong Kong even if the UNHCR guided most countries towards resettling from Thailand. It therefore seems that, although both felt each other’s pressures, the British and UNHCR acted as they saw best suited their own, respective interests.

Essentially, this means that non-state norm entrepreneurs were relatively ineffective. The shipping industry was mentioned by some parliamentary officials as an important factor to consider when resettling refugees but the final decision by the British to judge resettling refugees from British ships on a case-by-case basis was not what the industry lobbied for. The UNHCR were, in addition, alluded to as one cause of pressure on the British to achieve their quota. Nonetheless, it still failed to achieve actual British policy change.

²²⁸ UKNA, FCO 40/1101, Vietnamese Refugees, To Mr Simons from C A Munro, 22 June 1979.

²²⁹ UKNA, FCO 40/1105, ICRC Bulletin No. 42, 4 July 1979.

²³⁰ UKNA, PREM 19/604, Prime Minister to the Bishop of Tunisia, 30 July 1979.

²³¹ UKNA, PREM 19/129, From the Private Secretary to Stephen Wall, 25 May 1979.

²³² See UKNA, PREM 19/130, UN Conference on Indochinese Refugees, From Hong Kong to Immediate FCO, MacLehose, 3 July 1979 and see UKNA, HO 376/229, From G I De Deney to Mr Peach, Vietnamese Refugees - Co-ordination and planning arrangements, 10 August 1979.

Humanitarianism

What should be discussed in this final section is that the resettling of Vietnamese refugees was not the consequence of a humanitarian government. Although there was a point in which humanitarianism helped differentiate refugees from immigrants in Thatcher's mind, her government's lack of response to other ongoing, contemporary refugee crises show that she did not resettle the refugees due to charitable intentions.

Waldheim raised a relevant point himself in a meeting. He brought up concerns that countries in need of aid were being ignored by the Geneva conference:

He was clearly worried lest an international conference, which he speculated would cost a good deal, would increase criticism particularly from the Africans that the UNHCR were devoting a disproportionate amount of effort and money to South East Asia. He referred to refugees in the Sudan (100,000 from Uganda); Djibouti and Botswana (Refugee populations of one in ten); Pakistan (65,000 Afghans); and in Southern Africa generally. He remarked that in the global context even the figure of 40,000 in Hong Kong was "not all that significant."²³³

Waldheim made a good point: by approaching the Indochina refugee crisis with solely Hong Kong's interest in mind, Britain ignored the difficulties of so many other countries and so many other refugees. In Indochina alone, the number of land refugees in the ASEAN region was much larger than that of the boat refugees who dominated Hong Kong. The land refugees furthermore had less money to make financial deals with local authorities and stayed in similarly overcrowded camps in countries like Malaysia.²³⁴ Revolving the British speech in Geneva around "boat refugees" was consequently inward-looking.

Additionally, Vietnam had its own refugee problem ignored due to international politics.. After the Khmer Rouge shelled Vietnam, the Vietnamese government reported that 725,000 Vietnamese were driven away from their affected border provinces to be harboured in Vietnam. Later Vietnam

²³³ UKNA, PREM 19/129, From UKMIS Geneva to Immediate FCO, Proposed Conference on Indochinese Refugees TELNO 230, 6 June 1979.

²³⁴ Zakaria Haji Ahmad. 1979. "Vietnamese Refugees and ASEAN." *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 1, pp.66-74, p 69-71.

also requested help from the UNHCR to look after the 321,400 refugees from Kampuchea who had fled into southern Vietnam mostly between 1977-9.²³⁵ Instead of trying to shine light on this at the Geneva conference, the British pilloried Vietnam.

The callousness of Britain's decision-making is also unsettling. A study in June 1979 showed that the majority of the boat refugees were children and elderly people.²³⁶ Boat people usually arrived at foreign shores in dreadful conditions; those that came on the *Sibonga* arrived close to exhaustion, were dehydrated and were covered in filth.²³⁷ Yet Thatcher delayed resettling them because public opinion in Britain could have been hostile. Her ministers disliked the situation because of the “bad press” and not the perilousness of the situation faced by those onboard the boats. It took a visit to Hong Kong from Carrington for him to understand the severity of the situation.

What the archival documents depict is not politicians fearful of the health and safety of hundreds of thousands of people. Nor does it depict politicians who were in a rush to correct the past wrongs committed in a region decimated by foreign politics. Instead, these were high-ranking people playing a game, removed from the results of their actions in terms of its human costs. They viewed the refugee crisis from the perspective of a nation-state and not from a human perspective. Humanitarianism did not play a large part in the resettlement at all.

The British Response Compared

The United States' Indochinese Dominance

The UK's resettlement process in 1979, as established earlier, was inferior to other international responses. The country that dominated the international resettlement scene — the US — had done so for some time. On top of its large resettlement offers, from August 1975 to the beginning of January 1979, the United States contributed 52 per cent of total donations to the UNHCR for the

²³⁵ Bruce Grant. 1979. *The Boat People: An 'Age Investigation.'* p 98.

²³⁶ *Ibid*, p 54.

²³⁷ *Ibid*, p 69.

²³⁸ W. Courtland Robinson, 1998. *Terms of Refuge: The Indochinese Exodus and the International Response*, p 54.

Indochinese crisis.²³⁸ This was regardless of the fact that between 1975 and 1980, the United States had accepted as many refugees as the rest of the world combined.²³⁹

Supportive action by the Americans for the refugees was also done in spite of a public that were unwelcoming to the refugees. As early as July 1977, a Harris Survey opinion poll indicated that resettling more Indochinese refugees in the US was a deeply unpopular move. 57 percent of the population were opposed to the August 1977 parole that allowed more refugees in.²⁴⁰ This inhospitableness is explained by the high unemployment, the housing shortage and the large recession the Americans were facing.²⁴¹ Yet with full knowledge of this situation, the American government, on 5 September 1979, still voted on spending \$207 million more on the Indochinese refugees and in 1982 even put forward measures to help the refugees enter the workforce.²⁴²

The answer as to why the US were so active in resettling refugees in Indochina lies in the international politics at the time. It is of no coincidence that between 1945 and 1986, 90 per cent of resettled refugees in America had come from Communist countries.²⁴³ Nor was it a coincidence that the presence of Soviet troops in Cuba, in September 1979, was used to counteract hostility within the American public and motivate them in turn to resettle Indochinese refugees.²⁴⁴ Indeed, there were Americans who saw their resettlement programme as the last phase of their Vietnamese war, with Senator S.I. Hayakawa saying on 24 October 1979: “By welcoming Indochinese refugees to the United States we will once and for all show up the present government of Vietnam as the totalitarian, racist tyranny that it is. Morally, we shall have won the Vietnam war.”²⁴⁵

Yet, to believe that this politicisation of refugees by the Americans started after the Vietnam War would be wrong. America displayed such tendencies before and it was in the 1950s that a special

²³⁹ Gil Loescher and John A. Scanlan. 1986. *Calculated Kindness: Refugees & America's Half-Open Door Policy 1945 to the Present*. New York and London: The Free Press. p xiv.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p 129.

²⁴¹ *Ibid*, p 160.

²⁴² Bruce Grant. 1979. *The Boat People: An 'Age Investigation.* ' p 140 and “The State of The World's Refugees 2000: Fifty Years of Humanitarian Action, State of the World's Refugees.” 1 January 2000. *UNHCR*. available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/4a4c754a9.html> (last accessed on 29/10/2015). p 90.

²⁴³ Gil Loescher and John A. Scanlan. 1986. *Calculated Kindness: Refugees & America's Half-Open Door Policy 1945 to the Present*. New York and London: The Free Press. p xviii.

²⁴⁴ Bruce Grant. 1979. *The Boat People: An 'Age Investigation.* ' p 140.

²⁴⁵ Astri Suhrke. 1981. “Indochinese Refugees and American Policy.” *The World Today* 37(2), pp.54-62, p 61.

American unit, the Saigon Military Mission, was deployed in Vietnam. Their mission was to encourage North Vietnamese people to leave to join the democratic South using a “psywar” campaign.²⁴⁶ The purpose of this mission was clear: the refugees were to promote democratic values. When the refugees consequently left the North, they were heralded by Western audiences as examples of the impotency of communism.²⁴⁷ These political divisions of Vietnamese by the US were still being used in the Indochinese crisis. As has already been noted, one national archive document displayed the preference Americans had towards Southern Vietnamese refugees over those from the North in 1979.

The reason behind America’s large involvement in the refugee crisis, therefore, is largely due to the history of the region as well as, more specifically, America’s own history in the region. The resettling of Indochinese refugees was not only to frustrate their rivals, the Soviet Union and its ally Vietnam, but also to aid America’s allies. This explains why American resettlement of refugees was so centred on Thailand. The Americans had after all trained Thai mercenaries to fight in Laos against communists and used their bases to bomb Vietnamese targets.²⁴⁸

International politics in turn directed America’s refugee policy. For example, when Cambodian refugees arrived at the Thai border, the Americans provided assistance to the Thai government. The US government wanted to support Cambodian refugees who they believed could be potential recruits for Khmer guerrillas fighting the Vietnamese.²⁴⁹ Consequently, aid for the Cambodians was specifically only requested by the Americans at the Thai border. It was meant to be a display of solidarity with Thailand and a signal of doubt of the capabilities of the Cambodian authorities.²⁵⁰

This political attitude to the refugees also passed from America to other countries such as Japan. American Vice President, Walter Mondale, once said that there were “unprecedented and friendly relations among China, Japan and the United States.”²⁵¹ Such allegiances explain why Japan provided half of the total required funds for the Indochinese crisis in the Geneva conference as well

²⁴⁶ Aristide R Zolberg, Astri Suhrke and Sergio Aguayo. 1989. *Escape from violence: conflict and the refugee crisis in the developing world*, p 162.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p 163.

²⁴⁸ Bruce Grant. 1979. *The Boat People: An ‘Age Investigation.’* p 145.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁵⁰ W. Courtland Robinson, 1998. *Terms of Refuge: The Indochinese Exodus and the International Response*, p 68.

²⁵¹ Banning Garrett. 1981. “The Strategic Triangle and the Indochina Crisis.” In David Elliot (ed). *The Third Indochina Conflict*. Colorado: Westview Press/Boulder, pp 193-243, p 222.

as the automatic resettlement of refugees who landed on their shores.²⁵² It also explains why British international pressure was so poor at persuading other countries to resettle refugees from Hong Kong as international politics dominated the region at a time when Britain could not. After all, the ASEAN countries, which played such a central role in the crisis, were all already unified by the Americans in an attempt to ward off communism.²⁵³

America's actions in Indochina can also be explained by the presence of expansionary interest groups in America. Such an interpretation has been provided by Gil Loescher and John Scanlan who chronicled the organisation of one expansionary group, Citizens' Commission on Indochinese Refugees, created by Leo Cherne. Cherne, with this group, managed to attain public approval for the Indochinese refugees. He recruited high-ranking members from religious groups, businesses, organised labor and former and contemporary government officials to lobby for refugee resettlement.²⁵⁴ A month after these initiatives, on 25 January 1978, the Attorney General announced a new parole to resettle more refugees.²⁵⁵ Cherne's efforts continued and Loescher and Scanlan believe that this led, on 30 March 1978, to President Carter approving a plan to implement the Indochina refugee program on a long-term basis.²⁵⁶

The effectiveness of Cherne by itself shows the superiority of lobbying in America in contrast to Britain where non-state entrepreneurs struggled to achieve policy change. However, that America politicised their refugee policy at all greatly brings into doubt that they were primarily motivated by the humanitarianism that the expansionary group pursued. Instead it is much more logical to conclude that, in the Indochina crisis, the US were driven to continue their long history of politicising refugee policy regardless of Cherne's involvement.

The only other actor that could have influenced the US's administration was the media. Unfortunately for America, as with Britain, there is a lack of material covering the reception and role the media played in the Indochina crisis. The advent of television made a large imprint on America: during their war with Vietnam most Americans uncovered information on the war from

²⁵² UKNA, PREM 19/604, Statement by H.E. Mr Sunao Sonoda, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan at the Meeting on Refugees and Displaced Persons in South-east Asia, Geneva, 20 July 1979, p 3-4.

²⁵³ Aristide R Zolberg, Astri Suhrke and Sergio Aguayo. 1989. *Escape from violence: conflict and the refugee crisis in the developing world*, p 174.

²⁵⁴ Gil Loescher and John A. Scanlan. 1986. *Calculated Kindness: Refugees & America's Half-Open Door Policy 1945 to the Present*. p 130.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p 131.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p 134.

television coverage.²⁵⁷ However even with this lack of information, the media's influence is debatable. Michael Mandelbaum's article argues that television networks seemed to be more at the whim of the government than vice versa. He claims that the media would retreat from controversial practices at the first bit of pressure from government officials.²⁵⁸

Having ruled out other actors, it can be asserted now that America's administration was directed by international politics in the Indochina refugee crisis. At the time, Britain was fairly absent in international politics and prioritised other matters instead. Refugee policy can therefore be determined by international politics only if a country believes it is in its immediate interests. The consequence of this, however, is an unjust approach to refugees globally. Similar conclusions were made by Zolberg, Suhrke and Aguayo who once succinctly stated: "The entire international refugee regime was mobilised to assist the Indochinese and the Afghans, whereas the Biharis and the Chakmas were virtually overlooked. The key factor in this respect is that the first set of refugees had powerful foreign patrons, which the latter did not."²⁵⁹

Hungarian Refugees: Ideological Weapons

The Hungarian refugee crisis of the 1950s further exemplifies how international politics can produce policy change. This time Britain was clearly more willing to be ensnared in the affairs of the Cold War.

In October 1956, Hungarian refugees were fleeing from a Soviet attack on a Hungarian protest calling for national reforms.²⁶⁰ Tens of thousands of Hungarians were killed in the attack with hundreds of thousands escaping to Austria. Austria already cared for 150,000 German refugees who had arrived before the Hungarians.²⁶¹ The country therefore shared similar difficulties with Hong Kong, with its mixture of Sino-Vietnamese refugees and Chinese immigrants.

²⁵⁷ Michael Mandelbaum. 1982. "Vietnam: The Television War." *Daedalus* 111(4). pp.157-169, p 158.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p 160.

²⁵⁹ Aristide R Zolberg, Astri Suhrke and Sergio Aguayo. 1989. *Escape from violence: conflict and the refugee crisis in the developing world*, p 175.

²⁶⁰ Tony Kushner and Katharine Knox. 1999. *Refugees in an age of genocide: Global, National and Local Perspectives during the Twentieth Century*. p 243.

²⁶¹ N.J Metuchen. 1975. *Refugees: A problem of our time*. Massachusetts: The Scarecrow Press, Inc, p 391.

Yet the British government was more eager to resettle the Hungarian refugees. This was in spite of the British desire to not receive large numbers of the Eastern European asylum seekers.²⁶² By 11 December 1956, Britain resettled 11,000 refugees and only halted the resettlement process because all accommodation had been taken up immediately.²⁶³ By 31 July 1959, Britain had 14,312 refugees staying within the country.²⁶⁴ That 14,312 refugees was not a “large number” for the British in the 1950s differentiates the receptiveness of this government from that of the government in 1979 who found resettling 10,000 refugees to be a large enough quota.

That the British chose to help one country in particular in the case of the Hungarian refugees should also be taken into account as it again draws parallels to Hong Kong in 1979. The British specifically chose to transport refugees from Austria because the refugees were a burden on the Austrian economy and had the potential to create political problems for the country.²⁶⁵ Yugoslavia, which felt burdened by their portion of refugees, was labelled as less of a priority for the British as it was not at risk economically and politically. The British admission of 14,000 refugees from Austria was seen as enough of a reason not to help Yugoslavia.²⁶⁶

Why Austria was more of a priority politically and Yugoslavia was not was most likely due to their political ideologies: Yugoslavia was communist unlike Austria. The British were attracted to the Hungarian refugees as they favoured their communist antipathies and therefore, as the theory section attests to, they would have wanted to help a democratic country.²⁶⁷ The Cold War cast the Hungarian refugees in a brave light whilst the economic reconstruction of Britain and large labour market demands provided them with more favourable economic conditions.²⁶⁸

This had a knock-on effect for the Hungarian refugees who arrived to a receptive British public. This was attested to by Tony Kushner and Katherine Knox, who noted the marches of support for

262 UKNA, HO 352/141, To Sir A Hutchinson from KGP, 6 November 1956, p 2.

263 UKNA, HO 352/141, Addressed to Vienna, Telegram 442, 4 December 1956.

264 Tony Kushner and Katharine Knox. 1999. *Refugees in an age of genocide: Global, National and Local Perspectives during the Twentieth Century*. p 248.

265 UKNA, FO 371/127703, GP 22/111, From F.O. Minute, Mr Falla, Hungarian refugees in Yugoslavia, 23 January 1957, p 2.

266 *Ibid*, p 3.

267 Tony Kushner and Katharine Knox. 1999. *Refugees in an age of genocide: Global, National and Local Perspectives during the Twentieth Century*. p 244.

268 *Ibid*, p 241.

269 *Ibid*, p 251.

the Hungarians refugees that took place.²⁶⁹ This was regardless of the lesser skills that the Hungarians brought as they were expected to be employed as manual workers.²⁷⁰

The British resettlement of Hungarian refugees was much more enthusiastic than their efforts with the Sino-Vietnamese. The overriding factor driving was international politics as the government used the refugees to rouse the public. This in turn meant that conditions were very favourable for the Hungarian refugees and the state was more willing to aid their resettlement process.

The Sino-Vietnamese did share similar conditions: public opinion was complementary to them, state actors were content to accept them and the refugees were similarly running away from communism. Yet, the government was not drawn into the crisis in Hong Kong by international politics. This was as international politics for the British in 1970s was not a precedent. Even if it was, it most probably would not have elicited a large response. The amount of Hungarian refugees resettled was purposely low: three years after their expulsion, Britain resettled only around 5,000 more Hungarian refugees than the 10,000 refugee quota in 1979. This gives the impression that when concerned with international politics the government only wanted to resettle as many refugees as was necessary to demean opposing nations. When comparing US policy with the policy of the British, it can also be established from this evidence that international politics was not a dominating factor in British governmental refugee policy. Perhaps this is because Britain did not have the same interest in international politics after World War Two as the United States plainly did.

Ugandan Asians: Ethnic Outcasts

The Ugandan Asians fled Uganda between 1972-3 and, as a group, indicate how much of a force racism can be in British refugee policy. Both the public and the state were highly restrictionist towards this unfortunate group of refugees. The decision to eventually resettle them was based on legislation.

Ugandan Asian refugees arrived in Britain in 1972-3 having been expelled from their country by Idi Amin. As Uganda was previously a Commonwealth country, many of the refugees had the status of British Protected Persons. They were therefore legally allowed to reside in Britain where the conditions were similar to the conditions the Sino-Vietnamese encountered: the economy was poor

²⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p 254.

and immigration was unpopular with the public.²⁷¹ BME immigration was specifically condemned by the population.²⁷²

The Conservatives, the incumbent party, did not want to resettle the Ugandan Asians. In a parliamentary debate, characters such as Timothy Raison, a Conservative MP who in 1979 was an advocate for resettling Sino-Vietnamese refugees, criticised those supporting the Ugandan Asians in a time of high British unemployment and housing shortage issues.²⁷³ A Gallup sample supported these views. It showed that 57 per cent of the British population were “doubtful” as to whether the UK should accept the refugees. There were serious concerns about resettling refugees who could compete for housing and jobs.²⁷⁴

This dislike of the Ugandan Asians shows how much public opinion changed between 1972 and 1979 to become positive towards Sino-Vietnamese refugees. This is likewise displayed by the appearance of Timothy Raison who symbolises the change in opinion of the Conservatives by the end of the decade. Thatcher’s nullification of the National Front could have done much to appease both the public and the Conservatives’ immigration fears, however, this topic needs to be researched more.

The salience of legislation, however, is evident in the case of the Ugandan Asians. Resembling Thatcher’s requests in 1979, members of the Conservative government in 1972 also considered changing legislation in order to exclude Ugandan Asians. In one letter to the FCO’s Secretary of State, one Conservative politician deliberated the idea of refusing entry to anyone who could not be included in British immigration quotas. This was regardless of whether such a person was an immigrant or a refugee. A change in legislation, it was believed, would boost confidence in the Conservatives.²⁷⁵ Eventually, however, the Ugandans were accepted because of the legal obligation the government had to United Kingdom passport holders.²⁷⁶ This acceptance resulted in resignations by politicians from constituency associations around the country.²⁷⁷

²⁷¹ *Ibid*, pp 265-6.

²⁷² *Ibid*, p 269.

²⁷³ *Ibid*, pp 278-9.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p 271.

²⁷⁵ UKNA, FCO 73/163, Miles To Secretary of State, Nationality, 23 November 1972.

²⁷⁶ UKNA, T227/3601, United Kingdom Passport Holders Statement by the Home Secretary, 18 August 1972, p 1.

²⁷⁷ Tim Bale and Rebecca Partos. 2014. “Why mainstream parties change policy on migration: A UK case study – The Conservative Party, immigration and asylum, 1960–2010,” p 609.

The government, once it had decided to become involved with the Ugandan Asian exodus, was explicitly only concerned with those who had United Kingdom passports. They did not publicise these motives as they felt it could cause political disapproval, as the Foreign Secretary wrote: “In seeking the help of other governments we have been concerned solely with UK passport holders though we have not always said this explicitly because its would not have been politic [sic] to do so.”²⁷⁸ Those who were labelled as ‘stateless’, were not of concern for the British government.²⁷⁹

This serves as a reminder of how the British ignored refugees who were not from Hong Kong in 1979. It is a palpable exhibition of how responsibilities of nations are seen as their prime concerns. In 1972, instead of a colonial connection, it is possession of a British passport that identified which refugees Britain should resettle. That the British did not want to publicise their decision to only select passport holders indicates that the country’s focus on its responsibilities were not appreciated by its international allies. That national interest in this case overrode international pressure disputes the significance of international pressure once more.

The Conservative government of 1972-3, like its successors in 1979, also produced sympathy for the refugees by fashioning public opinion. They publicly condemned Idi Amin and claimed refugees would fill labour shortages.²⁸⁰ The press followed by reporting Ugandan military atrocities and comparing Amin to Adolf Hitler.²⁸¹ The government delayed the arrival of the refugees until public opinion was won over.²⁸² This was accomplished by late September, when a Louis Harris Research poll recorded a 54 per cent public approval rate for the resettlement of the Ugandan Asians.²⁸³ Therefore, in this case study as well, we see that the media are likely to be manipulated by the government.

²⁷⁸ See UKNA, FCO 61/942, Ugandan Asians, Annex B, UM 44/10, p 3 and UKNA FCO 61/942, From Douglas-Home to Immediate UKMIS Geneva, Stateless Asians in Uganda, Telno 330, 6 October 1972.

²⁷⁹ UKNA, H2/133/53 Part 2, From J R Madge to Mr Eldon Griffiths, Ugandan Asians, 12 October 1972.

²⁸⁰ Tony Kushner and Katharine Knox. 1999. *Refugees in an age of genocide: Global, National and Local Perspectives during the Twentieth Century*, p 270.

²⁸¹ Yumiko Hamai. 2011. “‘Imperial Burden’ or ‘Jews of Africa’?: An Analysis of Political and Media Discourse in the Ugandan Asian Crisis (1972).” *Twentieth Century British History* 22(3), pp.415-436. p 427.

²⁸² *Ibid*, p 435.

²⁸³ *Ibid*, p 425.

At their resettlement, Ugandan Asians were not granted any special treatment or particular provisions by the government.²⁸⁴ Due to possible public hostility, the government deployed the dispersal technique, for the first time, which sent the refugees to areas where jobs and housing were available.²⁸⁵ The government also paid great care in ensuring that the Ugandan Asians were not given preferential treatment in the allocation of Local Authority housing in comparison to white natives already on their waiting lists.²⁸⁶

The Ugandan Asian episode is comparable to the Sino-Vietnamese exodus in a few aspects: as mentioned, the conditions both groups faced were very similar. Yet their official refugee policy differed. In the Ugandan instance, resettlement of the refugees was undesirable due to public opinion and racism. Intra-party politics, on the other hand, seems to have been futile: many dissatisfied politicians voiced their opinion but failed to change policy.

The malleability of public opinion by the use of media campaigns is, however, apparent in both 1972 and 1979. This manipulation confirms that the media and the public can be guided by governmental policy. Legalities also played a large part in both refugee episodes as governments considered but failed to change national legislation. Although, that the government, in spite of negative factors against the refugees, then resettled more Ugandan Asians — around 25,000 — than Sino-Vietnamese insinuates that legalities influenced governmental policy with the Ugandan Asians to a larger extent. This is as legalities changed policy in the Ugandan Asian instance as opposed to restraining it as can be seen in the Sino-Vietnamese instance.

Conclusion

Evaluation of findings

This dissertation has, on balance, produced findings that agree with most elements of previously discussed theoretical discussions. Nonetheless, that the findings comply with many parts of many

²⁸⁴ Tony Kushner and Katharine Knox. 1999. *Refugees in an age of genocide: Global, National and Local Perspectives during the Twentieth Century*, p 282.

²⁸⁵ UKNA. T227/3601. Mr, J H Waddell. United Kingdom Passport Holders: Contingency Planning. 11 August 1972, p 2 and UKNA, T227/3601, M Widdup, UK Passport Holders: Contingency Planning (IC (72) 3). 15 August 1972, p 3.

²⁸⁶ UKNA. H2/133/53 Part 2. To Minister (Draft). Proposed Purchase by Local Authority Of Houses for Ugandan Asians, p 1.

individual theories but do not conform to any theory in totality shows how complex a process policy change is and how hard it is to simplify.

To begin the evaluation of the findings, this section will look at Phil Orchard's work first. In one sense, Orchard was right to believe that countries are contained by the norms that have been passed on to them. Although Thatcher attempted to change Britain's refugee legislation and maritime laws, her colleagues' rejection of these suggestions — as it would be seen as an embarrassment in the international community — shows that international norms do hold some significance. The same can be said for how national legislation, in the form of passports, directed refugee policy in the case of the Ugandan Asians.

However, norms were in other ways unlikely to have made much of an impression on a state motivated by national interest. Firstly we must remember that members of Heath's parliament did try to change legislation to exclude the Ugandan Asians in similar ways to Thatcher. In the case of the Kenyan Asians, the Labour government did succeed in doing so. Therefore it seems that if a state can smoothly change legislation, it will.

The same can be said for non-state norm entrepreneurs. The UNHCR, a large norm entrepreneur, did touch on state policy matters but did not notably direct British affairs. Their norms, such as the directive to aid Thailand after the Geneva Conference, only seemed to benefit those already interested in aiding Thailand. Those that were not interested, particularly the British, ignored the UNHCR's guidance. Therefore, this dissertation's findings support those that believe national interest overrides international norms. Good work can be done, however, on how international bodies direct countries with less of an initial interest in the crisis, like Sweden and the Netherlands who were driven to follow UNHCR directives.

The UNHCR's lack of success mirrored the failure of international pressure for and against Britain. That the US succeeded in international pressure during this time when Britain did not indicates that international pressure is only successful for nation-states with strong international powers. Nation-states with international powers, as seen as the US in Indochina, furthermore appear to be more likely to use refugees for international political purposes.

Those supporting the salience of public opinion will likewise feel ambivalent towards the findings. Although public opinion was used to argue for and against the resettlement of refugees, it was also incredibly malleable to the desires of the government. For instance, in the Ugandan Asian episode,

with the help of the media, the government was able to turn opinion to favour the refugees. Public opinion was therefore a factor behind decision making but not an actor or decision maker in itself. The public were also less restrictionist than theorists lead us to believe and were even expansionary in the case of the Sino-Vietnamese. Racist views, which were expected from the public, were instead expressed by Margaret Thatcher.

To follow on from this, it is worth bearing in mind how incapable Margaret Thatcher was in measuring public opinion. It was the media that were often utilised, by her colleagues, as a source of information regarding the population's desires. Although they were powerless in swaying government policy themselves, the media could have been agenda-setting for and influencing the public. It can also be argued that, as government officials were using them as sources for information, the media were agenda-setting for members of the government too. However, even if the media were agenda-setting and influencing both public and government, the lack of direct policy change as a consequence demonstrates that the agenda-setting theory and influence theory did not apply for the British in 1979.

Nevertheless, greater research needs to be carried out on the media's role concerning the change of British public opinion between 1972 — when they were hostile to Ugandan Asians — and 1979 — when they were reportedly more welcoming to the Sino-Vietnamese. Again, findings suggest that the media might have played a large role in this change. Additionally, further work is needed on the media generally during the Indochina crisis. Investigations into whether the government succeeded in its attempts to manipulate the media during the Indochina crisis would also be fruitful.

The divisions of the state must also be discussed. Firstly, that intra-politics did play a substantial role in the resettlement quota of 1979 greatly supports Ceron's work: ministers did test Thatcher's authority. That the protests of MPs during the Ugandan Asian crisis were not successful also validates Ceron's beliefs that a strong leader should be able to withstand intra-party politics. Internal politics, on the other hand, does not seem as prevalent as Bonjour's advanced theory: in 1979 it was the senior government officials who made the decisions and arguments behind the resettlement of refugees. Regardless, the fragmentation of the state needs more attention in academic work where often, with refugee policy, emphasis is on state actors as a whole rather than as individual components. In this dissertation, the state has clearly been the dominant force in changing refugee policy and has withstood outside pressures. Therefore more research has to be done on who, in the state, over time, has played the biggest part in advocating these changes.

It is important to end by commenting on the most significant aspect of the findings produced: colonial connections. These connections were understandably absent from prior discussions on policy change as they are a remnant of a certain era. However, in the case of the Indochina crisis, they were a vital influence not only on British policy but also on the policy of the French. There is a need, therefore, to highlight how a colonial relationship affects policy change. The colonial connection also established a new norm that Orchard did not highlight: the responsibility a state had to refugees from prior or current colonies. This was understood domestically and internationally with many states expecting Britain to help the Ugandans and refugees who arrived in Hong Kong.

Finally, it is even more significant to produce a more modern understanding of colonial connections. American influence in Indochina, which resulted in their military forces being stationed in the region, forged complicated relationships in the region that far surpassed the importance of a normal allegiance. Such recent developments in military history share characteristics with colonialism and clearly have a direct impact on refugee policy.

All of these findings can be used to further inform us on more recent or future refugee policy. For example, the very similar British resettlement quota, in 2015, of 20,000 Syrian refugees shares territoriality, with Thatcher's administration, as the influence behind it. This resettlement quota, David Cameron claimed, was aimed at stopping future groups from undermining the UK's borders and was consequently designed to only resettle refugees from outside of the EU.²⁸⁷ As Britain is an island detached from Europe, is not part of the Schengen agreement and no longer has any colonies, its refugee policy has now transformed to only be concerned with the British land. The future, therefore, looks blighted by a more narrow understanding of territoriality than before. Resettlement of refugees — now — only seems to be directed at stopping refugees from migrating to Britain as opposed to aiding those much further away. Those further refugees, who have no connection to the country, face a future of isolation.

Vicious Cycles

There is a need to highlight the continuity of British policy regarding immigration. With a public that has often had restrictionist elements, politicians have become accustomed to expect

²⁸⁷ Patrick Wintour "UK to take up to 20,000 Syrian refugees over five years, David Cameron confirms." 7 September 2015. *The Guardian*. Available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/07/uk-will-accept-up-to-20000-syrian-refugees-david-cameron-confirms> (accessed on 17/01/2015).

restrictionism to be the populist demand. Thus immigration becomes portrayed by political circles not as the beneficial lifeblood that feeds our society but instead as a burden. This then creates a loop as politicians pander to public restrictionism and consequently breed more restrictionism which eventually can even lead to the rise of far right parties.

In order to break this loop, the public have to reeducate themselves as to the actual realities of immigration. When public restrictionism and racism culminated with racial riots in the 1950s, immigration statistics proved that more people left the country than entered whilst BME immigration was lesser in number than white immigration. Open proliferation of such statistics would help to reduce some of the political benefits of supporting restrictionism. Similarly, there needs to be work done that confronts the public's fear that their cultural identities would be infringed upon by immigrants. This is a fickle belief most probably due to its baselessness and has been easily overcome before. If the government managed to persuade the public as to the merits of the Ugandan Asians and if the public were welcoming of the Sino-Vietnamese, ethnicity and cultural assimilation of incoming refugees should not be an insurmountable fear in the public's mind.

When it comes to refugee policy specifically, it would be beneficial to confront any implicit allocation of refugees as the responsibility of a certain government. This breeds global passivity in refugee crises. Without global proactivity and cooperation, we are once more predestined to continue repeating the same mistakes of our predecessors.

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