

# Life, learning and university:

An inquiry into refugee participation in UK higher education.

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## **Abstract**

### **Life, learning and university: an inquiry into refugee participation in UK higher education.**

Movement, stasis, and the management of displacement underpin this thesis on refugee participation in UK higher education. Drawing on accounts from mature students of their experience of going to university in England and Wales, the study examines the intersection of higher education and migration in contemporary British society. The research was informed by the ethics and principles of participatory research methodologies, and framed by the aim to explore the relationship between students' lived experience of asylum in the UK and their engagement in higher education. Analysis focuses on five individual accounts of participation in undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, and explores how the sites and spaces of higher education interplayed with personal and political identifications. Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) field theory is used to explore refugee negotiation of the UK national field and the field of higher education. Post colonial and post structural theoretical perspectives are also applied to analyse questions of identity and identifications.

The social and educational policies that relate to refugee students in the UK continue to be in a state of flux, and these directly impact on HE participation. Examining the experiences of refugees with both permanent and impermanent forms of leave to remain in the UK, the thesis shows the ways in which participants valued their studies beyond an instrumental purpose for social mobility in the UK. Rather, I suggest that participants engaged in higher education to manage both psychic and physical displacements. Moreover, the students' engagement in the field of higher education could be seen to produce further displacements, undermining the extent to which participating in university is understood as a means to facilitate social and cultural integration.



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## **Glossary of humanitarian statuses in the UK**

### **Asylum seeker**

Someone who has fled to the UK and lodged an asylum claim on the basis of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) that 'no one shall be subjected to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment'.

### **Refugee**

Under international law a refugee is a person who is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of persecution because of his or her race, religion nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion; and is unwilling or unable to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution. In the UK, a person is recognised as a refugee only when their application for asylum has been accepted by the Home Office. An asylum applicant is granted refugee status if they meet the criteria laid down in the 1951 UN Convention on Status of Refugees

### **Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) – with or without refugee status**

ILR is permission to live permanently in the UK, with the right to leave and re-enter the country. Prior to August 2005 ILR was granted automatically with refugee status. Since that date, if refugee status is granted it is done so with 'limited leave' for five years. During these five years refugees have full entitlement to employment, family reunion, social security benefits, and NHS health care. At the end of this period the individual case is subject to review to see whether the cessation clauses of the UN Convention on the Status of

Refugees might apply (ie: if there has been an announcement to the effect that the situation in their country of origin has changed and they are no longer in fear of persecution). At that stage refugees could be faced with removal. If not, refugees will normally be granted ILR. ILR is also granted to asylum seekers whose claims have been resolved by the Case Resolution Directorate (see 'legacy cases' below).

## **Discretionary Leave (DL)**

This status may be granted to an asylum seeker who does not qualify for refugee status or humanitarian protection when there are other strong reasons why s/he needs to stay in the UK for a temporary period. Discretionary Leave can be granted for a period of three years or less. A person who is granted Discretionary Leave is allowed to work and has access to public funds.

## **Humanitarian Protection (HP)**

This is a temporary protection for asylum seekers who are not classed as refugees, but who are allowed to remain in the UK on human rights grounds. It is normally granted for a period of three years, after which the person can apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain. A person who is granted Humanitarian Protection is allowed to work and has access to public funds.

## **'Legacy case'**

In 2007 the Case Resolution Directorate (CRD) was established by the UK Border Agency to resolve the estimated 450,000 'backlog' or 'legacy' of outstanding asylum claims announced by the Home Secretary in 2006. Claims for asylum processed by the CRD are often referred to 'legacy cases'. These usually result in ILR being granted.

# Chapter One: Introduction

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In 2013, the internationalisation of British higher education is at a point of fast expansion, with the coalition government seeking to increase student immigration to the UK by twenty percent over five years (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department of Education, 2013).

However, a strategy that frames internationalisation as 'educational export income' overshadows the internationalisation from within that is embodied by refugee students. Indeed, this strategy to increase overseas recruitment features a raft of new student visa proposals that contrast significantly with the 'politics of restriction' approach taken in British immigration policy since the 1990s (Gibney, 2011). During this time the legal rights of people seeking asylum in the UK have been subject to growing limitations, contributing to the erosion of the political status of the 'refugee' (Zetter, 2007). Moreover, in 2011 the UK government cut around sixty percent of its funding for third sector agencies that support new arrival integration (Refugee Council, 2012), and after only four years of operation the UK Border Agency-backed Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES) closed in late 2012. In light of this tension, the investigation of the experiences of first generation refugees and asylum seekers in British higher education is timely and worthwhile.

This thesis draws on the accounts of refugees studying at universities in England and Wales, with an overarching purpose to highlight how individual experiences of asylum and university intersect, by examining the relationship between higher education participation and the ways in which refugees negotiate the cultures, institutions and social structures of Britain. To do so, the research purpose is framed by two primary aims. The first is to contextualise the place of higher education within refugees' everyday lives. The second is to examine if and/or how, participants made connections

between their HE participation and 'refugee' subjectivities. Within contemporary British society, the labels 'refugee' and 'asylum seeker' are set within multiple discourses of deficit (House of Lords and House of Commons Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2007), that can combine to produce an essentialised identity (Doná, 2007). My research demonstrates that individual experiences of the UK asylum system and the field of higher education cannot be reduced to a generalisable 'refugee experience'. Rather, the accounts from Lul, David, Aro, Amal and Jordan show that to speak of 'refugee experience' is to speak of diversity and individuality.

Participants in this research held different forms of humanitarian status when they engaged in higher education, and these statuses gave either permanent or impermanent permission to remain in the UK. In order to examine how im/permanency intersected with decisions to study at university, the concepts of integration (Ager and Strang, 2008) and displacement (Bakewell, 2011) are applied in conjunction with Bourdieu's (1977) field theory and Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybrid identity. Participant accounts suggest that university was an ambivalent site in which to build reserves of cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1977) valuable in the UK national field, or indeed for some, valuable on a transnational level. Rather, engaging in HE brought disjuncture between individual habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) and the national field, to which individuals then had to respond. As a result, it is argued that while taking up higher education could be seen to be a part of refugees' strategies of displacement management, being at university also resulted in further significant psychic and physical displacements. In doing so, analysis reveals a tension that underlies framing (higher) education as a stable 'means' or 'marker' of refugee integration (Ager and Strang, 2008).

## **Overview of the thesis structure**

Following this introduction, chapters two and three examine the methodology and research methods that underpin the study. Chapter two presents my rationale for engaging in this research, and examines the literature on participatory methodologies. I problematise my understanding of the theoretical framings of participatory research and relate this to my epistemological position. The concepts and methodological tensions that arose as the research was undertaken are also presented. Chapter three then gives further detail on how participatory theory was then put into practice over the duration of the research. This chapter engages reflectively with research methods and ethics, discussing some of the decisions and difficulties I encountered as the research developed, from inviting people to participate through to questions of analysis and representation. It also sets out the criteria on which I would like this study to be judged.

Chapters four to seven are literature chapters. There are four literature chapters in this thesis due to the interdisciplinary background of the research topic. Chapter four examines definitions of 'refugee' and discursive representations of refugee identity. It introduces the global refugee context that locates UK immigration policy and practices, before exploring how 'refugee identity' is constructed and theorised. The way in which 'refugee' is understood and used in this thesis is then clarified.

Chapter five provides a critical overview of the key policy areas relevant to the study. This is structured in four sections: a) UK asylum policy and the rights accompanying different immigration statuses that might be granted to asylum applicants; b) the framing and theorisation of integration; c) approaches and strategies of the UK government and the devolved governments of Wales and Scotland towards refugee integration; d) how immigration policy and educational strategies intersect to exclude or include refugees and asylum seekers from higher education (HE). This chapter

highlights that the UK is in a state of flux with regard to how policy frames the hosting and integration of refugees, and that this is reflected in the in/visibility of refugees in higher education policies.

Chapter six engages further with key theoretical concepts that are applied to produce the analyses in chapters eight and nine. The chapter discusses identity as neither fixed nor stable, relating back to the epistemology that was presented in chapter two. Bhabha's (1994) framing of hybrid subjectivities is examined as a basis for offering a critical analysis of refugee identity that is neither 'hero' nor 'victim'. Key concepts from Bourdieu's (1977) field theory are also introduced in this chapter. These form the basis for an examination of the interplay of individual agency and social structures in refugee experiences of living and studying in the UK.

Drawing on the Bourdieusian framework of capitals (1977, 1986), chapter seven has two purposes. First, it locates refugee participation in education by considering some of the socio-cultural and economic contextual issues that impact on refugee participation in UK society. Second, the existing body of literature on refugee participation in higher education is examined. As yet this is a relatively small area of study, therefore the literature is considered alongside that of non-traditional and international student experience. These literatures offer useful concepts and provide a solid context in which to locate an analysis of refugee HE experiences.

Chapters eight and nine form the body of analysis and theorisation in the thesis. These draw on the accounts from five refugees who reflect on their engagement in university over the academic year 2010-2011 as well as earlier experiences of UK higher education. Chapter eight addresses a key gap in the literature by examining the higher education participation of refugees with impermanent forms of immigration status. Jordan's account focuses on his engagement in HE while living with the uncertainty of asylum seeker status over a period of seven years, before finally being granted Indefinite Leave to

Remain. David, meanwhile, studied for both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees while having Discretionary Leave (see thesis glossary and chapter four for descriptions of statuses). This chapter explores the place of HE within the lives of two men with who had little certainty as to whether they would ultimately be accepted or rejected by the UK government. In particular it focuses on their framing of how HE did or did not offer spaces or opportunities for managing this impermanency.

Chapter nine examines the accounts of higher education from three refugees, Lul, Aro, and Amal, who have permanent leave to remain in the UK.

Continuing to draw out the role of HE within individual strategies of displacement management, this chapter explores how their university experiences impact on identity and their identifications with 'being' refugee. The chapter also shows how that for Amal and Aro, the uptake of higher education shapes, and is shaped by, decisions about a return to their home country. This also adds a further dimension to considering how refugees, particularly those who are categorised as 'Home' students contribute an unseen transnational dimension to UK higher education. In relation to this analysis, the chapter questions how stable higher education is as a 'means' or 'marker' of integration (Ager and Strang, 2008).

Chapter ten, the concluding chapter of this thesis, consists of two inter-related sections. The first engages in a reflective discussion on my decision-making in producing an analysis, 'troubling' how I did so, and how these chapters offer partial and tentative claims to knowledge. In doing so I also refer in some detail to the participants whose accounts did not feature within chapters eight and nine. The second part of the chapter brings together a discussion of the conclusions that have been made, presents potential directions for future research. It concludes with a discussion of the original contribution to knowledge that the thesis makes and implications this has for understanding the role of higher education in the lives of refugees in Britain.



# Chapter Two: Methodology: participatory principles

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## **Introduction**

This is the first of two chapters that discuss the methodological framework of the inquiry, and it explores the participatory principles that influence my research and the tensions that surround understanding 'participation'. The study was designed in a way that sought to be responsive to the interests and experiences of participants, informed by my aim to enact the social justice values of my work as a community educator. This was important as the research aim was to inquire into the lives of people who, to varying extents, would have experienced some form of oppression, persecution and/or interrogation. The chapter first identifies the origins of the study and focuses on the theory of participatory methodologies, contextualising my work within the participatory debate. Next, epistemological questions are explored, relating epistemology to research ethics, and presenting my epistemological perspective. Finally, I examine how the participatory intent and epistemological foundation behind the research frame the importance of thinking critically about representation of participants in my analysis and writing. While this chapter explores theoretical concepts, chapter three engages with the research methods and practices that I undertook with the aim of exploring my research questions and developing a participatory way of researching.

## **Framing the research: social justice**

There is a very real possibility of social marginalisation in the lives of people seeking asylum and/or living with one of the many forms of refugee status (Bloch, 2008; da Lomba, 2010). When asylum is the research object, a dominant gaze on asylum seekers may be reproduced, perpetuating an 'exclusionary politics' and marginalisation of individual agency and lived experience (Squire, 2009). More, a discourse of criminalisation can be seen to inform and legitimise contemporary UK asylum policy interventions, often leaving unchallenged a conflation of asylum with illegal immigration (Bauman, 2003; Mulvey, 2011). As a result, an exploration of refugee and asylum seeker participation in the British higher education system is framed by questions of cultural recognition and distributional justice (Fraser, 2001).

The suggestion from Figueroa (2000) that educational research needs to address truth *and* virtue, impartiality *and* commitment, truth *and* social justice' (p.99) is challenging. My rationale for looking to participatory methodologies to underpin my research is based on an understanding that any knowledge claim made would be partial and subjective, rather one of certain truth. Furthermore, particularly due to the research topic, these knowledge claims could not be de-coupled from a wider exploration of power within the research context. It was important for me to research in a way that would foreground the knowledge people held about their own lives, and how they could self-represent their experiences. In turn, I wanted to explore how that personal knowledge could focus the substantive content of the inquiry and direct how the research developed. This connected to a second aim, which was to critically approach the dominant discourses that surround asylum and how the lives of refugees in the UK are represented. This relates to Fraser's (2001) framing of cultural recognition, and as such, it was important for me to be mindful of how my research was located within these discourses, remaining vigilant to the power of academic research to potentially challenge or reinforce oppressive stereotypes. Therefore, working

up a participatory methodology inherently felt like a 'right' way to approach framing the research. This brought a range of complications in working out the boundaries and practices of participation, and these are discussed in further detail in chapter three. This chapter continues with a discussion of the philosophy and principles of participatory methodologies that I explored in order to develop a framework for my research.

## **Participatory methodologies**

Perhaps no term has been more distorted, more overused than participation. Participation is not simply 'communicating'. Neither is participation mere 'doing'...Authentic participation defines itself within each unique structural, social, and cultural context as it unfolds (Arnst, 2002:110-111).

The ways in which participation is defined and understood, as Arnst (2002) points out, is highly context specific. There are multiple interpretations of what participatory research could and should be, as well as who benefits, and how. This range in the framings and definitions of participatory research also results in a variation of criteria for validity and knowledge claims. This section explores participatory research principles, practices and methods.

Identifying and clarifying a set of working terminology presents the first challenge in understanding participatory research. In this thesis, the term 'participatory research', using lower case letters, indicates an overarching term to discuss a range of methodologies and approaches. Heron (1996) has described participatory research as a 'spectrum' on which methodologies can be located. In an extensive list, Heron and Reason (1997) name thirty five methodologies that follow participatory principles. Such diversity results in a spectrum of how participation is measured or evaluated and a range of research practices and methods, the significance of which will be discussed later in this section. One unifying characteristic of participatory research is perhaps most tangible in its purpose to bring change and development in individuals, groups and/or organisations (Bray *et al*, 2000). This thesis is not

the place to discuss all participatory methodologies in detail. Rather the focus here is to draw out the main distinctions within the field, in order to contextualise a subsequent discussion in chapter three of how my understanding of participation was identified and enacted, and how this evolved within the context of this study.

Following a distinction made by Reason (1999), participatory research can be seen as having ontological roots in both 'Northern' and 'Southern' traditions. The 'Northern' tradition was based in Action Research (AR) methodologies founded in the methodological work of Lewin (1946) that focussed on organisational inquiry. Discussion on AR from Bray *et al* (2000) highlight that with Lewin's model of Action Research, change was identified by a collaborative process of reflection and action to solve an identified problem. However, they argue that this approach ultimately sought an objective form of knowledge that was often reliant on the final decision of the research expert leading the project (Bray *et al*, 2000, p.32).

In contrast, the 'Southern' tradition was characterised by its origins in the liberatory community development movement of South America. It drew upon a political commitment to privileging local knowledge/s over that of dominant regimes (Reason, 1999, p.15). Hall (2005) identifies the influence of Marxist-informed educational theories of Gramsci (1971) and Freire (1970), on the development of Participatory Action Research (Tandon, 1988; Fals Borda and Rahman, 1991). The purpose behind this approach is defined by Hall (2005) as the fusion of three strands; social investigation, education and action. Similarly, Macaulay *et al* (1999) identify core elements as 'collaboration, education and action' (p.775), highlighting a sense of equity in the research relationships as a defining feature, along with the dual purpose of education and action. These elements provide a useful starting point for discussing participatory research. However, the debate is complicated by a lack of clarity in the naming of the work being done.

The terms Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Participatory Research (PR) are often used interchangeably. For example, Hall (2005) does not specify a difference between PR and PAR. Others state that they choose to use the terms interchangeably (Maguire, 1993; Cornwall, 2008) and justify doing so. Additionally, 'PR' has been used in lieu of 'PAR' without any clarification. Visible in work from Bourke (2009), it is the flipside to a point that Reason (1999) makes: that using 'PAR' to describe research without 'Southern' emancipatory aims throws the participatory debate into confusion. A useful distinction is needed then, and one is offered by Kasl and Yorks (2002), who suggest that Action Research seeks to collect data about people in order to make change, whereas PAR privileges collaborative learning processes as part of a liberatory project (Maguire, 2001; Park, 2001).

However, Wadsworth (1998) argues that such diversity in the literature directly comes from the focus of the research: while some researchers may focus on the action element, others put greater emphasis on participatory processes. It is this Wadsworth suggests, that leads at times to vague use of terms 'action research', 'participatory research' or 'participatory action research'. While differences in focus do not necessarily equate to problems of rigour, in a time when 'participation' is a buzzword in my professional field of community learning and development (Ledwith, 2005; Cornwall, 2008), it seems to me to be a matter of professional rigour to make clear how participatory research is framed, why and how it might be relevant and meaningful to all people involved, and the challenges it involves. Not addressing this fully could indeed be a strategic move for projects that may benefit (perhaps by attracting funding) from claiming to be more participatory or radical than is the case in reality.

Reason and Bradbury (2001) suggest that the overarching purpose of participatory research is defined by its engagement with the 'issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally *the flourishing* (my italics) of individual persons and their communities' (p.1). This immediately raises questions that would need to be answered to evaluate the role of

participation in the research. What or who defines this flourishing? Why is it important, and for whom? How is it measured?

For participatory research to be rigorous then, it is important to evidence the initial and evolving purpose(s) of the research and the criteria for understanding this. Yet dealing with the specifics of 'how' 'what' and 'for whom' is an ongoing challenge which is intrinsic to working out participation in practical terms. Cornwall (2008) points out that as early as the 1960s PAR researchers called for 'clarity through specificity' with regard to purpose, method and measurement of participation. To this end, various typologies of participation have been developed that offer a range of stages and criteria with which the extent of participation may be assessed.

The following typologies focus on the field of community development but the analysis from Cornwall (2008) is relevant to understanding participatory research within any context. Arnstein's 'ladder' (1969) is considered first. It ranges from 'manipulation' of a community by an outside researcher or agency to the point of 'citizen control', whereby a local population take full ownership of local resources. Cornwall points out that this framing is backed by an implicit assumption that full ownership is the most successful form of participatory work. White's (1996) typology of stakeholder interests is also examined. This typology posits participation as a dynamic process, where the interests and motivations of all participants are identified. Participation is seen to take different forms and is enacted to varying extents throughout the period of research. After exploring these typologies, Cornwall advocates that we need to think about how diverse acts of participation are potentially of equal relevance and value. This moves the participation debate away from a discourse of 'more is better' and opens up a fluid approach to understanding participation.

One line of debate around the role of research context argues that full participation may not always be possible in certain sites or under particular circumstances, (Maguire, 1993; Tuck, 2009). While this is certainly true with

regard to enacting certain research methods or practices, this line of thinking also seems to support the idea that 'more is better', and without this any knowledge produced will be of a lower quality, validity or relevance. More, approaching site specific requirements in what seems to be a static way reduces the significance of participant agency in shaping and interacting with the research agenda and how sense-making processes are defined. Martin (1997) also argues that following a typology of participation in the field of PR risks an overly reductive approach, and simplifying the processes of participation. The following discussion explores this idea with reference to epistemology, a less tangible element of understanding participation in a context-specific way.

Tuck (2009) presents an overview of PAR. This offers five key dimensions; i) questions are co-constructed; ii) the design is collaboratively theorized, negotiated and co-constructed; iii) there is transparency on all matters of the research; iv) analysis is co-constructed and v) the products of the research are dynamic, interactive, and are prepared and disseminated in collaboration. At first glance this seems no different in essence from the co-research cycles of Co-operative Inquiry (Heron and Reason, 2001), in which co-researchers work together to generate ideas, manage the research and make conclusions. Yet closer inspection to the Co-operative Inquiry (CI) methodology shows that CI draws strongly on humanistic psychology as a theoretical basis to underpin sense-making processes, quality indicators, and methods for working with group dynamics (Heron and Reason, 2001). This suggests that what is seen to count as 'participation' rests not only on the practical methods of participating, but also on the theory that frames the rationale for participation.

This divergence is also visible in the epistemological basis of participatory epistemologies. Heron and Reason (2001) propose an 'extended epistemology' of knowing in four ways: experiential, presentational, propositional and practical (p.5). This epistemology privileges these four ways of knowing as equal and necessary. The authors propose that understanding

these ways of knowing are based in a critical consciousness or 'critical subjectivity'. Developing this 'critical subjectivity', and challenging the 'consensus collusion' of group work are located in psycho-social methods and therapeutic skills, such as managing projections, exploring anxiety and probing uncritical subjectivities (Heron, 1996; Heron and Reason, 2001).

Meanwhile Park (2001) offers a typology for a PAR epistemology which appears to be similar, in that knowledge is understood in representational, reflexive and relational forms. These however are situated within a wider theoretical remit of 'emancipatory' knowledge. Guiding Park's understanding of emancipation are Habermas' theory of communicative action (1984) and Freire's (1972) concept of critical consciousness. This privileges knowledge as generated through shared reflections on the everyday experiences, and inter-relation of people with each other. The ways in which power runs through knowledge claims of PAR is also interrogated by other PAR practitioners. For example, Maguire (2001) examines critical consciousness, exploring how this intersects with gender in PAR knowledge-making. Evans *et al* (2009) draw on post-colonial theory to question how racial 'Othering' might occur when researchers use PAR constructs of 'the oppressed' and 'the people'.

This section has examined in detail some of the theoretical tensions behind participatory research. It has shown that PR is a broad concept that holds within it a range of methodologies and typologies to define 'participation' in relation to knowledge creation and research validity. What underpins all of these however, as a core element, is the making of spaces and processes for negotiation between researchers and participants as to how the research develops. This is not only in relation to the specific research site or context, but also with regard to their individual investments and purposes for engaging in the research. The ethos of PR is to privilege the development of collaborative processes, and this, as Arnst (2002) says, reaches deeper into the structure of the research than communication alone. A key part of my interpretation of this includes giving overt attention to the ways in which research methods can foster, or impede, a shared research purpose, and/or



explicitly value diverse investments or interests within the same project. Research that can be located on the participatory spectrum then, is that which addresses questions of power and knowledge creation through putting this ethos into action. I began with a clear intention to carry out PAR work, yet the final result was research of a more conventional appearance. In chapter three I document the important shifts in my critical understanding of the wider concept of PR, as I responded to changing circumstances in research context, and as I interacted with individual participants to negotiate our research purpose/s. As the literature shows, attempting to develop participatory research can involve a high level of risk because it seeks a particularly active form of engagement from all participants to shape the research. A willingness to be flexible and responsive to how individuals engage with the research is, to my mind, the only way that can give potential for meaningful participation to flourish, and to understand participation within that specific research context. It is in this way, after moving on from an original PAR intent, that I carried forward my participatory principles. These ultimately form the core of the research methodology and in chapter three I demonstrate how these principles were enacted, thus situating this research on the participatory spectrum.

The next section in this chapter highlights challenges of researching with refugees as a specific 'group', before examining the epistemological questions behind 'knowing about' refugees. Both of these sections confirm the importance of taking a participatory approach towards research with refugees.

### **Research with refugees: more questions about participation**

Guidelines produced by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Seminar Series on Eliciting the Views of Refugee People Seeking Asylum (2004) suggest that a participatory approach is a socially responsible way of engaging in research with refugees. This is based on a premise that a

participatory research design is more likely to raise opportunities for refugees to self-represent, and engage in meaningful action for change. These guidelines are written from a position which acknowledges that asylum seeking refugees in the UK have likely experienced traumatic life events, are often socially marginalised and misrepresented in public discourses.

The document makes a number of recommendations for researching in an ethical manner. First, the document indicates that good research practice will clarify the approach being taken- whether to work collaboratively or to consult.

(Research) that intends to consult with, rather than actively engage the participation of refugee people seeking asylum, is made transparent from the outset (ESRC, 2004, p.2).

Second, the guidelines suggest participatory research should be clear about how its aims will be practically carried out, in that it

...specifies how it is going to ensure the meaningful participation of refugee people..in collecting, analysing, reporting and disseminating research data and findings. (It) generates individual and community/group level capacity building (and)...ensures the project has adequate resources to achieve its aim (ESRC, 2004, p.2).

Here the key indicators are 'meaningful participation' and 'capacity building', terms popular in community development work, but still requiring a context-specific definition if to be of any value or significance. Both of these suggested indicators require a rationale and an indication of who would have the authority to make such judgements. There is here a suggestion in the guidelines of the complexity that underpins participatory research, when validity and quality are subjective criteria. How meaningful is meaningful enough? What is individual, group or community capacity and how do we know when it has been built? How much, and in what forms, is participation needed before it evidences 'good' research? As argued earlier in this chapter, it rests on researchers to clearly define and justify such claims.

Moreover, while the statement focuses on the need to be realistic in terms of 'adequate resources' to achieve the project aims, it could also suggest what those resources might include. An assumption would be resources of time, financial and those of a physical nature, such as funding and equipment or meeting spaces, but if 'meaningful' participation is a priority, then it could highlight the human dimension of these resources, and how 'meaningful participation' might be identified or explored. For example, it might be important to consider that 'meaningful participation' is likely to be defined differently by participants. And if so, then that would need to be worked in to the research design. In this way, there seems to be an omission of two significant points. First, if participation is important in all aspects of the research, then guidelines might include the setting and defining of the research questions. Second, the need to be flexible and responsive to changes in circumstances as the research evolves is perhaps implicit, but could be made overt. This second point is applicable to all research certainly, but is intrinsic to research that prioritizes active participation throughout the research cycle. Otherwise, the significance, and the sense of activity and dynamism of the term 'participatory' might be lost.

The discussion in this section has examined the importance of clarifying the guiding theory and epistemology that underpins any participatory research project. There may not be a 'right' or 'wrong' way as to how participatory research unfolds, but unpacking epistemological assumptions and expectations about the purpose and form of participation is essential. This is important if to later avoid counter-claims of tokenism, but perhaps more importantly, so that the research is responsive to individual participants and their circumstances. More, given that participatory research may take such different forms and include a range of research practices, it also seems important that researchers (and potentially participants as well) engage with how they understand participation worked out in their specific research context. I discuss and reflect on these practices in chapter three.

This section began by making a distinction between ‘Northern’ and ‘Southern’ influences on participatory research, highlighting key concepts and how these have been framed. In discussing this framing, it has become clear that the notion of ‘participatory’ intersects with epistemic and theoretical perspectives in such a range of ways, that the term ‘participatory research’ certainly does require context-specific definition. The chapter continues now to contextualise my approach to participatory research by locating the epistemological foundation of this study.

## **Epistemology**

Marshall and Reason (2007) suggest that in striving towards quality in research, an ‘attitude of inquiry’ should be taken, underscored by reflection on, and attention to, ‘the perspectives and assumptions we are carrying’ (p.3). Patai (1991) argues however that ‘in an unethical world we cannot do truly ethical research’ (p.150). Holding both these perspectives in mind, this section suggests that the ethics of making and claiming knowledge are underscored by critical engagement with epistemological questions. I see the practice of exploring assumptions about knowledge production as a point of connection between participatory principles and methods of knowledge generation, including approaches to analysis, and representation of ‘Others’.

Epistemology relates to understanding the ways in which knowledge exists, raising questions as to ‘how’ we know. Pallas (2001) suggests that for both experienced and newer educational researchers, there is a struggle to ‘keep up with the cacophony of diverse epistemologies’ (p.6), pointing to the range of epistemic names and concepts, and the questions these raise regarding the nature of knowledge and truth. These include questions of value and power (who creates and defines what counts as knowledge?), of methods and purpose (for whom is the knowledge produced, and how is this done?), politics (how is this knowledge used?) and truth (is there a singular truth, or multiple truths, indeed does truth exist?). Understanding epistemologies,

continues Pallas, is necessary not only to appreciate the research carried out by others but is central to the production and consumption of educational research.

Usher (2000) argues that epistemic and ontological positions are 'culturally specific, historically located, and value laden' (p.172). By pointing to difference in conceptions of knowledge within different philosophical traditions, he highlights that 'Western' research methods have developed within one culturally specific philosophical framework, as part of the evolution of the natural sciences. As a result, he suggests, no single research methodology can be intrinsically self-validating, rather validity claims are always located within these specific cultural and historical contexts. Usher (2000) also reminds us that viewing educational research as a commodity brings into focus the process of production- who has it been produced for, who (if anyone) has read it, for what purpose was it intended? This fits well with the argument from St Pierre (2009) that legitimating the authority of one's claims to knowledge is as much an epistemological concern as an ethical one. David (2001) suggests that there is a doubled responsibility to examine the tension between self-interest and the contribution to knowledge when developing an academic career based on research with marginalized social groups. Marshall and Reason (2007), writing on participatory methodologies, suggest that good research is 'for me, for us, for them' (pp.112-113), yet Reason (1999) suggests that often graduate students start a research project with an unproblematised desire to research 'for them' (p.4).

Doctoral researchers seeking to engage in participatory research have raised questions about how the purpose of research for a PhD impacts on generating knowledge collaboratively. Thesis examination criteria, based in proving academic expertise and authority, can be seen to present a direct challenge to the participatory principles of co-research (Maguire, 1993; Moore, 2004). Birch and Miller (2002) draw upon Walker's (1992) ethics of responsibility to examine the tension between PhD requirements and participatory research, highlighting the sense of responsibility to sustain engagement with

participants throughout the duration of the research. They also identify the pressures of time and single authorship on decisions to discontinue contact with participants in the final stages.

These tensions clearly require attention over the duration of the research, as addressing the questions that they raise contributes another strand to understanding how knowledge claims are made, and what impact this might have on claims of research validity. Lather (2008) addresses the problem of conflating truth and validity, suggesting instead that researchers engage in making validity 'a space of constructed visibility of the practices of methodology' (p.120), considering how it is they 'see' the research they undertake, and the analyses they make. In a self-confessed post-structural move, Lather suggests that 'validity' is re-interpreted in order to rupture its connection with implications of finding truths rather than use different terminology to describe how the worth and reliability of the research is justified. This perspective is helpful in thinking through a possible conflation of participatory research as producing 'truer' knowledge rather than being a methodological attempt to privilege recognition of different ways of knowing. As such, while there may be tensions between PhD research and 'full' participatory research of the kind described by Tuck (2009), by approaching validity claims as being less about truth and more about knowledge produced within specific contexts there is legitimate space to examine the fluid and negotiable boundaries of participation. This calls attention to the balance of power within the research.

In relation to research with refugees, Temple and Moran (2011) observe that refugees may be 'research-fatigued' by feeling obliged to participate in research, knowing that they are part of an identifiable 'under represented' social group. Moreover, given that refugees will have to tell 'their story' on multiple occasions (Morrice, 2011), the boundary of participation is important in that it also relates how people are mis/recognised as members of this particular social grouping. As questioning and information gathering forms a

key part of the asylum process, boundaries of participation may be influenced by the individual experiences of asylum that participants have had.

This brings questions as to the beneficiaries of the research, and the research purpose back to an ethical point of 'doing no harm' that begins with the social justice aim of participatory research. Jacobsen and Landau (2003) also argue an important point that ethical responsibilities are situated in a wide web of associations. When researching with refugees, they suggest that care must be taken to consider the family and personal networks of participants. They refer to those who remain in participants' home countries, and who may be placed in danger following dissemination of information from the research. Yet clearly there may be ramifications in the country of asylum too, for example through having an impact on how people are perceived by the Home Office or other institutions that refugees may need to engage with as part of their settlement. This reconnects research ethics with the question of who the research is for, and how knowledge is being claimed- the epistemological base.

Of course, it is of primary importance for me that this research, and any future dissemination, is in no way detrimental to perceptions of the UK refugee population. This research has two clear purposes: first, to contribute to the field of knowledge on Higher Education engagement of the UK refugee population, and second, to fulfil the requirements of PhD qualification. In this first section on epistemology I have begun to explore the ethics-epistemology nexus in relation to my purpose to work in a participatory way with refugees as part of a PhD study. Epistemology is now discussed in more depth as I consider the tensions in making knowledge claims 'about' people.

### **Knowing 'about' refugees? Uncertain knowledge claims**

In this study, the research object is specifically, 'the refugee'. The research aim 'to explore refugee students' experiences of higher education in the UK'

may appear to be straightforward, but it rests upon an identifier of refugee<sup>1</sup>. The identifier of refugee is an unstable category and this is explored in more depth in chapter four. First, the legal status(es) associated with the word are in flux both at UK legislative and international levels. Second, the term 'refugee' is a social construct, located within a number of discourses. It is necessary to privilege 'refugee' subjectivity as the research purpose is to explore what it is to seek sanctuary in the UK and engage in higher education. Yet while necessary, it is also problematic, creating the epistemological tension that underpins the research. On one hand, framing of participants' subjectivity as refugee from the outset gives one set of co-ordinates for the direction in which the research can move. On the other, I also seek to foreground how participants self-identify, and remain aware of potential 'Othering' through use of the 'refugee' label. This in turn demands critical thinking about my position as researcher, and the potential limitations of 'seeing' participants as 'insiders' (refugees) and myself as an 'outsider' (non-refugee) in this research context. In chapter three I highlight examples of this occurring as the research developed, then in chapter ten reflect more fully on the matter. St Pierre (2009) says that 'troubles with subjectivity are bound to lead to troubles with language' (p.222), but it seems that it is the other way round in this research. Troubles with language, that is of naming and of talking about the identifiers of 'refugee' or 'asylum seeker' raise questions about subjectivity.

Post-structuralism, in rejecting the availability of an essential subject is helpful here. It is helpful because any perception that people may have natural defining features, and as a result may be in some way knowable, according to the features attributed to a categorisation, such as race or ethnicity, is unacceptable. If it is accepted that knowledge of the social world is socially constructed through attributed categorisations, such as 'citizen' or 'refugee' then it seems also necessary to attend to the problems which come with such

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term 'refugee' here to include all legal statuses that have been given leave to remain in the UK after seeking asylum. My use of the term is discussed in detail in Chapter four.



categorisation. Suspicion of meta-narrative, and the myth of universality (Lyotard, 1984) or the complete truth claim, is connected with this stance against essentialism. Rather, the post-structural attention to the historicity of knowledge claims locates any understandings as biased, in that historical time and cultural context permeate all representations of the social world (Hall, 1996; Sparks, 2002). In place of truth waiting to be uncovered, understanding is always partial, never complete, due to such biases. There is no such thing as a view from God's-eye (Haraway, 1988) or even 'God's shoulder' (Baier, 2010), that is privileged to see all without bias.

A post-structural understanding of the subject then follows that subjectivity is considered to be socially constructed and historically contextualised, rather than being a fixed entity. Knowledge is based in understandings of the world that are plural, and constructed through discourse. Through systems of representation, such as language or other symbols, meanings are negotiated. Within discourses there is both an arbiter and object, both situated and situating the resulting knowledge claims. Convictions about the existence of a singular truth are shaken by their contingency on a false subject positioning which locks subjectivities into one-dimensional, binary positions, such as refugee/ non-refugee or citizen, that are part of the power dynamics of discourse. For example, Bauman (2004) and Squire (2009) examine power discourses in their discussion of the narratives of criminalisation of asylum. Both explore power relations of a discourse of fear that is used by governments to inform and legitimise policy interventions and discourse that conflate asylum with illegal immigration.

There are more questions raised though engaging with post-structural approaches to knowledge than there are clear definitive answers which neatly define my epistemological and ontological position. This section has shown how I see that completeness of knowledge is not viable in this research, in that the privileging of one representation over any other is flawed *and* that I start from a position of incompleteness of knowing about myself. While the social world is ordered through labels and categorisations, I have no desire to

make claims about '*the* refugee experience of higher education in the UK'. Such a statement would not only rely on the removal of conflicting or contradictory details of participants' accounts of their lives, but also it would require a perspective that viewed participants to be unified by an essentialised 'refugee-ness', and for that perspective to be privileged throughout.

What I aim to do is to indicate where and how my subjective lens defines and runs through the research, and as such interrupt such limitations and definitions. In looking to post-structural approaches, I have identified a way of thinking about knowledge that challenges a taken-for-granted assumption that truth exists in obvious forms. Yet I am also aware of the role these labels of 'refugee' or 'asylum seeker' have in forming a basis for the research. So far this section has shown how I have explored my epistemological position. I aim to be confident about what this research ultimately claims, but this confidence will be based on this uncertainty, rather than an unproblematic surety of 'truth'. In order to explore this further, and to consider how Othering might occur in research that at its core seeks to make space for all participants to engage equitably, I consider questions of power, voice and representation.

## **Representing 'voices': deconstruction and power**

Within educational research informed by post structuralism, the method of deconstruction has been undertaken as a means to unsettle essentialist truth claims and in doing so, interrogate an (im) balance of power in what is claimed as knowledge. Foucault (1983) asks

I wish to know how the reflexivity of the subject and the discourse of truth are linked- how can the subject tell the truth about itself? ... If I tell the truth about myself, as I am doing now, it is in part across a number of power relations which are exerted over me and which I exert over others (1983:38-39).

By looking at the way in which subject positions are discursively constructed, the deconstructive process examines the connection of knowledge with power, scrutinizing who has the power to produce knowledge, and how power permeates knowledge claims made. This links back to questions about the purpose of the research that were raised earlier in the context of participatory methodologies; *who* the research is for and *what* the research does (Clough, 2002). In order to engage critically with such power relations Spivak (1990) suggests taking an approach of 'vigilance' in research, to carry out an 'examination over and over again, of the fact that we are obliged to produce truths, positive things, we are obliged to finalize..' (p.46). This is a useful way of framing what it is we do when we draw conclusions in our research, but also this suggests a process that explicitly considers power throughout all stages of knowledge production.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, power is a primary concern within participatory research, and some forms of participatory research may be based in a view of 'reality which can be uncovered and then altered in some way or improved upon for emancipatory purposes' (Brown and Jones, 2001, p.5). Lather (1991; 2008) explores the tension of holding both emancipatory aims and post structural understandings of knowledge when engaging in research. Lather (2008) extends Spivak's (1990) framing of knowledge production by observing that a deconstruction of the research process alone will exclude any useful sense-making of the social world under investigation. Instead Lather advocates an approach to deconstruction that interrogates our ways of understanding, and 'tries to trouble, to look for dangers, normalising tendencies, tendencies towards dominance in spite of liberatory intentions' (2008, p.108).

Deconstruction is helpful to consider how ideology-based understandings of power may be part of the knowledge making processes, without rejecting lived experience of oppression or discrimination. An aim of this research is to offer interpretations and understandings of the social world to add to knowledge about higher education and refugee experience. Part of this for

me, is about learning to hold but not merge, what has been shared with me by participants, with my personal belief that aspects of the UK asylum system are unjust. This contributes in part to my work 'to learn rather than to know' (Lather, 2008, p.73), and specifically here not to 'know about' an essentialised refugee experience (Doná, 2007).

A further concept that links epistemology with research practice is found in the work by Bhabha (1994) on the concept of hybrid subjectivities. In this, Bhabha deconstructs the binary of essentialised subjectivities, in order to working towards identifying the limitations of knowledge claims based on binary positions. It is in the gap between boundaries of Subject/Object that Bhabha's hybrid subjectivities illuminate how colonial discourse produces 'otherness which is at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity' (1994, p.96).

Chapter five shows how 'refugee identity' is constructed through conflicting yet concurrent discourses, such as vulnerability and criminality. As I seek to engage with how the refugees in my study are 'capable of resisting explanation' (Lather, 2008, p.71), Bhabha's (1994) approach to examining resistance to 'otherness' is a useful concept to take forward in my analytical work. The concept of hybridity in relation to identity is discussed in greater depth in chapter six. In addition, it is important to also consider where I am located within this research work, and how my perspectives frame the knowledge claims I make. Highlighting the ethical- epistemological intersection, Fine (1992) identifies 'ventriloquism' as a research practice through which de-contextualised voices of research subjects are represented by a researcher who makes herself invisible and silences her own subjective voice.

Voices can be used to accomplish a subtler form of ventriloquism. Within such texts, while researchers appear to let the Other speak, just under the covers of those marginal—if now 'liberated' voices—we hide, unproblematical (Fine, 1992, p.215).

In this the researcher is challenged to think about how it is 'the Other' is represented by the words in a chapter, article or thesis, and what it might mean to tell a story about someone else's life, using their words to speak about 'their' lives yet channelled through layers of other words that are clearly not theirs. Fine (1998) later writes of 'working the hyphen' between researcher-research object to disrupt such ventriloquism. She argues

the hyphen..separates and merges personal identities with our inventions of Others...when we opt..simply to write about those who have been Othered, we deny the hyphen (1998, p.131-34).

This is a call to move towards this shifting space in between, and examine how representations of Others find researchers challenging, but also colluding with, dominant and dominating structures (1998, p.150). By explicitly, and critically, engaging in the tensions, dilemmas and contradictions we create or encounter, Fine suggests we can resist representing research participants as 'socially bereft, isolated and deficient' Others' (1998, p. 149). This seems important not only in the context of writing up the thesis, but also within sites such as academic conferences in which my authority as researcher may be reified through the analysis and representation of participants' lives.

## **Chapter summary**

This chapter has set out the methodological rationale behind the research, clarifying why I looked to participatory approaches to underpin my work. Through an exploration of the literature on participatory research and on researching with refugees, it is clear that there are nebulous boundaries in which questions of justice, ethics and power intermesh. In examining the connection between epistemology and ethics I have identified a number of tensions that go forward into how I put methodological theory into practice. First, is the need to work out research practices for negotiating participation: balancing my research purpose and my methodological principles as I invite people to participate. This involves clarifying my framing of what it is I expect from participants, the roles we will have in the research, and the research

methods we use. This also requires developing a way to hold my aims lightly so that 'meaningful participation' has the space to develop. Second, I must find ways to work with the category of 'refugee', and appreciate how it might act as a filtering lens on how participant experiences are discussed and analysed. This involves ongoing recognition that it is a necessary category, yet at the same time how it can produce 'Othering'. By drawing on the range of PR literature to inform my research practice, I identify these two strands as integral to taking forward a participatory ethos within this research. Chapter three presents a detailed examination of the tensions involved in doing so in relation to research purpose, practices and methods, as well as outlining my criteria for judging the validity of the research.

# Chapter Three: Methodology: research methods and practices

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## **Introduction**

This chapter presents the research design, methods and ethics that underpin this study. The participatory research theory discussed in chapter two is re-engaged with to show how this translated into methodological practice. This chapter is substantially longer than chapter two as I write about how the design developed over time, and how circumstantial changes influenced how my understanding of participatory research shifted. It is important to show how the research evolved as it highlights the interplay between participatory principles and the research methods that ultimately shaped the way in which knowledge was generated. Research design, participant recruitment, and research ethics are discussed in the first half of the chapter. This is followed by a reflective discussion on research methods and my approach to analysis. Points of tension and difficulty are engaged with in this section related to practical challenges and epistemological questions raised in chapter two. Finally, I set out the validity criteria on which I wish the research to be judged.

## **Research aim and questions**

Located in the participatory theories discussed in Chapter Two, the research design sought to start with where participants 'were at', by engaging them to think about their ongoing experience of studying in British higher education, contextualised by their daily lives. I envisaged that the research would evolve as participants identified and explored the themes related to their HE participation that were of interest to them, with the potential to investigate

these themes within an emergent co-research group. The overarching aim of this research was identified as follows:

- To explore the experiences of asylum seeker and refugee students in UK higher education.

It included the following component questions:

- What were participant experiences of UK higher education?
- How, if at all, did participants relate their HE experiences to that of their lived experience of asylum in the UK?

The aim and questions were set to be relatively open-ended so that there was opportunity for the research to become more focussed as key themes of inquiry were identified through discussion and reflection. As outlined in chapter one, I aimed to examine what role higher education had in the lives of refugees as they settled in the UK, their motivations for participation in university and what they thought about their current experiences of degree studies. The final question reflects my aim not to make assumptions about their individual identifications with 'refugee'. I wanted to remain vigilant to this and to the ways in which different experiences of seeking asylum might impact on participation in higher education.

As I was interested primarily in exploring how 'refugee' and 'higher education' intersected, I was open to this being examined through a breadth of contexts, such as people undertaking undergraduate or postgraduate degrees, and with people with refugee or asylum seeker status (the significance of different forms of humanitarian status is discussed in greater detail in Chapters four, five, eight and nine). It is hard to know with total certainty about the numbers of first generation refugees in the UK, or how many of these people are engaged in university studies (see chapter four). Therefore setting too many criteria for participation at the outset could have resulted in insufficient numbers of participants. This section now moves on to discussing how I identified and contacted participants, indicating how the



participatory principles examined in chapter two began to be put into practice.

## **Identifying and contacting participants**

In the early stages of planning this study I approached ex-colleagues at a university in South Wales, as I knew they had been engaged in outreach work with local refugee community groups. A specific project aiming to recruit refugees to a ten credit Year One module in Community Development was scheduled to start in October 2010. This module had been piloted in session 2009-2010 with students recruited through outreach work with the city's Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) organisations. By offering highly supported tuition, the module ran over a full academic year as an introduction to degree studies.

Between November 2009 and February 2010 I met with the module co-ordinator and tutor to discuss my research ideas. As ex-colleagues with whom I had worked closely, I respected their approach to community engagement, and considered us to have a good working relationship. The team were willing to allow me to invite students to participate in research with me, and we discussed practical and ethical issues, such as timetabling research into the students' days on campus, and confidentiality and boundaries. Nevertheless, after our final meeting to confirm that this could go ahead, at the point when I needed to confirm my research proposal with the UWE Research Degrees Committee, I left feeling that while I was hearing 'yes' from my ex-colleagues, what really was being said was 'no'. At the time I was uncertain why I felt this, but by May 2010 I was informed that that the module would definitely not be running. I understand this was due to a combination of financial and staffing issues, but it did mean that I had to start again in looking for prospective participants.

A period of anxiety and frustration followed, I felt unsure as to how I would bring together a new research group. Unlike when I had been immersed in

community education as a practitioner, I was now a full-time student, and I did not have a well-established network of contacts with local refugee organisations. This change in circumstances is an important point to reflect upon. In terms of methodology, the paragraphs above show a tacit assumption that I held about shared interests that I expected would be found in a small student cohort. By default of having come through the asylum process, I think I assumed they would have an interest in exploring their educational experiences. While a strong co-research group may have developed within the cohort- as we would have had resources of time, meeting space, and geographical proximity – equally, the group might not have worked well for a number of other reasons. However, at the time I did not see that assumption, so as I sought to find a new set of participants, I remained focussed on bringing together a research group to work collectively, rather than research on a one to one basis with individual participants. This was how I first framed ‘meaningful participation’ in that I perceived that if a group of participants co-identified key themes for the inquiry it would provide a strong base for their ongoing participation.

While that may be true, I also underestimated the importance of a clear pre-established shared interest, or a shared context, as a starting point for a group-based inquiry. Despite the possibility that a co-research group might not have worked for the reasons above, if a group had been formed with the Community Development students then there would have been clear potential for the research to follow a PAR methodology. For example, investigation of the students’ ongoing learning experiences in the context of that module could potentially have effected change in course content, teaching methods or student engagement practices. The section now moves on to outline how I invited people to participate, showing the challenge of bringing together a research group, and highlighting how the framing of ‘participation’ in the study was shifting.

## **Inviting participation?**

My aim was to find refugees who were currently engaged in higher education, willing to discuss their HE experiences, and potentially explore these or related themes within a group inquiry. I sought support from the UWE Refugee Migrant Support Hub as well as contacting people who worked with refugee and BME community organisations in Bristol, Cardiff and Newport. This was a period of numerous emails, phone calls, and conversations that were interesting and seemed full of potential, but ultimately did not result in high numbers of participants.

In addition to the people who ultimately chose to participate, I was also contacted by three women refugees who had seen a flyer about the research in a Bristol Refugee Community Organisation (RCO) office. However, these women were not already in HE, but seeking advice on how to begin degree studies. In reply, I advised they contact the UWE Migrant Support Hub for more information about doing so. At this point I could have re-focussed my project to include the aspiring students. However, I wanted to maintain the original aim to explore in-depth the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees once they were engaged in degree studies. It was still of primary importance for me to find out about what happened after access; what was involved in getting through the course of study in both practical terms of 'doing' university and within the wider context of living through forced migration.

A key element of the initial contact stage was to establish rapport and trust, as well as clarify mutual aims and ideas about participation in the research. Keeping in mind the potential to start 'Othering' participants from the outset of the research (Evans *et al*, 2009) through my perceptions of their 'refugeeness', I began to engage in the practice of 'bracketing' (Heron and Reason, 2001) that I then carried through the research. This practice is defined as the

'reframing of the classifications and constructs that we impose on our perceiving' (Heron and Reason, 2001, p.150). This involved me thinking critically about my actions so as to neither over-emphasise discourses of deficit of refugees (see chapter four), such vulnerability or victimhood, but at the same time, show that I was engaged with questions of justice in relation to asylum and refugees in UK society.

To do so, I chose to talk about my work in HE teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) to International students as well as my experience of community-based English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and literacies teaching with asylum seekers and refugees. Being involved in these different forms of teaching led me to think about how asylum seekers and refugees access higher education in the UK, and what kinds of experience they might have. Over the course of three years work as an EAP tutor at a university in Scotland, I had noticed that language support was available only to International Students, yet I was concurrently teaching asylum seekers in community based ESOL classes in the same city, and working in these two contexts triggered thoughts to find out more about refugee participation in HE. I used this framing to demonstrate that I was interested in how refugees access and participate in HE, but at the same time I wanted to keep some sense of balance as to how I addressed questions of justice. As a result, the formal Invitation to Research that I produced was carefully worded, with the intent to make clear that I wanted to work both critically and creatively in order not to perpetuate negative stereotypes of refugees. The extract below is taken from the Invitation to Research (Appendix A) sent to prospective participants following our initial meetings and informal discussions. It introduces the research aim and rationale and why they are being asked to participate.

### **Extract 3.1 from the Invitation to Research**

**Dear Student:**

*My name is Louise Bowen. I am a university student, studying for a PhD in Education at the University of the West of England (UWE). I invite you to take*

*part in a research project called Life, Learning and University. I have not gone through the asylum process myself, but one of the reasons for doing this research is that I think it is important that there is a wider understanding of how people seeking asylum are part of British society.*

***Why have I been asked to participate?*** *You have been asked to participate because you are either an asylum seeker or refugee in the UK, studying at a British university.*

***What is the purpose of the research project?*** *The project aims to research the experiences of asylum seeker and refugee students in higher education, to understand how university fits into the everyday lives of students who have gone through the asylum process in the UK.*

The second extract from the Invitation to Research outlines the suggested research design and methods, and my reasons for this approach. This reflects how I adapted the research design to work with the changes in prospective participants. Instead of an on-campus research group taken from a module cohort in South Wales, the research was now going to be based on a collection of individuals living and studying in various locations in England and Wales. However, it is clear that I still aimed to develop a collective approach to shaping the substantive content of the research.

### **Extract 3.2 from the Invitation to Research**

#### ***Do I have to take part?***

*It is your choice to take part in this research, or not. If you are a UWE student then there is no connection between this research and your current grades, assessments or future studies at UWE. If you decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you take part you can also stop being part of the research at any time without giving a reason. Although if you do stop, the research you have already participated in could still be used in the final research document.*

#### ***What will happen if I choose to take part?***

***Online forum:*** *The online part of the research will run 2010-2011 (November to July). I suggest that the online forum focuses on a new topic once a month. You can contribute in your own time, when it is convenient for you. So that a group discussion can develop, each person will need to contribute at least one post to each new discussion as well as contribute comments on the posts that other people make.*

**Interviews:** *I suggest 3 interviews with me over the academic year, approximately one hour long, either by phone (I will call you), or face to face. One interview each academic term can be arranged at a time convenient to you.*

**Activities:** *I will ask you to focus on understanding how university and your everyday lives are connected. This means thinking of some questions you are interested in answering and deciding how you want to record your ideas. For example, by taking photos or keeping a diary for a while. In the forum we will be able to discuss each other's ideas and decide what to do next.*

The research methods listed above were finally selected after informal discussions with prospective participants and in meetings with my supervisory team in advance of circulating the Invitation to Research. In selecting these methods and presenting them in this way, I was attempting to work out the boundaries of how the research could take forward a participatory ethos, while also responding to participants' questions for direction as to what the research might involve. They identified that they wanted to have a practical, tangible idea of what could be involved before they agreed to participate. This shifted the boundaries of participation again, as I proposed research methods, rather than this being a group decision-making process. I was setting out my expectations of how participation might take place, but this was a point of constant reflection, as I tried to negotiate my research purpose with the boundary-setting carried out by participants via our emails and phone calls (for example, when expressing a preference for an interview but not to produce a diary).

The 'participatory' in this research was clearly beginning to be shaped by context and interactions between people. This was the enacting of a guiding principle which is rooted in my work as an adult educator, drawing on the principles of privileging experiential knowledge, whereby adults name and frame their interests (Schön, 1989; Foley, 1999), rather than the research being structured from the beginning by my theoretical knowledge and perceptions alone. In this way I attempted to work out my own research purpose with that of the participants, to form a basis for the research through negotiation and clarification of our respective contributions. However, at this

early stage I believe that I conflated this with a sense that somehow, *more* variety in fieldwork methods equated with the production of *complete* knowledge, despite my epistemological framing of the incompleteness of knowledge. Also, it was necessary to remember that the production of a PhD thesis was also a main driver of undertaking this research, so to a large extent the flexibility of the research was limited by pre-set timescales and requirements of thesis single authorship.

Moreover, participants had no other connection with each other than having sought asylum in the UK and currently studying at a UK university. Importantly, there was no local, specific problem to be addressed that had been identified by group members (Reason, 1999) that would locate this research within a PAR framing. Rather, people were 'participated into' the research (Cornwall, 2008), in that although the research was framed by participatory principles, by this stage there were clearly defined limitations on the ways that participants could have co-researcher status. In part this is due to the shifting context of the study, but also my emerging doubts of whether there could be the potential for a form of action research to take place. This marked a key shift in the development of the research. I revised my original aim to develop a PAR project, looking instead towards how I could facilitate a group approach to identifying further inquiry questions or themes, rather than fix those questions and themes myself. I hoped that in doing so a shared point of interest might arise so that some form of co-research could begin, and in this way the research shifted from a focus on action to an emphasis on embedding participatory processes through application of research methods. Discussion of the rationale behind selection of research methods and how these worked out in relation to the shifts in research purpose follows later in the chapter. This section concludes with an overview of the research participants.

## The research participants

The chart below provides an overview of the participants at the outset of fieldwork in November 2010. The thesis glossary and chapter five provide more detail about humanitarian statuses such as Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) and Discretionary Leave.

**Chart 3.1: participant list**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Immigration Status</b>	<b>Gender/ Age group</b>	<b>Home country</b>	<b>Degree type</b>	<b>University</b>
Lul	Refugee (ILR)	F 30-39	Somalia	U/G BA	92 + England
Amal	Refugee (ILR)	M 30-39	Kurdistan	P/G MA	92+ Wales/ 92+ England
Aro	Refugee (ILR)	M 30-39	Kurdistan	P/G MA	92+ England
Bako	Refugee (ILR)	M 30-39	Iraq	P/G PhD	92+ England
Harry	Citizen	M 30-39	Iraq	P/G PhD	<92 England
Moses	Unspecified	M 30-39	Somalia	P/G MSc	<92 England
David	Discretionary Leave	M 30-39	Zimbabwe	P/G MSc	92+ England
T-Jay	ILR	M 30-39	Zimbabwe	U/G- Cert HE	92+ Wales
Jordan	ILR (CRD)	M 30-39	Zimbabwe	U/G Cert HE	92+ Wales
Vincent	Refugee – unspecified (possibly ILR)	M 40-49	Zimbabwe	U/G BA	92+ Wales

The people who chose to go ahead with participating were those who had been contacted via the UWE Migrant Support Hub and a Refugee Community



Organisation (RCO) worker who was based in Cardiff. These were the two 'gatekeepers' with whom I had the most strongly established working relationships. This seems to reinforce the importance of trust on multiple levels, between participant and 'gatekeeper' as well as researcher and participant (Temple and Moran, 2011). However it also brings into question the hidden agendas of gatekeepers, their motivations for encouraging people to participate, and the element of power that may have been in play should they have persuaded people to engage with the research.

Chart 3.1 also shows a significant gender imbalance, of nine men and one woman. In the case of this particular study, perhaps it can be attributed to the 'snowballing' effect of Aro agreeing to participate, and then inviting his friends Bako and Harry to participate. However, I also contacted two other female students, but they declined to participate. As recording humanitarian status is not a part of Equalities monitoring practices (Aspinall and Watters, 2010), it is difficult to know how many refugees engage in higher education. What is known that the age and gender of the participants in this study and the period of time they have already spent in the UK reflects that of majority of people who come to the UK seeking asylum. In 2011, the majority of asylum applicants were between the ages of twenty five and thirty four (Blinder, 2013) and also male. While women make up 27% of overall asylum applications in all age categories apart from the over sixties, men make up at least 63% of asylum applicants (Blinder, 2013). Although the majority of participants in this study were enrolled at post-1992 universities which are well documented for recruiting higher numbers of minority ethnic students (Reay *et al*, 2005; Runnymede Trust, 2010), it is also important to point out that my strongest 'gatekeeper' links were based in this type of university, and therefore had an impact on how I identified potential research participants.

Chart 3.2 below provides an overview of how participation in the research occurred. It shows who left the research before it had fully started, and that with respect to the remaining individuals, participation was not uniform over the duration of the academic year 2010-2011. It also highlights that different

research methods were accepted, or rejected, on an individual basis by participants.

### **Chart 3.2 Extent of participation in the research**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Extent of participation</b>	<b>Research activities</b>
Lul	Full duration	3 interviews, written diary.
Amal	Full duration	3 interviews, written diary.
Aro	Full duration	3 interviews, online forum, written diary.
Bako	Change in circumstances: ceased contact after first interview (via email)	n/a
Harry	Ceased contact between agreement to participate and start of interviews	n/a
Moses	Ceased contact between agreement to participate and start of interviews	n/a
David	Full duration	3 interviews, photo diary.
T-Jay	Partial	2 interviews.
Jordan	Full duration	3 interviews, photo diary.
Vincent	Partial	1 interview.

As this chapter continues, and research methods are discussed, I reflect on the impact of these different extents of participation on the research methodology, my understanding of ‘participation’, and the decisions I made regarding representation of ‘voices’. Before that however, the section focuses on ethical clearance and how I worked with UWE institutional ethical requirements when inviting participants to research.

### **Ethical approval**

My research was granted approval by UWE following Faculty Research Ethics Sub-Committee (FRESC) procedures. This approval was subsequently accepted as satisfactory by the ESRC. Within my research ethics statement I provided plans for dealing with anonymity, disclosure, and ongoing

negotiation of consent, alongside consideration of researching with potentially vulnerable participants in a group setting. Although the application was submitted when I originally planned to work with a group of students from the Community Development module, the main elements of this application held for the subsequent work I carried out. The FRESC application is attached in full in Appendix C.

The FRESC raised a question related to UK Border Agency surveillance of participants, and what provision I had made for responding to such investigation. I consulted with the UWE Refugee and Migrant Support Hub and checked British Sociological Association (BSA), British Educational Research Association (BERA) and ESRC ethical guidelines, as well as the UK Border Agency and other immigration websites. However, I was unable to find information clarifying the situations in which the UKBA could demand statutory disclosure of information that would compromise participant anonymity and confidentiality. The issue was then redirected to the Chair of the University Ethics Committee. As no further clarification could be made it was finally agreed with the Chair that I would proceed as per BERA and BSA guidelines, and indeed as per my original Invitation to Research. This meant that I would adhere to participant confidentiality/ anonymity unless any participant gave me reason to believe that there was risk of harm to self or others. If risk were to arise I would consult my supervisory team for guidance, as well as raise the matter with the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee if necessary.

It was not necessary to do so, but this question illuminated an interesting point of intersection between UK higher education, educational research and the policy and practice of immigration legislation. This inquiry was carried out in a time of intense focus by the UK Border Agency (UKBA) on illegal immigration through international student enrolment, and the removal of some HEIs from a Highly Trusted Sponsors list (UKBA, 2011). As such the risk of harm to participants is escalated from the local site to a national level, in which UKBA practices potentially could overrule the ethical boundaries of the

inquiry. The FRESC observation also reinforces the possibility that participants considered that the UKBA might be able to access their commentaries, and thus modified their participation in light of this.

### **Engaging with participants on research ethics**

Ethical matters were discussed informally and later more formally with participants, covering anonymity and confidentiality, and mutual expectations of what participation in the research would entail. This was also a period of developing the trust which would shape our research relationships, rather than approaching ethics as a regimented exercise of delineating what was ethically acceptable or unacceptable (Nespor and Groenke, 2009). In researching with people from a range of cultural backgrounds it was also important to remember that I might be unaware of culturally specific ethical practices that participants might expect or assume (McEwan, 2003).

After leaving a 'cooling off' period of around two weeks I followed up more formally with participants to discuss the research purpose again, review the main ethical concepts, and distribute the ethical documents for signing. The documentation was threefold; an Invitation to Research, outlining the aims and scope of the research; Online Conduct Guidelines, and the Participation Agreement. By signing the Participation Agreement participants were giving consent as well as recognising the Online Conduct Agreement. These documents can be found in Appendix A (Invitation to Research), Appendix B (Research Participation Agreement) and Appendix D (Online Forum Agreement).

Ethical procedures for carrying out research through the medium of online groups are still at an early point in development. Therefore it was difficult to find specific guidelines on Intellectual Property and data protection rights regarding the extent of ownership, access and dissemination rights of the third party host (Ning) of content uploaded to the forum. Ning is a social networking platform, offering options to upload audiovisual files,

photographs and engage in real-time conversations through a 'chat' facility. I wanted to be clear to talk confidently with participants about their safety when contributing to the forum. Ultimately after discussing with supervisors, and consulting the UWE E-learning team, I was clear that contributions would be secure as possible, particularly if participants used aliases and were careful in sharing personal identifiers, either in written or photo form. The British Psychological Society's Guidelines for Ethical Practice on Conducting Psychological Research Online (2007) were the most detailed and recent of sources available at the time, so my Online Conduct document included recommendations made by these guidelines. Key points here were: identity protection of oneself and others, acceptable online behaviour, and mutual respect of opinions. I also outlined the Ning policy on data ownership and storage of data and uploaded this to the forum as well as circulating it by email. As a way of extending my duty of care to participants I populated the Ning site with potentially relevant advice and guidance RSS feeds from the Refugee Council, the Council for Assisting Refugee Academics (CARA), and UWE Student Services.

As a key ethical consideration in the negotiation of ongoing consent, I explicitly pointed out that participants could leave the research without obligation. All group emails I sent to participants included a footnote message to inform me if they wished to opt out of communications on the research, although none did so. Moreover, after consulting the BPA recommendations I decided that the online forum would be an active opt-in, agreed through signing the Online Conduct Agreement. All participants opted in and their choice to do so was also verbally confirmed. However, online participation was minimal, and as will be discussed in the forthcoming section on research methods, after three months I decided not to continue pressing participants about posting to the online forum, recognising that people were not engaged with using it in this way.

It was important to me that my ethical practices consisted of more than a formulaic approach to 'doing no harm' by protecting identities and

confidentiality. My aim to research in a participatory way was underpinned by an ethic of being responsive to the dynamics of participation as the research developed. As people participated in ways other than I expected, this reframed how knowledge was generated through the inquiry. The chapter now moves on to focus on the research methods used, with attention given to how participants set their own boundaries of participation through engagement with these methods.

### **Research methods: shifting boundaries of participation**

This section opens with an overview of the rationale behind selecting particular research methods. Methods are then discussed in relation to literature and how using these methods worked out in the context of this study. This follows the thread of continuing to negotiate my research purpose and the boundaries of participation at group and individual levels. Mindful of the observations on researcher ‘control’ of participatory research from Cornwall (2008), I needed to develop an ethos of flexibility, so that research could be responsive to how participants engaged in it as it progressed. The research design needed to incorporate participants’ agency, and recognise the ongoing negotiation of informed consent and participation. In this way my aim to do this was inter-connected with the need to provide a methodological framework to support the social justice commitments that framed my interest in carrying out participative research. The table below provides an overview of the research schedule.

**Table 1: Fieldwork schedule (November 2010-July 2011)**

Month/ Method	Nov 2010	Dec	Jan 2011	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Online forum									
Interview									
Photo diaries									

First, I encountered logistical restrictions on bringing together the kind of research group that I initially imagined. Participants did not live within commutable distance from each other and I had no funds to cover any travel/accommodation expenses for attending group meetings. In order to create a central 'meeting space' for participants, in which ideas could be shared and explored, I set up the private, invitation-only 'Ning' online forum.

Second, a schedule of regular one to one interviews over the academic year was designed so that the research would have another stream of knowledge production. While I hoped that the online forum could flourish into an active research site, I also considered that one to one interviews would allow for more in-depth exploration of the individual HE experiences of each participant, and that in this way interviews and the forum could complement each other as research methods. I also recognised that in any group there is a power dynamic, and that should there be 'loud' voices present on the forum, the offline interviews would offer an alternative space for 'quiet' participants to express their thoughts.

The third method, to produce a 'week in the life' journal, was also chosen as a means to explore in detail the ways that HE was part of daily life. I was interested in photo diaries as offering a different way of self-representation and stimulus for discussion of experiences. However, in the Invitation to Research I also referred to written diaries, on the basis that taking documentary style photos may have seemed overtly risky or uncomfortable for some participants (despite also offering guidance on maintaining anonymity when taking photos). In selecting these methods I was again working with the tension of being mindful of refugee experiences of surveillance from the UKBA and other organisations but equally I did not want to avoid trying to use particular methods because of this.

## **Method 1: Online forum**

Participants were encouraged to upload content of interest that they wished to share, so that questions about their HE participation might be understood within a wider everyday context, and to promote an active space of discussion, reflection and analysis. I posted about various aspects of the research, introducing the shared space to participants, and inviting comment and questions. The screenshot in Appendix E shows this in the 'welcome' post.

Stewart and Williams (2005) suggest that the primary benefit of asynchronous online forums, such as this, is the flexibility it allows people to access and contribute at a time and place of their choosing. They argue that the key disadvantages are a lack of face-to face contact, the need to find alternative ways of expressing emotions, and time delays in interaction that may cause a drift in conversation. The Ning forum was used infrequently by participants, although I monitored the site regularly, and quickly followed up on any posts. As forum administrator I could see the most recent log-ins of group members and tried to encourage forum activity by mentioning it in one to one interviews, phonecalls and emails. At this time I was concerned with overloading the forum, as I was striving for a balance in how we all could share the role of developing a discussion on the forum. I sought to ensure new content was available for participant reaction, while also encouraging people to add material that was new, and not only respond to my posts.

Around three months after the forum had gone 'live', it was clear that it was not functioning in the way I had expected, as people were not posting or using it as a discussion forum. At that point I decided that my continued requests to participants to actively post on the forum could inadvertently be pressuring people to make excuses to me for not posting or logging on. While



some individuals had been enthusiastic about the idea of the forum before signing up to the research, this enthusiasm did not translate into active posting. Others made repeated assurances to me that they would look at it, and post when they had time.

Grey (2004) explores the development of a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 2001) through studying online forum discussions of adult educator co-ordinators. In this she highlights the importance of offline communication practices in fostering a sense of group cohesion, rather than reliance on technological communications to do so. That is to say, the importance of face to face communication cannot be underplayed in establishing relationships. The participants in Grey's (2004) study who continually logged in (with or without making their presence visible through posts), cited their reasons for doing so as feeling connected to others in their field and that it was a means to combat isolation. Grey cited three main reasons from those who did not log in. These were: i) a lack of familiarity with the technology and uncertainty as to how online forum could aid their work ii) lack of access to technology and iii) limited or no self-identification with that particular co-ordinator community, both online and offline (p.25).

The infrequent use of the forum instigated another important shift in my understanding of participatory research practices, and also of researching with refugees. The tacit withdrawal from those who had enthusiastically (I thought) signed up to the forum may suggest that questions of surveillance and risk of exposure might run deeper than I expected. Or indeed, that in the moment of facing the screen, and the empty text box, the risk was too great, despite using a pseudonym. Before setting up the forum I had discussed computer access and familiarity with technology with participants, specifically to see if the forum would be a viable research method. Participants seemed confident with IT, and had access to computers, so this was not a problem. Kralik *et al* (2006) suggest that as a means of data generation, online discussion forums provide the means for conversation and debate in which people may not have otherwise been able to engage in. More, the type of

conversation may be reflective rather than the immediate response that happens in real-time. Yet this type of active engagement did not take place in this forum, so it seems more likely that, in light of Grey's (2004) third point, the forum may indicate that individuals simply did not have the type of connection with the research that was necessary to want to engage in group discussion. When one participant posted, asking if others had received guidance on accessing HE in their ESOL classes, none of the other participants responded (see screenshot of this post in Appendix E). He then cited this lack of response back to me as a reason for not posting again. This seems to relate to the persistent tacit assumption I think I held about participants in the earlier stages of the research, that by agreeing to be involved in the research, they were fully identifying with being a member of a 'refugee community'. In this way, I was unknowingly cementing an arbitrary interpretation of what it meant to be an 'insider' or 'outsider' in the research. That is, my positionality as an 'outsider' (non-refugee) was defining how I assumed participants might identify with the 'refugee' label. Hynes (2003) points to multiple factors which may contribute to refugee mistrust of others, accumulating over the course of leaving their home country to the point of settling elsewhere. This includes the interpersonal dynamics with other refugee people within a perceived 'refugee community', in which intersectional cultural and social dimensions create tensions and power imbalances, as within any other social context.

In this way the forum became an important boundary setting tool in signalling how people chose to engage in the research on an individual basis, requiring me to reflect on how I understood research participation as it was developing. Rather than close it down I decided to use it as dissemination tool for engaging with participants as the research progressed. I posted slides and mini blogs on my conference presentations and invited comments on these and my own photo diary. When I posted I emailed participants with details of the new posts, and in this way aimed to keep the forum open for further discussion and dialogue. No comments were made online, but as Nonnecke and Preece (2000) state, unseen online presence ('lurking'), can still be of

value. Visible activities, such as commenting, are only one form of participation. Non-visibility does not mean the site is not being used or that those visitors do not feel involved. A few participants said they visited the site in this way, although because these visits are not recorded I do not know if this is so. For example, although they did not comment online, some brought up questions and comments regarding my photo diary during subsequent interviews. I interpreted this as a useful method in showing participants that it was fine to ask me questions, and therefore it was valuable in its own right, as a dissemination space. This was significant in partially answering a question raised in chapter two; how much, and in what forms, is participation needed before it can be taken as a valid indicator of 'good' research? Even though the eventual purpose of the forum was different to that which I originally envisaged, it gave some subtle insights into how 'participatory' research intent and practice are so deeply reliant on interpersonal relationships and the specific local context. This outcome demonstrates the importance of flexibility when working with participants to engage in research methods. As a result, the forum did have value as a meeting point for different research purposes, playing a role in contributing to the participatory ethos of the research.

## **Method 2: Interviews**

The research design included interviews as a central strand of knowledge production. One-to-one interviews were held with participants over the academic year 2010-2011. This dimension of the research was intended to 'follow' participants' lives through this period in their HE studies. The online forum had been established as a shared space and communication point that would be available for the duration of the research, and so interviews had two primary aims. First, this was to discuss individuals' experiences of university in greater depth than possible through the online forum, while providing a further opportunity for participants to lead the discussion. Second, this allowed for me and each participant to check out, in real time,

facts or points of interest from the research thus far that may be specific to that participant that might not otherwise be shared in a group forum. Initially this was also a way of cycling between group and individual lines of inquiry (Heron and Reason, 2001), but as the research progressed, and group interaction did not develop via the forum, interviews focussed primarily on individuals' experiences.

The interviews were conducted either in person in private spaces on university campuses, such as library study rooms, or via email, phone or Skype. In the cases of participants who lived beyond commuting distance, I endeavoured to carry out at least one interview in person by travelling to meet them, so that we both could benefit from a face to face meeting. I took an iterative approach to interviews, starting with a semi-structured first interview before moving into subsequent very lightly structured or unstructured interviews. Particularly during the first 'round' of interviews it was important to develop rapport, and engage each participant further with the possibilities for exploring lines of inquiry that were important or of interest to them. Concurrently, I wanted to start discussing their participation in Higher Education. As a result I encountered the dilemma that Watts (2006) highlights, of the multiple aims of first interviews, and the difficulty of balancing open questions with covering topics that are important from the researcher's perspective. These multiple aims are visible in the first interview schedule (Appendix F) in which I sought to review our mutual aims and expectations for the research before starting to discuss their experiences. However in this research the multiple aims continued through subsequent interviews as I sought to revisit ethical issues each time I met with a participant.

Birch and Miller (2002) suggest making time for 'ethical talk' with participants, as explicit 'processes of participation', for example through agreeing that both researcher and participants make, and share, field notes. Yet they also highlight the extent to which this kind of activity increases the level of commitment required of participants, something they may not wish. I

engaged in a similar practice to 'ethical talk' with participants, agreeing that I would give them a detailed summary of our interviews for fact checking and adjustment (if necessary) by them before our next interview. Then at the start of each interview we could discuss points that arose from that summary, as well as how the research was going. I suggested this approach as I could not always be certain I would have a full transcript ready in advance of meeting, but I did want to make space for this type of discussion. While this practice was useful for clarifying specific facts, I think now it may have been more useful to separate the two activities- reflective discussion and interview- as these had distinct aims. Once again, this exemplifies how I negotiated the boundary work of trying to hold my research purpose lightly, and show that I hoped to inquire 'with', rather than 'about' the participants.

The semi structured approach taken in the first interviews also created a platform for subsequent interviews. These later interviews took the form of a starting stage of sharing reflections and/or clarifying facts before taking a very lightly structured or unstructured format (Corbin and Morse, 2003), sometimes following an open question from me, such as 'so what's been happening since we last met?' Given that participants had been involved with Higher Education for differing timescales, and were studying different qualification levels, interviews varied in the extent of reflections made back to their earlier HE experiences. Some participants clearly had more extensive HE experience in the UK which was relevant to discussions of their current situation. Ensuring there was space for unstructured discussion allowed for accounts of Higher Education experience to be framed within accounts of life more broadly (Atkinson, 1998). This helped to foreground each participant's 'personal knowledge' (Goodson, 1995, p.3) of wider social structures and processes. These points interweave with the argument that interviews can focus too extensively on the participant as the subject of the research, rather than the socio-cultural contexts in which their stories are situated (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990).

Prior to the interviews, literature on refugee participation in UK education and society gave me tentative ideas about what participants might say about their university experiences. This added to my experiential knowledge drawn from working with asylum seekers and refugees as an ESOL tutor. However, I did not wish to direct the interviews from the outset by locking in participants' biographies as primarily 'refugee'. Participants who produced written or photo diaries about their everyday life (see Method Three below) discussed these in the third interview. Overall, in the third interviews participants spoke more widely about their lives outside university, perhaps as they looked to the end of that year of study. This was in contrast to the second interviews that were undertaken in the middle of the academic year when participants were deeply involved in coursework. In interviews I again engaged in 'bracketing' practice, by looking out for and following up on the conversational threads that participants started about family life, or work, or other interests, in which they spoke to other forms of self-identification than 'refugee'. As participants discussed what was happening in their lives, and what had happened since our previous discussion, I aimed to strike a balance between listening and responding to points raised. Corbin and Morse (2003) point out additional questions from researchers can change the topic and direction of interviews. While this may be so, people can also choose to speak strategically to create a particular emotional dynamic (Blee, 1993) and/ or represent themselves in a particular way (Dyck and McLaren, 2004), in spite of what questions are asked. My epistemological perspective recognises that knowledge is always partial and time and context-specific, therefore what was discussed would be no more or less valid or 'true' than if the interview had been held on a different day, or if other questions had been asked.

These interviews became the primary method for knowledge generation as few participants produced visual or written diaries. This third method did make a useful contribution to the research however in both contributing to the discussion in final interviews for some participants, and also in my learning about research participation dynamics.

### **Method 3: Visual and written diaries**

The third method used in the research was the diary-logging of a 'week in my student life'. This stage, in the third academic term, followed the second interviews. As stated earlier, the rationale for using this method was based in the possibilities it offered for participants to reflect upon, and document their HE experiences, then bring these into the research. Rather than being in a position where they were responding to my questions, I thought this could be another way to engage with the power dynamics of research, in that the selection of topic/focus of our discussions arising from the diaries would very clearly be participant led.

In visual research, participants might respond to pre-made images, produce their own through photography, collage or drawing, for example, or engage in a combination of these activities (Pink, 2007; Rose, 2007). In this way images could be either the starting point for the production of research data or be one form of data produced by the research (Warren, 2002; Gourlay, 2010). Choices around self-representation and substantive content of the research can be negotiated with participants in the selection, discussion and making of their images, (Lykes, 2001; Rose, 2007). Gourlay (2010) suggests visual methods can be a 'means to facilitate exploration of subtle, abstract and difficult themes in a creative way' (p.81), bringing rich data that may not be accessible through conventional interview methods (Warren, 2002), or 'making explicit the tacit' (Simco and Warin, 1997). Images can also provide a focus for dialogue and meaning making that does not rely on written language (Lykes, 2001) by bringing together the visual and the verbal (Kissoon, 2008). Visual methods have been used in research with refugees to explore the concepts of belonging (Rishbeth and Finney, 2005) and resilience (Munt, 2012). Rishbeth and Finney (2005) engaged with asylum seekers to examine belonging and difference through photo-documenting urban greenspaces. They found that through the process of taking photographs

asylum seekers engaged in reflective discussion on their new living environment in relation to the places and spaces of their home countries, thus identifying what made them feel 'at home' or out of place. Munt's (2012) work similarly engaged refugee women to document their feelings connected to 'being refugee' as part of an innovative psycho-social learning class.

Both these visual research projects suggested that interaction with the surrounding environment, through the act of taking photographs, evoked memories and emotional associations that may have been less accessible through written journaling or interview alone. Prosser *et al* (2008) observe that this dimension of visual methods can have an important role in equitable research practices. For example, by removing the emphasis on language fluency, participants may be able to self-represent identities or experiences more as they would wish through visual methods. In my study, this could be pertinent to participants who have been asked to recount 'their story' for official purposes, in that a visual approach might be a way in to making a different kind of account. However, Prosser *et al* (2008) also note that visual methods such as photography may be culturally inappropriate. This observation also influenced my decision to suggest written diaries as an alternative to taking photos.

When I talked through the idea of making photo diaries with participants (offering disposable cameras if necessary), responses were mixed. The reactions from participants echoed what had been observed by other researchers, such as being uncomfortable with using photography due to a sense of inexperience (Rose, 2007; Banks, 2008) or that that this method seemed too trivial for academic research (Gourlay, 2010). Only Jordan and David created a photo diary, while Lul, Amal and Aro produced short written journals. I discussed the rationale for diary making, and uploaded my own photo diary of my 'student week' to the Ning forum, after I had been asked by participants for clarification of what this activity might involve. Aiming not to intimidate or put people off making a diary, I shared photos that were quite



neutral in content, yet had significance for me. For example, a picture of my cluttered desk after a day working in the 'hotdesking' room in the Education Department, and a photo of the road that I walked along to university from the station. This also seemed like a good way to share some further aspects of my life with participants, in the spirit of reciprocity. This was not intended as a means of 'faking friendship' (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002) however, as by that stage we had established our research relationships.

When faced with low participation in this method I reflected on how people chose to engage with the online forum, and decided not to push the case for diarying. Again it required me to think through my desires for doing research in a particular way, and the aim to use multiple methods to encourage a certain form of participation. It is possible that participants agreed to engage with these research methods as they perceived this to be the 'correct' answer (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) to my requests. Ultimately though, most people were content to meet for interviews, and in this way marked their boundaries of participation. The chapter now considers how I approached working with the accounts given by participants, and dealt with questions of analysis and representation.

## **Working with questions of analysis and representation**

Before starting working with the narratives in more depth I first worked creatively through a series of large scale mind maps to bring out the ideas, themes and concepts that were at the forefront of my thoughts, and the associations I made between these. I produced a number of these, working from memory at first, then adding layers of detail through listening to the interviews, and close readings of the transcripts, as well as returning to my fieldwork notes. My aim at this stage was to identify overarching themes then move through detail within those thematic areas. Rather than use software like Nvivo to do so, I preferred to work through this stage with a more physical interaction with the audio, transcripts (and diaries if these had been

produced), drawing out connections and colour-coding these themes on paper. This allowed for flexibility in coding, and made space for unexpected themes or lines of analysis to 'appear' (Silverman, 2005).

The expectations that I held related to that participants might discuss in interviews resulted in two significant surprises. First was that the 'practicalities' of academic life, such as assessments, language and curriculum that were discussed to a lesser extent than imagined. While certainly these were discussed, and to some detail, participants spoke far more widely about social dimension of university, and other aspects such as employment, friendships and social networks, and leisure activities, both at the time, and in the recent past. Second, direct connections between 'being' refugee and their experiences of HE were far less commented on than I expected. This was another point at which I had to then reflect again on my tacit assumptions about 'refugeeness', and understanding the boundary between being an 'insider' or 'outsider'. I began to see that as a result of being an 'outsider', a non-refugee, I had been regularly questioning my assumptions about other people's experiences. Observing these surprises coming from the content of the interviews was the stage at which I realised the questions I had asked could never have been entirely perfect, or 'right'.

The interviews covered a range of topics that were not only about individual experiences, but also included representations of experiences of people they knew. Some talked in greater detail of the practices of the Home Office/UKBA, while others did not. Similarly, the way in which people talked about their HE participation ranged from offering detailed vignettes about specific events to taking a broader approach to where HE was in their wider lives. This was a significant shift in where my analysis might be located, in that my tacit beliefs or expectation of how participants would 'talk to' an abstract sense of 'refugeeness'. This as a result became an important strand in my analysis, in that it informed an interpretation that focussed on absence, and what that might mean in how 'refugeeness' might be understood, or indeed how useful it was as a concept for understanding lived experience. This also

led me to direct my analysis to look in more detail at the particular spaces within the wider context of UK society, for example, examining where and how identifications with ‘refugee’ or ‘asylum seeker’ were made, and what connection, if any, this had with HE. The table below offers an overview of how these areas for analysis developed.

**Table 3.1: Organising research themes**

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Key topic</b>	<b>Related theme 1</b>	<b>Related theme 2</b>
What were participant experiences of UK HE?	Form of study: PG/UG/community HE  Status of current studies: ongoing/disrupted	Motivations for study/ Choice of degree  Expectations of HE  Academic practices Institutional practices Social/cultural: relationships with students/ staff	Previous HE/ educational experiences in UK/ home country  Social context: family/ friendships/ social networks in UK <b>and</b> transnational
(How) did participants relate HE experience to that of asylum/refugee experience?	Form of immigration status  Rights to work/to study  Identity construction	Access to HE  Employment  [Academic practices Institutional practices Social/cultural: relationships with students/ staff]  ‘Asylum seeker’ or ‘refugee’ identity  Non-refugee identities	Available options for study  Importance of place/displacement: staying in the UK or plan to return home  Importance of place/displacement: identification with ‘refugee/ asylum seeker’  Discrepancies between self and ‘being’ refugee

The ‘key topic’ was identified in the early stages of analysis and used as a broad basis on which to then make a more detailed coding of themes. The first set of related themes also began to emerge over the fieldwork period,

and these then formed the basis for the deeper engagement with the participant accounts, resulting in the second set of themes. Both sets of thematic areas are addressed in Chapters Eight and Nine, with analysis and theorisation based on accounts from five participants. I chose to organise these two chapters through the theme of immigration status. Chapter eight draws on accounts from two participants who had impermanent statuses when they participated in higher education, while chapter nine examines three participants' experiences who all had permanent leave to remain when they were studying. I did so for the following reasons. First, the importance of time and timing was an unexpected thread that I noticed emerge in the accounts from David and Jordan. They had different forms of status, but despite this, the impermanence of their permission to stay in the UK seemed to pervade their accounts. As refugee status is no longer given on a permanent basis (see chapter five), and the intersection of this with educational participation is still very under-explored in existing literature (see chapter seven), this appeared an important theme to examine. In contrast, I chose to focus on Amal, Lul and Aro in chapter nine, as their accounts of life with permanent leave to remain show that university plays an ambivalent role in how they move towards realising their aspirations. Participating in HE for them brings challenges in their management of both psychic and physical displacement, and their accounts exemplify the instability of education as an indicator or facilitator of social and cultural integration.

### **Selecting and representing 'voices'**

In selecting to write about some participants and not others, questions of voice and representation are raised. These relate to the participatory intent to be equitable in the production of knowledge, and the ethics of representing the experiences of refugees. Following chapter nine I reflect upon the analytical approach I took, and also consider the contribution to the research from the participants who I did not represent within chapters eight

and nine. However, there were circumstantial reasons that shaped how I chose some participants rather than others.

Some participants left the research in the very early stages. Moses agreed to participate then did not respond to further phone calls and emails, so as such he did not participate at all. Vincent met me for one interview then became unavailable due to personal circumstances, and contacted me only to say that he did not wish to participate in further interviews. Shortly after the research began, Harry travelled abroad to undertake part of his own PhD research. We conducted one email interview subsequently, as he had suggested this might be a possible alternative. This was limited in its success, as his replies were short and covered details of where and what he was studying, and his desire for an academic career, but little more contextual information. He did not reply to my later attempts to continue with contact.

In addition to this, T-Jay tacitly withdrew from the study, while the majority of my interviews with Bako did not record properly. Neither of two Skype interviews with Bako recorded accurately, in both there was distortion that made them unlistenable. Although we met for one face to face interview, and I had notes from our Skype discussions, the detail of these other discussions was lost. This is in contrast to my Skype interviews with Amal, that recorded without problems. Amal went through a difficult time when he decided to leave his MA studies and reconsider what he was going to do. But by keeping in touch with him, and stressing the importance of identifying the challenges as well as the joys of his university experiences, I was able to negotiate a new schedule for our interviews. In this way the inquiry 'followed' him for the interim period between leaving one MA course, working, then applying to study elsewhere.

T-Jay's participation changed suddenly. He met me twice for interviews, but then cancelled our third meeting, and stalled on rearranging a new date. He stopped replying to emails, phone calls and text messages. In my last email I stated that I would be happy to hear from him if he wished to re-contact me,

without any pressure to be interviewed. T-Jay's withdrawal from the research was a surprise, as he had appeared enthusiastic to participate. What I might identify as a possible reason for doing so was that in the second of our interviews he became quite upset as he found himself talking about life in Zimbabwe. We agreed to stop the interview early, but when I emailed him the next day to check how he was, he responded positively, signalling that he looked forward to meeting a few months later. This was the only participant who, from what I witnessed, may have withdrawn as a result of the interviews stirring painful emotions. In light of these issues, I decided not to draw on the accounts from T-Jay, Vincent and Bako in the main analysis work of the thesis, but their contribution to the research is discussed in the reflective section following chapter nine.

As the initial period of my close work with the accounts progressed, I became uncertain as to how to then represent the stories people told as well as my own analysis. Aware of the lack of 'textual innocence' (Lather, 2008, Mazzei, 2009) and the problem of 'ventriloquism' (Fine, 1998) in any representation, I was drawn to creative approaches, such as writing fictional 'stories' drawn from the participant accounts (Banks and Banks, 1998; Schoepflin and Kaufman, 2011). This technique has been used as a means to explore the intersections between participants' unique experiences and those of others in order to examine wider social structures or contexts. But I was concerned at whether I would be able to work skilfully enough with the accounts to add this fictionality into the analysis I carried out. The risk of producing a story that featured essentialised 'typical' refugees seemed too great. Therefore, drawing on work by Lather (2008) and Mazzei (2009) I begin chapter ten with a critical reflection. This has a twofold purpose. First, it shows the reader some of my decision-making and how it is that I come to 'see' my analysis (Lather, 2008). Second, it is intended as a break between my analyses and the final discussion chapter, making a space for the reader to move away from the analysis offered and re-engage with the extracts of participant accounts on their own terms. Following Mazzei (2009), I address these questions:

- Where am I in these accounts? When/did I 'push' a refugee subjectivity?
- What interpretations do I favour? Why? What do I do about that if/when I notice it?

This move to self-challenge my analysis interweaves both ethics and epistemology as discussed in chapter two, and along with the reflective discussion on research methods and decision making forms a key strand of my claim for rigour in this work. The final section of this chapter examines the criteria on which I judge the validity and worth of the research I have carried out.

### **Criteria for evaluating the study**

This section presents my choice and justification for the criteria with which I would like this research to be evaluated. Morse *et al* (2002) argue that 'a crisis of confidence' occurred when qualitative researchers sought to respond to challenges that their work lacked 'the certainty of hard numbers' (p.14). Therefore criteria for judging the worth of qualitative research are widely contested, and a justification of validity might be based on the ways the study persuades readers that it is worth attention, and/or how it indicates that the researcher has striven for 'best practice' in carrying out the work (Tracy, 2010). Yet although validity might be judged from a range of perspectives, Lincoln and Guba (2005) point out criteria of some form are always essential to any research work, as the core purpose of validity criteria is to provide the framework for evaluating trustworthiness. This might be described as 'authenticity' (Lincoln and Guba, 2005), 'sincerity' (Tracy, 2010) or 'genuineness' (Atkinson *et al*, 2003).

Morse *et al* (2002) also suggest that attention to the reliability of the work needs to be an ongoing concern rather than one-off, final evaluation, as by the latter stage of research it may be too late to attend to problems. Taking a

post structural perspective, they indicate that validity should not be confused with a sense of getting 'better' knowledge or becoming closer to the 'truth'. This touches upon another dimension of the validity debate, whether validity criteria should be paradigm-specific (Lincoln and Guba, 2005) or general enough to be universally applied. Tracy (2010) suggests eight criteria for judging qualitative research which are used to frame the following discussion of the validity/quality of this study. The 'big tent' approach advocated by Tracy (2010) is marked by a holistic understanding of the interconnections between credibility, ethical practices, and the significance of knowledge claims. This is based on the premise that while research design, analysis and theorisation can be specific to the overarching purpose of the study, it is still possible to relate these to core criteria for assessing 'goodness' (2010, p.843) as the research evolves. As such it fits very well with the inquiry I have carried out, in which I have sought to be responsive to the boundaries of participation, and consider how these shifting boundaries have impacted on the generation of knowledge and subsequent knowledge claims made.

Tracy's (2010) criteria for judging qualitative research are outlined below, with discussion of how I see these are evidenced in this study.

1. Worthy topic: The research should be timely, relevant and interesting (p.840).

This is an area of study that is relatively under- explored in both the fields of refugee studies and educational research. The research was carried out over a period in time when the UK Government was simultaneously restricting the rights associated with humanitarian visa statuses, and increasing surveillance of immigration. By exploring the intersections between refugee lives in the UK and participation in education, the study examines what roles higher education can play in individual experiences of living in the UK with refugee status.



2. Rich rigour: Rigour is found in detailed and in-depth work in relation to the theoretical constructs used, fieldwork and analysis practices undertaken (p.841).

Analysis is located in a multi-disciplinary theoretical framework that draws on migration theory related to integration (Ager and Strang, 2008) and displacement (Bakewell, 2011) and identity formation (Bhabha, 1994; Bauman, 2002). Bourdieu's (1977) field theory is also used to examine the dynamic between agency and structure in the accounts of lived experience. Research methods and practices are critically considered at appropriate stages throughout the thesis, as part of the methodological framing of the study. The research does not claim to make widely generalisable claims about refugee experience, but offers a close, detailed examination of the role of higher education within individual lives.

3. Sincerity: This is expressed through practices of self-reflexivity, and a commitment to showing the processes, practices and challenges of carrying out the research (p.841).

Reflexivity is a fundamental element of methodology in this study. This is evidenced in the discussion of research methods and my approach to analysis in which I interrogate some of my own subjective biases. I identify tensions and difficulties behind carrying out the research and in representing participant experiences. This is linked to an ethical claim for research that is both 'earnest and vulnerable' (p.843).

4. Credibility: The plausibility and trustworthiness of the analyses and theorisations made.

The rationale for the research is stated early on in the thesis and is developed through giving detail on research participants and their engagement in the research process. First, I explain who participated in the study and how they did so, then I link this to my analytical work. I also discuss how I sought participant reflections or comments on the research process and my

emergent analysis. Analysis is also firmly contextualised within existing literature related to student experience and to forced migration.

5. Resonance: The study has a meaningful impact on a wider audience, and offers transferable findings (p.844).

This research examines how people engage in the field of higher education while living with an extra-ordinary political status that carries with it a social label marked by deficit and stigma. While a wider audience may not experience forced migration, the arbitrary nature of global politics may result in any individual seeking asylum. Therefore as anyone *could* become a refugee, the study should resonate on an individual level in this way. Related to higher education, the findings of the study transfer into further understanding of student experience, and how global politics frame this less visible aspect of the internationalisation of HE.

6. Significant contribution: An original and significant contribution may be identified on practical, heuristic, theoretical and/or methodological levels (p.846).

The study has contributed to knowledge about the intersection between humanitarian statuses and higher education, drawing out the heterogeneity of 'refugee experience', and the ambivalent ways in which refugees are recognised within the field of British higher education. Chapter ten makes my suggestions for future research into the impact of living with impermanent forms of humanitarian status, as well as further ways in which higher education might be explored as a site of refugee integration.

7. Ethics: A typology of procedural, situational, relational and exiting ethics is presented, relevant to different stages and processes of the research (pp.846-847).

Research ethics are clearly addressed in relation to these four categories, which is based in my approach of negotiating ethics an ongoing process. Procedural ethics related to formal institutional ethical clearance and

professional ethical guidelines (ERSC, BERA, BSA) are outlined in my FRESC application document (Appendix C). Situational and relational ethics have been attended to over the duration of the research with regard to participant boundary-setting and an ongoing ethic of care and reciprocity. Exiting ethics are evidenced in my reflections on my analytical work, and how these knowledge claims might be interpreted by any future audience.

8. Meaningful coherence: The research structure and content is closely interwoven, with the analysis and representation fitting well with the overall research purpose and research design (p.849).

The study offers analyses and theorisation that is in line with an original research purpose to be cautious about representing refugees as an essentialised social group, easily located within a binary subjectivity, such as 'victim' or 'hero'. The research design also reflected this aim by looking to participants to guide the focus of themes for investigation within the wider context of HE experience. Analysis is also firmly grounded by relevant literature from the fields of migration studies and educational research.

I recognise that this study is ultimately validated by external judges, through the award (or not) of a doctoral degree in line with the academic standards of UWE and the wider field of UK higher education. Yet I concur with Morse *et al* (2002) that it is the responsibility of the researcher/s to uphold validity criteria rather than this being the responsibility of external agents. In taking this position up I demonstrate not only how it is that I understand and assess my research work, but also offer this open for critique from an audience. I see making validity claims as inseparable from other research practices, all of which extend from ontological and epistemological beliefs. In making my judgement criteria available, along with the substantive content of the thesis- my analyses and theorisations- the research is grounded in the sincerity that Tracy (2010) highlights as a core element of validity.

This thesis does not seek to make generalisations about the UK refugee population, not only because of the small scale of the study, but because it

engages directly with subjective accounts of lived experience. Rather, I have sought to remain vigilant to the wider discourses of asylum that these accounts are situated within, and offer a partial, tentative analysis that contributes to debate on asylum and education in contemporary Britain. The responsibility of being able to speak confidently about validity rests with me, and I hope that I engaged with these criteria in such a way that does invite further dialogue rather than display disinterested self-authority (Pillow, 2003). This, alongside a careful and detailed approach to analysis and theorisation, form the basis of my claim to rigour. In giving detail on how the research evolved, and how my methodological choices were made and remade, the study critically considers how participation was framed. Analysis was undertaken in a structured way, and included further reflective work engaging with the assumptions and expectations that I brought to that later stage of the study. The discussion of these dimensions of the study provides a solid basis for a claim of sincerity and contributes to the credibility of my analyses and my claim for an original contribution to knowledge.

## **Chapter summary**

In this chapter I have set out how guiding methodological principles and my epistemological perspective translated into research practice, and how this contributes to producing research that has 'meaningful coherence' (Tracy, 2010). In doing so I have explored the tensions identified in chapter two, of inviting people to engage in research in a way that was informed by participatory methodology. The early part of the chapter examined the circumstantial changes which resulted in a revised approach to finding participants, and caused a shift in the purpose of the research. While the overarching aim remained constant- to explore refugee experiences of HE- a participatory action research element became less tangible and ultimately did not develop with the final group of participants. However, the main body of the chapter highlighted how I tried to hold my research purpose lightly in

order to negotiate if and/or how a collective research purpose could be established amongst participants. A key implication from how the research worked out was in the importance of having a clear shared purpose identified at the outset. Even if the themes for investigation are unclear at the outset, I think a strong commitment to co-research is necessary in the first instance. In this research I tried to facilitate a co-research group by asking people to identify their interests first. But given the geographical distance and lack of personal connections between participants I am uncertain how I could have brought people into becoming a research group otherwise. Nonetheless, I also enacted participatory principles through my flexible approach to engaging participants with research methods, seeking to use these methods as a means to negotiate my research purpose with their motivations and purposes for participation. In these ways a participatory methodology was at the core of this work. The chapter also detailed the ways in which I engaged in ethical practice, highlighting the importance of situational and relational ethics (Tracy, 2010) in linking research purpose and guiding principles with my approach to analysis and representations. The knowledge claims that I make in the later chapters of the thesis are grounded by the theory and literature of the next four chapters. The first of these examines the term 'refugee' and how this social identity is constructed.

# Chapter Four: Definitions of 'refugee' and constructed identities

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## **Introduction**

This chapter examines the definition of refugee and discursive representations of refugee identity. To contextualise this, the chapter begins with an overview of global refugee and migration trends and the UK context. The legal definition of refugee is then discussed, highlighting the extent to which it is a definition in flux, with reference to the debate on whether refugees should be considered as distinct to other forms of migration. This is followed by an exploration of the constructions of migrant and refugee identities within political, media and humanitarian discourses, showing that such discourses of the 'minority of migrants' (Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007; Aspinall and Watters, 2010), bring concurrent visibility and invisibility of 'being refugee' across different social contexts. The chapter also examines theoretical approaches to understanding refugee identity, particularly the work of Bauman (2002a, 2002b), and explores the debates around refugee experience and 'refugeeness' as a form of identity. The final section then presents how the term refugee is understood and applied in this thesis.

## **Refugees within the global context**

In 2011, the highest number of forcibly displaced people in fifteen years was reported by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Of an estimated 42.5 million, 15.2 million people were refugees, 27.5 million

were internally displaced<sup>2</sup>, and 895,000 asylum applications were pending. An additional twelve million people were recognised as being stateless. On an international scale, Pakistan hosted the greatest number of refugees (1,702,700), while within Europe, Germany did so, with a refugee population of 571,685.

According to the UNHCR (UNHCR, 2011) the UK ranked eighth internationally as a first-choice destination for new asylum seekers, following South Africa, USA, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden and Belgium. However, despite its popularity as a destination for asylum, refugees accounted for only 0.5% of the overall UK population in 2010 (Vargas Silva, 2011), with a refugee population (inclusive of pending asylum applications) estimated at 193,510 the following year (UNHCR, 2011a). This figure shows a significant drop from an estimated 238,000 refugees in 2010, reflecting a trend of fewer asylum applications over the decade. UK asylum peaked in 2002 at 84,130 (excluding accompanying dependents), dropping to 17,916 applications in 2010, and by 2011 this had reduced to 15,710 (UNHCR, 2012a). As a percentage of UK net migration, asylum accounted for only 7% in 2011 compared to forty nine percent in 2002 (Blinder, 2013). These figures suggest that the UK is indeed not currently experiencing a 'deluge' of refugees, in contrast to how immigration is portrayed by some elements of the British media.

These figures are in line with decreasing asylum applications throughout Europe and a reduction in refugee numbers globally. Only 8% of international migrants were classified as refugees in 2010, which is a decrease of 4% since 1990 (UNHCR, 2011a). However, as the UNHCR points out, such decreases in refugee statistics are not necessarily indicative of less forced displacement, as the number of internally displaced people is on the rise (UNHCR, 2011a). Moreover, in the UK, refugee status has become less available since 2005,

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<sup>2</sup> Internally displaced person (IDP) "internally displaced persons (also known as DPPE in many civil and military organizations which assist) are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border" (UNHCR, 2006).

when the Home Office stopped granting automatic permanent settlement to refugee status, opting instead for temporary settlement rights with permanent residency becoming available only after five years (Blinder, 2013, Home Office, 2005). Other forms of leave to remain associated with asylum (but not equivalent to full refugee status) also have complicated time-related processes which interrupt permanent residency (Zetter, 2007). These are discussed in depth in chapter five. What is important to emphasise at this point however, is that in line with the fall in asylum applications and the 2005 policy change, the share of asylum as part of net migration has significantly dropped in the UK from the 1994-2003 peak of 54% to 7% in 2011 (Blinder, 2013). In addition, it is important to point out that this extended process of applying for permanent settlement further complicates knowing about the distribution and constitution of the UK refugee population.

### **Incomplete data on refugees in the UK**

Understanding in depth about the UK refugee population is also made difficult by the incomplete data that is regularly collected once any form of leave to remain has been granted. UK figures on refugees are approximate not least because once (permanent) leave to remain has been granted, people are not required to disclose their legal status or identify themselves as refugee (Dwyer *et al*, 2011). Nor does immigration status form part of Equalities monitoring, which leaves a quantitative gap in understanding about refugee participation in education or employment. Therefore, examining intersectional aspects of refugee settlement results in having to draw on data from asylum applications, where only age, gender and ethnicity are recorded in the statistics provided by the Home Office Quarterly Asylum Statistical reports. Since 2011 these reports have been subsumed into Immigration Statistical reports, another signal perhaps of a changing governmental approach that downplays the difference between asylum as a separate, or



special, form of migration, due to its humanitarian purpose and other types of immigration.

Although some information is accessible, there are significant gaps in knowing about who is applying for asylum in the UK. Globally, the first five countries of origin of refugees were; Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Myanmar (UNHCR 2010:15). With regard to the Country of Origin of refugees in the UK, in 2011 the first ten countries were as follows; Pakistan (3,945); Iran (3,045); Sri Lanka (2,125); Afghanistan (1,525); Libya (1,185); Nigeria (1,055); China (920); Eritrea (835); Sudan (790) and Zimbabwe (735) (UNHCR, 2011). Even though these data are useful, there is for example, very partial information connected to gender of asylum applicants. For example, only 27% lead asylum applicants in the period 2003-2010 were female (Blinder, 2013). In 2010 alone, 5,329 women claimed asylum in their own right compared to 12,571 men (Refugee Council, 2012a). However, this figure on female asylum applicants excludes figures on the family dependents who arrive in the UK after the initial asylum decision was made for the lead applicant. Data is not collected on this, and similarly, no data is collected about the dependents of people granted refugee status (Vargas Silva, 2011). Children who are later reunited with a refugee parent may possibly be recorded as refugee within the educational system, but spouses, partners and other adult dependents who are not part of the original asylum application are as such invisible in government data collection on asylum. On a wider level, figures on all migrants to the UK show that there are more female migrants than male migrants in UK than in other OECD countries (Vargas Silva, 2011). Therefore, there is an important gap in knowledge about women who come to the UK for humanitarian reasons.

This kind of data gap extends into the post-asylum stage of migration, once leave to remain has been granted. Data on the geographical distribution of the UK refugee population is also not collected in any standardised or regular way, such as through the national census. In order to estimate figures of refugee settlement, it is necessary to use figures for asylum seeker dispersal,

unsuccessful asylum claims and compulsory returns as well as UK net migration figures (Blinder, 2013). The Office for National Statistics (ONS) also uses a combination of sources to collate data on the internal UK destinations of migrants more generally. Data is collected from the Annual Population Survey, data from the Northern Ireland Statistical Research Agency and the International Passenger Survey to give estimates of international migration to and from different UK regions. In 2010, 591,000 immigrants arrived in the UK, of which 517,000 immigrants arrived to live in England, or 87.5 % of the UK total. This was followed by Scotland with 8%, Wales with 2.5% and Northern Ireland with 2% of the total immigrants arriving to the UK (ONS Migration Statistics Quarterly Report, November 2011).

Aspinall and Watters (2010) note that calls have been made for more regular data collection on the UK refugee population in order to plan and provide improved statutory services. For example, in 2013, the Scottish Refugee Council could only estimate that there were 20,000 refugees, asylum seekers and 'others of concern' living in Scotland (Scottish Refugee Council, 2013), while the Welsh Refugee Council Survey of 2007 estimated that 10,000 refugees lived in Wales. The Welsh Refugee Council recommended that similar surveys were carried out by the Welsh Government every two to three years to improve knowledge about refugee integration. However, this call was repeated in 2010, as regular data collection had not yet been instigated (Welsh Refugee Council, 2010), and this lack of regular population mapping remains the case across the UK<sup>3</sup>.

This section has outlined the position of the UK within global migration trends, and indicated the apparent decreasing numbers of refugees in the UK. It has also pointed to some of the ways in which data on refugees in the UK is incomplete, with inconsistencies and omissions in data collection. With this in

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<sup>3</sup> Vargas Silva (2011) also points out that mapping refugee populations globally is also difficult due to different countries using a range of data collection methods and having incomplete datasets available for comparative analyses.

mind, the chapter now examines the term 'refugee', and how in contemporary debates it holds multiple definitions.

### **'Refugee': a definition in flux**

Although the 1951 United Nations (UN) Convention and the subsequent additional Protocol of 1967 provide the current legal definition of the term 'refugee', the complexities of contemporary global politics have raised considerable debate as to how these original definitions are applied. The political, legal and sociological dimensions of this debate with particular reference to the UK context are discussed here.

The 1951 UN Convention was a response to the circumstances of refugees in Europe during the aftermath of World War II. A further protocol of 1967 amended the article to apply on a worldwide scale without the geographic and time restrictions of the original document (UNHCR, 1967). Article 1 of the 1951 (1967 protocol) United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees provides this definition as:

A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (UNHCR, 1967).

Refugee status occurs when the application made by an individual for asylum within a nation state is approved. This is underpinned by the principle of *non-refoulement*, or no forcible return, to a territory where that individual's life is under threat.<sup>4</sup> The term 'refugee' has also been used interchangeably,

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<sup>4</sup> There have also been regional additions to the definition, namely by the Organisation of African Unity (1974), the Cartagena declaration in Central America (1986), and the Bangkok Principles (1966, 2001) from the Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization (AALCO). The latter extend the refugee definition to "persons who have a well founded fear of persecution due to colour, ethnic origin and gender" (2001: Article 1).

although not necessarily accurately, with ‘displaced person’ and ‘stateless person’ (Malkki, 1995, p.501). Yet the definition of refugee can also be seen to include a range of legal statuses, not just that as defined by the UNHCR. For example, in a briefing paper on Refugee Women, the Scottish Refugee Council (SRC) (2012) uses the following definition:

‘Refugee women’...refers to women and girls who have sought asylum and whose claims are undecided or have been refused, as well as those who have already been successful in their asylum claims and granted refugee status, humanitarian protection, indefinite or discretionary leave to remain, unless otherwise specifically indicated (SRC, 2012:1).

In referencing temporary and permanent settlement, and even refused settlement, the SRC definition of ‘refugee’ does not differentiate on grounds of legal category, and in this case does so to focus strategically on gender. Bloch’s (2002) definition approaches the problem of legal categorisation from another angle, thus defining refugees as:

all forced migrants (that is refugees, people with Exceptional Leave to Remain, people with Indefinite Leave to Remain, asylum seekers on temporary admission and naturalised British and EU citizens who came to Britain initially as forced migrants), unless a distinction is specified (Bloch, 2002:1).

In Bloch’s definition, changes in political terminology and degrees of legal status are visible as being particular to the UK (Exceptional Leave to Remain, Indefinite Leave to Remain, asylum seeker, all of which are discussed further in chapter five). Here the term ‘forced migrants’ is defined to be inclusive of, rather than separate from, people with legal refugee status. Bloch also includes people with pending asylum applications. In doing so, ‘refugee’ is disaggregated from legal status and constructed categories of people, and offers an inclusive identifier for use in the context of lived experience of forced migration.

On the other hand, this is countered by those who advocate for a clear distinction between refugee and forced migrant. Hathaway (2007) argues that the key differentiation between refugee and any other migrant identifier is

the 'doubly deserving' nature of an individual's circumstances. This is explained as being that, in the first instance, a person has taken flight from their home in order to avoid the risk of harm. Second, he argues that this risk of harm is predicated by disenfranchisement, specifically due to discrimination around who the person is, and/or what they believe. For Hathaway this is why not only should there be separation between the concepts of refugee and forced migrant, but also that 'refugee' should be distanced from migration more generally.

The stance taken by Hathaway (2007) is part of the debate around the applicability of the 1951/1967 Convention to contemporary migration patterns, and the associated terms 'forced migrant' or 'forcibly displaced person'. The UNHCR (2007) has pointed to the following UN Declaration on the Right to Development to make clear the distinction between possible causes of forced migration and those cited in the 1951 Convention on Refugees. According to this Declaration, forced migration may result from circumstances which prohibit the people from their entitlement 'to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development' (Article 1.1). A report from the Refugee Studies Centre (RSC) at the University of Oxford (2010) suggests that such a distinction is based on the fact that the international refugee regime as it is at present is unable to provide assistance through *non-refoulement* to many forced migrants, especially those whose flight is caused by environmental, political or socio-economic factors. The RSC report (2010) goes on to state that asylum has become harder to attain for many people because an overly rigid interpretation of the 1967 Protocol is applied to claims. These claims, they argue, are likely to be rooted in extremely complex socio-political-economic circumstances, making the distinction between other forms of migration and seeking asylum far from clear.

What is clear, however, is that despite such possible confluence of factors at the roots of differently named forms of migration, those who arrive in countries via asylum systems are treated differently to those who are able to

legally enter the country through economic or other social streams. Seeking asylum essentially is a request for exceptional access to cross a national border and remain in that country. According to Parekh (2008), globalization confronts traditional identities by challenging collective categories such as ethnicity, culture and national identity. For any immigrant to successfully integrate into a society, Parekh (2008) also argues that redefinition of both the individual's and receiving society's identity are necessary. Despite the UNCHR definition, the term 'refugee' is contested, reflecting the range of political stances towards asylum. It is important then to consider the ways in which people are discursively positioned as refugees, how they are represented, and self-represent, through different discourses. The following section contextualises the identity work of the participants in this study by exploring the ways in which refugee identity is constructed through political, media, and humanitarian discourses.

### **Constructions of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants**

As has been discussed, there is a difference between the legal and social definitions of refugee. These definitions are located within the wider field of migration theory, within which exist a range of theoretical understandings of movement and displacement. Different positions on migration are seen to make a distinction between 'refugee' and other forms of migrant, leading to a range of interpretations as to who is, or should, be considered refugee. This section explores the construction of 'refugee identity' through discourses based in different fields but all of which ultimately focus on the political dimension of 'refugee-ness'. Also, albeit to varying extents, these discourses tend to represent refugee people as a homogenous social group. Monnier (1995) argues that the categorisation of refugee is doubly political, as people not only have political reasons for leaving one place, but on arrival at a border they are met with a political response and categorisation/identity conferred upon them. With this in mind, the political discourses which stem from recent

UK government legislation and approaches to asylum and immigration, and the impact of these on framing a refugee identity, are explored first.

Migration as a security problem has dominated immigration discourses of the 2000s. The criminalisation of migration is no longer solely focussed on the illegality of crossing borders and illegal employment, but has expanded to include the risk of threat to national borders and the safety of individual citizens. While in the 1990s this was portrayed as a crisis of numbers, (Mulvey, 2010) the discourse of crisis of security (Lavenex, 2001) can be seen to have taken precedence.<sup>5</sup> Karyotis (2011) suggests that through a post-9/11 securitization discourse governmental regimes of control are being enforced and legitimised. Elsewhere it has been suggested that a post-Cold War reappraisal of national borders and nationhood also have made a significant contribution to the uptake of this kind of framing of migration (Bigo, 2009).<sup>6</sup>

Within the UK, it is clear that asylum has been increasingly linked discursively to criminal activity. This is visible in national policy (discussed in the Chapter 5) that makes explicit links to illegality and immigration, as well as UKBA and Home office practices. Malloch and Stanley (2004) argue that an increased use of detention centres as part of the asylum process has redefined asylum seekers as high risk to national security, which in turn perpetuates the justification for their detention. In late 2012, the UK Borders Agency (UKBA) was engaged in a pilot of the Immigration Allegations Database, to which the public could make anonymous claims about illegal immigration. Yet reports from the Home Affairs Committee (HAC) on the pilot period December 2011-March 2012 noted that although 25,600 allegations were made, only 900 of these were judged to contain sufficient information to justify an enforcement visit. Nonetheless, 16,000 of these allegations were judged to contain sufficient and genuine information to merit further investigation (HAC, 2012).

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<sup>5</sup> See Lavenex (2001) for theorization of the 'realist policy frame' which centralises an interpretation of migration as a security problem.

<sup>6</sup> See Sasse (2005) for discussion of minority rights within the European security-migration nexus. See also Huysmans (2006) and Hampshire (2008) for wider discussions on the security-migration nexus.

The HAC also commented that only 4% of claims from the public contained viable information that then led to arrest and criminal charges being made. Despite questioning how the UKBA will improve the quality of information that they act on, the HAC recommended that the UKBA continue with the establishment of the Database, which indeed was launched on September 30th 2012.

Such an approach of government towards the monitoring and control of immigration echoes the observation recently made by Mulvey (2010) that political discourse has resulted in individuals rather than behaviours as being primarily categorised as illegal. He points out that this shift is incongruous with the tenets of the UK legal system that focus on acts of illegality rather than the illegality *per se* of people. Furthermore, this also fits with the argument put forward by Zetter (2007) that overall, the discourse of immigration policy has shifted from that of 'rights and entitlement' to that of 'identity and belonging' (2007, p.189). As a result, constructions of refugees and asylum seekers can be seen to be in flux as government discourse on immigration focuses on securitization of national borders. This reinforces the oppositional binary of the deserving or undeserving immigrant (Sales, 2002). In chapter five it will be shown how legislation has narrowed the parameters for defining who is worthy of refugee status, and extended the time period over which this worthiness must be proven before permanent residency is available. More, when residency does become available it has become more closely linked to a requirement to seek citizenship.

Government legislation is interwoven with media representations of migrants, resulting in a dynamic that can, and often does, reinforce damaging constructions of migrant identities. Media representations of migration can also be seen to fall within overarching deserving-undeserving boundaries (Sales, 2002; Baker and McEnery, 2005), such as the 'bogus' asylum seeker (Lynn and Lea, 2003) or the 'genuine' refugee (Sales, 2005). Such discourses are also highly raced, classed and gendered, making individuals subject to greater or less visibility dependent on the context in which they are



represented (Colic-Peisker, 2005). Spencer (2011) examines how the New Labour administration of the 1990s held a mis-placed assumption that the UK public at large would understand the different forms of migration that were underway at the time. This was in spite of the 'media frenzy' on asylum and limited public engagement from the government on the new immigration which allowed citizens of EU accession states to live and work in the UK. Spencer (2011) also highlights how problematic this conflation actually was, with a detrimental impact on race relations within particular communities.

Furthermore, media representations of asylum also reach beyond a simple division between sympathy or demonization as Baker *et al* (2008) suggest. Rather, they argue, media across the political spectrum tend to present asylum through a political discourse which effectively marginalise the lived experiences of the refugee people. Once again, this points to a removal of individual agency replaced by a focus on the political dimension of 'refugee' as an overarching identifier and identity. As a result, concurrent yet contradictory discourses become possible. On one hand, refugees may be represented as non-autonomous subjects, yet on the other hand may be seen to actively embody threat. In this way, as immigration, and by default, asylum, has been firmly located within accumulative discourses of crisis, the range of deficit subjectivities that migrants, refugees and asylum seekers may be ascribed has widened. With this comes an increasing likelihood of these discourses being conflated within the public domain.

The political agenda and strategies of humanitarian organisations can also contribute to the representation of a de-politicised or ahistorical refugee figure (Rajaram, 2002; McPherson, 2010), whereby refugee people may be portrayed as part of an imagined, rather than tangible or cohesive, refugee community (Malkki, 1995). Similarly, Zembylas (2010), draws on Agamben's (1995) concept of 'bare life' to suggest that 'the refugee' is located within humanitarian discourse as a dehumanized subject made re-human through humanitarian aid. Although significant trauma is a very real part of forced migration, it has been observed that this discourse of trauma can contribute

to reinforcing a pathologised identity of 'refugee-as-victim' (Pupavac, 2006; Marlowe, 2010).

The contemporary 'health paradigm' as Pupavac (2006) terms it, identifies refugees as in need of therapeutic intervention, by focussing primarily on emotional suffering. Contrasting this with a Cold War-era discourse of refugee as political hero, it is posited that refugees as trauma victims are thus positioned in a patient-professional relationship, reliant on support rather than being seen capable of making autonomous decisions. This, Pupavac suggests, may be seen in an over-resourcing of support services which focus on life skills and wellbeing, reinforcing external expectations of a refugee identity linked to helplessness and deficit. Citing Furedi's (2001) concept of 'cultivating vulnerability', and Foucault's (1979) concept of 'therapeutic intervention', Pupavac argues that while on one hand a discourse of vulnerability facilitates refugee access to much needed services and resources, it may also distance rather than support social integration. Discourse that privileges 'therapeutic governance' of refugees, it is then suggested, may be seen to be complementary to the politics of securitisation and migration control.

Approaching the humanitarian discourse from a journalistic perspective, Gready (2010) argues that human rights journalism works within dualistic discourses, of violence and violations (victims and perpetrators), idealism and resistance. Within these binaries human rights practitioners are identified with one of four roles; representative, ally, mediator or exploiter. Problematising advocacy, Gready suggests exploring concepts such as vulnerability and resilience by focussing on dynamic states of experience and the agency of individuals.<sup>7</sup> However, he points out the problem that within the field of human rights, legal systems enact judgements on fixed identity positions, such as victim or perpetrator. Therefore, in a comment that

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<sup>7</sup> Gready draws on work from Marks and Clapham (2005) who argue that if the human rights advocate takes the position of representative, individuals may be rendered passive, voiceless, and dependent upon their more powerful advocate.

appears to echo Spivak's (1987) concept of 'strategic essentialism', Gready advocates for linking 'ethical sensitivity and strategic effectiveness' (2010, p.84), which, he argues, must consider how stories of lived experience are represented, and how they may be retold in the future.

This section has explored the representations of refugee identity through political, media and humanitarian discourses, which are clearly interconnected rather than operating in isolation. The contemporary political context is underpinned by a discourse of securitization which also permeates media and humanitarian representations of refugee people. The construction of 'refugee' is one that may be found to concurrently hold a range of seemingly contradictory positions across these discursive fields. Furthermore, the concept of refugee identity has an intrinsic connection to legal status. However the definition of 'refugee' may be interpreted in such a way that challenges the 'fractioning' of status (Zetter, 2007) or alternatively, other interpretations may conflate 'refugee' with illegal migration. Discourses of crisis and illegality contribute to a connection of refugees with the potential for being illegal (and thus assumed to be agentic in order to carry out illegal acts) while in humanitarian discourses they may also be positioned as victims, traumatized and incapable of action and self determination. With this in mind, attention is now given to sociological theorisation of refugee identity and experience.

### **Theorisation of 'refugee experience' and identity**

The chapter now turns to sociological approaches to understanding 'refugee identity' and 'refugee experience' in relation to national belonging. Thus far it has been shown that discourses that surround refugees are marked by questions of legitimacy and control, agency and vulnerability.

A significant critique of the pathologising discourses of refugee identity is based in observations that the specifics of socio-political contexts are often

removed from the representation of refugees. Malkki (1992, 1995) argues that this territory-based premise is based in the erroneous assumption that holds the concept of national sovereignty as a pre-requisite, a form of belonging and validity based on an intrinsic, necessary connection of a person to not only a nation, but indeed to a physical location:

sedentarist assumptions about attachment to place lead us to define displacement not as a fact about socio-political context, but rather as an inner, pathological condition of the displaced (Malkki, 1992: 33).

Malkki (1995) argues that uprootedness has been pathologised, whereby due to assumptions about ties to territory, blame is placed on the individual refugee for their movement. The decision to leave becomes the personal responsibility of the forced migrant, and as such they are disturbing the 'natural' order of the global population (Malkki, 1992). This pathologisation is linked to post-World War Two medical literature, associating 'the refugee condition' of movement with psychological instability and immorality. While Pupavac (2006) examines the stigmatization of trauma at the site of arrival, Malkki suggests that the decision to flee is the original source of stigma, and signifier of an unworthy refugee identity.

Bauman (2002a, 2002b) and Agier (2008) also offer insightful theorisations of the pathological identities ascribed to forced migrants. Agier's 'On the margins of the world' (2008) draws on his earlier work (previously untranslated from the French) to conceptualise refugee camps as sites that are 'out of place and time' (p.49) in which the only possible, or acceptable, status is that of being a victim. In these places, this is the only identity possible as an indefinite period of a refugee's lifetime is spent without, or beyond, the institutional ties that define human social identities (p. 49).

Bauman (2002a) writes from a similar perspective about identity in refugee camps, elaborating the idea of the 'zombie identity' (p.286). This identity, he argues, occurs when the value of life is demoted to such an extent that it exists outside or below any recognised approved status. In these camps a form of life is passed that is neither passive nor active, it is sentient but it is

not fully alive. Bauman (2002a) also usefully draws on the concept of 'social nakedness' (Turner, 1969). In the migration biography of the refugee this is a 'de-robing' ritual (2002a, p.286) which prevents direct passage from point of arrival to the acquisition of the appropriate garments required for participation in the new country. Instead, a mandatory holding period mediates these two statuses, during which no opportunity to acquire the appropriate social garments is available.

Moreover, Bauman proposes, refugees become other than displaced people, they in fact lose a place in the world (2002a, p.293). By crossing one national border they are rendered stateless and thus reliant on the hospitality of another nation, which may place them in the 'nowhereville' of the camp, with no clear route out. Pointing to the effects of globalisation on the 'mass production of refugees' Bauman argues that the 'solid' modernity approaches of Western states of 'devouring' (assimilating) or 'vomiting' (expelling) strangers is no longer possible (2002b, p.293). As liquid modernity directly confronts the physical as well the psychological security of national borders, nation states increasingly lose power over traditional forms of governance, and as such individuals too feel increasingly insecure and uncertain (2002b, p.294). Thus Bauman perceives the practice of limiting the availability of refugee status as a response to the lack of certainty of nationhood, and the demise of overarching cultural authority. It is useful to consider this final point in connection with the reminder from Agier (2008) that the collective 'refugee' identity imposed upon forced migrants is an identity without cultural or geographical foundation (p.29). These theorisations offer helpful concepts with which to think about 'refugee experience' in order remain vigilant to attributing 'lack' or 'loss' as default elements of an essentialised 'refugee identity'.

The approach provided by Lacroix (2004) is an example of the difficulties in developing such a framework of analysis of 'refugee identity' that will not inadvertently privilege these identity-territory-victim connections to the exclusion of alternatives. In her examination of the concept of 'refugeeness'

in the lives of refugee claimants in Canada ('asylum seekers' in the UK), Lacroix (2004) takes a post-structural approach to subject positions, understanding these as being produced by economic, social and political discursive fields. With an aim to explore identity and social marginalisation, an analysis is developed to question the intersection of policy with lived experiences, and problematize the temporary identity status of 'refugee claimant'. The analysis follows a thematic progression from uprootedness to limbo, including discussion of the rebuilding of subjectivity. In doing so, Lacroix takes a position that seeks to emphasise agency, observing contradictions between government policy and practice when interviewing refugees:

Claimants discourse reflected... [a] contradiction between official discourse which is humanitarian and welcoming to 'real' refugees, and practices which impede their self actualisations through participation in society through work and family (Lacroix, 2004:164).

Lacroix concludes that 'refugeeness emerges... as a way of understanding the particular subjective experience in relation to existing refugee policies' (2004, p.166) stating that refugeeness is constructed through social, legal and political dimensions (after Moussa, 1993). This is a useful term with which to discuss 'refugee experience' in that it is such policies that pertain to a specific group of people, thus separating them from any other migrants. However, in defining this concept, Lacroix appears to overlook the significance of the intersections between experiences of refugees and other migrants. Commonalities of experience in participation in society among refugees, other migrants and citizens are important, as this connects theorisation about refugee experience with the global context of migration and social participation. Although 'refugeeness' is a useful term to describe this specific kind of subjective experience, the concept misses out the affective dimension of migration. The theorisation of migration proposed by Bakewell (2011) is relevant here and is discussed in chapter six which engages further with the theoretical concepts that inform this thesis. This section concludes by outlining how 'refugee' is used in this thesis.

## How the term 'refugee' is used in this thesis

This thesis uses 'refugee' to refer to people who have been granted permission to remain in the UK after making an application for asylum, inclusive of other forms of leave to remain granted on humanitarian protection grounds. This is in contrast with 'prima facie' refugees, who arrive en masse to a receiving country, for example in response to conflict, where it is clear what the cause of flight is, and is a generalised rather than individual case of persecution. (UNHCR, 2012b). My choice is not an unproblematic one, as in principle I agree with Bloch's (2002) definition of refugee that is inclusive of people waiting for an asylum decision, and those whose application has been rejected. However this thesis is written with the intent to clearly correspond to the categories found in UK legislation and policy, so that this can be commented on. The UK immigration system makes a clear distinction using the terms 'asylum seeker' or 'failed asylum seeker' to make clear the acceptance or rejection by the government of a claim for asylum.

In their research on the decision-making of young undocumented migrants to the UK, Bloch *et al* (2011) argue that

strategies and migration routes result from negotiating the tension between the 'migration project' and the constraints and possibilities of the immigration regime (Bloch *et al*, 2011: 1299).

In chapters eight and nine I present my analysis and theorisation of refugee accounts of Higher Education participation, where the tension described above by Bloch *et al* (2011) is examined. This thesis explores the ways in which the different forms of humanitarian leave to remain are enmeshed in experiences of participation of UK higher education. Individuals are required to self-identify with categorisations of refugee status, in terms of accessing rights and services, including education, and these statuses have a significant impact on what can be understood about 'refugee experience', and how. It is necessary then, to hold this in mind while not conflating the partial, complex

stories of lived experience with the one-dimensional identity positions of 'refugee' or 'asylum seeker'.

## **Chapter summary**

This chapter examined the definition of 'refugee' and outlined the UK context, highlighting the difficulties involved in what can be known about this small percentage of the population. It has shown how 'refugee' is a contested term, applied and understood in multiple ways; yet is a word that invokes a justification of the moral codes that guide how we humans treat each other. On a global scale, 'refugee' is a definition in flux, and that people who are identified as refugees are subject to a range of powerful and contradictory discourses. These discourses can be seen to essentialise a deficit refugee identity, or minimise difference among an imagined refugee community. As such, it is important to explore individual agency within an analysis of refugee identity and relate experiences of forced migrants to those of other members of society. This chapter has also provided a basis for my analysis and theorisation of lived experience in that I recognise the discourses that frame research about refugees, and potentially frame how refugees make sense of their experiences as they participate in education and wider UK society. These key definitions and conceptual framings of 'refugee' and 'refugee identity' underpin the forthcoming discussion in chapter five. This next chapter examines the legislation and policy that impacts on the lives of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK and, in relation to this, explores the concept of 'integration'.



# Chapter Five: The policy context: asylum, integration and higher education

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## **Introduction**

This chapter engages with the policies that relate to refugee participation in UK society and higher education. This is presented in three parts. First, UK asylum policy is examined, outlining the contemporary context of asylum in the UK. This section also gives a detailed overview of the humanitarian statuses available in the UK and the rights that accompany these, showing how refugee status has been subject to increasing restrictions. The second section of the chapter explores the concept of integration before discussing the differing approaches to refugee integration taken by the UK nations of England, Wales and Scotland. Finally, the chapter shows how immigration policy and educational strategies intersect to exclude or include refugees and asylum seekers from higher education.

## **UK immigration: asylum policy**

The policy that governs the asylum process in Britain is set by the UK government. Although constituent nations have devolved rights in setting policies that relate to matters of refugee integration, it is the Home Office that governs the processes of asylum and the rights accorded to asylum seekers and refugees. This section outlines the current landscape of asylum in the UK, highlighting the importance of different forms of humanitarian statuses (see also Glossary) that add complexity to any discussion of ‘refugees’.

As observed in chapter four, during the period between the early 1990s and mid 2000s applications for asylum in the UK peaked, with the UK a primary destination for asylum within the EU (Gibney, 2011). During this time an unprecedented number of Acts of Parliament concerning asylum and immigration were passed, most of which were carried out by the Labour administration under Prime Minister Tony Blair (Spencer, 2011). Mulvey (2011), in an examination of immigration under New Labour, highlights the extent of legislation passed:

The Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act (1993, 1996, 1999)

The Immigration and Asylum Act (1999)

The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act (2002)

The Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants) Act (2004)

The Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act (2006)

The Criminal Justice and Immigration Act (2008)

The Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act (2009)

(Mulvey, 2011)

The development of legislation in this area reflects the change in policy direction on immigration towards that strategy of 'managed migration' that aimed to facilitate migration in response to labour market requirements while also reducing overall migration to designated levels (Castles, 2003). Spencer (2011) points out that during the 1990s this approach was a complicated balancing act. It involved a need to clear a backlog of asylum claims, reduce the number of new asylum claims and simultaneously rework the immigration system to create sufficient legal channels for migrant workers to enter the UK.

As this managed migration strategy progressed, significant changes then occurred for people seeking asylum. Dwyer *et al* (2010) note a pattern developed of 'stratified rights' for different types of migrants, which Mulvey

(2011) discusses along a spectrum of 'wantedness', with certain types of labour migrant preferred over those seeking asylum. Changes enacted in legislation of 1999 and 2002 respectively removed asylum seeker rights to social security benefits and legal employment. This legislation is still current in 2013, although since 2010 if an asylum seeker has not been given an initial decision on their claim within twelve months, they are entitled to employment in a job included on the national shortage occupation list (UK Parliament, 2011).

In 1999, the National Asylum Seekers Support Service (NASS) was established, effectively removing asylum seekers from the mainstream social security system (Institute of Race Relations, 2011). At this time the controversial practice of dispersal was also introduced, whereby asylum seekers who seek government support while their claim is processed are relocated to one of a number of 'dispersal cities' across the UK. In this programme, asylum seekers have no choice as to where in the UK they are moved. The dispersal programme has been subject to a range of criticisms, most commonly in relation to the housing of asylum seekers in substandard accommodation, and in areas of multiple deprivation, and/or with little ethnic diversity (Gibney, 2011). This is discussed in more detail in chapter seven.

Refugee status with indefinite (permanent) leave to remain in the UK was revoked in 2005, marking another significant shift in asylum policy. In the UKBA Five Year Strategy for Asylum and Immigration (February 2005: Immigration Rule 334) refugee status became temporary, given on an initial five year basis. Prior to 2005, refugee status was granted with Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR). Since 2005, for the majority of refugees, ILR only becomes available following a reassessment of the asylum claim at the end of these initial five years. The exception to this ruling is the relatively small number of refugees who are granted immediate permanent leave via the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) Gateway Protection Programme<sup>8</sup>. Alternatively,

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<sup>8</sup> Through the UNHCR Gateway Protection Programme up to 750 individuals are granted ILR in the UK annually (UKBA, 2012)

people whose claims are not considered to meet all the criteria for refugee status may, on humanitarian grounds, be granted shorter-term forms of permission to live and work in the UK. These forms of subsidiary protection are generally granted for three year periods. Permanent leave may not be applied for until residency of at least six years has passed (UKBA, 2013a), effectively requiring an interim renewal of a temporary status, such as Discretionary Leave. The table below summarises the range of current forms of leave to remain in the UK.

**Table 5.1: Humanitarian statuses in the UK (2013)**

<b>Asylum status</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Duration</b>
Asylum seeker	An individual who is awaiting a Home Office decision on their claim for asylum in the UK.	The UKBA states an aim to make an <b>initial</b> decision in under six months from arrival. This timeframe does not include appeal processes which may take years.
Refugee	Post 30 <sup>th</sup> August 2005 refugee status given to those who meet specific criteria.  Three streams: Asylum Process, Resettlement, Family reunification.	5 year period then reapplication for ILR. Prior to this date Refugee Status was given with ILR on permanent basis.  Resettlement refugee stream such as UNCHR Gateway Protection Programme grants automatic permanent residency (includes ILR)
Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR)	Permanent leave to remain in the UK.	Permanent  Granted with Refugee Status prior to 30th August 2005.  Granted without refugee status: to Family ILR Exercise and Case Resolution applicants and applicants who previously held other forms of leave to remain. Some Gateway refugees who fall outside immigration rules.

Humanitarian Protection (HP) and Discretionary Leave (DL)	<p>Leave to remain granted to those who fall outside refugee status criteria.</p> <p>HP: usually granted when applicant faces high risk of harm.</p> <p>DL: usually granted to UASCs (Unaccompanied young people under 17.5 years) or for family or medical reasons.</p>	<p>Temporary.</p> <p>HP: 2003-2005 up to 3 years. Since August 30<sup>th</sup> 2005: up to 5 years</p> <p>DL: up to 3 years</p> <p>May be renewed after first permit comes to an end.</p>
Exceptional Leave (ELR)	Until April 1st 2003 granted to claims that did not fulfil refugee-status criteria. Replaced by DL and HP	Temporary. Up to 4 years.

Source: Refugee Council, 2013; UKBA, 2013b

The impact of changes to humanitarian statuses in bringing increasing restriction on asylum is examined by Zetter (2007). The temporary dimension that now permeates the UK asylum system is significant, as the majority of these forms of leave are reassessed periodically. This extends the possibility of ultimate repatriation to one's country of origin (not necessarily one's 'home' country) and draws out the period of time an individual may have to wait before settling permanently in the UK. Zetter also suggests that with these practices a 'blurred label' of refugee has been created, as subsidiary statuses are often referred to as 'refugee' (2007, p.189). He argues this 'fractioning' of refugee status is an assertion of power by national governments, a process of 'forming, reforming and politicising the (refugee) label', while potentially masking important consequences, in both social and

legal terms, for individuals who do not have the legal status of refugee (2007, p. 189). In social terms this is clearly inter-related with the discourses of crisis that surround the collective identity of 'refugee', as discussed in chapter four.

It is also clear that asylum has been subsumed into UK immigration policy. The word 'asylum' has disappeared from the titles of Acts, rather than being maintained as a clearly defined status with particular significance (Hathaway, 2007). The argument made by Zetter (2007) reflects the global trend observed by Hathaway (2007), that of 'rendering refugee as much of a migrant as possible' (p.345), in order to manage and control immigration. As a strategy of control, or a 'politics of restriction' (Gibney, 2004; Karyotis, 2011), UK immigration legislation certainly has given increased attention to matters of security and illegality since 2007 (Spencer, 2011). This is visible in the titles of the Acts of 2008 and 2009, in which there is no reference to asylum. Rather, the Act of 2008 links criminal justice with immigration, while the 2009 Act links citizenship with border control. Not only has immigration policy restricted the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, but the humanitarian purpose of asylum has effectively been removed from clear sight. With this in mind, the chapter now moves on to consider how refugee integration is conceptualised and then how it is approached at government policy level in the UK.

### **Integration: a contested concept**

Castles *et al* (2003) observe that integration is a contested term, with no single definition or model of integration privileged. This is still pertinent, with a more recent description from da Lomba (2010), who states that it is a 'complex and fluid concept that does not suit itself well to definitions' (p. 415). This is exemplified by Ager and Strang (2008), whose research found forty nine working descriptions of integration and approximately 200 suggested integration indicators or markers (2008, p. 167). A key problem in discussing integration is that the term may refer to either the processes

undertaken by migrants to participate in a new social context, or it can refer specifically to the final result or aim of policy strategies (Spencer, 2006). With regard to the former, processes of integration are often presented over a spectrum in which differing rights and responsibilities are attributed to the migrant and to the host society. Cultural integration can be seen to be placed on a spectrum which is marked by assimilation on one end and multiculturalism on the other (Hollifield, 1997; Castles, 2003). Broadly speaking, the assimilation model would expect migrants to adapt extensively to follow the culture and practices of the host country, at risk of marginalization if they do not adapt sufficiently (Entzinger and Biezeveld, 2003). In contrast, integration at the multicultural end of the spectrum would be based on the rights of migrants and minority ethnic groups to also retain their own culture as an enriching part of a mixed society. The definition given below is that which is currently supported by human rights advocates as shaping the most effective approach to refugee integration (da Costa, 2006; European Council for Refugees and Exiles, 2010).

Integration of refugees is a dynamic two-way process. It begins from the day a refugee arrives within the new host society. The approach that governments choose determines the outcome of integration efforts and services, and will ultimately influence integration for individual refugees. Refugee integration therefore places demands both on receiving societies and on the individuals and communities concerned (European Council for Refugees and Exiles, 2010).

This model highlights the reciprocal nature of this framing of cultural integration, framing the adaptive work as something for both host society and the arriving refugee, indicative of an approach that is more multicultural than assimilative in its emphasis. Moreover, in the context of the rights attached to asylum seeker and other humanitarian statuses in the UK, it is important to note that this definition highlights the significance of inclusion rather than separation from the first day of arrival. A range of models and frameworks for understanding integration processes and gauging the extent of successful

integration have been developed, but these cannot be dealt with in detail here. Rather, this section examines the framework from Ager and Strang (2008) that was developed as part of a Home Office commission of 2002. This remains the most recently commissioned integration framework from the UK government, despite immigration policy having shifted significantly over the last decade. In order to make observations about the relational aspect of integration as a dynamic and two-way process, the integration model from Entzinger and Biezeveld (2003) is also explored. Discussion of these models will show how education is identified as an indicator and facilitator of cultural integration, as well as give a theoretical context for an examination of the contemporary UK government approach to integration.

Entzinger and Biezeveld (2003) offer a model of migrant integration which rests on a premise that both integration and acculturation are separate, but closely intertwined, concepts. This is based on an understanding that integration is subject to both institutional and personal dimensions. They describe the institutional dimension as migrant participation in the institutions of the receiving society, such as education, health care and the labour market. Meanwhile, the acculturative element is identified as the cultural shifts that migrants experience, such as self-identification and cultural orientation. In this model, the institutional dimension is conceptualised as integration, and the personal dimension as acculturation. The model is marked by four fields; socio-economic, cultural, legal-political, and attitudes of recipient society to migrants. Integration in and across these fields is measurable through a set of indicators, with education identified as one of the socio-economic field indicators. Where the model is limited however, is in the way that the interconnection between these fields is theorised. Despite the clear differentiation between acculturation and integration, this model posits the extent of integration is to be found in the *attainment* of these indicators. Although the authors argue that the fields are inter-related, the separation of indicators within each field makes it difficult to look holistically at dynamic processes of integration and how the personal,



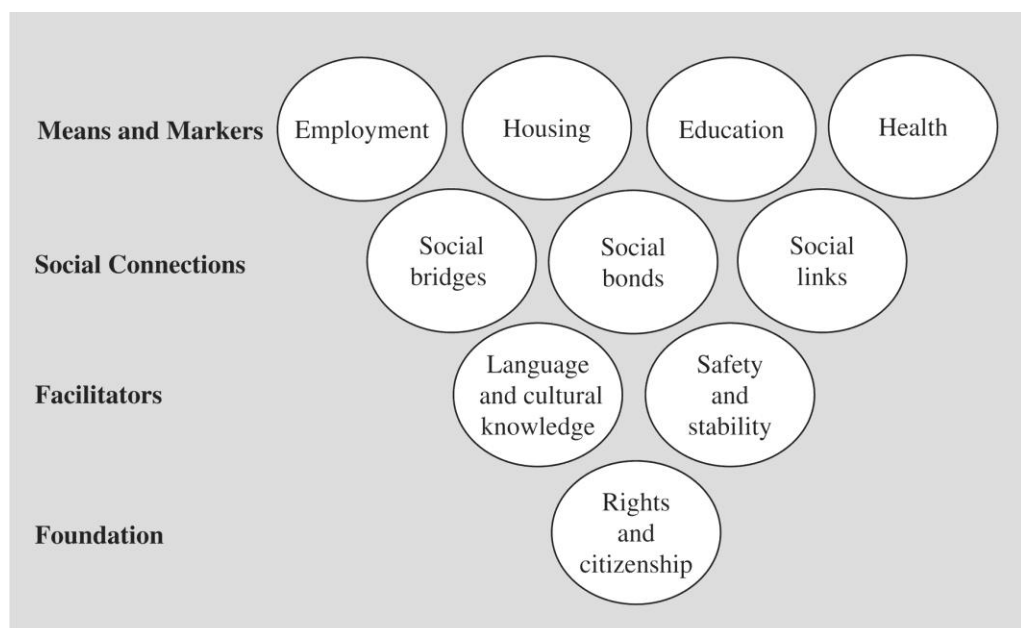
relational dimension of integration impacts on participation in societal institutions such as education. This is where the framework proposed by Ager and Strang (2008) is more useful.

Ager and Strang (2008) do not make the same clarification between integration and acculturation as discrete processes, but do offer a fluid understanding of what Entzinger and Biezeveld (2003) term 'indicators'. The domains identified in this framework are layered in such a way as to show their interconnection, and to present integration as dynamic and multi-dimensional, rather than as an accumulative or uni-directional process.

..it is problematic to see achievement in these areas purely as a 'marker' of integration. They may serve as such, but they also clearly serve as potential means to support the achievement of integration (Ager and Strang, 2008:169).

As one of these domains, education is suggested to have a dual function in which it can act as both a 'means' and a 'marker' of integration. For it to be so, it rests upon a foundation of social, cultural and legal domains.

**Figure 5.1: Framework of domains of refugee integration (Ager and Strang, 2008)**



The model works from a foundation of rights and citizenship, and the authors suggest that any integration policy must articulate the rights accorded to refugees. Therefore for integration policy to be accountable to these rights, the rights themselves must be clearly defined (p.175). Resting on this foundation are two 'facilitator' domains, language and cultural knowledge, and safety and stability. Social connections, primarily drawing on Putnam's (2000) theory of social capital, distinguishing between social bonds, bridges and links, form the third tier of the model. Finally, the fourth tier is formed by the 'means and markers' of integration, identified as housing, education, health and employment. As this chapter has already shown, the rights of refugees and people with associated humanitarian statuses have changed significantly over the decade since the framework was formulated. This has brought important restrictions to the foundation of rights, which Ager and Strang (2008) argue are 'the basis for full and equal engagement in society' (p.177). Therefore, if using this framework in an analysis of integration, the relationship between this foundational domain and the other domains of integration has to be closely examined.

In a subsequent discussion of their framework, Ager and Strang (2010) emphasise that integration is 'multi-dimensional in the sense that it involves the forming of relationships across people with multiple and overlapping identities' (p.602). It seems that in order to examine these relationships and the interdependence between the domains of integration presented in Figure 5.1, it is useful to consider Entzinger and Biezeveld's (2003) observation that acculturative work is context-dependant, and carried out to differing extents by both hosts and migrants. Considering these ideas together offers a way into thinking of the domains of integration as non-neutral sites, but rather as structured by power that results in this imbalance of acculturative work. From this perspective, an analysis of the interdependence of these domains will also interrogate the extent to which the 'means and markers' of integration are un/stable domains due to this power dynamic. This is considered again in chapter six in connection to working with Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) field

theory. Integration has been shown to be a complex and contested concept that exists on a spectrum dependent on multiple and closely inter-related elements. The shifting position of integration in government policy, and the implications of this for refugees in UK, is examined next.

### **Integration: the differing approaches of the UK nations**

This section discusses the incongruity between UK asylum and immigration legislation, the UK government position on refugee integration, and the approaches taken to refugee integration by the governments of Scotland and Wales. This clearly can be connected to the foundational integration domain of 'rights and citizenship' (Ager and Strang, 2008) and as such shows the UK to be in a state of flux regarding the way in which refugees are received. These differing approaches can be seen to complicate how refugees and asylum seekers are able to participate in British education and civic society more widely. Only Wales, England and Scotland are discussed here as current information on refugee integration in Northern Ireland was not readily available.

The 'day of arrival' stance on integration is not shared by the UK nations. In England, recent government strategies have stated that integration should begin *after* an asylum claim has been approved by the Home Office (Home Office, 2010). In contrast, Wales (Welsh Government, 2008; 2011), and Scotland (Refugee Council, 2012) take the 'day of arrival' approach towards asylum seeker and refugee participation in society. As England hosts the greatest percentage of the UK asylum seeker population, this means that the majority of asylum seekers are subject to a policy approach that advocates a very limited participation in society. In addition to this approach to asylum seekers, the current UK government framing of refugee integration has also shifted. This appears to be in line with the removal of asylum from immigration policy that was discussed earlier in the chapter, and is discussed next.

By late 2012, the UK coalition government had produced what appears to be an interim paper on integration, issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), titled *Creating the Conditions for Integration* (DCLG, 2012). This is the first integration document from the coalition, superseding the strategy *Moving on Together* from the previous Labour government (Home Office, 2009). The document states that it is an England-only *approach*, rather than a strategy, and makes no reference to the Scottish or Welsh approaches to integration, despite stressing the UK-wide relevance of the topic.

This paper outlines our approach to integration in England. However, the issues this raises have wider relevance across the United Kingdom (DCLG, 2012: 1).

While UK government interventions in integration can be seen to have moved on since 2009, this document is notable for its minimal commitment to supporting refugees to integrate. Instead it refers to migration in a much more general way. In contrast to the previous Labour government's strategies *Moving on Together* (Home Office, 2009) and *Integration Matters* (Home Office, 2005), the 2012 DCLG document makes no specific reference to refugees, and reference to migrants is very limited. Instead, integration is framed as a social issue that will be addressed through the 'Big Society' approach. This is a visible distancing of the UK government from integration-specific interventions, emphasising the responsibility of localised 'community' responses to civic participation. Crucially this approach erases, or makes invisible, the category of 'refugee'.

In contrast, the Welsh and Scottish Governments, in taking the 'day of arrival' approach, emphasise that participation in civic society is a fundamental priority for enabling integration. Prior to the UK-wide 2010 Equality Act (Home Office, 2010), the Scottish Government named refugees and asylum seekers as an 'Equalities' group within strategies applicable to the wider population, such as the Race Equality Scheme (Scottish Government, 2008). The Scottish Government is in the process of producing a new integration

strategy, in collaboration with the Scottish Refugee Council and COSLA Strategic Migration Partnership (Scottish Government, 2013). This is likely to contain specific reference to refugee access to education. In 2008 the Welsh Government (formerly Welsh Assembly Government) introduced the Refugee Inclusion Strategy (RIS) that has since been updated (2011). This document identifies refugee-specific needs for integration through addressing questions of poverty, education, access to services and discrimination. However the next section demonstrates that despite these 'day of arrival' approaches that seek to tackle social exclusion, the Welsh and Scottish government interventions have a limited impact on supporting access to the field of higher education for the majority of refugees and asylum seekers.

## **Higher education and refugee integration**

The chapter now examines the place of education within integration policies and the intersection of asylum regulations and immigration statuses with national higher education policies.

In a clear shift from the refugee integration strategies of 2005 and 2009, the UK government no longer frames education as a crucial element of refugee integration. For example, the *Moving on Together* (2009) strategy refers to education as important in ways other than solely learning English for instrumental, or assimilative, purposes. Throughout the document education is discussed as having a key role in social, economic and cultural integration. Moreover, within a thirty two page document, three case studies give examples of refugees engaging in Higher Education (p.11 and pp. 20-21). Not only do these examples attribute a positive collective subjectivity to refugees, but also gives Higher Education a tangible presence within the integration strategy. In the DCLG (2012) paper however, Higher Education has been subsumed to a general reference under the thematic heading of Social Mobility. This is in relation to all members of British society, rather than with specific reference to migrants or refugees. The paper suggests:

a range of reforms to higher education designed to widen access, including strengthened access agreements setting out how universities will attract students from low income and other under-represented groups (DCLG, 2012: 13).

These 'under-represented groups' are not specified, but it is important to note that neither the Office for Fair Access to higher education (OFFA) nor the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE, 2009) name refugees and asylum seekers in their list of 'under represented' social groups. OFFA (2013), whose remit is to protect access to higher education for under-represented groups, defines these students as:

students from lower socio-economic groups and neighbourhoods in which relatively few people enter higher education.

students from some ethnic groups or sub-groups.

students who have been in care.

disabled students.

(OFFA, 2013)

Therefore, while refugees and asylum seekers may fit these criteria, migration via asylum is not seen in itself as a criteria additional support for access to higher education. Socio-economic and cultural factors are examined in more detail in chapter seven, and in this discussion it will be seen that the circumstances of many refugees in the UK fit with OFFA's (2013) 'under represented' criteria listed above.

In contrast to the UK government, the Welsh Government (WG) Refugee Inclusion Strategy (2008; updated Action Plan, 2011) directly addresses education as a key factor in refugee integration. In doing so it refers specifically to the entitlements of refugees and asylum seekers to HE. The 2012 Action Plan outlines two priorities:

To ensure that Higher and Further Education Institutions are fully aware of refugee and asylum seeker entitlements.

To provide accessible information, advice and guidance as well as direct financial and other support to increase access to further and

higher education by refugees and asylum seekers (Priority 3- Action 4, p.30).

Yet despite these aims, no details were supplied on how the aim Priority 3 – Action 4 ‘to provide direct financial and other support’ for refugees and asylum seekers would be enacted. It does, however, refer to the need for universities to recognise finance as only one key barrier to HE for refugees and asylum seekers. In this it draws on recommendations made in the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) Circular on Widening Access to Refugees and Asylum Seekers (HEFCW, 2010). The HEFCW (2010) document suggests that apart from finance, other barriers include ‘social and cultural adaptation to UK life (and) to further and higher education systems and processes’ (2010, p.5). In doing so, the Welsh Government approach reflects a similar understanding of integration as that outlined in the framework by Ager and Strang (2008), whereby participation in education (and subsequent integration) is seen as dependent upon inter-related economic, social and cultural factors that impact on refugees and asylum seekers in ways specific to their form of migration. While not *all* refugees and asylum seekers might be disadvantaged in participating in UK higher education, as the WG document states, there is a clear need for recognition of the complex rules of entitlement to higher education that different forms of humanitarian statuses hold. This is perhaps the most tangible starting point for exploring the domain of education, specifically higher education, as a stable means or marker of refugee integration.

Although recent rises in university fees have had an impact on how British citizens access HE, potential students with humanitarian statuses are subject to different entitlements to HE fees and funding regimes, dependant on both the forms of status they hold, how long they have lived in the UK, and where in the UK they seek to study. The table below summarises the key differences regarding humanitarian statuses and fees and funding entitlements in England, Wales and Scotland.

**Table 5.2 Student fees and funding as per humanitarian status/  
country of study**

Status/ UK nation	England Fees	England Student support	Wales Fees	Wales Student Support	Scotland Fees	Scotland Student Support
Refugee	Home	Yes	Home	Yes	Home	Yes
Hum. Protection (HP)	Home*	Yes	Home*	Yes	Home*	Yes
Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR)	Home*	Yes	Home*	Yes*	Home*	Yes*
Discret. Leave (DL)	Inter-national	No	Home*	Yes*	Home*	Yes*
Asylum Seeker	Inter-national	No	Inter-national	No	Home **	Partial**

Key: \* Home fees are applicable but only on fulfilment of a three year residency requirement prior to application. In the case of a successful appeal against a negative asylum application, the qualifying residency period is considered to start from the date of appeal, not first day of arrival<sup>9</sup>.

\*\* In Scotland, home fees are applicable to asylum seeker children or unaccompanied youth under twenty five years old. People in these circumstances may not apply for public student support, such as student

<sup>9</sup> For further detail see:  
[http://www.childrenslegalcentre.com/index.php?page=faq\\_Furtherandhighereducation\\_question4](http://www.childrenslegalcentre.com/index.php?page=faq_Furtherandhighereducation_question4).



loans, but are eligible for the Scottish Government tuition fee allowance to study at a Scottish university.<sup>10</sup>

The table above highlights that the type of status individuals have, and indeed where in the UK they wish to study, has significant implications for fees and funding. The matter of residency is a further complication which refugees also have to take into account, and these rules are complicated. Refugee status only requires that the individual has been resident in the UK since being recognised as a refugee, thus overrides the standard three year residency requirement. If however, ILR has been granted to a 'legacy case' application via the Case Resolution Directorate, then the standard three years residency requirement holds. Meeting the residency requirement is also necessary for those who are awarded subsidiary forms of status if they wish to have recourse to 'Home' fees and the student bursaries and loans available to UK citizens. In the case of Humanitarian Protection (HP), residency is dated from the date that HP was granted, and must also be three years prior to the first day of the course. However, if a student's spouse or parent is granted refugee/ HP status during the student's course of study, then that student may then become eligible for 'Home' fees for the remainder of their degree (UKCISA, 2012).

Discretionary Leave (DL) is subject to further difference. Prospective students with DL in Scotland and Wales are classified as 'Home' students if they have been ordinarily resident in the UK for three years prior to the first day of the course, that is, they have held DL status for three years, rather than been in the UK for three years. However, the situation in England again seems to reflect the UK government tightening of restrictions on refugee rights. Since February 2012 people with DL who wish to study in England are no longer eligible for Home Fees (UK CISA, 2012). Elwyn *et al* (2012) suggest that this predominantly affects young people, as DL is the form of leave most commonly granted to unaccompanied children asylum seekers. These are

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<sup>10</sup> For further detail see:

[http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/student/info\\_sheets/student\\_support\\_scotland.php#not\\_refugees](http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/student/info_sheets/student_support_scotland.php#not_refugees)

people who may already have spent years in British secondary education, and who may have aspirations to study at university.

Asylum seekers, meanwhile, are categorised as International students in England, Wales and Scotland. Since 2010 however, young asylum seekers in Scotland may be granted 'Home' student status if they have been resident for three years prior to applying to university in Scotland. The decision from the Scottish Government appears to acknowledge that indeed there is an asylum seeker population that may have been resident in the country for an extended period of time. However, this exception is made only for people under the age of twenty five, who are either unaccompanied or are children of asylum seekers. This ruling thus excludes older prospective students, ignoring the significance of issues that impact on aspiration and participation in HE. For example, asylum seekers may arrive with a disrupted education and need time to gain entry level qualifications and/or learn English. Moreover, it seems unclear, and at cross purposes with the government's equalities agenda why children of asylum seekers may benefit from this fee status, but not the parents themselves.

For asylum seekers, alternative routes lie in applying to universities that classify asylum seekers as 'Home' students (Elwyn *et al*, 2012) or in applying individually for a reduction in International fees, or for Home fees on a one-off basis. This second approach however requires the individual to have access to current advice and guidance, and to be equipped to supply a strong personal case in their favour. Yet these alternatives are limited in their scope, as the asylum seeker remains ineligible for student support, and is also likely to be prohibited from legal employment. All of these are *ad hoc* solutions which rest the main burden of successful access on the individual applicant. As is discussed in the chapter eight, trying to participate in Higher Education with asylum seeker status can be difficult for a range of other reasons, but the financial dimension is clearly a key barrier.

This section has examined how higher education is recognised as part of refugee integration, and how humanitarian statuses intersect with entitlement to access higher education. Eligibility for Home fees and student support is limited by humanitarian status, residency requirements and geographical location and this reflects the differing approaches taken to refugee integration in the UK nations of England, Wales and Scotland. Prospective students with humanitarian status other than refugee, or ILR granted by the Case Resolution Directorate, are effectively categorised as International students for at least the first three years of their time in the UK, despite sharing some of the rights that citizens hold, such as the right to employment and access to social services. This is a point of substantial discrepancy between national systems of education and asylum, which also emphasises the requirement of individuals to ‘wait out’ a minimum time period before accessing certain rights. As such this also undermines the extent to which higher education can be understood as a stable ‘means’ or ‘marker’ of refugee integration.

## **Chapter summary**

The chapter has examined the concept of integration, indicating how education has been framed as a ‘means’ and ‘marker’ of integration (Ager and Strang, 2008). It has also highlighted how UK asylum and immigration legislation has shifted over the last decade towards an increased restriction of the rights accorded to asylum seekers and refugees, and that the discourse of UK immigration policy has shifted to link asylum with criminality. Although refugee integration is approached in different ways by Wales and Scotland, the UK is bound to immigration laws set by the Westminster. Thus immigration policy overshadows the ‘day of arrival’ approach that frames the work on integration and inclusion by the Welsh and Scottish Governments, and this ‘politics of restriction’ (Gibney, 2011) is reflected in the UK government partial erasure of education within its integration approach.

However, the 'day of arrival' approaches still have a limited impact on refugee and asylum seeker access to HE, as age, residency history and humanitarian status intersect with eligibility criteria for student fees and funding. In these ways the chapter has shown how asylum seeker and refugee access to UK higher education is arbitrary, and dependent on where in the UK these prospective students are based. The next chapter of this thesis considers theoretical perspectives for making an analysis the experiences of refugees as they participate in a new country.

# Chapter Six: Theorising lived experience: concepts for thinking about identity, agency and displacement

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## **Introduction**

This chapter engages with theory to develop a framework for analysis of the experiences of higher education and the place of HE in the lives of the participants in this study. Earlier chapters have considered the literature around the construction of refugee identity and ‘refugeeness’, and this chapter extends the discussion of these concepts by examining theoretical approaches to identity, displacement and interaction between individuals and social structures. The chapter consists of three distinct sections. First, drawing mainly on the work of Hall (1996, 2003), Bhabha (1994), Bauman (2001) and Brubaker and Cooper (2000), differing conceptualisations of identity are discussed, clarifying how identity is approached in my analyses. Second, key concepts from Bourdieu’s (1977, 1986, 1992) field theory are presented in relation to transnationalism and Bhabha’s (1994) concept of ‘hybrid’ subjectivities. Finally, the theoretical perspective on migration and displacement from Bakewell (2011) is considered in relation to thinking about the psychic and physical disjunctures involved in forced migration.

## **What do we mean when we talk about ‘identity’?**

Identity is an important element of the analyses made in chapters eight and nine, and as seen in earlier chapters on government policy and the literature on experiences of forced migration, ‘refugee identity’ is a highly contested term. This section also connects back to the discussion of epistemology in

chapter two as it engages with post-structural perspectives on identity. Brubaker and Cooper (2000) suggest that identity has become a 'pervasive concern' in research that engages in matters of gender, religion, ethnicity, and immigration. Indeed, they argue that 'identity' extends such a hold that a sense of obligation to address the concept has been perceived even by those whose work is not primarily engaged with these topics. More recently, Elliot and du Gay (2009) argue that identity is moving more closely to the core of societies, further complicated by the super-structures of the contemporary globalised world. Identity is an important part of this thesis for this reason, as globalisation and national border controls exert shifting and ongoing pressures on what it is to 'be' a refugee. This is explored in chapters four and five, whereby in the act of seeking sanctuary, forced migrants are required to engage with highly emotive and politicised 'refugee' and 'asylum seeker' identities for extended periods of time, even potentially for the duration of a lifetime. Therefore, examining how a 'refugee' identity might be theorised is crucial to any analysis of such experiences.

Much contemporary educational research draws on the post-structural perspectives to identity which Hall (1996) previously referred to as bringing the 'discursive explosion' (p.1) to debates around identity. In this, Hall highlights 'the necessity and the 'impossibility' of identities' (1996, p.16) arising from the post-structural or postmodern challenge to essentialist concepts of identity formation. Hall also suggests that cultural identities are subject to the interplay between history, culture and power, and that modernity has been subject to 'ruptures'. In doing so he argues that thinking about identity has shifted from a point when it was thought of as singular, complete, and stable to a point where it is understood as being multiple, fluid and/or fragmented. Hall's (1996) threefold model of subjectivities exemplifies this shift. First, he posits that the 'Enlightenment' subject is one that, through processes of reason and self awareness, is possible to discover a fixed, core identity. Or rather, an inherent essence of identity that remains stable despite changing life circumstances or context. Second, is the 'Sociological' subject.

This subjectivity is based in relational interactions, bridging an inner, personal world with the outside social world. Finally, the 'Postmodern' subject is presented in which a centered or fixed 'self' is impossible. Individuals *choose* to take up identities based in historical and culturally defined contexts, and this is subject to ongoing change. There is no possibility of a 'whole' or singular identity, rather it is possible for an individual to hold multiple and contradictory identities simultaneously.

Bauman (2001) also calls for a way of thinking about identity that engages with the transient nature of subjectivities as people negotiate daily life. He does so within his framing of 'liquid modernity', arguing like Hall (1996) that no future exists in which there is a final destination of a secure identity position. As our local worlds interconnect with the global, and indeed become global, Bauman argues that our approach to identity must change. Rather than lives which rest on the bed of a single identity, people face a challenge which is:

...not so much how to obtain the identities...of choice and how to have them recognised by others, but which identity to choose, and how best to keep alert...so that another choice can be made in case the previously chosen identity is withdrawn from the market or stripped of its seductive powers (Bauman, 2001: 126).

In Bauman's liquid modernity, identity is a commodity rather than an intrinsic feature of who we are as people. Rather than a notion of identity, or identities, that although multiple we keep hold of as an essence of our personalities, he suggests that:

...instead of talking about identities, inherited or acquired, it would be more in keeping with the realities of the globalising world to speak of identification, a never-ending, always incomplete, unfinished and open-ended activity in which we all, by necessity or choice, are engaged (Bauman, 2001: 129).

Bauman speaks of identity work as a necessary and ongoing task within a competitive world. In the later discussion in this chapter of Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) framework of capitals, connections can be made with the processes of identification that Bauman suggests as being part of strategic manoeuvres for

position within a network of power, and of 'identity' as a form of cultural and symbolic capital. Therefore while individuals may actively make identity choices, some choices may also be impossible due to a lack of the right forms of capital.

The re-working of 'identity' as an ongoing project of identification, is also found in the work Brubaker and Cooper (2000). They propose that there is a need to critically revisit how the term 'identity' functions in social analysis, outlining the limitations of applying the concept of 'identity' in a generalised way when constructing analytical work. First, it is suggested that identity can be considered as being a category of practice (after Bourdieu), through which people describe and distinguish themselves from others, and second, that identity can be a category of analysis. The argument here is not that the category of practice *cannot* also be a category of analysis, but that it should not automatically be assumed as such. The point made is convincing, illustrated through discussion of the reifying potential that comes with the construction of categories of analysis, such as in the use of 'nation' or 'race'.

The problem here is that 'nation', 'race', and 'identity' are used analytically a good deal of the time...more or less as they are used in practice, in an implicitly or explicitly reifying manner... that implies or asserts that 'nations', 'races' or 'identities' 'exist', and that people 'have' a 'nationality', a 'race', an 'identity' (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000:6).

Instead the authors suggest caution in how such terms are used in theorising. For example, they suggest 'race-talk' or 'nation-talk' as terms to describe the categories of identity that are used in everyday life without tacitly reproducing essentialised meanings. In addition to the discussion in chapter four which problematises how we can talk of a 'refugee' experience, Brubaker and Cooper's (2000) observation about nation is particularly salient to this thesis. Chapters eight and nine suggest how nationality, immigration status and feelings of displacement can be bound in complex and contradictory ways within experiences of forced migration and refugee settlement.



With these points in mind, Brubaker and Cooper's (2000) distinction between 'strong' and 'weak' forms of identity is also useful. The 'strong' form reflects an interpretation of identity that is close to Hall's (1996) 'Enlightenment' subject. The authors suggest that this 'strong' identity assumes homogeneity within social groupings, and that identity is something that people intrinsically hold, a stable core element of being. Much like the Enlightenment subject, the 'strong' understanding of identity assumes that a singular identity it is available for humans to discover. Of more relevance to this study though, are the arguments made regarding the 'weak' conceptualisations.

Similar to Hall's 'Postmodern' subject (1996), the 'weak' identity is multiple, fragmented and shifting, as the individual moves through different social contexts. The authors suggest that some forms of the weak identity may be too weak in order to usefully be applied to theoretical work. Work that is underpinned by the challenge of:

..devising a concept 'soft' and flexible enough to satisfy the requirements of a relational constructivist social theory, yet robust enough to have purchase on the phenomena that cry out for explanation, some of which are quite 'hard' (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 12).

Here the authors argue for a theoretical approach aligned with how Hall's (1996) 'Sociological' subject is constructed, in which an account of the social world is made through examination of the interplay between both the individual and social structures. The core of the argument around identity is found here, whereby Brubaker and Cooper suggest that given the range and depth of work that *identity* as an analytical concept expected to cover, there is too great a risk of accidental essentialism, in which final analysis 'subsumes the particular into the indifferent, flat rubric of identity' (p.34). They advocate a clear distinction between the *processes* of identification by individuals and the *categorisation* of identity perpetuated through the 'formalized, codified, objectified systems of categorisation developed by powerful, authoritative institutions.' (p.15). The tension between 'strong' and 'weak' identities becomes apparent here. Brubaker and Cooper (2000)

suggest that people may undertake identification potentially using both a collective category, such as nationality or citizenship, and an identifier that is based in relational networks, such as student-teacher, or family member, for example. In doing so this seems to follow the distinction made by Giddens (1991) between reflexive self-identification and the social identities made through socio-political categorisations. This is a useful distinction, and one which Modood (2007) also appears to agree with at least in part, by highlighting the problem of postmodern approaches that over-emphasise fluidity to exclusion of being able to define any element of what 'identity' might be, or have been.

In the case of a living culture that we are part of, that we have been inducted into, have extended through use and seen change in our own lifetimes, it is easier to better appreciate the processes of change and adaptation, of borrowing from other cultures and new influences, and yet at the same time appreciate what is the subject of change. There cannot merely be flux and fluidity, for change implies the continuation of something that has undergone change (Modood, 2007: 93).

Yet Modood maintains that 'identity' is useful in discussions of cultural group based identity work, as it lends itself to 'stretching widely enough to encompass both behaviour based and associational conceptions of group membership' (2007, p.107). Citing the example of second generation British-Indians, he argues that identification with a group identity (in this case, being Indian) is not necessarily contingent on engagement with particular activities or behaviours associated with that group. Indeed, strong group identification may still occur even when individuals only minimally conform to traditional group norms or practices.

This approach to group identity is helpful in finding a way to approach talking about 'refugee identity', where there is clearly no 'core' cultural reference point, for example, based in ethnicity. However, as discussed in chapter four, 'refugee identity' is bound by discourse, exemplifying how discursive practices 'chain' subjects into their boundaries (Hall, 1996). Processes of identification are carried out within discourse, and Hall presents a Foucauldian interpretation of the impact of discourse on self-representation:

Individuals...may not be able to take meaning until they have been able to identify with those positions which the discourse constructs, *subjected* themselves to its rules, and hence become the *subjects of its power/knowledge* (Hall, 2003: 56).

An additional theoretical approach which is useful in an analysis of identity work is found in Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybrid subjectivities, which draws on Foucault's understanding of power. In this, the binary of essentialised subjectivity is deconstructed, and a way of working towards identifying the limitations of knowledge claims based in the binary and finding a way of theorising is explored. Bhabha suggests that knowledge claimed about people within a colonial discourse emphasises essentialist categorisations, and the justification of colonising actions is based in these essentialised 'truths'. First, by using the concept of stereotype, Bhabha challenges the 'fixity' of positions of colonial discourse as put forward in Said's (1978) theorisation of the centre/ margin binary. This posits that the centre is the (colonial) essence of all that is modern, rational and ordered, in contrast to the chaotic, irrational and 'backwards' margins. In this binary the coloniser must therefore control both the centre and the margins, identified in the stereotype, in order to maintain the privileged position of power which will then produce and reproduce a particular form of knowledge about both colonised and coloniser.

The concept of 'hybridity' is proposed, based on an understanding that subjectivities are both unrestricted and incomplete, offering the possibility of multiple and potentially conflicting dimensions of identity and identification. Interruption of the colonial discourse is possible, argues Bhabha (1994), 'by engaging with its *effectivity*, with the repertoire of positions of power and resistance, domination and dependence' (p.95). In examining the production of knowledge within these binary positions, he seeks a way of revealing the 'construction of the colonial subject in discourse and the exercise of colonial power through discourse' (p.96), and thus making the boundaries of knowledge more visible.

It is in the gap between boundaries of Subject/Object that Bhabha's hybrid subjectivities are available, bringing into focus the 'productive ambivalence of the object of colonial discourse, that 'otherness' which is at once an object of desire and derision' (1994, p.96). His intention here is of delineating the boundary points of the colonial discourse, investigating the constestation of this knowledge, which then produces liminal spaces in which resistance might occur. Thus for Bhabha, the epistemic core of hybridity is the boundary- it is the 'thirdspace' or the 'in-between' where knowledge is produced. It is a space where agency is enacted by the hybrid object, rather than remaining fixed in, and bound to, a passive subjectivity produced within particular discursive limits. In this space the dominant forms of knowledge, based on these binary positions, are undermined by liminality, and what occurs in these liminal physical and psychological spaces. From this position, the possibility of universal truths is undermined, through the problematising of (flawed) ideal types, and the process and contexts of how it is we come to know.

What is..politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood - singular or communal - that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself (Bhabha,1994:2).

This concept of hybridity is useful for examining the boundaries of identity and identifications that refugees may inhabit as they participate in a new society. By holding this concept alongside theory that engages with the structuring of society as Bourdieu's field theory (1977, 1986) does, there are opportunities in which to examine how identity is both a product and a productive element within lived experience. How these approaches can be used together is discussed following an exploration of Bourdieusian theory.

## **Bourdieu's theoretical 'toolkit'**

In *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977) Bourdieu presents a theory of social space with which to examine the relationship between the individual and society. In order to illuminate social space as being a dynamic space, Bourdieu proposes this 'field theory'. Although this theory has been critiqued for offering an overly deterministic analysis of the limits of individual agency (Adams, 2006; Archer, 2007), it is discussed in relation to work from Bhabha (1994) and Bakewell (2011) as a means to focus on agentic strategies. This section turns now to discuss Bourdieu's framing of field, habitus and capitals, and related concepts of misrecognition, symbolic violence, and hysteresis.

### **Fields: structuring social space**

Bourdieu (1977) conceptualises social space as structured by both the 'field of power' and constitutive fields. The field of power is presented as a meta-field within which elite social groups compete for domination. It is here that power holders engage in processes to extend their control of power across and between the numerous fields that structure social space. As the field of power is not available to those without pre-existing power, it is essential for the social group or individual to have already have established dominant positions within other fields. In this way it is defined by the contest for the 'legitimate principle of legitimation' (Swartz, 1997). Or rather, the field of power is shaped through the reproduction of established elite practices.

Field is conceptualised as 'a network or configuration of objective relations between positions' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.72). In *The State Nobility* (1996), Bourdieu argues that the governing forms of power in contemporary societies are four-fold; political, intellectual, bureaucratic, and economic

power. Yet these have varying amounts of strength in different fields and different societies. Therefore, while one particular field or group of fields might dominate in Society A, it is likely that Society B would be dominated by a different field or group of fields. On a global scale then, only a very limited number of nation states are in a position to compete for dominance of the (global) field of power. As a result of power inequality between nations and their societies within the global field of power, sources of advantage are limited for certain classes or groups of people (Bourdieu, 1996). To relate this concept to this thesis, it can be seen that refugees enter a national field of power (in this case, the UK), but the maintenance of UK border controls and immigration is situated within a context of global migration, and the ongoing engagement of the UK in competing for a position within the global field of power.

Fields are never in stasis, nor are their boundaries fixed, as these are dependent on and defined by acts of mutual recognition between individuals who share similar motivations and investments in each field (James and Grenfell, 2004). A wide range of fields exist within social space, with sub-fields also existing within these. For example, education can be considered as a field with sub-fields, such as higher, primary, secondary, and community education. All of which are connected in this relational network that contextualises and contributes to the dynamic between society and actors, and the subsequent demarcation of individual field positions. Processes of recognition are underpinned by 'nomos', or the structuring principles of the field, and such principles that cause different fields to value different forms of capitals over others (Bourdieu, 1986).

However, these structuring principles are not rigid universal patterns (Grenfell, 1996), rather they too are flexible and in a dynamic state of evolution, as individuals engage in the practices that are aligned to the nomos. Bourdieu (1977) terms this commitment to the field 'illusio', or the investment made by each individual to the field. By taking up a field position individuals thus conform to the social illusion, and a set of tacitly agreed social

rules. These are the 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu, 1977); the often implicit practices that are intrinsic to the field participation of those who are already situated within the field, and those who wish to enter. Such practices act as the boundary markers of each field, defining behavioural norms and acceptable actions. This taken-for-granted, unquestioned range of possibilities is termed 'doxa' (Bourdieu, 1977). More, this range of possible actions is only available when the field principles and structures, the nomos, are in balance with an individual's subjective dispositions, or embodied cultural capital, their habitus. Otherwise, Bourdieu (1977) argues, individuals struggle to achieve or maintain a strong field position and experience disjuncture within the field. Before discussing habitus, the section refers to the other forms of social, cultural and economic capital that Bourdieu (1977, 1986) uses to explain how field position is gained, or lost.

## **Capitals**

Capitals are the resources that are available within each field, and over which individuals and groups compete. All of which are of which may be convertible into forms of symbolic capital, or power, within each field and between fields. Moreover, these may be found as taking different forms in which the capital is institutionalised, embodied or objectified (Bourdieu, 1986). Such resources however are distributed unequally amongst individuals, and as shifts occur in the definition of field, so does the distribution, availability and value of capitals (Bourdieu, 1986). As such, capitals mediate fields, becoming both the product of fields, and constituent of the process that defines fields (James and Grenfell, 2004). In this way, how individuals or groups accrue these forms of capital is based in the relationships and 'the rules of the game' that define the continuously changing value of each capital within any given field. Each form of capital is now discussed.

## **Symbolic capital**

Within each field, Bourdieu suggests that field position is attained when habitus acts to convert symbolic capital. Symbolic capital is recognisable through the status and prestige associated with occupying a position of power, and is attained only through the accrual and/or conversion of other capitals that have worth within the field. Individuals are thus vulnerable to acts of symbolic violence, or rather, acts of domination which tacitly devalue the capital held (Bourdieu, 1986). In this way, individual perceptions of the social world are recognisable through the categories or concepts offered by those who occupy dominant field positions. Thus the process of recognition allows attributes those in positions of power to set the value of capital(s). In this way social injustice is normalised, and the status quo of dominant interests can be maintained (Bourdieu, 1986).

## **Economic and social capital**

Economic capital refers to material resources, directly convertible into currency and financial wealth. Most commonly this takes institutionalized forms, such as property ownership (Bourdieu, 1986). A key strand of Bourdieu's theory is based on an argument that an analysis of how society functions based on economic capital analysis alone overlooks the importance of socio-cultural exchanges (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital is accrued through social connections and the acts of being recognised as part of a social network or group. The extent to which an individual can accrue social capital is dependent on the range of social networks that recognise her/his position as a network member:

The volume of social capital possessed by a given agent ... depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic)



possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected (Bourdieu, 1986: 249).

In certain conditions, social capital may be converted into economic capital and become institutionalized, for example, through titles which indicate status in social hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1986). Moreover, attributes that may be considered as forms of cultural capital (see below), such as accent, pronunciation or other social manners, may also be considered as social capital as these represent membership of a particular social class or group (Bourdieu, 1986). The value of social capital that an individual holds is then also directly related to the field position of the individuals or groups that constitute these social connections or networks. This is considered further at a later stage in the chapter, in relation to transnational cultural capital.

### **Cultural capital**

Cultural capital is the most complex of the capitals, in that it is theorised as taking embodied, objectified and institutionalised forms (Bourdieu, 1986), with all cultural assets or resources that an individual holds considered as taking one form or another of cultural capital. The objectified form is seen in cultural goods, such as books, clothes, or other artefacts that have symbolic worth within fields. The institutionalised form of cultural capital can be found in educational qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986) that convey the cultural capital of education in a standardised, comparable state. In the case of refugees, this might take the form of immigration papers, and the symbolic worth that different forms of permission to live in a country may have. The embodied state of cultural capital takes the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body, or habitus, and this is discussed next.

## Habitus

Social reality exists so to speak twice, in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside social agents. And when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a fish in water: it does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world about itself for granted (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:127).

It is through the habitus that the outer, objective world is internalised and made subjective (Maton, 2002). While field attends to objective structuring, subjective experience is theorised through habitus. In developing these concepts, Bourdieu seeks to recognise the agency of the individual in relation to social structures. A key element of this relationship is that objective field positioning of the individual contributes to the formation and evolution of social practices and dispositions - the habitus. This form of embodied cultural capital accrues over time, from early socialisation throughout the life course, and as such may be both consciously and unconsciously acquired. It is recognisable in physical expressions, such as manner of eating, speaking or dressing, and preferences for particular cultural activities or practices. For Bourdieu, habitus is 'meaning-made-body' (1990, p.43).

Sayer (2005) stresses that habitus is not personality, rather it is the dispositions embodied by the individual that structure their perceptions of what is meaningful social practice. Such dispositions form the basis for decision-making and choices, yet are *not* predictive (Grenfell, 2004). While individuals accrue a range of experiences within different social fields, so the habitus evolves, but in such a way that reflects the unpredictable and unique combination of habitus, field, and field position within any given moment. Stating that 'the habitus goes hand-in-hand with vagueness and indeterminacy' (1990, p.77), Bourdieu highlights its defining feature, that of being in a dynamic state. As a result, resultant social practices are located in, and responsive to, the relationship between habitus and the fields of social space. As these dispositions evolve, the set of possible choices, or strategy, is

then formed. Yet this does not develop through a process of progressive accumulation. Rather, the dispositions that constitute the habitus at any given moment effectively exclude an alternative set of practices or choices, creating limits for what appears to be possible (Hodkinson *et al*, 2008). Habitus is thus formed by both past and current field positions (Reay, 2004), and importantly it continues to transform, and also produce transformative practices (Bourdieu, 1990). In that way it is not a solitary concept (Maton, 2002), and cannot be considered in exclusion from field and other capitals.

The limits on possible actions are also connected to the investment made by individuals to the field, whereby field rules and their associated practices are understood not as arbitrary, but as natural. Bourdieu (1977) conceptualises this as misrecognition, arguing that processes of misrecognition are essential to the maintenance of field hierarchies, and as such, reproduction of practices of domination. However, people with limited reserves of capital, or with limited access to dominant forms of capital, undergo greater struggles to acquire capital. This is in contrast to those who, as a result of misrecognition, are able to access greater reserves of dominant capital. When individuals are engaged in this type of struggle, then that is the point at which Bourdieu posits that capitals become the process by which power runs through social relations:

the structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world, i.e. the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which governs its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success of practices (Bourdieu, 1986: 241).

In addition, this struggle can also have a negative effect on the habitus of those in such weaker field positions (James and Grenfell, 2004). This can induce out-of-habitus experiences, or hysteresis, and this is discussed next.

## **Hysteresis: degrees of integration between habitus and field**

Fields engender and require certain responses, 'hailing' the individual to respond to their surroundings in specific ways, to the point of habituation (Adams, 2006). When individuals encounter the field 'hailing' them in such a way that clashes with their existing social practices and dispositions, the result is hysteresis, or a sense of being out of place. Bourdieu (1977) argues that this discomfort is the result of a pre-disposition of habitus to maximise power in any given social field. While it is possible that the field may change to produce conditions that are favourable to this previously out of place habitus, the logical result, according to Bourdieu is that the individual adapts habitus to fit field conditions. However, this response may not be possible, if the gap between field and habitus is too great:

practices are always liable to incur negative sanctions when the environment with which they are actually confronted is too distant from that in which they are objectively fitted (Bourdieu, 1977:78).

In this case an undefined period of hysteresis ensues, and is subsequently reflected in a weak field position. There is a third possibility however, offered in Bourdieu's later work (2000), although this does not appear to have been as fully developed as the original concept. Presenting the idea of 'degrees of integration' between habitus and field, Bourdieu suggests that it is possible to experience an in-between stage that is neither comfortable alignment with the field nor extreme disjuncture:

habitus...has degrees of integration- which correspond in particular to degrees of 'crystallization' of the status occupied...to contradictory positions, which tend to exert structural 'double binds' on their occupants. There often correspond destabilized habitus, torn by contradiction and internal division..generating suffering (Bourdieu, 2000: 160).

Although it is not clear in Bourdieu's discussion here how these 'degrees of integration' might be analysed, it is a useful concept for this thesis, helpful for making an analysis of the adaptation of a particular group of people- refugees- to a new national field and its associated cultural fields. The rules of

the game, in terms of immigration policy and practice, and recognition of the forms of cultural capital that refugees possess, can be seen to be constantly shifting. Moreover, the idea of 'degrees of integration' is also useful within the context of migration and globalised societies, in which individuals may hold concurrent, but different, field positions on a transnational level. Furthermore, as Moore (2008) points out, fields have their own time and timings as to how they change and evolve. Therefore a migrant or refugee negotiating social fields within different national contexts will also potentially be dealing with asynchronous timeframes, not only within localised national fields, but also between and across international fields. The next section explores this idea of 'degrees of integration' in relation to transnational applications of Bourdieusian theory and Bhabha's (1994) postcolonial framing of hybrid subjectivities.

### **Thinking with Bourdieu: transnational and postcolonial perspectives on agency**

With the concepts of misrecognition and hysteresis, Bourdieu supplies theoretical tools for thinking through points of conflict between habitus and fields. A Bourdieusian analysis of refugee experiences can be developed by drawing on transnational and postcolonial perspectives.

Erel (2010) makes a useful theoretical contribution towards understanding the transnational dimension of cultural capital, in her analysis of the lives of Kurdish and Turkish migrants living in the UK and Germany. In doing so, she argues against a 'rucksack' framing of capital that assumes that migrants only bring ethnically bounded cultural capital that either fits, or does not fit, to the national field in the country of migration. This builds on earlier work by Kelly and Lusic (2006) who, in an analysis of the lives of Filipino migrants in Canada, propose habitus may be characterised by transnational psycho-social elements, favouring an understanding of migration as an extended and complex range of processes and practices. They argue that migration is far

more than a one-off process of movement from one physical location to another, and is impacted upon by the migrant's gender, age and occupation, as well as the immigration timeframe. As a result, they posit that on one hand, individuals could hold more than one habitus; a range of context-specific dispositions and approaches to valuing and validating capitals. On the other, citing Reay (2004), they suggest that hysteresis between habitus and national field may invoke reflection and resistance to the devaluation of their habitus.

With reference to these understandings of habitus, Erel (2010) suggests that in addition to 'unpacking' cultural capital, migrants develop mechanisms for the validation of their cultural capital that build upon the field positions and recognitions of capital in both countries of origin and of migration. In this, attention is given to an analysis that draws attention to how inter-cultural hierarchies can intersect with class and gender to impact on how individuals reproduce or resist external de/validation of their reserves of cultural capital. In mobilising cultural capital to create or join new social networks, Erel suggests that migrants can then take up positions to critique such hierarchies within their cultural communities. Social capital can be seen to consequently develop in and through the activation of transnational cultural capital in ways other than 'fitting in' to existing national social networks.

These applications of Bourdieusian theory highlight the importance of thinking about habitus and capitals from a broader, transnational perspective when making an analysis of refugee experiences. Hall (1996) states that identities and identifications are made, and remade, within the interplay of culture, history and power, and this is very clearly the case in the lives of forced migrants. An analysis that considers the transnational dimension of their experiences not only contextualises the local or national within the global, but doing so can potentially illuminate the less immediately visible 'refusals of powerlessness' (Skeggs, 1997, p.11). Thinking about the 'degrees of integration' between habitus and field, can also be assisted by drawing on

post-structural approaches to identity in addition to these transnational perspectives on habitus and capital.

Understanding identity as constructed within the boundaries of discourse, and considering the process/es of identification as social practice (which may include the activation or conversion of different forms of capital), then the 'degrees of integration' of habitus to a field might be further explored.

Drawing on Bhabha's (1994) framework of hybridity in relation to formation of subjectivities, it is possible to explore the discursive limits of subjectivity and the framing of possibilities for identification practices. In the case of refugees, the binaries of the citizen/stranger, or victim/criminal as reproduced through political and public discourses, for example, or as Bhabha puts it, the 'processes of subjectification made possible and plausible through stereotypical discourse' (1994, p.95).

Approaching how these discourses contribute to forms of knowledge 'about' refugees and dominant field practices, allows for closer examination of the influence of structure on refugee practices of adaption to the national field, and its sub-fields, such as that of higher education. In this way the field of higher education can be analysed to see how it offers sites for alignment between habitus and national field , or conversely how participants contribute to shaping the field, potentially create spaces in which to resist lower status field position of 'being' refugee in the national field. It is a way to examine the encounter between agency and structure, or the point(s) at which the 'articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity' is made (1994, p.96).

After Foucault, Bhabha (1994) asserts that the effectivity of surveillance relies on active consent of objectification, although such consent is based in ambivalence.

Subjects of discourse are constructed within an apparatus of power in which contains in both senses of the word, an 'other' knowledge... arrested and fetishistic and circulates through the limited form of otherness...stereotype (Bhabha, 1994: 111).

In the case of refugees, such ambivalence runs through the processes of asylum, for asylum to be given then that form of consent to 'being seen' as refugee must also be given. This effectively is given in the moment when the decision to flee is made. If field is seen as establishing the 'always existing obligatory boundaries of experiential contact' (Adams, 2006, p.514), then not only the boundaries of field, but also the misrecognition that reinforces them, can be interrogated through examination of the ways in which the stereotype is produced and the ambivalence of which it is lived. Refugees can become competitors in fields that do not allow for them to take up strong field positions due to a disruption in how their cultural capital is valued, dependent on the political rights associated with their form of leave to remain (eg: to work, or to remain permanently, or citizenship). However, as Erel (2010) points out, there are other modes by which migrants can activate and mobilise their cultural capital in order to gain field position.

This section has considered how transnational and postcolonial perspectives can frame an analysis of the liminal field positions that refugees may be located in, and how agency might be examined within such spaces. The final theoretical framework that this chapter examines is one that highlights the importance of the interplay between political categories and experiences of migration. Bakewell (2011) interrogates migration and displacement by suggesting that these should be seen as two separate concepts which can be theorised as taking the forms of process, category and condition.

### **Migration and displacement: process, category and condition**

The overarching aim of the theoretical approach taken by Bakewell (2011) is to draw attention to the fact that there is no clear dividing line between voluntary and forced migration, and examine where tensions are created in how migration and displacement are understood. This framework relates to the discussion in chapters four and five of how it is that 'refugee experience'



and 'refugee identity' are theorised. Bakewell (2011), suggests that migration and displacement are considered as process, condition or category, he argues a need to question the arbitrary boundaries within a spectrum that ranges from voluntary movement (migrant or economic migrant) to involuntary movement (forced migrant) within and across borders (after Richmond, 1993). This framework is discussed next in the following order: process, category and condition.

Bakewell (2011) posits that migration and displacement are separate processes, but both are underpinned by individual agency. In doing so he argues that different forms of migration are based on external judgements about the extent to which the migrant is agentic in this process, and how far institutions enable or force the migrant to move. The extent of change in the migration process is also seen as important, and this change is sub-categorised under the themes of socio-cultural, spatial, environmental and economic change, all of which are contextualised by timescale, and whether the form of migration is underpinned by a temporary or permanent intent. Bakewell argues that displacement is likely to be considered as a separate process to migration when low levels of migrant agency are observed or assumed, resulting a problematic tendency for forced migration to be theorised separately from other forms of migration.

In response to this, his (2011) theoretical framework distinguishes between migration and displacement as categories, showing where categories are both necessary yet complicated in relation to legal rights. Bakewell suggests here that in the case of refugees such distinction is essential to access particular rights associated with refugee status. Yet he also argues that if the experiences of refugees are understood as uniquely political (in contrast to other forms of forced migration), then the possibilities to examine commonalities of experience across the spectrum of movement and migration become limited. He refers to Zetter (2007), stating that categories and labelling contribute to producing overly restricted or unhelpfully generic understandings of migration experience. For Bakewell, one problematic result

of humanitarian organisations working along an agency-migration nexus in relation to labels and categories is that 'stereotypical identities and assumed needs' (p.24) can be perpetuated. It is in this respect, and in relation to the earlier discussion in this chapter on identity, that Bakewell's framing of the 'condition' of migration and displacement is particularly relevant to this thesis.

Defining migration and displacement as separate conditions also highlights a distinction between psychic and physical displacement. Bakewell (2011) argues that displacement as a condition is connected to one's self-perceptions, while if one has migrated then *de facto* one is a migrant. The crux of this argument is that while the condition of having migrated may impact on how a person lives their day-to-day life, their relationships, and their self-perceptions, it does not *necessarily* do so. Conversely, the condition of displacement is that of feeling out of place and/or disconnected from a real or perceived home elsewhere. As a result it is posited that the condition of displacement is highly likely to have an impact on daily life to some extent. The author examines the relationship between migration and displacement by giving examples of contrasting conditions. One example is that of the individual with refugee status (category) who no longer feels displaced (condition). Another person may feel that they are displaced after escaping intolerable humanitarian circumstances, but due to their means of immigration to a new country they are categorised as an economic migrant rather than refugee. More, Bakewell suggests that it is also important to consider the relationship and tensions between condition and category of displacement in relation to time, and how this relationship might evolve. Drawing on an earlier argument (2008), he reasserts that research of migration experience must be alert to difference between category and conditions, in that their experiences of migration are at risk of being excluded from category or policy-led research.

Bakewell's (2011) framework has much relevance to this thesis. The concept of the condition of displacement works well with the Bourdieusian concept of

hysteresis, the disjuncture between habitus and social field. Considering these in tandem offers two clear benefits for an analysis of refugee experiences. In the first instance, Bakewell's framing gives a clear rationale for distinguishing the condition of having migrated from the condition of feeling displaced. Meanwhile, Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) field theory allows for a closer and thicker examination of the condition of displacement by looking at how this might play out in and between different social fields, and how migration category might relate to the condition of feeling displaced, and subsequent identifications. This builds on an observation made by Erel (2010), that although Putnam's (2000) framing of social capital is widely used in migration studies, a Bourdieusian approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of power dynamics in migration experience, through examination of the interplay between cultural, social, economic and symbolic capitals within social fields.

## **Chapter summary**

This chapter has presented and discussed the key theoretical concepts that are applied in this thesis for understanding the lived experiences of refugees engaging in higher education in Britain. These concepts have been identified as useful to an analysis that seeks to explore how the practices of an immigration regime, and national discourses of immigration might link individuals to a particular social identity or label, and produce a tension between their self-identifications and how they are externally perceived. Bourdieu (1990) suggests that people can be seen to share similar 'conditions of existence' in social space when they have a similar extent of access to the goods, powers and services' of the society (p.60). However, this is not necessarily the case for refugees. Earlier in the thesis it was argued that in the UK the ongoing shift in asylum policy in relation to different 'refugee' categories is characterized by restriction, both in terms of rights to resources and access to permanent leave to remain. Therefore, it is relevant to consider

what Bakewell (2011) terms the 'condition' of displacement in relation to these 'categories' of displacement (different forms of leave to remain in the UK), in order to begin to explore the complexities of 'refugee experience'. Drawing on Bourdieusian field theory alongside 'post' concepts of identity and identifications is an approach that can offer further understanding of how refugees in contemporary Britain negotiate identities within national field(s). Existing literature that examines refugee student experience of higher education is presented and discussed in the next chapter.

# Chapter Seven: Refugees in higher education: access and participation

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## Introduction

In this chapter the literature on refugee participation in higher education is examined and contextualised by key factors that impact on refugee participation in contemporary UK society and access to education. From this it will be seen that although there are similarities of experience of higher education between refugees and international and 'non traditional' students, forced migration does impact in particular ways on university participation. Although research into student experience of higher education is extensive, refugee participation in university remains an under-researched aspect in both the fields of refugee studies and higher education research (Harris and Marlowe, 2011). In the UK, one factor that may in part contribute to this is the lack of standardised monitoring of refugee and asylum seeker engagement in education.

Building on discussion in chapter five on government policy, this chapter begins by considering key factors that underpin refugee participation in society, factors that ultimately can be seen to impact on how refugees access higher education. The chapter then moves on to examine the literature on refugee HE experience, highlighting similarities and differences in educational experience with other 'categories' of student. In relation to this discussion, the chapter closes by considering the concepts of 'belonging' and 'risk' within higher education.

## **Contextualising refugee participation in HE: questions of access**

The Refugee Council (2012) argues that in terms of economic and social participation, people who arrive to the UK via the asylum system form one of the most marginalised groups in UK society. Bellis *et al* (2005) identify a range of factors that influence adult refugee uptake of education and employment in the UK. These are as follows: poverty, citizenship/immigration status, lack of recognition of overseas employment/education experience, low self-esteem, post-traumatic stress, racism, discrimination associated with the 'refugee' label, and social isolation. In addition, other studies highlight the negative impact on integration of general unfamiliarity with UK systems (Stevenson and Willot 2007; Daniel *et al*, 2010), limited access to information, advice and guidance (Bloch, 2008; Houghton and Morrice, 2008), and the role of language fluency or access to English language tuition (Clayton, 2005; Doyle, 2009). Individually, the factors identified here are not necessarily unique to refugees but may combine in ways that are specifically caused by the experience of forced migration, and/or impacted on by the political rights and restrictions connected to different forms of humanitarian statuses.

By considering studies on refugee participation in higher education and research into refugee engagement in UK society together it is possible to draw out how these factors intersect and can impact on university access. Although the concept of 'barriers' is contestable as a means of understanding non-participation in HE (Fuller and Paton, 2007), there are clear structural obstacles to HE access that are specific to refugees. As discussed in chapter five, eligibility for student fee status and access to funding is highly differentiated between UK-granted humanitarian statuses. Despite some universities offering bursary support for asylum seekers, Stevenson and Willot (2007) observe that these bursaries are rarely advertised, as universities realise there would be over-subscription from potential students, given the limited financial resources asylum seekers in the UK have.

Asylum seekers are prohibited from work, and for those who need financial support while waiting for a decision, the UKBA offers cash support at a rate lower than standard DSS rates. In 2013 cash support was set at £36.62 per week for a single adult with no children (UKBA, 2013b), significantly less than the weekly Jobseeker's Allowance of £56.80 for UK citizens or refugees with leave to remain in the UK (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013). The restriction of asylum seekers from legal employment prevents individuals from fully utilising skills and qualifications, as well as from earning a salary and setting up a National Insurance number.<sup>11</sup> As a result asylum seekers are prevented from developing reserves of economic capital and institutional forms of cultural capital in preparation for settlement in the UK, thus reinforcing a sense of 'limbo' while waiting for a Home Office decision (Rutter *et al*, 2007, Mulvey, 2010). Furthermore, if an asylum seeker also needs accommodation support, this is given through the 'dispersal' programme, whereby people are relocated to any part of the UK that has available UKBA accommodation (UKBA, 2013c).

Following a 'positive' status decision, new refugees become ineligible for asylum cash support and have only twenty eight days to leave this housing. In this timeframe individuals must find and pay for accommodation and its associated costs, as well as register with social services and/or seek employment (Lindsay *et al*, 2010). In addition, Gillespie (2012) suggests that refugees are at high risk of destitution and poverty when they experience elongated periods of transition time between the UKBA and mainstream social security systems. This shows that for the majority of asylum seekers HE is far from readily available in terms of economics and that given these circumstances, they may not be in a position to prioritise aspirations to study for a degree once they are granted leave to remain. In many ways this might also be the case for people who already have refugee status or other forms of humanitarian leave to remain in the UK.

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<sup>11</sup> Since 2010 if no decision to an initial application or appeal has been given within 12 months, then asylum seekers may apply for permission to work in employment listed on the UKBA Shortage Occupation List (Gower, 2011).

Although having leave to remain in the UK allows people to take up employment, Lindsay *et al* (2010) and Hills *et al* (2010) state that a significant number of refugees in the UK live in poverty or near to its threshold. Research points to high levels of refugee unemployment generally (Bloch, 2008; Houghton and Morrice, 2008), and also emphasises refugee under-employment. The study by Crawley and Crimes (2009) of refugees in Wales indicated that while two thirds of respondents had worked overseas prior to seeking asylum, only one third found employment following approval of their asylum claim. These Welsh findings reflected those of an earlier study into the employment of highly skilled refugees in the East Midlands. In this, Phillimore and Goodson (2006) show that the majority of the skilled workers they interviewed had only found low skilled employment in the UK. Meanwhile, none of the professionals they interviewed had been able to find professional level employment at all. This last finding was also echoed in research based in other parts of England by Psinos (2007) and Watts (2007). This research suggests that in economic terms, higher education is not readily accessible to refugees. While low income is not a refugee-specific issue in terms of HE participation, Elwyn *et al* (2012) state that rising tuition fees combine with the complex eligibility rights for student fees and loans produce a doubled exclusion of refugees from HE. This can be seen in the discussion of these rights in chapter five of this thesis. As such, refugees with limited incomes from employment may find that they do not have a way to pay for their fees. This is in contrast to citizen 'Home' students or those people with humanitarian statuses who meet residency requirements.

Underemployment of refugees with higher qualifications is observed in more recent research (Doyle, 2009; Lindsay *et al*, 2010), with lack of employer recognition of overseas qualifications also being cited as a key problem. The non-recognition of refugee skills and academic qualifications has also been identified as a barrier to refugee participation in higher education (Bloch, 2002; Doyle and O'Toole, 2013). Refugee students may arrive in the UK without their academic certificates due to the abrupt way in which they fled



their country (Stevenson and Willot, 2010), with no way to corroborate their eligibility to apply for university. Alternatively, their qualifications may not be recognised by the UK education system at all (Doyle, 2009; Morrice, 2011), or may be subject to discretionary practices, being recognised by some universities, but not by others (Doyle and O'Toole, 2013). Furthermore, British universities only accept the IELTS English language qualification as proof of English language fluency of international students (Stevenson and Willot, 2007; Morrice, 2011). Stevenson and Willot (2007) point out that while this is the only accepted qualification for HE access, it does not attract funding support from the Learning and Skills Council. This may mean refugees need to engage with further study to gain UK validated qualifications, extending the period of waiting time, and shouldering additional financial costs, before entering HE is possible.

In addition, it has been observed that English language tuition (ESOL) supported by government funding does not extend to levels of fluency sufficient for higher degrees or professional employment (Crawley and Crimes, 2009) and that ESOL is limited in its availability in and between UK regions (Furlong and Hunt, 2009). It has been found to be particularly limited in rural areas (Atkin *et al*, 2005), and generally ESOL classes tend to have long waiting lists (Welsh Refugee Council, 2007; Scottish Refugee Council, 2012). In addition, refugees with caring responsibilities, of which the majority are women, have cited insufficient childcare provision and ESOL class times as particular barriers to participation (Clayton, 2005; Crawley and Crimes, 2009). Therefore, not only might it be difficult for refugees to access these classes for a range of reasons, but when they do, the classes may not fully support development of the type of language fluency needed to confidently engage with academic study.

Moreover, in 2012 the Department for Communities and Local Government (2012) stated that UK government support for ESOL would only be provided for those actively seeking work, or not able to work. This additional restriction complicates a point made by Phillimore and Goodson (2006), who argue that

refugees are effectively excluded from seeking higher paid employment that requires English fluency as a result of the limited availability of ESOL tuition. If the UK government does proceed to give ESOL support only to migrants who are not in work, this may mean that the refugees in low skilled or low paid employment could be further limited in how they access the qualifications, practical language skills and advice networks that could widen their future employment or higher education options.

Insufficient support for refugees to access information, advice and guidance (IAG) on UK social systems has also been identified as a key barrier to participation in higher education (Morrice, 2011). It is recognised that refugee-specific IAG provision is extremely limited, resulting in refugees and asylum seekers receiving inaccurate information regarding educational access (Elwyn *et al*, 2012). This reflects an earlier finding from Spencer (2006) that argued that migrant services were not being mainstreamed, and as a result were of an *ad hoc* nature, reliant on specific, time-limited funding streams. This consequently resulted in a lack of specialised workers with awareness of both the cultural requirements and the legal rights of migrants, poor inter-service communication and limited resources.

Doyle and O'Toole (2013) reinforce this point when they discuss the aspects of IAG that refugees have identified as important in accessing education. These are as follows: a need to understand the different types of courses and qualifications available in the UK: knowledge about 'alternative' routes into further and higher education, and access to specialist advice about how asylum status affects rights and entitlements in education. This study highlights that as a result of insufficient specialist advice, refugees can lose years in trying to find a way in to studying the right qualifications for the career they wish to pursue. In this way it builds on the observation by Houghton and Morrice (2008) that it is necessary for service providers to recognise that in order for refugees to act effectively on advice, they need to mobilise reserves of cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), based on trust in the advice giver, and cultural knowledge about the UK. Research also

shows how inaccurate information can result in refugees dropping out of university once they realise the degree does not match with their employment goals (Morrice, 2011), or if inaccurate fees and funding information has been given (Stevenson and Willot, 2007; Elwyn *et al*, 2012).

The unpredictable availability of refugee IAG support has also been compounded by recent, 'austerity' cuts made to government funding of nationwide IAG services. The abolition of the Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES) in December 2011 effectively ended UK government involvement in support for refugees during their transition period from UKBA dependency to longer term settlement. Established in 2008, RIES offered specialised IAG support to those granted Humanitarian Protection (HP) or full refugee status. Despite the limitations of RIES, its subsequent closure has invoked calls for urgent improvements to transitional support for people with all forms of leave to remain (Asylum Support Partnership, 2011). Funding cuts have also contributed to the closure of some other key IAG services, such as Refugee and Migrant Justice and the Immigration Advisory Service (Meili, 2012). Moreover, reformation of the national Legal Aid system is likely to impact on refugees and asylum seekers who do not have the financial means to lodge asylum appeals or other claims in the early stages of settlement in the UK (Refugee Action, 2011).

Zetter (2007) observed that the primary task of refugee services had become that of 'filling the increasingly large void left by the withdrawal of state support' (p.187), noting that these agencies were required to focus on emergency advocacy or crisis intervention, rather carry out longer term integration support work. This is indeed the case in more recent years (Asylum Support Partnership, 2011), but with within a context of fewer resources. Therefore, refugees and asylum seekers may find that not only is accurate information about higher education not readily available, but that pursuing higher education may appear as less of a realistic option when IAG for more pressing matters, such as immigration appeals, understanding

employment rights, or accessing the welfare system, is also less readily available.

This first section of the chapter has examined structural factors that have been identified as influential on how refugees and asylum seekers access education generally, as well as higher education specifically. What emerges from this is a sense of the UK as a society in which refugees have fewer entitlements to the resources that can support integration and subsequently make higher education appear as a risky choice. The concepts of entitlement and risk are taken forward as the chapter continues to examine literature on refugee experiences of higher education.

## **Refugees in higher education**

This section examines literature on refugee experiences of higher education, and suggests that forced migration frames refugee participation in higher education in a particular way. Before examining this though, some general observations are made about the existing body of research into refugees in higher education. Studies that focus specifically on refugee HE experience in the UK are few and small scale (Stevenson and Willot, 2007, 2010; Morrice, 2011, 2013) although these are complemented by research into refugee access to post-compulsory education (Elwyn *et al*, 2012; Doyle and O'Toole, 2013), and studies with a broader focus on refugee education, training and employment (Phillimore *et al*, 2003, 2006; Psinos, 2007; Houghton and Morrice, 2008).

Before discussing the specific findings of this literature, it should be pointed out that to a certain extent there is an emphasis on the experiences and aspirations of refugees under the age of thirty (Stevenson and Willot, 2007, 2010; Elwyn *et al*, 2012). This reflects a focus on social justice for younger refugees, as seen in the literature on refugee childrens' participation in

compulsory education and UK society.<sup>12</sup> Experiences of older refugees in higher education are less widely examined, either in studies that specifically look at refugee HE participation or those that consider this as part of wider work on refugee education, training and employment. A report by the Refugee Council (2006) defined older refugees as those over the age of fifty, highlighting a lack of research about their educational access and participation. However, it also seems that there is still little known about engagement in education by refugees and asylum seekers in their thirties and forties who are in between these 'youth' and 'older' categories.

Research by Morrice (2011) explores the HE experiences of five refugees, four of whom had prior degree qualifications in their home countries, who sought to regain professional employment in the UK. This is a longitudinal study based in the South of England, following these five refugees (three women, two men) over four years as they engaged in higher education. The youngest was in his mid- twenties, while the ages of the others ranged from mid-thirties to around fifty. Four students had permanent leave to remain in the UK, while the other had a five-year refugee permit. Earlier work by Stevenson and Willot (2007) examines the aspirations of young asylum seekers and refugees in Yorkshire and Humber. Eighteen young people were interviewed, all aged between sixteen and twenty years old. The research also drew on observations of discussion groups formed of these and other young refugees.

Work from Doyle and O'Toole (2013) and Elwyn *et al* (2012) has a slightly wider focus. Doyle and O'Toole (2013) draw on interviews with twenty refugees and asylum seekers (ten men, ten women) and a survey and interviews with learning providers, in order to examine key issues in refugee access to post-compulsory education in England. The age of the refugees ranged from sixteen to forty seven. Meanwhile, the report from Elwyn *et al* (2012) reviews a pilot project run by the Refugee Support Network in London

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<sup>12</sup> For further discussion of social justice and refugee youth in the UK, see Hek (2005) on the role of education in refugee childrens' settlement, and Pinson and Arnott (2010) on inclusivity in refugee children's education.

to give specialist advice and guidance to young refugees on educational options. It draws on information from thirty nine clients in their teens and early twenties who engaged in one-to-one guidance programmes. The gender of the interviewees was not specified.

Looking more broadly, studies with a wider remit of exploring refugee education, training and employment do not examine HE participation in detail, nor is there a focus on particular age groups (Phillimore *et al*, 2003, 2006; Waddington, 2008). In such studies higher education participation tends to be framed primarily by discussion of financial barriers related to fees, funding and low income (Bloch 2002; Basford, 2005; Psoinos, 2007; Aspinall and Watters, 2010). This emphasis somewhat overshadows the significance of other socio-cultural factors involved in refugee HE participation.

On an international level, it also seems that studies that specifically focus on refugee HE participation tend to be few, and small scale. This can be seen in research from Australia, a country with a similar higher education system to that in the UK. In a study by Joyce *et al* (2010) the majority of the twenty six student participants are under the age of thirty, with the group consisting of fifteen men and ten women. Work by Hannah (1999), on refugee participation in Sydney colleges and universities, does not specify how many refugees were interviewed, nor the gender balance, but their ages range from twenty to forty-eight. Meanwhile, the study by Harris and Marlowe (2011) on African refugee students interviewed twenty students and ten teaching staff at a university in South Australia. The study does not refer to age or gender of the students.

What can be understood from this is that there appears to be space for further exploration of older refugees' participation in higher education as part of a general need for greater understanding of refugee engagement in HE. Moreover, within the UK context, there is also scope for research that engages specifically with refugee students who have not already studied at HE level in their home countries. This is particularly relevant as over the last

decade the majority of lead applicants for asylum in the UK have been older than twenty five (Blinder, 2013). This section continues now by examining the existing literature on refugee experiences of university.

This literature clearly shows that refugee students have similar academic and social experiences of university to those of international students. With regard to academic experience, adapting to the academic norms and practices has been highlighted as a key issue. This is seen in adapting to unfamiliar teaching and learning practices, such as learning to use new technologies (Houghton and Morrice, 2008; Morrice, 2011), or taking a more self-directed approach to learning (Joyce *et al* 2010; Harris and Marlowe, 2011).

Knowledge about academic cultural practices, such as referencing and plagiarism, and understanding assignment formats has also been extensively discussed in literature on international students (Schweisfurth and Gu, 2009; Benzie, 2010), and this has also featured in literature on refugee students (Stevenson and Willot, 2010; Morrice, 2011). Harris and Marlowe (2011) point out that although 'domestic' students may also struggle with such academic practices, there is a tacit assumption held within universities that students will have been made aware of these skills as part of their prior learning. As a result, refugee students' awareness levels about this aspect of academic work can pass unrecognised by tutors.

Academic writing and communication also connects with language fluency, and this has been noted as impacting on refugee achievement in written assignments (Morrice, 2011) as well as in seminar and group work (Joyce *et al*, 2010; Morrice, 2011). These studies show that language fluency not only can affect students' sense of ability to achieve, but has a bearing on self-confidence, and engagement with fellow students or lecturers. In addition to this, like international students, cultural difference has been cited as having an effect on how refugees are able to make friends at university, either in relation to dominant ways of socialising (for example social activities based around drinking alcohol), or a more generalised cultural group separation

within the student cohort (Houghton and Morrice, 2008; Joyce *et al*, 2010; Morrice, 2011).

These studies also suggest that while there may be similarities with international students in the ways mentioned above, forced migration intersects with these factors in a particular way. Stevenson and Willot (2010) observe that forced migration is likely to be the cause of refugees experiencing challenges that other students may also have, but on a multiple, and concurrent scale. They exemplify this by showing that students from low socio-economic backgrounds will have experience of poverty, students who have been abused will have experience of the threat of violence and/or trauma, while economic migrants and international students are likely to have encountered culture shock and language problems. They argue that refugees, however, are highly likely to have prior or ongoing experience of all of these, and as this chapter has suggested earlier, there are clear structural factors involved in this. Developing their argument, the authors state that within the UK HE context, because refugee students are effectively International students with 'Home' student status, they are located outside the safety net of support mechanisms that international students have, such as additional language or study skills tuition, and pastoral care from International Student Offices. This is an important point that highlights a general lack of recognition of refugees in higher education at institutional levels.

What is not made clear in this however, is the importance of recognition of diversity amongst refugee students in the UK in terms of their forms of leave to remain, as not all would have permanent leave, but be in possession of a short-term status of five years or less. The authors frame the five year refugee status as a likely barrier to participation in HE, due to the lack of security this brings to refugees. While this may be so, the discussion here overlooks the refugees in British HE who have other impermanent forms of humanitarian leave, such as Humanitarian Protection, Discretionary Leave, or protracted asylum seeker status. Nonetheless, the overall argument is clear, that forced migration can be seen to play out in refugee HE participation in



ways that bridge both academic and social aspects of university. It seems then that refugee experiences can be described as 'both/ and' in terms of difference and similarity to other students. All these points made above relate to the discussion of 'belonging' and 'risk' in higher education that is raised later in the chapter. This is further illustrated by research findings that highlight some of the psycho-social pressures that refugee students experience.

Refugee students are likely to have caring responsibilities and/or need to work to support themselves (Joyce *et al*, 2010; Stevenson and Willot, 2010; Harris and Marlowe, 2011; Morrice, 2011) resulting in less available free time, or money, to socialise. Joyce *et al* (2010) also highlight the gendered dimension of this in the accounts of women refugee students who described fitting their studies caring for children or running a household. While these findings echo research carried out into working class students in higher education, who are also likely to balance study with work and caring duties, (Ball *et al*, 2000; Reay *et al*, 2005; Waller *et al*, 2011). Harris and Marlowe (2011) illuminate a transnational dimension of this that may relate to refugee students. As well as working to support themselves while studying, some of the students interviewed were also responsible for sending funds back to family overseas. Sending remittances back home can be a priority for refugees, and as Lindley (2007) argues, this can add an additional element of stress and pressure to refugee lives. This has also been observed by Joyce *et al* (2010). The refugee students in their research described that as well as the stress of providing for family overseas, the separation and worry over what was happening to family and friends was a constant strain as they participated in their degree studies. In this way, HE participation is underpinned by refugee experiences of life post-asylum in a new country as well as the commitments they have to people and places overseas.

In addition, stigma and shame of a 'refugee' identity is something that students in studies by Morrice (2011) and Hannah (1999) identified as a constant filter on how they interacted with people within the university

environment. Students described either avoiding telling people that they were refugees in fear of being judged, or gave the examples of when they felt discriminated against because of the 'label'. This has parallels with the discourses of shame examined in studies on working class student experiences, whereby worries about being 'found out' (Reay *et al*, 2002) become part of a strategy to manage class identity as part of a growing learner identity (Christie *et al*, 2008). Moreover, the burden of the refugee/asylum seeker label can combine with dealing with racism (Joyce *et al*, 2010; Morrice, 2011). While racism has been extensively cited as a key point of stress and difference in daily life for international students (Brown and Jones, 2011), refugee students clearly encounter both, even though it is not always possible to separate anti-refugee sentiments from racism (Spicer, 2005). Moreover, refugee students may also have to deal with these issues concurrent to having Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

A number of studies found PTSD to have a significant impact on refugee students' university participation and academic achievement (Hannah, 1999; Stevenson and Willot, 2010; Harris and Marlowe, 2011). Stevenson and Willot (2010) highlight how stigma around both mental health and of refugee identity combined for one student to contribute to her dropping out of her degree, as she could not face asking for support repeatedly and disclose her experiences of forced migration when struggling with workload. In contrast though, in the study from Morrice (2011), one student who also experienced ongoing mental health issues found that 'being' a student helped him move on with his life. He drew self confidence from recognising university as somewhere he could belong to and could be identified as a member of a student body with shared interests and aspirations.

The study by Morrice (2011) on refugee participation in contemporary UK higher education draws on Bourdieusian concepts to theorise refugee experiences. In her analysis, Morrice argues that refugees were able to activate and accrue nationally valuable cultural capital with varying degrees of success. Although some were able to capitalise upon pre-existing reserves of

cultural capital, such as prior experience of university study in home countries, others were not able to do so. For example, one student with a five year refugee status decided to avoid taking a year's work placement abroad due to concerns over completing his degree before his status was reassessed by the Home Office. In this way he missed out on gaining valuable cultural and social capital from this work placement that could improve his chances of future employment. This man was the only student in the study with this limited form of status, but this example highlights how that these impermanent forms of leave can potentially have a significant impact on how refugee integration works out.

Related to this 'capitalisation' on existing cultural capital, Morrice points to the mixed outcomes of taking up higher education as a strategy to engage in 'moral boundary work' (Sayer, 2005) to find respectability (Skeggs, 1997) and distinguish themselves from a deficit 'refugee' identity. One participant found that while he developed a positive student identity, he nonetheless had strong feelings of difference due to not being able to participate in student social events, as he had to work to fund his studies. Conversely, a different participant found her student identity gave her a means to overcome the low expectations held of her as a Black African woman working in the care industry. In contrast to both these people, another of the five students struggled over the duration of her degree to develop a student identity of any substance, describing ongoing doubt and uncertainties academically, and did not develop social networks within the university.

These experiences suggest that the students were not able to fully take up Bourdieusian 'fish in water' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) positions within the field of higher education. In making this point, Morrice (2011, 2013) argues that this was related to the extent that individual habitus had been marked by their refugee background. As a result, the author argues that 'boundaries of belonging' are created through the interplay of habitus, shaped by personal history, and the experience of being a refugee within contemporary Britain. In this way, Morrice suggests that a 'refugee habitus'

might exist, that is, a form of habitus that contributes in part to the individual's unique habitus. In the case of the people in her study, this 'refugee habitus' is marked by shame of 'being' refugee, their loss of professional status and the respect garnered by public recognition of their professional identity. While this indeed may reflect how the habitus of each of the five people in this study has evolved, it seems that this under-explores how resistance might contribute to a 'refugee habitus' in productive ways that challenge discourses of loss and deficit. Without denying that refugees are 'firmly placed in symbolic structures of inequality' in the UK (Morrice, 2011, p.131), there is scope here to consider if, or how, a 'refugee habitus' might also be marked by resistance to these inequalities.

HEI recognition of the inequalities that refugees encounter within society is a key recommendation made by these studies. This includes improving mechanisms for recognising overseas qualifications and/or improving Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) strategies (Watts, 2007; Morrice, 2011). Watts (2007) also suggests that asylum seekers and refugees should be recognised as a Widening Participation group in order to acknowledge the unique pressures and impacts of forced migration. However, the point has been made convincingly elsewhere (Archer, 2007; Burke, 2011) that widening participation is not a value free concept, but is underpinned by a problematic discourse of meritocracy and un/deserving subjectivities. Doyle and O'Toole (2013) and Stevenson and Willot (2010) instead suggest that recognition is taken forward through institution-wide policy measures combined with visible institutional engagement in awareness raising about the value and diversity of refugees within society.

Staff training has also been identified as crucial in providing specialist knowledge and support for refugee students (Stevenson and Willot, 2010; Harris and Marlowe, 2011, Doyle and O'Toole, 2013). Stevenson and Willot (2010) also advocate a 'joined up' use of information systems to identify refugee and asylum seeker students but suggest that this is highly sensitive, given that many refugee students do not declare this status. However, they

argue, it could be a discrete means of guiding students towards support services if necessary. In addition, these authors advocate that refugee and asylum seekers students be entitled to the same study support accorded to international students. Morrice (2011) and Elwyn *et al* (2012) also make recommendations with regard to questions of access, arguing for example, for public funding for IELTS tuition and exams, and, in England, ensuring that the government Equivalent or Lower Degree ruling does not exclude refugees from accessing funding for taking degrees in order to re-train or re-qualify. In lieu of government policy change towards asylum seekers being prohibited from work, yet being charged International fees, Elwyn *et al* (2012) call for quotas of fee-waived places on degree courses being made available to asylum seekers alongside bursary support. Moreover, the authors suggest that should asylum seekers be given a negative decision on their claim while midway through studies, they should also be entitled to complete these studies.

Two key points are interpreted from these recommendations. First, that HEIs could do more to recognise asylum seekers and refugees as part of the student population, and put mechanisms in place to constructively engage with and support this part of the student body. Second, due to this general lack of recognition of forced migrants as potential HE students, educational policies and practices are reproducing restrictive immigration policy. In these ways, the field of higher education is contributing to a perpetuation of the discourses of deficit and lack of entitlement that surround refugees and asylum seekers. The chapter now moves on to consider literature on student experience that engages with the concepts of 'belonging' and 'risk'. These are useful concepts to this thesis in the way that they also complement the concepts of displacement and integration that have been discussed in chapters five and six.

## Belonging and risk in higher education

The section above indicated how refugee experiences of HE are neither entirely different to other groups of students, nor are they entirely similar, given the cultural and socio-economic impacts of forced migration. Research into the experiences of 'widening participation' students, such as mature students, those who identify as working class or are from an ethnic group under-represented in higher education, offer useful theoretical insights on 'belonging' and the construction of learner identities (Crossan *et al*, 2003). As a whole, this literature has examined the ways in which university participation results in experiences that are intersected by race, age, class, and gender, and marked by difference within an exclusionary academic culture (Bowl, 2003; Reay *et al*, 2005, Burke, 2011). Burke (2011) states the field of higher education operates around a hegemonic framing of an ideal-type university student. This, she argues, is based on:

...an (imaginary) ideal student-subject, associated with normalised values, and dispositions, historically connected with the young, able-bodied, middle-classed, white-racialised subject (Burke, 2011:171).

This framing of the ideal student, perpetuated by neoliberal education policy (Burke and Hayton, 2011), can be seen to impact on students' existing identities and identifications, producing uncertainty and disjuncture, rather than a smooth 'progression' through education (Read *et al*, 2003; Waller *et al*, 2011). Read *et al* (2003) demonstrate how age, class, ethnicity and gender can intersect to produce feelings of isolation in students who are not 'white, male and middle class'. For some of the black women students they interviewed, 'belonging' in university was about 'learning to play the game', taking action to resist the intimidating atmosphere of seminars by 'acting confident' (p.273). Additionally, other students chose to form study groups to work collectively, in order to resist the pressure to conform to institutional expectations of being 'independent learners'. Ultimately however, the onus was on these students to adapt to the culture and practices of the institution in order to succeed academically. More recently, Reay *et al* (2010) offer an

analysis of the relationship between identities and different HE institutional cultures. They suggest that 'institutional habitus' impacts on how working class students identify with their pre-existing class and learner identities. The students who appear to benefit most from their experience of higher education are those who are able to negotiate a way for both forms of identity to be recognised. Yet by examining the experiences of working class students in both elite and newer universities, the authors argue that 'fitting in' may be as hazardous as 'standing out', in terms of costs, or damage, to learner and class identities. For those with less strongly developed learner identities, studying at a university 'for people like me' could be counterproductive in reinforcing prior dispositions of low academic self-confidence. In this way the study highlights that an assumed 'good fit' between institutional culture and student habitus (embodied in aspirations for academic success), may still result in making university a site of discomfort, despite external appearances of 'fitting in'.

The concept of 'risk society' (Beck, 1992) has been drawn on to examine the ways in which such uncertainties are experienced and managed by students. Concepts of risk (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992) posit that our lives become increasingly individualised as society becomes less collective in its organisation. As a result, we experience higher levels of anxiety as we become aware of, and negotiate, increased levels of risk within day to day living. Studies have suggested how risk is experienced by students on multiple levels. Brine and Waller (2004) find that both anticipated and unexpected risks impacted on learner and class identities of working class women embarking on Access studies. Alongside expected economic and academic risks, this study found that participation in university brought unanticipated risks to personal relationships. Work by Clayton *et al* (2009) highlights how classed perceptions of risk, and conversely, safety, underpinned student decisions to study near or far from home. Relating this point to the discourse of the 'ideal student', the authors suggest how for working class students, without the forms of middle class cultural and social capital normalised by the

field of higher education, staying closer to home while studying was a means to manage the risks of being a working class student in a middle class environment. In light of such risks, Waller *et al* (2011) suggest as higher education becomes an increasingly competitive field with fewer places available, students require both 'a secure sense of self and of entitlement' (p.521) in order to succeed. This is, they argue, is something that the field of higher education must recognise through policy, if working class and other first-generation students are to productively engage with academic culture.

For refugees entering the field of higher education, risks such as these are intensified by the act of entering a competitive arena as a means to integrate, or 'belong' in a new society. This section has suggested how education is a field in which acquiring a sense of belonging or integration is far more than academic achievement (Pinson and Arnott, 2010). Rather it can be a hard-fought negotiation of identities framed by the relationships a student has with/in and beyond the university, and the forms of cultural and social capital that are recognised within academic culture.

## **Chapter summary**

This chapter has considered how refugee participation in university is framed by a lack of recognition within the field of higher education, and increasingly limited integration support services within the UK national field. The availability of specialised information, advice and guidance services that can support refugees and asylum seekers to access education is unpredictable across different parts of the UK, with existing services becoming increasingly stretched due to significant cuts in government funding. Given high levels of poverty related to refugee unemployment or underemployment (Bloch, 2008; Crawley and Crimes, 2009), higher education may appear as a means to either re-qualify or to find well-paid employment within the UK (Stevenson and Willot, 2010). For refugees whose overseas qualifications are not recognised within UK professional fields, returning to higher education may be essential



in order to continue with a career established in home countries (Morrice, 2011). Furthermore, for asylum seekers prohibited from employment, higher education may be seen as a means of preparation for life in the UK following a 'positive' decision from the UKBA (Doyle and O'Toole, 2013). However, university institutional practices generally reflect a lack of recognition of refugee and asylum seeker students and the forms of cultural, social and economic capital they have. As a result, forced migrants are likely to encounter challenges faced by international and non-traditional students, but on multiple levels (Stevenson and Willot, 2010). The chapter also highlighted how there is space within the literature on refugee HE participation to examine the experiences of older refugees and those with impermanent forms of leave to remain. In relation to this, and the discussion of existing knowledge of refugee student experiences, the chapter also drew on theoretical work from educational research to explore concepts of belonging and risk. This chapter completes the four literature chapters of the thesis, contextualising the analysis and theorisation presented in chapters eight and nine.

# Chapter Eight: Impermanent statuses, extended uncertainties: Jordan and David

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## Introduction

This chapter examines accounts from Jordan and David, both of whom had been living in the UK with an impermanent form of leave to remain while they engaged in degree studies. Jordan's first and second time participating in university courses occurred while he had asylum seeker status, while David undertook undergraduate and postgraduate degrees while holding the temporary humanitarian status of Discretionary Leave. This had been renewed between 2003 and 2011. The rights associated with these two forms of temporary status are different, yet both men can be seen to be living out a period of extended uncertainties, neither knowing if they would ultimately be accepted or rejected by the UK government.

The chapter considers their motivations for participating in higher education, examining when and how these change over time in relation to their initial plans and aspirations. In doing so, the ways in which Jordan and David manage displacement as a condition and category (Bakewell, 2011) are studied, suggesting that it is possible to see shifts in habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) in connection to their encounters with both the fields of higher education and the UK national field. By mapping habitus and field position to the spaces of education Jordan and David encounter or choose, the relational dimension of their higher education participation is explored, and frames their accrual and activation of cultural, social and economic capitals within a dynamic of movement and stasis. The two sets of experiences are discussed separately, beginning with Jordan's account.

## Jordan

Jordan arrived in the UK in 2003, and was granted Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) by the Home Office in 2010. Jordan is Zimbabwean, in his early thirties and has lived in South Wales since he came to the UK. He spent seven years categorised as an asylum seeker until ILR was eventually granted through the Home Office Case Resolution Directorate.<sup>13</sup> He was prohibited from legal employment due to his asylum application being made after July 2002.

Jordan had studied part-time at his local FE college during 2004-2008. He completed an HNC in Mechanical Engineering, and followed this with an IT course. He described this time at college in positive terms, referring to supportive tutors and that he did well with the coursework. He was encouraged to continue with his education, and in 2009 Jordan enrolled at a university in South Wales to begin an Access to Higher Education course, in preparation to apply for a degree.

### **In/visible status: accessing university**

*Wow! I'm at university this is just amazing! You know? I've never been to university before so being on the campus was like heaven.*

Jordan began an IT Access course in September 2009, but left in 2010, around halfway through the academic year. By this point he had also applied for an IT undergraduate degree at the same university, to begin in September 2010. Reflecting back, Jordan speaks of a complicated time, extending directly from a clash between his Asylum Seeker (AS) status and his degree application. The university Admissions team contacted him to confirm his immigration status, pointing out to him that if his pending asylum appeal was not resolved by September 2010, he would be liable for International student fees (approximately £7000 per annum). He was advised by Admissions to wait to

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<sup>13</sup> Zimbabwean refugees have experienced extended problems with their applications as a result of ongoing uncertainty of Zimbabwe's political circumstances. In January 2009 a Home Office estimate put the number of pre-2006 'legacy cases' that were yet to be resolved at 'more than 10,000' (Humphris, 2010).

until the Home Office had resolved his status, then reapply for the degree as he would be eligible for Home fees and student funding.

In the institution's Widening Participation strategy asylum seekers were named as eligible for fee-waiving on Access and Community HE programmes of study. This was in line with Welsh Government regulations on educational access for Asylum Seekers. However Jordan's circumstances show where HE funding policies reflect the limited rights accorded to AS status (Elwyn *et al*, 2012). Although someone with AS status may enter HE, they would do so as an International Student, required to self-finance their International fees (UKCISA, 2012). As a 'post-2002' claimant, Jordan was prohibited from working, thus without a private income or recourse to loans it was impossible for him to raise these funds. This is the first instance in Jordan's account that highlights the impact of asylum seeker status on his existing reserves of cultural capital. In this case Jordan is subject to a complex process of exclusion from the field of higher education. While this could be argued as a case of economic exclusion, it also seems that within this field the cultural capital of asylum seeker status is being both recognised and rejected at different levels. This occurs in such a way that the cultural capital of AS status is recognised in relation to his existing educational qualifications, nominally allowing him entry to HE, but this is simultaneously negated by the low value of cultural capital of AS status within the UK national field (resulting in prohibition from employment and no right to access student funding). Although in practice Jordan could have started the degree if he possessed sufficient economic capital, this situation shows that the cultural capital of asylum seeker status was subject to fluctuating value within the HE field. Applying for a degree marked a field boundary, ultimately demonstrating that the university reproduced exclusionary Home Office policy.

When asked if he received any guidance as to what he could or should do in the meantime, or if he discussed this with his Access tutor, he pointed out that:

I didn't really discuss it with anybody. I decided...I don't want people to be sorry for me. You automatically think that it is a big organisation and they all know. See? So if Admissions tells me something I automatically presume that my personal tutor knows about it...

Jordan's assumptions about how communications worked in the university were connected to feelings of shame about his AS status. Bourdieu (1994) argues that the hierarchal organisation of universities is manifested through the physical distance of student and lecturer in lectures, which reinforces the power of knowledge as cultural capital, and maintains dominant field positions. Here the gap between Access practices and institutional Admissions practice replicates this hierarchy and power dynamic. Jordan, who was categorised primarily through his AS status, was initially positioned as deserving of access to education. However at this point he is repositioned as undeserving of entry to a more powerful position in the field of education. In contrast to the strong learner identity (Crossan *et al*, 2003) he had developed in college, this situation brings out an identification with a stigmatised 'asylum seeker' identity.

Jordan left the Access course midway through. He explained that he was also having problems with the expenses of travelling to university and associated course costs, but that he cited 'personal circumstances' to his tutor as his reason for leaving. He had reached a point of disillusion, thinking that his effort to continue would not be worthwhile. With his lack of knowledge of how the university system worked (Stevenson and Willot, 2007; Christie *et al*, 2008), assuming that his tutor would have approached him if there had been alternative way to progress to a degree, Jordan decided there was no point in struggling on.

...you are trying and studying hard and you have this [going on to a degree] in your mind, so automatically I cannot give up hope. Seeing other people around you and you look at your situation, in that circumstance you could all be doing the same thing, but you end up not being able to progress. It kind of really makes you feel like, well, there's no point to really struggle at this time to push yourself to do something, you might come out with nothing.

The extended period of waiting for his appeal to be resolved manifested itself with an ongoing, deeply held, fear of removal from the UK:

I used to worry...that any time the government can decide to tell me to go home, or they can detain me and stuff like that.. I was always hoping that the Home Office are not going to say that, to send me back to my country, and come to the university and grab me from the classroom... how embarrassing, I would want to die, you know what I mean?

Jordan also had not told his classmates about his status, because he saw that as 'a disadvantage', perceiving that people were unlikely to understand what seeking asylum entailed, and judge him negatively. Although he legitimately could take up a position in the field of education through the Access course, this was not a space that was really safe, despite his arrival on campus as 'being like heaven'. His words above indicate how he was undertaking action to manage how his category of displacement (AS status) impacted on his condition of feeling displaced within the context of the university, and in order to benefit from the nationally valuable cultural capital the Access course could offer him.

The account also exemplifies a point in which symbolic violence took place, with the result that Jordan removes himself from the field of education. He is not legally prohibited from HE, but the practices of that particular HEI and of the Home Office effectively prevent him from studying a degree. So while his time at university so far had offered a physical space and a social position in which he could make identifications other than 'being' an asylum seeker, it was untenable in the longer term. The symbolic violence occurred in that education was presented as a viable space in which he could fulfil a 'positive' stereotype of being a worthy refugee (Lynn and Lea, 2003) or self-improving widening participation student (Archer, 2007; Burke, 2011). Yet when he tried to do so there were structural obstacles that stopped him from taking an imagined linear trajectory either through education (Waller *et al*, 2011) or towards integration in UK society (Phillimore, 2011). Thus far university had been, at best, an ambivalent space. There was an illusion of safety, 'like

heaven', but ultimately campus became a site of exclusion and further displacement.

Unlike some of the refugee students in the study by Morrice (2011), Jordan's account does not clearly suggest a feeling of a personal lack of entitlement to be in higher education. Rather he sees the status as stopping him. While this can be seen to be connected to lack of recognition of asylum seeker status by the field of higher education, it is also suggestive of a mismatch in the timeframes of the national UK field and that of HE. Griffiths *et al* (2013) explore the relationship of time and temporality with migration, highlighting that time can be framed and experienced in concurrent but potentially asynchronous ways. In their discussion, they summarise a broad theoretical literature on time and temporality by defining its three key aspects: the different ways in which time might be framed and understood; the scales on which time may be experienced both individually and collectively; and the ways in which these scales may be ordered. Bourdieu (1977) suggests that time may not be synchronised across fields, in that trends or practices may develop at different paces within different fields.

Jordan's discussion of his circumstances clearly indicate how he saw that his life, as defined by status, was not synchronised with the national (cultural) time frame, in which the academic calendar is set. Jordan's experience of time in the immigration frame was one of stasis, as he could not actively change when the Home Office would decide his case. Conversely, he was active in the field of HE and in this way was experiencing the timeframe of the national field in a way similar to other students. He reached the point of despair when he could see other people going ahead through education, but that he would not be able to. After almost seven years of waiting he could not imagine a point at which the immigration and academic time frames might align. Jordan's account illuminates the significance of time, and how it is experienced as another variable that comes into play in his accrual and/or activation of capitals within the national field.

## Community HE: university as therapy?

In September 2010, six months after leaving Access, Jordan enrolled on a community-based HE programme to study Certificate of Higher Education modules<sup>14</sup>, in Counselling and Peer Mentoring. He explained that he didn't really want to study Counselling, but he saw these modules as means to being out in the world, rather than waiting in his flat for a Home Office letter to arrive. This was significant for more than socialising for leisure reasons though, as he said:

The thing about it is, as an asylum seeker you always have some kind of [pauses]. I don't know what it is, some kind of anger. But you always have this kind of aggression sometimes when something is not going right and what is stopping it is the status. It sometimes makes you feel like why me, while everybody else is okay.

He simultaneously identifies with an 'asylum seeker' subjectivity of aggression and victimhood while also resisting it. He draws on the discourse of deficit to show that how the status has an affective impact. The power of the pathologising discourse of asylum is visible here; to have leave to remain, refugee status or citizenship is to be 'okay'. He is trying to negotiate how he identifies himself within a discourse that posits that he can never be 'okay' until he has status, and that frustration and anger are part of that deficit stereotype, rather than being viewed as a healthy adult response to living in restricted circumstances. Jordan points out an element of that particular module that he had not expected, the therapeutic effect it had on his coming to terms with his circumstances.

Doing the community courses, and the actual module was very beneficial for me, because I started seeing things in a different way. The counselling course wasn't something that really kind of gave me any idea to study further, but it was my therapy.

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<sup>14</sup> Certificate of Higher Education: 120 credits equivalent of completion of the first year of an undergraduate degree. Jordan studied these at the same university as his Access course. The part-time format of the programme fell within the AS status education rules, with AS status eligible for a fee waiver as part of the university's Widening Participation strategy.



Moreover, in the community-based context, where learning took place in local community centres, Jordan was able to identify with classmates who appeared to participate for social reasons.

The community-based course, I was more comfortable there. You see people in the class because they enjoy it, they don't want to sit at home.

In this learning environment Jordan is removed from the campus sites that remind him that full time degree studies are not available to him. I see two contrasting readings of Jordan's accounts of this period. On one hand, the alternative site of education was viable location for building up cultural and social capital reserves. Perhaps due to the substantive content of the Counselling course and the teaching methods, the class offered a site in which his habitus, embodying both his 'voice' and resilience to his circumstances, was recognised and externally validated (Clegg, 2011). Although a marginal position in the field of HE, it carried the 'possibility of a higher education environment where the 'other' can move from the periphery to centre stage' (Read *et al*, 2003, p.267). In the account below, Jordan's resilience is apparent, in spite of traces of an internalisation of the 'self-blame' discourse of asylum (Lynn and Lea, 2003).

Because basically this is the entrance. But you have to go all the way round, you're still making the journey longer for yourself because you are waiting for that door to open. So everybody is just going straight on but you can't. But as I said that is why got into community learning, I just thought that if I am going to get ten credits then at least I am aiming for some credits.

A more pessimistic interpretation of his accounts would illuminate his re-entry into a field that reinforces a subjectivity of difference and deficit as a widening participation student (Burke, 2011), who is bound to the margins of higher education. Jordan's account suggests that he is in fact in an ambivalent position, whereby he identifies both with the social and therapeutic rationale for education, and with the dominant discourses of self-improvement, through his aim to achieve more accreditation. Yet his discussion of this point in his life seems to indicate an approach to managing his own feelings of

displacement also involved considering the discomfort other people might feel in relation to the negative stereotype of the asylum seeker. Working towards the ten credits may have been a process of developing a learner identity (Crossan *et al*, 2003), but it was also means to regain a strategically useful international student identity:

To tell someone I am a student because that will stop them from investigating further. So to me it was to keep my mind busy, *and*, if I go somewhere I have got my student ID to show them I am a student...Then people think automatically I am in this country to study, so it makes people feel that they are not uncomfortable and they come near you.

Yeah, you can socialise because you are a student. You go out with people and you..go to the students union and you are a student, you are allowed to go there. But if you are an asylum seeker you can't. So my personal experience was to stay in education to give me that comfort. If I have got nothing to do I can get up every morning and just say ' I am a university student'. So it gives me that upper hand and I can meet new people and talk to people because I am a student... you all blend in then.

Seeking 'the upper hand' locates this narrative in a discourse of mastery (Burke, 2011), yet ultimately this is on a limited scale, always undermined by restrictions of his asylum status. Although not entitled to full access to the mainstream sites of HE, he is trying to make the margins work for him, as there are few other ways to build up reserves of valuable cultural and social capital. In this way Jordan sees he is legitimately able to access public spaces and engage with people, hoping that identification with being an international student will erase social barriers connected to an asylum seeker identity. This points to a fragility in the foundations on which Jordan is seeking to build social relationships, and is made clearer by his description of why this student identity is so important to him:

Basically you are not living within who you are. You are basically living day by day waiting for that moment. So everything you are doing every day, that is what is in your mind, when is that day going to come where I will be able to do what I want to do? See...you are an asylum seeker and basically restricted in a very confined space. It is basically, you are just out there in the crowd but you cannot go where those

crowds are going. Sometimes you have got to step back because of the status.

Earlier he had referred to 'waiting at the door', comparing himself to others who could 'go straight on'. Here 'stepping back' suggests a deliberate adaptation of habitus, of his dispositions towards life, in order to tolerate the circumstances he lives in. Charteris-Black (2006) examines the discourses of immigration which present an image of Britain as a container that may eventually overflow into chaos. Jordan's imagery of self containment mirrors that discourse, in the self-surveillance that he undertakes in order to minimise the disjuncture between his habitus and national field. Although the student identity is useful, it has a weak conversion value into national symbolic capital in certain social contexts. This is exemplified by the account Jordan gives of participation in a police outreach panel, when asylum seekers and refugees were asked to comment on how they felt about local policing.

..there are people who know who an asylum seeker is, they know somebody who has run from their country to escape. But other people treat you and see you as a criminal and sometimes that can restrict what you can do to help the community. I told them, if I see somebody committing a crime I'm not going to tell the police because the police are not going to ask me what happened. They are going to ask me who you are and automatically they are going to think "Yeah, yeah. He is an asylum seeker, he is going to be deported anyway.

These statements above are evocative of the life in refugee camps that Agier (2008) and Bauman (2002a, 2004) write about. While Jordan might not have been physically detained within a camp, his being 'restricted in a very confined space' suggests psychic confinement. More, it was Bauman's (2004) 'zombie identity' that he seemed to relate to. His liminality within the national field was apparent, as he believed that he might have been accused of crime as he was liable to be deported as a matter of course. In saying this he seemed to recognise that asylum seekers 'embody – visibly, tangibly, in the flesh – the inarticulate yet hurtful and painful presentiment of their own disposability' (Bauman, 2004, p. 56). As a result, Jordan pointed out how he would strategically not interact with society in a certain way in order not to identify with his status. It also shows how he felt unable to self-represent as

worthy of asylum, fulfilling a role as moral and good member of society by reporting crime. It seems then that Jordan was concurrently experiencing displacement and disjuncture within different fields.

On one hand, community-based HE was a means for Jordan to move in wider social circles and stretch the boundaries of his immigration status. It seemed to mitigate the disjuncture between his habitus and national field position in that he could re-frame his purpose for participating in higher education. It gave him a space in which to consciously adapt some aspects of his habitus in order to make his self-preservation strategy work, and participate in education in such a way that gave him some psychological 'comfort'. However, outside this learning environment he may have been strategically 'stepping back' from spaces within the national field that could also offer him social and cultural capital. Once again it appears that symbolic violence was being enacted in relation to asylum seeker status, and that engaging in education was only partially useful in taking up positive identifications. During the time that Jordan was studying on the Cert HE programme, he was granted Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR). He completed the two modules and immediately began a search for employment. The final section examines how his purpose for university shifted again, and that this was framed by the further displacement that ILR brought to his life.

### **Leave to remain: time to catch up**

Jordan was granted Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) early in 2010. With this change in status he was now eligible for 'Home' student fees and could access student loans. However, although studying for a full time degree became more financially possible, in the first instance he had to prioritise seeking employment, and supporting himself. His new immigration status brought with it the cultural capital of having permission to live and work in the UK, and thus gave him access to building up new forms of social and economic capital.

However, with these changes there were also losses as the new status effectively closed down important social networks that he had established.

...It kind of breaks from society, the social life you are living you just see that you are going to a completely different path now...The moment you get your status you are aiming to achieve something so you think that you have got to leave these people behind. Before I used to go to all these kind of refugee drop-in centres...but I don't go there anymore because I feel like there is nothing there for me.

With ILR granted, Jordan finds himself taking up a different but still liminal position in the national field, and appears to be stuck between two sets of assumptions about 'how life is' for a refugee. He refers to the assumptions held by asylum seekers awaiting status (as he highlights his own assumptions about life with ILR) and the public stereotype of refugees. What may be perceived externally as a 'community' of asylum seekers and refugees, is in reality a much more tenuous and fragile web of relationships. Having ILR means he is less likely to be publically identified by his immigration status, yet Jordan's experience of that post-status period is full of ambivalence. While he no longer thinks that friends can help him in his search for work, he also feels that he is being rejected from those meeting spaces, as his friends perceive his life to now be very different to theirs. Through necessity he focuses on employment, but he has lost access to the 'places to seek comfort' as a result.

Psychologically it is hard, it is really tense...it is just like a reality shock because when you have no status it is like, I don't know how to put it, it's basically like you are in high school and you are living on your parents, you are depending on somebody. But now you are on your own, the world is open, out there for you. Now all the support and the places you go to seek comfort, you find it is a waste of time, cos you want to leave and get a job. It puts a lot of pressure because you go to places and get rejected and you sit down and think 'I thought when I have my status I was just going to get a job'.

The stress of long term uncertainty has been observed in having a an impact on asylum seeker mental health (Jayaweera, 2011). Here Jordan's discussion illuminates impact of the sudden change in relationships with people he had been close to, and the hard psychological work in re-adapting habitus. Casting his gaze back to life with asylum seeker status, he is critical of the way in

which he had to live as if he were a teenager, framing the government as an overly-restrictive parent. It is other than protection however, as he finds himself then desperate to find employment, yet immediately isolated from the 'places of comfort' that he had made for himself, both the drop-in centres, and the community education classes. In this description he seems unwilling to portray himself as a victim, rather his position is critical of the enforced dependency, and the waste of the effort he made to find a way of coping with this. It evokes the idea of 'hostipitality' (Derrida, 2000) or the 'law of hospitality which violently imposes a contradiction on the very concept of hospitality in fixing a limit to it' (2000, p.4). Derrida (2000) illuminates the tension behind the idea of hospitality, that of its shared Latin origin with the word 'hostility'. Contrasting the unconditional acceptance of hosting with the aggression of hostility, Derrida locates the boundaries of the two concepts:

Hospitality is opposed to what is nothing other than opposition itself, namely, hostility. The welcomed guest is a stranger treated as a friend or ally, as opposed to the stranger treated as an enemy (friend/enemy, hospitality/ hostility) (Derrida, 2000, p.4).

Derrida argues here that offering hospitality is a conditional, rather than unconditional acceptance of the stranger. Rather, when the 'master of the household' allows entry to the stranger, the rules of the house are re-asserted, and thus hospitality as unconditional acceptance is impossible. Or rather, when an offer of hospitality is made, an invitation is made, then with that invitation a threshold is created, marked by 'customs and police checks' (2000, p.14). Limits were placed for seven years on Jordan by his immigration status as to how he could actively proceed with his life and now that he has been given new rights, he reveals the how he incurs losses that combine with pressure to act on these new rights. It seems that Jordan is at the threshold that Derrida (2000) writes of, and the boundary that Bhabha (1994) describes. At which point he contests the subjectivity ascribed to him by the asylum system, highlighting its limits.

Perhaps then this is a point in which it is useful to consider the concept of 'asylum seeker' habitus, in particular reference to people who, like Jordan,

who lived in the UK with the same form of limited rights for a period of many years. Mindful of Reay's warning that 'it's all becoming a habitus' (2004), I suggest a long-term asylum seeker habitus might be one that is marked by liminality and the extended partiality of 'degrees of integration' (Bourdieu, 2000). This is characterised by a self-conscious adaptation of dispositions to minimise discomfort, in knowledge that finding a position of comfort within the national field is not possible, given the restrictions and requirements of asylum seeker status and the power of dominant discourses of asylum. Bourdieu (1977) is not specific as to the duration of time over which habitus might undergo hysteresis, and following this period of adapting to 'being' an asylum seeker, there is further disjuncture and displacement as Jordan seeks to catch up. In Jordan's account, the typically abrupt change to his immigration status (Griffiths *et al*, 2013) has had an impact on how he engages with time within the national field. For him the passing of time has suddenly accelerated (Hynes, 2009), and he must catch up with this, so he can now try to live as he wishes. However, the extended disjuncture between the immigration and national timeframes has had lasting tangible impacts, significantly in how he can activate his cultural capital, and begin to access additional forms of valuable capitals. At this point he recognises that although he has lived already for seven years in the UK, he has accrued very few forms of cultural capital, such as work experience or a degree, with which to mediate his participation in the social fields he could now legitimately enter.

By September 2011 Jordan had started an HND in Engineering. He spoke positively about it, saying that 'the really hard maths hadn't started yet' and was waiting to see how he managed with that aspect. Making the decision to return to Engineering had been difficult, involving a reappraisal of how he had already participated in the field of UK HE. Before starting the HND, Jordan had been enjoying a new job in a care home, although he started this job after he had applied for the HND Engineering. He had decided that a Health and Social Care qualification would provide fewer opportunities for a well paid job, whereas Engineering would offer him more options, as he already had an HNC

in Mechanical Engineering to build upon. But with the new job going so well in the meantime, his thoughts moved towards studying for a healthcare qualification, and with the potential aim of a degree in Psychiatric Nursing. He was uncertain whether he should change track to focus on what he was now enjoying, or to continue as planned with the HND in Engineering. His manager and senior colleagues had given him very positive feedback on his work, and encouraged him to think about nursing as a career.

With the healthcare, you see the senior nurse and the manager observed what I'm doing, and they said that they think I'll be a good nurse. If these people, if they give me this advice, I should take it. But it's not easy, they don't know about this [the HND Engineering].

He believed that if he switched to a healthcare qualification, his manager would be supportive of him working flexibly around study commitments, but not if it was an unrelated course, and he worried about losing the job altogether. Moreover, as well as accepting the HND Engineering place, he had also applied for a Welsh Assembly Learning Grant. He was concerned that because he had already enrolled on the HND and been to the induction sessions at university, he couldn't back out. He was uncertain about the details, but concerned that if he left the course, and did not use the grant, he might not be eligible for the grant for a different course at a later stage. Furthermore, he did not have time to waste:

Before, I would do anything, I didn't have a choice. Now I have the choices I think, but it's a difficult decision. I don't want to miss out this year, I want to make every year count!

Jordan makes a stark comparison between life with asylum seeker status and his life with ILR status. While his management of displacement continues to be reactive to his immigration status, it is focussed on finding a stable position within the national field, and making new places of comfort. The significance of time to Jordan is again apparent as he contacted local colleges and heard that he was too late to apply for Access to Nursing courses. Going back to university in the new term was non-negotiable for him however. He stressed again the length of time that he had been in the UK, eight years by this point,



and that in his thirties now he only had a few months paid work experience to show for it.

If I don't study, I'll end up in a dead end job. I don't want that, I see that happen to people. But if I waste a year doing this [waiting to do the Access to Nursing course], then... [long pause]...it's just how quick do I decide... I'm heading down two different pathways.

Contrasting life when he was an asylum seeker to the present day, he felt that he had gone beyond making the 'choice of the necessary' (Bourdieu, 1979). Yet his choices are restricted by the social, economic and cultural capital he has at his disposal (Read *et al*, 2003). It seems that he is in new stage of hysteresis, or as he put it, 'heading down two different pathways'. This is suggestive of how he holds 'contradictory positions, which tend to exert structural 'double binds' on their occupants' (Bourdieu, 2000, p.160).

Jordan decided to follow the HND Engineering. When asked him about work in a follow up phone call, he said that he had been able to drop his hours in the care home to part time in order to accommodate his study time. While superficially this could be seen as a neat resolution to Jordan's dilemma, where he had been able to reconcile work and study, it indicates that he made decisions that have costs to him in other ways. He exerted pressure on himself not to 'waste a year', and chose a degree that he was uncertain about, and this seems to indicate the longer term impact of hysteresis on his dispositions towards higher education. Within migration research claims have been made that experience of asylum contributes to individuals increased disposal towards making the best of opportunities rather than strategic planning (Griffiths *et al*, 2013). It is suggested in this analysis however that it was not an 'either/ or' situation for Jordan. Rather, his decision shows that making the most of his immediate opportunities *is* a strategic plan when it is considered from the perspective of how his habitus has evolved in relation to the extended negotiation of the national field with asylum seeker status.

## **David**

David is also Zimbabwean and in his late thirties. He lives in South West England with his partner and young family. He works in a managerial role for an international engineering services company. He came to the UK in 2002, on an international student visa with a confirmed place to study an undergraduate degree at a university in the south of England. Before he began his degree, complications with his student visa resulted in a return journey to Zimbabwe, where on arrival he was taken into detention for political reasons. On release from detention he returned to the UK, this time seeking asylum. He was initially granted Discretionary Leave (DL) status within a year of his return to the UK, and following that he began the degree he had originally intended to study at the same university. His DL status had been renewed in the interim, during which time he had completed his degree and had been working fulltime. During the year 2010-2011 he was working as a manager and studying for an MSc in Management, while waiting to see if his application for ILR would be granted. David's account of participation in higher education is discussed in three sections: the early changes to his immigration status and access to HE; his negotiation of ongoing uncertainty about his immigration status; the role of university within his experience of forced migration.

### **Changing status: activating capitals**

David spoke directly about the professional ambitions that underpinned his studies and his initial plan to study in the UK. He originally planned to return to Zimbabwe, explaining that the UK qualification and work experience (from his degree work placement) would have secured him a management role there.

However following the dramatic change in his circumstances, he found himself in the UK without the financial resources he had expected to have access to. Although granted Discretionary Leave early in 2003, which allowed him to live and work in the UK for the next three years, accessing HE was now complicated, given his loss of economic capital and change in immigration status. Discretionary Leave meant that he was still liable for international fees due to the three year residency requirements, and had no recourse to student loans. In other words, he would only have become eligible for Home student fees as this first period of leave was coming to an end. Despite permission to work, he would not have been able to pay these fees. His position in relation to the field of HE had shifted, initially being categorised, and recognised, as an international student possessing the economic capital valued by the university, he was now in a marginal position. He was still categorised as 'international', but without the economic resources to enter the HE field. From this position he reappraised his purpose for studying, reframing HE as a means now to survive within the competitive UK national field:

I saw the chances of me going back are as good as zero. So how am I going to fit into the current situation that I am in, and probably progress?

This shows how David began to negotiate displacement, in terms of both his forced migration and his position outside the HE field, as a condition that he had to respond to. He was clearly aware that there were different 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu, 1986) in the UK field of employment. Despite the transferable cultural capital (English language fluency, work experience in an international industry) he brought with him, he noted that this alone would be unlikely to bring the social mobility to which he aspired (Erel, 2010). At this point however, he was able to activate other forms of transnational capital. Drawing on his diasporic cultural and social capital he became aware of a Zimbabwean refugee charity (Phoenix Fund). Through contacts with this organisation, a case for waiving his international fee status was presented to parliament, on the basis that Britain now had to become his home. The case was successful, permitting David to pay Home student fees.

This first point of access to HE highlights the significance of different forms of cultural and social capital that David was able to activate in the national field, in order to overcome hysteresis between his habitus and the field of higher education. In relation to the field of higher education, the cultural capital of Discretionary Leave, when combined with limited economic capital, resulted in positioning David outside the field, despite his having an open offer of a place at the university. Although he could activate social and cultural capital to be able to have a case for fee-waiving made, and potentially resist exclusion from higher education, he was dependant on parliamentary power to work in his favour. David was able to negotiate the field boundaries of higher education, but to do so, he had been reliant on a humanitarian recognition of his symbolic capital as 'refugee' within the UK national field. As a result, David brought a particular kind of transnational habitus into the field of higher education, one that was not recognised by the field itself. The next section focuses on how access to the field of higher education allowed David to distance himself from a deficit refugee identity.

### **'Tough luck': planning for displacement and maximising capitals**

David reflected back to the period during which he studied for his undergraduate degree, and what motivated him then to undertake further studies. His account of this time is framed by a critical view towards how he felt able to 'get on' with living in the UK, and why preparing for further displacement was crucially important.

David funded his undergraduate degree by working fulltime and fitting in his degree around work. Again he was able to activate his transnational capital, this time of years of work experience within an international company which operated near his university. When he recalled this, he also showed how he strategically decided to avoid taking on a stigmatised identity:

I could distinguish myself from that benefit culture of getting student loans and finances and all that kind of stuff. So I was working and whatever I would get I would pay for my fees.

Retrospectively distancing himself from a 'benefit culture' stereotype and emphasising his hard work and self-reliance, David privileged a self-representation of 'respectability' (Skeggs, 1997; Morrice, 2011). Through this act of distinction (Bourdieu, 1984), he appears to be complicit with the 'dependency discourse' that surrounds asylum seekers and refugees (Sales, 2005). However, he followed this statement with an indication of the difficulty of managing his category and condition of displacement, while seeking to remain resistant to such a deficit subjectivity being ascribed to him by others:

I didn't have any kind of thought about being a refugee or an asylum seeker or the piece of paper that says whatever. I'm still a human being. This is the circumstances I found myself to be in, it's either I accept it, or the people I am dealing with or that I am talking with in my social networks- the University, everybody around me, accept it as it is. If they don't accept it then tough luck, that's the way it is. Maybe I just blocked it and said 'I'm not going to be thinking about all this label thing because that's not what I am, this is the circumstance', so maybe that's what came to me and it never really bothered me.

It is important to emphasise here the difference between 'not being bothered' and the management of how his political category and subjectivity intersect, both publically and privately. In emphasising his humanity, he illuminated the power of the dehumanising discourse of forced migration (Zembylas, 2010) that pervades how others might relate to him. The clash between national field, his position in it, and his habitus, is almost tangible here. While he confronts those who might judge him for his status, their 'tough luck', his words also show how it is his 'tough luck', in that he needed to engage in the process of 'blocking' the deficit cultural capital of being identified as 'refugee' or 'asylum seeker'.

Once in university, David was also to develop an industry-related social network, resulting in a job. This was again connected to how he fitted well

with the doxic boundaries of his internationally-orientated field of employment. He pointed out that:

...in my field or the industry that I am in everybody is treated equally, nobody asks you where you are coming from.

To a certain extent, he was the Bourdieusian 'fish in water' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), in terms of how he was not marked by difference due to nationality, ethnicity or gender in this context. As a result, David could avoid overt identification with his immigration status, or category of displacement (Bakewell, 2011), and continue to participate in the UK national field, accruing and activating capitals across the fields of employment and education.

However, the impermanency of his immigration status, this limited, and limiting, form of institutional cultural capital, reinforced his sense of ambition and the need to plan for further displacement:

I have been thinking about it because I didn't want to just have an undergraduate degree and a pilot licence without something a little bit stronger because the UK is very competitive, you have always got to be looking a step ahead. I work in the mode where I am constantly thinking what might happen, what am I going to do? If there is an opportunity I will take the risk.... obviously we are living in a very competitive world, everyone is looking for qualifications, what have you got and what haven't you got.

A disposition to take risks appeared to inform his decision to apply for the MSc, and in this way highlights how habitus provides the boundaries for which (educational) choices appear possible or impossible (Hodkinson *et al*, 2008). As he looked towards being 'a step ahead', he was doing so after living and working in the UK for five years. During which time he had experienced the uncertainty of reapplying for further Discretionary Leave. While his early account of why he originally came to the UK to study is suggestive of a habitus already disposed to take risks, it seems that his experience of living in the UK with Discretionary Leave had reinforced this disposition. David uses the language of commodity to talk about his qualifications as resources to have 'banked' for when unexpected changes to his circumstances occur, such is the

power of the DL status to effect further physical displacement in his life. This account points to his awareness of the need to hold different types of transnationally valuable cultural and symbolic capital through being multi-skilled. This fits well with Beck's (2000) perspective on globalised risk, and Bauman's (2002b) observation of life within liquid modernity, in which having multiple options for identifications are necessary. Living with a tenuous impermanent form of humanitarian protection, at the very least, David can draw upon identities of manager, pilot, UK MSc/ BA graduate. This suggests how his management of his category of displacement (Bakewell, 2011) is integral to his strategy for managing the condition of feeling displaced.

### **'Time is time': the limits of managing displacement**

This third section draws together David's reflections on his circumstances in 2011 and his framing of the role university has had in his life in the UK. In doing so, it highlights the structural limits on David's approach to managing displacement. In his final interview, David emphasised that university became the centre point around which his life in the UK developed, but also reinforced the arbitrary nature through which this transpired:

...even now when I reflect and say if it wasn't because of these MPs, what would have happened? I still don't know what would have happened...it would have been maybe something else, but what it is I don't know. Now I have like a family that has been almost brought up with university links, so now I have got friends from the industry, I have got my partner- she is a lecturer- so now it's almost like I have a new family because of university, it's a completely new thing. It is overwhelming, you say okay is university just for education? Maybe not. It is all about your life, because my life has completely changed.

He spoke about this just before he showed a photo of his child, and it is clear that he related all that he gained personally to the decision at parliament for International fees to be waived for his undergraduate degree. In these words the work that he undertook to activate and accrue trans/nationally valuable social and cultural capital is sidelined, overwhelmed by the power behind the

decision from these MPs. However, despite framing his circumstances in this way, he also recalls that:

..it is quite a painful wait because when you have a set objective, you can't trade time, because...time is time. So you are like 'okay how long will I wait until I know what's going to happen'? And will that demotivate me? Or [do I] just say, 'you know what, I can't be bothered', or will I just say 'one day it will come'?

At this point David's account returns to the problem of uncertainties that stem from impermanent immigration status. Although he had periods of time in which he was 'safe' in the UK, his account resonates with Jordan's. Both men identified a need to re-frame their purpose for higher education in a way that supported them to manage their feelings of displacement, and maintain a sense of agency within the limits of their immigration status. Again the disjuncture between the timeframes of immigration and day-to-day life within the national field is visible. David identified that time is untradeable, it has no exchange value. 'Time is time' evokes the loss that David saw he could have experienced, not only of potentially having to wait out three years residency requirements before starting a degree as a Home student, but of the life that he now has, filled with friends, colleagues and his own family. From suddenly being in the position of claiming asylum, isolated from life in Zimbabwe, he now has 'a family brought up with the university'. In order to arrive at this point however, David has had to remain vigilant and find ways to negotiate his short-term leave to remain while participating in UK society *and* preparing for potential removal from it. As such it is a negotiation of liminality, a refusal to be positioned in the margins of society.

Bhabha (1994) conceives hybridity as a position of resistance to the effects of colonial representation and individuation, whereby 'denied knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority- its rules of recognition' (1994, p.162). David has taken up such a position by not only pointing out the tenuous basis of his access to higher education in the first place, but that despite all he has gained and achieved from this, his life remains at the discretion of the Home Office. His earlier statement that 'time



is time' remained pertinent to his current status, of waiting for Home Office confirmation that he would be able to apply for citizenship. In this way, the hysteresis effect between habitus and national field continued, even though he was able to accrue social, economic and cultural capital with national and transnational value.

In 2011 there were two more years left before this Home Office decision would be made. He explained that during this time he would continue to be monitored by a Home Office caseworker. If the circumstances in Zimbabwe had not changed, and if he demonstrated 'good behaviour in the community', then he hoped that he would be allowed to apply for citizenship. However, he was aware that citizenship may not be available to him, and that he may be expected to return to Zimbabwe. For him, the threat of further physical displacement was another obstacle to encounter and find a solution to: 'there is always that thing where you have got to jump another hurdle'. But while he saw this as a matter that he would have to attend to on an individual basis, (Beck, 1992), he also highlighted the incongruity of practices between the government departments that would decide his eventual acceptance or rejection from the UK:

[The Foreign Office says] Zimbabwe is very oppressive- they are killing people they are doing all this, we can't recognise the country, we can't send people because of human rights abuse. At the same time the immigration secretary or the home office secretary is saying, 'no we should send them back'. So I don't know [pause], the political decisions within the same political party, two different departments are kind of saying one thing, one with the right hand the other one saying it with the left hand and they are clashing.

Through seeking asylum David's life in the UK has been overtly politicised, but this has occurred in such a way that both ascribes to him a 'refugee' identity without having the right to settle on a permanent basis (Zetter, 2007).

Throughout three interviews, David presented a narrative of successful integration into UK society through education and employment, in addition to discussing the volunteer work he had done with local and national charities and his church. He established friendships, started a family, all suggesting that

since 2002 he had actively participated in UK society in the ways advocated by the integration policies of recent and current governments (Home Office, 2005, 2009; DCLG, 2012). He had proved himself as 'worthy', or, as he put it, he had shown 'good behaviour in the community'. However, in his critique of the government, he revealed the crack in the ground into which he currently stands over, and into which he may still fall.

David's account very clearly exemplifies how the contemporary asylum project is flawed through the potential for extended impermanent forms of leave to remain. The burden to accrue and activate nationally validated forms of capital is potentially an extended endeavour that requires habitus adaptation in order to manage displacement. David has engaged in practices that are externally recognisable as 'integration' yet he has done so with clear knowledge that the national field as he encountered it was founded on shifting, volatile ground. In his position, living through the gap between the possibilities of being invited to remain in the UK or being expelled, hybridity does not, as Bhabha (1994) argues, resolve the tension 'between..two scenes of the book' (p.162). David's strategy of displacement management shows what he does is in response to the requirements of rules of the integration game, while also undertaking what he identifies as necessary to 'stay a step ahead', should he be ultimately removed from the UK. Establishing high levels of transnational symbolic capital have involved a partial reproduction of the neoliberal discourse of individual achievement, yet his hybrid position 'intervenes in the exercise of authority...to represent the unpredictability of its presence' (Bhabha, 1994, p.163)

## Chapter summary

Despite biographical differences and having different forms of immigration status, there are similarities in David and Jordan's accounts of their engagement in British higher education. Ager and Strang (2010) state:

the domains of the refugee integration framework can be seen as.. reservoirs of resource from which refugees may draw and invest in securing other resources (Ager and Strang, 2010, p.604).

Although David and Jordan were seeking to accrue and activate capitals that were recognised in the UK national field, their purpose for doing so was not a clear cut desire for integration alone. Rather, they both found ways in which to make university a means to develop strategies to resist the liminality of uncertain, impermanent forms of leave to remain in the UK. Indeed, social and cultural integration through the 'domain' of education (Ager and Strang, 2008, 2010) in this case higher education, was not, in the first instance available to either David or Jordan. The sites of HE that they both sought to access did not recognise their legitimacy as students, given that the foundational integration domain of 'citizenship and rights' (Ager and Strang, 2008) was itself an unstable domain for David and Jordan. In this way they were restricted in their activation of capitals, or as Ager and Strang (2008) put it, the resources they could draw on, in order to access higher education.

Even though the field of higher education was not readily available to either of the two men, it was, from their perspective, the one most likely to give them what they needed. Arguably this was more crucial for Jordan, whose immigration status was more restrictive. Denied participation in the field of employment, there were few social fields that he could access in order to dis-identify with a deficit stereotype of asylum seeker. Moreover, this prohibition from employment restricted him from capitalising on the skills and knowledge of his HNC gained at college by moving into related work, and accruing

cultural capital of work experience. Continuing in education not only offered him a strategically useful student identity, but also allowed him to continue to self-represent as an active member of society through a coherent learner identity.

Both men engaged in strategies to manage the feelings of displacement resulting from their re-positioning outside the field of higher education. In Jordan's case this involved a re-framing of his purpose for studying, and in the marginal space of community-based HE was able to re-connect with strategically useful learner and student identities. This strategy to manage his displacement allowed him to find 'comfort' from the psychological constricts of life with extended asylum seeker status, despite only partially recuperating a sense of entitlement to be present in higher education as well as wider society. This limited entitlement could be seen in his later decision to return to university after he was granted ILR, whereby he took up a place on an HND despite having doubts, uncertain that he would be able to enter HE again if he did not take up the place that he had been accepted on.

For David, being able to access to the field of higher education gave him a position within the field of higher education from where he could continue to capitalise on his pre-existing social and cultural capital, as well as accrue further nationally and transnationally valued capitals, including other identities, such as 'manager' and, eventually, 'MSc graduate'. However, part of this capitalisation work involved strategic 'blocking' of a 'refugee' identity. Mosselson (2011) suggests that education is a space in which refugee people may retreat from a position as 'Other', but at the cost of refugee-ness becoming silenced. For David, it remained to be seen if the costs of his displacement management work would be returned, as the Home Office had yet to decide on whether he would be granted indefinite leave to remain in the UK, or not.

At this point it is worth reflecting on the ways in which David and Jordan came to discuss their experiences, and return momentarily to research

methodology and methods. Both men were the only two participants to engage in making photo diaries over a period of seven to ten days. These diaries then formed the basis for our third interviews, whereby David and Jordan led the direction of our conversation as they discussed their photos. It was a space in which their agenda as to how they defined their lives took on a tangible form, and their agency to do so was overt. Although the first two interviews had only been only lightly structured, to a certain extent they might have echoed the interview dynamics of the asylum process, as I initiated the conversations. In their third interview, Jordan and David took ownership in a creative way of how they self-represented, in a way which I had hoped might have developed earlier for all participants via the online forum. These photo-based interviews visibly went beyond traditional interview parameters that had set our previous conversations.

The third interviews were highly descriptive, with David discussing his work and family, while Jordan spoke extensively about the everyday tensions between his current employment as a careworker and his aspirations to progress to degree studies. The depth of expression and emotion that ran through the conversation about the photo left me feeling, without doubt, that using this research method had given an opportunity for meaningful participation to occur. Also importantly, the content of these interviews highlighted the depth of complexity of managing a sense of disjuncture related to refugee identities with the practice of getting on with all aspects of everyday life.

David and Jordan's experiences were framed by different forms of leave granted by the Home Office, but it seems that a significant tranche of refugees in the UK will continue to encounter similar forms of impermanence as they (aim to) participate in higher education, whether related to backlogs in the asylum processing system<sup>15</sup> or due having short-term forms of leave that are subject to further extensions. The analysis in this chapter suggests

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<sup>15</sup> In 2012, there was an outstanding backlog of 28,500 asylum applications awaiting decisions (Crossley, 2013).

that managing displacement while living with impermanent immigration statuses was a fragile endeavour, marked by ongoing movement in and out of liminal social field positions.

# Chapter Nine: Permanent statuses: leave to remain? Amal, Lul and Aro

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## Introduction

This chapter examines the role of higher education within the lives of three refugees who have Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR), the right to live in the UK without fear of removal. In contrast to David and Jordan, Lul, Aro and Amal had been granted this permanent permission to stay in Britain before starting to engage with university studies. In this way, they had a stronger foundational basis of rights and citizenship (Ager and Strang, 2008) on which to establish their participation in higher education. However, this chapter suggests that engagement in HE did not entirely bring tangible returns for these students in terms of integration into UK society. The chapter begins by identifying the aspirations held by Lul, Aro and Amal, before considering the extent to which university participation met with their expectations. The analysis examines how their experience of forced migration framed the accrual and activation of different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986), as each person engaged in both the UK national field and that of higher education. For Aro and Lul, participation in the field of higher education interacted with habitus to bring uncertainties about their 'place' in UK society. Meanwhile, for Amal, pursuing higher education in the UK was clearly linked to an aim to return to Kurdistan. Nonetheless, his experiences in and related to university also produced disjuncture between habitus and the UK national field.

## **Pen portraits**

All three students were in their thirties. During the academic year 2010-2011, Aro and Lul were studying at the same university, a newer HEI in the South West of England, while Amal was 'in between' universities, following a decision to leave one MA course and apply for another.

### **Amal**

Amal is in his mid-thirties, and is Kurdish. He sought asylum in the UK in 2000 and although he was not granted ILR until 2005, he was given permission to work in the UK after two months of being in the UK. Initially, he lived in the North East of England, and stayed there until 2005. Between 2004 and 2005, Amal completed a range of college courses- ESOL, Citizenship and IT- before moving to the West Midlands to study an Access course at university there.

On completion of the Access course he moved to Wales in 2006, to start a BA in Philosophy, and intended to carry on to MPhil studies at the same university. Shortly after Amal agreed to participate in this research, his university underwent a merger, with the result that the option to continue straight from the specially designed four year BA into the MPhil was removed. Amal applied for a different MA course at this university, but following difficulties with his application he left in November 2010. He relocated to the Midlands to resume full-time employment, but kept in touch with this research project. Later in the academic year 2010-2011 he reflected back to his intentions for the Masters year. He spoke about the recent changes in his circumstances, the process of applying for another Masters degree and his hopes to return to Kurdistan in the future.



## **Lul**

Lul is a Somali woman in her early thirties, and lives in one of the cities in South West England. She came alone to the UK from Somalia in 1999 when she was in her late teens, and initially lived in the North East until 2005. She was granted full refugee status with ILR within six months of being in the UK. When she participated in this research she was in the final year of an undergraduate degree in Social Work. During this time Lul did a professional placement, as well as taking modules and then writing her dissertation. Her discussions reflect these different aspects of her busy year, as well as reflecting back on her motivations for studying for this profession, and her plans for the future. She was the only woman to participate in this research.

## **Aro**

Aro travelled alone to the UK from Iraq in 2003. He is Kurdish and in his late thirties. His wife and son joined him two years after he arrived, and he now lives with them in a city in South West England. When he participated in this research he was in the second year of a part-time MA in Intercultural Communication after completing an undergraduate degree in Media and Sociology at the same university. While studying he worked part time in retail and as an interpreter/translator for the city council. He also has ILR status, which was granted before he started his undergraduate degree.

## **Expectations for higher education: dispositions and ambitions**

This section considers the expectations and dispositions that Amal, Lul and Aro held with regard to higher education, their ambitions, and what they sought to gain from studying. While all three suggested to differing extents that a university degree was a means to developing or beginning a career, this was not necessarily their only, or primary, aspiration.

### **Amal**

Amal's decision to enter HE formed an integral part of a longer term plan to return to Kurdistan. It was this project to return that framed his accounts of participation in university, rather than contemporary government discourse of integration that focuses on upward social mobility and employability (DCLG, 2012). As a result, his engagement with the field of education had a transnational filter, underpinned by a hope that higher education would offer a stable core to his plans to return.

Amal had studied the equivalent of A-levels before leaving Kurdistan, but due to political circumstances he had not been able to take up the offer of a place at university. He spent his first five years in the UK focussed on working to financially help his family in Kurdistan. Sending financial remittances back to family is cited by many refugees as a necessity, and a primary reason for working as much as possible to the exclusion of other activities, such as education (Lindley, 2007; Joyce *et al*, 2010). In 2003 he took courses at his local college, gaining ESOL Level 3 as well as taking IT and Citizenship classes. Amal took some time to make this decision to return to education, needing to reconcile a sense of obligation to his family with his own ambitions:

I was in a difficult situation at the time because my family, I had to support them, and morally I thought, because my father worked very hard in his life, I thought I have to, not pay back, but have to do

something. I had a huge interest in education but, because I have this interest myself, I can't do it because my parents were the symbol of the appreciation I have for them. I thought that I can help them now and I can work, because I had work permission and everything, so I had to work and satisfy them, or at least myself, and then start my education and I did.

He did not mention whether he was encouraged or not by his family to return to education, but his reference to them indicates their importance in his decision-making. His loyalty to his parents, to be a worthy son to them, was his primary concern, situating his account outwith the behaviours or characteristics that governmental and/or public discourses use to identify 'deserving' asylum seekers in relation to the UK national field. For Amal, entering the field of UK education involved balancing his commitments in Kurdistan with his circumstances in Britain. This gives an indication of how he was managing his position in two national fields simultaneously, and exemplifies Ley's (2004) statement that 'locality should not be regarded as static and contained, but as fluid and dispersed...emotional sites may be in geographically distant places' (p.155).

He described his subsequent decision to apply for an Access course in the Midlands:

I spoke to someone, a Kurdish man, at Midland University doing third year in Sociology. And he said it's interesting that I am interested in advanced level, because there is many people there, but they are not very keen to study. But he said because I am keen it would be good to study there. At the time I was living in the North East and it was a big challenge. I thought once I finish college I will move there, and he said I could stay with him until I find a job.

This account shows how his ambition to study at university transformed into a process of moving into a realm that seemed to be both welcoming and familiar, as Amal's habitus appeared to fit with a university habitus (Reay *et al*, 2010) in which Kurdish refugee men had a legitimate place as students. More, the student at Midland suggested that Amal's commitment to studying hard would stand in his favour. It is at this point that Amal's recognition of HE as a welcoming place that he was entitled to be in, began to crystallise.

Being accepted onto the Access course reinforced a self-identification as ‘hard working’. This set Amal up as a ‘deserving’ asylum seeker and an ‘ideal’ Widening Participation student who seeks to self improve through the neo-liberal discourses of ‘motivation, hard work, and self-discipline’ (Burke, 2007, p.418). However, Amal’s account of his focus on education did not privilege or even suggest an aim to self-improve in terms of his social mobility in the UK. Rather, he emphasised a personal interest in academic work, and stressed the importance of his ties to his family in Kurdistan. His engagement in the British national field was thus moderated by this transnational commitment, and his consequent need to manage conditions and categories of displacement (Bakewell, 2011) in relation to both the UK and Kurdistan national fields.

## **Lul**

Lul’s ambitions for university were articulated as an aspiration to complete and extend her education, following disruption to her childhood education:

I’m the only one who went to university from my family so I was excited because my education was disrupted by the civil war and I never thought that I would. I always liked education, but when the civil war took place in my country when I was a child I didn’t know that I would continue. But luckily I managed to continue.

This ambition appears as a negotiation of past and present, of a habitus disrupted (Reay *et al*, 2001) and a point of re-engagement with partially abandoned aspirations. Like many other ‘non-traditional’ students, Lul was the first of her family to participate in university, with no familial experience of university to contribute to aligning her habitus with the field of HE (Reay *et al*, 2005). However, not only was higher education a new field for her to encounter, but she was doing so as part of a wider project to establish herself in UK society. She could not return to Somalia, and, after twelve years of living in Britain, she planned on staying. As a result, any sense of ‘belonging’ in university would be interwoven with that of ‘belonging’ in Britain.

Lul attributed her decision to study Social Work to the voluntary work she did with other refugees, helping people to re-establish contact with family and friends in their home countries. She emphasised the importance of her own learning about other cultures and faiths through this work as a reason for enjoying it, as well as the satisfaction of helping people. Lul then explained that in this role she began to think more critically about social injustice, explicitly linking her life experiences to the decision to study Social Work:

Like when I think of my personal experiences back home and how disabled people were treated and people from minority and ethnic groups were treated even back home. When I was in Somalia some people were a minority and they were denied in mainstream society, so even though I was a child I am reflecting back now, at the time I didn't have knowledge or experience or even the power to challenge or even to understand more. I realise not only back home but even here and around the world there are many people who are disadvantaged either by the system or by society so I thought I could make some effort in contributing some positive change in a professional way, and I thought Social Work was a gateway to doing that.

This comparative discussion of injustice suggests that Lul believed she was capable of acting on social injustice, and that she was not disadvantaged 'by the system or society' within the UK. On the contrary, like some of the students in the research by Morrice (2011), studying for a profession offered Lul a channel through which to demonstrate an agentic, powerful subjectivity. But in contrast to those students who previously had professional jobs, this was Lul's first attempt to develop a career. In making sense of her circumstances before and after migration in this way, she illuminated a sense of disjuncture between her habitus and her life as lived in Somalia, suggesting that her position within UK national field was one that brought her closer to living in ways more suited to 'who' she was. Moreover, constructing herself as hard-working and open to opportunity, 'I just got known as someone who would always do another course if there was one', meant that Lul also had a recognisable form of cultural capital, in the form of a habitus disposed to self-improvement. This is one form of self-identification that refugees can capitalise on, in that it fits with dominant discourses of integration, and in this

way higher education can be understood as a functional means and/or marker of integration. However, later in this chapter it is suggested that Lul's experiences of being in university and of Social Work professional practice found her encountering moments of symbolic violence in relation to her 'refugee identity'. As a result, higher education will be seen to further complicate rather than facilitate her integration into British society.

## **Aro**

Aro explained that he took his undergraduate degree in Media and Sociology not only to continue with his career, but also to fulfil a desire to develop intellectually. In Iraq he had worked as a cultural commentator and journalist, but found that he was restricted in exploring his research interests. He framed the UK not only as a place offering political sanctuary then, but also offering intellectual freedoms:

So imagine this situation: you've got ambitions, you've got ideas, you've got hope to do something... to expand my knowledge and my, what's it called? To improve my academic background because in that time there wasn't enough institutions and it wasn't a good place to do so.

In this way he contextualised his aspiration for university in terms of knowledge expansion, simultaneously asserting that:

I'm really a fan of studying- some people are fans of football, some people are fans of the music. I'm a fan of research.

Being a 'fan' of research also had deeper meaning beyond an uncomplicated enjoyment of learning for pleasure. He referred back to when he lived Iraq and the solace he took in reading and researching while living in increasingly difficult political circumstances:

So I remember very well, when I was there, I had such a very hard and difficult time economically, and in every way. Then I couldn't live without books...always reading, reading.

For Aro, studying and researching formed part of his strategy to manage his feelings of displacement prior to leaving Iraq. Despite a different context, there are parallels here with Jordan's discussion of the therapeutic benefit of finding 'comfort' as he participated in community-based HE. It also echoes the voices of the young refugees interviewed by Stevenson and Willot (2007) who identified university as a means to regain a sense of stability in their lives after a period of disruption.

Aro's commitment to taking up higher education was also evidenced in his retaking of the IELTS exam, in order to prove that he was sufficiently fluent in English for degree studies:

They asked for IELTS...I did it again I remember, because [a score of] five and a half wasn't enough for university. I think they wanted six... I put myself under pressure to work hard...to meet the requirements.

He was willing to engage in adaptive work in order to meet the requirements for acceptance to the field of higher education. In this statement Aro shows how he took on the pressure of gaining the right form of cultural capital, recognising and reinforcing field doxa (Bourdieu, 1977). This work to retake exams to gain relevant cultural capital begins to suggest how for Aro progression into and through higher education might not be a smooth or easy trajectory, rather, that it would be one marked by retracing of steps and negotiation of both expected and unexpected risks (Brine and Waller, 2004; Waller *et al*, 2011). Clegg (2011) argues for the field of higher education to acknowledge the aspirations of students who take up degrees in pursuit of 'rounded intellectual identities' (p.104). It seems that in Aro's case, the importance of such an identity was integral to how he engaged with dealing with his feelings of displacement and how he approached integrating into UK society.

## **Participation in higher education: meeting expectations?**

The first section of this chapter has highlighted the expectations and dispositions towards higher education that Amal, Lul and Aro brought with them into their degree studies. All three encountered challenges in developing a sense of belonging within higher education, and this section draws out some of the ways in which their participation in university intersected with their experience of forced migration.

### **Amal**

Amal's degree studies were marked by unexpected disruption and change, much of which stemmed from the merger that his university underwent as he was nearing the end of his BA. This section examines the fragility of his sense of 'belonging' in university, and how the university merger impacted on his plans. In 2010 Amal graduated with a BA in Philosophy, with the intention to continue straight into an MPhil at the same university, and as described earlier, when the university underwent a merger in 2009 that option to continue to an MPhil was removed. When he spoke about this in interview he was clearly still angry and disappointed at the disruption, particularly at the cost of time to him:

I could have done the three years and in that extra year I could have done an MA, do you know what I mean? I mean I have done that extra year just for my knowledge and understand about philosophy, but I could have done it in an MA as well. But the only difference being that I would have achieved an MA.

The loss of the year that could have effectively been his MA year, or the first MPhil year, is a point that Amal returned to discuss, explaining that ultimately he lost two years before embarking on a subsequent postgraduate course. This cost of time echoes discussions from Jordan and David in chapter eight, stressing the need to make up for time lost, yet at the same time, knowing that time cannot be recaptured. For Amal, despite his permanent leave to



remain in the UK, time is also of the essence for his plan to return to Kurdistan and to re-establish his life there. Once it was clear the MPhil option was no longer available, he decided to apply for an MA in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). There were subsequent problems in the admissions process, and as a result Amal missed the opportunity to apply for degree funding from the Kurdish government. Having pinned his hopes on taking up this new course, he was overwhelmed by frustration:

It was about November, December something like that. So I said I was not happy with the service of that university any more. I would go to Admissions and one member of staff would say one thing and one member of staff say another and I was very disturbed by that attitude...They were saying they send the offer letter to me, and I was waiting for it to send it to get the funds. And that offer letter never came through... I thought it's better if I apply to a different university. I thought I would wait, and I waited and waited until I said I will not wait any more, so I just leave everything.... I just left everything behind.

Although his account suggests he was active in discussing this with Admissions staff, frequently seeking updates on the progression of his offer letter, these were circumstances he could not control. The tension and frustration this produced can be seen to be shifting his disposition towards the field of higher education. Bourdieu (1990) writes about the constant transformation of habitus, that this occurs:

...either in a direction that reinforces it, when embodied structures of expectation encounter structures of objective chances in harmony with these expectations, or in a direction that transforms it, and for instance, raises or lowers the level of expectation and aspirations (Bourdieu, 1990: 116).

In this case, Amal no longer could see how he could continue in higher education in the setting of this university, and so removed himself from the field. For Amal, getting on with achieving a postgraduate degree was an intrinsic part of his plan to re-establish a life in Kurdistan and this was his priority. This tension between his aspiration and the field of higher education did not transform his habitus in a way that lowered his expectations, but

rather if this disjuncture did not then raise his expectations, it certainly seemed to reinforce a sense that he *could* proceed with higher education, albeit elsewhere. He returned to the Midlands to begin fulltime work as he reassessed what, and where, he might be able to take up postgraduate studies. In doing so, Amal actively re-routed himself (Clayton *et al*, 2009) in order to work towards his goal of a return to Kurdistan. On one hand, this could be framed as a huge risk, by giving up waiting for the offer letter, he could lose the learner identity that he had worked hard to develop in the UK. On the other, Amal perhaps accurately identified that he was unlikely to be able to 'belong' within that particular university.

Griffiths *et al* (2013) suggest that bureaucratic categorisations of migrants present the 'ideal' migrant as conforming to 'a sequence of events from arrival to settlement, productivity, integration and ultimately...naturalisation or return' (p.29). Amal's account illuminates that this was not how his individual 'migration project' was working out. Rather, it did not seem that he had reached a point of 'settlement'. His strategy to re-integrate into society in Kurdistan was channelled directly through engagement in the field of British higher education and as such he moved around the UK in order to realise this aim. Moreover, this plan involved negotiating around the disjuncture in timeframes of the UK national field, that of the field of higher education (the academic calendar) and the Kurdistan national field. Following the university merger, his immediate solution was to enrol on the TESOL MA. This proved unsuccessful due to the mismatch in timing between the admissions process and Kurdish government funding deadline. Now he had to respond to the time pressures of the UK national field, by finding employment before he ran out of money, while simultaneously carrying on with his plans to study and to return to Kurdistan. Being able to draw on the reserves of social capital he had in the friendships and employment networks established in the Midlands meant that what might appear as a move backwards can be seen as a productive move for Amal as he negotiated these three sets of field timeframes. Nonetheless, his subsequent attempt to enter HE brought a re-

evaluation of the social and cultural capital he held, and this is discussed in the third section of the chapter.

## **Lul**

Lul's account of doing her degree was one of both unexpected pleasure, in the realisation that she was at university, something she had thought she would never be able to do, as well as one of unexpected challenges:

my experience of university, it's okay. I get on well with everyone, the other students and also, the course is [pause], there is quite a lot of course work to do, a lot of assignments and sometimes exams. I am managing it, because I have ambition and this is a course that I enjoy.

By reasserting her ambition to succeed academically and in restating her ability to manage the workload, she highlighted her disposition towards adapting to the requirements of the degree. However, this ambition involved adapting to the unexpected challenges of producing work using academic English (Joyce *et al*, 2010; Morrice, 2011) and of having to find her own solutions to accessing support with this (Stevenson and Willot, 2010):

When I was doing the Access course, students who English was not their first language, we used to get extra support with English, and we used to get someone to check for us the grammar. It was not to comment about the content, or how you put it, because that's not fair, I mean for other students. But also we used to get someone who checked for punctuation and grammar. But on my first day [at university] when I asked, *"English is not my first language will I get some support for my English or someone to check my assignment before I submit?"* they said *no*. I was told, *first of all you are expected come with good English to do this course, so unless you want to find out on your own, privately...* I had to pay extra money for academic writing skills... I mean as someone who English is not my first language I just decided to do it, to do better in all my classes and *be academic*.

Although Lul entered HE through the Access course pathway, she was still unprepared for the academic practices and institutional expectations that underpin degree studies, which result in a moment of shock and disjuncture. The limits of a 'hardworking' learner identity are clear at this point, in that the

rules of the academic game changed, conflicting with her sense of being a good learner. For Lul to 'be academic' she has been explicitly told to find her own way to avoid failure, to overcome *her* deficit in language skills. Like the refugees with 'Home' student status described in research by Stevenson and Willot (2010) and Morrice (2011), Lul was not entitled to the free language skills support offered by the university to its international students. As a result she invested additional economic capital into private tuition and proofreading.

Lack of recognition in this way by the university was in direct tension with how otherwise Lul was recognised as a 'deserving' student. She was in receipt of financial support from the Local Authority (a bursary for low income households), the university (a bursary for Access students continuing to degree studies), and the General Social Care Council (a bursary for Social Work students). Paying for academic English was an extra expense, and Lul perceived she had little option but to invest in these classes in order to succeed in her degree. The investment of this additional economic capital might contribute to a longer term gain of institutional capital in the form of a degree, and in the shorter term, progressing through university allowed her to identify as a professional-to-be rather than be associated with a deficit form of 'refugee' identity. Access to these forms of capital were, however, predicated on Lul's individual ability to activate her own reserves of economic capital, rather than utilise existing university learning support mechanisms. In this way, Lul's account illuminates an otherwise hidden process of capital exchange that took place in order for her to pursue nationally valuable cultural and symbolic capital.

In spite of this extra investment of time, work and money, Lul found that language issues impacted on her professional practice, in influencing how she developed working relationships with her placement supervisor. Hage (2000) argues that language fluency and accent combine with ethnicity to create deficit forms of national capital when migrants enter, or try to enter, the field of employment. In relation to this, Lul could be to have had second thoughts

about how she worked with her placement supervisor. She worried that the supervisor might think she was seeking a proofreader or 'an English class' when in fact she was trying to engage in collaborative working practice:

What I feel is what my supervisor will say if we do work together, and I say OK, will you check these reports. It doesn't mean that I am saying can you check my English, but the content, because we do this work together. So instead of just finishing and sending the work without showing her, I do show her to respect that we do this work together so that she can add something if I missed it. It's not only the English but also the content. But she might misinterpret it because English is not my first language, that I want her to check the English. I do not go there as an English class, I go there to practice, my professional course. But I do understand, it doesn't bother me that much, sometimes it does.

When Lul said 'I am managing it, because I have ambition' she clearly accepted that hard work was necessary to achieve a degree. However, it seems that the university's response to Lul's question about language support may have impacted on her practice, reaching deeper than being a case of simply improving her grammar. Rather it seems to have shifted the condition of displacement (Bakewell, 2011) into the field of employment at this professional level; in her concerns that her practice might be misinterpreted, Lul has carried a sense of personal deficit across the field boundaries between education and employment.

As such, the rules of the academic game can be seen to impact in concurrent, but, conflicting ways, enacting symbolic violence. On one hand, Lul had accrued the symbolic capital of a Social Work student identity, allowing access to the field of social work employment. Yet on the other, the negative form of recognition given to her language skills by the field of higher education, was carried, embodied in habitus, into the field of employment, producing further anxiety and self-doubt. Later in the chapter, Lul's approach to managing this form of psychic displacement within the field of employment is discussed in relation to 'refugee' identity and identifications as a professional social worker.

## Aro

In pursuing his undergraduate degree, Aro experienced a strong disjuncture between his habitus and the field of higher education. In common with many other mature students (Bowl, 2001; Waller, 2006) he found it difficult to interact with younger students on his BA course due to age difference and how he perceived they saw him as 'not one of them', and this sense of difference was reinforced by his ethnicity and nationality. There were few minority ethnic students at the small campus where he studied, in contrast to the visible ethnic diversity of the university's main campus. Additionally, beginning his degree only a few years after the 9/11 attacks, Aro was extremely aware of his ethnicity and nationality, and the powerful post- 9/11 counter-terror discourses. He described feeling that he would be perceived by other students as 'contagious', like 'a virus'. This viral metaphor invokes Bauman's (2004) suggestion that refugees are perceived as bringing with them 'the noises of war and... the stench of gutted villages' (2004, p. 66), and with this imagery Aro cast a powerful image of habitus in turmoil.

Finding it difficult to interact with his younger, white, classmates, he looked to establish good relationships with his tutors instead:

Actually, in regard to the teachers and teaching staff was brilliant, it was, OK, a little relief. Because first of all there was diversity among the teachers, they all come from different backgrounds, one from Greece, one from India, some English teachers and some even European countries. So it was kind of diversity first, and secondly age. It was easy to communicate and really I was enjoying to stay with these teachers and my relations with the teachers was okay, and I was happy. And they were helpful with me, and some of them checked after me...if I had difficulty to understand.

This strategy of managing this sense of displacement shows not only a commitment to pursuing his aspirations but also a way of establishing a sense of entitlement to be in the field of higher education. The cultural diversity of the tutors and their attitudes towards him were integral to this, giving him a sense of recognition, rather his feelings of difference being reinforced

through practices of 'distancing' (Read *et al*, 2003) that maintain a hierarchical divide between tutor and student. Aro highlighted this as a crucial factor in sustaining his participation in the first year of university, alongside the pedagogical approach of group work used in his second year:

Communication, talk, and sometimes I remember a few classmates we went to drink together to the café, and we did a good project as a team together. Always unknown things, for you unknown places, unknown persons, unknown territories, unknown everything, for you is kind of difficult. Not easy to confront. But when, for the next year we had together a project and essay and things like that....a couple of my class mates for the second year, we talk and we, kind of opened up with each other, so it was okay. Amongst the youngsters in the first year of my degree, who looked to me as a kind of stranger, they, for the second year, we were able, both actually, I remember, to talk from both sides...

Here the border crossing of international classrooms (Giroux, 1992) is apparent, in that he saw that both for him, and his co-students, there was so much that was unknown in their encounter with each other. However, by his third year he felt differently, in terms of his sense of confidence and contentment with his position within the university:

My third year in many ways, emotionally, academically...socially, it was okay for me and worked very well. Much better than my first year and second year. I can say I integrated. Kind of integrated in the institution, socially and academically.

It is interesting that he talks about integration, perhaps a term that someone who did not have a refugee or migrant background would be less likely to use when talking about their experience of university. In this Aro emphasised that *he* integrated, and had successfully managed to fit into the social and academic culture of the institution. He had managed to overcome what he saw as being deficit identities, Iraqi nationality and being an older student, by developing a positive student identity. This brought him social capital within his peer group and from this he no longer felt as if he was 'standing out' (Reay *et al*, 2009) within the spaces, culture and social networks of university. However, Aro's experience of his Masters degree brought further questioning

of the 'rules of the game' of higher education in relation to his age, ethnicity and position within the UK national field as a refugee.

## **Finding a place in the world: identities and migration**

Bauman (2002a) suggests that when people become refugees, they lose their place in the world not only in terms of physical location, but also in how they lose possibilities for identity and identifications. This third part of the chapter considers the ways in which Amal, Lul and Aro framed their position in UK society in relation to their participation in university, and explores the identity work that they undertook in their individual projects to find a place in the world.

### **Amal**

As Amal talked about his life in the UK, he highlighted the importance of the Kurdish diaspora in relation to both his participation in university and in employment. He moved from the North East to study at Midland University on the basis of support from a Kurdish student already there. When he decided to leave Wales, he found employment in the Midlands due to his Kurdish social network. Yet although Amal was able to capitalise on his links with other Kurds in these ways, he also related his experience of trying to return to university to the social stratification of diaspora.

Between leaving Wales and eventually moving to the South East, Amal was accepted to study for an MA in Kurdish Studies at a 'red brick' university in the South West. He applied to a Kurdish charitable organisation for funding, but was unsuccessful in his bid. He did not take up the MA place, as he was unsure how he would otherwise afford the fees. When he did not receive feedback after inquiring as to why he had been unsuccessful in gaining the funding, he began to second-guess the reason behind this:



My friend and I applied for that fund and I thought we may get it because of the confirmation from the university that they accepted us for that MA...We did not hear anything about the funding and I didn't think we got it because I have heard some people say the person dealing with that fund is not a very genuine person. I have heard that, but I am not sure if it is right or not...In the sense that if he knows somebody closer to him, the offer would go to them... I don't think he knows me, and I don't know him at all.

Adkins (2006) suggests that social networks may function in a way that excludes just as much as they may foster inclusion and sense of being part of a 'community'. Similarly, Erel (2010) discusses the acts of Bourdieusian 'distinction' that occur within diasporic social networks. Although Amal may have said this in order to dismiss a sense of personal failure, it can also be understood as a point at which he was forced to reconsider his transnational identity as a member of Kurdish diaspora. At his point he recognised the limited power that this identification gave him within this wider social network in the UK.

His discussion of this attempt to get back into university also highlights the uncertainties that surround how to go about accessing HE for many refugees (Morrice, 2011). His discussion about accessing funding illuminates the power of hearsay that circulates in lieu of definite knowledge. This is similar to the privileging of 'hot knowledge' (Ball and Vincent, 1998; Bovill, 2012), information from friends and family or other trusted contacts, by working class students when making decisions about applying for courses, rather than engage directly with institutional sources. There is a tension here for Amal in that while he may have fitted into the university and the MA course specifically because of a habitus marked by his ethnicity and refugee experience, it might be that this habitus also worked against him. A lack of recognition of his cultural and social capital within this diaspora network meant that Amal would have to find another way into higher education.

Despite this point of continued uncertainty about how he would continue with higher education in the UK, Amal began to accrue certain forms of transnational cultural capital that could support his plans for a return to

Kurdistan. Kurdish diaspora became a keystone of his future plans in a different way when he decided that he would try to establish a small teaching academy with colleagues overseas:

...two of our friends one in Switzerland and another one in Sweden one of them is busy with his Masters in Philosophy and the other one is thinking about doing another MA in Literature and Philosophy... and there are another three or four people in Kurdistan as well. We are not one hundred percent sure how it will be, we have to plan for something, but when it comes to reality it is something really different... So trying to translate the original text in philosophy and then we write beside that, and maybe teach. Just like a small philosophy school.

Surprisingly perhaps, Amal had not met all of these people in person, but he had established important relationships:

I know them through my cousin. We haven't seen each other physically but mentally [we have] seen each other, and we are very close so it does make sense. So we have never met before [but] we have just met through talk and conversation and exchanging ideas.

Through the use of email and Skype, Amal developed a cyber- social network from which relationships have grown to form the basis for his future plans. He also maintained contact with academic friends in Wales, thus linking his academic past with his hopes for the future. Although his Masters plans were at a point of stasis, this social network was a dynamic transnational 'third-space' (Bhabha, 1994), and a form of 'borderless citizenship' (Ong, 2006). Within this network Amal could begin to activate some of the social and cultural capital he had accrued from being at university in the UK, as well as develop further capitals relevant to living in Kurdistan. Brooks and Waters (2009) examine the 'second chance' choices of British students who take up degrees in elite universities overseas following failure to gain access to Oxbridge. The authors highlight the Bourdieusian 'networks of privilege' that these students are already located in, in which their global mobility is facilitated by family wealth and access to relevant social contacts. Drawing on this framing of second chances, it seems that Amal, while not in an elite social position, began to use his 'second chance' of having studied at a British

university to accrue further social and cultural capital. In this way he was engaging in processes of capital exchange to transform his circumstances of forced migration into a means to realise future transnational mobility. Part of this appeared to involve the re-negotiation of his identity within Kurdish diaspora. As such he was not only re-making a self-identity, but in doing so he was actively drawing on the cultural and social capital of his learner identity formed within UK higher education to make new social connections.

The influence of this new social network was then visible in his decision to apply for a Masters in TESOL at a university in South East England. Although his original plan had been to study for an MPhil in Philosophy, he decided to opt against taking an MA in Philosophy at South East in order to pursue the TESOL course and learn about teaching:

I'm interested in teaching because it involves meeting people and in that way I can express both language and my philosophy as well....you can talk about philosophy through everything, I believe....my ultimate aim is going back to stay in Kurdistan, and teach...and establish an organisation in Kurdistan with friends.

Meeting with an admissions tutor for the course at South East also brought to light previously undiagnosed dyslexia:

I said I had finished my undergraduate and had been speaking English for five or six years, and she said I make some very simple mistakes in relation to grammar and writing. And she suggested I go for a test because I maybe have dyslexia. So I went and I've been told I have dyslexia, and I really have a problem with writing and things like this. For a long time I thought I had some problems...but I always thought "no I am clever enough", maybe I must work harder.

By the time the dyslexia was confirmed, Amal had been studying in the UK for seven years, acquired a number of qualifications, and had been a student at two universities, in the Midlands and in Wales. He suggested that there was no institutional space at the university in Wales in which he could discuss his concerns, although at that time he had been unaware of the condition of dyslexia, stating that it was not recognised as a learning disability in Kurdistan. Instead, he blamed himself for not working hard enough. He explained about going to student services at the university in Wales:

I went there [student services] sometimes and somehow I mention that I might have some sort of problem, and I have been told there that it was because English is not my first language. Usually people think I have a problem with the language, so they just ignore it. It's a shame because I'm sure if I had extra help it would have made a difference. It's the way she said it, it made me feel I shouldn't even mention such a thing.

This shows a point of significant disjuncture between local university practices and the internationalisation of higher education. In this case, Amal had been identified as international student who had problems with English. Perhaps if he had been an 'official' international student receiving academic language support, his dyslexia might have been noticed earlier. As it was, because he was not aware of the concept of dyslexia, he could not express his concerns. That Amal completed his BA before a diagnosis was made is testament to his commitment to achieving a degree, but also illuminates the ongoing tension between habitus and the field of higher education that he managed for an extended period of time. That he felt he was wrong to discuss his concerns suggests that rather than 'belonging' in the university, he may have felt that his presence was being tolerated. This situation exemplifies the call by Madge *et al* (2009) for institutions to be vigilant of 'the struggle that lies behind having a voice and claiming agency as an international student' (p.43). More, it highlights the importance of recognising the cultural capital that refugee students bring with them into higher education. In this way institutional learning support mechanisms can be suitably developed to facilitate, rather than complicate, the academic success of refugee students.

## **Lul**

Lul's account of her professional work placement conveyed a sense of critical ambivalence towards the 'self work' that she undertook in relation to a 'refugee' identity. In the later interviews, Lul made extended references to identity, coinciding with the period that she was out on placement, and deeply involved in developing a professional identity within the field of Social

Work. She spoke about this professional identity first, describing her work with a client when she struggled to understand his circumstances, feeling that her personal values were in opposition to his. Discussing the difficulties of finding a way to relate to him, she ultimately thought that she had managed to do so by foregrounding a 'professional identity':

...in that case it wasn't because I was using my Somali identity, or my self-identity which was against that [his opinion], it was my professional identity.

Her professional identity however involved recognising and adapting to the ways in which since coming to the UK, external perceptions of her identity had changed by default.

Some people might say asylum seeker or refugee or black. I don't deny that. Before I didn't have all these identities, I had my name and my clan, but I am now here, and it is just Somali. Some people will see my clan, but here people will see you as a black person, so that's why when I was back home I never saw myself as a black person. Because everybody was black, I didn't see the colours. But when I came here I became a black person. I was always a black person but didn't see myself as one. People ask me if I am Muslim but nobody ever asked me if I was Muslim before because most people were Muslim. I never saw myself as black. I didn't think about being Muslim. I knew I was, but I never reflected like that. But now you are put in a pigeon hole, you are black, you are Muslim, so you are categorised.

Becoming aware of being categorised by race and faith (Hage, 2000), her approach towards understanding 'what' defined her shifted to adapt to this change in her circumstances. In doing so, Lul developed an approach towards identity marked by ambivalence towards how she was now seen by others, and how such identifiers were neither accurate nor inaccurate. For Lul, a requirement of living in the UK is to accept being recognised from the perspective of the dominant gaze of 'here', that is, of a generalised UK society. The comparative sense of 'Other' seems to be implicit when she contrasted this with how she self-identified when in Somalia. Lul's discussion suggests extensive reflexive work in order to respond to and manage the way in which she has been identified in UK society. Her response to this categorisation was to try to carry her identities lightly:

So when I came here I had a new label, which was an asylum seeker which I never had before. Then I get my refugee status and I get a label as a refugee. Then I do this course and I am a social work student and another new identity... So that's why I say identity is like food- it is something you can make and remake and always a plate. So I don't know what my future identity will be, but so far I've had so many.

With this metaphor, Lul succinctly indicated how forced migration has impacted on her understanding of self, that identity for her now was something to strategically choose, and remake, but also something to be approached with ambivalence, when it was 'given' by external sources. This could be seen in her discussion of how she saw her immigration history shape the practice of her co-workers, and how she might also be expected to engage in the performativity of 'refugeeness' (Khosravi, 2010) in her own practice:

When I was on placement I felt like some professional people were asking me, if they get an asylum seeker, they were asking me questions. Sometimes that used to annoy me, are they asking me because I have been in this situation? This person is different. Sometimes it was good that I was being consulted with, but sometimes I felt like, *why me?* You are there to find out how you can help this person, talk to the person, use the resources available, not me. It was a good and a negative experience.

Lul approached the re-making of her identity by others in a way that seems to be reminiscent of Bauman's (2001) suggestion that within liquid modernity it is necessary to remain alert to the choice of identities. Lul overtly named the range of identities that she had previously held, and those acquired in the UK, revealing the default nature of their acquisition from her life circumstances. In this way, one of the ways in which the 'codes of distinction' (Bourdieu, 1984) work within national fields (both when she was in Somalia, and now in England) is illuminated. She then made a space for herself to look critically at the way in which identity was part of her 'doing' integration in the UK, which at this point was related to becoming part of a team within her chosen field of employment. From this position of hybridity (Bhabha, 1994), Lul directed her own gaze back towards the ways in which national field was perpetuating and defining the boundaries of refugee/ asylum seeker difference. Her ambition

to succeed academically and professionally in the UK included recognition of the 'rules of the game' but she showed an awareness of the limitations of these rules, that at some point may affect her ability to successfully take up the most useful of all her possible identities (Bauman, 2001). In doing so, it seems that such rules were not being accepted without question.

## **Aro**

During the academic year 2010-11, Aro was completing the final year of a part-time MA in Intercultural Communication. He had gone into his postgraduate degree directly after graduating from his BA at the same university. Although he spoke positively about the social and academic 'integration' he had achieved by the end of his undergraduate degree, in his final interview his perspective shifted to suggest a growing sense of disillusion with how he could further integrate into UK society.

Following a visit to Iraq in 2008, he decided that he would continue with postgraduate studies. He had observed socio-political change in Iraq, but also saw potential for more change:

So those things we fought for before, they get much better now. And there was also work still needing to be done... there was say, academic work, or the improvement on education and things like that for higher education. So then I was just thinking, I was observing what we need. I actually I promised myself when I go back to the UK, I do more studying.

Aro has re-positioned himself and re-located his subjectivity in Iraq. He presented a new point of identification, of being an active member of a post-war nation, involved in creating a new socio-political infrastructure. This was a shift towards presenting himself as a fully agentic subject who would be part of creating new field practices and dominant capitals. This contrasts starkly to his previous description of being considered as 'a virus', a deficit subjectivity related to the low cultural capital of his ethnicity, gender and

political status within the UK national field. Beck (2000) describes transnational social spaces as 'the category of the ambivalent, the mobile, the volatile, the Here-and There' (p.25). In looking to this new ambition, Aro then found that he was managing the 'here' and the 'there'. His engagement with higher education changed then, making university a space in which he negotiated the UK national field, but also, simultaneously, a space in which he prepared for a potential return to a changed national field in Iraq.

He enrolled on the MA in Intercultural Communication, studying part-time so that he could also work to support himself, his wife and son. At this point he was employed as a Kurdish language translator for the city council and was able to capitalise on his transnational cultural capital in conjunction with his graduate status to take up a well paid job. He explained why he chose that MA, and what potential he saw it had for him, yet quickly moved on to show his sense of unease about his decision:

When I first heard and saw the name, it was really striking, you know? Intercultural Communication, it was this area I was hoping to do, and also my plan was, we live in Britain, we live in such multi-cultural societies, the notion of intercultural communication was at that time attractive. So I think if I do this one it would be really useful if I don't go back to Iraq...but once I have started and the situation in the UK, generally in Europe, in terms of the recession [pause] now I am not really, as before, I am not really keen to work here with this Masters. Because the thing is, in this sort of environment we've got right now, I don't know what happens next. I think there is not any room for jobs with this certificate, especially for someone like me, nearly thirty nine years old. So I am not disappointed and I am not pessimistic, but I mean that's how I am thinking.

Aro's evaluation of the field of employment was perhaps not pessimistic, but it may have been realistic. Through this he re-identified with a discourse of deficit, indicating that his age as a problem, being an older graduate entering the British field of employment as an economic recession was beginning to take effect. His account also reinforces the significance of time and timing in relation to refugee integration, when refugees are already adults on arrival in the UK. Since arrival in England in 2003, Aro had been constantly engaged in education, achieving qualifications for entry to HE before then starting degree



studies. Despite Aro having taken the most direct route through higher education available for him, he found that the national field boundaries were shifting, and had to re-evaluate his position within the national field, and that field of employment. Moreover, his perspective on his position within the UK field of employment was reinforced by the discussions he had with his friends. Like some of the students in the research by Bovill (2012), Aro did not enter originally higher education with a clear plan for upward social mobility, and his decision to continue with postgraduate study was informed by loose notions of how the MA might be useful for his life either in the UK or Iraq. However, in discussing his postgraduate studies within his social network he was constantly challenged as to why he made the effort to study:

My friends they are all educated in my country, and educated in this country, they have two or three degrees. So for example, I know of PhD graduates in Physics, PhD in Politics, PhD in Natural Science, PhD in Geography, PhD in Philosophy...they are all taxi drivers in this country, and some of others, three of them are interpreters like me. I know more than five, maybe eight people, who did Masters in a variety of subjects. They all or most of them are interpreters, or they have their own business, separate businesses which are a hundred percent opposite to what they studied, I mean really unrelated areas. That's the reality. So for my son, for example, that is discouragement for people going further. Till now, from the day I started my undergraduate until now, which is almost about seven years, so six years. From this time till now, six, seven years, I've been stopped and asked *"why do you bloody study? You'll never get the job you want."*

With this pressure, and also real-life examples of highly educated refugees who were not capitalising on their advanced levels of education, Aro could not see much chance of successfully converting the cultural capital of the MA into economic capital within the changing UK national field. 'I am not really keen to work here with this Masters', suggests further disjuncture between his habitus and both the fields of higher education and the UK national field. Beginning to discard thoughts about working in the UK, he appeared to be re-focussing his plans, and thinking about how he might find more opportunities in Iraq. Importantly, he was concerned for the effect on his son of living within a social context where refugees were visibly not benefitting from

higher education in terms of upward social mobility, nor in fulfilling their academic aspirations. For Aro, participation in HE had also been marked by the self-positioning of academic refugees as Others within the national field, unable to transfer their high level qualifications into meaningful and/or well remunerated employment. This resonated with his contribution some months earlier to the online forum. In the forum he had highlighted his anger of feeling that asylum seekers and refugees were not considered as having potential to be academically successful (Appendix E). Rather, he saw that stereotyping of refugee capacity for social mobility was inherent in British social, political and institutional structures. His discussion then in our later interview suggests how he saw this stereotype infiltrating the dispositions of the highly qualified refugees he knew. Again, this highlights the importance of recognising the forms of cultural and social capital refugees might bring with them into higher education, and how these interplay with their experiences of academic culture.

Reaching that point in his education, and in his life in the UK, suggests a period of doubled hysteresis (Bourdieu, 1999). His disposition towards valuing higher education, and the solace he found in academic work while living through periods of difficulty in his life, has become a source of conflict and tension. In his work to gain both his BA and MA, his aspirations had been repeatedly challenged by friends and other refugees, with his participation in HE becoming a point of disconnection and dis-identification between Aro and his diaspora social network (Mavroudi, 2007). Concurrently, HE was again becoming a site in which he questioned, through the lenses of nationality and age, how he would be perceived, this time as an older graduate in the UK field of employment. Following nearly five years of study at university Aro appeared to be extremely uncertain about the value of his learner identity, and clearly saw his student identity as one that was marked by difference, producing further anxieties. At this point in Aro's life then, it seems difficult to consider higher education as a stable 'means' or a 'marker' (Ager and Strang, 2008) of refugee integration.

## Chapter summary

This chapter has examined the place of university within the lives of three refugees with permanent right to live in Britain. All three refugees have found their cultural and social capital to be subject to the 'codes of distinction' (Bourdieu, 1977) that stratify the field of higher education, and are embedded in academic culture. This could be seen to complicate how Aro and Lul understood their integration to the UK national field, and how Amal proceeded with his plans for a return to Kurdistan.

For Lul, further integration into UK society was clearly part of her long term plan to stay permanently in the country. Although the cultural capital of a degree could give Lul the means to access the field of social work, and potentially facilitate her further integration into the UK through graduate employment, understanding HE as a 'marker' of integration (Ager and Strang, 2008) is less clear. At this point in her life, being in higher education had also reinforced a sense of deficit that impacted on the formation of her emergent professional identity. Engaging in degree studies at that particular university produced a tension between her 'having ambition' and a lack of recognition by the university of her refugee background in relation to her linguistic capital. This disjuncture was not confined to the field of higher education however, as this marking of difference could be seen to transfer into her emergent professional identity, shaping the way in which she developed her social work practice and professional relationships.

The role of university within Aro's 'integration project' shifted as time passed and his motivations for studying changed. Indeed, his aspirations for postgraduate study were related to new thoughts about a return to Iraq. Within the UK, he had been able to capitalise on his graduate status and his cultural capital of Kurdish language to acquire well paid work as a translator. However he also highlighted the importance of finding employment related to his degree, and the impact on him of knowing many highly qualified refugees to be under-employed. In light of this and the change in the UK economy, he

reassessed the combined value of his embodied cultural capital, as he defined by ethnicity and age, and his institutional cultural capital of the MA in Intercultural Communication. This appeared to produce further psychic displacement, as becoming aware of the limits on his chances for attaining upward social mobility and meaningful employment in Britain reinforced the impetus to leave the UK, rather than to remain.

In contrast to Lul and Aro, Amal's decisions to engage in higher education were clearly connected to his plans to return to Kurdistan. His discussions highlighted that the aim to return may be a primary motivation for refugees to participate in higher education, with settlement in the UK a secondary, albeit potentially necessary, consideration. In this way, like Amal, refugees might enter the field of British higher education while also trying to balance the requirements for taking up positions in other transnational fields. Amal's negotiation of different fields, and their capitals and timeframes, suggested that this type of balancing act lay beneath his decision to leave Wales and try to study elsewhere. In this way his account raised questions to the extent that higher education is able to be understood as a reliable 'means' to refugee integration through social mobility in the UK. As seen in Amal's account, and latterly also in Aro's case, degree choice might be based on the capital value systems of more than one field of employment or national field, rather focussed only on the UK field alone. While this may not be significant if the value of the degree is strong in the UK as well as overseas, conversely it might be detrimental to that refugee should they be required to remain and seek employment in Britain.

The accounts from Lul, Aro and Amal present some of the field negotiations undertaken by refugees who were first-time higher education students. This chapter has highlighted how all three engaged in university studies to manage the condition and category of displacement (Bakewell, 2011) within their lives in one form or another, but thus far the benefits to them from this strategy had been limited. Chapter ten discusses this further in connection to the

conclusions drawn in chapter eight, looking to the wider significance of this analysis in understanding refugee participation in British higher education.

# Chapter Ten: Discussion and conclusions

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## **Introduction**

This study sought to explore the university experiences of first generation refugees studying in British universities in order to understand the place of higher education within the lives of forced migrants. It has presented the accounts from five individuals of their participation in HE, identifying the aspirations they had for university and seeking to examine these in relation to their plans for life after seeking asylum. The literature on refugee participation in HE is growing, but is still a relatively small part of the wider bodies of literature in the fields of educational and refugee research. As yet there is much to be understood about the how individual lives are impacted upon by the ways in which the British asylum system and higher education intersect.

This discussion and conclusion chapter is structured in two connected but discrete sections. As discussed in chapter three, I make space in the first part of this chapter to reflect on the analyses made in chapters eight and nine, and consider the limitations of the research. This is a re- engagement with the epistemological and ethical perspectives I hold, and addresses the choices I made in representing participants' lives and making knowledge claims from these representations. The second part of the chapter discusses what the research has found, the original contribution to knowledge it makes, and the implications for policy and for future research.

## **Part one: reviewing analyses and representations**

This first part of the chapter is a response to the ethical and epistemological questions raised in chapter two. By locating this discussion at the beginning of the final thesis chapter, I offer it as a space between my analyses in chapters eight and nine and the formal discussion of the knowledge claims I make. This is an intentional break so that some of my decision-making and biases are brought forward, interrupting my 'ventriloquism' (Fine, 1992) and indicate some of the unsettling and difficult parts of the research that would otherwise be rendered invisible. The representations that are made in chapters eight and nine are partial, and the analyses made are tentative. Even though these accounts of university participation could never recapture lives as they were lived (Sikes, 2010), this thesis has emphasised the liminal positions in wider society and higher education that these refugees have negotiated and after researching a socially under-represented population, it seems important to discuss what is absent and not included in my representations.

Following work by Mazzei (2009), I respond to these questions to interrogate my analytical work:

Where am I in these accounts? When/did I 'push' a refugee subjectivity?

What interpretations do I favour? Why? What do I do about that if/when I notice it?

In selecting participant accounts, and subsequently small parts of these accounts for inclusion in the thesis I have taken voices and re-routed them through my academic 'voice' (Fine, 1998). The most visible re-routing is in my decision to relate the participants' accounts to their immigration statuses. In doing so, I aimed to draw attention to the apparent significance of immigration status in participant decision-making and feelings about their university studies, but also show that within these im/permanent forms of leave to remain in the UK, there were different in/stabilities within participant

lives. The people who spoke to me were clearly not defined by their immigration status, and I wanted to represent the ambivalences towards status and 'refugee' identity that I heard in these voices. Sikes (2010) argues that although researchers need to take responsibility for the interpretations they offer as knowledge, it is impossible to write if there are no stories shared in the first place. I connect this observation to the question I ask myself about 'pushing' refugee subjectivities, and 'favouring' particular interpretations. I give an example of this below.

In the case of working with the account from one participant (who is included in this thesis) I saw that an early draft of my analysis clearly represented him as a 'victim'. I drew primarily on extracts from his account that focussed only on moments of sadness, disillusion or anger. I did so to the exclusion of examining the contexts in which he actively questioned the authority of those in powerful social positions, or considering how he way in which he framed his aspirations for higher education. Returning to identity theory from Bhabha (1994) helped me to reassess how I interpreted his identifications, and the discursive boundaries in which these were made. It took a number of re-readings of transcripts and re-listenings to our interviews before I could find a way to get through this first interpretation. Working with the account from this person highlighted to me the always present risk of 'Othering' by default, when a desire to 'reveal' social injustice is counterproductive, and reifies victimhood.

It is also important to talk about the voices that were overwhelming and confrontational, that pushed the limits of my decision-making about research ethics and representation. A limitation of the thesis is that it does not include contributions from T-Jay and Vincent. In the overview of research participants in chapter three I explain how Vincent overtly withdrew participation following our first interview and T-Jay tacitly did so after our second interview. I attempt here to examine the challenges of responding to these voices in a productive way.



In the one interview I had with Vincent I found myself becoming frustrated at his refusal to 'speak to' his own experiences of higher education, preferring instead to take up a position of advocacy on behalf of the refugee 'community' on the subject of access to higher education. When I tried to bring the conversation back to his own experience, he would resist, continuing to talk on wider terms. Perhaps if we had met again he would have spoken more about his own experiences, but I see now that this first interview may have been his way of evaluating the research, and me as a researcher, before going further. I could not work out what to do with this single interview. On one hand, I had very little detail of what his personal experiences of university had been. On the other, as I have come to see, in taking on the position of advocate he critiqued the wider field of higher education. Why did I not recognise his position? Perhaps it was because I could not 'find' a story to be retold within his words. He spoke about the negative media representations of refugees, and the difficulty of accessing relevant information on access and funding for higher education, making the observation that:

Because of the media, communities, society doesn't understand refugees. On the university website it's still the same problem, you don't find anything about refugees and asylum seekers. They can talk about all the labels: international students, gay and lesbian students, they can talk about everyone's got a right, they can talk about disability, but they won't talk about refugees and asylum seekers on their website. You have information on international students but we don't have information on refugees.

I include this extract as I take this observation forward as a policy recommendation, and I do not wish to claim it as my own. Making the decision to represent what was shared in the interviews through the accounts from individual people directed my focus in such a way that meant I could not see how to work with Vincent's contribution. This highlights a limitation of re-telling the 'I' stories in a way that suggests completeness, when there are valuable contributions made that do not fit this neat format.

More, the interview with Vincent particularly illustrates the tensions around my status as an 'outsider' in this research. I suggest above my thoughts as to why Vincent chose to speak to a generalised 'refugee' experience of HE, rather than give detail about his own life, and that not only might he have been checking my 'worth' as a researcher, but also my motivation as a non-refugee for researching refugee experiences. It could be argued that if I too had personal experience of seeking asylum, there might have been stronger immediate rapport between us, or I might have approached the topic in a more suitable way, asking more pertinent questions.

However, thinking along this fixed binary of insider-outsider positionality can bring its own limitations to research. Lather (2008) highlights the struggle of neither demonising nor angelising the lives of people she has researched and written about, and in doing so reminds us to be vigilant of how we think about ourselves in relation to 'Others'. In chapter eight, Jordan indicates that once he was granted leave to remain, he felt alienated from other asylum seekers and their social spaces, he had transgressed a fragile boundary. This, Vincent's interview, and the accounts from other participants in the research show how problematic it is to think about a shared 'refugee' positionality. A strength of regularly re-assessing my 'outsider' status was that I was thinking critically about what 'insider' status might also mean, and what value it might have for the research. In this way it contributed significantly to my work towards not re-presenting an essentialised refugee experience.

The decision not to include the contribution made by T-Jay to this research was based on a decision that at the time felt like the right thing to do, and continues to be so, but continues to make me think hard about the power of being 'the researcher', and in this case, what it means to re-present the participants in this research. When T-Jay tacitly left the research, in the first instance I decided that I would continue to work with the content of the two interviews he had. Otherwise, I thought, what had been the point of him speaking with me? Would it undermine the purpose of the research to engage with otherwise under-represented members of society? Over the

process of transcribing the second interview, re-listening to the point when he became quite distressed, and we stopped the interview, I began to reconsider. As I transcribed, it began to feel not right, not permissible, to represent him. In the fifteen minutes or so before we stopped the interview his voice was audibly becoming less confident in tone as he spoke. I needed to think further about the impact of the interview on him.

Although the Invitation to Research (Appendix A) clearly states that if participants stop being involved in the research their contributions might still be used, it felt that to do so would be to disrespect his decision to leave and what may have caused him to do so. Farrugia (2013) discusses a concern that when he interviewed young people about their experience of homelessness, he was effectively enacting symbolic violence, reproducing the suffering and stigma associated with the dominant discourses used to describe homelessness in Australian society. He suggests that interviews are sites of recognition that hold the potential for symbolic violence, where interviewees might interpret questions as 'morally loaded judgements' on their lives and experiences (p. 117). T-Jay was the only participant who visibly became distressed during an interview, and following this he left the research. While there may be a range of other possible reasons why he became distressed at that point, in listening to the recording again, I hear the possibility of symbolic violence, of a re-location of his voice to a position that he did not want to speak from. This decision was not taken lightly, and it sits on the boundaries of ethics, of silencing and voice, of Othering and empathy (Lather, 2009).

### **Limitations of the research**

The section above discusses a key limitation of the research in relation to the selection and representation of participant accounts, as well as giving my rationale for presenting the accounts in chapter eight and nine connected to the immigration status of the participants. The limitations of engaging in participatory research are discussed fully in chapter three, so I do not return to these here, other than to acknowledge the need to remain aware of the

context and purpose for seeking to research in this way. I discuss some further limitations of the research now.

I chose to focus on temporary and permanent forms of leave to remain as a means to frame my analyses around displacement and identity. I could have explored the affective dimension of higher education participation, drawing on the concept of emotional capital (Reay, 2000) or geographies of emotion (Conradson and McKay, 2007). This may have helped to develop an understanding of the impact of emotional ties, and exchange of emotional resources within national and transnational field negotiations and identity re/formations.

In relation to my epistemological perspective discussed in chapter two, there was no intention to produce an analysis about 'the' refugee experience. However, the small number of participants in the research clearly limited the types of observations that could be made. A greater number of participants may have provided scope to make comparative observations about the different types of leave to remain that refugee students have when they participate in university, such as the temporary statuses, and the duration of that status. There may have been a different female to male ratio of participants, rather than what I suspect was a circumstantial imbalance in this research. In this study, participation levels were low, and even before the expected 'dropping out' of some participants, it was difficult to reach a point of having ten participants to start with. In part this was probably due to my need to revise the approach taken to identifying and contacting participants after my original plan had to be altered, and I did not have an immediate connection or 'way in' to identifying students. It would be useful to explore the experiences of refugee students within different types of British university, in the way Reay *et al* (2010) explored the experiences of working class students, but to be able to do so would require a more certain means of identifying and contacting refugee students in the first instance. This is considered further in the discussion of implications for policy that is found in part two of this chapter.

## **Part two: discussion and implications of the research**

This second part of the chapter returns to the research questions and discusses what has been found by the research, and what this offers to knowledge about refugees in higher education. Following this, I present implications for policy and future research.

The principal aim of this research was identified as follows:

**To explore the experiences of asylum seeker and refugee students in UK higher education.**

It included the following component questions:

- 1. What were participant experiences of UK higher education?**
- 2. How, if at all, did participants relate their HE experiences to that of their lived experience of asylum in the UK?**

In order to answer these questions, I examined participant accounts of their HE studies within a theoretical framework that explored the relational dimension of these processes of participation, and which also problematised what 'being' refugee involved. Both these questions were addressed in chapters eight and nine, drawing on the accounts of refugees with both permanent and temporary forms of leave to remain in the UK. From this, the thesis has offered an interpretation of the ways in which immigration status interplays with habitus, agency and social structures as refugees engage in university studies. For David and Jordan, the extended impermanence of their 'temporary' statuses clearly framed their accounts of access and participation in higher education. Chapter eight concluded that unlike the migrants in Erel's (2010) research, neither David nor Jordan were able to transform the rules of the (education) game by activating otherwise devalued forms of cultural capital. However, they did push the limits of time and timing related to their impermanent forms of leave in order to change the pace at which they lived their lives. Meanwhile, the connections made by Amal, Lul, and Aro between

lived experience of asylum and HE participation were less explicitly related to immigration status. Chapter nine pointed out the different motivating factors that these refugees identified for their participation in HE which informed their decision-making about and during their degree studies. The chapter concluded that engaging in higher education as a means to manage feelings of displacement was not entirely successful, as engagement in the field of higher education produced further disjunctures of habitus, and uncertainties within their individual lives. The chapter now returns to examine the research questions in order to consider the significance of these individual experiences to understanding the intersection between higher education in the UK and forced migration.

Participants spoke less than I expected about the day-to-day practicalities of being a student, but their accounts support and extend a number of the observations made by the existing literature on refugee students. These were experiences of 'doing university' in relation to institutional and academic practices. Both Amal and Lul's accounts illuminated ways in which language was a point of symbolic violence as they undertook their studies. In Lul's case this confirms the lack of academic language support available to refugee students by universities due to their 'Home' status (Stevenson and Willot, 2010). For Amal, his dyslexia was explained to him as poor English fluency during his undergraduate studies. Amal was not aware of the concept of dyslexia, stating that it was not recognised in Kurdistan. This illuminates the challenge for refugee students to self-represent as agentic and knowledgeable subjects when difference in cultural knowledge is not acknowledged within institutional practices. Aro and Jordan's experiences support the literature that examines how mature and minority ethnic and international students are constructed as Other in relation to their younger and/or white, student peers (Read *et al*, 2003; Madge *et al*, 2009). Their accounts additionally highlighted the importance of teaching practices and the ethos of the classroom as integral to their sense of 'belonging' in higher education. Without collaborative pedagogical practices bringing students

together, Aro suggested that he may have continued to remain socially isolated within his student cohort. More, the ethnic diversity of the lecturers was crucial to his ongoing participation in providing an alternative means to recognise his ethnicity as valued within HE. While none of the four refugees spoke directly about a stigmatised 'refugee' identity, Jordan's account emphasised the lack of entitlement to be in public space that he associated with 'being' an asylum seeker, and how this transferred into his experience of being on campus. He did not share this asylum seeker identity while on campus, but that he did so within a small community-based classroom was significant in how he identified with/ against these different spaces of higher education.

Jordan and David's accounts of their experiences were those that most directly related HE experience to that of lived experience of asylum and this was discussed in chapter eight. Although both asylum seeker and DL statuses are nominally accepted within HE, David and Jordan's inability to acquire the economic capital to pay International fees effectively excluded them from continuing with their original plans. David's account highlighted the impact of the 'fractioning' of refugee status (Zetter, 2007), in making HE less available to him. His discussion of seeking advocacy support for the right to have Home student status revealed the importance of being in possession of nationally valuable cultural and social capital, but despite this, his case was subject to an arbitrary ruling by parliament. This revealed the limitations of immigration status, or rather the way in which immigration status devalued forms of transnational cultural or social capital that would otherwise have had value within the UK national field. David also found that he needed to reframe his purpose for attending university once he was unable to return to Zimbabwe by recognising the advantages of institutional cultural capital, and associated social capital, that a British degree would offer him within the UK and the wider global field of employment.

Jordan showed how he re-made his purpose for higher education, and did so in the marginal sites of community-based HE, given the unavailability of the

campus and degree studies in relation to his asylum seeker status. In Jordan's case, the hysteresis effect between the field of higher education and habitus was extreme, as was the subsequent evolution of his habitus in relation to field conditions. This was evidenced by his 'in and out' relationship with higher education over a period of two years, in which he both responded to, and resisted, the limitations and requirements of having asylum seeker then ILR status. It is suggested here that both men consciously adapted elements of habitus in order to strategically manoeuvre around the wider national field and that of higher education. In undertaking this adaptive work, both David and Jordan looked critically at the boundaries that were being set for them, and to a certain extent appeared to be able to manage their sense of psychic displacement from the hybrid identity positions they took up in and between the UK national field and that of higher education.

The students who already had permanent leave to remain in the UK did not make an explicit reference to immigration status and their university experiences. This is possibly because they faced neither the risk of removal nor the limitations of the International fee and funding regime. While Jordan and David referred directly to their status, the accounts from Lul, Aro and Amal explored the relationship between HE experience and that of asylum in a wider biographical frame. For example, Lul's degree choice appeared to be closely related to her sense-making of her position in the UK. In asserting her subjectivity in Britain as one of power and agency to act against injustices, Lul's experience of HE was set in the discourse of her ambition and expectations to be successful in education, and that of 'giving back' to society. Lul also identified an intention to remain in the UK, and of the five refugees, her account was that which most closely reproduced a government discourse of integration as social mobility (DCLG, 2012), and of respectability (Skeggs, 1997; Morrice, 2011). However in taking up a critical perspective on how identities were ascribed to her in the UK, she questioned the extent to which she was expected to respond to a 'refugee' identity as part of her professional practice.



In contrast to Lul's intention to settle in the UK, Amal's experience of university was underpinned by a plan to resettle in Kurdistan. He did not talk in detail about the period of his life in the UK prior to studying at university, therefore his account of lived experience of asylum in Britain was one that was fully intertwined with his intention to study, and in turn, that intention to study was key to his intended return. While Amal and Lul had clear ideas about where their futures were located, Aro's discussion of his university participation suggested less certainty, and this may be partially connected to his impetus for studying. Although this was related to an aspiration for employment, he identified a key motivation for taking up higher education as based in the personal reward of studying for intellectual development.

These accounts in part confirm the findings from Morrice (2011) who suggests that engaging in higher education as a strategy to accrue forms of capital with UK exchange value was one of mixed outcomes. This, Morrice argues, was in relation to the extent that individual habitus and reserves of pre-existing capitals were recognised as valuable within the higher education field. This thesis supports that observation, with chapters eight and nine discussing the limits of recognition of the cultural capital of these refugees within both the UK national field and that of higher education. All of the participants in this research encountered disruption and disjuncture between their individual habitus and the field of higher education. My research however questions the extent to which higher education might have been pursued as part of an overt strategy to attain a 'respectable' or positive identity. While the work from Morrice (2011) draws attention to a collective aim of a small group of refugees to regain a professional (graduate) status and the respect that accorded, the refugee students in my research did not appear to be engaged in the same kind of recuperative process. Instead, taking up higher education appeared to be more closely aligned to broader processes of coping with, or managing, displacement on both physical and psychic levels.

The risk of further (forced) displacement shaped the ways in which David and Jordan participated in higher education. Although Jordan saw having a

student identity as a means to legitimise his presence in public space, he also highlighted the limitations of such an identity, as he described his discussion with the police panel. Jordan's return to the community based HE classes was based on a need to find 'comfort' from the stress of waiting for a Home Office decision, and the disruption caused by his asylum seeker status to his previously strong learner identity. David, on the other hand, sought to accrue as much trans-nationally valuable cultural, social and economic capital as he could. His was a discourse of competitiveness rather than respectability, marked by the uncertainties of his temporary leave to remain.

Conversely, Amal sought to leave Britain as soon as possible, with his university participation framed by a desire for progression towards the return home. He negotiated transnational fields as he managed the physical and psychic displacements that being in the UK involved. This use of higher education as a means to return subsequently brought Amal to redefine his identification with Kurdish diaspora in Britain as well as developing new, productive identifications and diasporic connections. This was not the case for Aro, who appeared to experience a doubled hysteresis effect (Bourdieu, 1999) as he ultimately sought to balance his academic interests with a qualification that might also bring him social, cultural and economic capital rewards in both the UK and in Iraq.

In examining how these motivations and aspirations for higher education played out within the lives of these five people, this thesis highlights the diversity within refugee experience of the British higher education system. In an analysis that suggests that displacement management is privileged over social mobility in the UK, the research also illuminates some of the transnational commitments that inform the uptake of degree studies by forced migrants. The thesis makes a second original contribution to knowledge by exploring the significance of university participation for two people living with prolonged 'temporary' forms of leave- that of Asylum Seeker and Discretionary Leave. These extended statuses are landmarks on the contemporary British immigration landscape, in which people seeking

sanctuary are required to live out liminal existences on an ever-extending continuum of uncertainty. Therefore the knowledge claimed about the experiences of David and Jordan is offered as foundation for understanding the importance of getting in, then staying in higher education for adult refugees waiting for a Home Office decision.

## **Implications for policy**

This thesis did not set out with the aim to examine the experiences of a specific group within the wider refugee population, for example, selecting participants by gender or ethnicity, although it is notable that only one of final participant group was female. This in part could be connected to the ways in which participants were recruited to the study, but without datasets that record gender and asylum status, it is not possible to know the gender ratio in UK refugee student numbers and draw conclusions about how representative this study was of the male: female ratio of refugee students in the UK. Indeed, without asylum status being recorded as part of standard university monitoring processes, knowledge about refugee enrolment, participation and retention at both undergraduate and post graduate levels is unclear. Although people may not wish to disclose their asylum status publically, options for recording this status should be included in university Equalities monitoring processes, building upon statutory requirements of the Equalities Act (2010) to fulfil public sector equality duties towards students with regard to race, disability and gender. This would be an important step towards understanding more about the role of higher education in the social mobility of forced migrants living in the UK and the role of higher education in refugee integration, as well as supplying data to inform institutional policy and practice.

The findings of this research also reinforce the recommendations made in existing literature with respect to other HEI policies and practices regarding refugee and asylum seeker students. Work needs to be done for the field of

higher education to overtly recognise refugees and asylum seekers as legitimate members of the student population. In other words, this calls for a reframing of how 'internationalisation' in higher education is understood, in looking to the current experiences of refugee and asylum seeker students, and engaging with prospective students. It is clear from the experiences of participants in this research that both institutional practices and wider HE policies brought them particular challenges either at the point of accessing HE, and/or during their degree studies. Lul and Amal's accounts highlight the importance of recognising that students with a refugee background may have language support requirements. Jordan's account shows how asylum seeker status and institutional practices contributed to his leaving the Access course, and suggests that the rush to 'catch up' once he had been granted ILR informed his decision to take up an HND that he was uncertain about. In one way or another all five participants illuminate how university was not entirely a 'safe' space in which to identify as refugee or asylum seeker.

In line with calls made by Stevenson and Willot (2010) and Doyle and O'Toole (2013), it is suggested that HEIs should embed recognition of students with humanitarian statuses on an institution-wide basis, including a commitment to recognition of these students within strategic and operational policies. As well as ensuring there are trained employees within the institution who can give accurate information, advice and guidance to prospective and current students, marketing materials should also acknowledge this category of students. University web pages on student fees and funding could make an additional section supplying detailed and accurate information on the entitlements for students with different forms of humanitarian status. While some universities do make reference to these entitlements within International student information, this is neither common practice, nor does placing this information under 'International' make it clearly accessible to prospective refugee/ asylum seeker students. Making such changes would communicate externally that refugee students, and the cultural capital they

bring, are welcomed, rather than maintaining the status quo of these students neither being fully excluded nor fully accepted.

This is particularly relevant to prospective students with short term 'other' forms of leave to remain such as Discretionary Leave or Humanitarian Protection, as these students are limited by three year residency requirements before eligibility for Home student fees and funding. In England this goes further, that since 2012 those with DL status are no longer eligible for Home fees. Moreover, the UK Border Agency (2012) has ruled that for all people granted this status after July 2012 eligibility for settlement will only occur after a minimum of ten years (120 months) rather than the previous minimum of six years, the potential wait for people with this status to access higher education is now one that may last a decade. It has also been recommended that DL is now granted only on maximum of thirty months at a time (UKBA, 2012). This means that for those people granted DL, a period of four consecutive applications would need to be successfully made before permanent leave to remain might be given, and access to Home fees become a possibility. This change in circumstances for those with DL indicates that it is increasingly likely that there will be more prospective students like David who wish to proceed with HE, but are living through extended periods of uncertainty over status renewal.

Even for refugees in Wales and Scotland, where DL remains eligible for Home fees status, the renewal period of thirty months makes studying for an undergraduate degree virtually impossible without risk of non-completion, particularly in Scotland where four year undergraduate degrees are standard. In this study, David was able to find an *ad hoc* solution to the problems of residency requirements, and the time limits of his first DL visa gave him sufficient leeway in which to undertake a three year degree. In light of this increasing extension to 'temporary' statuses, the recommendation by Elwyn *et al* (2012) is reiterated here, that students with such statuses be entitled to finish their degrees should a re-application for further leave be rejected over the course of their studies. Furthermore, it is suggested that residency

requirements be removed entirely for people with any form of humanitarian leave to remain, and that HEIs consider how to support long-term asylum seekers' participation in degrees.

It is also recommended that the UK government re-align its integration strategies to those of the Scottish and Welsh governments, by taking a 'day of arrival' approach to integration. Despite the limitations of the Scottish and Welsh government policies related to student fees and funding as discussed in chapter five, both governments recognise the legitimacy of refugees and asylum seekers as prospective higher education students. This example should be followed by the UK government in integration policy, with explicit strategies for enabling access and participation of refugees and asylum seekers in higher levels of education. At present, the deficit discourses that surround refugees and asylum seekers are compounded by the intersection of the 'politics of restriction' of the UK government (Gibney, 2011) with the field of higher education.

## **Future research directions**

This thesis has focussed on understanding experience of higher education as part of refugee strategies to manage different forms of displacement (Bakewell, 2011), and the relationship of this to understanding higher education as part of social and cultural integration. The analysis has made tentative suggestions about the ways in which refugees could be seen to be managing asynchronous field timeframes as part of this displacement work, in relation to the field of higher education, the national UK field and those of overseas national fields. This could be developed into a theoretical approach that explores time and timing within the cultural and social fields that constitute national fields, and the accrual and activation of different forms of capital within and across these fields. Drawing on the observation by Brooks and Waters (2011) that attention should be given to the relationship between 'student sending' and 'student receiving' locations, it is possible to reframe

the UK higher education system as 'student receiving' in relation to asylum seeker and refugee students, and students' 'home' countries as 'student sending'. Amal's account, and, in the latter stages, Aro's account of engagement in HE suggest that there would be scope to develop this idea in relation to refugee students. Exploring this in relation to immigration status, and the duration of that status as held by individual students, could offer a different perspective on understanding refugee participation in UK higher education.

Although the uncertainty of future immigration status has been taken into account to a limited extent in some of the research that examines refugee education (Stevenson and Willot, 2007; Morrice, 2011), there is still much to be explored about impact of temporary statuses on refugee HE participation. The study by Stevenson and Willot (2007) discusses the aspirations and access barriers to higher education for young asylum seekers or those with the temporary five year refugee status (with no reference to people with Discretionary Leave or Humanitarian Protection statuses). Only one student in the study by Morrice (2011) had the five year refugee status, while the others had Indefinite Leave to Remain. Although these authors and others (Elwyn *et al*, 2012; Doyle and O'Toole, 2013) rightly point out that short term status is likely to dissuade or prevent refugees from participation in HE, as it is either financially impossible, or appears too high risk, my research (chapter eight) reminds us that people with such statuses are participating in HE nonetheless. Despite the limitations of temporary statuses, there are individuals from the UK refugee population who are not waiting to engage in higher education. As government policy continues to move in a direction towards extending the duration of temporary status before permanent settlement is available, there is a clear need to further explore the impact of these temporary statuses as part of understanding more about refugee engagement in British universities, and the experiences and outcomes involved in that participation.

In connection to this, there is also potential to explore and develop the concept of habitus in relation to asylum seeker status, and to those refugees with different forms of impermanent leave to remain. One possible outcome of examining the impact of extended impermanence on habitus could be a contribution towards developing how indicators of integration are conceptualised. Relating this to the work by Ager and Strang (2008) it seems that exploration of extended impermanence would be likely to re-frame the domain of 'safety and stability'. Examining 'safety' and/or 'stability' would also locate this future research within the work that examines the civic mission, or public good, of universities. As suggested in the section on policy implications, there is space for the field of the higher education to overtly recognise asylum seekers and refugees as a legitimate part of the student population. An exploration of how safety and/or stability is imagined and experienced by refugee students would add to the debate on the relationship between higher education and human flourishing (Nixon, 2011), or rather, the role of British higher education in contributing to a global purpose of offering sanctuary, and durable solutions, in response to global humanitarian crises (UNHCR, 2012c).

## **Final observations**

Although there is still much to be learned about the participation of refugees in British higher education, this thesis has highlighted the significance of HE in the lives of five people, all first-time university students, as they sought to get on with life after seeking asylum in the UK. In doing so it has explored how higher education participation intersects with different forms of permission to live in the UK, illuminating how the field of higher education reproduces the exclusionary immigration policies of contemporary Britain. Temporary forms of immigration status have been reported as creating a barrier to refugee uptake of university studies. This observation is not disputed, but the thesis presents accounts from two men, both living with long term uncertainty about their 'temporary' statuses, detailing how they accessed and



participated in higher education. It also reveals the importance of ongoing transnational commitments and relationships in shaping the university participation of refugees with permanent leave to remain in the UK.

More widely this research adds to the growing calls for recognition of refugees by the field of higher education in a way that acknowledges the diverse aspirations, life experiences and forms of social and cultural capital they bring into academic culture. The accounts from Lul, Amal, David, Jordan and Aro illuminate how university was a key part of their individual strategies to manage both physical and psychic forms of displacement resulting from forced migration. However, as they moved in and out of different university spaces, the interplay of national field(s), university cultures and individual habitus produced different levels of opportunity for these students to pursue these strategies. In this way, the thesis highlights the heterogeneity of 'refugee student experience', and emphasises the importance of acknowledging this, and the forced migrants who come to Britain, as the field of higher education continues to evolve and widen its international remit.

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## Appendix A: Invitation to Research

### Dear Student:

My name is Louise Bowen. I am a university student, studying for a PhD in Education at the University of the West of England (UWE). I invite you to take part in a research project called Life, Learning and University. Before you decide to take part, or not, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. I have not gone through the asylum process myself, but one of the reasons for doing this research is that I think it is important that there is a wider understanding of how people seeking asylum are part of British society.

***Why have I been asked to participate?*** You have been asked to participate because you are either an asylum seeker or refugee in the UK, studying at a British university.

***What is the purpose of the research project?*** The project aims to research the experiences of asylum seeker and refugee students in higher education, in order to understand how university fits into the everyday lives of students who have gone through the asylum process in the UK.

***Do I have to take part?*** It is your choice to take part in this research, or not. There is no connection between this research and your current grades, assessments or future studies. If you decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you take part you can also stop being part of the research at any time without giving a reason. Although if you do stop, the research you have participated in could still be used in the final research document.

***What will happen if I choose to take part?*** Time and place: The research will run over the academic year 2010-2011 (October –June). As a group we can arrange a timetable to meet over the duration of the academic year (not including university holidays). I suggest that we could meet once a month, on campus, for 2-3 hours each time. It is OK if you are sometimes unable to come to a meeting, or only come for part of a meeting.

***Activities:*** I will ask you to focus on understanding how university and your everyday lives are connected. This means thinking of some questions you are interested in answering and deciding how you want to record your ideas. For example, by taking photos or keeping a diary for a while. Sometimes research might be done in the group, and at other times, research might be done individually. In group meetings we will be able to discuss each other's ideas and decide what do next. We will discuss this research method when we meet as a group, but please ask me if you wish more information before we begin.

***What are the possible disadvantages?*** You are asked to come to group meetings regularly and to be active in researching your experience of higher education and

how it is part of your everyday life. It is not intended to be “hard work”, but it will take up some of your time.

***What are the possible advantages?*** I think this is an opportunity to share ideas, to hear different stories about how education is part of our lives and to think about what university means to us. We will also improve our group work skills, and learn about doing creative social research.

***How will the research data be stored?*** Group meetings will be audio recorded and these recordings, along with any other data (writing or images) will be stored safely- at UWE and in my home- in locked drawers, or on a password protected computer.

***What will the research be used for?*** The research will form the basis for my PhD thesis as well as articles I might write for conference presentations or journals. In the group we can discuss other ways that might be good for sharing the research with other people who might be interested in it.

***Further information:*** Because I am co-ordinating this research I have some obligations that you should know about:

I am required to discuss the research with my supervisors at UWE. But I will **not** use your real name when talking about the research, so your identity will be protected.

If I believe that someone is at risk of harm then I must discuss this with my supervisors, and take guidance on what to do next. **Only** in this situation might your real name be used. This is unlikely to happen in this research project, but you do need to know about the possibility of this happening.

***I'm interested, what do I do now?*** Please contact me directly, or pass on a message with your details, so that I can contact you. We can talk and I will answer any questions you have about the research.

***Contact details***

***Email: [andrina.bowen@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:andrina.bowen@uwe.ac.uk)***

***Thankyou***

*Louise Bowen*

## **Appendix B: Research participation agreement**

### **Research participation agreement**

Dear Student:

This document is for you to sign if you wish to participate in the research project called “life, learning and university”. Please sign your name if you understand and agree with these statements:

1. I have attended the “invitation to research” meeting and read the invitation document. I understand the research purpose and methods.
2. I understand that this research is a separate activity from my university modules- it does not contribute to my academic grades.
3. What we discuss in the research group meetings is confidential. I understand that other group members may prefer that people outside the group do not know that they are participating in this research.
4. All group members have equal rights to speak and be listened to.
5. Discussions in group meetings will be audio recorded.
6. My identity will be protected in the final research documents.
7. I can choose to leave the research group at any time without giving an explanation for doing so.

Name:

Date:

**Appendix C: UWE Faculty Research Ethics Sub- Committee  
Application for ethics advice (abridged to include Section B  
only, as applicable).**

**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES**

**Faculty Research Ethics Sub-Committee**

**Request for ethics advice and/or approval**

**STEP 1:**

Please ensure that you have done the following:

- Read the Guidance Notes for Ethics Approval and Advice
- Discussed this application with colleagues/supervisor
- Attached your research proposal
- Secured CRB certificate if needed and attached a copy (see guidance)
- 

**STEP 2:**

Clarify whether you are seeking advice on the ethics dimension of your enquiry or whether you are seeking approval to proceed.

- Advice
- Approval

**STEP 3:**

Identify whether your enquiry falls within the remit of Department of Health Research Governance Regulations – specifically:

- The enquiry is to be conducted with people in their capacity as patients or staff of the National Health Service
- The enquiry is to be conducted on NHS premises
- The enquiry involves the harvesting of human tissues

If it does you should talk immediately to the Chair of the Faculty Research Ethics Sub-Committee who will advise you on the particular procedures you need to follow. You do not (yet) have to complete this form.

**STEP 4:**

Complete this form, Section A and/or Section B.

**FIRST, PLEASE GIVE US YOUR DETAILS**

Name: Andrina Louise Bowen

Staff/Student/Department:

PhD student- Education

Your contact details:

Andrina2.Bowen@live.uwe.ac.uk

Do you have a Project Director or a Supervisor – and if so who are they?

Prof. Jacky Brine

Is the enquiry:

Externally funded?

(By whom?) n/a

Linked to a project or programme with external partners?

(If so – whom and who takes the lead?)

n/a

Part of an award programme?

PhD

Personal research?

n/a

Is a response to this application urgent? If so, why, and by when do you have to have a response?

By July 2010 in order for research to begin September 2010.

**SECTION B: Seeking the approval of the FRESC to proceed with my enquiry**

**PLEASE ATTACH AN OUTLINE OF YOUR RESEARCH PROPOSAL WHICH MAKES CLEAR YOUR PURPOSES, METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH, LIKELY RESPONDENTS, TIMEFRAME AND PLANS FOR PUBLICATION.**

**Will the participants be from any of the following groups?** *(Tick as appropriate)*

- Children under 18
- Adults who are unable to consent for themselves<sup>2</sup>
- Adults who are unconscious, very severely ill or have a terminal illness
- Adults in emergency situations
- Adults with mental illness (particularly if detained under Mental Health Legislation)
- Prisoners
- Young Offenders
- Healthy Volunteers
- Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the investigator, e.g. those in care homes, medical students
- Other vulnerable groups

*(<sup>2</sup> Please note, the Mental Capacity Act requires all intrusive research involving adults who are unable to consent for themselves to be scrutinised by an NHS Local Research Ethics Committee – Please consult the Chair of your Faculty Research Ethics Sub-Committee or Amanda Longley or Alison Vaughton (RBI) for advice)*

**If any of the above applies, please explain their inclusion in this research**

n/a

**Note: If you are proposing to undertake research which involves contact with children or vulnerable adults you will generally need to hold a valid Criminal Records Bureau check. Please provide evidence of the check with your application.**



**Outline the ethics procedures you plan to implement in your enquiry** (you must read the guidelines). This may involve a Participant Consent Letter, an Explanatory Note and/or an Ethics Agreement – which you should attach to this application:

While the categories of vulnerable adults listed above are not applicable to the participants in this research, it is suggested that individual participants may be vulnerable due to their forced migration experiences. (ESRC guidelines, 2004). It is assumed that individuals in this study will have experienced trauma leading up to and during their process of seeking asylum. Furthermore, it is widely documented that asylum seekers and many refugees in the UK may be vulnerable as a result of experiencing or being at risk of the following: political and legal marginality, destitution or poor housing, language barriers, removal to detention quarters, poverty, lack of support networks or opportunities for community integration, racism. (Rutter et al, 2007; Welsh Assembly Government, 2008; Palmer & Ward, 2007; Phillimore et al, 2007; Jacobsen and Landau, 2003). It is therefore important to be mindful of such issues that may be ongoing in participants' lives.

In order to work in an ethical way that recognises the knowledge and agency of all participants involved, this research will be informed by Participative Action Research methodologies (Torbert, 2001; Heron and Reason, 2001). The core method of data gathering will be that of a cyclical action-reflection process during which informed consent is continuously negotiated with co-researchers from the outset.

Potential co-researchers will be invited to attend an introductory meeting. This meeting will offer an opportunity to discuss key ethical concerns, such as the purpose of the research, envisaged participant involvement, benefits/risks, participation and withdrawal. It will also address issues of data recording and subsequent data use/storage as well as issues of confidentiality and privacy. (Heron and Reason, 2001; Reason, 2005; BERA, 2004; BSA, 2002). This will be accompanied by a document outlining the key points covered in the introductory meeting and the ethical issues that I, as initiating researcher, will abide with. (App 1.) Subsequently, individuals will be invited to participate, and should they choose to do so, they will then be asked to sign an ethical agreement. (App.2)

Particularly in initial meetings time will be allocated to collectively establish rapport and group working ground-rules, which will cover issues such as speaking/listening, confidentiality (disclosure),

conflict and stress. It is understood that conceptualisations of ethics and group-work vary between cultures, and that these issues will require continued attention and reflection. From the outset, I will clarify the boundaries of our roles as co-researchers and co-subjects with regard to my ultimate responsibility for the research and thesis authorship. As the research progresses, other locations and methods for dissemination will also be discussed, so that the research outcomes might be shared in appropriate and engaging ways that do not limit the audience to members of the academic community.

The research will be group-based, moving between individual action and group reflection, therefore all participants will have the opportunity to make choices as to what and how they contribute to the inquiry forum. As data is generated, the research cycle will involve group theorization, at which points I will ask group members to verify or dispute the data analysis I make. Group outcomes will also be recorded (for example, at the close of each meeting) as a basis for subsequent meetings, again allowing for further group reflection and discussion.

These reflective cycles will thus function as an ethical centre point as the research becomes more complex and offer space to challenge any data analysis that might represent co-researchers as members of an essentialised 'refugee community' (Doná, 2007). Visual data generation methods may also be used (Rose, 2007) in order to acknowledge multiple ways of knowing (Heron, 1996; Lather, 1991; ESRC, 2004). Before embarking on visual data collection, discussion will take place to remind participants that images (eg:photos) also count as data for analysis and inclusion in the thesis. This is an issue requires further consideration, with regard to image content and participant anonymity.

For detail on protection of identity and use/storage of data, please refer to following sections of this document.

**Outline any risks you foresee to respondents and/or to you and your research and how your ethics procedures respond to them** (again, read the guidelines):

**Potential risks to respondents:**

1: Stress and distress: The research is based on exploring participation in higher education and the role this plays in everyday life. Although the focus is on the education and learning practices as currently experienced by participants, there is clearly scope for

distress to occur from individual reflections (vocalised in discussion or not) or issues raised unexpectedly in group meetings.

Procedure: In order to maintain inquiry focus on education, rather than becoming group therapy, it will be necessary to make judgement calls as to when to actively re-direct discussion rather than allow natural flow of conversation. This also applies to sensitive monitoring of group dynamics in order to avert distress should early signs of individual discomfort begin to be shown. It is understood that individuals will have differing perceptions of what is sensitive or private information, and awareness of this will grow as the research progresses. Participants will be made aware of institutional Student Services, which can offer professional support. Advice on asylum-related issues will also be sought from the UWE RMS Hub. I would also seek guidance from my doctoral supervision team.

2: Conflict: This may affect all participants at any point, as the inquiry group moves through forming/ working/dissolving stages and relationships are established and re-negotiated. As participants (myself excluded) are likely to be peers in a student cohort following a particular module, and possibly part of the same social network, there is risk of conflict within the group going beyond group boundaries, or similarly, of external issues entering group meetings.

Procedure: Collaboratively establish and implement a group work agreement. These ground rules will be agreed upon in early meetings (although will be open to renegotiation) and hard copies available for all inquiry members. As noted in point 1, there will be external support networks available.

3: Anonymity: i) Inquiry meetings may take place within same building as module classes are held, thus tutors may be aware of students participating in the research. Students may also mention their participation while in class.

Procedure: Although tutors might know (or want to know) who is participating in the inquiry (and what is being discussed) participants will be reminded that confidentiality applies here, particularly in respecting the privacy of other group members. Refer to confidentiality in ethical agreement.

ii) Identification of participants in publications.

Procedure: Anonymity discussed in information meeting, as well as in consent agreement. Pseudonyms will be used, and personal identifiers will not be included. Individual members of the group may be able to identify each other, as data used will have been generated within the inquiry group forum. Use of visual artefacts will be in line with respecting anonymity and protection of sensitive/personal information.

**Are you planning to follow ethical guidelines or standards of any professional body (refer to these guidelines)?**

BERA: With particular reference to sections 23-28 covering privacy, Data Protection and disclosure. (BERA, 2004: 8-9)

BSA: With particular reference to section 14 on power and integrity and section 25 on renegotiation of consent. (Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association, 2002: 3).

**Do you have plans for the storage and management of data, taking into account the Data Protection Act, and if so what are they?**

**Storage:**

Audio recordings: uploaded to password protected computer, copied to back-up disc stored in locked drawer. Visual artefacts: stored digitally on password protected computer and on memory stick in locked drawer, hard copies in lockable filing cabinet.

**Data management:**

Informed consent will be for use of data generated within the inquiry action and reflection cycles. Personal and sensitive data data will be coded in order to protect identities from public recognition. Such data will only be disclosed in line with BERA guidelines, should harm to the participant or others be likely as a result of illegal behaviour. (2004:9). Data will be collected with participant agreement for data to be used in PhD thesis as well as in subsequent dissemination events and publication.

## **Declaration**

Principal Investigator	A.L.Bowen
Signed	A.L. Bowen
Date	17/03/10
Supervisor or module leader (where appropriate)	Prof. Jacky Brine
Signed	Prof. Jacky Brine
Date	17/03/10

## **Appendix D: Online forum agreement**

### **Online research 'netiquette'**

Participation in this online research is based on your agreement with these ground-rules ('netiquette') to respect and protect all participants.

1. Respect diversity of participants' views: This forum welcomes respectful debate of different points of view on issues related to the research topic. There may be questions or issues that some participants do not wish to respond to- do not insist on a reply.
2. Please avoid posting any links or images that may be considered offensive or inappropriate to the research (eg: pornography or commercial websites).
3. Avoid using offensive language. Written language can be misinterpreted, so please be sensitive to how people might read your words (eg: jokes, using sarcasm).
4. English is the shared language of all participants. Please provide an English translation if you use any languages that other participants might not understand.
5. Consider the privacy of other participants: This forum should be a safe space. Please do not ask other participants to share private information (eg: real names, phone numbers or email addresses).

I want to participate in the online forum, and I agree with these ground-rules.

Signed:

Date:

## Appendix E: Screen shots from Ning forum. Welcome and participant response.

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the address bar displaying 'life-learn-uni.ning.com'. The page has a green background and contains several sections:

- Left Column:**
  - A link to '+ Add a Blog Post'.
  - Advice, guidance and useful information** (with an 'Edit' button):

Here are some weblinks that might offer useful information and guidance.  
Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees:  
<http://www.icar.org.uk/>  
Council for Academic Refugees:  
<http://www.academic-refugees.org/>  
Student welfare @ UWE:  
<http://www.uwe.ac.uk/student-services/>  
Personal issues:  
<http://www.uwe.ac.uk/advice/personal/>  
Careers and employment:  
<http://www.uwe.ac.uk/careers/>
  - Refugee Council arch info** (with an 'Edit' button):

<http://refugeearchives.wordpress.com/feed/>
- Center Column:**
  - Welcome!** (with an 'Edit' button):


Welcome to the *life, learning and university* research project!

This site has been made as a meeting place for our small research group to exchange knowledge, ideas and experience of refugee students in UK Higher Education. There is already some research and understanding about the barriers stopping asylum seeker/refugee people getting into university, but there is very little knowledge about the issues and experiences that people with this background have while they are studying for a degree. I hope our research can contribute to increasing knowledge about this.

Originally I (Louise) hoped to bring together a group of students who could meet face-to-face to research collaboratively on this topic, but that was not possible, as we live and study in various parts of the UK! Fortunately we have a virtual meeting place instead.

This ning site will be open for our research discussions during December 2010 to July 2011. I hope you will find it easy to use and consider it a safe space to share and debate ideas, upload photos or useful weblinks connected to our research. You can also start your own blog, or start new forum discussions whenever you want.

Please take some time now to consider your [Online safety doc](#) as well as explore the various parts of the site. If you have any suggestions for changes or improvements to the site, please share with us! When you're ready, your first thing to do is go to the Forum to explain **what** issues you are interested in discussing here.


- Right Column:**
  - Louise Bowen** (with an 'Edit' button):
    - Sign Out
    - Inbox
    - Friends - Invite
    - Settings
  - Members** (with an 'Edit' button):

A grid of nine profile pictures, some showing people and others showing abstract or nature images.

+ Invite More    View All
  - Student Action Refugees (STAR)** (with an 'Edit' button):
    - Not just for Refugee Week
    - Refugee Week is coming! Get involved now
    - Two major student led conferences taking place this weekend in London!
    - STAR Week was fantastic
    - Coalition's claims of success in their mid term

Refugee and Education - 1 x

life-learn-uni.ning.com/forum/topics/refugee-and-education

NING Louise Bowen Sign Out Search Life\_learning\_university

# Life\_learning\_university

Main page Invite My Page Members Photos Blogs Forum Videos My Network

All Discussions My Discussions Settings Options Add

## Refugee and Education

Posted by [redacted] on February 3, 2011 at 13:08 in What do we want to research?  
 Send Message View Discussions

Typically it is an asylum seeker who want learn basic English language and start to work (of course manual labour). this stereotyping can be seen in both official and non officials ways, i mean you can find this in the government policy and discourse as we saw in the report and also UK's educational institutions. for refugees your last stage and goal is to finish ESOL and go to work, continuing your study and wish to achieve higher education qualification is not encouraged. i remember when i was doing ESOL always our teachers talking about options related with use language for daily life and finding a job only.

Share

Views: 2

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LINK [icons] B I [icons] U [icons] [icons] [icons] [icons] [icons] HTML

About Louise Bowen created this Ning Network  
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Louise Bowen  
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 Inbox  
 Friends - Invite  
 Settings



## **Appendix F: First interview schedule**

Review research purpose- participant questions?

Purpose of this interview/ timing (c.1hr)

General- toilets/ other housekeeping/safety if in location not known well by participant.

Confidentiality and recording the interview. Breaks/ stop recording whenever participant needs.

Suggest today's discussion starts with current studies and route into HE

**Q1. Can you tell me about the course you're studying now, why you chose to do it?**

Prompts (checking out aspirations/ access to IAG)

When did you decide to study this?

Where/how/ from whom did you get information about the degree?

What did you think was interesting about it?

What did you hope to do after graduating?

Have your aims/plans changed as you've been studying?

Check participant's year of study- if not first year:

What has uni been like so far? (check positive/ negatives of uni experience, elicit details as necessary)

What do you like/ dislike about uni generally?

Can you describe what your course is like at the moment? (elicit responses on people + relationships/ academic content + practices) .

See how far this goes time-wise – to be followed up in Interview 2.

Questions from participant?

If not been covered in interview, reconfirm basic info again- to confirm with info already from introductory emails/ phonecalls: age/ home country and ethnicity/ refugee or AS status/ time in UK so far. Arrange to follow up by email to arrange next interview.

Online forum participation: discuss before depart.