

# Refugees' Social Mobility and Cultural Bias in the Polarization of Reality

## Abstract

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Refugees' cultural values and perceptions are bound to change over time as a function of their new acquired identity and experiences in the recipient country. The current study questions how social-mobility success in the recipient country affects the polarization of happiness levels and political views of refugees.

We reinterpret this research, looking at the endogeneity of the perception of reality by migrants, in particular young Syrian refugees. We focus on two sub-aspect of the polarization of perception question: (i) the endogeneity (i.e. dependence) of perceptions (and their change over time) in relation to the social-mobility success by the young refugees in the recipient country, using information on the refugee's parental occupational status; (ii) the impact from socio-economic mobility on the individual's happiness levels, their cultural integration and political perceptions.

To conduct the above research, we use a novel IAB dataset on Syrian refugees in Germany. The data includes the evolution of educational success, social mobility, happiness levels, cultural values, and political perceptions of refugees between 18 and 35 years of age. The data covers annual survey waves for the period 2016 – 2020, with pre and post COVID-19 information. We employ a Heckman selection model, using a Mincer equation (including effort to learn German) to explain the pre-selection into success in social-mobility upon arrival in the recipient country. We study how this pre-selection affects three alternative hedonic model outcomes: the refugee's individual happiness, their cultural integration (approximated through the level of cultural value change in the direction of increased cultural proximity with the recipient country's milieu) and the perceptions about the political economy in this country.

Our findings help distinguish the impact from personal effort and personal drive for perceived belonging and well-being. These results are representative for young Syrian refugee population in Germany, however the revealed mechanisms of social-mobility-based perceptions and integration might be worth exploration also in other countries.

**Keywords:** refugees, social mobility, happiness, values, cultural change, perceptions

**JEL classification:** Z13, R23, F22, J61, P16, I31

## Bio

Annie Tubadji is an Assistant Professor in Economics. She is a cultural economist teaching economics and research methods. Annie has previously worked at: University of West of England, Bristol, the UK; University of Bologna, Italy; University of the Aegean, Greece; Institute for Employment Research (IAB), Germany; as well as UNDP, UNICEF and the State Agency for Analysis and Planning, Ministry of Finance, Bulgaria (as part of the EU-NSRF Strategic Team 2007). She is the holder of the Shackle Scholarship at St. Edmunds, Cambridge University, the UK for 2015-2016. She has been awarded the 2010 "Student Paper Award" by the Association for Institutional Thought (AFIT), Western Social Science Association meeting, Reno 2010, for her paper: "The Culture-Based Development (CBD) Hypothesis". Annie obtained her PhD from the University of Regensburg, Germany in 2011.

Annie's main areas of expertise are New Cultural Economics (NCE) and Regional Economics. She focuses on the cultural bias in economic choice as a function of the interaction between the micro and macro levels. Her working paradigm is termed the Culture-Based Development (CBD) approach. Annie's contributions cover predominantly empirical work in regional economics and economic growth, labour economics, economics of innovation and entrepreneurship. She works on the topics of migration, diversity, creative class, social capital, religion, innovation and uncertainty. Her current research interests include narrative economics, economics of happiness, refugees, moral philosophy and socio-economic inequalities and the taste for discrimination.

Annie was the Cluster Leader for Microeconomics at the Bristol Centre for Economics and Finance (BCEF) and the organizer of the BCEF Economic Research Seminar Series. She is currently co-organizing with Dr. Dilshad Jahan the Seminar Series of the Economics Department at Swansea University.