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The Workplace as an Arena for Identity Affirmation and Social Integration of Immigrants

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Abstract: The social integration of first generation immigrants in Norway is the main topic of this paper. If certain conditions are fulfilled, a workplace may be a key arena for identity reproduction and social integration. For some, they are a means of finding new acquaintances and having their identity affirmed. For others, they will seem closed off, and even appear as sources of social exclusion and discrediting. If we look beyond the general reasons for the absence of social relations between immigrants and hosts we may find some further explanations in the nature of the work immigrants tend to have. In this article, I focus at three mechanisms that influence their integration and identity reproduction at the workplace: a) The meanings immigrants attached to contact structures at the workplace, b) the degree of occupational displacement that immigrants experience and c) the occupational status and the status position within the workplace. Given the focus on immigrants' voices, the data is mainly gathered through qualitative interviews with them.

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1. Introduction

In Norway, many immigrants face a variety of challenges as they try to integrate into the host country. They experience marginalisation in the labour market as well as also being over-represented in marginalised areas of the host city and city suburbia.[1] This study shows that certain categories of immigrants face similar if not greater challenges in respect to becoming integrated socially in the primary networks of the host communities. Social life and social integration of immigrants and refugees has received much less attention in sociological and political debates in Norway in comparison with, for instance, a prevailing fixation on low participation in work-life, spatial segregation and their alleged lack of interest in cultural adjustment. Fortunately, there also exists a growing trend of concern amongst politicians and scientists about everyday life and social integration of

1 See BROX (1998), DJUVE and KAVLI (2000), SSB (2006).

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immigrants and refugees. It is not difficult to see how important social capital and networks are to immigrants and refugees in terms of their quality of life, and for opening up participation in other segments of society. Social contact and informal networks are, if not a precondition of incorporation, then at least a way of facilitating cultural and economic integration. Amongst certain categories of migrants, being excluded from mainstream informal networks and social life may lead to a general dissatisfaction with life in Norway. A potential consequence could be the adoption of an oppositional stance vis-à-vis the norms and culture of mainstream society (LIEN, 1997; BROX, 1998; GULLESTAD 2006). [1]

This article has a restricted focus. Firstly, I am especially in one particular dimension of the immigrant social integration process; namely, that which encompasses their experiences and strategies while they try to get identity affirmation from their Norwegian work colleagues, and while they try to enter Norwegian social networks in the workplace. Other aspects of immigrant integration, both in terms of economic and cultural integration and integration within their own ethnic community lies outside the primary scope of this study. Secondly, although there are several sources of social integration (family, relatives, children, clubs, associations, neighbourhood, etc.) in this article I focus only on the workplace as source of identity affirmation and ties with indigenous locals. [2]

Other aspects of immigrant integration, both in terms of economic and cultural integration, and integration within their own ethnic community, lie outside the primary scope of this study. It is a widespread belief that when immigrants emerge from the passivity of unemployment and start to participate in the work life of the host society, then social integration will automatically follow. I believe that participation in the work life of the host society may have important direct and indirect positive effects both on immigrant identity negotiations, and bridging to the mainstream, but only within certain contexts and conditions. In what follows, this paper argues the need for diversifying and enriching the current perspective, if we want to develop the sociological debate on integration of immigrants into a host society. [3]

2. Perspectives on the Workplace as an Arena for Social Integration

Newcomers may experience everyday life in the host society as problematic because they are insufficiently familiar with cultural codes of the host country (MILLER & STEINBERG, 1975; GUDYKUNST & KIM, 2003). A feeling of insecurity in everyday life and a sense of cultural subordination in relation to the indigenous locals may be amplified if such experiences are combined with difficulties in communication (CHRISWICK & MILLER, 2003). Immigrants and refugees may also have problems with self-presentations and experience uneasiness and inferiority in everyday life because they speak a foreign language (BARNES, 2001; KNUDSEN, 2005). Furthermore, many non-Western immigrants and refugees who resettled in Western countries may also experience uneasiness and discomfort during interactions with natives due to ethnic discrimination, stigmatisation and racism (LIEN, 1997; OYSERMAN & SWIM,

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2001; ROSS & TURNER, 2005; PORTES & RUMBAUT, 2006). Several studies show that people actively involved in the workforce also tend to be more involved in community life (PUTNAM, 2000). Those who work outside the home are exposed to a wider range of ties, while those without work become passive and withdrawn (PUTNAM, 2000). The idea that people who are active in the workforce have a better chance of making new connections and becoming involved has also been explored in discussions about how immigrants integrate into a host society. The conclusion seems to be that the degree of immigrant inclusion or exclusion is largely dependent on what paths of economic integration are open, and the level of access to work (NÆSS, 1997a; HOSSEINY-KALADJAHI, 1997). As NÆSS (1997a) points out:

> "The workplace is one of the arenas that newcomers are included and excluded from. Through work, one achieves economic independence. Exclusion from the work arena has consequences for other areas of life. The type of job may influence a person's status and prestige in society. Therefore, exclusion from work is a source of more general exclusion from society" (NÆSS, 1997a, p.33). [4]

The conventional assumption is that newcomers will meet indigenous locals at the workplace and have opportunities to learn the language as well as to establish social relationships with locals. On the other hand, several studies have suggested that jobs do not necessarily bring with them indigenous friends and paths to other areas of Norwegian mainstream society (BERG, SOLLUND & SVARVA, 1994; DJUVE & HAGEN, 1995; NÆSS, 1997a; ROGSTAD, 2000; KORAC, 2003). According to ROGSTAD (2000), immigrants often work together with their compatriots in segregated environments and seldom become integrated with the Norwegian workforce. ROGSTAD's findings are consistent with findings in other studies—for example, BORCHGREVINK's (1996) study of inter-cultural interactions at work. BORCHGREVINK (1996) argues that the situation at the workplace is, in many ways, a reflection of general tendencies within Norwegian society. The hostility and scepticism towards immigrants, as found in the host society, also carry over into ethnic segregation at the workplace.

> "Employment at the workplace is not necessarily congruent with the kind of social participation one normally associates with social integration. The job is not enough! If the work place is multicultural, this does not automatically mean that the workplace is a multicultural fellowship" (BORCHGREVINK, 1996, p. 53). [5]

Other studies, both in Norway and elsewhere, show that immigrants also experience racism at the workplace, and that there is ethnic discrimination with respect to work tasks, promotion, wages, etc. (NÆSS, 1997b; ROGSTAD, 2000; TIBE-BONIFACIO, 2005; PORTES & RUMBAUT, 2006). These experiences may reduce immigrant motivation for further contact with Norwegians at the workplace (AAKERVIK, 1992; GRØNSETH, 2006). Furthermore, most immigrants feel that friendly relations with their fellow employees remain weak relations that are anchored exclusively in the arena of work (BERG, SOLLUND & SVARVA, 1994; NILSEN, 1999). Some immigrants who establish relations with their Norwegian workmates are satisfied with these, while others are not. Those who expect

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something more from these relations are frustrated that they do not gradually become multiplex, close-knit friendships (NILSEN, 1999). Drawing on these studies we may construct several hypotheses. We may assume that work is not a key factor in achieving social integration. Nevertheless, the workplace could indeed be viewed as an important arena for social integration of immigrants, but which seldom goes beyond the formation of weak workplace ties with indigenous locals. It remains then to explore how these weak workplace ties are experienced by immigrants. It is possible to see different perspectives about workplace social relationships in the stories of my informants. We may assume that some immigrants experience that work is the only arena where they participate in continuous face-to-face contact with indigenous locals. It is also reasonable to expect that some immigrants will see the positive side of even weak ties with their Norwegian workmates. On the other hand, we cannot exclude the possibility that feelings of being stigmatised, of non-belonging and of discomfort in interactions, with Norwegian co-workers, necessarily diminish within the workplace. We cannot exclude the possibility that workplace interactions may contribute to reducing an immigrant's motivation to invest energy in external social integration. Indeed, I will argue that immigrants invest a great deal of energy to cope with misrecognition and that their identity negotiations and reconstructions of social life after resettlement should be seen in the light of their ethno-class positions. Drawing from Pierre BOURDIEU's theory, I believe that these strategies, and experiences with face-to-face interactions with their work-colleagues, are influenced by differences in *habitus* and *cultural capital* (BOURDIEU, 1995). Here, it should be noted that when I discus differences in cultural capital, I do not refer to inter-cultural differences that may be found between different ethnic groups. Cultural differences often prove to be less evident than the class differences and interpersonal ones (GRØNHAUG, 1979; SEEBERG & DAHLE, 2005; SMITH, 2005; CRANFORD, 2005; VALENTA, 2008). [6]

3. Methods and Sample

Given the focus on immigrants' voices, interpretations and subjective experiences the data is gathered mainly through qualitative interviews. Forty-three immigrants were interviewed with most of them resident in Trondheim at the time of the interviews. The data is based on information gathered from immigrants from Iraq and from former Yugoslavia (the majority originating from Bosnia). They were chosen because these groups represent some of the largest first generation immigrant groups in Norway. The oldest informant was 65 years old, while the youngest was 17. Most informants were between 30 and 45 years old. Of the 43 respondents, 21 were men and 22 were women. [7]

The selection of informants was based on observations and discussions with key informants and gatekeepers. Informants were mobilised, in the main, via key informants as well as by way of the "snowball method" where respondents were drawn from a range of different immigrant networks. The intention was to gather data about migrants representing a variety of different occupations within the Norwegian labour market, and to explore how the nature of their employment might influence social integration within the workplace. In this way it was possible

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to capture both migrants with high status workplace roles, and migrants accorded with very low status workplace situational identities. Within these two distinct sets of immigrant categories, the attempt was made to determine which informants felt strong marginalisation and misrecognition within the workplace, and which informants felt affirmation and acceptance by Norwegian work colleagues. The aim of the analysis was to explore links between workplace attachment, low status, job insecurity and opportunities for identity affirmation and social integration of immigrants. [8]

4. The Nature and Interpretations Attached to Work in Context of Contact Structures

According to several informants, loose social ties with fellow workplace employees may foster positive responses when immigrants also have informal and personal interethnic contact within the working environment as characterised by ethnic tolerance and mutual respect. Unfortunately, many of the environments in which immigrants work are far removed from this ideal situation. For several of the informants, the workplace appeared not as a welcoming, or even neutral environment, but as an arena where they felt isolated, alienated, humiliated, and marginalised. There are several factors which may explain why immigrants do not develop affirmative relationships with their Norwegian workmates. If we look beyond the general explanations for the absence of social ties between immigrants and hosts (culture, language, discrimination, etc.) we may find some further clues in the nature of the type of work in which immigrants tend to feature. In addition, we have to take into consideration the wider contextual environment within which immigrants interpret interpersonal relationships with work colleagues. [9]

The nature of the work has an impact on levels of friendliness and supportiveness in relationships amongst workplace employees. Many of the "typical immigrant" occupations in Norway (such as cleaner, newspaper deliverer, fish processor, translator, taxi driver and mother-tongue language teacher) do not provide ideal conditions for developing personal ties with work colleagues.[2] Most of the immigrants who did not feel integrated at the workplace had such "typical" occupations. Their jobs were either solitary within the organisation, or they were employed by external contractors. One informant told me:

> "I work as a taxi-driver. I meet many people when I am driving the taxi, but I actually have a lonely job. As a taxi-driver, one meets many people, but they are strangers. I am not only talking about customers. I also include other taxi-drivers. While we wait in the line, taxi-drivers sometimes speak with each other. Ties between us are weak and superficial. I do not even remember their names" (Iraqi man). [10]

Some jobs are simply not social. Although immigrants can work for several years at the same company—as taxi drivers, cleaners or newspaper deliverers—they

2 See Statistics Norway, SSB (2006) for further information on "typical immigrant occupations in Norway".

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do not always have real opportunities to meet their co-workers. The following comment provides a good illustration of this problem:

> "I have worked for several years as a newspaper deliverer. I do my job very early in the morning, while other people sleep. I am alone all the time … My job is not social. One may even say that in a way my job actually hinders me from being more social. I sleep during the day—often to noon or later. Therefore, I do not have the opportunity to participate in normal everyday social activities with my friends" (Iraqi man). [11]

It seems too that the more unstable the job, the fewer the opportunities for forming friendships. Many of the jobs occupied by my informants are part-time, and are either regulated by short-term contracts or are arranged by the local labour office. These jobs do not last long enough to give immigrants a chance of entering into the more stable, tight-knit groups of established employees:

> "I work as a teacher in four different schools, and I do not belong anywhere. It is difficult to be friendly with someone when you have to run from school to school. One has to be there all the time, like the others, if one wants to be accepted as an ordinary, full member of the group" (Bosnian woman). [12]

It is not difficult to imagine that Norwegians, as well as immigrants, when employed in similar types of work, would also experience problems in trying to develop personal ties with work colleagues. However, most Norwegians can be expected to have many other arenas for forming and maintaining personal ties with other Norwegians. For many of the immigrants in this study, the workplace represents the only available arena for developing stable acquaintanceships with Norwegians. Furthermore, I met immigrants who, in different arenas, experience ethnic discrimination, stigmatisation and racism. This category sometimes interpret the lack of contact with their Norwegian colleagues as the product of ethnic discrimination and rejection. Where a Norwegian would say—"I do not have contact with my colleagues due to the nature of my job", the respondents in this study may, at the very least exhibit an ambivalent attitude, and wonder whether such lack of contact is because s/he is foreigner, or whether there are some other underlying reasons. As one Iraqi informant pointed out: "The possibility that others may discriminate against me due to my ethnicity always exists". Within this uncertain state of alertness and anxiety, immigrants become vulnerable to all signs of possible discrediting and rejection. Within such contexts, immigrants may even misinterpret a lack of contact with their workmates and the behaviour of their work colleagues as discriminatory, even where this was not the case.[3] [13]

3 See VALENTA and BERG (2003), VALENTA (2008).

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5. Occupational Misplacement

In short, we may say that workplace ties and contact structures often do not provide immigrants with favourable conditions for developing friendly relationships with Norwegians. If friendships are to develop, the workplace must provide the opportunity for developing such relationships. Nevertheless, a favourable contact structure is sometimes not enough. Even those immigrants who worked at places with favourable contact structures (in the sense of having a stable job contract, the possibility of frequent, informal and personal face-to-face interactions with co-workers over longer periods of time, etc.) sometimes experienced a sense of being outsiders within their own workplace. For several reasons, these respondents could not associate and identify with the social environment of their workplace. Among other things, immigrants did not "fit in" because of their cultural capital, habitus, human resources and occupational misplacement (BOURDIEU, 1995; TOMLINSON, 2003; CHISWICK & MILLER, 2003). [14]

When I refer to occupational misplacement, this relates primarily to cases where an immigrant's human capital and occupation in their country of origin is highly incongruent with their present occupation in the receiving country (CHISWICK & MILLER, 2003). It seems that occupational misplacement is especially problematic for the social integration of immigrants at work when it leads to social class-related displacements. Although many of the informants brought with them a great deal of human capital (in terms of higher education and work experience), they did not attain the same positions in Norway as they had in their country of origin. In such cases, migration resulted in brain waste. Among the informants, there were individuals who had occupied high profile positions in their home country (such as company directors, doctors, judges, lawyers, engineers, politicians, etc.). Some had found work in part-time blue-collar jobs, or were employed in low-status service occupations (such as waiting tables, cleaning, assisting at nurseries or driving taxis). Such occupational degradation led to bitterness among the people themselves, and increased their sensitivity to misrecognition by co-workers. Moreover, it also hindered their identification with the social environment at work, as illustrated below:

> "I am not a snob, but my colleagues and I do not have the same interests. I found that we could not be friends. I am highly educated and have travelled a lot. They are simple people. Their perspective is very restricted. I am used to having serious discussions about politics, literature and art. They are not. I have never had much in common with such people, because our usage of time is quite different. Nor did I socialise much with such people in my own country either" (Bosnian man). [15]

The sociological literature reminds us that social class is an important determinant of group identification and of particular cultural patterns of behaviour, consumption and lifestyle (BOURDIEU, 1995). People who are in approximately the same social class have similar conceptions of reality and lifestyle (TOMLINSON, 2003). They may also share similar tastes and interests. All of this makes them feel "comfortable" with each other. Several immigrants in this study came from a middle class background. Due to occupational displacement, and

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the accompanying class displacement, their habitus and cultural capital were not compatible with those of the people they had to socialise with at work. All of this made some of them feel uncomfortable with their co-workers. These individuals were not especially interested in developing friendships with their Norwegian work-mates: on the contrary, they preferred to differentiate themselves from them. [16]

It is well-known that members of different classes and social groups often attempt to distance themselves in this way (BOURDIEU, 1995). In situations where former class distinctions cannot be supported by occupational positions in the present, the relative value of class-related cultural capital, lifestyle and taste as tools for separation and class identification may increase. In such situations, referring to their social background and cultural capital may seem, to immigrants, as the only means available to them for redefining minority/majority relations. One informant said:

> "I do not like to offend my work-colleagues, but sometimes I have to respond. Although they are really shallow and undereducated, they think that they are better than us … Sometimes, they are embarrassed when I show them how ignorant they are" (Bosnian man). [17]

Because of the combination of occupational displacement and devaluation, it may be especially important for immigrants to emphasise sophisticated middle-class tastes and lifestyles. I observed several situations where class and ethnicity were negotiated between immigrants and their Norwegian counterparts. Especially in contexts where immigrants felt devalued because of their ethnic background, the need emerged to actualise what they thought were the more favourable aspects of their social identity. At the same time, such redefinitions of relations (from ethnic to class relations) and gestures towards distinction may be seen by Norwegian workmates as unsympathetic and snobbish forms of behaviour. These processes contribute to isolating immigrants who are in positions of extreme occupational misplacement from their Norwegian workmates. Immigrants then sought out elsewhere, those they identified as representing their own class. However, in relation to indigenous locals, it was rare to encounter any opportunities to meet and become familiar with people from their own social class and operate on equal terms., Thus, these immigrants often ended up finding them from among their compatriots. [18]

6. Situational Identities, Social Identities and Ethno-Class Position

Composite identities are made up of different intersecting positions (such as race, class, gender, etc.), according to which people assume their multiple positions (WERBNER & MODOOD, 1997). Immigrants who achieved a superior status position within the workplace were in a favourable position. These statuses and the roles connected with them help such immigrants in their self-presentations and in gaining social recognition within the working environment. In addition, their socioeconomic position helps in acquiring recognition within their personal networks—as well as outside a direct work context. Occupational position influences different aspects of an individual's identity because it contributes to

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defining his or her status and role in everyday life. The position of the immigrant within the occupational hierarchy of Norwegian society may have an effect on his or her situational identity, but it may also locate the person in a social space which is much broader and longer lasting than any particular situation. The occupational position of the immigrant may, in other words, also have an impact on his or her social identity. The higher the prestige of status symbols an immigrant has in his arsenal, the better the possibility for identity negotiation in interactions with indigenous locals.

> "It was much easier to speak with Norwegians after I reached these positions. As a result, I am more self-confident … I feel that they look at me with different eyes … They are more interested in me. I also feel that it is easier to approach them" (Iraqi man).
>
> "I take the initiative more often than they do, but this is how I am. They still have a lot to learn about friendship. However, I never feel that my company is undesirable. I have much more to offer them than they can offer me … For some of those I work with, I am actually their superior. I am sure that this fact is more important to them than the fact that I am a foreigner—at least as long as we are at work" (Bosnian man).
>
> "Of course my occupational status makes me more self-confidant in conversations with Norwegians … People used to introduce me by saying where I work. People used to start conversations by asking where I came from and what I did … If you feel that they look down at you because of your ethnic origin, you can always tell then what you do for a living" (Bosnian woman). [19]

The occupational status of an immigrant can be combined and contrasted with another otherwise dominant aspect of their social identity (i.e. their ethnic identity). As the above immigrant suggested, one may use occupational identity more actively in order to "premptively challenge" a potentially stigmatised reaction to ethnic identity. The multiple characters of identity and its fragmentation between different segments of social life lead immigrants to be constantly involved in such identity-negotiations. Although immigrants do not, for example, play the role of doctors or engineers outside of their job, the status of their educational and occupational background may be used by them as symbolic capital in different social and relationship contexts. [20]

It has to be noted here that occupational statuses sometimes lose their force if they are not reproduced though role practice. An ex-player of a particular role may refer to the high status of the role which s/he previously played, but the effect will not be the same if, because of migration, the former status is disconnected from role-play and networks normally attached to a particular status. One Bosnian dentist said:

> "My workmates use to introduce me sometimes to other people by saying my name and that I used to be a dentist. It is humiliating. I would reply that I was still a dentist … I was not the unqualified nursing assistant that they wanted me to be … I actually had a longer education and more working experience than they had, but because

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> their dentist profession is protected from international competition, I was downgraded." [21]

One Iraqi medical practitioner who experienced loss of occupational status reported the following:

> "When I lived in Iraq, everyone addressed me as doctor … People used to do that both at work and outside, in the local community. Here, I took some courses, but I do not do the work I am professionally qualified for. If I even say to someone that I actually am a doctor, this means nothing. They do not believe me, or they think that Iraqi doctors are not good as Norwegian ones ... Yes, my compatriot friends and acquaintances address me as doctor. They knew who I was in our home country and what this means." [22]

Immigrants with high human capital who regained their high occupational position after resettlement were in a totally different position than the immigrants portrayed above. The high-level professions of these immigrants strengthened relationships between them and their Norwegian work-colleagues. In their case, the redefinition of ethnic relations into class relations, or relations based on a common professional background, helped integrate these immigrants into the social life at work. I participated in meetings at different workplaces and observed informal interactions where, by actualising middle-class values and aspects of behaviour shared in common, immigrants made their hosts receptive to the notion that they were all on the same side when it came to lines of class distinction. Emphasising similarities in their middle-class lifestyles and tastes served to demonstrate that they were closer to their Norwegian colleagues than were other Norwegians who did not share this cultural capital and habitus. In fact, I heard first hand from several Norwegians that they felt they had more in common with "Boris" or "Sanela" (i.e. immigrants who, like them, were researchers, doctors or engineers, etc.) than with Norwegian trades workers such as "plumber" or "carpenter". [23]

7. Getting a Proper Job: "Winners and Losers"

In short, it is possible to argue that access to work does not necessarily lead to social affirmation and integration of immigrants. Nevertheless, the workplace can be a crucial arena for identity reproduction and social integration, on the condition that the immigrant succeeds in getting a proper job. In cases where immigrants established a permanent and secure anchorage as well as a good position at their workplace, the job was not only an opportunity to gain economic resources, but it also conferred social benefits. Immigrants with substantial human capital, who regained their social positions after resettlement, were in the best position. Several of the Bosnian informants fall into this category having regained their former positions as academics, doctors, and engineers. [24]

One of the reasons why Bosnians regained their former positions in the Norwegian labour market may be their human capital. The most educated informants in the study were from Bosnia. Moreover, it was easier for the

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Bosnians to have their education and credentials recognised by the Norwegian authorities than it was for the Iraqis. It would then seem natural, and to be expected, that the most successful informants, in terms of their achievements in the labour market, were found amongst the Bosnians. It is not difficult to imagine that life is less complicated and more comfortable for those who work as a doctor, engineer or researcher, than for whose who work as cleaner, paper-boy or taxi driver. In cases where immigrants regained their former prestigious occupational status, the resultant occupational identity made their life easier, partly due to the function of occupation as a source of identification. In other words, the type of roles played were "respectable" ones. Further, not only could they show themselves more favourably in workplace interactions with Norwegian colleagues, but also in other areas of everyday life—beyond the confines of their working environment. The hosts tended to consider these immigrants as unique individuals or, at the very least, as exceptional members of their otherwise stigmatised ethnic group. As a consequence, such immigrants were also more motivated to engage in external networking. [25]

In contrast to the above, there are also those immigrants whose situational identity at the workplace is based on very low status roles. This category is placed in a problematic ethno-class position which does not provide them with favourable opportunities for identity negotiation. In extreme cases, they risk dual discrediting: both as potentially stigmatised foreigners (ethnic stigmatisation) and as members of the lowest strata within the labour market (class related stigmatisation). Some of these immigrants came to Norway with little in the way of human capital and ended up in unstable, unskilled and low paid jobs. They sometimes had a similar social background as their Norwegian peers at work. Nevertheless, their class-based habitus could not help them transcend the perceived cultural differences and prejudices held by their Norwegian peers unlike the case of immigrants who achieved high positions in the Norwegian labour market. [26]

Also identified amongst the immigrant sample population was a sub-group, already familiarised from their homeland with Western/globalised middle-class cultural capital and habitus. This group could not only refer to their former high position and professional success as something which they shared in common with their Norwegian peers at work, but also had a distinctive middle class taste, etiquette and knowledge about music, books, fashion, food, and wine, etc. that they shared with their "Norwegian equals". However, in terms of less well educated immigrants working in low status occupations, the results of this study suggest that they are primarily viewed through an "ethnic lens" and are excluded from worker solidarity based on shared occupation and/or class position.[4] [27]

Other immigrants were engaged primarily in work that brought them both distinction and frustration, arising out of occupational displacement. Immigrants who had substantial human capital, but who experienced a huge loss of status and occupational/class misplacement in Norway, belonged to a group that was

4 See CARLI (1993), NÆSS (1997b), GRØNHAUG (1979), VALENTA (2008).

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especially frustrated. As shown above, informants pointed to a lack of respect and acknowledgement in terms of their former occupational positions and qualifications after resettlement. Their sense of who they were contrasted strongly with how others saw them, and this also isolated them from their workmates. We may say that their occupation contributed in a negative manner to their already problematic social identity. [28]

As I noted, several of the Bosnian informants secured prominent occupational positions. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that not all Bosnians had the same workplace experience. It was among Bosnians that the most extreme examples of occupational misplacement were found. Bosnians with certain academic qualifications and occupations, such as engineers, nurses and doctors, easily regained their positions in Norway, while economists, dentists, lawyers and judges (to take some examples) had problems having their education and former professions recognized in Norway. Due to their ethno-class position in Norway, the latter category had fewer favourable opportunities for self-presentation within the workplace. [29]

8. Conclusions

Some arenas help immigrants to attain recognition while others may promote feelings of non-belonging, exclusion and stigma. Immigrants are granted access into certain arenas, while others remain closed. Since work is the central arena in the lives of many immigrants, and the place where most of their everyday interactions occur, exploring immigrant relationships with indigenous co-workers was a central focus of this paper. [30]

Being excluded from the workforce may not only have negative consequences for their economic prosperity, but may also foster discontent about their social life and social identities. Contrary to conventional opinions about work being the solution to all of an immigrant's problems, it is argued here that while work may be an important source of stable ties with indigenous locals and positive identity reproduction, such outcomes can only be achieved when certain conditions are fulfilled. Otherwise, immigrants may still be excluded from social life in the workplace. The workplace is not always an arena that promotes the development of interethnic relations. Some immigrants experience the workplace as a source of humiliation and exclusion, while others experience it as a source of personal confirmation and inclusion. Acquiring a "proper job" (incorporating long-term employment, a good working environment, and a prominent structural position within the job arena) may indeed enable immigrants to establish stable good personal relationships with their Norwegian workmates. [31]

The workplace is not the arena where people form their best friendships and not an important factor in terms of leisure-time friendships. As with most other people, immigrants do not meet their closest friends at work: rather, it is primarily weak ties that are established in this context. Nevertheless, weak ties developed with people at work may be an important source for social affirmation and identity reproduction. In cases where immigrants have opportunities to reproduce positive

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identities in workplace interactions, it can be of little significance when such relationships are restricted to the workplace environment; to the immigrant they may represent the most important (and often the only) bridges to Norwegian mainstream society. The acquisition of favourable roles and statuses connected to work has an impact on social identity, irrespective of whether the person is part of the indigenous or immigrant population. In the case of "low status immigrants and refugees", however, attaining favourable social positions at work in the receiving society may have a higher relative importance. Since certain kinds of work bestow a positive class-status on the immigrant, s/he may improve their social identity which can compensate for an otherwise stigmatised ethnic identity. [32]

By getting a "proper job", both immigrants and refugees extend the possibilities they have for bridging and identity reproduction. The symbolic value associated with prominent occupational position may be used in identity negotiations outside the workplace. While some immigrants and refugees experience no barrier to regaining former occupational status, but nevertheless encounter prejudice directed at their ethnicity, others are forced to struggle with both aspects of stigmatisation, i.e. class and ethnicity. The high social status attached to certain professions may give an immigrant better opportunities for successful self-presentation, as well as increasing self-confidence during interactions with indigenous locals. Alternatively, a low status job, characterised by short-term contracts and a hostile working environment, can have a detrimental effect on an immigrant's self-image. In this way, the negative impact of ethnic discrediting undermines confidence in self-presentation and reduces motivation to socialise with Norwegians outside of the job arena. As we have seen, employment in the form of temporary contracts in less desirable, low status occupations does not provide the best context for reconstructing immigrant identities and social life after resettlement. Even where immigrants and their Norwegian work-colleagues make a conscious choice not to avoid one another, and to get to know each other better, developing relationships is difficult in the absence of a proper social arena where people with similar interests can interact meaningfully without endangering the self-respect of one or the other. [33]

In this article, I focused on the internal logic of social life after resettlement. This is not to suggest that the social integration of immigrants is somehow disconnected from the broader social contexts to which their migration is related. Although there are differences in informant experience, it can be reasonably argued that most of the respondents had to reconstruct their social lives in Norway within a problematic social context. For example, even those who regained favourable occupational positions still had to deal with ethnic stigmatisation. Their experiences should be compared with the realities of indigenous locals and newcomers who re-establish in countries that are more pluralistically oriented, multicultural and diverse than Norway. More importantly, the experiences of the immigrants who participated in this study need to be compared with the experiences of other immigrants. For instance, those who are less stigmatised, or those who Norwegians perceive to be more similar in terms of, for example, culture, religion, etc. Such variety within the sample would enable

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us to distinguish in more systematic ways between influences connected to class, ethnic identities and contact structure at the workplace. [34]

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