



Moving Stories

International Review of How Media Cover Migration



Ethical
Journalism
Network

EDITED BY AIDAN WHITE

Moving Stories

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A group of children, likely refugees, are shown in a line. In the foreground, a young boy is holding a piece of light-colored fabric. The children are wearing simple, worn clothing. The background shows more children and a clear sky.

FOREWORD

Beyond the headlines

» JAN EGELAND



For years, the Norwegian Refugee Council and other humanitarian actors have called out – too often in vain – to the international community, to the media, the decision makers and the public opinion about the sufferings of millions of civilians fleeing war in Syria.

As the conflict escalated, and the humanitarian disaster with it, creating the biggest refugee crisis in our generation, our appeals for wider media attention, with some notable exceptions, fell on deaf ears with an apparent lack of interest on the part of the vast majority of television and radio companies and major newspapers.

It was arguably only with the tragic death of Aylan Kurdi and the publication of pictures of his body on a beach in Turkey that Western public opinion and global media finally woke up. Immediately, media lenses focused sharply on the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean and both politicians and ordinary people had to respond.

What about the many other humanitarian crises beyond the media's radar? Every two minutes another South Sudanese child becomes severely malnourished. But these stories are seldom told.

But this incident only raised another question. What about the many other humanitarian crises beyond the media's radar? In war-torn South Sudan, for example. This country is rarely in the limelight. In 2011, it gained independence from Sudan ending a generation of war. Two years later, the civil war broke out resulting in massive forced displacement and today the country is one of the world's impoverished places. Every two minutes another South Sudanese child becomes severely malnourished. But these stories are seldom told.

A South Sudanese colleague told me it was strange to see how things can change from one day to the other only because of international media attention.

“In Europe, it was that boy on the beach. Maybe we need a picture of a boy like that in South Sudan,” she said while preparing to go on a new mission to one of the world's hardest-to-reach areas where dropping food from World Food Programme airplanes is the only way to provide hungry people with something to eat.

Too often not even stories about children dying of starvation are enough to make headlines on the nine o'clock news. Humanitarian disasters that deserve our attention often go uncovered because there is no photographer or journalist on the ground to tell the story. Only a couple of conflicts receive our attention at any given time, while most dramas get none at all. Why is that?

The reasons are complex. It is not just a lack of humanity on the news agenda or a matter of luck or a matter of caring more about some people at the expense of others. We need a broader lens to see what really is going on.

In the Norwegian Refugee Council we annually publish a list of the world's 10 most neglected displacement crises. This year the Rohingyas have topped the list. This minority Muslim community under pressure in Myanmar is also found in neighbouring Bangladesh where hundreds of thousands have sought protection.

One criterion to be on the neglected crises list is a lack of media attention. Other factors include lack of funding, little humanitarian presence and difficult access to the victims of the conflict. Often, there is a strong correlation between the different factors: access problems can lead to lack of media attention, which again can lead to lack of donor concern, which again leads to even bigger access issues. This completes a vicious circle that is not easily broken.

But there is an important truth in all of this – decision makers pay attention to the media, and independent journalists reporting with care, humanity and professionalism have enormous power to tell stories that create a new path.

But, as this report reveals, mainstream media is currently under pressure with news companies struggling to adapt to a new reality with plummeting revenues and competition from new media. Often media will simply say they cannot afford to cover these stories.

But this should not be an excuse for adopting a herd mentality – where media follow each other to cover a small cluster of the most obvious stories. Media around the world are now reporting on the disastrous humanitarian consequences of the civil war in Syria and the exodus to Europe and they are going beyond the numbers story which has dominated news coverage so far.

Yet as the poignant human tragedies from Syria takes centre stage, where is the coverage of the second largest humanitarian crisis and war on our watch: in Yemen? Here, around 21 million people are in urgent need of emergency relief. They suffer from external and internal bombardment, blockade and totally inadequate assistance and protection.

Also the journalists themselves need to be protected to be able to report on the atrocities. For journalists reporting from conflict and war 2015 is another deadly year. Like humanitarian workers, journalists are not only at risk of becoming so-called collateral damage during military operations, they are also increasingly targeted.

It is therefore essential that the international community focus on the protection of journalists in armed conflicts to allow for less casualties in the imminent future.

In Europe we talk about a sharing of responsibility in terms of coping with the growing influx of migration. Maybe it is time to talk about a media “burden sharing” where media institutions, rather than chasing the same stories, divide the coverage of the human suffering so that children in grave risk in South Sudan or Gaza do not continue to stay in life-threatening situations without the world knowing.

This EJN report *Moving Stories* is a welcome step to allow journalists get an overview of the problem areas as well as promoting best practices when it comes to reporting on the wider migration story.

Without media attention, humanitarian crises, with their horrifying impacts, will continue to be learned by the outside world way too late.

Jan Egeland is the Secretary-general of the Norwegian Refugee Council



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INTRODUCTION

Moving stories

» KIERAN COOKE AND AIDAN WHITE

Migration is part of the human condition. Ever since humankind emerged out of East Africa it has been on the move – searching for a better climate, looking for supplies of food and water, finding security and safety.

Migration has suddenly jumped to the top of the news agenda. During 2015 journalists reported the biggest mass movement of people around the world in recent history.

Television screens and newspapers have been filled with stories about the appalling loss of life and suffering of thousands of people escaping war in the Middle East or oppression and poverty in Africa and elsewhere.

Every day in 2015 seemed to bring a new migration tragedy: Syrian child refugees perish in the Mediterranean; groups of Rohingyas escaping persecution in Myanmar suffocate on boats in the South China Sea; children fleeing from gang warfare in Central America die of thirst in the desert as they try to enter the US.

In response to this crisis the Ethical Journalism Network commissioned *Moving Stories* – a review of how media in selected countries have reported on refugees and migrants in a tumultuous year. We asked writers and researchers to examine the quality of coverage and to highlight reporting problems as well as good work.



The conclusions from many different parts of the world are remarkably similar: journalism under pressure from a weakening media economy; political bias and opportunism that drives the news agenda; the dangers of hate-speech, stereotyping and social exclusion of refugees and migrants. But at the same time there have been inspiring examples of careful, sensitive and ethical journalism that have shown empathy for the victims.

In most countries the story has been dominated by two themes – numbers and emotions. Most of the time coverage is politically led with media often following an agenda dominated by loose language and talk of invasion and swarms. At other moments the story has been laced with humanity, empathy and a focus on the suffering of those involved.

What is unquestionable is that media everywhere play a vital role in bringing the world's attention to these events. This report, written by journalists from or in the countries concerned, relates how their media cover migration.

They tell very different stories. **Nepal** and the **Gambia** are exporters of labour. Thousands of migrants, mostly young men, flock from the mountain villages of Nepal to work in the heat of the Gulf and Malaysia: often the consequences are disastrous. People from the Gambia make the treacherous trip across the Sahara to Libya and then by boat to Europe: many have perished on the way – either in the desert or drowned in the Mediterranean.

In these countries reporting of the migration of large numbers of the young – in many ways the lifeblood of their nations – is limited and stories about the hardship migrants endure are rare. Censorship or a lack of resources – or a combination of both – are mainly to blame for the inadequacies of coverage. Self-censorship, where reporters do not want to offend either their media employer or the government, is also an issue.

The reports on migration in **China**, **India** and **Brazil** tell another story. Though large numbers of people migrate from each of these countries, the main focus is on internal migration, a global phenomenon often ignored by mainstream media that involves millions and dwarfs the international movement of people.

What's considered to be the biggest movement of people in history has taken place in China over the last 35 years. Cities are undergoing explosive growth, with several approaching 20 million inhabitants. Similar movements are happening in India and, to a lesser extent, in Brazil.

In Africa the headlines focus on people striving to leave the continent and heading north, but there is also migration between countries, with many people from the impoverished central regions heading for **South Africa** – a country where media also deal with problems of xenophobia and governmental pressure.

In Europe migration and refugee issues have shaken the tree of European unity with hundreds of thousands trekking by land and sea to escape war and poverty. The reports here reveal how for almost a year media have missed opportunities to sound the alarm to an imminent migration refugee crisis.

Media struggle to provide balanced coverage when political leaders respond with a mix of bigotry and panic – some announcing they will only take in Christian migrants while others plan to establish walls and razor wire fences. Much of the focus has been on countries in South Eastern Europe which has provide a key route for migrants and refugees on the march. In **Bulgaria**, as in much of the region, media have failed to play a responsible role and sensationalism has dominated news coverage.

In **Italy**, a frontline state where the Mediterranean refugee tragedy first unfolded, the threat of hate-speech is always present, though this is often counterbalanced by an ethical attachment of many in journalism to a purpose-built charter against discrimination. In **Britain** the story has also often been politically-driven and focused, sometimes without a sense of scale or balance: this has been particularly evident in reportage of the plight of refugees in Calais.

In **Turkey**, seen by many European politicians as a key country in stemming the onward rush of migrants, most media are under the thumb of a government that punishes dissident journalists, so the public debate is limited.

Like their Turkish colleagues, journalists in **Lebanon** live with the reality of millions of refugees from war-torn Syria within their borders which makes telling the story more complex and it is not helped by confused mixing of fact and opinion by many media.

At the same time in the **United States** media have helped make the migrant and refugee issue an explosive topic in debates between Republican Party candidates for the presidency. Media time has focused on heated and often racist exchanges. This has obscured much of the good reporting in some media that provides much-needed context. South of the border, in **Mexico** media also suffer from undue political pressure and self-censorship.



“Open the world more equitably so we all may walk freely. Or close the borders and let each one return to his house and see how much poorer and drearier and darker the world is when we all stay at home.” – Chibundu Onuzo

In **Australia** the media in a country built by migrants struggles to apply well-meaning codes of journalistic practice within a toxic political climate that has seen a rise in racism directed at new arrivals.

These reports cover only a handful of countries, but they are significant. The problems of scant and prejudicial coverage of migration issues exist everywhere. Even reporting of migration in the international media – with a few notable exceptions – tends to be overly simplistic.

Migrants are described as a threat. There is a tendency, both among many politicians and in sections of the mainstream media, to lump migrants together and present them as a seemingly endless tide of people who will steal jobs, become a burden on the state and ultimately threaten the native way of life.

Such reporting is not only wrong; it is also dishonest. Migrants often bring enormous benefits to their adopted countries.

How would California’s agricultural industry or the Texan oil fields survive without the presence of hundreds of thousands of Mexicans and Central

American workers, often labouring on minimal wages? How could the health service in the UK continue without the thousands of migrant nurses and doctors from the developing world? How would cities like Dubai, Doha or Singapore have been built without labourers from Nepal or Bangladesh – or how would they function without the armies of maids and helpers from the Philippines and Indonesia?

These reports underscore why media need to explain and reinforce a wider understanding that migration is a natural process. No amount of razor wire or no matter how high walls are built, desperate migrants will find a way through. People will still flock to the cities, drawn by the hope of a better life.

The migrant crisis is not going to go away: the impact of widespread climate change and growing inequality is likely to exacerbate it in the years ahead.

The inescapable conclusion is that there has never been a greater need for useful and reliable intelligence on the complexities of migration and for media coverage to be informed, accurate and laced with humanity. But if that is to be achieved we must strengthen the craft of journalism.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND USEFUL LINKS

1. Ethical context

Migrants and refugees are a vulnerable minority who can quickly become scapegoats for the ills of society – social and economic decline, crime and unemployment, pressure on health and welfare services and lack of security.

Media can counter this threat and help people better understand the complex migration story by applying ethical principles, avoiding crude stereotypes, developing good newsroom practice and engaging with the audience. In particular, journalists should apply and respect the following five core principles of journalism in their work:

- ▷ Accuracy: fact-based reporting, analysis and commentary;
- ▷ Independence: journalism free from self-censorship and political pressure;
- ▷ Impartiality: fair reporting that tells all sides of the story;
- ▷ Humanity: sensitive and careful journalism that avoids doing undue harm;
- ▷ Accountability: media transparency and commitment to correct errors.

2. Newsroom practice

Media companies and journalists' unions and associations should prepare concise guides to best practices for the reporting on refugees and migrants. In addition, all media should examine their internal structures to make sure they are telling the story in the most effective way.

News organisations can:

- ▷ Appoint specialist reporters with good knowledge of the subject to the migration and refugee beat.
- ▷ Provide detailed information on the background of migrants and refugees and the consequences of migration. It is especially important to note that some major studies reveal how migration can strengthen national economies in the longer term, even where there are short-term challenges.
- ▷ Avoid political bias and challenge deceptive handling of the facts and incitement to hatred particularly by political, religious or other community leaders and public figures.
- ▷ Respect sources of information and grant anonymity to those who require it most, particularly

those who are vulnerable and most at risk.

- ▷ Establish transparent and accessible internal systems for dealing with complaints from the audience over coverage of migrant and refugee issues.
- ▷ Review employment policies to ensure newsroom diversity with reporters and editors from minority communities.
- ▷ Provide training for journalists and editors covering everything from international conventions and law to refugee rights and what terms to use while covering refugee stories.
- ▷ Monitor coverage regularly. Organise internal discussions on how to develop and improve the scope of migration coverage.
- ▷ Manage online comments and engage with the audience to ensure that migration stories are not used as a platform for abuse or intolerance.

Media associations and journalists' unions can also support national structures for independent regulation or self-regulation of journalism, such as press councils. Where there are industry-wide codes of conduct and guidelines dealing with non-discrimination these should cover reporting migration.

3. Engage with the media audience and connect with migrants

Refugee groups, activists and NGOs, many of which provide vital information for media, can be briefed on how best to communicate with journalists and media can explain to the audience their policies and editorial approach which may encourage readers, viewers and listeners to contribute useful additional information.

4. Challenge hate-speech

Hate-speech is widespread in the media. Often it can't be prevented when it comes out of the mouths of prominent public figures, but journalists should always remember that just because someone says something outrageous doesn't make it newsworthy. The Ethical Journalism Network has developed a 5-point text for hate-speech as a useful tool for newsrooms. (See below).

5. Demand access to information

Media cannot report without access to reliable information and facts. When access to information is restricted, such as not being allowed to enter

refugee camps, media and civil society groups should press the government both nationally and internationally to be more transparent. Media and journalists' unions should meet regularly with police and state authorities and agencies to ensure journalists have safe conditions in which to work and access to the information they need.

Some Useful Links

Glossaries

International Organization for Migration (IOM Key migration terms)

United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) Media Friendly Glossary for Migration

Statistics

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Statistics and Operational Data

International Organization for Migration (IOM) World Migration Report

Internal Displacement Monitoring Center Global Estimates 2015

Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) Resources Publications

Sources

International Refugee Law – Everything you need to know from the UNHCR

Institute for the Study of International Migration (ISIM)

Refugee Studies Centre (RSC)

International Labour Organization (ILO)

Council of Europe (COE)

European Network Against Racism (ENAR)

European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)

Forced Migration Online

The Journal of International Migration and Integration (JIMI)

The Global Migration Centre (GMC)

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)

Red Cross Global Campaign on Migration

Middle East Migration Issues (Migration Policy Institute)

Resources for journalists

Accountable Journalism Database

Africa's Media Silence over Migration Crisis

BBC: Migration in Figures

Climate News Network

Dart Centre Covering Migration Tips for Journalists

Ethical Journalism Network: Migrants or Refugees?

Ethical Journalism Network Five-Point Test for Hate-speech

Europe: The Migrant Files

Jean Paul Marthoz: "How to cover migration"

Getting the Facts Right: Ethnicity and Religion (ARTICLE 19)

Media Diversity Institute

Statewatch

UK NUJ Migration Reporting Guide for Journalists

Data-Based Study into Characteristics of Migration Coverage in Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States – Summary report and Full presentation

Why Al Jazeera will not say Mediterranean Migrants

David Cameron: "Swarm" of Migrants crossing Mediterranean

Ten myths about migration

Guardian Special Report:

Hardline Australia, confused Scandinavia and tense Russia: The global immigration picture

Generation E – Data Driven Project Report on Youth Migration from Southern Europe

The Med: One final danger in a migrant's odyssey

The Arduous Journey of Colombian Migrants Headed for Chile

What crime have I committed to be held like this? Inside Yarl's Wood

Risking their lives to cross the border: Europe or Die

Jimmy Breslin: "The Short Sweet Dream of Eduardo Gutierrez"

Giovanna dell'Orto/Vicki Birchfield: "Reporting at the Southern Borders Journalism and Public Debates on Immigration in the U.S. and the E.U."

Peter Andreas/Kelly Greenhill: "Sex, Drugs and Body Counts"

Fabrizio Gatti: "Bilal"





CHINA

An inside story – the invisible and ignored migrant workforce

» VIOLET LAW

Migration has been a familiar part of China’s history through the centuries, with Chinese explorers roaming the globe and traders following in their wake.

Millions left, from the south of the country in particular, to escape famine and poverty, eventually settling and setting up vibrant communities throughout Southeast Asia. Today, in virtually every country across the world, there are communities – some big, some small – whose forebears emigrated from China.

As large as this emigration has been, it is dwarfed by migration within the country. In the 1950s, following the Soviet Union’s lead, the Communist Party government, which took power in 1949, followed a policy of developing heavy industries. Farmers flocked to urban centres to work on production lines, encouraged by a relatively relaxed attitude to internal migration by the central authorities, which aided this mass movement. By the end of the 1950s, 20 per cent of the population had settled in cities, predominantly in the eastern half of the country.

During the 1960s the policy radically changed: a “rustication movement” was inaugurated, with millions of party cadres, intellectuals and students forcibly sent to the countryside. Continuing urbanisation was condemned as being bourgeois: instead people had to learn from those working in the commune movement out in the country.

This policy was only reversed after the death of Mao Tse Tung in 1976 and the gradual unveiling of economic policies more open to the outside world in the late 1970s. With a move towards a more market-orientated form of economic development foreign investment was welcomed. Special economic zones were set up to entice domestic and foreign industries.

China began to grow at breakneck speed, with large numbers of workers providing relatively cheap labour the key. People migrated from rural to urban areas – mainly from west to east – in their millions.

Since 1979 China’s urban population has grown by 440 million to 622 million today – the largest mass movement of people within such a time period anywhere in the world. Nearly 55 per cent of the 1.36 billion population now live in urban areas. There are six cities of more than 10 million. In the past five years alone Shanghai, the most populous city in the country, has grown by 4 million to 23 million and Beijing by 3 million to 18 million.

Media focus on economic migration

Interest in migrant workers, at once the ubiquitous and the invisible in Chinese society, seems mostly to take place in the context of economic development. Generally the media seems to view them only as a collective source of cheap labour in factories and at building sites, fuelling urban economic growth.

The media, including internet news portals, are tightly controlled by central government thus reflecting official attitudes and policies to migrants, who are valued only for their contribution to economic growth and not as equals to long-term residents of the cities.

The most striking manifestation of such attitudes is the “hukou” system, under which all citizens have to register with the authorities in their place of birth. It operates in a way similar to an internal passport, with a citizen only entitled to public benefits and services – such as medical or educational – in his or her place of birth.

So while rural migrants are free to move to the cities, they and their urban-born-and-bred children are deprived of their entitlements once there. It’s estimated that more than 270 million people from the countryside – over a third of the country’s entire workforce – live and work on rural status in China’s cities and are effectively treated as second-class citizens.

Only infrequently does the media draw attention to the suffering caused by the “hukou” system. Shortly before the 2010 meeting of the National People’s Congress, one of the main policy-forming bodies, a group of 11 national newspapers called for reforms, saying: “We hope that a bad policy we have suffered for decades will end with our generation, and allow the next generation to truly enjoy the sacred rights of freedom, democracy and equality bestowed by the constitution.”

However, despite calls for reform, little has been done, with few signs that “hukou” is going to be dismantled soon. In some cities, such as those in the special economic areas of Shenzhen and Guangzhou in the south and in Chengdu in western China, officials have relaxed requirements of the system by allowing long-term migrants to receive certain benefits, including locally available health-care and education for their children.

In large part such changes have been brought about by economic realities rather than changes in official attitudes; a one-child policy which

came into force in 1980 in much of China is now giving rise to labour shortages; there is also the fact that the country has one of the world’s fastest-ageing populations.

The numbers willing to work for low wages – and a long way from home – who once fed the industrial power base are just not there anymore: industries are being forced to relax the “hukou” system to entice more workers.

Generally, when these internal migrants are written about as individuals rather than as a factor important for economic growth, their second-class citizen status is reflected in news coverage. Reporters tend to be biased against their status and rural origins, and portray them in an unfavourable light, when such portrayals are neither substantiated or warranted.

For example, a local resident of Tiantongyuan, a Beijing suburb that has more migrant workers than locals, was quoted using deeply critical terms in an article entitled “Migrants out” in *The Global Times* newspaper, the English-language version of the state-owned *People’s Daily*: “The whole place is ruined by the messy and dirty crowds,” said Liu.

In the rare cases where reporters attempt to highlight the discrimination migrant workers face, there is regrettably very little critical coverage of policies which continue to add to their plight.

Perhaps self-censorship is at work: reporters do not want to fall foul of the authorities. They also might feel their work – if at all critical – will be censored if they describe such policies as “hukou” in a negative way. Consequently most media coverage is either based on or occasioned by official pronouncements and reporters often appear to have made no effort in challenging officials.

A member of the Chinese Peoples Political Conference (CPPCC), talking to journalists about recent migrants to Shanghai, suggested that they no longer sought to work for their living. “Shanghai has been attracting residents from other regions because of its migrant-friendly education and health policies”, Chai Junyong, a CPPCC member told *The Global Times*.

“When the first generation of migrants came they came for jobs,” Chai said. “Then they started to bring their children. Now, they are coming because they want their children to be educated here.” No one challenged the CPPCC’s statement: the views of migrants themselves were not given.



Coverage of migrant issues is generally limited to once a year during the Spring Festival travel season, spanning the Lunar New Year. This sees as many as 175 million travelling for family reunions.

Although the event is repeated year after year, with such mass travel first witnessed from the mid-1980s onwards, the media still gives full coverage to detailing how millions of workers return to their towns and villages. But again, little is said of their suffering and hardship, nor is there questioning of broader issues such as whether these vast movements are good or bad.

Amongst the generally negative and lop-sided coverage, there is only one exception which really stands out. *YazhouZhoukan* – literally *Asia Weekly* – is a Chinese-language news magazine published in Hong Kong but barred from the mainland.

In reporting the annual Spring Festival migration, *YazhouZhoukan* makes efforts to provide informed news. An early 2015 edition devoted 10 pages to five stories detailing different aspects of journeys home – to the perils of the trip, the migrants' hopes and the realities they face.

Reporters presented the varied life experiences of migrants. Most, they report, are stuck on the bottom rung of society, though some manage to save money and build a business or otherwise advance in life.

YazhouZhoukan reported: "Working in a factory is the surest way to wear down one's will," said Lei Jianxin, 29, who at 13 left his home in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, to work. Now a low-level supervisor at a shoe factory in Dongguan, Guangdong province, Lei works the production line.

"Every day you clock in, clock out. You collect your paycheck, and you won't think about much else. A decade ago I might still have dreams; now, I don't have any whatsoever."

Yazhou Zhoukan's reporters went to various parts of the country and travelled alongside migrant workers, some of whom were loaded with gifts to bring home, travelling by motorbike with wives and children. Others travelled in overloaded vans.

In addition to capturing individual stories, reporters also sought to examine the mass travel phenomenon: they pointed out that despite modernisation of the rail system, migrants still face considerable financial and technical difficulties in securing a ticket home, with many forced to spend frustrating hours waiting at stations.

Interestingly, the media gives little coverage to outward migration. Over the years there have been many reports in western media concerning Chinese trafficking gangs, and people paying substantial sums to be smuggled from China to western



countries, mainly to the US and Canada, with large numbers also going to Europe. Such stories have received little or no coverage in China.

In 2000, 58 migrants from China being smuggled into the UK died when they suffocated in a container truck. In 2004, 23 Chinese illegal immigrants – both male and female – were killed by rising tides while working to gather cockles in Morecambe Bay, in the north of England. The incident received widespread coverage in the UK national and international media though little within China.

One reason for this lack of coverage is perhaps reporters' fear that giving space to such stories might be construed as criticism of the status quo in China – reporting that people are seeking to leave the country and work abroad in often harsh conditions could imply that all is not well at home. The media has chosen instead to focus more on those migrants who successfully build businesses overseas.

Migration and media in Hong Kong

As a British colony, Hong Kong had a long history of opening its doors to diverse peoples from around the world – from the Indians and Nepalese who came to serve in the British Army and the local police force to refugees fleeing wars and political purges in mainland China and Vietnam.

There has been a large influx of Chinese to Hong Kong since 1997, after Beijing resumed sovereignty over the former British colony. There are stringent border controls and a strict quota system to regulate migration from the mainland.

Usually only mainland Chinese citizens with family ties, special talents or substantial financial resources are granted an immigrant visa to live permanently in Hong Kong. More than 800,000 have settled since 1997, accounting for 11 per cent of the current population. In addition, there are tens of thousands who are on temporary student and work visas.

However, this latest wave of migration has roused much conflict and controversy. Even though nearly all recent Chinese immigrants and local people share ethnic origins, a substantial segment of Hong Kong society sees a gulf between the newcomers' value system and cultural habits and its own.

Reporting often tends to mirror such attitudes. For example, TV or tabloid news reports invariably mention whether the new Chinese immigrant involved in an incident is on a one-way permit – that is a permanent visa, as opposed to a two-way, temporary permit.

The city's leading English daily paper, *The South China Morning Post* (SCMP) gives generally wide coverage to migrants though articles seem to focus

on the extremes – the people mentioned are either desperate and needy or very rich.

Coverage often focuses on money and not on human interest stories, as in the cases where some new immigrants asserted their rights as permanent residents to welfare and other entitlements. A 2012 feature headed “Call to cut number of mainland immigrants” in the SCMP gave the results of a poll on public attitudes:

“The view that new migrants lowered wage levels was held by almost half of those polled – 46.7 per cent – and almost four in 10 said they stole locals’ jobs. Meanwhile more than a third thought a rise in new migrants would result in more crime.”

There are those in Hong Kong who say the government and the media should do more to counter what they feel are excessively negative attitudes.

“This (the poll result) is worrisome,” Professor Chou Kee-lee of Hong Kong’s Institute of Education was quoted as saying. “The sentiment needs to change. The government needs to face this problem before it gets worse ... to change negative public sentiment through education, and increase policies targeting immigrants to help them integrate.”

A rapidly ageing society with one of the world’s lowest birth rates, Hong Kong should regard immigration as a boon rather than a nuisance, and a population flow within what is the same country should be seen as normal.

Bringing the migration story out of the shadows

While China has for centuries seen its people migrate overseas, few foreigners, particularly in more recent times, have been allowed to settle in the country.

The experience of having been subject to successive colonisations by foreign powers has sowed deep suspicion, at least within officialdom, towards foreigners. But with China’s economy growing rapidly in recent years many foreigners have sought to establish themselves and participate in its rapid growth.

Yet, this new land of opportunity is also the land of a draconian immigration regime. Very few foreigners are allowed to become naturalised. Permanent residency, introduced only in late 2004, may be available for those with strong family ties or with large amounts of money to invest. Even so, the naturalisation quota is minuscule.

The 2010 census was the first time China officially counted foreigners, who now number around 850,000, less than 0.1 per cent of the total population. Amongst them, Africans, Americans, Japanese, Indians, Pakistanis and South Koreans represent the largest groups, mostly living in the most populous cities, Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou.

Although Beijing and Shanghai have a higher percentage of foreigners, Guangzhou’s foreign population is by far China’s most visible concentration of migrants. An estimated 200,000 Africans, who arrived to trade from a number of countries – including Nigeria, Mali, Cameroon, Ghana and Tanzania – live in Guangzhou: more than half are believed not to have proper immigration papers.

“In the early days, media coverage of these people was mostly negative,” says Li Zhigang, an academic who has researched Guangzhou’s foreign population.

In 2009, a police chase resulted in two Nigerians jumping to their deaths. Coverage focused not on the circumstances of the incident but rather on the commotion caused when angry Africans surrounded the local police station.

However, as the presence of these new arrivals became less a curiosity and more accepted, coverage has become more enlightened.

The foreign traders were recognised as important patrons of local factories; reporters noted that some Africans come out of hiding only at night in order to avoid police attention. News reports also sought to explain the difficulties these foreigners had with the local bureaucracy.

But there are still issues which go unreported: there is no mention of the extrajudicial detention of migrants and traders who might have overstayed their visas or been accused of minor offences. Nor is there mention of cases where permanent visas are denied to those married to local Chinese.

Migration is an issue of great importance in China although many aspects have gone unreported or are under-reported.

The economy, though still growing at rates many countries can only dream of, is slowing down. Migrant workers, many from the countryside, are being laid off. It will be interesting to see how these developments are reported, whether an open discussion is allowed or whether the media, nervous of official disapproval, will seek to avoid them.



Migration: It's the same old story

'The enormous change in human conditions to which nearly all our present stresses are due, the abolition of distance and the stupendous increase in power, have flung together the population of the world so that a new way of living has become imperative ...

'The elaboration of methods and material has necessitated a vast development and refinement of espionage, and in addition the increasing difficulty of understanding what the warfare is really about has produced new submersive and demoralising activities of rumour-spreading, propaganda and the like, that complicate and lose contact at last with any rational objective ...

'The uprooting of millions of people who are driven into exile among strangers, who are forced to seek new homes, produces a peculiar exacerbation of the mental strain. Never have there been such crowds of migrating depressing people.

'They talk languages we do not understand ... they stimulate xenophobia without intention ... Their necessary discordance with the new populations they invade releases and intensifies the natural distrust and hostility of man for man – which it is the aim of all moral and social training to eliminate ...

'For the restoration and modernisation of human civilisation, this exaggerated outlawing of the fellow citizen who we see fit to suspect as a traitor or revolutionary and also of the stranger within our gates, has to be restrained and brought back within the scheme of human rights.

– H. G. Wells, *The Rights of Man* (1940)



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