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## **Developing an Independent Anti-Racist Model for Asylum Rights Organising in England**

### **Abstract**

Since the mid 1990s third sector professionals and organisations have come under increasing pressure to help enforce restrictive and punitive policies toward refugees and asylum seekers. This paper presents one response, using an empirical case study to develop a new 'Independent Anti-Racist Model' for asylum rights organising. This uses data from a three-year study comparing four organisations in a major city in England. The study data is combined with reflections on the author's own experience as an active participant in the case study organisation, contextualized in the literature. The paper identifies a related set of features distinguishing this model from other types of organisation and the conditions making it possible and concludes that this model offers wider lessons for work with groups in a conflictual relationship with the state.

### **Keywords**

refugees; community mobilizing; community development; social movements; collectivism; internationalism

## **Introduction**

This paper responds to critiques suggesting that where British state policies and practices jeopardise the interests of refugees, as I call all those who seek asylum<sup>1</sup>, many third sector professionals have limited ability to intervene, in some cases even aiding the state's agenda (Hayes, 2005, Briskman and Cemlyn, 2005, Griffiths et al., 2005). This paper uses a case study of an organisation demonstrating an alternative approach that overcomes these limitations, to develop an 'Independent Anti-Racist Model' (IARM) for asylum rights organising. The presentation of a model, understood as a 'simplified framework of key variables', follows the use of models by community practitioners to 'get a "handle" on the situations, processes and systems they have to deal with' (Henderson, 2007: 10), and supports generalisation to other contexts.

The paper begins by using a discussion of the literature to consider the conditions facing refugees and the third sector organisations who work with them. This is followed by an outline of the research the model is based on. The paper then considers the main features of the IARM, including: a value base of collectivism and internationalism; anti-racism as the main principle of membership; a participatory democratic structure; politicized community mobilisation as the main form of action; and financial independence from the state and official funders. I conclude by analysing the conditions that made this model viable in a particular time and place and considering wider implications.

## **The 'right to asylum': theory and practice**

Britain is a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees, representing a commitment to rights of entry and settlement for foreign nationals on the basis of a universalist claim to safety from persecution (Kundnani, 2007: 24). This contradicts the priority given to private wealth, or

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the stigmatisation associated with the term 'asylum seeker', I use 'refugee' to encompass everyone who comes to Britain seeking refuge (as does WILLIAMS, L. 2006 'Social networks of refugees in the United Kingdom: tradition, tactics and new community spaces', *Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 32, no. 5, pp. 865-879.).

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in its absence labour market demand, as a basis for settlement within neoliberal policies guiding British governments since the 1990s (Chinweizu and Jameson, 2008, Morris, 2007: 46). Asylum claims are particularly problematic where the British state is directly or indirectly involved in situations creating refugees, of which the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are only the most obvious (Schuster, 2002, Kundnani, 2007, *author's book in press*). These contradictions are reflected in a decision-making process for asylum claims that is fair in theory but in practice weighted heavily against refugees (BID, 2009). In the first quarter of 2010, 76 per cent of asylum applications were refused, in a context where 93 per cent of applications for other forms of settlement during the same period were granted (Home Office, 2010).

Since the late 1990s, the British government has introduced a series of measures making refugees' lives increasingly difficult. Between 1997-2010 immigration detention facilities expanded to a capacity of over 3,000, among the largest in Europe, with the most common category of detainees in 2010 people who had sought asylum (Silverman, 2011). Outside detention, refugees without status must sign regularly at Immigration Reporting Centres or police stations, increasing a sense of criminalisation. In 1999 a 'dispersal' programme began, further isolating refugees by moving them to another city often just when they were starting to form new relationships (Hynes, 2009). The main justification was that too many refugees in one place would fuel racism, an argument which implicitly blames ethnic minorities themselves for the racism they face, and points toward assimilationist solutions (Kundnani, 2007: 81-3). Access to many statutory welfare services was removed, to be replaced by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), with payments for destitute refugees without status 30 per cent below minimum unemployment benefits for British citizens and initially given in the form of stigmatising vouchers only redeemable for food (Grady, 2004: 135-8, Sales, 2002). In 2002 a new law prohibited most refugees without status from taking paid work, reinforcing dependency on state benefits. The government claims these measures' purpose is to reduce Britain's attraction as a comfortable destination for people falsely claiming to be refugees (Borjas and Crisp, 2005: 75). Yet in the face of substantial evidence that most refugees have little information about welfare entitlements in Britain before their arrival (Bloch and Schuster,

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2005: 116-17, Crawley, 2010: 26), it seems more likely the purpose is to pressure refugees already in Britain to leave 'voluntarily'.

Alongside dispersal, voluntary sector organisations specifically targeting refugees grew in number and geographical spread (WLRI, 2005). In many dispersal areas little preparatory work was done. Voluntary sector organisations, churches and RCOs (Refugee Community Organisations) had to respond quickly (Hewitt, 2002: 7), creating pressure toward a narrow focus on service provision and partnerships with the local state. Briskman and Cemlyn (2005) conducted interviews with a range of asylum teams and voluntary agencies, finding:

a mixed picture among those with government funding between maintaining independence and advocacy on behalf of asylum-seekers' rights, and becoming enmeshed in managing an unsatisfactory situation. (Briskman and Cemlyn, 2005: 719)

While many professionals were, and are, driven by personal and professional values to support refugees, they increasingly found themselves called on to act as a second line of immigration control, policing access to resources (Hayes, 2005: 191-2, Kundnani, 2009: 32). Even among RCOs, overtly critical voices were often sidelined as organisations were drawn into the requirements of funding regimes reliant on the state (Griffiths et al., 2005: 22-3). This is the context which led CAMP's founders to believe a new organisation was necessary, one free to defend refugees' interests even to the point of open confrontation with the state, and that leads me to conclude the model carries wider relevance.

### **Case study background and methodology**

This paper draws on a study from 2007-2010 funded by the Economic and Social Research Council in a major British city receiving refugees without status under the dispersal system. Many refugees were housed in working class areas with few ethnic minority people already resident, and some in areas scheduled for demolition and boarded up, where break-ins, fires and serious racial attacks were common.

The study investigated relationships between experiences, consciousness and voluntary activity among refugees and included a cross-case analysis of four third sector organisations

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that involved refugees as members/volunteers. The nature of the total refugee population in Britain as a 'hidden population' limits the utility of purely statistical methods and increases the relevance of case studies (Esterhuizen, 2004: 10). The sample was constructed to include organisations founded in 2006 or earlier and still in existence in 2008, with a range of relationships to the state and covering a range of activities. Heterogeneity of cases created possibilities for both replication and contrast (Yin, 2003: 46-53). Organisations are indicated by anonymized acronyms: VOL, a voluntary sector project delivering contracts for the Home Office; COM, a community advice and signposting project established by refugees; CHUR, a church-based project delivering signposting, advice and hardship support; and CAMP, an asylum rights campaign group which forms the basis for the IARM. Data included transcripts of twenty-four in-depth semi-structured interviews and two focus groups involving eighteen refugees, contextualized through background interviews with five managers and twelve other professionals (for full details of the research methodology see *reference removed for anonymity*). The direct quotations in this paper are from interviews with six members of CAMP who were refugees, most without status, who I interviewed from 2008-2010. Some were sought out because they played a leading role in the organisation, others volunteered when I announced my research at one of CAMP's monthly General Meetings. The refugees I interviewed in CAMP were all women, from six different African countries, and had arrived in Newcastle from 2000-2008. I also draw on a book chapter (Banks, 2007), which discusses CAMP under the pseudonym ASN, using interview and focus group data I was commissioned to gather in 2006 before I began my own study. Banks uses CAMP to illustrate aspects of the Critical Community Practice (CCP) model discussed below.

This paper goes beyond both the 2007-2010 study and Banks' book chapter, by also reflecting on my involvement as a CAMP member from 2006-2012. I take a committed approach, siding unequivocally with refugees in their struggle to remain in Britain and meet their needs. I also took definite positions within the sometimes fiercely contested debates on CAMP's strategy and tactics. My 'insider-outsider' position offers insights otherwise unavailable, and calls for a reflexive approach. My work is informed by a Marxist understanding

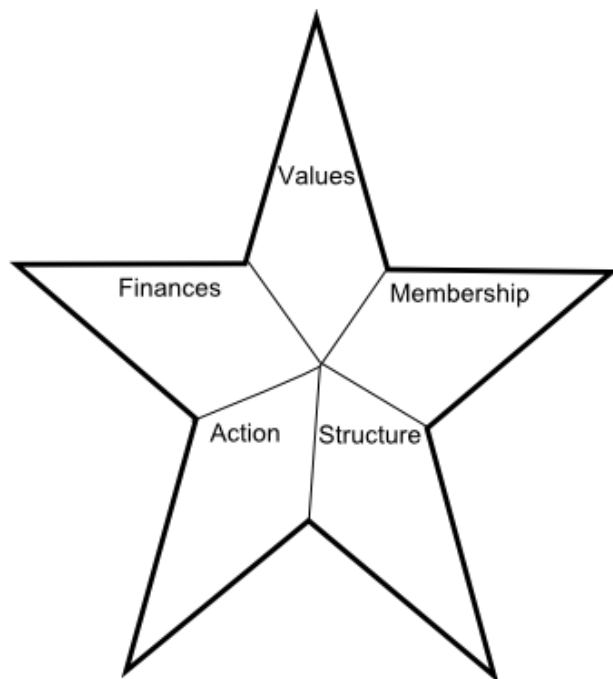
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of the relationship between social divisions and ideas. Marxism demonstrates the ideological role of liberal claims to 'objectivity', in representing the ideas arising from one set of class interests as an absolute truth. I argue there are different kinds of knowledge beneficial or dangerous to the interests of different classes, whose members possess different capacities to propagate their kind of knowledge (Marx and Engels, [1845] 1991: 64; Bukharin, [1921] 1969: 9-10). I make no claims to objectivity, but aim to make my subjective position clear to enable the reader to engage critically with the account I present. By articulating a perspective of radical political action often missing from discussions of the range of activity in the third sector, I aim to contribute to a fuller understanding of the world, as part of what Sandra Harding calls 'strong objectivity' (Hirsh and Olson, 1995).

### **Findings and Discussion: Distinctive features of the model**

CAMP was established following a regional meeting organized by a national anti-deportation network in autumn 2005. At this meeting, a member of a national communist organisation proposed establishing a local network to campaign for asylum rights. This brought together a small group of individuals who organized a series of meetings, leading to the formal founding of CAMP in early 2006. From 2006-2010 a combination of features distinguished CAMP from other contemporary organisations, providing a basis for theorising an Independent Anti-Racist Model for asylum rights organising (IARM). Figure 1 outlines the dimensions of the model, which will be explored below. These emerged through a cross-case comparison of the four organisations in my study, as key points of difference that enabled the production of a typology. The dimensions produced through this analysis are similar to those adopted in the Critical Community Practice model (CCP) proposed by Butcher et al. (2007), although the two models are not identical, and neither is IARM a variant of CCP simply adapted to the asylum rights context. However, they are close enough that comparison helps to clarify IARM's particular features and strengthen generalisation to other contexts.

Figure 1: Dimensions of the IARM



The main elements of the CCP and the IARM broadly map onto each other: IARM's 'Values' relate to the CCP's 'critical theorizing'; the basis for 'Membership' in anti-racism represents a form of 'critical consciousness' in the CCP; the focus on 'Structure' in the IARM relates to the facilitation of 'critical reflection' in the CCP; and 'Action' in the IARM corresponds to 'critical action' in the CCP. An additional fifth dimension in the IARM, 'Finances', reflects the higher priority attached to the material basis of social relations in this model compared to the CCP.

*Values: Internationalism and collectivism*

Although not discussed explicitly within CAMP, the theoretical assumptions of the CCP could all be read as implicitly informing the work of CAMP, including: the importance of human sociality; the potential for purposive collective action; the social construction of society and social institutions and therefore their capacity for change; and the potential for all members of society to participate in decision-making (Butcher, 2007: 53-6). However, CAMP went beyond these generalizations to also address specific structures and processes shaping refugees'



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experiences of flight and settlement, and the implications of people's and institutions' position within the international capitalist system.

Internationalism underpinned CAMP's work, linking the British government's treatment of refugees within Britain to its overseas interests and foreign policy. This was expressed in CAMP's literature, such as the following excerpts from a press release in 2008:

Husband and wife ... have already lost all trace of three of their children ... as a result of the conflict in their home country of Nigeria. Now the family are faced with deportation ... with their last remaining daughter ... Nigerian armed groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) have been battling western oil companies and the British- and US-backed government for control of the country's resources ... [CAMP] opposes the racist and degrading treatment of this and every asylum seeking family by the current Labour Government. While families continue to be dragged from their homes, into detention centres and onto planes against their will then we will continue to oppose and expose the shameful actions of the Home Office on the streets and in the media

Arguments making the connection between British foreign policy interests and black people's experiences within Britain have a long history in anti-racist critiques that point to structural as well as cultural factors in racialized inequalities (e.g. Ahmad and Atkin, 1996, Dominelli, 1997, Craig, 2007), but have often been missing in anti-deportation campaigns, RCOs and the wider refugee sector. These ideas were introduced by sections of CAMP's membership, including: British communists; refugees who had been part of movements opposing governments close to the British government, in countries such as the DRC and Cameroon; refugees who had experienced direct military intervention by Britain, in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan; and refugees who were part of national liberation struggles, for example Kurds from Turkey.

A second principle underpinning CAMP's work was the identification of individual interests with a wider collective, as one member explained:

Everyone there in CAMP is there for everybody, if anybody is snatched, we stand up for each other, so it's ... a kind of solidarity ... that's what I like about it

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Public actions focussing on individuals were generally limited to 'emergency' situations of impending deportation. A focus group in 2006 found 'some areas of disagreement and debate over the balance of the work of the group between campaigning work (including demonstrations) and support for individuals (legal and moral support, as well as material support in terms of finance, childcare and accommodation)' (Banks, 2007: 82). The relationship of the individual to the collective was a recurring issue of discussion within CAMP, but was not necessarily a contradiction. Some CAMP members I interviewed described how public defence of collective interests, embodied in opposition to all deportations, combined with a close attention to individuals' experiences, perspectives and abilities, as one member explained:

[Another organization] are more strategic ... if something happens to an asylum seeker or a black person on the street, there is nothing that [the organization] can do for that particular case, they can only go to the person and say you have to be more careful ... I think CAMP is more personal, [in] the sense that we have the power to go to the person ... and people are able to come and talk to us

Another member described the opportunity to share experiences with others in a similar situation as one of their main motivations for joining CAMP:

One friend ... told me that [at CAMP meetings] I will meet people in [the] same situation, so that's why I started going, you know when you share, you feel a little bit of relief, instead of just staying at home and keeping everything inside

As Takhar (2011: 347) puts it, 'It is the identification with a collective identity which allows for the personal empowerment of both parties in this social relationship'. In CAMP, a close relationship between the personal and the political was actively nurtured through an open format in meetings, sufficiently flexible to enable individuals to bring personal issues to the group, to become part of a collective process through discussion linked to action. Such practices can transform individual day-to-day experiences of oppression into new forms of consciousness, which build solidarity and stimulate resistance (Hill Collins, 1990).

Internationalism and identification with collective interests distinguish CAMP from the other organizations in my study, who largely limited their criticisms of the British state to its

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actions within Britain, and approached refugees as individualized 'service users' or 'clients'. In this respect, CAMP is also distinct from many other anti-deportation campaigns. One of the most prominent national anti-deportation networks in Britain in recent years has tended to avoid mention of Britain's involvement in countries refugees flee, on the basis that this might undermine support from British politicians (personal correspondence). It has also focused overwhelmingly on individual cases, although more recently this has shown signs of changing as a result of the increasing use of charter flights (Statewatch, 2003), which makes the collective character of deportations more difficult to ignore. Some campaigners criticized CAMP's emphasis on collective struggle as leaving individual refugees vulnerable. However, it might be argued that given the British government's power and global interests, internationalist collective struggle offers an important basis for opposing its policies. In CAMP these values provided an effective basis for mobilizations over a sustained period, by people from many different countries, which helped to stop the deportation of a number of individuals, as well as contributing to longer term political pressure and public awareness. The priority given to opposing *all* deportations also prevented any section of CAMP from being drawn in to participate in defining 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' migrants, as occurred in France in the 1990s as a result of human rights associations' focus on the regularization of individuals' status (Nicholls, 2011: 14-17).

#### *Membership: An anti-racist alliance*

CAMP operated as a political alliance between groups and individuals committed to defending rights to asylum, within a broader framework of anti-racism. This approach brought together refugees without status (the majority of the active membership from 2006-2010), refugees with status, experienced non-refugee activists with a range of communist, anarchist and social democratic perspectives, and other non-refugees who became politicized through contact with asylum rights issues. This diversity of backgrounds provided CAMP with lessons from previous social movements, from many different countries, and connected members to networks

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through which they mobilized support, including people, financial resources, skills, legal knowledge and publicity, as one member described:

In CAMP we are mixing, and British people ... have some experience about the country where we're living ... we don't know all the ways this country [works]

Anti-racism provided a dynamic alternative to the essentializing tendencies of identity politics, similar to the uniting principle of 'radical democratic citizens' proposed by Emejulu (2011) as a response to the construction of 'women' as a basis for unity in some contemporary feminisms. It formed the basis for alliances combining the resources and local knowledge of British activists with the mobilising ability of migrant communities based on strong internal ties, a combination which has been a recurring feature of migrant rights movements in many countries (Nicholls, 2011: 3).

CAMP's heterogeneous membership also created tensions. Members had different understandings of the causes of problems the organization was trying to address, which led to different strategies. In contrast to anti-fascist alliances, whose focus on groups and individuals at the margins of society often blurs political differences (Lentin, 2004: 204), CAMP's focus on the racism of the British state, at the centre of British society, sharpened differences. While communist members viewed the struggle for asylum rights as ultimately unwinnable without a wider struggle for revolutionary change, for some other members 'their concern [was] essentially reformist – to be able to impress upon the British authorities the ways in which the system is not working for them, and seeking improvements in childcare, education, housing and the legal processes' (Banks, 2007: 87). These political differences were complex and shifting, and cut across the divide between refugees and British activists. Anti-racism formed an important unifying factor, and as with the organization in Bailey's (2012) research, members' 'commitment to the wider cause, as well as their strong emotional ties, support[ed] their participation in shared activities beyond difference and occasional tensions' (Bailey, 2012 : 861). Differences were usually negotiated through dialogue, facilitated by the democratic structures discussed below. One episode involving serious divisions occurred in 2007, when British anarchists and social democrats attempted to pass motions that would have excluded

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communists from membership because of their collective form of organization. This led to long debates, which while democratic were seen by some members as a diversion from the organization's aims, leading to a drop in active membership which it took the organization nearly a year to recover from. During a later period, the chair of CAMP, herself a refugee without status at the time of the interview, reported frustration that some members raised things privately that they thought should change in CAMP, but would not raise them in a meeting:

For me [the challenge is] how to get asylum seekers more involved, and to also know that they have some power ... people talk to me ... if they want to complain about something, [but] they get discouraged very easily ... nobody can guess what asylum seekers want, unless they are there and they [say what they want]

This account illustrates the complex power relations within such diverse alliances, calling for both open democratic structures and political values to inform an ongoing effort to build the capacity of all members to participate actively and to be alert to the emergence of oppressive processes within the organization.

Among the other organizations in my study, VOL shared the involvement of refugees and non-refugees at all levels, while COM was run almost entirely by refugees, with the exception of occasional student placements. CHUR exhibited a clear separation between white British, paid professionals and a small number of unpaid refugees, mostly doing translation work. More widely, CAMP's character as an anti-racist alliance involving significant proportions of refugees and non-refugees distinguished it from types including: organizations with memberships based around an immigration category or national origin (for example the African women's group in Bailey, 2012); solidarity organizations supporting refugees without involving them as core members (for example the 'rights organizations' in Nicholls, 2011); or approaches which explicitly place people in different organizations by immigration status (for example the separate organization of migrants and their supporters in Anderson, 2010).

*Structure: Participatory democracy*

CAMP organized in a way intended to maximize participation in decision-making by the whole membership. Structures shifted over time, in response to the changing context, size of membership, and reflection and discussion among members. In the initial period, open organising meetings took place every two weeks, with anyone attending entitled to vote. By the time the organization approached its first anniversary, it became clear these meetings were too large to complete organizational tasks effectively, and at the same time too frequent for many members to maintain their attendance. In response to this, the format was changed to weekly organising meetings and a monthly General Meeting, with the latter retaining the power to make strategic decisions. At various times, working groups were created to enable members to become more closely involved in areas of particular interest.

Although this open organising structure allowed a high degree of participation, it presented difficulties ensuring key tasks were completed. In many RCOs, the pressure on refugees as clients, volunteers and staff can lead to organizational instability (Evelyn Oldfield Unit, 2004: 7). Similarly for CAMP, the insecure personal circumstances of many members both made an open and fluid structure important, in order to provide the opportunity to contribute to decisions when they were able and to withdraw when they were not, and created problems, as the individuals attending meetings could change significantly from week to week and month to month. Nationality-based community dynamics added to this; in the first year of CAMP's existence, first Iranian, then Congolese, then Eritrean, then Kurdish, refugees participated in CAMP in large numbers but at different times, often with a few individuals continuing longer-term involvement once the main 'community' mobilization had subsided. CAMP attempted to respond to these challenges through the election of a committee, whose members could be recalled at any monthly General Meeting by a majority vote. For most of the organization's existence, the committee met only intermittently. In my experience, the organization was at its most vibrant and confident when the majority of the organising took place in open meetings, including tasks taken on by ordinary members, rather than among the committee. There was a tendency for British activists to act in some senses as 'representational brokers' (a term used by

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Nicholls, 2011: 12), often on the front line of CAMP's contact with the press, government officials, the police and other organizations. This was partly a consequence of some British members' longer experience of British systems and institutions, and partly a consequence of fears among some refugees without status that if the authorities saw them as prominent within the organization, this may increase their risk of deportation<sup>2</sup>. However, this does not mean that refugees did not play a leading role, even if it was often less public. In some cases individuals from refugee backgrounds took on leadership roles akin to 'organic intellectuals' (Gramsci, [1929-1935] 1982: 204-5), maintaining a connection between CAMP and wider refugee communities and playing a role as 'experts' able to develop other refugees' understanding and confidence. It is also important to note that precarious conditions did not only present a barrier to involvement for some refugees, but also for some working class British members. Leading members of CAMP attached a high priority to valuing all members' abilities, engaging in activities to build members capacity to take on new roles, and providing additional support where members' precarious situations threatened to limit their involvement.

CAMP's structure aimed to facilitate collective deliberation as part of a process of mutual empowerment. In discussion of the CCP, Butcher (2007: 72-75) asks how reflection might be fostered at a collective level, and calls for 'systems thinking', building a shared vision, team reflection, and making explicit the models members are using. CAMP's weekly meetings played an important role in sharing ideas and perspectives as part of a reflective process, with broad political questions discussed alongside practical issues. Members I interviewed reported empowering democratic participation, with individuals contributing towards a collective goal, engaged in a process of open debate reaching agreement through exhaustive discussion:

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<sup>2</sup> Some refugees' solicitors also expressed this fear, but there was no evidence of any refugees' involvement in CAMP negatively affecting their asylum claims. Indeed, the proportion of CAMP members who secured leave to remain in Britain was well above the national average, although there are many factors that might have contributed to this.

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Sometimes everybody [has] some news, everybody [has an] opinion ... I like it because everybody [is] free to talk, say [what] you think to develop ... our community ... they can look at your opinion, take this one, or leave this one, [decide on the] best one, help the group to grow

Another member described the importance of this process in enabling refugees without status to determine the form of 'help' they received:

the nice thing about asylum seekers leading a group is that they know the issue and they know what they want, it's not about what people want to give them, but what they want.

This level of participation, and the sense of control it cultivated, constituted a powerful influence towards not only collective identity, but also a degree of collective agency.

CAMP's structure contrasted with the other organizations in my study, which in common with much of the third sector used an Annual General Meeting to elect a management committee that led the organization for the rest of the year, with paid workers in charge of day-to-day operations. It is significant that this is the format required by most funders, and so is closely linked to organizations' financial dependencies. In contrast with the sense of empowerment reported by CAMP members, refugee volunteers from VOL who I interviewed frequently described traumatic experiences as 'middle men' carrying messages between the Home Office and 'clients', and perceived by other refugees as holding far more power than they did. CAMP's format of more regular General Meetings allowed the committee to play a more purely administrative function. This format was particularly suited to CAMP due to the organization's reliance on mobilizations of its membership, which in turn called for strong accountability to retain members' commitment. CAMP's internationalism and prioritization of grassroots mobilizations also helped shift power within the organization toward refugee members, whose knowledge of countries and struggles outside Britain was highly valued to inform international understandings, as were their connections to wider refugee communities. This is different from many other alliances between 'native' organizations and migrants, which Nicholls (2011: 5-6) suggests often distribute power increasingly toward native organizations



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because they possess the most valued 'discourse and legal expertise', and because in the more purely national context, any 'activist capital' possessed by migrants is not easily transferable.

*Action: Community mobilising*

Butcher (2007) outlines CCP's principles of action, including: conscientisation, described as 'consciousness through action', 'which generates the hope, energy and know-how necessary to achieve "action for liberation"'; empowerment, described as 'the collective mobilization of power to shape public decisions, influence agendas, and effectively challenge hegemonic ideologies and oppressive discourses'; and collective action, encompassing motivation, skills and capacities; together leading to desirable outcomes including transformational change and emancipation of individuals and groups (Butcher, 2007: 57-8). CAMP's activities developed within a similar framework of community mobilising, prioritising the potential for members' collective action as the organization's greatest strength. As one member said:

I think one person alone cannot change things ... solidarity is very important ... I see myself ... playing a part where I can ... many people ... need to play their part so that change can be seen.

CAMP's ability to mobilize was strengthened by non-political, 'broad-based' networks, formal and informal, in which members were also embedded, as has been found in other studies of migrants' rights mobilizations (e.g. Bunyan, 2010: 115, Però, 2008: 83). The 'community' mobilized by CAMP was diverse, and different members were uniquely placed to mobilize different groups, including communities based around a shared country of origin outside Britain (not all of whom were necessarily refugees), geographical neighbourhoods, religious congregations, and activist and trade union networks. Specific practices within this framework included informal contacts with friends, street stalls, public meetings, press releases and media interviews, demonstrations, pickets, marches, door-knocking, and distribution of leaflets and a newsletter.

Banks (2007: 86) suggests 'campaigning, protests, leaflets and media coverage are one way of starting a process of deliberative civic action by making the public and others aware of

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the asylum seekers' perspectives and the plight that they face'. One member explained the priority CAMP gave to raising awareness in order to inform action:

Most of the British citizens, they don't know what goes on with asylum case[s] ... when they [immigration police] dawn-raided my house, [a neighbor] told her granddaughter what happened and the granddaughter was saying does this happen in Britain? She was not aware ... that could happen, where somebody's door could be broken and things like that ... there needs to be [an organization] enlightening people about what's going on, and once people see ... they can ... act ... in supporting asylum seekers

Another member described CAMP's distinctiveness compared to organizations more focused on providing services:

there are many, many charities here, I'm not saying they're not doing good work ... because when people are destitute ... they are giving money to them, they are giving [a] parcel of food, but in terms of support, for example when someone has been snatched, or the immigration [police] come and they want to deport [you], and I think this kind of organization, CAMP ... is helping many, many people, and since I've started going there I know that still I'm an asylum seeker but I'm a human being and I've got my rights ... if I've got problems I can ring them at any time and they will be there and they will come and try to help me. But not just help me, they are trying also to explain to people who asylum seekers are ... and they are trying even to challenge the [government] policies.

Empowerment was achieved by CAMP through cycles of action, reflection, and discussion, as Takhar argues: 'being "empowered" ... is not simply a case of placing trust in another person to act as an advocate, but to take action, thereby generating even more power' (Takhar, 2011: 347). This was described by a member of CAMP:

[A member of CAMP was taken into immigration custody] and CAMP, we did something big ... we went to the [local government offices] ... we did everything that we could, and she came out, that was ... a very good thing for us ... to see that we also have some power, so if we want something we can get it

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The above framework of community mobilising contrasts with asylum rights organizations whose work focuses on service provision, professional lobbying, casework, or research. Among the other organizations in my study: VOL provided services including support in navigating the legal system, befriending and social activities; CHUR provided hardship support and help filling in forms; and COM provided community social events and one to one support with the immigration system and service providers. CAMP's approach was more overtly political, aiming to transform relations within society through propaganda, education, and agitation, in order to build an independent movement strong enough to force changes in government policy. Banks (2007: 85-6) conceptualizes this as a combination of elements of 'power with', in terms of CAMP's internal organization, and 'power over' in its external actions. There is an underlying assumption in the CCP model, that people at all levels of society can cooperate together to transform society and liberate oppressed groups and individuals, including politicians and others in positions of power and privilege (Butcher, 2007: 66-72). By contrast, in CAMP the predominant view, based on shared experience and reflection, was that the British state and those managing it were actively hostile to refugees, and approaches to the state followed from this, emphasizing self-reliance, autonomy, and resistance rather than partnership. This enabled continued action after other routes within the system had been exhausted, as a member explained:

When the Home Office rejects somebody's asylum, and all the courts reject somebody's asylum ... CAMP will be there to do demonstrations ... to help the asylum seeker's deportation to be stopped ... and one can end up getting status, whereas you could have been deported originally

#### *Finances: Community fundraising and members' resources*

CAMP considered financial independence and freedom from political constraints associated with charity registration as essential to independently represent refugees' interests (similarly the Latin American Workers Association, Però, 2008: 83). CAMP ran on a minimal budget, the main sources of income being a small number of monthly standing orders from individual

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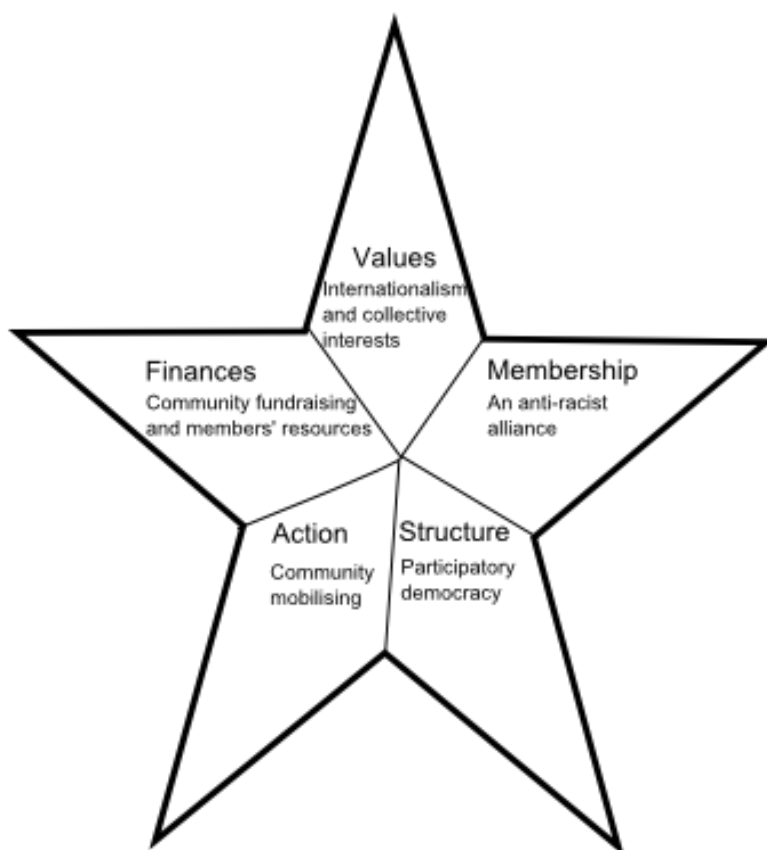
supporters, funds raised through the sale of campaign literature and badges, and musical benefit events. For much of the organization's existence a meeting room was provided in the back room of a charity bookshop and leaflets and newsletters were printed by a communist organization affiliated to CAMP, all at no cost to the organization. The main demands for cash funds were for travel expenses, which many CAMP members needed to attend the group's activities, and for the hire of a church for monthly General Meetings, although this was given at a significantly discounted rate.

At several points throughout CAMP's existence, there were pressures from sections of the membership to register as a charity and apply for grant funding. This was often linked to a belief that getting funding would enable CAMP to pay for immigration solicitors, reflecting the pressures of the asylum system to individualize each applicant's 'case'. Each time this was discussed the majority of CAMP's membership opted to retain financial independence. Interviews I conducted and my own experience suggest this was informed, to varying degrees for different members, by an understanding of a basic contradiction between the interests of refugees and the interests represented by the British state, and observations of the practical limitations faced by many funded organizations, particularly those most closely linked to the state. A CAMP member who had also volunteered with VOL explained:

CAMP is strong, because sometimes you have to challenge the government ... [VOL] is partially funded by the government, so that means ... you can never challenge, otherwise you will be out. So when I'm doing [voluntary] work with VOL it's just to help people [find out] how to get financial support ... If I want someone to fight for his rights to stay in this country I will lead this person to ... CAMP

Figure 2 provides an overview of how the key features of the IARM, explored above, fit together according to the dimensions set out in Figure 1.

*Figure 2: Features of the IARM*



### **CAMP in historical perspective**

CAMP emerged under conditions that require consideration when drawing wider generalizations for the IARM:

- The severity of hardships most refugees without status were facing (Prior, 2006, Lewis, 2009), and the long wait for cases to be decided (Hynes, 2009), had a radicalising effect on refugees and their supporters and fostered few hopes that the government might change its policies, except under extreme pressure.
- The numbers facing the same problems as refugees without status (British Red Cross, 2010; Griffiths et al., 2005: 38), which both created the potential for a collective consciousness of specific oppressive policies and left individual anti-deportation campaigns (e.g. Ford, 1998, Welford, 1988), increasingly inadequate.

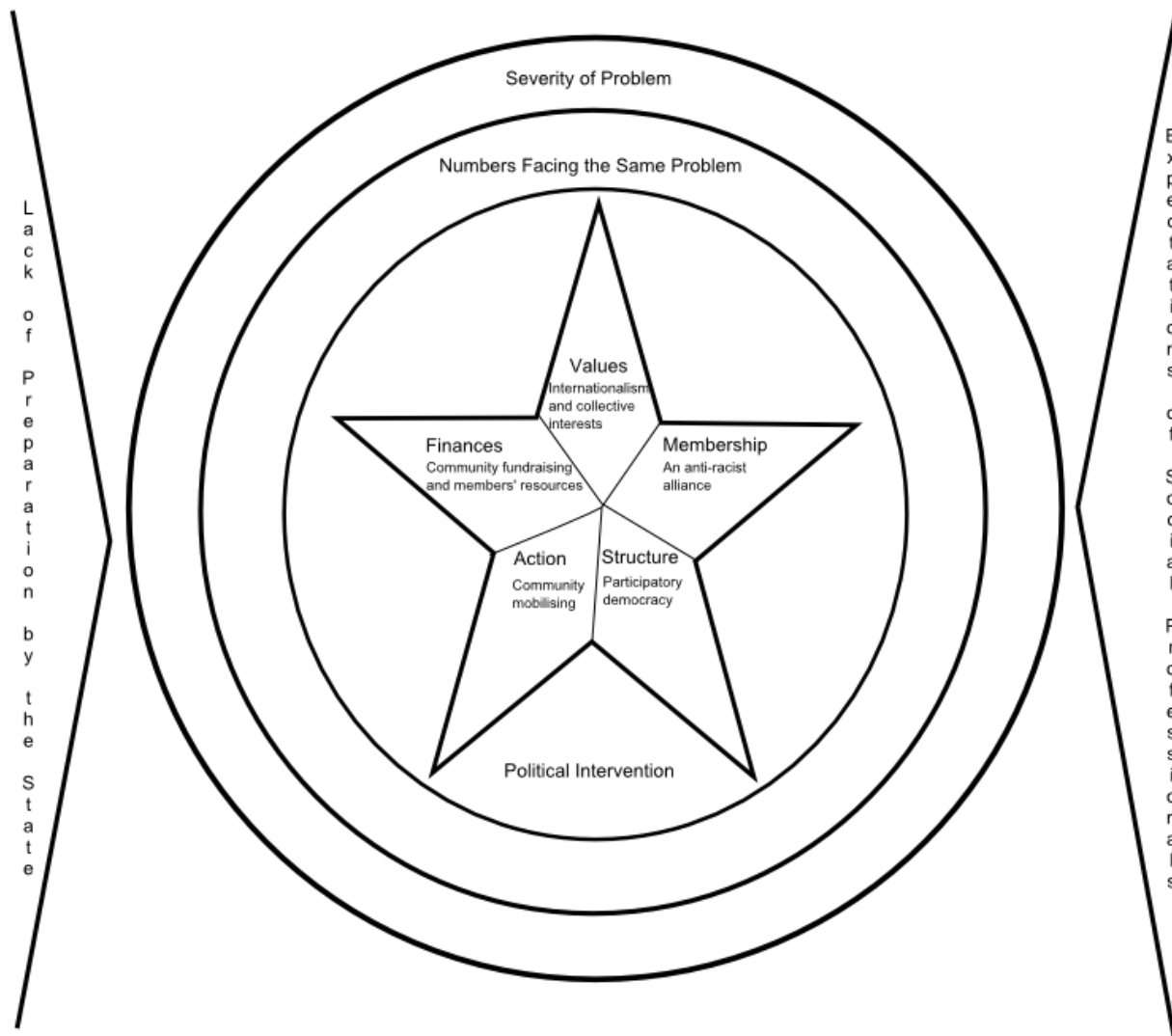
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The conditions above, which made CAMP possible, were augmented by two factors that pushed people's responses in a particular direction and contributed to the rapid growth of support for CAMP:

- Expectations that social professionals should act as a second line of immigration control, policing refugees' access to services (Dominelli, 1997: 27, Humphries, 2004; Fell, 2004), led to the radicalization of some workers. Founding members of CAMP included several British individuals who had current or past experience of working in these types of roles. They felt frustrated with the limitations of their roles in other organizations and so contributed to CAMP in their spare time.
- The lack of preparation in areas where refugees without status were dispersed (Boswell, 2003: 326, Briskman and Cemlyn, 2005: 718, Hewitt, 2002: 7), resulted in a lack of structures to channel refugees' complaints into less confrontational approaches. In the city where CAMP was based, 'race relations' networks which had been set up in the 1960s to mediate the relationship of predominantly South Asian communities with the state were largely ineffective at relating to refugees arriving from countries such as the DRC, Zimbabwe, Iraq or Afghanistan (*author's book, removed for anonymity*).

Within this context, the political intervention by a small group of activists to initiate CAMP acted as a catalyst. Figure 3 summarises the above conditions that made CAMP possible and encouraged people to engage with it.

Figure 3: Enabling conditions in IARM's context



Changes to these conditions would eventually make CAMP's ways of operating described in this paper no longer viable. Legislation in 2007 ended the direct dispersal of refugees to the city where CAMP was based. A 'legacy exercise' helped to clear the backlog of undecided asylum cases, with many being granted some form of 'leave to remain' in Britain, and a continuing expansion of immigration detention facilities meant more refugees without status could be housed away from contact with non-refugees (Hynes, 2009). These factors contributed to a decline in community-based asylum rights mobilizations nationally, whilst inside immigration detention centres hunger strikes, break-outs and other forms of protest

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continued, although largely isolated from outside support (Jameson, 2010). By 2010, attendance at CAMP meetings had fallen considerably. Members attempted to reorient CAMP toward wider anti-racist issues, mounting several campaigns against individual instances of racial harassment, police racism, and racism in social services, but these were limited in scale and lacked the collective character of CAMP's earlier period.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has presented a model for opposing government policies that are detrimental to refugees, through building alliances based on shared political values independent of the state. The construction of a model, based on a unique combination of values, membership, structure, action and finances, enables us to 'make sense' of what distinguished CAMP from other third sector organizations working with refugees in the same period. In particular, the model helps to explain what enabled CAMP to defend refugees' interests in situations where other organizations could not, and to avoid becoming embroiled in attempts to make refugees accept and adapt to an unacceptable situation. The combination of multiple sources enhances the model's robustness, including organizational literature and interviews as part of the 2007-2010 study, reflections on my personal experiences as a participant, and a chapter written by another author (Banks 2007). Comparisons with the CCP model have situated the IARM within wider traditions of community development practice and research, and the empirical data has enabled the paper to make a further contribution based on the specific conditions facing refugees in England, which foreground questions of racism/anti-racism and relationships with the state, as the final arbiter of asylum rights.

The IARM model has relevance to other groups whose conditions of life are made intolerable by the state. The IARM emphasises the importance of objective conditions which create a potential for collective resistance but also the importance of an organized political intervention to realize this potential, by asserting claims based on internationalist values which challenge nationalist state discourses (Chimienti, 2011 discusses similar conjunctions of objective and subjective factors). The IARM is less suited to meeting immediate service needs,



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and therefore benefits from the coexistence of other types of organization. In a context where Craig (2011: 383-3) suggests funding cuts across the wider BME third sector could force a return to small self-help groups and campaigning organizations, such a model is likely to become increasingly relevant.

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