

# Mechanisms Through which Involuntary Minorities are Socially, Economically and Politically Ex

Written by Sophie Housley

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## Mechanisms Through which Involuntary Minorities are Socially, Economically and Politically Excluded

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In order to discuss the mechanisms through which involuntary minorities are socially, economically and politically excluded primarily I am going to define the meaning of the term 'involuntary minority'. Following this, a brief identification of the main direct and indirect mechanisms clarifies the direction of the discussion. To examine the mechanisms used I have selected three examples of involuntary minorities to focus on; Palestinians in Israel, black Americans in the U.S. and refugees/asylum seekers in Britain.

The main body of the essay focuses on Palestinians in Israel since 1948 as a key example of an indigenous involuntary minority. I take a historical approach here so as to render the utilization of exclusionary mechanisms over a long time period. Black Americans who were brought to the U.S. as slaves (Ogbu, 1998:166) and refugees/asylum seekers in Britain are then drawn upon in turn as examples to depict the mechanisms through which migrant involuntary minorities are socially, politically and economically excluded. The focal point of the latter part of the essay will be based on the media as a key modern mechanism of exclusion, particularly for migrant involuntary minorities, concluding with the argument that the growth and force of the media will only strengthen the exclusion of involuntary minorities, meanwhile enforcing the effects of the other mechanisms discussed.

Firstly I shall consider what an involuntary minority actually is. In order to define an involuntary minority it is helpful to take into account what a *voluntary* minority is. Due to the complexity of both definitions a brief outline is appropriate for this essay. Voluntary minorities are identified as either; indigenous people who are national minorities within a federal state or migrants of a mainly economic purpose (Ogbu, 1998:164). The phenomenon of 'national minorities' is inextricably linked to the creation, or surfacing, of the notion of 'nation states' (Guy, 2001:54). The emergence of 'nation states' over the past two hundred years has largely been driven by the rise of 'culture', a widely used yet complex term, and this often results in a tendency for 'nation states' to turn in to 'ethnic' states. Following this a sense of 'state unity' emerges bound up by 'cultural unity' and 'homogenisation'. A 'national culture' is formed within very

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specifically set geographical boundaries (Guy, 2001:54). Those who are not incorporated in this 'national culture' become 'ethnic' or 'national minorities', however this does not make them involuntary minorities as such.

Whereas voluntary minorities can be identified as indigenous people who are 'national minorities' within a centralized state, involuntary minorities are classified as indigenous people who are dominated by their 'host society more or less involuntarily through conquest or colonization' (Ogbu, 1998:165). The indigenous groups are normally 'descendants of the first occupiers of this territory, which has subsequently been overwhelmed by another group of people (the host society) from a dramatically different cultural background' (De Varennes, 1996). Similarly, whereas economic migrants are regarded as voluntary minorities, those who have migrated due to exile, slavery or to seek asylum are termed as involuntary minorities (Ogbu, 1998:165).

To expand, there are a number of mechanisms through which involuntary minorities are socially, economically and politically excluded. Direct mechanisms include; military rule, the use of assimilation policies, movement's restrictions and limitations on political organisations. Some indirect mechanisms that result in exclusion are; the creation of economic dependence, the promotion and maintenance of separate systems (residentially, socially and economically), the impact and pressure of the media and the reshaping of the history, identity and culture of the involuntary minority. These mechanisms will now be examined and discussed in more depth by using the aforementioned examples of indigenous and migrant involuntary minorities in turn.

Military rule is one of the most crucial direct mechanisms that results in the social, economic and political exclusion of indigenous involuntary minorities. There are many examples of the utilization of this mechanism in the case of conquest or colonization such as the physical force used upon the Aborigines in Australia, American Indians and Alaska Natives in the U.S. (Ogbu, 1998:166) and Palestinians in Israel. In this discussion I focus upon the latter example. This example is one of huge complexity and is embedded in a history of fierce debate and disagreement, yet it holds strength as explicit evidence of military rule as a method used in the exclusion of a group of people.

Before 1948 there were roughly 70,000 Arabs in the city of Haifa, by July of 1948 only 3,500 of the city's original Arab inhabitants remained (Morris, 1994:215). The majority had left the city or were driven out. Furthermore, by May 1948 roughly '300,000 Palestinians had already been expelled from their homes or fled the fighting' (Chomsky, 2002:132). This displacement depicts what Morris describes as the 'pattern, in the first months of the existence of the state of Israel, of the government's policy toward the Arab minority'. In December 1948, Israel rejected the U.N. General Assembly call for allowing Palestinian refugees, 'that had fled violence that had broke out in Palestine beginning in 1947', the right of return (Chomsky, 2002:131). The outright rejection of calls or recommendations by, for example,

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the U.N. General Assembly (Chomsky, 2003:131) – who are attempting to uphold worldwide social, political, economic and overall human rights- renders the powers of exclusion a host society can withhold.

The promotion of a separate system residentially, economically and socially is another mechanism of exclusion. In 1948 the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) are claimed to have wanted those Arabs who were still in the Southern coastal plane of Israel to leave and engineered their departure in order to ‘transfer’ them to Gaza (Morris, 1994:345). Morris argues in his book ‘*1948 and After; Israel and the Palestinians*’ that the Majdal Arabs were a ‘ghettoized minority, under military rule, hemmed in by barbed wire and sentries and a pass system, dependent on Israeli handouts, largely unemployed and destitute, cut off from relatives in Gaza and from the Arab world in general’ (Morris, 1994:345). Here it is clear that as well as military rule there was a mixture of direct and indirect mechanisms being employed in order to socially, economically and residentially exclude the Majdal Arabs. In order to engineer their full departure to Gaza, Morris goes on to describe further direct and indirect mechanisms used such as ‘measures of persuasion and pressure, including minatory rumour-mongering and outright threats of eviction exercised by Israeli authorities’. There is also talk of more physical and brutal methods such as ‘shooting in the night, threatening behaviour by the soldiery, unpleasant early-hour-of-morning visitations, cut-off rations, frequent summons and occasional arrests’ (Morris, 1994:346). This supports the argument that primarily it is the physical force and domination exerted by the IDF that worked as a direct mechanism of exclusion. Unemployment and economic dependence also results in exclusion – if a person or group is living under such restrictive conditions, in fear of their life/lives, and are physically and mentally dominated on a daily basis then there is little premise for them to support themselves to a sufficient financial standard, and less so for them to have a successful or well paid job.

Movement’s restrictions and limitations on political organisations are also mechanisms utilized resulting in political and social exclusion. There were many threats of expulsions made to the Palestinians from the late 1970’s onwards. Several of those threats were also made during the first intifada (‘the Palestinian popular uprising in the occupied territories which began in December 1987’) (Masalha, 2000:87). Therefore if the Palestinian people challenged their host society via a social/political uprising they would be threatened- another key mechanism that aids in creating exclusion as it induces a sense of fear regarding political activity. It is reported that Rafi Eitan, a former advisor to the PM of Israel, urged the government to ‘declare all parts of territories in which intifada is active as zones in which a war situation exists’ (Masalha, 2000:88). He claimed that it would enable him to ‘legally do things that today (he) cannot do; for instance to transfer population from one place to another... to expel inciters without a prolonged legal process, to confiscate for security needs land and property’ (Masalha, 2000:88). By allowing the involuntary minority no freedom to politically protest, even peacefully, the host society omits them further. Moreover, Amnon Linn, a member of Likud in the 1970’s, spoke of ‘mass expulsion of entire communities which took part in demonstrations and riots’,

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further depicting the unjust response to Palestinian political protest (Masalha, 2000:89).

As I have mentioned previously, economic dependence is a key mechanism of exclusion. As Masalha discusses in the situation of the Palestinians in Israel;

*“The creation of economic distress and economic discrimination against the Arab population of the occupied territories has long been deliberate and systematic, and growing ever worse...The creation of economic hardship was not the only measure taken to make people leave ‘voluntarily’”* (Masalha, 2000:84)

Masalha goes on to discuss the policy of ‘collective punishment’ as a mechanism of exclusion and/or persuasive transfer. This policy is reported in the Hebrew Daily on 6 June 1980 as having a ‘clear purpose of making the inhabitants’ life unbearable’ through the utilization of methods such as curfews, daily harassment, the cutting of all the elementary services i.e. disconnection of telephones, ‘even in doctor’s clinics’ (Masalha, 2000:85). Even in 2003, Cook highlights the exclusion that Palestinians feel in Israel, despite the right to now vote and have their own political party; ‘the Israeli national anthem is Zionist, some Israeli holiday’s celebrate the defeats of Arabs’ enforcing a sense of domination and exclusion, ‘informally they are residentially segregated (less than a tenth of neighbourhoods mix Jews and Arabs)’ (Cook, 2003:141). The recent removal of Israeli Jews from the Gaza Strip has seen a development in politics regarding the occupied territories, however the Palestinian-Israeli conflict seems to have a long way to go before being resolved, and many question if it ever will be (McGeary, 2006:19).

Now the mechanisms through which migrant involuntary minorities are socially, economically and politically excluded shall be discussed. An example of a migrant involuntary minority is ‘black Americans in the U.S.’ who were originally removed from their native countries and incorporated into their host society involuntarily as slaves (Ogbu, 1998:166). Despite the abolition of slavery, this history of maltreatment and subordination has, without surprise, contributed to racial tensions in the U.S. John Ogbu has carried out much research on the differences in school performance between minority and dominant-group students. His findings and ‘cultural-ecological theory’ depict a difference between the academic achievements of voluntary minorities and involuntary minorities; such as black Americans. The ‘cultural-ecological theory’ considers the ‘histories and socio-cultural adaptations of minorities’ (Ogbu, 1998:158). He discusses the responses of minorities to ‘their history of incorporation into U.S. society and the subsequent treatment or mistreatment by white Americans’ and goes on to claim that ‘minority responses are affected by the how and why a group actually became a minority’; this is termed as ‘community forces’ (Ogbu, 1998:158). In the case of black Americans in the U.S. Ogbu claims that as a group they are aware of the fact that they were originally brought over to their host society as slaves and therefore ‘have been made to be part of the U.S.

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society permanently against their will' (1998:165).

Discrimination is a key mechanism through which the aforementioned migrant involuntary minority is either excluded early on in educational life or later due to employment restrictions. Ogbu describes the 'collective problems' this involuntary minority faces, leading to their social, economic and political exclusion. These 'collective problems' are; 'institutional discrimination (e.g. employment/wages), relational discrimination (e.g. social and residential segregation) and symbolic discrimination (e.g. the denigration of the minority culture and language)' (Ogbu, 1998:158). The involuntary minority often finds 'collective solutions' to these 'collective problems' which can result in further problems and feelings of exclusion. An example being the response to symbolic discrimination; the involuntary minority develops an 'oppositional culture and language frame of reference' alongside the selective adoption of certain "white ways" (Ogbu, 1998:161). Thus, the reshaping of the history, identity and culture of the involuntary minority group is a mechanism through which they are excluded as well as the maintenance of separate systems residentially, socially and educationally. Ogbu highlights the problem of educational policies such as the policy of school segregation, and subsequently unequal school funding and staffing of minority schools (Ogbu, 1998:161). Ultimately the discriminatory treatments and structural barriers that an involuntary minority such as black Americans in the U.S. face are evident determinants of low school achievement and limitations on future employment opportunities. Furthermore, this involuntary minority may go on to feel socially, politically and economically excluded further due to the economic dependence on the state they may develop because of the limited employment opportunities they have if they have not achieved a certain level of educational success.

Refugees/asylum seekers are another concrete example of migrant involuntary minorities. To further the definition; a refugee is a person seeking asylum in a foreign country in order to escape persecution ([refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://refugeecouncil.org.uk), 2005). Therefore, refugees are people who have been forced to leave their homeland and to live in other countries due to 'destitution, starvation, fear of violence, constant racial or religious abuse or harassment' (Dummett, 2001:35). The refugee normally sees this asylum as temporary and wants to return to their own country as soon as it becomes safe to do so (Dummett, 2001:35). This temporary migration is also acknowledged by the host society. The initial priority of a refugee is usually to seek refuge where they will be protected. Dummett claims that despite the primary desire of survival, the refugees 'initial choices of where to go to apply for asylum are seldom wayward, however'; they want to go to a country where they will be in contact with others 'of their own people', where they can speak the language, or at least have the chance of learning it (Dummett, 2001:35). Also of great importance are employment prospects; however refugees are less likely to consider long-term employment opportunities.

If a state grants a refugee asylum in their country then it is their duty to ensure that the person is treated appropriately

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([refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://refugeecouncil.org.uk), 2005) The reported incarceration of refugees in 'detention centres' and 'actual prisons' by the British Government (Dummett, 2001:38) and lack of sufficient assimilation policies available renders the further problems migrant involuntary minorities face even once they've found refuge. A Home Office report issued in October 1999 shows a serious lack of help given to those granted asylum in Britain (Dummett, 2001:41); those given 'refugee status or exceptional leave to remain in the country' were suffering from social, economic and political exclusion. Some mechanisms that caused this exclusion were; high levels of unemployment (affecting them economically and socially, as they could not meet new people via the workplace, and it also resulted in economic dependence), poor housing and health, limited access to welfare services and many suffered from social isolation, discrimination and marginalisation. Those who are unable to speak English suffer further due to the lack of language classes supplied by the central government when they reside in the country. Psychological problems such as post-traumatic stress-disorder are also commonplace as often refugees have experienced past mistreatment, for example torture. Yet, in years as recent as 2001, Dummett claims that no specialist medical care is being offered in order to aid or ease these problems (Dummett, 2001:42). Equally, the existence of political parties such as the BNP, who openly discriminate against asylum seekers, only furthers their feeling of exclusion by reminding them of the hostility they face in their host society. Thus, the overall lack of fully efficient government policies to assimilate refugees and reduce hostility towards them serves as a strong exclusionary mechanism.

The media is a key mechanism through which migrant involuntary minorities are also discriminated against, thus excluded. Newspapers such as the '*Daily Mail*', amongst others, are renowned for printing prejudice and discriminatory articles regarding refugees appealing for asylum in Britain. Articles entitled 'Refugees a drain on UK' (Daily Mail, 2003) and the leader comment in the '*Sunday Express*' stating; '...so-called asylum seekers who, in reality, seek no more than access to our welfare system' (Sunday Express, 02/05/04, cited in [refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://refugeecouncil.org.uk)) are good examples of this. Hostility is therefore fostered towards them via the media and many fear this can reduce employment opportunities. This combined with the aforementioned language difficulties leaves many asylum seekers forced to live on social security benefits. It is clear that there is a vicious circle here as the media also highlights when asylum seekers are on benefits thus furthering the notion that they are 'sponging off the state'. They could be usefully employed on entrance to the state, yet this is more likely if they are given initial support with the host society's language, housing and job-hunting. There are websites such as '[refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://refugeecouncil.org.uk)', which provide information for asylum seekers and refugees in twelve different languages, links to Refugee Council training courses and news about asylum policy and legislation updates. The website even has a 'Myth Buster' section, stating that;

*'The issue of asylum is rarely out of the British press. But can you believe everything you read? Get the facts behind the headlines.'* ([refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://refugeecouncil.org.uk))

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There is also a danger of blurring the difference between refugees and 'economic migrants' via the mechanism of the media and propaganda. As I stated at the beginning of the essay, 'economic migrants' are considered as voluntary minorities, yet refugees/asylum seekers are deemed as 'involuntary minorities'. The British government is guilty of speaking of asylum seekers in general as 'bogus', declaring that many of them have 'unfounded claims' and are just 'playing the system' (Dummett, 2001:44). Former Conservative party leader Michael Howard said, in January 2005, that if the Conservatives won the general election, 'all asylum seekers would be turned back at British ports and airports by new armed squads of security guards on duty 24 hours a day' (Walters, 2005). The UK has a legal obligation, under international law, to allow people to seek asylum, yet declarations such as Howard's do little to render Britain as a hospitable and safe haven for those facing possible persecution.

In conclusion, I have discussed many mechanisms, both direct and indirect, through which involuntary minorities are socially, economically and/or politically excluded. By focusing upon the case of the Palestinians in Israel in a historical manner in conjunction with the examples of black Americans in the U.S. and refugees in Britain I have highlighted mechanisms of exclusion that were used over fifty years ago and in the present day. This depicts that those mechanisms of exclusion such as military rule, movement's restrictions and limitations on political organisations are ones that have been utilized over time. However, I have also considered a fierce indirect mechanism of social exclusion, which has emerged via the development of technology; the media. This mechanism highlights those other mechanisms of exclusion, thus reinforcing them. For example the publishing of articles emphasizing the economic dependence of refugees, a segregation mechanism in itself, only furthers the overall feelings of exclusion experienced by involuntary minorities. It is therefore the 'myths' printed in the press that can incite racism, discrimination and add to social, economic and political exclusion that those such as the Refugee Council and Social Exclusion Unit are tackling.

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