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Challenging dominant narratives:

Stories of women seeking asylum

Kate Smith

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the

requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Huddersfield

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Dedication

India and Ewan

Long may you share stories and care about the stories we hear

Abstract

In the last decade there has been a growth in the number of women seeking asylum in the United Kingdom (UK), yet research remains extremely limited. Negative and disempowering narratives have come to dominate contemporary understandings of women seeking asylum. Taking a relational narrative approach and drawing on feminist perspectives, the main aim of this research was to explore the stories told by women seeking asylum.

Placing the stories of women at the heart of this study, I conducted interviews with seventeen women who had made a claim for asylum in the UK. Their interviews were recorded, transcribed and then analysed using the Listening Guide. A further analytical step was developed called 'letting stories breathe'. Hearing women's stories of persecution and sexual violence, I present four recurring, inter-linked and, at times, contradictory narratives. These I have called the narrative of resistance, the narrative of reworking, the narrative of resilience and the narrative of ruination.

I suggest that women, despite limited opportunities and restricted choices, do not necessarily accept the concepts and notions which have formed a basis for contemporary understandings about women seeking asylum in the UK. Furthering our knowledge of the relationship between stories and the narratives which frame them, I have demonstrated the active role women play in the construction of their own stories. Inspired by the stories told by women, this thesis contributes to creating a space where women seeking asylum can tell their own stories about their lives.

Declaration

I confirm that the work submitted is my own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others. This copy has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

- o A list of my publications and presentations can be found in Appendix Two.

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[1] All of the women's names have been replaced with a pseudonym which they chose (as discussed in Chapters Four and Eleven).

Contents

Word count - 91,160 (excluding appendices and references).

Points on language and terms

The question of terminology and use of language is important in this thesis.

The term 'asylum seeker' used in this study includes women who have made a claim in the UK for asylum (see Appendix One) under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Refugee Convention). Literature about women seeking asylum frequently refers to women as 'asylum seekers'. Being viewed as an asylum seeker has become synonymous with hate and vilification or victimisation and passivity in the UK, as discussed in Chapter Two. Therefore, I have attempted to prioritise the term 'woman' before 'seeking asylum' or 'asylum seeker' placing 'woman' first and foremost, before any category of immigration status and, wherever possible, I have used the phrase 'woman seeking asylum' or 'woman asylum seeker'.

The term 'victim' frequently reduces a woman's status to that of passive 'object' rather than active 'subject'. In some literature the term 'victim' has been largely replaced with the term 'survivor', reflecting a shift in terminology and purporting to challenge the construction of 'victim' as helpless, passive and powerless. Claiming the category of 'survivor' has potentially allowed women to locate suffering in the past (Szörényi, 2009). Given that women seeking asylum must testify to their fear of persecution in order to be given legal protection in the UK (Bögner et al., 2010), the notion of 'survivor' may be less accessible. Importantly, none of the women in this study used the term survivor, choosing to use the term victim, often without meaning passivity, powerlessness or helplessness. I therefore use the term 'victim' in this thesis, acknowledging the persecutions and abuses perpetrated against women but I also include other stories and, in using the term 'victim', I do not assume that women are powerless, passive or helpless.

Female Genital Mutilation (see Appendix One) was referred to by some of the women and they used a number of different terms for this practice in their interviews. For example, Jen is quoted in this thesis and uses the term "circumcision". I have, however, used the term Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in line with recommendations made by the Foundation for Women's Health Research and Development (FORWARD[2], 2014). FORWARD (2014) are opposed to the term female circumcision because it implies the female equivalent of male circumcision, does not depict the true practice of FGM and implies that the consequences of FGM are far less severe than is the case. Like FORWARD, I consider FGM a term that emphasises the gravity of violation and abuse of girls' and women's human rights but where I have quoted women I have retained their original words to ensure their story is also heard.

For a list of definitions of terms used in this thesis, please see Appendix One.

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2 FORWARD are an African Diaspora women-led UK-registered charity who work to advance and safeguard the sexual and reproductive health and rights of African girls and women in UK, Europe and Africa, helping to change practices and policies that affect access, dignity and wellbeing.

Chapter One:
Beginnings

"The fight was not by gun, the fight is by paper (Z) [3]"

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to offer a context for the study. I start by providing an overview of the study, as well as highlighting the research aims. I go on to outline some of the concepts around seeking asylum. I explore my own reflexive positioning in relation to the study and I conclude this chapter with an outline of the organisation of the thesis.

Overview of the study

Based on in-depth narrative interviews carried out with seventeen women, this qualitative study explores the stories of women who claimed asylum in the United Kingdom (UK). Aspects of the UK asylum system form parts of their stories and are included in the analysis to varying degrees. This is not, however, a thesis about the stories women told in their asylum claims. Nor is the aim of this research to question the 'credibility' of the stories that women tell when they claim asylum; these already face huge scrutiny within the UK asylum decision making process (Herlihy et al., 2002; Herlihy and Turner, 2007; Crawley, 2007, 2011b, 2011c). This thesis places women's stories at the heart of the study and provides an analysis of the narrative frameworks drawn upon to shape and tell their stories.

Caring deeply about this area of study, I came to the research with a "particular sense of purpose" (Andrews, 2014, p.28). Socially and politically active, working and

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3 In order to further the visibility of the stories of women seeking asylum, each chapter has an overall heading and alongside the heading I have used a quote from different participants. All of these quotes can be found elsewhere in the thesis. The women's names have been replaced with a pseudonym which they chose (as discussed in Chapters Four and Eleven).

campaigning around issues of rights and social justices, I had a great deal of contact with women seeking asylum. Within my community, these women were my neighbours and their children attended the same schools as my children. I also met women seeking asylum that worked, volunteered and attended support services at my workplace. A search of the literature in the area of asylum revealed that few studies had listened to the stories of women seeking asylum in the UK. There was a gender bias towards men seeking asylum (Freedman, 2008; Hunt, 2008; Canning, 2010); stories about women seeking asylum were often occupied by others speaking on their behalf and frequently focussed on the issue of international protection and particular gender-based victimisations (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2009; Refugee Council, 2009, 2010, 2010b, 2012; Canning, 2010, 2011a, 2011b).

Concerned about how to listen to women on their own terms rather than assimilating women's stories into existing frameworks, I turned to the Listening Guide (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, 2003; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008) as an approach to the research more generally and also to analyse the interviews. Reflecting feminist perspectives, the Listening Guide enabled me to put women at the heart of research enquiry, approaching and engaging with women as active participants. Viewed here as an ethical and methodological endeavour, I attempted to make explicit room for listening to women's stories, particularly those which may not have been spoken, listened to or understood (Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan et al., 2003). Examining the relevance of my own biography to the research process, reflexivity has been central to the development of this thesis (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, 2003; Letherby, 2000, 2002; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008). Underpinning my focus was the assumption that no story is ever singular (Frank, 2010). Stories may give some insight into the lives of people, but they are not straightforward descriptions of experiences or events (Squire

et al., 2008). Accomplished in relation to narratives, which act as frameworks to make sense of, inform and understand what is being said and heard, stories are relationally constructed (Somers, 1994; Plummer, 1995, 2013; Frank, 1995; Andrews, 2014; Woodiwiss, 2014).

Drawing on the work of Cindi Katz (2004), Lawrence Langer (1991) and Arthur Frank (1995), concepts of resistance (Katz, 2004) and ruination (Langer, 1991; Frank, 1995) were explored, adopted and adapted in response to the data. Four central narratives emerged; those of resistance, reworking, resilience and ruination. The narrative of resistance was reflected in stories of challenge and the narrative of reworking in stories of change. Providing the most subtle aspect of resistance within this study, the narrative of reworking was reflected in stories of survival. Contrasted with the narratives of resistance, the narrative of ruination represented disintegration and applied both to the stories that women *told* and *the ways in which* they told their stories.

Acquiring new ways of listening to and understanding the richness and depth of stories of this particular group of women contributes to creating a space where women can tell their own stories and potentially tell different stories about their lives, extending the narratives available about women seeking asylum in the UK. Demonstrating that women play an active role in the construction of stories about women seeking asylum, I have highlighted that they do not necessarily, or always, accept the dominant narratives that form the basis of contemporary understandings about women seeking asylum in the UK. I have tried to open up a space within which we can 'recognise', listen to and understand the diverse, creative and pragmatic ways that women negotiate their own stories. I suggest that women seeking asylum would be better served if future research were to open up the potential for them to

tell different stories about their lives where they are no longer framed by dominant narratives as a way to make themselves recognisable as 'asylum seekers' in the UK.

Research aims

The aims of this study are to:

- o Identify and explore the narratives that dominate understandings of women seeking asylum in the UK.

- o Highlight the ways in which dominant narratives have come to stereotype, marginalise, misrepresent and, at times, overlook women seeking asylum.

- o Explore critically the stories that women seeking asylum tell about their lives, potentially unsettling, disrupting and challenging dominant narratives.

- o Develop a narrative framework for understanding the stories of women seeking asylum.

- o Elevate the stories of women seeking asylum, contributing to creating a space where they can tell their own stories about their lives.

Seeking asylum

Seeking asylum takes place in a global context, an interrelated aspect of broader transnational mobility, movements and migrations that occur across and within the national boundaries of countries and states (Jordan and Düvell, 2003; Brown, 2005; Yuval-Davis et al., 2005). Whilst migrations of people have not always been categorised as 'seeking asylum', searching for protection and sanctuary[4] has always been a feature of migratory movements (Brown, 2005). 'Asylum' is a derivative term from the Ancient Greek word 'asylos' which means 'cannot be seized or violated'

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4 The term sanctuary has been utilised by the 'City of Sanctuary' movement which began in October 2005 in Sheffield and has attempted to build a culture of hospitality for people seeking asylum through developing places of safety and sense of welcome in towns and cities across the UK (City of Sanctuary, 2012).

(Schuster, 2003). Seeking asylum can be understood in terms of a person looking for safety where she will not be persecuted (Brown, 2005; Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2009; Andrijasevic, 2010).

Asylum is likely to have been practised for more than 4,000 years (Schuster, 2002). As early as the thirteenth century, the Egyptians recorded their practice of asylum in relation to the notion of 'sacred spaces' where a person could be protected. Similarly, the Hittites and the Israelites have some of the earliest records of forms of asylum around the notion of safe spaces, dating from the fourteenth century BC (Schuster, 2003). Given that even in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, people's motives for migration were rarely questioned and remained relatively unexamined (Schuster, 2003; Brown, 2005), the concept of sacred or safe spaces is likely to have looked very different from more contemporary understandings of asylum.

The presence of people seeking asylum is not a new phenomenon in the UK (Sirriyeh, 2008, 2013) but it is only in relatively recent times that legal forms of seeking asylum have been developed. In response to significant gaps in the protection of people, exposed during the First and Second World Wars, the latter half of the 20th century became an historical site for the emergence of a legal form of asylum seeking. Key approaches to the management of large numbers of displaced people became increasingly standardised and globalised (Malkki, 1995). One of the significant developments in relation to asylum was the Nuremburg Trials which played a vital role in the development of the International Criminal Courts and, more recently, the International Criminal Tribunals for Rwanda and for the former Yugoslavia (Woodiwiss, 2005; Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2009; Canning, 2011a, 2011b). Alongside these developments, the concept of international protection was enshrined

17

in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Declaration of Human Rights) which specifies; "Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy asylum from persecution in other countries" (Article 14). The UK government was one of the states who participated in drafting the Declaration of Human Rights and has been a signatory since 1948 (United Nations, 2008).

To claim asylum in the UK, an applicant must be outside of their country of origin[5] (Refugee Convention). Enacting a concept of 'territorial asylum', people can be "granted asylum in a state/nation that is not their own" (Schuster, 2003, p.88). The UK Home Office expects all potential asylum applicants to disclose their intention to apply at port of entry, making their claim "at the first available opportunity" (Home Office, 2009b, online). For those people already within UK borders, the Home Office insists that potential asylum applicants claim asylum "following entry to the host country due to a change in circumstances" (Home Office, 2009b, online). Whilst everyone has the right to *seek* asylum, the right to *receive* protection is not absolute, so the importance of an asylum story cannot be emphasised enough given that the possibility of legal protection is entirely contingent on an individual's claim (Crawley, 2007).

The Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol, which removed geographical and temporal restrictions from the Refugee Convention, forms the legal basis for states to grant asylum. It is one of the most crucial human rights instruments of international protection, potentially offering legal protection to all people seeking asylum. One hundred and forty seven states are obliged to carry out the provisions laid out within the Refugee Convention in relation to their status as signatories (UNHCR, 2007).

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5 The exception to the rule is the UK 'Gateway Protection Programme' (see Appendix One).

Intended to ensure the rights, protection and provision for the adequate treatment of

refugees (Woodiwiss, 2003, 2005; Canning, 2010, 2011a, 2011b), states grant

asylum to those individuals who they feel demonstrate compatibility with the Refugee

Convention definition of a refugee, or refuse people who they feel do not. The

Convention states that a refugee is;

> "… 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… is unable or, owing to such fear, is
> unwilling to return to it" (Refugee Convention).

Whilst the term 'refugee' is widely used by state signatories to the Refugee

Convention across the rest of Europe to identify people seeking asylum, in the UK

'refugee' is a term commonly applied to distinguish between those granted asylum

and those awaiting a decision on their claim (Canning, 2011a, 2011b). For people

who the Home Office decide do not meet the Refugee Convention definition of a

refugee, the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) (formally

the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms), in

particular Article Three (freedom from torture and inhumane or degrading treatment)

as well as Article Eight (respect for family and private life) may provide a legal status

to individuals applying for asylum in the form of 'humanitarian protection' or

'discretionary leave' (see Appendix One) (Clayton, 2010).

Stories about asylum are often underpinned with assumptions that the UK has a long

history of granting asylum to refugees, carried out benevolently (Schuster, 2002; Kea

and Roberts-Holmes, 2013). Evoking history as a way to position stories about the

UK, the national narrative (Andrews, 2014) encompasses accounts of the Second

World War whereby the UK is represented as a great protector of refugees, whilst Nazi Germany was expelling and creating refugees (Schuster, 2002). Positioned as "'official' or 'authoritative' discourses of asylum and distinguished in relation to a sense of formal national identity" (Andrews, 2007b, p.196), the national narrative of offering asylum to 'genuine' refugees and generously extending asylum to those in need persists. As if it were a principle of the UK asylum decision making process, the UK's role as an asylum granting country has been actively promoted by the government. The UK Border Agency (UKBA - see Appendix One) argues that 'asylum' has played a 'proud'[6] part in the history of the UK. Despite the national narrative (Andrews, 2014), some scholars have argued that asylum has a very long, conflicted and contested history and there is little consensus between the national narrative and other versions of asylum history in the UK (Jones, 2000; Schuster, 2002; Cohen, 2002; Patterson, 2002; Mynott et al., 2002).

There has been an ever-changing and imposing body of immigration and asylum legislation within which central features are increasingly restrictive and repressive (Yuval-Davis et al., 2005; Clayton, 2010). Immigration and Asylum Acts have been brought to parliament at a rate of almost one every two years in the last decade, with nine pieces of specific asylum legislation since 1993[7] (Clayton, 2010; Sirriyeh, 2013). Throughout the 20th century, a dual approach has been developed in the UK founded on limiting immigration and curtailing social and welfare rights for those seeking asylum (Bloch, 2000). Immigration borders hold increasing significance with a rise in the levels of restrictions placed on non-European immigration (Sirriyeh,

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6 The UKBA states "We are rightly proud of our history as a diverse and welcoming society" and "the UK has a proud tradition of providing a place of safety for genuine refugees" (2013, online).

7 The Immigration Act, 2014, which received Royal Assent on 14 May, is now an Act of Parliament.

2013). The increase in border controls and security on border entry to the UK has played a role in dividing and sub-dividing, ordering and re-ordering people entering the UK (Schuster, 2003; Sirriyeh, 2013). Sirriyeh suggests we are in "an era of securitization" (2013, p. 31), primarily aimed at the securing of borders against those seeking asylum (Yuval-Davis et al., 2005; Gedalof, 2007).

Once within UK borders, people seeking asylum are denied the same rights as citizens regarding key areas such as accommodation, freedom of movement, financial support, employment, education and social welfare (Hayter, 2000; Hunt, 2008). Immigration and asylum legislation has entwined the rights and entitlements to welfare provision and public funds with immigration status (Bloch, 2000; Hayter, 2003; Hunt, 2008; Sirriyeh, 2013). At the heart of contemporary legislation is a focus on deterring people from seeking asylum or from making new applications; removing people who have unsuccessful applications for asylum; and an overall reduction in the numbers of people within the asylum system (Mynott et al., 2002; Patterson, 2002; Sales, 2002).

Biography, privilege and resistance

My research was consciously motivated by my personal and intellectual biography (Letherby, 2000) and inextricably linked to my sense of a feminist identity and consciousness that is "...rooted in the concrete, practical and everyday experiences of being, and being treated as, a woman" (Stanley and Wise, 1983, p.18). I was not attempting to make claims that speak for all women or for any collective "we women" or "we feminists" (Holland and Ramazanoglu, 2002, p.8) and I did not assume unity on the basis of gender (Mohanty, 1988). I have made every effort to remind myself that there were many dimensions of commonality and difference which were present

and relevant to the researcher-participant relationship. Trying to take account of my biography and personal involvement with the issue I was studying has been a part of the research process in order to understand myself within the study and examine the impact I had (Letherby, 2000, 2002), a point I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Three.

I was born in Wick, one of the most Northern points in the Highlands of Scotland in the UK. There is a particular history to the Highlands which formed aspects of the stories I grew up with. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the 'Highland Clearances' saw the mass and brutal displacement of people who were deprived of their land and forcefully evicted from their homes. A reminder of that time, clusters of deserted crofts littered the Highland landscape and my early childhood was spent living in one of those crofts.

> Hush, hush, time tae be sleepin
> Hush, hush, dreams come a-creepin
> Dreams o peace an o freedom
> Sae smile in your sleep, bonnie baby
> No use pleading or praying
> All hope gone, no hope of staying
> Hush, hush, the anchor's a-weighing
> Don't cry in your sleep, bonnie baby[8].

By virtue of where I was born, as well as my mother and father's nationality, I was born a UK citizen. This is something I did not choose; this is an aspect of who I am and I have grappled with what it means and how this position has afforded me many privileges in my country of origin and across the world. Granted, many women are disadvantaged and I have faced some adversity for being a girl and a woman, but I

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8 A section of a Scottish lullaby 'Smile in your sleep', written by Jim McLean (1968) which tells a story of the crofters forced eviction and migration during the Highland Clearances.

have never known what it is like to fear persecutions which compel some girls and women to seek asylum. In the UK and when I have travelled to countries and places across the globe, I have never been targeted for my immigration status, for the colour of my skin or for my nationality and, for the most part, I have not felt criminalised. I am shielded in privileges in my everyday life and, whilst I have been stopped multiple times at different border controls and national boundaries, subjected to immigration processes when working and travelling, I have not explicitly feared being detained, incarcerated, deported or disappeared.

Engaged with a number of protest movements and practices of resistance (Conlon, 2007), I identify as a campaigner and an activist, holding many of the distinctive ideological beliefs that sometimes underpin this particular sense of self, including striving for and hoping my work will bring about social and political change (Yarrow, 2008). Looking back at my life, I recognise that the passionate aspects of my activist sense of self have spanned decades (Andrews, 2007b). Turning forty years of age as I completed this study, I identify some of the ways in which my formative years have served as the basis for my later roles, including as an anti-war campaigner, promoting solidarity movements with women across the globe, anti-racist/anti-sexist street demonstrations, community theatre and art exhibitions, as well making numerous representations to Governments and international committees over the years.

Being a practitioner who specialises in working with women and children seeking asylum in the UK has been another way in which I underpin my sense of self and this has been particularly advantageous for my research. With more than fifteen years of practice, management and facilitation experience, I have volunteered and worked within women's advice, wellbeing and therapeutic services and the UK asylum

sector. I started working in the North of England with women and families seeking asylum in December 1999[9]. I mention this specific date because it was in this month that the first official 'dispersal' (see Appendix One) of individuals and families within the asylum system arrived to the area where I was living and working as a community outreach language teacher. Political hostility against people seeking asylum escalated during the 1990's in the UK (Schuster and Solomos, 1999). Just prior to the introduction of the 1999 Asylum and Immigration Act (1999 Act), I had started work with people seeking asylum, little knowing the 1999 Act would have far reaching consequences for the lives of people in the asylum system and communities across the UK.

I, along with other workers, volunteers and activist campaigners, was shocked at the severity of the changes within the 1999 Act, which included the removal of welfare support and an increase in 'detention' facilities (see Appendix One). Dispersal became compulsory and there was a rise in levels of 'destitution' (see Appendix One) amongst people from within asylum and refugee communities who were impacted by reduced provision (Hayes, 2002; Patterson, 2002). Seeking asylum in the UK came to mean being "issued with an identity card… subject to detention, dispersal and electronic tagging, barred from access to paid work and hav[ing] limited (if any) access to education, healthcare, social housing and income support" (Tyler, 2006, p.188). A voucher-scheme was introduced which precluded people from accessing any form of cash, and the vouchers could only be redeemed in certain shops to meet essential living needs (McLeish, 2002).

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9 Prior to moving to the North of England I had contact in London with children and young people in the UK asylum system and in secondary schools where I taught English and Drama.

Particular concerns were raised about specific groups, including women, who were being made extremely vulnerable in relation to the asylum system. Maternity Action, for example, two years after the introduction of the 1999 Act, published two reports on the inadequacy of provision, outlining some of the grave risks posed to pregnant women seeking asylum (McLeish, 2002; Mcleish et al., 2002; Feldman, 2013). Campaigning took place on a number of central issues arising from the 1999 Act and I was part of local protests which sustained a national campaign against the subsistence voucher scheme, calling for the scheme to be abolished and replaced with a cash scheme[10].

This particular period of time brought a new and acute awareness for me about the particularity of the asylum system in the UK. My consciousness was raised about the ways in which UK immigration legislation and policy had divided women in the asylum system from other women, creating grave inequalities between women living in the UK. I witnessed what I perceived to be injustices committed against women seeking asylum in the UK, sanctioned or carried out by the UKBA and people involved with the administration of the asylum system.

Threats to women's physical safety and wellbeing have continued to be exacerbated within the UK asylum system (Querton, 2012; Ali at al., 2012). I found myself caught up in stories about women's lives in very real and tangible ways that became deeply embedded in my sense of social injustices being carried out against a specific group of people. One of the stories which haunts me was a woman's account of being

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10 The voucher scheme was scrapped in 2002 and replaced with cash payments. However, a lower level of support, under Section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, reintroduced a cashless payment system through the introduction of the Azure card which is a prepayment card for those on Section 4 support and can only be used to purchase items in certain designated shops. Vouchers are provided to individuals in a limited numbers of circumstances for short periods, usually when the card has been lost or stolen or when the person is waiting for their Azure card to be issued (Asylum Support Appeals Project, 2013).

undiagnosed with gestational diabetes and who, due to repeated re-dispersals, never managed to register for ante-natal support. As a result, the unborn baby died in my local hospital, a place where I would birth my daughter, my second child, four years later. This story irrevocably changed me and I was, and continue to be, deeply concerned about the state of the asylum system in the UK and its impact on women. The 1999 Act and subsequent Acts, as well as associated practices, go against some of the very origins embedded in the term asylum. There remain few sacred places in the UK where people seeking asylum cannot be seized and violated at any time (Schuster, 2003).

The magnitude of women's life stories has been extraordinary within the context of my life. Whilst there may be personal and academic dangers and risks attached to including personal details about myself in academic writing (Letherby, 2000) this was the starting point for planning to carry out this PhD. My grassroots work had provided invaluable knowledge and understandings from women seeking asylum and I moved into the area of academic research, successfully applying for a one plus three Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) bursary at the University of Huddersfield, with the clear purpose of formalising my training to become an academic researcher. I completed my MSc 'Social Research and Evaluation (Social Work)' in 2010, using my dissertation (Smith, 2010) as an opportunity to explore the subject and review the literature that pertains to women seeking asylum and detention. This training solidified my research approach as necessarily narrative, which would enable me to explore critically the stories that women seeking asylum tell about their lives, potentially unsettling, disrupting and challenging dominant narratives.

Overview of the organisation of the thesis

This thesis has eleven chapters. Having provided an introduction to the study and outlined the research aims, in Chapter Two I present a review of relevant literature which includes a summary of the dominant narratives about women seeking asylum and provides contextual information important for understanding stories told 'by' women seeking asylum.

In Chapter Three I describe how I have drawn on a narrative approach called the Listening Guide (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, 2003; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008) which has informed and provided an approach to the research process.

In Chapter Four I present a detailed account of the methods I used during my fieldwork, emphasising the situational nature of ethics in relation to the context of this study.

In Chapter Five I provide an overview of the seventeen women who participated in this study. Focusing this entire chapter on the participants was a strategy to raise the visibility of the women who took part in this study.

In Chapter Six I explore the Listening Guide (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, 2003) which provided the central method of data analysis for the study. In doing so I highlight some of the challenges and limitations of the method. I also include information about how I formulated the final steps of analysis in relation to an approach called 'letting stories breathe' (Frank, 2010). I go on to explore listening to stories of persecution and violence and hearing the narratives of resistance (Katz, 2004) and ruination (Langer, 1991; Frank, 1995).

On the basis of the participants' stories, in Chapters Seven, Eight, Nine and Ten I present the central narratives which framed women's stories, which I have called narratives of resistance, reworking, resilience and ruination. These narratives were represented in stories of challenge, change, survival and disintegration, enabling women to suggest a particular sense of self through stories about their lives.

In Chapter Eleven I provide a concluding discussion to this study, exploring the key contributions of my thesis.

Chapter Two:
Stories told about and for women seeking asylum

"They think we're weak. They think we just need to be supported. They think maybe we can't make decisions (Precious)"

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to review a body of literature about people seeking asylum, in particular women. I start by outlining my approach to reviewing the literature. I go on to identify three important studies and give a brief overview of the studies, all of which focussed on women seeking asylum in the UK and served to inform my own research. I provide demographic information about asylum seeking in order to develop a broader context for this research. Central to this chapter is an exploration of the literature relating to dominant narratives told 'about' and 'for' women seeking asylum in the UK. I aim to highlight the dominant narratives which have formed a basis for some of the contemporary understandings about women seeking asylum in the UK.

Reviewing

Using a planned search strategy, I reviewed a number of international human rights Conventions[11] as well as national legislation in the form of immigration and asylum Acts of Parliament[12]. Policies and practice documents relating to people seeking asylum, in particular those that applied to women, were explored. New publications were considered throughout the research process which included a number of

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11 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Refugee Convention, 1951); Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW,1979); Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC,1989); European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR, 1950) (formally the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms).

12 Immigration Act 1971; Immigration Act 1988; Asylum and Immigration Act 1996; Immigration and Asylum Act 1999; Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002; Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc.) Act 2004; Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006; UK Borders Act 2007; Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009; Immigration Act 2014.

parliamentary inquiries[13] which related to the area of asylum and women, as well as developments in immigration and asylum policy, practice recommendations and national campaigns, together with the media and political debates that were generated as a result of these pronouncements.

To explore relevant statistics on immigration flows, asylum claims and, where possible, aggregated information about women, I accessed the websites of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the UK Home Office, the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, and Migration Yorkshire. Including an 'author' based search, I utilised my knowledge of key writers in this area, drawing on a substantive body of relevant literature. A search of 'grey' literature, published by regional and national organisations, provided a source of up-to-date information. I used my knowledge of relevant organisations and charities, a number of which provided regular updates and to which I subscribe[14]. Carrying out a key word search and combination key words, I used electronic databases[15], with consideration for spelling and meaning, as well as alternative words which might generate further data (Ely and Scott, 2007; Cronin et al., 2008)[16].

The literature sources can be broadly categorised as follows: international human rights conventions; national legislation and policy documents; practice documents including briefings; international and national statistics; academic research based

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13 The Cross Party Parliamentary inquiry into asylum support for children and young people, 2013; The Centre for Social Justice Inquiry and evidence sessions prior to the publication of the Modern Slavery Bill, 2014; All Party Parliamentary Group on Human Trafficking and Modern Day Slavery inquiry into the collection, exchange and use of data about human trafficking and modern day slavery, 2013; The Home Affairs Committee inquiry into Asylum, 2013.

14 Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees in the UK, Refugee Studies Centre, Asylum Aid and Women's Asylum News.

15 Summon, Google Scholar, Social Care Online, JSTOR and the Migration Observatory.

16 The key words used were: 'women', 'female', 'asylum', 'refugee*' , and 'UK'. Combinations of key terms: ("asylum seeker*" or "refugee*") and ("wom?n" or "female"), as well as ("female asylum seeker*") or ("female refugee*") or ("wom?n asylum seeker*") or ("wom?n refugee*") were searched using Boolean operators ('AND', 'OR' and 'NOT').

studies; academic publications including journals, books and book chapters; 'grey' literature including research reports and pamphlets; media and political debates; literature from events, conferences and seminars; campaign literature; and articles from practitioner and 'Non-Government Organisations' (NGO) newsletters.

Reflecting

The review helped me to identify that there was a body of literature on the political, historical, humanitarian and economic issues broadly relating to asylum. In the UK and other European states particular focus has been given to publications about immigration and asylum legislation, policy and practice. The punitive and restrictive aspects of UK asylum and immigration policy have been documented, in particular some of the effects on people seeking asylum in terms of physical and mental health and welfare (Bloch, 2000; Hansen and King, 2000; Hayter, 2000; Cohen, 2002; Bögner et al., 2007; Herlihy and Turner, 2007).

Focussing on and raising concerns about the asylum system in the UK, a growing body of grey literature has been established by third sector organisations and charities. Developed from specific projects, organisations, such as Refugee Council and Women for Refugee Women, have explored aspects of asylum policy and practice with women in the asylum system in order to engage with decision makers, make recommendations and influence policy. This work has targeted specific aspects of the asylum system affecting women such as detention (Cutler and Ceneda, 2004; Marchu et al., 2014) or issues such as pregnancy in relation to detention and dispersal (McLeish, 2002; Kennedy and Murphy-Lawless, 2003; Feldman, 2013; Refugee Council, 2013b). For more than two decades the work of Asylum Aid has highlighted the need for a genuinely gender sensitive asylum system

and in 2008 they produced 'The Charter for the Rights of Women Seeking Asylum ', a document which calls for minimum standards in the UK asylum system for women seeking asylum.

Whilst studies may have highlighted many of the negative effects of the lives of those who seek asylum, such as trauma (Goldenberg, 2002; Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004; Bögner et al., 2007; Herlihy and Turner, 2007) and victimisation (a point I discuss in detail in this chapter), there is a body of literature which has explored some of the ways in which seeking asylum can bring about positive experiences that are pertinent to women's lives. For example, Bloch et al. (2000) draw attention to a 'redefinition of roles' providing opportunities for women which not only relate to their previous professional identities but also to their role within the family networks. Also, Eastmond suggests that women claim their lives have been transformed "… as they gained a broader repertoire of roles, including a greater participation in economic and other public spheres" (1993, p. 48). Both studies outline that some women seeking asylum recreate and sustain themselves, whilst facing many challenges.

Women's stories

Under explored and largely overlooked, there remains a paucity of literature focussing on the stories of women seeking asylum (Clarence, 2003; Hunt, 2005, 2008; Freedman, 2008; Hadjukowski-Ahmed et al., 2009; Baillot et al., 2009; Canning, 2010, 2011a, 2011b; Kea and Roberts-Holmes, 2013; Sirriyeh, 2013). Whilst a body of empirical literature has emerged which seeks to raise awareness and advocate for the rights of women seeking asylum, academic studies appear to have mainly taken a gender-neutral approach and there is little analysis in the area of asylum that starts with women's own views. Dumper (2002) suggests that women

seeking asylum are often marginalised when it comes to shaping policy and practice in the UK, particularly given the lower numbers of women than men claiming asylum.

A few notable researchers have also identified this significant gap in literature and have attempted to address this through their particular research. Their work helped me focus my own study in a number of ways, including locating women asylum seeker stories at the heart of the research and elevating their importance; taking a particular approach to the study process which allowed time and space for women (Waite and Conn, 2011) as participants in the research process and paying attention to, amongst other things, issues of sexual violence in women's stories.

Three particular studies that took place in the UK highlighted the importance of listening to the stories of women seeking asylum in the UK. Lisa Hunt's (2005, 2008) research into the relationship between agency and structure in the lives of women seeking asylum; Ala Sirriyeh's (2013) study of young women seeking asylum and their interpretations of home; and Vicky Canning's (2011a, 2011b) study of sexual violence support for women seeking asylum in Merseyside.

Interviewing twenty one women asylum seekers and refugees, Hunt (2005, 2008) included the stories of twenty one key informants from statutory and voluntary organisations providing a broad study of women's stories within the context of 'professional' stories. Taking a particular focus on opportunities, constraints and women's capacity for action through her enquiry into the complex interplay between women's agency and structural constraints, Hunt (2005, 2008) makes the interesting point that once in the UK, women found themselves represented as 'asylum seekers', a term which rarely acknowledged the diversity of their backgrounds, their needs or the skills they had. Hunt (2005, 2008) goes on to emphasise the

importance of listening to women's stories amongst popular debates and in challenging negative images of people seeking asylum and refugees which, she suggests, do not match the reality of life for those seeking asylum in the UK.

The second study was Ala Sirriyeh's (2013) exploration of young women asylum seekers' interpretations of home whilst living in the UK. Using a photo-elicitation method to generate stories from twenty three young women, Sirriyeh (2013) highlighted gendered experiences of securing safety and negotiations of home. Unlike my own study, Sirriyeh (2013) focussed on women aged between sixteen and twenty five in order to explore the intersections of their identities as young people and as women, as well as transitions to adulthood which involved migratory journeys. One of the striking aspects of this study is Sirriyeh's (2013) emphasis on creating times and places, despite 'unhomely environments', for women to tell stories and produce 'homely enclaves'. This included the negotiation of women's identities through stories of "reinvention" (Sirriyeh, 2013, p. 164). Emphasising the importance of narratives, Sirriyeh (2013) suggests the value of engaging with women's own sense of self, but also the vital role of women producing counter-narratives.

The final study by Vicky Canning (2011a, 2011b) looked at local support for women victims of conflict-related sexual violence. Canning (2011a, 2011b) utilised interviews with local organisations in Merseyside alongside an oral history from Hawwi who was seeking asylum and was a victim of rape. In contrast to my research approach, Canning (2011a, 2011b) focussed specifically on issues of sexual violence affecting women seeking asylum and her work sensitised me to the importance of listening to women's stories that frequently include accounts of sexual violence. Exposing gaps in services and provision at an international, national and localised level, Canning (2011a, 2011b) argues that sexual violence remains a prevalent social problem in all

regions of the globe and, despite international and national developments, women's rights continue to be marginalised and the gendered experience of conflict remains overlooked. Canning (2011a, 2011b) suggests that research with women who are victims of sexual violence would be of benefit to developing further knowledge of women's experiences and assessing the development of support. Providing a platform for a detailed case-study centring on the story of a woman seeking asylum in the UK, Canning (2011a, 2011b) highlights the important role of women's stories.

Whilst Hunt's (2005, 2008), Sirriyeh's (2013) and Canning's (2011a, 2011b) studies go some way to placing women's stories at the forefront of developing a better understanding of the lives and contexts of women seeking asylum in the UK, all three studies concluded that, despite international and national developments, the accounts of women seeking asylum remain marginalised within and outside of academia. Research specific to women seeking asylum in the UK remains extremely limited, with stereotypes and generalisations allowed to flourish about this particular group.

A story for our time[17]

The UNHCR estimates that by the end of 2012, worldwide persecution, conflict, human rights violations and violence had resulted in 45.2 million people being displaced (UNHCR, 2012). This represents an average of 23,000 people who, every day, were forced to leave their homes, seeking protection, moving within the borders of countries or crossing borders into other countries (UNHCR, 2012). With escalating conflicts in many areas of the world, Antonia Guterres, UN High Commissioner for

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17 I have used this title from Jo Woodiwiss' (2009) book where she makes the argument that stories are constructed in particular moments in which we place significance.

Refugees claimed the statistics reflected a huge scale of human suffering and persecution (UNHCR, 2012).

More than 893,700[18] people submitted applications for asylum in 2012 across the globe (UNHCR, 2012). Contrary to popular press stories about the UK being 'flooded' by people seeking asylum (Daily Mail, 2009; Robinson, 2013), Pakistan continued to host the largest number of refugees in the world (UNHCR, 2012). With rises in the numbers of people displaced and claiming asylum across the globe, there has been an interest in immigration and asylum, reflected in literature across various academic disciplines. Numerical information dominates stories about immigration and asylum (Crisp, 1999) and large international and national organisations, such as Amnesty International, the Home Office, Human Rights Watch, the Migration Observatory and the UNHCR, regularly report statistical data. In particular, the UK has sustained a focus on numbers of people migrating to the UK, including those seeking asylum (Schuster, 2003; Sirriyeh, 2013).

Despite an interest in numbers there has been a lack of accurate gender statistics about women seeking asylum and refugees (Dumper, 2002; Hunt, 2005; Freedman, 2008). Also, whilst statistics potentially serve to offer some scale to the displacement of people across the globe, it is necessary to exercise caution when working with existing datasets which highlight the 'huge scale' and magnitude of migration (Andrijasevic, 2010). Uncritical use of large numbers of people can feed into the

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18 The total of 893,700 asylum claims can be broken in two distinct groups. First, an estimated 731,900 were initial asylum claims (but may include instances where a person has submitted one or more asylum claims in the same or in another country). Second, the remaining 161,800 claims were second submissions (such as asylum appeals) whereby statistical information on the outcome is often under-reported, not published or simply not collected by states (UNHCR, 2012).

moral panic[19] surrounding people seeking asylum (Cohen, 2011; ESRC, 2014), as will be discussed later in this chapter.

At the beginning of 2012 people with outstanding decisions on their asylum claims, as well as 'refugees' and 'stateless' persons (see Appendix One), made up only 0.27% of the overall population in the UK (UNHCR, 2012). Most people applying for asylum in the UK were men (Freedman, 2008; Singer, 2009, Home Office, 2011; Muggeridge and Maman, 2011; Querton, 2012). Women aged 18 years or more, and children, featured primarily as dependents on men's asylum claims (Migration Observatory, 2014). However, the number of women seeking asylum in the UK as main applicants has increased over the last ten years. In 2002 a quarter of asylum applications in the UK were made by women and between 2010 and 2011 the numbers increased to one third (Home Office, 2011; Freedman, 2008; Muggeridge and Maman, 2011; Querton, 2012). Home Office (2013a) figures show that 5,392 women were principal asylum applicants in 2011. Whilst the Migration Observatory suggests that there was a drop in the number of women applicants in 2012, they also state "43.6% applicants aged 60 or older were female" (Migration Observatory, 2014, online). Increases in women and older women applicants perhaps provide a more proactive view of women which is different from earlier constructions of women seeking asylum that have assumed that women's role in migration is primarily reactive rather than proactive or simply 'following' men (Kofman et al., 2000; Marfleet, 2006; Edwards, 2010).

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19 The term 'moral panic' was introduced by Stanley Cohen (1972, most recent edition 2011) to describe the media response to an issue that is represented as a threat to social order. Originally introduced with specific reference to Mods and Rockers in the UK, Cohen (2011) used the example of people seeking asylum as 'objects' of moral panic.

Labelling, categorising and assessing the different motives of people subject to immigration and asylum laws has become prolific in the UK (Brown, 2005). There has been an expansion in the number of different legal terms as people navigate the asylum process and are 'named' (Sirriyeh, 2013). Distinctions, classifying people's migration, have practical significance with regard to the individual's relationship to the state as well as to the state's obligations and responsibilities to the individual. Not all people are extended hospitality by the UK government and some people may be deemed "less desirable than others" (Tyler, 2006, p.186). The Asylum and Immigration Act 1996, for example, introduced a 'white list'[20] (see Appendix One), underpinned by the principle that certain countries are 'safe' countries and do not produce refugees (Bloch, 2000). Asylum claimants from 'white list' countries are assumed to have 'unfounded asylum claims' (see Appendix One). People whose claims are thought to be unfounded are likely to be 'fast tracked' (see Appendix One) and are liable to an expedited 'removal' (see Appendix One) from the UK (Bloch, 2000; Bennett, 2008). Bloch (2000) has argued that the 'white list' contravenes the human rights principles of international protection because the nationality of a person seeking asylum should not impact on the legal determination process.

Being identified as a refugee can be a critical stage for women seeking asylum, as discussed in Chapter One. Refugees are considered a special case within UK immigration law, with the UK government obliged, under international law, to legally protect refugees. The particular legal form of protection has not been extended to people seeking asylum and may not be afforded to other people in migratory situations. Who becomes a refugee is not the right of individuals but is the right of

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20 The 'white list' was then reintroduced in the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

the state (Schuster, 2003). Seeking asylum in the UK engenders the possibility of becoming a refugee (Malkki, 1995; Yuval-Davis et al., 2005) and, until granted legal status, people seeking asylum are "literally pending recognition" (Tyler, 2006, p.189).

In Chapter One I highlighted the refugee definition identified in the Refugee Convention. The product of a particular time (Canning, 2011a, 2011b), criticism has been made regarding the definition and I draw specific attention to the language used;

> "… owing to 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" (1951,UNHCR, emphasis added).

The gendered language indicates underlying assumptions about persecution and legal protection that neglect to identify a number of groups, including women and girls (Canning, 2011a, 2011b; Sirriyeh, 2013). As feminist critiques have noted, the refugee definition is founded on hierarchical categories of inclusion and exclusion. The binary implicit in the Convention divides between the political and public and the domestic and private spheres. This concept denies an acknowledgement of women's political activity and views whilst relegating them to the domestic sphere has prevents public or formal engagement in political activities. Valji argues:

> "At the time of the writing of the Convention, there was no single international instrument that dealt specifically with women's rights. Any provisions in existing treaties that even alluded to the existence of women did so by invoking the sanctity of family "honour," denigrating the violence to a besmirching of family pride. There were, therefore, few international instruments for the drafters of

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the Convention to draw upon in recognizing women's experiences" (2001, p.27)

The Refugee Convention, as well as the Declaration of Human Rights (discussed in Chapter One), may have been derived from some of the perceived needs of people at the time. For example, the dominant story of a refugee revolved around someone who had direct involvement in conventional political activity and was fleeing persecution. As a result, men were seen as key applicants and women as dependents or subordinates of men's political activities (Kofman et al., 2000; Marfleet, 2006; Edwards, 2010). Gendered persecution was omitted as a determining factor to receiving refugee status, despite recognition of the extent acknowledged during the time the Refugee Convention was developed (Daenzer, 2009). Hajdukowski-Ahmed argues;

> "… it was known that "comfort women" had been used by the Japanese army, "Aryan" women had been used by the Nazis for breeding purposes, and "non-Aryan" women – Jewish, Gypsies, Slavs – had been prevented from reproducing" (2009, p.35).

Benefitting men and women whose persecutions are acknowledged under the Refugee Convention, the refugee definition omits many of the protection needs of women across the globe. Neglecting to recognise gender-based and gender-specific persecutions (Crawley, 2000a, 2000b) as they affect women (and girls) differently across the globe (Malkki, 1995; Freedman, 2007; Daenzer, 2009; Crawley, 2011b, 2011c), the Refugee Convention reflects a very small part of the international context of people seeking protection (Hunt, 2005, 2008; Clayton, 2006; Freedman, 2007; Daenzer, 2009; Canning, 2001a, 2011b; Sirriyeh, 2013). Children are also omitted from explicit recognition in the Convention (Bhabha, 2004; Sirriyeh, 2013) and, as a

result of such absences, the category 'refugee' remains primarily adult-centric and gender-biased.

Dominant interpretations of the Refugee Convention have marginalised people who have been persecuted because of their gender (UNHCR, 2004). Canning argues that women experience "erroneous decision making … that subjects them to forms of double victimisation" (Canning, 2011a, p.127- 128). Unsurprisingly, women have faced substantial difficulties being granted asylum in the UK when their claims involve persecution on grounds of gender and/or sexuality (Crawley, 2000a, 2000b; Singer, 2009, Muggeridge and Maman, 2011; Hargrave, 2013). Whilst it has been suggested that particular persecution risks for women may be reflected in more subtle or nuanced activities, such as hiding people, passing messages, providing food and administering medical care (Muggeridge and Maman, 2011), these types of activity have been disregarded, trivialised and minimised in asylum claims, in contrast to more 'traditional' concepts of persecution (Bhabha, 1996; Crawley and Lester, 2004). Despite the UNHCR highlighting "… a woman who has a well-founded fear of persecution is just as much a refugee as her male counterpart" (1990, paragraph 15), Crawley suggests that in the UK "… women are less likely than men to be granted refugee status" (2001, p. 4). Also, in Asylum Aid's submission to the Joint Committee of Human Rights consultation on Violence Against Women and Girls, Singer points out that "once in the UK, she [a woman seeking asylum] is more likely than a man to get the wrong initial asylum decision" (2014, p.2). Negative decisions on women's asylum claims have frequently been overturned on appeal (Muggeridge and Maman; 2011; Hargraves, 2013).

The information required to support a woman's asylum claim may not be easily available. Not only is statistical data often inadequate and unlikely to be gender-

aggregated but country information may lack a gendered understanding and analysis of women's status and treatments may not be fully documented (Crawley, 2011c). As a result, some women's accounts of persecution have been regarded as 'discriminatory' rather than 'persecutory' (Crawley, 1999, 2001, 2000, 2011b, 2011c; Bloch et al., 2000; Crawley and Lester, 2004; Freedman, 2007; Hunt, 2008; Singer, 2009; Muggeridge and Maman, 2011; Querton; 2012). Hunt highlights that "women are offered protection on a more temporary basis than men; for example, being granted Exceptional Leave to Remain" (2008, p.39) (see Appendix One). As 'refugee' recognition recedes for women, being granted temporary forms of legal protection simply reinforces the notion that women's persecutions are viewed as less than is necessary for recognition as a refugee (Bloch et al., 2000).

The specific vulnerabilities that may affect women seeking asylum have been identified by the UK government, in part, by the development of an 'Asylum Instruction' (A.I.) on gender issues in the asylum claim (UKBA, 2010). The first UKBA Gender Champion was appointed in January 2010 (Singer and Chandler, 2010) and the A.I. can be used to legally recognise women as a vulnerable group with special procedural needs (Querton, 2012; Ali et al., 2012). Brought in substantially later than similar documents in other countries (Canada and the United States)[21], the A.I. has been seen as an attempt to rectify the unequal access and systematic exclusion of women within the UK asylum determination system and may offer some solutions to problems inherent within the Refugee Convention. However, NGOs have highlighted significant failures towards women regarding the implementation of the A.I. (Singer, 2009) and Muggeridge and Maman highlight their growing concerns that "the UKBA

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21 In March 1993, the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) issued Guidelines on Refugee Claimants Fearing Gender-Related Persecution and in 1995, the United States Immigration and Nation Service (INS) released Considerations for Asylum Officers Adjudicating Asylum Claims for Women (Macklin, 1998 -1999).

is badly failing to meet this challenge, and that women seeking asylum are frequently let down by an extremely poor standard of decision-making… women were too often refused asylum on grounds that were arbitrary, subjective, and demonstrated limited awareness of the UK's legal obligations under the Refugee Convention" (2011, p.5).

The 'dehumanised hate figure'

In Chapter One I suggested that seeking asylum can be understood in terms of a person looking for safety where she will not be persecuted (Brown, 2005; Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2009; Andrijasevic, 2010). Despite this reading, the reception of people seeking asylum in the UK has been "hostile, unwelcoming and inhospitable" (Sirriyeh, 2013, p.94). Constructed as an unwanted international burden (Schuster, 2003), people seeking asylum are frequently seen as "unwelcome visitors [and] unwelcome foreigner[s]" (Tyler, 2006, p.186). Paving the way for ceaseless vilification (Cohen, 2002), people seeking asylum have become rendered 'strange' national hate figures, regularly situated within "hate speeches" (Tyler, 2006, p.192). Demonisation (Jordan and Düvell, 2003), depersonalisation (Robinson et al., 2003) and dehumanisation (Tyler, 2006) has been sustained in relation to enduring and specific images about people seeking asylum, such as destitute beggars and scroungers, alongside the particularly gendered representation of women as professional beggars (Hayes, 2002; Seu, 2003; Kundnani, 2007; Szörényi, 2009).

The moral panic (Cohen, 2011) about people seeking asylum has not receded and the 'asylum seeker' has become the dominant marker of 'otherness'. Legal and popular imagery has relied on the foundations that position asylum as a social problem (Sirriyeh, 2013) and those seeking asylum have become "luminous apparition[s] at the foot of the bed" (Harding, 2000, p.51). Enabling negative

representations, stories about people seeking asylum have disabled other forms of recognition (Hunt, 2005; Tyler, 2006). Research by the ESRC in 2014 suggested that the general public in the UK propose that all forms of immigration to the UK be reduced and particularly oppose asylum seeking (ESRC, 2014).

Growing interest in drawing distinctions between people about their motivations for migration (Schuster, 2003), the general UK public, media and government have suggested that those who seek asylum may be disguising their economic agenda in an opportunistic bid to enter and stay in the UK (Kea and Roberts-Holmes, 2013). In particular, this has affected women, a point raised by the UNHCR who state "concerns that economic migrants are misusing asylum channels to gain regular admission are one factor resulting in more restrictive asylum systems…Restrictive measures affect everyone trying to seek asylum but women and girls face additional challenges securing asylum" (2008, p. 8). People seeking asylum stand accused of submitting "abusive [asylum] applications" (Schuster, 2003, p.196).

On-going polemical debates have led to the construction of people seeking asylum as 'bogus' or 'genuine' (Cohen, 2002; Sales; 2002; Neumayer, 2005). These distinct terms emerged in the early nineties in the UK, solidifying the belligerent notion that people seeking asylum have attempted to exploit public generosity and the government by seeking asylum (Schuster and Solomos, 1999; Schuster, 2002; Kundnani, 2007; Kea and Roberts-Holmes, 2013). Hunt points out a particular problem whereby a "distinction is now made between what are regarded as *genuine* refugees, who are deemed worthy of public sympathy and support, and *bogus* asylum seekers" (2005, p.2, my emphasis). Marrying notions of deceit, deviousness and fraudulence with 'bogusness' and synonymising people seeking asylum with the term 'bogus' has given legitimacy to stories that spread doubt about the motivations

of those seeking asylum (Hunt, 2005; Yuval-Davis et al, 2005). This dominant narrative has seamlessly blended the concept of 'bogus asylum seekers' into argumentative processes, which now needs no explanation or qualification in the UK - "it just is" (Lynn and Lea, 2003, p. 433).

Whilst purporting the appearance of an open asylum debate and discussion (Tyler, 2006) successive UK governments have characterised people seeking asylum as a threat to the UK (Cohen, 2002; Hunt, 2005 Yuval-Davis et al., 2005). This 'threat' has been constructed in multiple ways to include national identity (Sirriyeh, 2013); social and racial harmony (Jordan and Düvell, 2003); core values of European nations (Yuval-Davis et al., 2005); economic resources (Sirriyeh, 2013); and welfare benefits, public spending and employment opportunities (Jordan and Düvell, 2003; Clayton, 2006). Strategically applied by the UK Government, Tyler suggests "figuring the asylum seeker as a threat works" (2006, p.192), providing a basis for the development of border security to control migration in the UK today (Hammerstad, 2010; Home Office, Border Force and UK Border Agency, 2013, online). Plummer argues "stories are not just practical and symbolic actions: they are also part of the political process" (1995, p.26). The dominant narrative of threat has centred around borders and security, where villains and heroes have been cast and "… narratives play a critical role in creating and recreating history" (Andrews, 2014, p. 88).

Exacerbated in the aftermath of a series of attacks on the United States in New York City and the Washington, D.C. area on September 11th 2001 (Brown, 2005; Yuval-Davis et al., 2005), which provided an historical resonance (Andrews, 2014), national concerns in the UK have been reflected in stories about people seeking asylum who became branded a concern in relation to national security (Treacher et al, 2003; Freedman, 2008; Hunt, 2008; Hammerstad, 2010). Typified as potential terrorists

(Yuval-Davis et al., 2005) and positioned as "a sinister transnational threat" (Castles, 2003, p.16), rather than victims of human rights abuse or deserving recipients of protection (Hammerstad, 2010), people seeking asylum loom large in the UK national narrative (Andrews, 2014).

Maintaining public interest in 'protecting' the UK and arguing that political responses in the form of policy and legislation are necessitated, the UK government has relied on staging and maintaining stories of crisis (Tyler, 2006; Kea and Roberts-Holmes, 2013). Andrews points out;

> "… for a policy to be effective, there needs to be a reasonable story for why it is needed, or why another response would be inadequate or inappropriate. These stories, as it were, are not just within the domain of the individual… narratives are central to the machination of politics, for in constructing what is and isn't working, we are invariably deciding what aspects of social/political/economic/cultural life are and are not relevant to the current problem and its solution – in other words, the lifeblood of politics…" (2014, p.86).

The 'crisis story' surrounding people seeking asylum has been exploited in order to influence political decision-making (Cohen, 2002; Lynn and Lea, 2003; Treacher et al, 2003, Tyler, 2006). "Crisis management" (Tyler, 2006, p.190) has featured prominently on national and international political agendas across Western Europe (Schuster, 2003; Hunt, 2005). Negative stories are routinely drawn on by politicians and deployed to form policy responses to address the numbers of people seeking asylum (Hunt, 2005). Politicians have shown a commitment to gaining popular votes when they assure the public they will reduce the numbers of people seeking asylum (Lynn and Lea, 2003; Treacher et al, 2003; Hunt, 2008). For example, in more recent years, Jack Straw (former UK Home Secretary) was reported to say "… there is a limit on the number of [asylum] applicants, however genuine, that you can take"

(Cracknell, 2001) and members of the New Labour government under Tony Blair stated they wanted to halve the number of asylum applications (Hatton, 2009). Politicians have even made promises to discourage and restrict asylum seeking altogether (Sales, 2002). Kea and Roberts-Holmes point out that "[if] the overriding aim of asylum policy [is] to reduce numbers… then even 'genuine' asylum seekers with legitimate claims [would] not [be] given asylum" (2013, p.1010).

Told and re-told, dominant narratives seek to tell an authoritative story (Andrews, 2014). Used to essentialise, generalise and universalise people who seek asylum (Malkki, 1995), endorsement and repetition reinforces and amplifies narratives (Tyler, 2006). In an effort to maintain a national narrative (Andrews, 2014) repeated governments have mirrored the tabloid media stories, leading to and legitimising public hostility (Cohen, 2002). Positioning the 'undeserving asylum seeker' (Sirriyeh, 2013) and offering **"severe and exceptional"** (ICAR, 2004, p.25) solutions, political decision making processes have been utilised to authorise and introduce tough responses to people seeking asylum (Tyler, 2006). Potentially impacting on how people seeking asylum are legally processed and treated, stories have proved important to the UK Government in legitimising the use of "detention/reception centres, voucher schemes, a housing dispersal policy, I.D. cards, arrest for those arriving without official documents" (Kea and Roberts-Holmes, 2013, p.101). Hardship has become synonymous with the UK asylum system (Hynes and Sales, 2010; Sirriyeh, 2013) with people seeking asylum severely restricted in access to even the most basic services and rights (Hunt, 2005). The general public's acceptance of all tough and punitive measures brought to bear against people seeking asylum appear to justify any harsh treatment towards them in policy terms (Hunt, 2008).

Women seeking asylum have come to represent the 'other' in a society that dehumanises people seeking asylum and excludes them. National narratives are not only about people seeking asylum, they become narratives people tell about themselves. Andrews states "… group-identity claims rest upon our stories" (2014, p. 88). For example, stories are prolifically told about the native and foreigner; citizen and alien; us and them; deserving and undeserving; legal and illegal; and the self and other (Humphries, 2002; Lynn and Lea, 2003; Yuval-Davis at al., 2005; Tyler, 2006). Dominant narratives have provided a way of establishing and fracturing the boundaries and relations between the imagined self and the imagined 'other' (Andrews, 2014).

The gendered 'embodied victim'

For the most part in research and literature, people seeking asylum and refugees have been assumed to be male and male is taken as the norm (Dumper, 2002; Treacher et al, 2003; Hunt, 2005; Yuval-Davis et al., 2005; Freedman, 2008; Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2009; United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2012; Kea and Roberts-Holmes, 2013). Literature filled with men's stories has allowed for men's perspectives to exemplify dominant narratives told about asylum and refugee lives (Gilligan, 1986; Crawley, 2000a, 2000b; Dumper, 2002; Hunt, 2005). In an attempt to review literature on women refugees in the 1980s, Moussa highlighted that women were the forgotten majority, suggesting they appeared only as a footnote and never as text (Moussa, 1992).

Where there is research and literature about women, dominant narratives told about and for women seeking asylum have contained much discussion about the victimisation and particular persecutions of women and may, in part, be reflected in

the ways women seeking asylum are commonly understood as victims of sexual violence, including 'trafficking' (see Appendix One) (Johnsson, 1989; Cole et al, 1992; Kelly, 2000; Amnesty International, 2004a, 2005; Canning, 2010, 2011a, 2011b) and traumatised by their victimisations (Goldenberg, 2002; Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004; Herlihy and Turner, 2007). Represented as bereft of capacity, constantly under assault and perpetually victimised (Manchanda, 2004), women seeking asylum have been described as "de-selved… disposed, disorientated, dislocated, dismembered, stateless, nameless, landless, homeless, and powerless" (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2009, p.38). Histories of persecution typify stories of women seeking asylum and they tend to be doubly viewed as vulnerable because of being women and asylum seekers (Singer, 2014). The ongoing story of the victimisation of women seeking asylum has meant that some women have "stop[ped] being [viewed as] specific persons and become pure victims in general" (Malkki, 1996, p.378).

The grouping of women and children ('womenandchildren') together has been a popular way of representing women's vulnerability, with photos and images functioning as symbols of distress and displacement (Leudar and Nekvapil, 2000; Freedman, 2008; Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2009; Leudar et al., 2008). Evoking an imagined community, almost every piece of literature about women seeking asylum and refugees perpetuates an association, quoting an estimated 70%-80% of displaced people are 'womenandchildren' (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2009). The tendency to amalgamate their stories together potentially infantilises and distorts a detailed understanding of women's lives, rendering women's own stories further absent from the literature whilst overlooking the vast differences between individual women (Mohanty, 1988, 2003; Carpenter, 2005, 2013; Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2009).

Constructing stories about "helpless and superfluous women and children" (Manchanda, 2004, p. 4179) reproduces traditional notions of innocence and vulnerability, enforcing ideas about women as passive and disenfranchised as they flee 'man-made' disasters and persecutions (Carpenter, 2005, 2013). Viewed as mothers, Coomaraswamy (1994) suggests women may be afforded and accrue specific rights to protection. Also, Carpenter argues that stories of 'womenandchildren' may be used to "draw a distinction between individuals who may legitimately be killed and those who may not" (2005, p.302). Based on assumptions that presume a mother's non-combatant status, the propensity to perpetuate gender essentialisms and stereotypes about women may serve to distinguish them as civilians "whose lives must be spared" (Carpenter 2005, p.296), in contrast to combatants who may be targeted (Roberts, 2001; Carpenter, 2013).

Despite any potential gains for women through their association with children, it is frequently reported that the fundamental rights of women and children are less likely to have been met than other people, including the denial of nationality and reduced access to even the most basic food, health and shelter (UNHCR, 2008; Freedman, 2009). Women who have been 'internally displaced' (see Appendix One) primarily remain within their country of origin or cross an immediate border to a neighbouring and potentially less prosperous country, possibly living within refugee camps (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2009; UNHCR, 2010). The practical issues involved with seeking protection in a 'safe' country, such as the necessary resources, documentation and financial obstacles, has meant that the vast majority of displaced women never claim asylum in the UK (Hayter, 2003; Freedman, 2008). This may be one reason why woman asylum seekers have been rendered as symbolic figures of violation, typified by others speaking on their behalf (Mohanty, 1988). Tasked with

the role of 'speaking for and about' women in war, the frequently quoted Major General Patrick Cammaert (formally the UN Military Advisor and Deputy Force Commander) states "it is more dangerous to be a woman than to be a soldier in modern conflict" (Womankind, 2012, online).

Much of the literature on contemporary war and conflict zones has exposed the disproportionately huge numbers of women being victimised in war (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2011; UNHCR, 2011; Refugee Council, 2012; Womankind, 2012). The significance of acknowledging and emphasising the victimisation of women has formed the foundations of telling stories about women asylum seekers being victims. Frequently differentiated from 'other' women, women seeking asylum have been identified as being more affected by violence, vulnerability and victimisation (Refugee Council, 2012). The underpinning principles of this story are that women asylum seekers have been exposed to violence and persecution in their country of origin; become victims of exploitation in transit and on flight to asylum countries; remain vulnerable to further violence, exploitation and victimisation in resettled countries; and face social disapproval and isolation if returned (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2009; Refugee Council, 2009, 2010, 2010b; Canning, 2010, 2011a, 2011b).

Gender-based and gender-specific violence (Crawley, 2000a, 2000b) is considered commonplace in the lives of women asylum seekers. Even in places of 'safety', reports have exposed a lack of protection for women, made particularly visible in relation to accounts of sexual violence by peacekeeping troops in refugee camps and the issue of trafficking (Refugee Council, 2009, 2010, 2010b; Canning, 2011a, 2011b). The perpetually 'victimised women seeking asylum' is a story that is told and

re-told about women asylum seekers both internationally and nationally by charities and human rights organisations (UNHCR, 2011; Refugee Council, 2012).

Victimisation stories may be told for a range of complex political and advocacy reasons; sometimes these stories are attempts to increase legal protection and human rights for individual women and groups of women. A willingness to believe and tell stories about and for women may be an attempt to expose undeniable poor treatments and abuses of women with the aim of improving women's lives. One of the primary ways in which stories of victimisation have been cascaded is to highlight that atrocities happen and to emphasise that however 'unthinkable' the atrocity, it does not mean it could not have occurred (Andrews, 2014).

Storytellers may seek to explicate the veracity of accounts in order to render them accessible and believable, particularly because securing legal protection as a refugee demands a person establish their identity as a victim – "a person who has a well-founded fear of being persecuted" (Refugee Convention). Seeking asylum requires the applicant to provide an 'asylum story' as part of their claim for protection.

Frank (1995) has argued that illness calls for stories and, similarly, I suggest that seeking asylum calls for stories. Telling asylum stories of persecution is anticipated in a claim for asylum in order to gain admission to the UK and to receive legal protection (Eastmond, 2007; Herlihy and Turner, 2007; Home Office, 2009b). An individual's asylum story can strengthen their recognition as a victim (Kea and Roberts-Holmes, 2013) and distinguish refugees from 'other' people (Mosselson, 2010). Szörényi suggests that a woman claiming asylum has to prove that the victimisation and treatment has been "less than human", yet at the same time she

must also prove she is a "reliable, rational speaking subject whose word is dependable" (2009, p.175). Logical, credible and robust, whole accounts are necessary within a believable asylum story in the UK asylum system (Herlihy et al., 2002; Herlihy and Turner, 2007; Crawley, 2007, 2011b, 2011c). Herein lies a significant challenge and "the paradox of bearing witness to one's own oppression" (Oliver, 2001, p.93), as people claiming asylum are expected to provide an account as rational human 'subjects' but account for their persecution as 'objectified others' (Szörényi, 2009).

Refusing to present an asylum story can be seen as extremely high risk behaviour for the individual seeking asylum in the UK. For example, not attending a Home Office interview can result in an asylum claim being 'refused' (see Appendix One) on grounds of non-compliance (Home Office, 2008). Women are obliged to present an asylum story in informal and formal interviews, court hearings and written statements, and provide the central tenet of evidence for an asylum claim (Herlihy and Turner, 2007). Further obliged to attend several legal interviews, women make subsequent court appearances and are expected to fully disclose all information deemed relevant by immigration officials, which frequently includes self-disclosure; revelations, explications and clarifications of persecution (Herlihy et al., 2002; Bögner et al., 2010; Crawley, 2010; Muggeridge and Maman; 2011). Due to intimate aspects of life being detailed in relation to the asylum assessment and decision making in the UK, women's bodies may become reported on for public scrutiny and assessment (Kea and Roberts-Holmes, 2013). Rendering women's bodies as evidence of their victimisation and abuse, women have to justify themselves as legitimate to speak about, as embodied storytellers, and witness their own persecution through their physical objectification (Oliver, 2001; Kea and Roberts-

Holmes, 2013). In the event of a woman putting in an 'appeal' (see Appendix One) on the decision on her asylum claim or submitting a 'fresh asylum claim' (see Appendix One), further interviews will be necessitated.

The story told as part of an asylum claim may be witnessed by the claimant's child/ren and will regularly be called upon by solicitors and barristers, case owners, Home Office representatives and judges. Professionals, such as medical witnesses, organisations and 'country' experts, may also submit formalised evidence statements or medical reports (Laws and Patsalides, 1997) to the Home Office as part of the asylum assessment and decision making. Experts, from within the professional field of asylum, may be asked to carry out the task of making meaning from the testimony (Szörényi, 2009). Women's own stories are replaced with 'expert' and humanitarian statements which become a familiar way in which to make sense of the 'unfamiliar' asylum story. The 'expert' speaks for the 'other' and, in doing so, takes her place, making it impossible for her to be heard or to tell her story; her place has been taken and occupied by someone 'familiar' (Oliver, 2001; Tyler, 2006).

Each of these accounts will have been saturated within available dominant narratives, structured, produced and consumed in relation to various mechanisms and investigated (Kea and Roberts-Holmes, 2013). Other narratives may be silenced, contested or accepted (Mauther, 2000; Andrews, 2008). The UK asylum system assesses an asylum claim for issues of validity, credibility and plausibility (Bögner et al., 2010). In relation to verification, all stories are scrutinised, reported and judged, interrogating the evidence provided in the interview (Crawley, 2000a, 2000b). Stories have been treated with hostility by decision makers (Crawley, 2007, 2010, 20011a; Herlihy and Turner, 2007) and for people seeking asylum, stories can be profoundly, devastatingly contested (Mosselson, 2010).

The UK asylum assessment and decision making process relies on a distinction being drawn between the persecutions of 'other' countries and the 'safety' of the UK. Women seeking asylum are cast as 'them' who need 'us' to protect 'them' (Szörényi, 2009). Yet an asylum claim based on a story of victimisation and persecution is not one that ensures or guarantees success in the form of being granted legal protection. Even the smallest of discrepancies or inconsistencies within the asylum story, including late or a lack of full disclosure, can affect the credibility of the applicant and negatively impact on a woman's claim for asylum (Herlihy et al., 2002; Querton, 2012; Kea and Roberts-Holmes, 2013). In 2009, of the total initial decisions made that year on women's claims, 72% were refused (Home Office, 2009a). The UK asylum system regularly refuses the majority of asylum claims made by women (Dorling et al., 2012; Kea and Roberts-Holmes, 2013).

The UK government's aim for the number of asylum claimants to reduce may mean legitimate claims have been refused as decision makers seek out inconsistencies, reducing the credibility of the claimant and invalidating the claim (Kea and Roberts-Holmes, 2013). Invalidating asylum claims and treating asylum stories with suspicion has created an environment within the UK whereby being a victim may serve little purpose in terms of receiving legal protection (Kea and Roberts-Holmes, 2013). A culture of disbelief has long been reported as a popular practice in the UK, characterising the Home Office relationship to people seeking asylum and decision makers' attitude to the credibility and legitimacy of asylum claims (Glidewell Panel, 1996; Amnesty International, 2004b, Souter, 2011). Hynes' observations of accounts of people seeking asylum found that "without exception asylum seekers felt their accounts of persecution were not believed during interviews with the Home Office

and that interviews were conducted in an atmosphere of suspicion and disbelief"
(2009, p.105).

Szörényi also points out "a host of factors work against the perception of asylum
seekers as credible witnesses to their own history, even outside the kind of
deliberate efforts to demonise and discredit asylum seekers as 'queue jumpers' or
'illegal immigrants' that both government and media propagate" (2009, p.176). As
discussed in this chapter, stories told for people seeking asylum are bound up in
wider dominant narratives whereby stories of people seeking asylum are located as
suspicious in relation to notions of deviousness, deceitfulness and bogusness (Hunt,
2005; Neumayer, 2005). Therefore, "advocating on their own behalf can make those
hoping for asylum appear to have too much capacity and determination to be
convincing as 'genuine' refugees" (Szörényi, 2009, p.177). Represented as
possessing 'too much' capacity, women seeking asylum risk appearing 'bogus'.

Human rights are women's rights

Women refugees were specifically identified for discussion by the United Nations in
1979 at the World Conference of the UN Decade of Women (United Nations, 1979;
Querton, 2012). The Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination
against Women (CEDAW, 1979) began as a treaty pertinent to developing
understandings about human rights violations and the gendered situations women
face around the world. The Beijing Platform for Action, launched at the United
Nations World Conference on Women (1995), urged states to recognise women as
refugees, and include claims based on gender-related persecution. Arguments were
put forward that governments promote and fully protect all women throughout their
lifetime, offering fundamental freedoms and the enjoyment of human rights, stating

human rights for women were a "fundamental principle of universal human rights" (Platform for Action, 1995, p.7). This assertion, alongside other human rights documents (UNHCR, 1991, 1995, 2002a, 2002b, 2006, 2008, 2009), emerged during the early 1990s onwards.

The International Criminal Tribunals for Rwanda (1992) and the Former Yugoslavia (1994), as discussed in Chapter One, had a particular impact on stories told about violence against women by politicising issues of rape and sexual violence. These new stories identified specific forms of violence being used as a means of ethnic cleansing, acts of genocide and weapons of war largely being waged on the bodies of women and girls (Fisher, 1996; Sharlach, 2000; Hajdukowski-Ahmed et al., 2009). Despite these developments the UKBA has been one of the public authorities that has caused great concern with regard to fulfilling obligations under the Beijing Platform for Action (Rights of Women, 2010) and a lack of gender sensitive approaches within their policies and practices towards women seeking asylum (Singer, 2009; Singer and Chandler, 2010; Querton, 2012).

Faced with prolific and negative stories about asylum, one of the ways in which human rights advocates have responded, including charities and organisations, has been to generate counter-stories (BID, 2013; Refugee Council, 2013a). Counter-stories have attempted to challenge and disrupt dominant dehumanising stories found in UK government and the media (Tyler, 2006). Human rights advocates have made efforts to initiate interest in asylum by providing a form of education for the broader public, as well as raising money for charities doing work directly with and on behalf of people seeking asylum (Szörényi, 2009). In order to promote sympathy and compassion, attempts have been made in the UK to 'humanise' people seeking asylum (Tyler, 2006). For example, celebrations in Refugee Week take place across

the UK highlighting the contributions of refugees, showcasing the skills, knowledge and stories of people seeking asylum and refugees (Refugee Council, 2013a). This particular event promotes the position of people seeking asylum as active and whose role can be celebrated in relation to a wealth of contributions in the UK.

Despite such campaigns, dehumanising and disempowering narratives continue to proliferate. Stereotyping, marginalising and misrepresenting women seeking asylum brings vilification and hatred to bear on those who seek safety, authorising punitive policies and tough responses that negatively impact people seeking asylum and enacting social and political injustices. Human rights organisations, both international and national, have engaged with media and other forms of storytelling to generate campaigns against injustices. International organisations such as Amnesty International and the United Nations Population Fund frequently report on issues affecting women refugees as a means of promoting understanding of women's lives across the globe. National campaigns in the UK have often been explicitly resistant, positioning people seeking asylum as protesters and activists, often campaigning about human rights abuses within the UK asylum system (Home Affairs Committee Report, 2013[22]). Within such campaigns, people seeking asylum have become synonymous as human rights advocates openly criticising the UK government, communicating a struggle within the UK between individuals who strive for recognition of their human rights and a government who has marginalised aspects of those legal rights.

Testimony is often positioned by human rights advocates as "the truth' of victimisation" (Szörényi, 2009, p.178). Advocates of those seeking asylum have used

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22 See the Home Affairs Committee Report, for an example of a written testimony from 'Angela' (p.856) with specific reference to a 'No to G4S' campaign.

testimony to recount the trauma of human rights abuses (Andrews, 2007b). First person stories are often positioned to engender credibility and status in the storyteller, as opposed to stories told 'about' or on behalf of people seeking asylum. This popular rhetorical strategy, with universal application, has been effective in communication about injustices across the globe (Szörényi, 2009). Testimony has been viewed as a way to generate feelings of greater benevolence towards people seeking asylum from the wider public, governments and decision-makers (Tyler, 2006; Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2009).

Stories that display suffering have been used "… in order to inaugurate a sense of accountability" (Szörényi, 2009, p.175) in the listener. Testimonials that reach public availability call upon the general public in order for them to "recognize the 'human face' of specific asylum seekers" (Tyler, 2006, p.194). Women's organisations in the UK attempt similar strategies. For example, Women for Refugee Women (2013) have testimonies from women asylum seekers on their website, alongside photographs of women's faces and symbolic images of their asylum situations. Disseminating women's own stories about the suffering and persecution that brought them to claim asylum frequently exposes the specific situations faced by women around the globe. Some of this work in the UK has been carried out by organisations that involve women asylum seekers themselves and groups set up and run by women asylum seekers[23]. For example, projects are implicitly framed by the presentation of information about their work and the women for and with whom they carry out their work. These self-promoting groups of women asylum seekers and refugees take an active role in representing women seeking asylum by re-inserting

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23 See Women Asylum Seekers Together (WAST, 2010, online), Why Refugee Women (WRW, no date, online) and Development and Empowerment for Women's Advancement (DEWA, no date, online).

the notion of the importance of stories told by women seeking asylum. The repetition of the role of 'giving voice and speaking-out'[24] exposes some of the strategies used by advocacy groups. Organisations and charities have acknowledged the invisibility of women asylum seekers' stories and are attempting to change and challenge the situation in the UK.

There appears to be an assumption in the UK that testimony promotes empathy within wider audiences and that providing a 'humanising' account accordingly encourages the wider public to identify with people and treat them with the greater respect they deserve (Szörényi, 2009). Within this narrative framework people seeking asylum may be commonly imagined as "appropriately grateful recipients of charity" (Szörényi, 2009, p.177). The tellers of these tales take into account the content of the story but also the way in which these stories are framed. Malkki (1996) has noted that dominant narratives influence charities and human rights advocates who try to identify and promote exemplary victims in relation to the "relentless circulation of essentialised images of victimhood … intrinsic features of refugee existence" (Szörényi , 2009, p.178). Furthermore, gendered narrative frameworks have meant that some women seeking asylum become represented in relation to romantic, heroic and exotic stories (Uehara et al, 2001) intended to promote and celebrate "the resourceful human spirit" (Langer, 1991, p.xi). These types of stories potentially foreclose distinctions that women may make between themselves and essentially position women seeking asylum as 'other'.

Some campaigns have promoted their successes and effectiveness in bringing about changes in the UK for women, including policy developments in the UK. Asylum Aid

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24 Notably, WAST state: "… we refuse to be invisible and we are making our voices heard" (2010, online).

(2013, online) suggested that their role as advocates has effectively forced the government to make some changes to policy in favour of the needs of women. Other campaign outcomes are not always desirable. For example, "…the British Government is investing billions in building a penal system in which it will incarcerate increasing numbers of asylum-seekers in remote locations across Britain – precisely so that we will be less able to form identity attachments with 'them'" (Tyler, 2006, p.195).

In 2012 public protests were promoted in the media to support women's resistance to detention through uprisings and acts of resistance (Scott, 1985; Riessman, 2000) within a UK immigration removal facility (Gledhill, 2012). Individual women seeking asylum have also become the source of high profile campaigning in efforts to prevent detentions, deportations and removals from the UK. Blogs, email networks and other online forms of communication have played a role in galvanising support for individuals. These forms of storytelling are less 'stable' than others, tending to appear and disappear from the websites where they are hosted[25].

Conclusion

In this chapter I have reviewed a body of literature about people seeking asylum, in particular women. I started by outlining my approach to reviewing the literature. I identified three important studies which have informed my own research and I gave a brief overview of the studies. Providing demographic information about asylum seeking, I aimed to develop a broader context for this research. I have illustrated that the concept of asylum has been developed historically and remains largely shaped

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25 See the instance of film star Colin Firth campaigning for Rose Akhalu who was facing removal from the UK. [Online]. [Accessed 18 September, 2014]. Available from: http//www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/main-topics/general-news/actor-firth-backing-fight-to-stop-deportation-of-severely-ill-woman-1-4613579

by omitting gender-specific understandings of persecution. Furthermore, I have suggested that the context of seeking asylum in the UK is set against a backdrop of UK public moral panic (Cohen, 2002; Cohen, 2011) and media vilification,

Central to this chapter is an exploration of the literature relating to dominant narratives told 'about' and 'for' women seeking asylum in the UK which, I argue, have formed a basis for contemporary understandings about women seeking asylum in the UK. Including an exploration of dominant narratives relating to stories told 'about' and 'for' people seeking asylum, I have primarily highlighted the dichotomy of people seeking asylum, conceptualised as 'dehumanised hate figures', and women conceptualised as 'gendered embodied victims'. Linking together stories told 'about' and 'for' women seeking asylum, I have explored some of the potential problems with these specific stories, including how these forms of representation may disabled other forms of recognition (Hunt, 2005; Tyler, 2006). I have suggested these dominant narratives have justified and allowed for the development and general acceptance of tough, punitive measures in policy terms and harsh treatment brought to bear against people seeking asylum in the UK (Hunt, 2008).

Despite the problems and risks I have outlined with contemporary storytelling in the area of asylum, it has not been my intention to criticise the publication of stories by some campaigning groups and told by people seeking asylum, those who have chosen to become storytellers of their own tales. I have, however, suggested that the limited frameworks within which women asylum seeker stories are situated are deeply problematic for those who seek to tell stories with the potential to disrupt and challenge dominant narrative understandings about women seeking asylum. I have also highlighted how these particular dominant narratives may be both enabling and limiting for women seeking asylum. Exposing the absence of stories told 'by' women

seeking asylum, I have laid the foundations for the main aim of this research to explore the stories told by women seeking asylum.

In the next chapter I will describe how I have drawn on a narrative approach called the Listening Guide (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, 2003; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008) which has informed and provided an approach to the research process.

Chapter Three:
Listening to women

"It's not just listening, it's about understanding (Anne-Laure)"

I start this chapter with a section of a poem 'Hush'[26] by Imani Woomera, which

emphasises the power and importance of telling stories. This poem has particular

resonance for me as I have spoken it in public presentations on several occasions to

elevate the notion of listening to women's stories.

> Because my voice contains power
> My experience contains the experience of others
> The birth of my words is the death of my shame
> So I shall speak
> Until my tongue goes numb
> And my lips forget word
> I shall speak
> Until I create a hurricane and blow down concrete skyscraper
> I shall speak
> Through Monologue
> Through Scripture
> Through Song
> Through Noise
> Through Bad blood
> Through My anger
> Through My pain
> Through My shame and yours
> Through my soul
> I shall speak
> So I shall free
> I shall speak

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26 The source for the poem is a report: Integrated Regional Information Networks (2007, p.137).

Introduction

Listening to the stories of women seeking asylum was a starting point for this study. The concept of listening is of Germanic origin and derived from old English – "to 'pay attention to'" (Oxford English Dictionary). As described in the previous chapter, for the most part the stories of women seeking asylum have not been 'paid attention to'. Attempting to make explicit room for listening to stories, particularly those which may not have been spoken, listened to or understood (Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan et al., 2003), I view this as an ethical and methodological endeavour. Believing all human beings are Homo Narrans[27] (Niles, 1999), I work from a relational model of storytelling (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, 2003) that seeks to identify understanding about the stories women seeking asylum tell about their lives. Okri warns;

> "It is easy to forget how mysterious and mighty stories are. They do their work in silence, invisibly. They work with all the internal materials of the mind and self. They become part of you. Beware the stories you read or tell: subtly, at night, beneath the waters of consciousness, they are altering your world" (1996, p. 34).

In grappling with how to place women seeking asylum at the heart of the study, emphasising their stories while at the same time exploring the role of the researcher in shaping the research, the Listening Guide (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, 2003) approach has been particularly influential. In this chapter I will explore the foundations and development of the Listening Guide and I go on to discuss the importance of putting women at the centre of this study, highlighting the relational and feminist perspectives embedded in the Listening Guide. Finally, I outline the role

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27 Niles (1999) uses Homo Narrans to mean that human being are storytellers and shape their world through the stories they tell.

of reflexivity as a central aspect of this study (Letherby, 2000, 2002; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008).

Listening to opportunities

Asking myself about how I could best capture the complexities and contradictions of the stories women tell, as well as how to represent women's stories in their own interests (Standing, 1998), I was faced with not only methodological decisions but choices about research traditions. Navigating a research process that took account of the demands of personal and community commitments, as well as the academic standards embedded in pursuing research within the mainstream structure of a University, was difficult. Like many feminist researchers I was concerned with the dilemmas and challenges involved in coming to know someone, making claims about what I might know and representing women in qualitative research (Letherby, 2000, 2002). Ribbens and Edwards suggest "…while we may seek to de-construct 'expert' knowledge, we may also at times want to assert our authority and 'expertise'" (1998, p.204). Also pertinent was the context in which research participants tell their stories and the ways in which a researcher impacts on the research process (Letherby, 2000, 2002).

Balancing my research aims with my own wish for academic credibility raised questions for me about the complicated social context in which the study was carried out. Therefore, I have sought to make transparent not just the research process but the integration of the methodology and the theoretical foundations that have informed it. In an effort to take these relationships seriously it was also necessary, given that all methodologies are underpinned by particular theoretical assumptions that shape the research process, to try and include as much detail as possible about

how knowledge is created, what knowledge is produced, the use of knowledge and consideration of whose interests' knowledge serves (Brown and Strega, 2005).

The choices I made about my research approach were bound up with my personal and academic biography as well as my intellectual concerns (Letherby, 2000). Given some of the ways in which I have previously relied on forms of testimony and storytelling to bring awareness to particular situations of women across the globe, stories have played an important role in raising my own awareness and consciousness of many unknown, marginalised and unheard social struggles. Oral traditions and storytelling have often been used as a way of passing down cultural, social and personal histories which may be vital for survival (Qwul'sih'yah'maht, 2005).

Women authors and storytellers have had much to say about their own migratory and asylum seeking journeys. Highlighting a commitment to stories, women have spoken about and recorded crossing borders, life in exile, migrations and claiming asylum. For example, Hoffman (1998) reflects on her post-war journey from Cracow to America, making sense of her life in exile and suggesting a fragmented sense of having 'two identities'. Zabaleta (2003) tells her story of being exiled from Argentina, seeking asylum and becoming a refugee in the UK. Her account exposes some of the challenges she faced as a woman, resisting the erasing of her professional status whilst being perceived as 'merely a 'wife' and 'mother'. Parvaz (2003) accounts for her detention and torture as a political prisoner in Iran, attesting to the centrality of stories in making sense of personal events for wider audiences to hear. Listening to women who have drawn so specifically on their own stories has highlighted, for me, the importance of storytelling for making sense of other women's lives.

The institutional context and opportunities that arose during my research also played a central role in decisions about my research approach. I was presented with an opportunity early in my doctoral planning when I attended a postgraduate specialist qualitative research training event, 'Analysing interview narratives using the Listening Guide'. The training was delivered at the institution where I was based and was convened and facilitated by Dr. Natasha Mauthner, a visiting feminist academic and co-founder of the Listening Guide, alongside Dr. Ruth Deery who was, at the time, a Reader at the institution and holds expertise in the use of the Listening Guide. The event included a detailed exploration of the methodological ideas which underpin the Listening Guide, as well as practice about how to use the Listening Guide as a method for data analysis.

The Listening Guide, as a research approach as well as a method of data analysis, appeared to offer a multitude of particular ways of enhancing my own study and, as a result of the training, a number of students, including myself, created the postgraduate researchers' Listening Guide Study Group[28] (LGSG), as discussed in Chapters Four and Five (also see Appendix Three for more information about the LGSG). Central to the LGSG was the notion that the research process can be enhanced within a peer group setting, utilising multiple listeners to develop reflexive approaches to the research process, including sharing different interpretations during the analysis of the data (Gilligan et al., 2003). The study group provided me with an exceptional level of input, creating dedicated time-specific space and enabling me to give energy and thorough attention to allow an interpretative, reflexive process to develop.

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28 LGSG had its inaugural meeting on 11th April, 2011.

Following the training and the creation of the LGSG I attended a conference on Feminist Research Methods at East Anglia University[29]. The attendance of keynote speaker Dr Natasha Mauthner provided a unique situation for me to gain a greater understanding of the methodological potential of the Listening Guide. The conference, together with the training and the establishment of the LGSG, proved to be very valuable and served to confirm how the Listening Guide could potentially relate to and enhance my own study.

Historical foundations of the Listening Guide

The historical foundations of the Listening Guide lie in the influential work of Carol Gilligan (1982) whose research approaches were developed in direct response to longitudinal studies looking at young women's 'voices' (Gilligan et al., 2003). The concept of 'voice' emerged as a central tenet of the social sciences with Gilligan's (1982) influential book 'In a Different Voice'. Emphasising the importance of 'care and justice' in research approaches (Brown et al., 1991; Gilligan et al., 2003), a notion of listening to young women's voices (Gilligan, 1982; Brown and Gilligan, 1992) was established as an approach that allowed researchers to specifically consider feelings and the ways in which young women expressed their sense of self (Brown and Gilligan, 1992). Exploring the relational struggles of young women who may have "lost voices" and "lost strength" (Brown and Gilligan, 1992, p.6), this approach highlighted how voices may be influenced or altered and the ways in which young women potentially silence themselves, concerned that speaking out might fracture or damage relationships (Brown and Gilligan, 1992).

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29 Feminist Research Methods Workshop, 9th December, 2011, East Anglia University, Norwich.

Founded at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, collaborative work started in 1984, with post graduate students (a list of whom can be found at the end of Appendix Three) developing Gilligan's research (Gilligan et al., 2003; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008). The Voice Centred Relational Method (VCRM) emerged (Brown and Gilligan, 1992), an approach that has continued to be adopted, adapted and developed (Brown et al., 1989, 1988; Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Taylor et al., 1995; Brown, 1998, 1994). In contrast to other research approaches, VCRM moved away from traditional research paradigms (Proctar, 2010), rejecting and refuting assumptions foregrounded in some social science research which aimed to discover 'truth' in relation to objectivity, eliminating biases and striving to attain the ability to predict, quantify and control (Riessman, 1993, 2002, 2005; Miller, 2005; Squire et al., 2008). Letherby notes "historically, objectivity, rationality and value-freedom, rather than involvement, subjectivity and emotion, have been given academic status" (2000, p.107). This new approach focussed on research as subjective, interpretive, emotional and relational (Gilligan, 1982, 1993; Gilligan et al., 2003).

Like many feminist scholars, Gilligan's (1982) perspectives are marked by an insistence that researchers utilise the potential of storytelling (Taylor et al., 1995; Stone-Mediatore, 2003; Presser, 2005). Brown and Gilligan elevated the notion of women having "a voice worth listening to" (1992, p.21). Premised on young women's voices as a passageway into understanding young women, VCRM was inscribed with an overt political agenda which placed their voices at the centre of research processes. Consistent with its radical potential, researchers were encouraged to see VCRM as a way in which researchers could bring subjectivities to bear on stories (Brown, 1988; Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2008). Listening for resistance to dominant narratives (Gilligan, 2011), VCRM created opportunities for

girls and women to be heard in situations of struggle, abuse and difficult relations (Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Proctar, 2010).

Whilst scholars have championed VCRM, the approach has also been criticised for espousing a particular notion of individualism and suggesting that voices telling stories give direct access to "lived experiences" (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003, p.423) or the "actualities of people's lives as they experience them" (Smith, 1996, p.172). Of particular contention, is the suggestion that VCRM attempts to "… unproblematically reproduce the notion of the 'pure' voices… as though women, by virtue of simply being women, can utter truths about the world and thereby reveal our authentic selves" (Wilkinson, 1997, p.259). It is perhaps some of this criticism which has led to particular developments of VCRM.

Adapting and broadening VCRM for more sociological purposes (Byrne et al., 2009) Natasha Mauthner and Andrea Doucet were originally part of a small post-graduate research group mentored by Carol Gilligan (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, 2003; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008; Byrne et al., 2009). Through their re-positioning of VCRM, Mauthner and Doucet (1998, 2003) developed the Listening Guide. Whilst the terms 'the Listening Guide' and 'VCRM' continue to be used interchangeably in much of the literature (Middleton, 2010), specific and perceptible methodological shifts can be seen between these research approaches, reflecting more than just a change in name. In particular, whilst Gilligan's (1982) original work primarily focussed on voice, Mauthner and Doucet (1998, 2003) came to refute the notion that a researcher could come to know the authentic voices or the 'true selves' of their research participants. Rather than risk de-contextualising women's stories, the Listening Guide focuses on uncovering the multi-layered influences that shape and contextualise them (Tronto, 1995; Mauthner and Doucet, 1998; Tolman, 2001; Byrne

71

et al., 2009; Edwards and Weller, 2012). Influenced by the representational nature of storytelling (Riessman, 1993; Andrews, 2007a, 2007b) and emphasising narrative frameworks (Somers, 1994; Plummer, 1995, 2001), story, rather than voice, is central to the Listening Guide approach.

At the same time as making some significant shifts, the founders of the Listening Guide also honoured some aspects of VCRM and emphasised the ideas of relationships at all stages of the research process. By paying attention to stories and finding ways to understand them (Byrne et al., 2009), participants' and researchers' stories are not viewed as transparent accounts (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008). The role of reflexivity has become central to the Listening Guide approach, recognising that research narratives represent a joint and shared co-constructed endeavour (Maynard, 1994; Somers, 1994; Mauthner and Doucet, 2003; Sorsoli, 2007). The Listening Guide approach explicitly recognises that all stories are only ever partial and all storytellers cast themselves in particular roles in relation to who they think is listening (Andrews, 2014).

Whilst there are no studies to date that have used either VCRM or the Listening Guide to carry out research with women seeking asylum in the UK, studies using the Listening Guide continue to reflect an interest in the stories of women and girls (Gilligan, 1982; Brown and Gilligan, 1992). Studies have included stories told by younger women and adolescent girls, for example about 'sexuality' (Tolman, 2001); 'gossip' (Brown, 1998); 'race and relationships' (Taylor et al., 1995); and 'teenage pregnancy' (Middleton, 2010). Specific aspects of women's stories have also been explored through the Listening Guide including 'motherhood and imprisonment' (Lockwood, 2013); 'egg donation' (Golding, 2011); 'housework and childcare' (Doucet, 1995); 'older women and dementia' (Proctor, 2001); and 'workplace

transition' (Balan, 2005). Women's emotions have played a central part in studies using the Listening Guide, including 'depression' (Jack, 1991); 'aggression and anger' (Jack, 1999); and racialised and gendered stories of 'strength and depression' (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2008).

Although primarily developed and used with women and girls, there is little in the Listening Guide that precludes its use with other individuals and groups of people. More recent diverse and multi-disciplinary uses and adaptations of the Listening Guide are reflected in a range of different studies (Byrne et al., 2009; Fairclough, 2007; Doucet, 2008; Paliadelis and Cruickshank, 2008; Rostron, 2009; Stein, 2009; Woodcock, 2010; Pasura et al., 2013; Smith and Jones, 2012). Regardless of the range of innovative research developments reflected in different studies using the Listening Guide, what is consistent across the studies has been the commitment of researchers to listen to people whose stories may have been marginalised, mis-represented or overlooked in more traditional research approaches, and to taking an interpretive, emotional, relational and multi-layered approach to understanding stories.

Women at the centre

I have endeavoured to ground this study in a feminist understanding about the importance of listening to women's stories. The term feminist research covers a broad and a diverse body of literature and research which draws on a wide range of perspectives and different methodological approaches. Identifying this research as 'feminist' was based on an assumption that feminist research is not distinguished by research methods (Harding, 1987) but rather by "a sensitivity to the role of gender within society… and a critical approach to the tools of research" (Millen, 1997, 6.3). I

have incorporated the term feminist research to highlight my own feminist identity (Letherby, 2000) and my explicit concerns with raising awareness of stories told by women in an effort to address issues of marginalisation and to challenge some of the dominant narratives in the UK. Taking this research approach with women seeking asylum provided a way of engaging with these accounts when "the ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from awareness. Survivors of political torture, war, and sexual crimes silence themselves and are silenced because it is too difficult to tell and to listen" (Riessman, 1993, p.3). Invariably and similarly silenced, listening to women asylum seekers' stories potentially helps restore, both to the teller and to the listener, a sense of capacity (Eastmond, 2005, 2007). Arendt says "all sorrows can be born if you put them in a story or tell a story about them" (Hannah Arendt,1958, cited by Plummer, 2013, p.209).

Reflecting a feminist endeavour to "create the space for an absent subject" (Smith, 1987, p.107) and establishing the possibility of unsettling narrowly conceived dominant narratives, I have attempted to insert women seeking asylum into the research picture (Harding, 1987; Benhabib, 1992; Waite and Conn, 2011). It is a social, political and ontological move that places the stories of women seeking asylum - their accounts, their lives, their hopes and struggles - at the centre of analysis. Resonating with some transnational feminist thought on diversity and difference (bell hooks, 1984, 1989; Harding, 1987, 1986; Smith, 1987; Mohanty, 1988, 2003; Benhabib, 1992; Collins, 2000), I approached this study with a growing awareness and emphasis on the diverse ways and varying extents that different women tell stories about their lives including being disadvantaged or oppressed as a result of their gender (Francis, 2002). Not wishing to falsely universalise the ways in which the struggles of some women have been overlooked (Mohanty, 2003;

74

Clarence, 2003), I utilised the Listening Guide as a way to ground knowledge in "individual experience, perspective, subjectivity" (Harding, 1996, p.61) without merely positioning the stories of women seeking asylum as a reference for difference.

Unlike research approaches which consider storytelling as additional material to supplement other methods of research (Qwul'sih'yah'maht, 2005), the emphasis on storytelling and listening to stories highlights a diversity of women's own perspectives and suggests that women are experts in their own stories (Gilligan et al., 2003). Produced in particular situations, storytelling can be a way in which people "come to *be* who [they] are (however ephemeral, multiple, and changing)" (Somers, 1994, p.606, original emphasis). Representing a way for women to participate, storytelling can place the power in the hands of the participant to make choices about what they say and don't say (Qwul'sih'yah'maht, 2005).

I considered this approach to be explicitly feminist because it is intended to serve the interests of women by doing research 'with' women rather than merely 'about' women, whilst not attempting to covet that I ultimately "after leaving the field and whilst writing the research 'findings [have] ultimate control over the material" (Letherby, 2000, p.108). Rather than simply modifying more traditional research approaches, I have sought a rather different and critical approach, which is reflected in the research processes. The personal and political context of this study challenges a broad range of other popular research approaches, seeking to find innovative ways of adopting, adapting and developing research which did not reject critical and rigorous methods (Millen, 1997).

Listening and understanding

Rather than listening to stories as if they are merely a straightforward description of events, making sense of and understanding them was a central methodological concern. As one of the participants in my study rightly states;

> It's not just listening, it's about understanding (Anne-Laure).

In order to understand more about women's stories I focused on the relationship between stories and narratives, what Phoenix has described as "narrative-in-context" (2008, p.64). Adopting a relational approach (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, 2003; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008), in particular the concept of "relational narrated subjects" (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008. p.407), I was able to recognise stories as intimately related to narratives (Plummer, 2013; Phoenix, 2008). Narratives are frameworks that organise stories (Plummer, 2013; Phoenix, 2008) and the relationship between narratives and stories is necessary in order for stories to be understandable and "tellable'" (Andrews, 2014, p. 87).

"Familiar narratives" (Andrews, 2014, p.87) offer the storyteller and listener identifiable storytelling landmarks, templates and resources (Somers, 1994). People draw upon narratives, consciously and unconsciously, to organise and reveal underlying structures, tensions and storylines embedded in their stories. Unique and individual stories may be filled with events and relationships but they are constructed by adopting, adapting and developing narratives. We are not free to tell any stories because when we tell stories and represent a sense of ourselves and our lives, our stories need to be understood by others, so we orientate towards our perceived listeners (Woodiwiss, 2004, 2009, 2014). Therefore, specifically utilised within this study, narrative frameworks are used to explore how women present aspects of

themselves within their stories and enable listeners to understand their stories. Andrews states:

> "I am convinced that if I can listen carefully enough, there is much to learn from every story that one might gather. For society really is comprised of human lives, and if we can begin to understand the framework that lends meaning to these lives, then we have taken the important first step to being able to access the wider framework of meaning" (2007a, p.491).

This research approach to stories and listening enabled me to consider the ways in which women continually construct a sense of self through storytelling, enabling interactions and the possibility for taking up, ignoring or resisting particular dominant narratives. Highlighting the ways in which storytellers draw upon a contextual understanding through their stories, narratives may be used to explain decisions, choices and situations in people's lives. Told and retold and, at times, producing "well-worn accounts" (Phoenix, 2008, p. 67), analysis of narratives enabled attention to be paid to what may have motivated women to construct their stories and illuminate their presentations of themselves.

Understanding stories can be difficult. Storytellers mix and weave between different narrative frameworks and stories rarely conform exclusively to a singular narrative (Frank, 1995). Alternatively and repeatedly stories may shift between different narratives, reiterating, disrupting and reinventing new ones. Whilst some writers make no distinction between narrative and story, by conflating the terms or asserting that narrative is synonymous with story (Sarbin, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988), the importance of a distinction provides a critical component to comprehending the Listening Guide approach to this study. Offering a particular discipline that includes in-depth analysis of the data, which I explore in Chapter Six, the Listening Guide

does not depreciate the importance or originality of individual stories. Going beyond listening to what women said and retaining the context from where stories are formed, the Listening Guide permitted the study of individual stories whilst helping to identify the central narratives that helped frame them.

Reflecting on what the storyteller is trying to achieve within their story (Frank, 2010), as well as 'context' by considering what narratives frame the story, the Listening Guide helped me to recognise both the intentional and the structured nature of stories (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998). Woodiwiss notes "… in telling our stories we do not simply slot ourselves into ready-made narratives but we do draw on stories or narrative frameworks that are currently circulating" (2014, p.140). In this sense stories were not considered to be solely determined by narrative frameworks (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008) but also emphasised the role women may play in reacting to and intervening in creating and constructing narratives.

A memory, a monologue, a rant and a prayer[30]

Whilst the primary focus of this study has been on the stories of women seeking asylum, my own role in storytelling was not overlooked. An integral part of coming to understand women's stories and exploring the research process, reflexivity and representation has long been established in many approaches to qualitative research (Harding, 1987, 1991; Letherby, 2000, 2002). The importance of reflexivity is premised on the recognition that the construction of all literature "always bears the mark of the person who created it" (Riessman, 1993, p.v). As a result researchers are expected to consider how they affect the different stages of the research

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30 This sub-title is taken from a collection of monologues: "A memory, a monologue, a rant and a prayer: Writing to stop violence against women and girls" (Ensler and Doyle, 2007).

process, outlining key elements of themselves in relation to statements about aspects of their identity.

Throughout the thesis I have written in the first person in an effort to resist a more traditional academic writing style which has privileged using the third person as author, as if the 'author' has an "omniscient voice" (Kimpson, 2005, p.74). In order to position myself as overtly as possible, the rhetorical form is intended to compel immediacy and express a sense of transparency about myself. Robinson (2002) has criticised researchers for failing to consider the specific methodological challenges of researching people seeking asylum and refugees and advocates that researchers be more reflexive about their own positionality. In this research, attention was paid to the role that I had, as a "central figure" (Finlay, 2002, p.531), in the research process, directly or indirectly, subtly or intentionally, influencing the study.

Characterising reflexivity in this study as an endeavour to become more aware of the research process and my own story about myself (Letherby, 2000, 2002), I have attempted to bring the personal from the periphery to the centre and make myself as accountable and transparent as possible within all the research relationships involved in this study (Doucet and Mauther, 2008). Relying on reflexive accounts and listening to my own stories I was able to recognise and explain some of the ways that I came to understand the stories of the women participants. I have attempted to offer a value laden reflexive position throughout the thesis, including why particular stories may have resonated with me and the ways in which these understandings may have impacted on the research that I carried out (Letherby, 2000, 2002).

Beyond women's stories, I also paid attention to my own interpretations of meaning across the research process (Letherby, 2002). Drawing on Doucet's (2008)

metaphor of 'gossamer walls' to explore research relationships that occur during a research process, the approach incorporates an idea of sheer, thin and tenuous gossamer, overtly linked with the solidity of walls to combine two states within which relationships can be located. In other words, the constantly shifting constructions of knowledge that constitute the relations of research, moving between "transparency and obscurity, relation and separation, proximity and distance, and moments of closure and openness" (Doucet, 2008, p.84). Through gossamer walls I formed a basis for reflexivity that was conceived through relationships: the relationship we have with ourselves, haunted as we may be with other stories and 'ghost' figures; the multi-layered relations between the researcher and research participants; and the location of our research (Doucet, 2008). The fluidity of gossamer walls served as a constant reminder of the changes and shifts that occurred throughout the research process, helping to expand dominant understandings of reflexivity as a means of merely turning inwards towards oneself (Harding, 1987, 1991; Letherby, 2000, 2002). The solidity of gossamer walls was a presence of the barriers and differences that prevented me from staying in relationships.

By understanding that researchers do not transcend their subjectivity in the research process (Pillow, 2003), there were times when I felt cautious and self-conscious about my on-going reflexive process of documenting my accounts. Some of these concerns came from stark criticisms about the ways in which researchers have expressed themselves in reflexive accounts. Letherby states "until recently the 'self' has been hidden in mainstream social research" (2000, p.94). Whilst we can all be seen to be 'storytellers' in the way that we make sense of our lives (Plummer, 1995), I was concerned that including such material would bring professional dangers (Letherby, 2000). Researchers who utilise reflexivity have been viewed as

"narcissistic and tiresome" (Pillow, 2003, p.176), reproached for "self-indulgence" (Letherby, 2002, 5.8), labelled as promoting endless talk of social positions as if they were badges of honour (Patai, 1994) and accused of being "intellectually sloppy" (Letherby, 2000, p.109). There were also challenges to writing reflexively which include the restraints and rigour of academic language, as well as issues of privacy (Letherby, 2002) and my own complex feelings about my personal stories becoming a matter of public and academic record. Trinh calls for approaches which "inscribe difference without bursting into a series of euphoric narcissistic accounts of yourself and your kind" (1989, p.28). I was worried that I was potentially "fall[ing] into an infinite regress of excessive self-analysis at the expense of focusing on the research participants" (Finlay, 2002, p.532). Concerned that my reflexive accounts should not become the sole purpose of the research, I wanted my reflexive processes to contribute to noticing, questioning and increasing transparency about the relational perspectives I brought to the research process.

Complicating the role of reflexivity were some of the concepts embedded in the Listening Guide. For example, Mauthner and Doucet argue;

> "Influences may only become apparent once we have left
> the research behind and moved on in our personal and
> academic lives… our understanding … has deepened as
> a result of progress in our thinking" (2003, p.415).

Finding this particular statement oddly dissonant, I questioned how much I could know, understand and account for the influences that shaped my research at the specific time of conducting the research (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). Given the partial perspectives provided by any stories, it is not tenable, as Mauthner and Doucet suggest, that "…*detachment* from our doctoral work has allowed us to be *more reflexive*" (2003, p.415, my emphasis). The implication of 'detachment'

indicates an absence of relationship, suggesting the authors assumed that there is something that can be known beyond the subjective stories participants told. Bishop and Shepherd have also highlighted how the term "detachment" (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003, p.415) is "peculiar" (2011, p. 2185), falling into more 'objective' approaches to research.

I suggest, given the relational approach of the Listening Guide, that time and distance do not necessarily lead to deeper reflexive processes but may enable us to tell different stories about our research processes as we position ourselves differently in relation to our studies. My research process was not intended to incorporate "degrees of reflexivity" (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003) but rather I attempted to have an overt awareness of the situations and circumstances which facilitated different accounts for different purposes and with different limitations, constraints or opportunities (Woodiwiss, 2004, 2009, 2014).

Highlighting the relational process of this study, fixing an account on the impact and role I have had as the researcher has been problematic. Bishop and Shepherd note "it is one thing to know on an intellectual or intuitive level that we have an effect on other people - that we shape our research encounters and cannot be completely objective in our interpretations of these; it is another thing, however, to document when and in exactly what way" (2011, p.1290). I suggest that I cannot say which specific aspects of my past, social background, assumptions and stories have precisely impacted on the research process. Accounts of reflexivity had to be unpacked again and again as the research process unfolded; evaluating my own accounts (Letherby, 2002).

Examining the positions that I held as a researcher and attempting to make them transparent increasingly made my accounts problematic. Merely making statements about social locations and positioning myself within, for example, terms such as gender, class, sexuality and ethnicity, may have little to offer the research process in terms of their effects on the research. Rather than merely comprehending the process as reflection on myself, I elevate the notion that reflexivity included an explication of researcher subjectivity and social location as a self-conscious process of examination, largely in relation to participants' stories and the research process (Gilligan, 1982; Harding, 1991; Mauther and Doucet, 1998; Finlay, 2002; Holland and Ramazanoglu, 2002; Letherby, 2002; Harding and Norberg, 2005, 1992).

Throughout the study process I have questioned the ways in which reflexive accounts are frequently presented as independent and objective truth about the researcher and, therefore, that reflexivity can produce 'better', more authentic and truthful research (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991; Denzin, 1997). Seen as a guarantee that researchers' accounts are methodologically informed, I felt there was a risk that my stories would be heard as more legitimate than the stories of research participants (Pillow, 2003; Bishop and Shepherd, 2011). In an attempt to address the point of 'legitimatised' accounts, I endeavour to elevate the idea that my reflexive accounts are "not intellectually superior" than the participants (Letherby, 2002, 4.3) and are no less distorted, truthful or accurate (Altheide and Johnson, 1998). Neither are they any different from other stories in as much as they are socially and culturally shaped, producing "situated knowledges" (Haraway, 1988) in relation to narrative frameworks.

Highlighting that, like all accounts, reflexive accounts are a reconstruction after the encounter, I recognised my subjectivities as "partial, provisional and perspective

nature of knowledge claims" (Mauther and Doucet, 2003, p.416). Emphasising my own stories as constructions and accounting for the role of reflexivity in this way, I hoped to be more transparent to readers about the way the research process and thesis was constructed and to avoid self-indulgence (Bishop and Shepherd, 2011). Subsequently, understandings of my accounts are characterised as incomplete because no stories are true for all time (Plummer, 1995; Andrews, 2008). By implication, reflexive processes and accounts are viewed and presented within this thesis as partial, temporal and selected (Stanley, 1993) and are likely to give forth to further readings in the future.

Even though we are all ultimately unknowable and none of us can understand all the reasons for our research processes (Pillow, 2003), I have endeavoured to reflexively make explicit aspects of my biography, attempting to outline aspects of who I am in the research relationships and as part of the broader story (Bishop and Shepherd, 2011). I may be unable to fully capture my own role in this thesis but providing an account that has some insight into the partial meanings made within this research process, I have continued to use reflexivity throughout this thesis in the belief that it has the potential to throw some light on my research processes, for myself and others, making meaning about my role in the research process (Plummer, 1995). Recognising that my own story would be extremely prominent in the thesis (Letherby, 2002), I wanted to acknowledge my role. Framing reflexivity within the Listening Guide has helped me to begin a dialogue about this important aspect of the research process, leading to a greater understanding of what may be achieved through my reflexive practice and accounts, which I hope has fully embraced honest, transparent and ethical research processes (Bishop and Shepherd, 2011). This

approach to reflexivity can provide researchers with substantial theoretical and methodological value and insight (Letherby, 2000, 2002).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored how, premised on the aspiration to listen to women's stories, the Listening Guide is distinguished from other research approaches and embraces a number of methodological assumptions. Emphasising the relational and feminist foundations (Gilligan, 1982; Harding, 1986; Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, 2003) of the Listening Guide, I have explored that using this approach was particularly appropriate because it was utilised to place women's stories at the heart of the study, emphasising listening to and understanding their stories while at the same time exploring the role of the researcher in shaping the research. Interrogating the ontological assumptions about the status of researcher reflexivity, I have explored some of the principles within the Listening Guide to address reflexivity as a methodological concern and drawn specific attention to the ways in which accounts should be viewed within this thesis.

In the next chapter, 'Doing research with women seeking asylum', I emphasise the situational nature of ethics in relation to the context of this study and provide a detailed account of the methods I used during my fieldwork.

Chapter Four:
Doing research with women seeking asylum

"I will not explain myself to man (Jen)"

Introduction

In this chapter I aim to provide a detailed account of my fieldwork and the methods used throughout the research process. I begin with an overview of obtaining ethical approval for the study and go on to emphasise the situational nature of ethics in relation to the context of this study. I include details of how recruitment and interviews were piloted in a preliminary study to inform the main study.

Central to this chapter are the methods of the main study and I explore how I attempted to reduce barriers of access for women to participate which included the use of gatekeepers and interpreters and choices about location and environment. I reflect on the process of constructing consent including some of the dilemmas with concepts of 'informed consent' (Miller and Boulton, 2007). Given my particular interest in storytelling, I discuss how I approached the interview process, including the use of prompts, the role of emotion (Letherby, 2000; Doucet, 2008), a model of 'bearing witness' (Blackwell, 1997) and some of the implications of using these particular methods. I conclude with my method of transcribing.

Ethical approaches

I prepared and submitted an ethics application to the University of Huddersfield School of Human and Health Sciences Research Ethics Panel (SREP). The outline of the application was guided by professional codes and principles of research and ethics (BSA, 2002; BPS, 2009, 2010; ESRC, 2010). Eight central ethical considerations were outlined in the application:

- Permissions for study.

- Access to participants, which included informed consent.

- Confidentiality.

- Anonymity.

- Psychological support for participants.

- General support for research participants.

- Researcher safety and support including a risk analysis and management assessment.

- Potential conflicts of interest.

Ethical approval was confirmed on the 8th September, 2011 by the SREP, prior to recruitment or conducting any interviews.

Ethical research with women seeking asylum

Normative principles of ethical protocol have been challenged by some scholars for their limitations when doing research with people seeking asylum (Hynes, 2003; Jacobson and Landau 2003; Mackenzie et al., 2007; Hugman et al., 2011). Whilst I had included standard ethics of harm minimisation through the SREP application process, I felt I had obligations to construct an ethical research process that would attempt to address broader ethical issues, particularly in relation to the women participants. To further my ethical approach to the research process I conceived that this study would be grounded in feminist perspectives of ethics of care (Edwards and Mauthner, 2002). Whilst there is no definitive model of what constitutes ethics of care, Sevenhuijsen (1998) provides a helpful overview that emphasises 'responsibility' and the 'activity of caring' in research relationships. I attempted to use this principle to reflect my research approach, committing to the values of

responsibility and caring relationships. Involving women seeking asylum in this study invested me with particular ethical obligations to ensure that the research was carried out with the utmost regard for the women's wellbeing. As a result, a huge amount of attention was given to the priority of minimising harm and maximising respect towards participants.

One central ethical concern was the harm and safety specificities potentially facing women seeking asylum in the UK (Mackenzie et al., 2007; Hugman et al., 2011). Women conceivably faced difficulties, such as trauma and distress, about persecutions and violence in their lives (Herliy and Turner, 2007). Developing my risk assessment, I followed the guidelines developed by Ellsberg and Heise (2005) for the World Health Organisation and compiled a collection of leaflets and information that could provide up-to-date details on available psychological women-only and asylum specific services, as well as specialised violence-related services. Participants were made aware that I had this information at the start of the interview which I outlined in a 'statement of support' (see Appendix Five). On a practical level I could respond directly to situations that might arise in the research process and the information was used to support women at any point during the research process to help them make choices about a referral if necessary.

Rather than ethical generalisations, wherever possible the research process had an emergent (as opposed to a pre-determined) approach to the design, reflecting an ethical approach to decision making in relation to respect for participation and promoting research relationships. It was helpful to draw on some of the work of Kesby (2005) who argues for an optimistic, participatory approach and that narrative interviews potentially open up spaces for discussion and power negotiation, positioning narratives as a site of resistance. He discusses that participation in

research can "constitute and facilitate the performance of empowered agency" (2005, p. 2055). Approaching the research as a process whereby participants had the potential to construct themselves reflexively as agents, I identified the interview itself as a site that provided the possibility for women to represent their stories to themselves and to others.

I have privileged the term 'participant', rather than another term such as 'subject', in order to emphasise the importance of participants playing an active part in the research process (Birch and Miller, 2002). Drawing on feminist literature to underpin some of the notions of participation in research (Oakley, 1981; Riessman, 1987; Smith, 1987), and as part of ongoing decision-making processes throughout the study, I tried to create opportunities for an exchange of ideas and perspectives from different people involved in the study process, including the women participants, my supervisors, my advisor, gatekeepers and members of the LGSG. Attempting to place an emphasis on balancing my own responsibility to others and to myself, I presumed a relational view of the world rather than an autonomous view, embedded in contextual decision-making and reasoning with regard to decisions about the study.

Whilst participation was a central feature of many decisions made within the research process, this was achieved with varying degrees of success at different points. Despite my ethical intentions participants were not part of considering all dimensions of the research process (Birch and Miller, 2002). The balance of power was complex in my research relations and I was aware that, as Letherby states; "…it may be patronising to assume that the respondent needs to be empowered by the process (2013, p.134). Characterising the women as passive or powerless (Ribbens and Edwards, 1998' Letherby, 2002) alongside simplistic and limited romantic

notions of power transference (Sprague, 2005) were unhelpful. I was cautious that research designed to transfer power to research participants potentially negates acknowledging the power that participants have, such as power to participate or withdraw participation, to shape the interview process and to reflect and construct the stories that they tell.

Ethical care and sensitivity included honouring commitments I made to participants and, wherever possible, embracing ethically responsible decisions whilst negotiating a shifting and diverse research context. For example, each participant was given the option of receiving a copy of their transcript on a CD or as a typed up transcript. Whilst I told participants I would inform them of the outcome of the study, and I intend to do this, a significant number of the women are no longer contactable - such may be one of the challenges faced by people seeking asylum and being a researcher with those seeking asylum.

Central to my ethical concerns about this study was the particularity of the 'asylum' context in the UK (Mackenzie et al., 2007). I felt I was aware of some of these contexts but to increase my understanding and to allow me to reflect on my emerging ideas for my study design, I wanted to consult with women in the asylum system to use their expertise. I carried out a preliminary study which I designed as a small scale version to prepare for the larger (Polit et al., 2001). The preliminary study gave me an opportunity to try out, reflect on and evaluate a number of key aspects of the design with three women (Van Teijlingen et al., 2001). Although some researchers have argued that separate preliminary studies are not necessary in qualitative research (Holloway, 1997), I carried out the study with the women in order to increase their participation, to draw on their valuable knowledge and, primarily, to help me identify potential practical problems in order to inform the larger study. Most

importantly, after each of the preliminary interviews the woman was given the opportunity to give feedback about the process, including what had worked and where the process could be improved. The preliminary study was also reviewed and discussed in detail with supervisors and no significant changes were made to the overall design.

The data produced in the preliminary study was initially transcribed, using a method discussed later in this chapter. The data was analysed using the Listening Guide, a process that I explore in detail in Chapter Five. The data was an indicator of the possible richness and depth of data that could be gathered through the main study. Feeling an ethical obligation to honour the time and commitment of the women who had participated, I considered including their data in the main study. I recognised that this was a point of contention because of potential changes that might subsequently be made to the main study (Peat et al., 2002). Given that the preliminary study had affirmed the research design (Van Teijlingen et al., 2001) and that the main study remained almost entirely unchanged, I decided that the preliminary data was of great value and I saw no reason not to include the data. Therefore, the data from the preliminary study was included in the final analysis.

Main study

In total, seventeen in-depth interviews were conducted. All of the women were in the UK at the time of interview and had made a claim in the UK for asylum under the Refugee Convention.

Positionalities and trust

In Chapter Three I outlined some of the reflexive approaches I undertook to examine and acknowledge my impact on the research process (Doucet, 2008). Being a

practitioner, as discussed in Chapter One, with a particular specialism in working with women and children seeking asylum in the UK, I have established working relationships over a considerable number of years with a wide range of relevant local and national organisations. Provided with specialist knowledge, my background has been advantageous for the research. Working with women in many different settings has provided me with familiarity around different customs and cultures, supporting my own sense of ease about the fieldwork necessary to complete this study.

Negotiating trust had real implications for participant recruitment and access (Bloch, 1999; Omidian, 2000; Hynes, 2003). Women seeking asylum may (wisely) mistrust as a survival strategy (Hynes, 2003). Mistrust about the role of researchers has been traced back to "wider discourses of racism, sexism and other forms of positioning the Other" (Smith, 2002, p.90). Given some aspects of the dominant narratives I discussed in Chapter Two, mistrust has been a challenge for researchers recruiting and building relationships with people seeking asylum (Omidian, 2000; Hynes, 2003). I considered how previous researchers had addressed this issue, incorporating different ideas into my own study. For example, Omidian (2000) has explored how she was considered a spy or an agent from the Iranian regime by some potential research participants. She attempted to address aspects of trust through disclosure of her University role and provided a contact number to each participant. In a similar manner, I attempted to legitimise participation to potential respondents offering clarity about my researcher role. To minimise any sense of deception or fear that might exist or arise, I emphasised my independence from official government officials and agencies, assuring women that their details would not be directly passed to the Home Office (Bloch, 1999). Aiming to be transparent and honest, I offered information about my role in the University of Huddersfield, my

bursary status and highlighted that the study was primarily research for my PhD (Hynes, 2003; Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005).

To enable women a more participatory approach I included verbal and written information about how women could access further information about the study and provided my contact details at the University, advocating that they could be used for further communication if necessary after the interview (see Appendix Five). I also provided the details for my Director of Studies who women could contact if they felt there were any problems that were not resolved between us (see Appendix Five). This information served as a conscious attempt to be open about the scrutiny that the women and others could apply to my research practice.

As I outlined in Chapter Two, listening to women seeking asylum was essential, not only to obtain rich in-depth material but also to be able to reflect and respond to any potential discomfort, anxiety and distress created in the research process (Jones and Cutcliffe, 2009). An important aspect was my participation as the researcher within the entire process and the integrity of the research relationship. Actively open about the aims of my study, I tried to share information about myself, including being a practitioner, a mother and an activist, as well as other features of my personal and professional roles and identifies. Letherby (2000) highlights how she attempted to balance vulnerability and risk for participants by trying to include as much of her own experiences in the interview as participants asked for. I drew on the notion that self-disclosure could potentially enhance rapport and demonstrate respect for the participants (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005). I aimed to make it easier for women to tell their stories and to be listened to rather than collude with patterns which may have led to silencing, trivialising, dismissing and devaluing women's narratives (Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 2003).

To what extent the women's own stories, assumptions and perceptions were influenced by my approach to self-disclosure, I cannot be sure. However, the warmth and affection with which some women spoke may have been an indicator of how the women positioned me. My practice background 'credentials' often proved helpful to legitimise women's and gatekeepers' willingness (discussed later in this chapter) to participate in the research process. Also, some women specifically identified the importance of me being a woman:

> I wanted to talk about women and only talking about
> what's happened can another woman understand. When
> a woman has a problem she speaks to another woman,
> that woman would normally put herself in that place and
> understand immediately (Anne-Laure).

> I will not explain myself to man. But if it's a woman I am
> happy to go on to explain what's going on to me (Jen).

Positioning me as a source of empathy and understanding (Bishop and Shepherd, 2011), I found myself cast in a role of solidarity (Bishop and Sheppard, 2011) as women perceived I was aligned to their struggles. Whilst Letherby states "factors other than gender can facilitate good research relationships" (2000, p.97), issues of gender were evoked by the women to indicate assumptions of shared understandings:

> You know (Shimmar).

> You understand know what I talk about (Jen).

> Women understand (Naomi).

My being a woman was important to the interview process and may have contributed to women's disclosures about intimate aspects of their lives. Social positions may be

jointly negotiated, interchangeable and highly subjective (Letherby, 2000), whilst my identity as a woman helped address issues of trust for some participants.

Extending a level of transparency into other research relationships, I was open about my past working roles with SREP, my supervisors and my advisor. Whilst I did not feel there where conflicts of interest associated with this study, "divided loyalties" (Bell and Nutt, 2002, p.70) and role conflicts were a concern given the sheer number of professional working relationships I had with some of the organisations and potential gatekeepers. Due to my numerous years of work within the refugee sector it would not have been possible to be unidentified within the sector locally or nationally. Seeking to manage my responsibilities with ethical integrity (Mauthner, 2000), I worked closely with my supervisory team to ensure ethical consideration was given to the issue of 'divided loyalties', particularly during the data collection stage. I decided to move out of my former practitioner-manager role by reducing my hours and accepting a change in role. This self-regulatory approach to the research sought to separate out and divide some of my connecting roles by "playing down the role of practitioner" (Bell and Nutt, 2002, p.87) but remaining honest about this aspect of myself.

'Trust' remained a central challenge to recruitment and several women mistrusted my intentions and raised concerns about why I was interested in them. My approach to recruit them to participate in the study may have been viewed as an unacceptable intrusion and risk. The decision to refuse to participate in this study was sometimes "defensively orientated" (Fisher, 2012, p.3) and may have served as a protective strategy. I welcomed each woman's decision and respected their right to refuse to participate which I viewed as a form of resistance. Resistance to interviews and suspicion about the motivation of strangers (Robinson, 2002), as well as resistance

to being involved with research altogether, may be an anticipated aspect of attempting to do research with women seeking asylum. This may make populations of women seeking asylum a 'hard to read' (Crawley et al., 2011) group for researchers, but categorising people seeking asylum as 'hard to reach' may simply overlook individual forms of resistance.

Sampling

A total of seventeen women participated in the interviews and I used a "purposive sampling" approach and later a "snowball sampling" (Robson, 2011, p.275). My criterion was 'women who had claimed asylum in the UK'. Identifying 'women' as the potential participants, I used the widely accepted definition of an adult being 18 years of age and over, to distinguish from girls who, as children, are less than 18 years of age (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). In line with many of the major legal and policy definitions, this concept is widely ratified by governments and NGOs across the globe. The distinction between children and adults, using chronological age, was reflected in concepts within the organisations who acted as gatekeepers.

Given the different ways in which women seeking asylum might identify themselves in the UK, I used the terms 'asylum seekers' and 'refugees' as a broad recruitment strategy in my literature and presentations (see Appendix twenty). I was explicit that women would be included regardless of any decisions or the determination on their asylum claim. The women interchangeably referred to themselves as "'refugees' and as 'asylum seekers'" (Leudar et al., 2008). I did not seek any further verification of women's immigration status, regarding this as potentially intrusive, disrespectful and disempowering to participants, so I relied on women's own sense of identification about participation in the study. I hoped these approaches would allow women

choice about the study being relevant to them. The identification of women as 'asylum seekers' and as 'refugees' in the recruitment strategy was done in the hope that all women who were part of the asylum system would consider participating.

I have since considered some of the limitations of this aspect of my sampling approach. First, defining 'women' is problematic, particularly when a narrow chronological definition of age may not reflect the ways in which roles and responsibilities affect many young women or girls who might consider themselves adult women. Also, a chronological understanding of age may have little relevance to the way women talk about their lives (Katz, 2004; Sirriyeh, 2013). Given the specific asylum context in the UK, the very tangible issue of being 'age-disputed' (see Appendix One) has been prominent, causing suffering to a great many children in the asylum system and arising partly because of the limitations with particular conceptualisations of childhood and adulthood (Crawley, 2009, 2010, 2011a). Secondly, although my recruitment process had not intended to overlook women who are dependents on asylum claims, these women did not participate. This was disappointing because, as Bloch et al. point out, it is likely this particular group of women may already be "marginalised or excluded within the asylum process" (2000, p.174). Whilst this group of women may not have made their own claim for asylum, I understand them as people seeking asylum, with the potential to be refugees, and therefore as relevant to the study sample.

During recruitment, because of my approach to women's wellbeing, I initially sought to recruit women who were being supported through organisations, hoping that these specific structures might enhance their support and wellbeing. Initially this approach was successful but then a number of the women due to be interviewed were re-dispersed, evicted or relocated. Due to these new and emerging situations support

networks became increasingly transient for many women and organisations could not be viewed as a fixture in their lives (Hynes, 2003; Stewart, 2005; Cunningham and Cunningham, 2007; Lewis, 2007, 2009). There were times when women participants told other women about the study and a snowballing approach emerged as women self-referred through information given to them by friends and community networks. Whilst formal organisations may not have provided support to these women, women's networks enabled their participation, suggesting that women were playing a supportive role towards each other regardless of any organisational involvement. This snowball sampling was an effective method of gaining access to women seeking asylum and refugees, a somewhat 'hidden' population (Bloch, 1999).

Barriers to recruitment and access

Accessing potential participants required me to negotiate a way through the complexity of the UK asylum context. Limitations and restrictions on temporary accommodation was only one of the issues that revealed the potential challenges of access. Some practicalities stemmed from difficulty in locating women, who are part of a largely transient population (Bloch, 1999; Hynes, 2006; Bosworth, 2008). For example, people granted legal protection may experience a speedy eviction (a twenty-eight day period or less) in which to vacate UKBA accommodation. Homelessness, destitution (Amnesty International, 2006) and temporary living situations such as 'sofa surfing' (Stewart, 2005), as well as family separation (Cunningham and Cunningham, 2007), are regular features in the lives of people seeking asylum and refugees (Stewart, 2005; Lewis, 2007, 2009; Still Human Still Here, 2013). Negotiating some of these issues, people seeking asylum have sometimes opted to find alternative ways to support themselves, often with friends and family, relocating themselves back to London and other major cities (Phillips,

2006). Robinson et al. (2003) found that a fifth of people seeking asylum moved from known dispersal regions whilst waiting for a decision on their asylum claim.

The women in this study were accommodated and lived in a wide variety of situations, with a multitude of associated risks that posed potential barriers to participating in the study. Dispersal had a particular impact on recruitment. Acutely aware that re-dispersal could occur at any point, I sometimes had to make speedy connections with a woman to ensure the interview process could be put in place. Despite these efforts a number of women who had contacted me to be interviewed were re-dispersed. This frequently meant that the interview did not take place. Also, some women were newly dispersed, which had ruptured their established support networks in other parts of the UK (Zetter et al., 2005). Re-housed in deprived areas within what Phillips has called, "fractured communities" (2006, p.542), when I met with one small group of potential participants they said they were distressed about their living situations. These women did not feel welcome or at home (Sirriyeh, 2013) and said they could not participate until they resolved a multitude of practical and emotional issues.

Being detained made it harder for me to locate women and for women to participate (Bloch and Schuster, 2005; Bennett, 2008). People can be detained at any stage of their asylum application, for indefinite periods of time and within any number of 'closed' detention facilities (Immigration Act 1971; UKBA 2011; Smith, 2013; Smith and Jones, 2012). Two potential participants with whom I had made contact and who wanted to take part in the study were suddenly detained in separate dawn raids (Dorling et al., 2014). Sadly, detention imposed such a barrier that I found no further contact was possible.

Increasing participation

I considered ways to increase access and give choices to women about ways of participating. I took a number of approaches, which included working with gatekeepers, collaborating with an interpreter and facilitating the interview process by maximising women's choices about the interview location and environment. These approaches may have increased and enhanced participation and I was surprised by how many women were willing to meet with me. It may be that one of the reasons for this willingness was the desire for someone to listen and to speak to on their own terms (Plummer, 1995; Letherby, 2002). Perhaps I was seen as someone from the UK who was contributing to creating a space where women seeking asylum can tell their own stories about their lives.

<u>Gatekeepers</u>

Informed by previous researchers and my own practice experiences, it became clear that collaboration with gatekeepers was essential (Bloch, 1999, Hunt, 2005). Recognising that people seeking asylum are not a homogenous group and to enable women choice through information and access, a localised approach was taken using multiple gatekeepers (Bloch, 1999; Robinson, 2002). Reviewing my contact lists, through searches on the internet as well as online and hard-copy directories of asylum support services, I compiled a list of potential gatekeepers. I focussed my attention on organisations that provided services or ran support groups for women seeking asylum and refugees.

I approached professionals who worked for statutory services and multiple NGOs to ensure that information about the study was made available to potential women participants at different access points. Some organisations were ruled out on the

basis of potential mistrust. For example, I did not involve anyone connected with involuntary repatriation programmes which is mistrusted by some individuals and organisations (Sales, 2002). Wherever possible I identified gatekeepers who appeared to have a good reputation and established trust within communities (Robinson, 2002; Hynes, 2003). In particular I looked for organisations that had a particular interest in working with and supporting women seeking asylum. A number of the groups were run by women seeking asylum and refugees for women.

Despite careful planning, using gatekeepers raised a number of ethical issues. I was concerned about how information about the study would be cascaded out to potential participants and that I would have little detailed knowledge of how gatekeepers communicated with potential participants, which could frame the research agenda and influence the relevance of the study to the women. The risk of unequal power dynamics between potential participants and gatekeepers led me to consider how these dynamics might make participants feel their access to services might be affected, or that women might feel a sense of obligation, or even coercion, to participate. Decisions gatekeepers could make about which potential participants to tell about the study led me to be concerned about the agendas of some gatekeepers selecting women with particular experiences and influencing which women might take part, according to the kind of stories that might be told (Miller and Bell, 2002; Hunt, 2005). These issues were brought sharply to my attention on a couple of occasions when gatekeepers made contact with me about a potential participant, emphasising the 'traumatic' story that the woman had told them, a story that would hence be 'good' for the study.

To address some of these concerns I decided that my initial approach would be to give a mini-presentation to gatekeepers about the study, aiming to develop their

understandings of the research aims and interview process as early as possible in the recruitment process. Gatekeepers were made aware that potential participants could make a self-referral or be referred, but they were also told verbally, and later in writing, that they were under no obligation to 'provide' a sample of women for the study. Emphasising that the role of the gatekeeper was to support women to access the study, I attempted to ensure that the women themselves had access to as much information as they needed about participating to make a decision themselves. I provided information in a 'recruitment leaflet' (see Appendix Twenty) and a display in the public spaces within different organisations so that potential participants had information to contact me. Giving talks to groups of women in places where they came together, I placed particular emphasis on accessing women directly. I maintained that potential participants could meet and speak with me face-to-face or with an interpreter so that I could discuss the study further, answer any questions and address any potential barriers of access that they might have. Wherever possible women had multiple options to contact me autonomously or through a gatekeeper (see Appendices Eighteen, Nineteen and Twenty).

More than twenty five organisations were informed about the study at a series of briefings which I carried out. This yielded eight gatekeepers who were involved with direct recruitment. A number of additional gatekeepers from organisations played a central role in informing women about the study.

Interpreters

There is a diversity of literacy skills within the asylum communities, including a significant number of people who are professionals and have a high level of formal education (Aldridge and Waddington, 2001). However, English is not always spoken or read by people seeking asylum (Phillimore et al., 2003) and my own limitations as

a researcher needed to be considered. I recognised the problems posed by my being an English speaker with minimal multi-lingual skills and also the ways in which qualitative research has often excluded participants who speak languages other than English (Marshall and While, 1994). Edwards (1998) has raised concerns about research that silences individuals who do not speak English, ensuring they become "some of the most disadvantaged… members of society" (p.198).

Participants had differing levels of English language and literacy skills. Fifteen of the women participants spoke English as a first language (some of them spoke several other languages as well) and wanted to be interviewed in English. Two participants did not speak English and given that French was their mother-tongue, they wanted to work with a French interpreter. Whilst issues of language may not be addressed simply through the use of interpreters, using an interpreter to provide immediate translation (Baker et al., 1991; Freed, 1998) was a solution to interviewing women who potentially did not want to be interviewed in English or did not speak English and was one way of overcoming some of the barriers to participation.

In order to work with an interpreter a significant amount of planning was put in place, together with consideration of the methodological issues involved when using interpreters as part of the research process. I worked on the basis that involving an interpreter had the potential to create a more reciprocal, non-hierarchical and co-operative process while still acknowledging my responsibility as the researcher (Temple and Edwards, 2002). Reflecting on the methodological approaches to working with interpreters, a dilemma surfaced. Interpreters in most studies have received limited attention, almost always excluded in write-ups about research interviews (Edwards, 1998; Temple and Edwards, 2002; Temple, 2002, 2004). Where researchers include statements about interpreters they frequently attempt to

negate the interpreter role in the research process (Wallen and Ahlström, 2006). Recognising that the Listening Guide approach firmly acknowledges the importance of reflexivity and relationships, I turned to the literature about other studies using the Listening Guide but found that any discussion about the role of interpreters was entirely absent. Despite these setbacks it continued to be important to me to attempt to reduce barriers of access to participation through using an interpreter, attempting to ensure women were enabled to make informed choices by supporting them to understand some of the practical, as well as broader aims and values of the research approach and study (Temple and Edwards, 2002).

Highlighting the interpreter's role in this study was an attempt to make visible the interpreter (Freed, 1998; Edwards, 1998; Temple, 2002; Temple and Edwards, 2002). Temple asserts "the figure of the interpreter/translator must come from behind the shadows" (1997, p.607). Drawn from my University lecturing on working with interpreters, my own training and work with professional and informal interpreters in a range of different settings, I followed some of the recommendations made by Edwards (1998), Temple and Edwards (2002) and Wallen and Ahlström (2006). A robust understanding of the role of the interpreter in the study process was important to me. My approach was to identify and work with an interpreter who would understand some of the underpinning feminist and relational values of the study as well as work within the research aims (Edwards, 1998). The interviews would be carried out "with, rather than through, [an] interpreter" (Edwards, 1998, p.197), a central idea which acted as a prerequisite to determining the interpreter's role in the study in relation to the data collection. These principles served to inform a 'guidance sheet' (see Appendix Nine), which I developed to determine the choice of interpreter and the influencing factors that would be considered.

I used a single interpreter to develop rapport and trust with myself and the participants (Edwards, 1998; Temple and Edwards, 2002; Wallen and Ahlström, 2006). In line with my guidance sheet for the choice of interpreter, the interpreter was a woman with a well-established reputation within the asylum communities. Whilst some researchers have argued that matching interpreters to participants, in terms of ethnicity or culture, can have advantages (Harris, 2004), I was concerned that 'matching' could also become a barrier to participation and might actually impede women from engaging in the research process. Therefore, the interpreter was not directly from the community or country of origin of any of the participants. This was important given that some women seeking asylum may be fearful that an interpreter from their own country or members of their community might know them or their family, or could create a risk regarding safety and confidentiality.

The interpreter had a highly developed language proficiency and considerable experience of interpreting in a number of settings including local authorities, legal organisations, therapeutic environments and hate-crime reporting. The reputation and trustworthiness of the interpreter had been established within communities over many years. I had a long established history of working with this interpreter (Wallen and Ahlström, 2006) within women-only settings and a detailed understanding of her training and specialism in working with women seeking asylum. However, the decision to use a 'known' interpreter is not without issue. For example, Jentsch, (1998) argues that an 'unknown' interpreter is advisable to increase trust and confidentially between the interpreter and the participant. Issues of trust relate directly to Jentsch's (1998) concerns that a known interpreter may wish to protect his or her ethnic community and this may impact on the data collection. In response to some of these concerns, to maximise women's choice about participation and to

build trust, the option of an independent 'professional' interpreter was also offered to participants (Jentsch, 1998). The participants explained that they had built trusting relationships (Hynes, 2003) with the interpreter over the weeks of working together in other services and they made the final choice.

To clarify the interpreter's role in the research I met with her in advance of the interview to discuss the research approach and aims of the study (Baker et al., 1991, Phelan and Parkman 1995, Temple and Edwards, 2002). We went through the 'guidance sheet for interpreters' (see Appendix Ten) that I had developed for establishing agreements prior to the interview. This information aimed to make transparent a range of commitments made between myself and the interpreter, which included the seating arrangements, the style of interpreting required and the requirement to attend a debriefing session. The information had been approved by SREP and my supervisory team prior to any contact with the interpreter.

Involving and meeting with the interpreter, I asked her about the issues she regarded as important in relation to the interview situation (Freed, 1988; Temple and Edwards, 2002). This did not mean that the interpreter became viewed as 'the expert' in the interview process and nor were her views privileged over those of the women participants or my own, but she was positioned as a storyteller and a member of my collective and interpretive community (Doucet, 2008). The interpreter provided immediate translation (Baker et al., 1991) and was a solution to interviewing women who made specific choices about which language to be interviewed in, overcoming some of the barriers to participation.

To increase participation I wanted to maximise the women's choices about the interview. I discussed the timing and day they would prefer to be interviewed, as well as preferable locations. As a result interviews were conducted at a range of different times, on different days and at different locations across the UK. Acutely aware of the economic disadvantage that women seeking asylum may experience in the UK (Hynes, 2003), a number of issues arose. For example, consideration was given to interviewing women in their accommodation. Bergen (1993) argues that interviewing women in their own homes can be positive for participants who may retain greater control over the interview situation. However, Hynes (2003) raises the point that, given the economic disadvantage faced by many people seeking asylum, interviewing them in their accommodation may have a negative impact on the individual. Also, given the temporary nature of UKBA accommodation, there was a likelihood of accommodation being multi- occupant and residents might have been (un)known to me or the participant, as well as the potential of UKBA officers and police entering the property and detaining people (BID, 2009; Smith and Jones, 2012). Whilst every attempt was made to discuss choices about location with each woman, interviewing women in UKBA accommodation felt risky and I decided against this as an option.

Planning where the interviews might take place, it was important that the environment and location did not trigger anxiety or distress. Bögner et al. remind us "interview rooms can be small and bare, reminding interviewees of places where they were previously tortured" (2010, p.521). Therefore, I included a choice of community and accessible locations, some of which were women-only, child-friendly spaces and breastfeeding friendly places. All of the places had free-flowing air and

some form of natural light. Each woman and I negotiated a location which we agreed was appropriate for the interview, which met the needs of the woman and minimised associated risks to her and me.

Reflecting on my presentation of self through clothing, I was often caught between 'dressing-up' for interviews in order to be respectful of the occasion but also 'dressing down', which I hoped might minimise some of the power dynamics associated with clothing (Jacob, 1977; Adams, 2000). I explored approaches made by other researchers, such as Adams (2000) who explains how she tried to be authentic to her sense of dress to avoid presenting a false self in relation to her choices of clothing in interview situations, whilst Jacobs (1977) sought to emphasise his 'student' position and the independence he had from the penitentiary system by growing a beard (an option not available to me!) In order to create an informal and relaxed environment, I decided to remain relatively informal in my dress-code. What was interesting was that some participants wore smart clothing while other women notably wore very casual and contemporary fashions. A number of the women dressed up for the occasion wearing colourful tailored suits, elaborate hair pieces and jewellery. These strategies and ethical concerns, bound up with presentation and clothing, may have been indicators of how researchers and participant positions are deeply relational and continually being formed and reformed during the research process.

To enhance the woman's experience of the interview and given the acute poverty many women seeking asylum in the UK find themselves in (The Children's Society, 2013a, 2013b), I provided refreshments and lunch if we were meeting at particular times and over the mid-day period. I also brought age-appropriate toys for interviews

where the women said they were bringing their pre-school children[31]. I brought

tissues as a sign to each woman that the interview was an intimate emotional space

(Letherby, 2000) and as a practical resource in the event that the woman or I felt

psychological or physical distress and discomfort during the research process.

Seeking to reveal parts of myself and my approach as a researcher to participants

(Andrews, 2014), through these gestures I attempted to make clear that this study

was framed by ethics of care (Sevenhuijsen, 1998; Edwards and Mauthner, 2002).

Keen to make some form of payment to participants, I was aware this may be

considered inducement, potentially compromising voluntary participation (Macklin,

1981; Ackerman, 1989, McGee, 1997). When researching with people from

economically disadvantaged populations, payment may create a shift from the

researcher-participant relationship to a commercial relationship (Murray 1987).

Alternatively, payment has been viewed as an appropriate way of addressing some

of the power issues inherent in the researcher and researched relationship. Holloway

and Jefferson (2000) and Robinson (2002) have suggested that a small token of

appreciation can help develop a meaningful research relationship. I felt it was

important to demonstrate respect for the women's contributions and time, so I sought

to find a method that was more acceptable than others. I settled on a small gift-in-

kind[32] for each woman participant. This small gesture was intended to ensure the

women got a form of remuneration for their time. I also paid their travel expenses[33].

To reduce the risk of coercion or compromise to voluntary participation I did not

make reference to the 'gift-in-kind' in the literature or public presentations (see

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31 In the final interview sample, none of the interviews took place with children in the room.

32 £15 gift-vouchers in line with a previous University research project with families and mothers.

33 I funded the gift-in-kind and travel expenses from my student expenses budget and a small fieldwork grant I applied for.

Appendix Twelve for a more detailed account of decisions made about 'gifts-in-kind').

Constructing consent

'Informed' consent has become a central concern and an ethical requirement for social research (MacKenzie et al., 2007; Miller and Boulton, 2007). Processes to gain consent have been developed to minimise harm, reduce coercion and prevent exploitation of participants, underpinned by the principle of respect for participants (BSA, 2002; BPS, 2009, 2010; ESRC, 2010). Participants should be "fully and adequately informed about the purposes, methods, risks and benefits of the research and that agreement to participate is fully voluntary (MacKenzie et al., 2007, p.301).

In order to facilitate 'informed consent' and in line with standardised ethical practice, as outlined in my SREP application, I created different types of information about the study in a recruitment leaflet (as previously discussed), an 'information sheet' (see Appendix Four) and a 'consent form' (see Appendix Six). The information aimed to outline the purpose and methods of the research, as well as aspects of anonymity, confidentiality and the voluntary nature of participation, in clear and straightforward language. Whilst I used gatekeepers to distribute information about the study to support women to make referrals, I obtained informed consent directly from each participant. As far as possible it was important for me to offer clarity and articulate my values and role within the research relationship.

Despite outlining my ethical consent processes to gain ethical approval from SREP for the study, gaining informed consent was a complex ethical process (Miller and Boulton, 2007). The particular situations faced by people seeking asylum and refugees have been seen as one of the main reasons why research can be "ethically

fraught" (MacKenzie et al., 2007, p.302). For example, there have been potential issues with 'signed' consent; Omidian (2000) highlights that signing official forms may be problematic and fearful to some people, particularly those who come from governmental regimes that require an official signature which could then potentially be used against the individual, family or community. Additionally, issues of literacy were not overlooked in the consent process of signing. Whilst I considered abandoning the idea of gaining a 'signed' consent form altogether, I did not want to underestimate the gesture that an official signature might mean to each woman and for the status of the study.

To address the issue of informed and signed consent as respectfully and with as much dignity as possible, I discussed consent issues with each woman prior to the interview taking place. Where we were working with an interpreter, she was present and worked with us to increase the woman's understanding. I emphasised the importance of being informed about the study and a participant's role in the study. I provided verbal and written information about the research aims, as well as a description about the interview process (see Appendix Four). Permission from individual participants was sought via verbal as well as written consent. An additional form was used for participant contact information that was used if women wanted me to provide a copy of their transcript or a recording of their interview on C.D. (see Appendix Six). Whilst this opportunity was not explicitly made to gather feedback, I intended an openness and reciprocity in this gesture. Digitally recorded discussions did not take place until after the consent form process was complete and the form signed. After the interview had started I included an iterative process of negotiating consent with additional consent checks. This was intended to give the women the

opportunity to negotiate consent throughout the research interview process and to ask questions.

I cannot fully say how successful these approaches may have been to ensuring informed consent. Also, I recognise that consent may be fluid and neither I, nor the participants, could have fully known or anticipated the direction or potential of the study (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002). The success of these participatory approaches was perhaps indicated by the opportunities that were taken up by a number of women who, for example, requested that I switch off the recorder at several points during their interview and asked to talk to me but withdrew their consent for these parts of their stories to be recorded. Additionally, some women specified that sections of their transcripts could not be quoted, even with their pseudonym, and discussed how particular geographical features within their interviews, such as places and towns, could be changed. Wherever information was viewed by participants or me as 'risky', I gave reassurance that the information would be edited to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Powles (2004) suggests that issues of confidentiality and anonymity may be particularly pertinent for people seeking asylum. I switched off the recording at the end of the interview when most women wanted to talk privately and none of this information has been included in my presentation of analysis or quotes.

Approaches to anonymity

Ethical codes of practice and guidelines have emphasised the value placed on participant anonymity in research which can, in part, be achieved through replacing participants' names with pseudonyms. This method was used in this study and, to facilitate a more participatory approach, women chose their own pseudonyms. I explained to all of the women that I had committed to using pseudonyms within my

thesis, a decision I said I had made as a protection measure for them. For some women this seemed to be an important moment. The women frequently chose names that had a particular significance for them, such as their mother's name or the name of their 'lost' daughter. I know that when I hear the names I chose for my children, they resonate with my sense of who I am and the places I have travelled and lived. Qwul'sih'yah'maht states "behind a name is history – it brings forward with it the Ancestors of the past who shared that name…" (2005, p. 241, capital in original). Unlike other researchers, such as Lockwood (2013) and Mosselson (2010), I did not face any difficulties with the names the women chose and each selected a different pseudonym, which avoided me having to make any decisions about duplication (Grinyer, 2002).

Some women questioned the notion of anonymity and requested to use their own names within the study and future publications. I discussed with the women at length about how using their own names might have problematic repercussions for them and, potentially, members of their families and communities. My response was consistent with each of the women but I recognise that this decision is incongruous with notions of choice and anonymity remained an aspect of the study fraught with complexities. In Chapter Eleven I reflect on this issue in more detail, challenging some of the assumptions brought to bear on the issue of anonymity.

Creating a narrative

I started this study interested in generating stories with women seeking asylum. I considered how Sirriyeh (2013) had used photo-elicitation to help young women tell their stories and thought about the diverse ways that narrative data can vary and the possibility of generating letters, diaries, objects or photos (Lynn and Lea, 2005;

Mitchell et al., 2005; Frith and Harcourt, 2007). Reflecting on the asylum context, I was concerned that there was the likelihood of women living in emergency or 'temporary accommodation' (see Appendix One) and housed with other people. This meant that the construction of personal documents potentially raised additional issues of privacy, confidentiality and safety. There was always the risk that the women's possessions could be lost if they were taken into detention, unlikely to be recovered if they were removed or released (Cole, 2003).

My concerns also related to the asylum claims system. People seeking asylum in the UK are exposed to obligations around attendance and identifying themselves to officials (Hynes, 2003; Mallock and Stanley, 2005). Surveillance by the UKBA is high for people seeking asylum and in no way did I want to replicate types of immigration requirements. One of the challenges of exploring the stories of women seeking asylum was the likelihood that the women would have been involved in interrogative interviews previously, for example in their country of origin, in flight, at border controls and claiming asylum. Given the legal model used in the UK decision making process and assessment of asylum stories, I considered different ways of approaching stories which might open up more possibilities for the women to have the time and safe space to construct alternative, or at least broader, accounts about their lives.

I considered one-to-one in-depth conversational interviews (Fisher and Goodley, 2007) appropriate. This necessitated my decision to turn away from more structured one-to-one interview approaches and incorporate an unstructured way of stimulating stories so that the women, potentially, were storytellers and research participants rather than merely respondents (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000). Conceiving the women participants as not simply reactive, I took a research approach that

attempted to recognise women as social storytellers, capable of their own constructions which might or might not align with dominate narratives in the UK. My intention was not to bring research participants to new understandings but to provide an opportunity for the women to reflexively explore their stories in potentially new ways (Birch and Miller 2002; Fisher and Goodley, 2007).

My approach drew on Harding's feminist research processes which advocate women exploring their experiences with their own points of reference, rather than imposing or shaping the story with pre-determined and researcher-led variables (Harding, 1998). I conceived extremely broad areas of enquiry about women's stories, with very little direction placed on the interview or ways in which meaning should be understood. This 'generative approach' (Flick, 1998) was slightly more detailed than just the simple prompt of 'tell me about your life' but, primarily, the interviews were led almost entirely by the storytellers and held very few presuppositions about what stories the women might choose to tell (Qwul'sih'yah'maht, 2005). Aware that being asked simply to tell me their story might pose a challenge for some participants and might even cause some confusion about culturally accepted notions of an interview, I developed a set of very broadly conceived 'interview prompts' (see Appendix Eight). Focused around three main locations of temporal time, I included past (which could include pre-migration and forced-migration); present (which could include life in the UK); and an anticipated future. I based these prompts on the notion that "how one conceives the present… is always and inevitably bound up with a construction of the past, with one eye on the future" (Andrews, 2014, p. 108). Acknowledging that stories are forever in flux and therefore never fixed (Andrews, 2007b), the prompts served as loose guides and provided an element of structure for me rather than fixed ordered questions.

Listening did not involve the participants talking to a passive, objective or distanced researcher but emerged out of a relational process between myself and the participants, negotiated, evolving and co-constructed (Maynard, 1994; Somers, 1994; Mauthner and Doucet, 2003; Sorsoli, 2007; Finlay and Evans, 2009). My part in the storytelling process included me responding spontaneously (Fisher and Goodley, 2007), as well as intervening in the interview with requests for clarification within the story. I sometimes shared my interpretations of the story in order to check my understandings and to demonstrate my active engagement.

I incorporated ways in which to support women without imposing structured questions. For example, drawing on narrative research approaches, I used probes suggested by Narayan and George to help women unpack their stories; "… if someone says, "Life was hard", the interviewer might ask "In what ways was life hard…?" (2000, p. 449). This particular approach to open-ended questioning helped participants expand on points that they had raised (Riessman, 1993). With minimum interruption to the woman's story, I sometimes echoed back, repeating the participant's words. Following some of the wisdom of Holloway and Jefferson (2000), one of the most effective ways to elicit stories was not to use the question 'why?' Assuming that questions that include 'why' potentially locate a story in the rational-logical domain, I created overt statements about storytelling such as "tell me about a time when… " (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 35).

For a couple of the women, starting their interview was a slow and challenging process. Where the women struggled I included a prepared series of mini-prompts, such as: "when did you claim asylum?" and "which country are you from?" These prompts were intended to be easily answered and were used to create a discussion which then helped to facilitate the interview gently, often involving me disclosing

similar information about my life. These mini-prompts and self-disclosures were not intended to specifically gather demographic information but were a very successful way to form a reciprocal research relationship (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005).

Rapport was sought with the women, characterised as developing mutual respect and a level of intimacy (Oakley, 1981; Duncombe and Jessop, 2002; Letherby, 2000). I did not choose a narrative method because I think that women are 'inherently' better at establishing rapport. Rather, I wanted the women to maximise active engagement with participation in interviews and I assumed that listening to their stories would potentially enable participants to have the time and space to present particular versions of themselves and tell their stories in ways they wish to be understood (Gilligan, 1982; Harding, 1991). I was keen not be to another 'stranger' who came into these women's lives, often uninvited and temporarily, to research their stories "promising the earth" (Robinson, 2002, p. 65). These wishes had to be balanced by recognising that some participants may negotiate perceived risks and be comforted to imagine they may never see me again (Letherby, 2000).

As described in Chapter Three, 'listening' was central to the research process. Being a willing listener was important for the women to be able to speak (Andrews, 2007b). In order to create a safe research relationship for the women, which took account of their capacity as well as minimising distress, I engaged in a process of interviewing using a method called 'holding, containing and bearing witness' (Blackwell, 1997). This method emphasises 'holding' as a relational and emotional activity which is located in the research relationship and interview space. 'Containing' is a process that takes place in order to create a safe interview space within which stories can be told, fully listened to. These two processes of the method were intended to support the women to feel they had been witnessed and that I was willing to bear witness.

Practiced, developed and published in 1997 by Richard Blackwell, former Family Therapist at the Medical Foundation for Victims of Torture, this method of 'bearing witness' was developed with particular reference to relational narratives with people who had been victims of torture and organised violence. Familiar with the approach and having practiced, developed and trained other workers from frontline practice on this approach over the past seven years, choosing this method was an ethical endeavour to take full account of the women's capabilities and resources, as well as creating an affirming experience that aimed to minimise potential trauma or harm that might result from their participation in the interview (see Appendix Seven for a broader overview of 'Holding, containing and bearing witness').

Interviews were digitally recorded (King and Horrocks, 2010) because I felt taking notes could have altered the role of the bearing witness model and changed the research relationships and the accessibility that there was between me and each participant within the interview. After the recorder was switched off I spent a further period of time with each woman to debrief and discuss the interview process. This was an opportunity to reflect on the interview process together, consider how it felt to take part in the interview and discuss if there was anything the woman would have changed. This period of reflexivity was a further opportunity for the women to participate in shaping the study.

Emotion

The role of reflexivity was essential to negotiate the research and to acknowledge that the process was a time and space for emotion (Oakley, 1981; Letherby, 2000; Doucet, 2008; Jewkes, 2012). Andrews (2014) urges that researchers take seriously listening to other people's stories, suggesting that ultimately the research process is

very emotionally demanding. A particular aspect of emotionality was the extremely high expectations for my study. I felt a great privilege and gratitude about the information that had been given to me but these emotions also left me with weighty feelings of responsibility and debt (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005). Many of the participants held great hopes for the study, as did I. Aware of my work with women in the asylum sector, my campaigning around detention and other key issues, some women were keen to participate in a study which they hoped would be widely disseminated and make a difference to the lives of women seeking asylum. Others, including gatekeepers, understood the prestige of the ESRC bursary which funded this study. All these aspects added to the responsibility I felt.

Each in-depth interview took up to three hours and the interview space was a place of emotions (Oakley, 1981; Letherby, 2000; Doucet, 2008). Letherby notes "a denial of emotion and personal involvement [goes] against the principles of feminist research" (2000, p.101). Interviews were often highly charged and emotional for me and for the participants. At times the role of emotions was extremely positive but at times posed numerous challenges. There were "emotional dangers" (Letherby, 2000, p.91) and the "threatening implications of listening" (Andrews, 2014, p.27) to the chaotic stories which the women presented in various states of despair, pain, degradation and hopelessness (Langer, 1991; Frank, 1995). Women frequently cried and often seemed distressed during the interviews. Whilst I was not unfamiliar with 'dramatic' displays of emotion from women (Letherby, 2000), responding in ways that were useful to the woman, me and the research process was a fine balancing act. Letherby (2000) also brings awareness to the emotional responses of researchers that may be detrimental to those being researched. The interviews frequently involved stories about disturbing and traumatic events which at times were

emotionally and intellectually challenging and distressing to hear. On occasions some women wanted me to look at and witness scar tissue or other evidence of forms of abuse and torture in intimate places on their bodies.

Willing to step into these research relationships, I sought to engage respectfully in the research process as it unfolded in many unexpected ways. I felt I was being entrusted with deeply personal information, a point the women emphasised to me again and again. Balancing out decisions according to the emotions in the space, at different times I reached out to touch the hands of a woman as she spoke; a form of positive touch and to offer my support. At times tears ran down my cheeks as I listened to painful accounts and, in these moments of acute emotion, I tried to take my cues from participants, leaving the recorder on at all times unless requested to do otherwise. I asked participants if they would like me to stop recording if they were particularly distressed or silent. For the most part women asked me to keep recording despite their distress. We had snacks, cups of tea or water, taking time out for a cigarette break or toilet break which had the added value of giving time to re-compose and reflect. None of us, the women participants, the interpreter or myself, terminated a single interview, which may indicate the success of acknowledging the role of emotions in the space and taking up these particular relational and practical approaches.

For my part, I found myself thinking about the women long after their interviews were over. The ways in which the women demonstrated their emotions were occasionally tied to persecutions they faced in their present lives, making sense of their daily lives and threats to them within the UK. These emotions were very difficult for me and I was sometimes physically and psychologically, in both my conscious state and sleep state, filled with and haunted by women's stories (McMahon 1995; Jewkes, 2012;

Doucet, 2008), as discussed in Chapter Five. Letherby notes "the active role of participants [interview] is over but they do continue to exert influence" (2000, p.108).

At times the women's own fears "inhabited" (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000, p.69) me and I became concerned about specific women. I found myself ruminating on questions about where a particular woman would sleep that night, whether she had money to buy food and/or how she would protect herself from specific forms of violence that she faced after she had left the interview space. Despite my years as a practitioner and having heard many women's accounts with similar details, these emotionally laden interviews (Rager, 2005) had an impact on me and remained a sad and difficult process for me in many ways.

Given the level of emotions within the research process it was a comfort to read that it is not unusual for researchers to have some extreme and emotional responses to participants' stories. Gilgun (2008) outlines her anxieties, flashbacks, violent nightmares and fantasies of killing when she was interviewing perpetrators of violence. Letherby discusses how "the research represented a real threat to [her] sense of self" (2000, p.103). Bosworth (1999) highlights how she greatly empathised with the participants of the study which had negative consequences on her health. Mosselson (2010) outlines her nightmares, embedded in a cinematic reframing of the stories of young Bosnian women refugees.

Positive emotions were also a feature of the interviews and present for me during the research process. During and immediately after the interview encounters it was sometimes stimulating, fascinating and, at times, life-affirming. To meet and share stories with such interesting women and to feel their care, warmth and openness towards me, was uplifting. The reciprocal stories brought me into relationships and I

learned many things that I shared with different women. For example, my birthdate was the same as one woman; my daughter was the same age as another woman's daughter; one woman spoke of the book she was writing and that she would send me a copy; and another woman hoped we would publish together and deliver a workshop.

Despite the negative and positive impacts of the interviews, it was important for me to recognise risk and manage my emotions (Letherby, 2000). Whilst acknowledging the central role that emotions can play in the life of a researcher, I spent time managing my own physical and emotional wellbeing (Letherby, 2000). To help me in this process I engaged in self-care strategies to minimise harms (Rager, 2005). I kept a personal journal (Wincup, 2001) which became a source of support and immediate reflexivity to help process myself through the research journey whilst ensuring anonymity and confidentiality to the participants (Letherby, 2000). I relied on my supervision sessions for support, as well as my collective and interpretive community (Doucet, 2008) and other forms of peer support (Wincup, 2001; Rager, 2005). Other vital resources to my self-care strategy extended to my family, alongside my informal networks of friends and colleagues within the women and refugee sector, as well as the discipline of yoga and wellbeing practice.

Transcribing

I carried out my own transcribing on all of the participants' interviews to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, avoiding anyone else hearing the women's voices. The issue of highly sensitive and risky information was illuminated for me during the preliminary study when one of the woman participants gave me an account of her role as a witness at a war crimes tribunal. She said her name had been accidently

disclosed and that she was at threat from persecution, possible abduction and murder if identified and found in the UK. Given the extreme risks she had taken speaking to me, her safety and protection were paramount. Her account underlined the reason for me carrying out the transcribing and making every effort to preserve each and every woman's confidentiality and anonymity.

I viewed transcription as an opportunity to listen to and become deeply familiar with the data (Kings and Horrocks, 2010). Using a consistent style of transcription across the transcript, I practised a method of transcribing that captured as many details as possible, replicating the taped interview as closely as possible including own contributions to the interview (King and Horrocks, 2010). I created a basic structure of the transcript, similar to a theatre script and numbered the lines. I then listened again, checking each transcript against the recording (see Appendix Twenty One for a 'sample of a page of an interview transcript'). Transcription was one of the stages in my data analysis process which I describe in more detail in Chapter Six.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided a detailed account of my fieldwork and the methods used throughout the research process. Emphasising the situational nature of ethics, ethical considerations have formed an integral part of this chapter. I have included details of how a preliminary study was used to inform the methods of the main study.

Using a reflexive approach I have attempted to illuminate some aspects of my role and the positions I held in the research process. I have outlined the methods of the main study and how I attempted to reduce barriers of access for women participating through the use of gatekeepers, interpreters, location and environment. Some of the barriers to recruitment and access to women seeking asylum have been explored,

with a detailed discussion about the ethical and practical challenges of increasing access to participation incorporating, wherever possible, the individual circumstances of each woman. The sampling approach that I took has been highlighted, including the potential limitations. Participation and choice have been discussed as central ethical concerns and I have reflected on the process of constructing consent, including some of the dilemmas of concepts of 'informed consent' and anonymity.

I have explored the method of narrative interviewing used. Discussing how I approached the interview process, I have included information about the use of prompts, the role of emotion, a model of 'bearing witness' and some of the implications of using these particular methods. Lastly, I have included an explanation of my method of transcribing which sought to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the women participants.

In the next chapter I provide an overview of the women participants. This chapter has been used as a strategy to raise the visibility of the women who took part in this study.

Chapter Five:
Women who participated in the study

"I like for women to be respected (May)"

Introduction

In this chapter I provide an overview of the seventeen women who participated in this study. Constructing a chapter which entirely focuses on the participants was a strategy to raise the visibility of the women who took part in this study. The contextual information and introductions to the women are presented as selected accounts based on the information they provided in their interviews, which took place in the UK between 2011 and 2012. Details are largely, but not wholly, presented without reference to specific women in order to attend to confidentially.

I include an overview of the women's countries of origin; their motivations for migration; stories of migratory journeys and routes to the UK; and details about claiming asylum in the UK. This was done in an effort to prevent the potential homogenising and generalising of women seeking asylum in relation to the ways in which I have presented information. During the interviews I made no attempts to collect any specific demographic data; I was not interested in linking women in relation to specific categories such as their country of origin, sexuality, religion. I was not seeking to be representative of women seeking asylum.

Presenting individual summary biographies for each of the participants, their asylum claim stories formed no part of my enquiry so I do not provide any of those details. I have resisted a more traditional research approach, avoiding selecting key aspects of their interviews that describe sensationalist details, such as violent persecutory events. Only partially complete biographical information, highlighting some of the

diversities that they presented in the interviews is presented here. The legal

determination on their asylum claim was sometimes part of their interview, so I have

included this information where available, alongside the year they claimed asylum.

What is presented through the individual biographies is a diverse group of women

who were all at different stages in the asylum system when I interviewed them.

All names used are pseudonyms (discussed in Chapters Four and Ten) and the

women's ages have been generalised into years (i.e. early twenties or late forties).

The specific dates and details about their asylum claims are omitted, but included is

a general overview of their time in the UK prior to being interviewed for this study.

Routes into migration and seeking asylum

The women came from fourteen different countries of origin: Algeria, Cameroon,

Ethiopia, Gambia, India, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Sierra-Leone,

Somalia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Internal migration within their country of origin

was a primary route of migration for many of them. The women who migrated within

countries or crossed immediate borders into neighbouring countries, living for brief or

extended periods, sometimes found routes of migration were restricted. In response

to the increased tightening and formalisation of migratory channels (Andrijasevic,

2010) some opted for different routes and forms of migration, before eventually

finding routes to Europe.

The women's stories of seeking asylum and routes into migration showed that there

is not a clear distinction between voluntary and involuntary migration. Typifying the

interface between international migrations and seeking asylum, their stories of mixed

migration (UNHCR, 2007) included how they had migrated for work and/or studying.

Highlighting the diversity of their backgrounds, the women described their

understandings of what led to their migratory choices in terms of opportunities, challenges, limitations and constraints. Some talked about their individual decision-making capacities and their sense of social mobility (Andrijasevic, 2010), whilst others were bound within household decision making and family responsibilities (Collins, 2000; Andrijasevic, 2010). Mobility varied greatly in the women's accounts and some of them reflected on how poverty, violence and force had played a role in propelling them to migrate. Several women had spent years trying to leave their situations, locked in houses or trapped within relationships and work environments; it had taken huge resources and planning in order to migrate. Others were financially affluent with ample resources to facilitate their choices.

Age had influenced decision-making in migratory choices and control (Sirriyeh, 2013). Some women migrated to the UK as children accompanied by adults, not all of whom were known to them or provided protection. These particular children appeared to have had little control or choice about their migration. Multifaceted and fluid types of persecutions did not provide any one explanation of the complex issues facing girls and women across the globe but these stories did provide a greater visibility and recognition of them as targets and victims of persecution.

Refugee journeys are frequently presented as individuals fleeing from unsafe places of conflict to achieve safety in a country of asylum (Sirriyeh, 2013). Some women's gave accounts of violence and abuse which they located in their countries of origin and they felt they had left these aspects of their life behind. Seeking asylum had enabled them to reach a place of safety. Yet this dichotomy was challenged by other women in the study in a number of ways. For some, their country of origin was a source of persecution and their adversities continued, developed, changed and became similar or different in the UK. For others, severe adversities and

persecutions began in the UK. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh asserts "… an individual's search for protection as a refugee cannot be equated with fleeing an unsafe situation (country of origin) to a safe context (country of asylum" (2006, p.310). The women's situations did not always reflect a 'before and 'after' (Sirriyeh, 2013). Living in the UK did not always signal safety and protection for the women, exposing some women to new and unexpected forms of violence, as well as marginalisation and abuse.

Periods of waiting, uncertainty and immobility characterised many of the women's migratory journeys, including within the UK (Sirriyeh, 2013, p.163). For example, one woman had migrated across several countries, travelling during the night and hiding during the daylight. She made her way alone and unaided by others, frequently unable to find anything to eat. Eventually, with restricted legal rights due to her immigration status, she was held against her will in 'domestic servitude' (see Appendix One) (Lewis et al., 2013). She said she was helped by a friend to make her journey to the UK where she waited more than five years for a decision on her asylum claim, only to be refused asylum and evicted from her accommodation. She was living street homeless (Lewis, 2007, 2009) when I interviewed her and had very little sense of certainty about her future and an acute sense of immobility.

Moving from one country or continent to another, with or without the requisite documentation, often involved human smugglers and agents. In contrast to Sirriyeh (2013), who found women reluctant to speak openly about migratory journeys which might relate them to criminalising activity, accounts of smugglers and agents who had facilitated their migration were spoken about openly. Whilst some women were helped by friends and family to gather the resources necessary to make their migratory journeys, several of them arrived accompanied by a 'trafficker' (see Appendix One) who trafficked them into the UK for 'sexual exploitation' (see

Appendix One) and domestic servitude. The women who were trafficked were often relocated from their countries of origin across countries and into cities across the UK. Some social networks represented a source of information, resources and kinship, whilst others became risky and exploitative (Khosravi, 2010; Sirriyeh, 2013).

A number of women had entered the UK with the requisite documentation, such as a student, visitor, work or spousal visa. Once in the UK, the women's migratory routes within the UK continued to be varied. A number of them were housed by friends and family, whilst other women were given temporary accommodation within the asylum system and were dispersed away from the South of England and often repeatedly re-dispersed. Facing a further form of forced or secondary migration within the dispersal system, some women found themselves accommodated in areas far away where they often lost contact with their former networks of support. Most they did not have family in the UK and they said there was an absence of other minority ethnic, social or community networks (Bloch and Schuster, 2005; Zetter et al., 2005). Loss of accommodation was another cause of secondary migration, whereby women remained in the UK but became destitute, necessitating movements towards finding shelter and food (Bloch and Schuster, 2005; Lewis, 2007, 2009). Several of them lived destitute which posed a number of risks. Detention was one of the most inhibiting factors of mobility for the women, taking away their liberty whilst they were in the UK.

Not all of the women had claimed asylum when they entered the UK and these were in a wide range of different legal situations relating to their claim for asylum, including those whose asylum claims had been refused or classified as unfounded, as well as those who had been granted legal protection such as refugee, discretionary leave, humanitarian protection or 'family amnesty' (see Appendix One).

The women

The women were aged between early twenties and late fifties, and had been living in the UK for different periods of time ranging between two months to thirteen years when I interviewed them. I use their self-selected pseudonyms - Anne-Laure, Baelli, Bintou, Caroline, Diane, Fatou, Gloria, Jen, Love, Lucy, May, Naomi, Precious, Queenie, Shimmar, Z and Zain.

Anne-Laure

Anne-Laure was in her mid-twenties. She arrived in the UK in 2011 and was waiting for a decision on her asylum claim when I interviewed her a month after she had claimed.

Baelli

Baelli was in her early twenties. She arrived in the UK in 2011 and her claim for asylum had been refused. I interviewed her five months after she had claimed.

Bintou

Bintou was in her early forties. She had lived in the UK for several years before we met for the interview. I interviewed her seven months after she had claimed asylum. The interview was the day after her claim had been fully determined and refused.

Caroline

Caroline was in her late forties. She had lived in the UK for many years prior to claiming asylum. Caroline had been granted refugee status when I interviewed her.

Diane

Diane was in her mid-twenties. Having claimed asylum in 2006, her claim had been fully determined and refused. I interviewed her two weeks after Diane had submitted a fresh asylum claim.

Fatou

Fatou was in her early thirties and having claimed asylum in 2005, her claim had been fully determined and refused. She had submitted a fresh asylum claim shortly before we met for our study interview. A few days after we met Fatou told me that claim was also refused.

Gloria

Gloria was in her early fifties. She had lived in the UK for many years prior to the study interview. Having claimed asylum in 2012, I interviewed her three months afterwards and her claim had been refused.

Jen

Jen was in her early thirties and she had lived in the UK for several years. I interviewed her three months after she had claimed asylum in the UK in 2011 and she did not have an initial decision on her application.

Love

Love was in her late thirties. Having claimed asylum in 2001 and been granted refugee status, she had been living in the UK eleven years when I interviewed her.

Lucy

Lucy was in her early forties. She had been granted refugee status when I interviewed her.

May

May was in her mid-twenties. She arrived in the UK when she was less than sixteen years old. Having claimed asylum in the UK in 2007, May had been granted refugee status when I interviewed her.

Naomi

Naomi was in her mid-forties. Having claimed asylum in the UK in 2006, her claim had been refused. She had appealed the refusal and shortly after our study interview Naomi was granted leave to remain in the UK.

Precious

Precious was in her mid-thirties. Having claimed asylum in the UK in 2011, I interviewed her two months afterwards but no decision had been made on her claim. Shortly after our interview she told me she was being removed from the UK due to the 'safe third country' rule (see Appendix One).

Queenie

Queenie was in her mid-fifties. Having claimed asylum in the UK in 2009, she had been granted refugee status when I interviewed her.

Shimmar

Shimmar was in her mid-twenties. She had arrived in the UK when she was less than sixteen years of age. Having claimed asylum at the end of 2011, I interviewed her a month later and she had not received a decision on her claim. Shortly after our interview Shimmar was refused asylum and went missing from her accommodation. Attempts by her support worker to locate her proved unsuccessful.

Z was in her early fifties and had been given refugee status twelve years before I interviewed her.

Zain was in her late forties. Having claimed asylum at the end of 2011, I interviewed her a month afterwards and she was waiting for an initial decision.

Conclusion

Providing an overview of and focussing an entire chapter on the women, I have attempted to raise the visibility of the participants in this study. Presenting information provided by the women in their interviews, I have tried to prevent the potential homogenising and generalising of women seeking asylum in relation to the ways in which I have constructed the information. Adhering to stringent ethical codes of anonymity and confidentiality, the information presented is suitably vague.

The women exposed significant differences in their migratory routes and a plethora of motives informing their migration (Andrijasevic, 2010). Changes in circumstances meant the women negotiated and shaped their migrations in many different ways. Seeking asylum was not always represented as a momentous, singular move of leaving one's country of origin and entering the UK to claim asylum. Multiple processes and stages of migration included staying in countries, moving to new countries, living in transit countries, migrating to the UK and being moved or dispersed around the UK. Taking account of the stories of the women highlights, in particular, how theories of migration have overlooked and made invisible the diversity of women's backgrounds and migratory choices (Sirriyeh, 2008, 2013).

Singular pathways and overly deterministic explanations fail to account for women's fluid, complex, multifaceted and changeable motivations and migratory routes.

In the next chapter I explore the Listening Guide (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, 2003) which provided the central method of analysis for the study. I include information about the final steps of analysis in relation to an approach called 'letting stories breathe' (Frank, 2010). I go on to explore listening to stories of persecution and violence and hearing the narratives of resistance (Katz, 2004) and ruination (Langer, 1991; Frank, 1995).

Chapter Six:
The Listening Guide method of analysis

"I like the voice of women to be heard (May)"

Introduction

In this chapter I explore the Listening Guide (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, 2003) as

the central method of data analysis used in this study. Distinctly different from more

traditional models of data analysis (Brown, 2008), the Listening Guide offered four

central readings of each transcript, which are known as listenings. Maintaining a

research relationship with each woman in the study, each listening focused on the

uniqueness of their story whilst also providing a method to contextualise stories.

Exploring the purpose and opportunities of the Listening Guide, I explain how I used

the listenings and how I developed aspects of each listening in order to address

some of the limitations for the purposes of this study. I go on to highlight the

significant challenges posed by using the Listening Guide in the final stage of data

analysis and have included information about the final step I developed to

composing analysis, which I have called 'letting stories breathe' (Frank, 2010). I

conclude this chapter by exploring how I came to hear women's stories of

persecution and sexual violence, and how these stories were framed by narratives of

resistance, reworking and resilience (Katz, 2004) and of ruination (Langer, 1991;

Frank, 1995).

Method of analysis

Scholars have argued that analysing data can be a process spanning the whole

research project, continuous and progressive even before the start of data collection

(Ely et al., 1991). Others have put forward methods that specifically focus on the

data as the starting point of analysis (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000; Edwards and Weller, 2012). Confined to discrete aspects of analysis or incorporating broader continuous approaches, choosing a data analysis method has been widely recognised as a crucial stage where critical decisions are made about the research process (Riessman, 1993).

Recognising that data analysis is a site where the power of the researcher may be pronounced (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008), the ethical approach taken towards data analysis was of particular importance to me. Searching for an appropriate method I considered the different forms of qualitative analysis available. Some methods of analysis have been presented as a systematic, neutral set of procedures that researchers can apply to data in order to organise or index findings (Lacey and Luff, 2001). Standard methods of analysis may employ schemes of coding such as abstracting stories into themes or templates (King and Horrocks, 2010). Categorising and quantifying data as text from interviews can appear to create processes that enable quick retrieval of data and easy identification or detection (Bryman and Burgess, 1994; Lacey and Luff, 2001). These methods have been commonly assisted by computer programmes (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Robson, 2011).

Choosing an appropriate form of data analysis was important given that, as Mauthner and Doucet suggest "analysis is a crucial stage of the research as it carries the potential to decrease or amplify the volume of our respondents' voices" (1998, p.139).Taking seriously the method of paying attention to women's stories and keeping the stories of participants at the centre of the analysis, it was essential that my method of analysing data included an evaluation of my role as the researcher and did not reflect the ways in which women's stories have remained unheard, overlooked and marginalised (bell hooks, 1984; Mohanty, 1988; Collins,

2000). Equally important was consistency between the analysis method and the conceptual assumptions underpinning the study (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998; Holloway and Jefferson, 2000; Riessman, 2005; King and Horrocks, 2010). The dilemma of how to bring a balance to choices I made about the study was always contingent to the methodological issues confronting me. Gilligan reminds us "data alone do not tell us anything; they do not speak, but are interpreted by people" (1986, p.328).

Having adopted the Listening Guide approach to the study, I specifically assumed a particular relational ontology (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, 2003) (discussed in Chapter Three). Focussed on the seventeen women's stories and taking a reflexive approach to my role as researcher, I turned to a method of analysis that had the potential to make overt the ways in which the women's stories are shaped by narratives, as well as to recognise the individual capacity of storytellers (Somers, 1994; Lockwood, 2013). Frank suggests that no story is singular and there is always the need for relational narrative analysis. These methodological concerns and foundational understandings led me to use the Listening Guide as the method of data analysis (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, 2003).

The Listening Guide offers an analysis method that enabled me to focus on each story and contextualise the meanings of the stories, in ways that other methods might overlook. Listening to stories, whilst tracing narrative frameworks across individual interview transcripts, potentially helped to retain the uniqueness of each woman's story, in contrast to identifying categories or themes that might link across interviews to describe the women's situations or attempting to slot the stories into categories of the literature (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998; Andrijasevic, 2010). Understanding data analysis in relation to the use of the Listening Guide had much

in common with some other narrative forms of qualitative analysis (for example Plummer, 2001; Frank, 2010). The process included not only listening to what was said but recognising the interdependency of intimate and wider social relations and structures within which stories are embedded (Doucet, 2008). Important too was listening to my own stories as the researcher, reflexively considering my role in shaping the research process (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998).

Offering a careful and critical way to analyse narratives through an in-depth and practical approach to transcript analysis, the potential of the Listening Guide is found within four distinct "sequential listenings" (Gilligan et al., 2003, p.159). The words 'listening' and 'reading' are used interchangeably in order to capture the notion that, as researchers 'read' an interview transcript, it is as if they were listening to the story (Doucet, 2008). Forming a systematic and relational way of attending to the practicalities of data analysis, the Listening Guide offered a practical method that included listening to the audio-recordings and (re)reading the data "each time listening in a different way" (Brown, 1998, p.33). The process brought me into relationship with each participant's story in a detailed, deep and intimate way (Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan et al., 2003; Doucet, 2008).

A flexible method, the Listening Guide can be adopted to allow the researcher to make decisions about the number and different types of listenings, as well as the successive order in which the researcher places each listening in relation to the topic under enquiry (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008). The third and fourth listenings have frequently been adapted and shaped by researchers' aims or the focus and topic being explored (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998; Gilligan at al., 2003). A fifth listening has also been introduced by scholars such as Deery (2003) who listened for expressions of emotion in relation to different types of metaphors

pertinent to her inquiry and Edwards (2001) who traced how accounts developed over time and across the four interviews that she had carried out with each of her participants.

Time-consuming and a labour intensive process (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998; Sorsoli and Tolman, 2008; Brown, 2001; Tolman, 2001; Edwards, 2001; Deery, 2003), Gilligan et al., argue "no single step, or listening, is intended to stand alone" (2003, p. 154). I placed importance on my presence as a 'listener' for every interview conducted for this study. I listened more than the four times to each of the participant's interviews. Increasing familiarity through listening to the interviews, I transcribed every interview (discussed in Chapter Four) from the audio-recording, listening again to each interview and making at least another check for transcription accuracy by listening to the audio recording and reading through the transcript. Recognising that the generation of narrative data is not always carried out by the researcher who goes on to analyse the data, the implication of the Listening Guide method of analysis is that the researcher has carried out their own interviews and does their own analysis. This principle is underpinned by the assumption that the analysis process continually brings the researcher into relationship with the participant "as though they were still listening to the person in the interview setting" (Doucet, 2008, p.77). The entire process allowed me to 'stay close' to the women's stories (Tolman, 2001).

Listenings[34]

I paid attention to the women's accounts beyond interviewing and transcription. I listened four times to each full transcript using the Listening Guide method of analysis. In practical terms, I approached each listening using a different coloured pencil to trace and highlight elements of the story, individual words, phrases or whole sections within the transcript (Brown, 2001). Each listening was represented in colour on the transcript and related to the particular listening, "rendering a visual layer in the analysis process" (Gilligan et al., 2003, p.159). Using a different coloured pencil helped me to identify where the data relates to the four steps of analysis. This activity was done in parallel with note taking and short summaries, both on the transcripts and on separate pieces of paper (Brown, 2001; Gilligan et al., 2003).

Reading One:
Listening to "relational and reflexively constituted narratives"

Reading One offers a method of listening to the interview data as "a reflexive reading of narrative" (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008, p.405). This listening combines two key intersecting elements which I used as an entwined process. Utilising the first element, I paid attention to making sense of the story (Brown, 2001) and used a coloured pencil to identify central storylines by underlining sections of data, leaving notes across the entire transcript. I sought to explore how each woman spoke about herself, tuning into recurring words, repeated images and ideas (Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan et al., 2003; Byrne et al., 2009). I highlighted tensions and contradictions within the story, particularly when the woman became silent and where a fractured account remained unfinished (Scarry, 1985; Langer, 1991; Brown

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[34] The four titles in this section include quotes taken from Doucet and Mauthner (2008, p.405-406) and relate directly to the purpose of each of the listenings.

and Gilligan, 1992; Frank, 1995; Woolley, 2012) (see Appendix Thirteen for a small example of Reading One - element one).

The second element of this 'reflexive' listening was present at all times and attention was paid to reflexive listening as I attempted to read myself into the data (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998). The reflexive element of the first listening was captured by the question "who is listening?" (Byrne et al., 2009, p.69). Although scholars invoke reflexivity in many books and articles in order to position reflexivity as an acceptable methodology, detail about how the process is carried out is often overlooked or carried out very differently by different researchers (Pillow, 2003; Finlay and Gough, 2003). In order to evoke precision about my process I utilised the method outlined in the Listening Guide method of 'doing' reflexivity (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008). I used the worksheet technique (Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Mauthner and Doucet, 2003; Doucet, 2008), creating dedicated times and spaces to be reflexive. Putting each participant's interview data into one column, I wrote my reflexive account into an adjacent column that could be tracked next to the participant's account (Brown and Gilligan, 1992) (see Appendix Fourteen for a section of a completed worksheet).

My reflexive method primarily focused on documenting and listening to my emotional and intellectual responses to each participant's story (Gilligan et al., 2003; Doucet, 2008; Edwards and Weller, 2012). The aim was to understand how I might relate to and make connections with, or where my responses did not resonate with and disconnected from, participants' stories (Gilligan et al., 2003). Listening for commonalities and differences among the women and myself, I tried to unfold how my responses to each participant's story affected my assumptions and views about what I had heard. I aimed to be as transparent as possible about how I would later write about a participant's story.

Although I found the Listening Guide worksheet technique useful, it was also restrictive. Reflexivity was not a discrete and specific stage of the research process and I have viewed and attempted to acknowledge it as an ongoing process, even beyond the submission of the thesis. Letherby states "the self is always present affecting every aspect of the research process from choice of project through to presentation of 'findings' whether acknowledged or not" (2000, p.94). I developed other reflexive practices to address the limited use of the worksheet technique, including making notes in a journal (discussed in Chapter Four). Trails of interpretations from my data analysis were recorded in my journal, which helped me with my own stories and dialogues, bringing awareness to reflexivity as a practice (Finlay and Gough, 2003). The lengthy exchanges that I had with myself served to help me consider the ways in which I was also constructing a story of the research process and positioning myself within that story (discussed in Chapter Three).

Listening through gossamer walls (Doucet, 2008) in relation to the research location, I decided to widen my understanding by drawing on the expertise of colleagues who formed a collective and interpretive community (Doucet, 2008). Developing the Listening Guide Study Group (discussed in Chapter Three) was a central tenet of this aspect of my reflexive process. Also, engaging with other colleagues in what Rager (2005) and Robson (2011) have called peer debriefing, one colleague shared her understandings of Islam and the Koran in order to help me make sense of the imagery within one participant's story and another colleague, with a familiarity about female genital mutilation, helped to make me more aware of this specific practice as it was discussed in a participant's story. Discussions with the broader collective and interpretive community (Doucet, 2008) and peer debriefing (Rager, 2005; Robson, 2011) helped me to gain information about specific details that I was less familiar

with and also supported me to consider the multiplicity of viewpoints, reminding me of the different ways that stories can be interpreted.

Beyond this thesis I have numerous reflexive documents that I wrote during the research process in particular relation to this listening. A number of these accounts were shared with my supervisors and my advisor at regular supervision sessions in order to be transparent about my growing understanding of reflexive practice. These regular opportunities all provided dedicated times within which to practice reflexivity (Finlay and Gough, 2003) and formed parts of the rudimentary drafts of this thesis.

I was influenced by Kelsky (2001) who calls for researchers to account for their privileged positions in reflexive writings, specifically highlighting how often researchers have remained unidentified within research and simply become "identified with those they study" (2001, p. 429). Kelsky suggests that omitting information leaves huge assumptions about who the researcher is. Attempting to address some of these issues, I used my reflexive writing to try to acknowledge my resources (Letherby, 2002) and to try and make sense of some of the reasons why I might have chosen to enquire into the stories of women seeking asylum. Aspects of these reflexive accounts explored the situations I have faced in my life as a UK citizen that may look very different to some women seeking asylum in the UK (see Appendix Eleven for a small section of my reflexive research journal).

Through my reflexive analysis I came to recognise that I did not fully appreciate all my motivations for my research and new motivations emerged during the process of the study. This stage of the research process worked against quick analysis, exposing and evolving differing versions of myself (Doucet, 2008). I was engaged with slow scholarship.

Reading Two:
Listening for 'I' and "tracing narrated subjects"

Reading Two involved listening for 'I' in the interview transcript. This process focused on "tracing narrated subjects" (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008, p.406). Intended to elevate my understandings of how each woman presented herself, attention was paid to first person statements in the interview data (Edwards and Weller, 2012). Unlike the other listenings which work across the entire interview, selecting passages of the transcript provided me with another perspective and a practical way of listening to the women's stories.

In order to actively listen for 'I' in the interview data I used a two-step method (Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Mauthner and Doucet, 1998; Gilligan et al., 2003; Edwards and Weller, 2012) adopted from the Listening Guide (see Appendix fifteen for an example of Reading Two). First, I went through the interview transcript and used another coloured pencil to highlight where I heard the first person 'I'. Along with the pronoun, I also underlined the additional verb and any important accompanying words (Gilligan et al., 2003). For example:

> My mum had no friends. There was no one there and we really suffered, all of us. <u>I had no schooling, no education</u>, but all my friends were able to go to school. My mum was always tired so <u>I was always there</u> and <u>I did the washing and the cooking</u>. <u>I was always helping her</u> (Baelli).

Second, I placed the lines I had underlined together as phrases on a separate document "like lines in a poem" (Gilligan et al., 2003, p.162). For example:

> I had no schooling, no education
> I was always there
> I did the washing and the cooking
> I was always helping her (Baelli).

Drawing on the work of Elizabeth Debold (1990, cited by Gilligan et al., 2003), this listening provided the basis for the creation of 'I' poems. By maintaining the sequence in which the phrases appeared in the transcript, each line was kept in order (Gilligan et al., 2003). The statements fell easily into stanzas to form 'I' poems, examples of which can be found within the empirical narrative chapters (see Chapters Seven, Eight, Nine and Ten.

The emphasis on tracing the participant's sense of self, in relation to changes and continuities over time (Edwards and Weller, 2012), was a particular strength of using 'I' poems. Providing a creative method to analyse each transcript, 'I' poems helped me to tune in to the distinctive sense of self that the women constructed within their stories (Brown and Gilligan, 1992, Stanley, 1993; Doucet and Mauther, 2008). The separation of the 'I' statements from the containment of full sentences illuminated additional or varied meanings in the stories (Edwards and Weller, 2012).

Whilst some scholars have had difficulty using the 'I' poem method because they have been unable to identify a pattern in the data (Sorsoli and Tolman, 2008), I found I was provided with patterns where some women's 'I' statements used an associated verb to suggest an "emerging narrative self" (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008, p.406). For example:

> I want to be called a woman
> I want to be called a somebody (Precious).

'I' poems suggested the ways in which the women wanted to be perceived (Somers, 1994; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008). However, there were a number of dissonant points around the function of 'I' in women's narratives which I found the Listening Guide does little to resolve. For example, 'I' reflects particular socially and culturally relevant ways of speaking. Some women talk about themselves using the second

person 'you' (Edwards and Weller, 2012) or the third person 'she', and even 'me' (Sebba, 1993). Whilst the data that I analysed for this study contained 'I' statements from all the women, 'I' may not always feature in women's stories so may have little or no relevance in some transcripts.

A further problem was the conceptual notion of an essentialist 'self', accessible in relation to 'I' statements (Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan et al., 2003). Supported by scholarly statements, the 'I' listening pertains to give access to "the 'silent and invisible inner world'" (Gilligan et al., 2003, p.157). The notion that the 'I' listening can give a researcher access to 'a pure voice' or 'an authentic inner truth', was an untenable stance within this study. Given the relational ontology within which this study is located, all stories are understood to be subjective and relational (Somers, 1994; Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, 2003). Rather than accessing an 'inner self', I considered that listening to 'I' was explicitly relational and served as a route into a relationship with narrated subjectivity (Doucet, 2008; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008). This process has been described as 'discovering' (Brown and Gilligan, 1992), but Letherby (2002) points out that researchers construct rather than discover the story. My intention was "to stay, as far as it is possible, with the respondents' multi-layered voices, views and perspectives" (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, p.130).

The second listening was not considered in isolation but was brought into relation to the other three listenings through the analysis process. Primarily, the 'I' listening served as a reminder to listen to participants' stories, focussing on how a participant spoke and presented herself in relation to her stories before I wrote about her (Brown and Gilligan, 1992). The value of staying with the participant's story and focussing on 'I' creates more time in the research process to listen to participants

and the method helped to increase familiarity with the data by reducing the sheer volume of data within each transcript.

Listening to 'I' provided me with the method to take sections of my journal and utilise the 'I' listening to my own data (see Appendix Seventeen for an 'I' poem created from a section in my reflexive research journal). Whilst this process enabled another way of listening to my role within the study, it was particularly helpful where I felt I was struggling to make sense of the research process and the women's stories in relation to my own. This listening also served as a reminder to listen to my own stories, focussing on a way of exploring how I interpret and present myself throughout the research process.

Reading Three:
Listening for "relational narrated narratives"

Reading Three focused on listening for "relational narrated narratives" (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008, p.406). Drawing on the practical methods outlined in the Listening Guide, I used another coloured pencil to highlight elements of each transcript that identified and related to specific relationships (see Appendix Sixteen for an example of Reading Three). I listened for stories about social networks of relationships that were close and intimate (Somers, 1994; Plummer, 1995, 2001; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008; Woodiwiss, 2009). This included relationships with many different people such as children, mother (in-law), husband, partner, co-wives, extended family and friends, as well as broader social networks such as the asylum system, other institutions and communities.

Examining stories about relationships, I listened for the women's sense of autonomy or dependence (Brown and Gilligan, 1992) and the ways in which they understood relationships as enabling or constraining (Brown, 2001). Stories about relationships

147

often repeatedly alluded to particular people and central figures played specific roles. A series of complex and intimate relationships unfolded through this listening. Having a dramatic influence on the stories, detailed ghostly figures (Doucet, 2008), the living and the dead, formed characters in stories. Some ghosts served to disturb women whilst others provided comfort. I concentrated on those relationships and what the women said were the consequences of those relationships (Byrne et al., 2009; Edwards and Weller, 2012). Listening to how they spoke about relationships was pivotal to providing me with a sense of how women understood themselves, how they located themselves within relationships and how they wanted to be understood in relation to others.

I brought to mind ghostly relations who appeared as "shadow others" (Doucet, 2008, p.74). These were stories of women from my past who had prompted me to undertake this research and become woven with my own stories. Similarly, McMahon (1995) writes about her Irish aunts who influenced her analysis process, shadowy figures from her own past that haunted and visited her whilst she was exploring Canadian mothers' stories. Letherby points out "even in research writing that is not explicitly auto/biographical the weaving of stories is not unusual" (2000, p.95).

My ghosts included Nikki[35] whose home in her country of origin always smelled of the lilac flowers outside her windows, a gift from her husband. Layla, who had told me about her torture in a Turkish prison and coming to the UK to seek asylum but being subsequently part of the 'no-choice' dispersed asylum practice to the North of England. As a consequence she was moved away from her family and isolated from

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35 All names in this section are pseudonyms to protect the safety and identity of the women.

her extended networks of support. Shanaz from Kurdistan told me how she had mis-carried her unborn baby in transit from London to a northern town. Her journey took more than eight hours and she did not receive any food. I remembered how I had witnessed Rose being detained; her accommodation was entered by police and she was handcuffed, taken in security vehicles to detention facilities to be removed from the UK. Another time, I arrived 'too late' to one house after receiving a frantic call from Keustan whose front door had been broken down as police (with police dogs) entered the accommodation to remove the family, including baby Mohammed and his sisters Moon and Fahima – I entered the property to find the breakfast table still set, toys and books left abandoned and was told by the neighbours that Keustan was not given time to even prepare the babies' milk bottles.

I found hauntings (Doucet, 2008) helped to widen out my own reflexive understandings when listening to and understanding the women's stories of their relationships. Cotterill and Letherby draw attention to how "as feminist researchers studying women's lives… we draw on our own experiences to help us understand those of our respondents (1993, p.71). Whilst the Listening Guide does not suggest the third reading is utilised as a reflexive listening, I included accounts of the process in my journal and alongside my other reflexive practices, as discussed earlier in this chapter. I was acutely aware that we, the participants and I, were all women living in the UK but with potentially very different and diverse stories, but as Mohanty states "… the lives of women are connected and interdependent, albeit not the same" (2003, p.521). Through this listening, different understandings of the women's stories emerged and I was reminded again and again of the interest I have in, and the importance of paying attention to, women's stories.

Reading Four:
Listening for "structured subjects"

Reading Four attended to listening for "structured subjects" (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008, p.406). This listening positioned the women as 'subjects in relation' (Stanley, 1993; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008) and was pivotal for understanding the link between "micro-level narratives [and] macro-level processes and structures" (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008, p.406). Used to consider narratives as the frameworks that shaped the women's stories, I was provided with a way to understand and make sense of them. In particular, I listened for the ways in which the women appropriated, challenged, disrupted and resisted dominant narratives and created new narratives.

Whilst women are responsible for constructing their own stories, we are all also potentially limited by the narrative frameworks which are available (Woodiwiss, 2009). Making the women's stories more visible in the research process demanded that I look at naming and recognising some of the ways in which dominant narratives have acted to shape understandings of women asylum seekers in the UK. Drawing attention to the ways in which dominant narratives have been constructed goes some way to deconstructing the very formation of stories. Most important was an understanding that stories are not true for all time, "we invent our stories with a passion, they are momentarily true, we may cling to them, they may become our lives, and then we may move on" (Plummer, 1995, p.170). Therefore, studying the women's stories offered a way to explore the relationships between an individual woman's story and the narrative frameworks drawn on to tell that story.

In practical terms, this listening was extremely tactile. I used another coloured pencil and underlined sections of data, leaving comments across the whole transcript and identifying where dominant narratives informed and underpinned the stories. An

iterative process, this listening was used to establish relational links between this listening and the other three previous listenings. I was able to begin to explore how the women predominantly constructed a sense of self by evaluating themselves, events and situations, alongside their social relationships, in relation to dominant narratives. Whilst some of the women's stories incorporated understandings of the dominant narratives of the 'gendered embodied victim' and the 'dehumanised hate figure' (discussed in Chapter Two), other narratives took centre stage too, contradicting and complementing each other.

Letting stories breathe[36]

Having completed the four listenings there was very limited guidance in the Listening Guide about how to bring together the analytical process and compose a written analysis. Mauthner and Doucet (1998, 2003) and Doucet and Mauthner (2008) have provided examples of how they formed their final analysis by introducing other methods of analysis; creating themes and sub-themes and using computer-based programmes (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998). Whilst these methods may be valuable, they presented me with a number of difficulties. I was unhappy with re-positioning the Listening Guide within other thematic or coding systems. Running the risk of rupturing the arc of the stories (Frank, 2010) and jeopardising the relational processes that aimed to keep individual participants' stories at the heart of the analysis, I felt these new methods potentially undermined the conceptual understandings embedded in the Listening Guide. Plummer suggests "… too much 'science', 'rigour', 'formality' can overwhelm our tales. All can indeed reveal partial truth; but many additional skills are needed to complement them" (2013 p.212).

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36 This title is taken from Arthur Frank's (2010) book: "Letting stories breathe a socio-narratology".

Without further guidance the final step of pulling together the analysis from the separate listenings was a challenge and remained a significant limitation of the potential of the Listening Guide. I began to consider how to bring about the analysis for a wider audience but to remain faithful to listening to the stories of the women. I turned to the work of Arthur Frank who has argued that researchers should take time with stories, "letting stories breathe" (2010, p.2). He suggests that we should avoid imposing on stories by paying close and careful attention to a story, suggesting "the study of stories is less about finding themes and more about asking what stories do" (Frank, 2010, p.2).

Driven by my belief in listening deeply to women's stories, I took my time and I re-read the participants' interviews alongside the information I had gathered in relation to the four listenings. Paying close attention to the stories I was able to "stay with the data" (Doucet and Mauther, 2008, p.129), seeking to ensure the participants' stories were not subsumed by my own need to bring together an analysis (Gilligan et al., 2003). This 'slow scholarship' was helpful, as Plummer states;

> "… stories are never transparent all at once: they are
> rarely immediately clear. Narrative understanding requires
> the space to sit and stare, ponder and puzzle and life
> often does not offer such a space. But like a slow moving
> veil or curtain, the wisdoms of our stories can be revealed
> gradually. We grasp our meanings slowly, bit by bit. We
> need time to appreciate stories" (2013, p.212).

During this period of analysis I created interpretive short summaries about each participant based on their stories (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998; Brown, 2001). Parts of those summaries have provided the overview of the women who participated, which I presented in Chapter Five. In an effort to bring each woman's story into relationship with each other, I tried to listen to what the story potentially did for each

woman's representation of her life (Frank, 2010). Specifically, this process helped me to re-visit my understandings of what broader narratives may have shaped the stories.

The final stage of analysis enabled me to incorporate a shift of focus from analysing individual transcripts to bringing the entire data-set into a research relationship. By making sense of how the stories where shaped by particular narrative frameworks I created an arc across the whole study. Through the method of 'letting stories breathe', I recognised that the women's representation of themselves and their lives reflected aspects of the dominant narratives in the UK, whilst also conflating the two or engaging with creating new narratives; disrupting and redefining contemporary understandings about women seeking asylum.

In the process of 'letting stories breathe', the relationships between myself and the participants began to transform. I experienced a shift in critical understanding as I listened to the women's stories, coming to recognise that my research was primarily dealing with storytelling. I was no longer attempting to 'know' about the women's lives but rather I was developing my understandings about the narratives that framed their stories. Despite recognising "there may well be something 'beneath' or 'behind' or outside narrative" (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008, p.404), I came to believe that I could not 'fully know' the research participants in this study. In specific terms, rather than making claims to access understandings of the women's lives, my work has been informed by paying attention by careful listenings to the women's stories and unpacking the narratives which frame them, as discussed in Chapter Three.

Stories of persecution and sexual violence

For all the important differences, and although the women were not asked about sexual violence and persecution directly, their interview transcripts were permeated with such accounts and suffused by details of their own and other people's lives. They used the interviews to establish and reinforce their claims that they had been violated and wounded. In Chapter Two I suggested that the dominant narrative of the gendered embodied victim can be a disempowering narrative. It also provided a means of telling stories about some of the more negative and hostile associations of being a women and seeking asylum in the UK.

The women explained how they had been positioned in ways so that other people would and could act out abuse and violence against them, ensuring these aspects of their lives were not overlooked. They spoke about a complex range of atrocities committed against them as women and as girls. Telling harrowing stories, the women elaborated in detail about gendered political, cultural and historical situations which were described as widespread and global, taking place in the UK as well as many other countries through which they had travelled, lived and fled to. Persecution and sexual violence were often very much part of their present and everyday lives.

A broad understanding of persecution and sexual violence was brought together in the women's stories. Rather than attempt to categorise and list all the different persecutions and forms of sexual violence that the women spoke about, I have intended to bring them together and give an overview. Persecution was regarded as an extreme concept that differed from more general discrimination and included more than a couple of isolated incidents of, for example, verbal harassment. Accompanied by physical, emotional and psychological violations, the women told

stories about being harmed and about deprivation of liberty. They spoke of systematic deprivation of their right to practice their religion and to access formal education. Some women said they were unable to travel safely within a country and others said they were forcibly expelled from their country of origin. Their accounts reflect violations of many of the human rights standards enshrined in the Conventions discussed in chapters one and two.

Reflecting different accounts of violations, when referring to sexual violence I have not only included rape in relation to forced oral, anal and vaginal penetration by a penis without consent (see Sexual Offences Act 2003) but also broader understandings of sexual violence. Drawing on the definition given by the World Health Organisation, sexual violence is;

> "Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work" (2002, p.149).

This definition well reflected the stories of the participants, encompassing the diverse and far reaching forms of sexual violence across the globe. Outlining additional threats posed to them when fleeing different situations, alongside other forms of exploitation such as rape at national borders, women spoke of coercive (Bletzer and Koss, 2010) or transactional sex for travel documents, violations at border crossings and rape within immigration detention facilities or within refugee camps. As suggested by Amnesty International (2004a; 2005) and the Integrated Regional Information Networks (2007), women and girls are predominantly and disproportionally targeted for sexual violence. Organised approaches to national

conflict, civil unrest and war have included sexual violence against women as a systematic strategy (Canning, 2010, 2011a, 2011b).

When women presented stories of suffering or harm, they explored what had been physically, emotionally and psychologically inflicted on them. Often they spoke of serious physical harm and they included stories of confinement, kidnapping, torture and beatings. Replete with examples of gender-specific and gender-based persecution and violence (Crawley, 2000a, 2000b, 2011b, 2011c), violence and persecution also took the form of being targeted for their sexuality. The women told stories of being subjected to 'corrective rape' (see Appendix One) and punishment and humiliation played a central part in some of the women's stories.

The women told stories about threats made to them which they claimed caused them significant harm. Suggesting that threats would likely establish future persecution, they elaborated in detail about the individuals and groups who were making the threats, explaining how and why they had the will and ability to carry out the threats. These included 'early' and 'forced' marriage (see Appendix One) and female genital mutilation which, they suggested, were persecution to themselves and to their girl-children. Violence against their family members was another aspect of women's accounts.

In relation to their claim for asylum, all of the women said they feared persecution if they were returned by the UK government to their countries of origin. Their particular concerns were constructed around their own safety, that of family members and the safety of their children. The women said they particularly feared their daughters would face gender-based and gender-specific violence (Crawley, 2000a, 2000b). Suggesting that claiming asylum was about seeking sustainable and durable

solutions to their protection needs, the impacts of gender-based and gender-specific violence and persecution, during and beyond, were profound.

Recounting how they had been told about particular codes of honour and shame (Akpinar, 2003), the women identified stories that included their mothering obligations, marriage roles and responsibilities such as sexual obligations. These roles and responsibilities had been bound up with gendered traditions and rituals which often implied that the protection of women was maintained through compliance and control of their sexuality and capacity to reproduce (Baker et al., 1999; Akpinar, 2003).

Relevant to this study was that the women highlighted how attempts had been made to silence their stories, as well as how stories had been imposed on them. Naomi spoke about stories told to and about women:

> … culturally women are not supposed to speak. Even if we have a horrible husband, even if he beats you, even if you're swollen, even your parents teach you not to say 'my husband has beaten me' but maybe 'I bumped into the wall'. Even if he breaks your tooth, you can say 'I was eating a sugar cane and it has broken my tooth' (Naomi).

Emphasising how women were given scripts about their lives (Somers, 1994; Woodiwiss, 2009), Naomi suggested that the family and community would deny and refuse any other stories that women might tell about their situations. Enduring the violence in her family, she explored how authorities also colluded with family and community structures to silence women.

The women's stories stood in contrast to some of the literature about women seeking asylum. As I highlighted in Chapter Two, it has been suggested that women seeking asylum may be traumatised and unable to relate an account of events (Goldenberg,

2002; Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004; Herlihy and Turner, 2007). Rather than being able to consciously recall events (Hellawell and Brewin, 2004), Herlihy and Turner (2007) have proposed that stories of trauma are significantly different from normal life stories and that people may adopt strategies to avoid telling painful stories. However, the women actively told painful accounts and appeared to prioritise these types of stories rather than to avoid the issues.

As I listened to the women's stories of persecution and sexual violence, I came to understand that their stories had inter-related narrative frameworks embedded within them, which I identified as resistance and ruination (Smith, 2014; Smith, forthcoming a, forthcoming b). The relevance of resistance and ruination were present throughout my listenings, working in relation to each other as resources for telling and listening to stories (Frank, 2010). Provided with a bridge beyond the Listening Guide, 'letting stories breathe' helped me develop an understanding of the narrative frameworks which have supported my interpretation of the women's stories.

Hearing narratives of resistance

Revealed in their stories, I understood that the women negotiated 'resistance' to support particular claims about their sense of self (Smith, 2014; Smith, forthcoming a, forthcoming b). Reflecting a nuanced understanding of resistance, they told stories which included challenge, change and survival. The women's stories mixed inextricably with my own stories of resistance and activism. As discussed in Chapter One, I have been an activist for more than two decades and part of the ways I am connected to people is an active attempt to work in solidarity across the globe, in particular with women. Many of my stories of resistance are grounded in challenge through activity and spaces of protest as a form of resistance (Yarrow, 2008).

Koopman points out "we are all potentially homo sacer … but we are vulnerable to different degrees… the key is to resist *before* becoming homo sacer (2008, p.828).

My own sense of resistance created a space for stories of resistance (Gilligan, 2011), relationally connected to those who tell stories of resistance. It was from this reflexive gossamer wall (Doucet, 2008) that I listened to the women's stories, deepening my understandings and not distancing myself from stories of resistance. I listened to the women's stories of resistance, making connections with my own resistance and struggles. My stories were not the same but were relationally entwined with those of the women in this study.

Attempting to define and distinguish what I meant by resistance was complex. Concepts of resistance are frequently bound up with 'acts of resistance' and including everyday behaviours cast as resistance (Scott, 1985, Riessman, 2000). Non-compliance as opposition to social relations has become a popular way of delineating resistance and wide range of oppositional activities have been considered resistance, from overt and demonstrated acts of challenge to more subtle forms of resistance, such as change and survival, that do not entail a full scale challenge (Katz, 2004). Measuring outcomes, researchers have gone on to consider that ways in which resistance can be considered as effective or ineffective (Scott, 1985).

Troubling the notions of resistance as reactive and visible to an external audience, Bosworth and Carrabine (2001) have attempted to acknowledge personal or intimate activities and intentions. This particular approach to conceptualising resistance has been particularly relevant to studies of women and resistance, providing for practices and behaviours of resistance in response to a potentially subtle and complex set of

different circumstances and situations. These concepts of resistance have been utilised in a number of influential studies about the relationship between women and resistance, including an analysis of resistance to the stigma of childlessness in India by Catherine Riessman (2000), whereby women negotiated and mitigated the stigma through a range of strategies. Also, Lila Abu-Lugoed's (1990) study of women's resistance to control over sexuality and marriage, whereby Bedouin women attempted to use humour and create folklore through shared tales as a form of resistance. Illuminating the diversity of forms that resistance has taken, in response to a multitude of different situations, has developed broad conceived understandings of resistance as everyday oppositional practices in the lives of women.

I was aware that I might be at risk of 'romance' with the notion of resistance (Abu-Lughod, 1990). My desire to find new approaches of challenging the ways in which women have been represented as merely passive victims might have put me at risk of "misattribute[ing] women's stories with intentions where none exists" (Abel and Browner, 1998, p.322). Several scholars have argued that resistance has become such a popular term that it is identified by researchers in everything and seen everywhere (Conlon, 2007). For example, Lewin states;

> "Resistance…can be either conscious or unconscious, either carefully crafted or serendipitous, either direct and efficient in its impact or stymied by powerful forces beyond the control of the actors. Resistance can be physical and observable or may be imputed even to those who accede to the demands of the powerful while perhaps secretly harbouring what seem to be subversive thoughts" (1998, p.164).

In these broad, uncritical and all inclusive conceptual understandings of resistance, an appreciation for the complexities of women's stories and their relationship with resistance may be lost. The concept of resistance may be diluted if researchers

160

conceive a diversity of individuated actions as political, primarily self-interested and the expansion of every possible activity (Scott, 1985; Joseph, 1990). Failing to offer detail about the intricate workings of resistance in women's lives may delimit our grasp on women's stories.

Underscored by recent scholarship which has proposed a nuanced understanding of resistance, I wanted to ensure that theories of resistance did not mis-attribute forms of action or practices that were not part of women asylum seekers' stories. Rather than reflect "whether a woman's act... had transformative effects – however small" (Riessman, 2000, p.130), I turned to narrative approaches (Frank, 1995, 2010; Plummer, 1995, 2001; Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, 2003; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008; Andrews et al., 2008; Gilligan, 2011). Although telling stories has in itself been considered a form of resistance (Brown and Strega, 2005; Gilligan, 2011), my primary concern was to create the possibility of reflecting the ways in which women appropriated, challenged, disrupted and resisted dominant narratives and created new narratives through their stories.

Rather than focus on "transformative effects" (Riessman, 2000, p.130), as discussed earlier, I listened for intention in relation to resistance, and asked what the story did for the storyteller (Frank, 2010). On the issue of intention and resistance Cindi Katz (2004) has been particularly insightful. Offering fierce criticism of "finding 'resistance' in each discursive or other cultural practice that might be construed as autonomous" (Katz, 2004, p. 242), Katz's approach resonated with my own opposition to ambiguous and loose definitions of the term resistance. Rather than listening to the women's stories and hearing resistance "almost everywhere and… almost nowhere" (Weitz, 2001, p.669), Katz (2004) has considered different ways of exploring resistance. Retaining worth in the concept of resistance I drew on Katz's (2004)

161

delineations of resistance, making conceptual distinctions between 'resistance' and the more subtle forms of 'resilience' and 'reworking'. These three overlapping delineations highlight a nuanced understanding of resistance.

Katz's (2004) original concepts of resistance were historically used to explore the lives of children in Howa (Sudan) and Harlem (New York City). In her influential book 'Growing up Global' she sought to explore the "creative strategies that people [use] to stay afloat and reformulate the conditions and possibilities of their everyday lives" (2004, p.x). In her study Katz (2004) outlined that resilience was revealed by "small acts" (Katz, 2004, p.244) of people getting by and surviving, provided with a subtle form of resistance which enabled a person to recuperate, endure and survive, albeit within situations of persecution and violence. Resilience was evidenced in examples of social networks, neighbours providing childcare, guidance and advice through "webs of care" (Katz, 2004, p.246). Whilst this form of resistance did not fundamentally challenge existing social relations that create structural constraints and difficult conditions, Katz (2004) locates resilience as a practice of negotiation and transgression that sustained and enhanced people's situations.

Katz (2004) suggests that reworking differs from resilience. Less ambiguous, reworking is revealed in the ways in which people seek to improve their everyday lives, involving a different type of consciousness. Citing an example of residents developing community gardens in derelict spaces in an "attempt to recalibrate power relations and redistribute resources" (Katz, 2004, p.247), this concept differs from resilience. Rather than just 'getting by', reworking reflects how people have attempted to change, improve and transform their conditions, involving a level of consciousness to the conditions of people's existence. Reordering some of the inequalities that social systems have created, acts of reworking (Katz, 2004) aim for

a more equitable distribution of resources and sometimes undermine structural constraints.

Finally, Katz's (2004) concept of resistance differs from both reworking and resilience. Instead, resistance is seen as active, autonomous and overt initiatives which have agendas of liberatory and emancipatory change. More fundamental and transformatory, resistance requires a strong oppositional consciousness and involves direct challenges that disrupt conditions of exploitation and contest situations of oppression (Katz, 2004). Revolutions and rebellions are also identified within this concept of 'resistance' (Katz, 2004, 2009). A less common practice, Katz observes "it was easy to identify numerous instances of resilience and reworking from my work in New York and Howa, discerning resistance was more difficult" (2004, p.249). Exploring resistance through the example of social reproduction, Katz (2004) has included accounts of how women in Howa took direct action against the civil war in Sudan, ensuring their sons did not take their academic examinations and therefore would not graduate, in an effort to prevent them being drafted. Also, Katz (2004) cites examples of women taking to the streets in public protests against the war, despite the probable risk of arrest.

Distinguishing between the delineations of resistance, Katz (2004) has attempted to resist arbitrary categories. Her understandings of resistance seek to build on, conserve and identify people's personal resources, capacities and potentialities for promoting change, sustaining themselves and their communities when faced with adversity (Aranda et al., 2012). Within these understandings resistance is located as an exceptional attribute that belongs to some people, as well as the more common place attributes of reworking and everyday resilience. Katz (2004) has assumed that through her observations, knowledge of resistance, reworking and resilience is

accessible. This account of resistance privileges a notion of resistance as something that one has or does not have. My interest in the role of resistance in this study was premised on a slightly different understanding.

Providing delineations of resistance by focusing on the relationships between resistance, reworking and resilience, Katz's (2004) discussion about the subtleties and nuances of resistance was explicitly present in the women's stories. However, I did not view resistance as an innate attribute which occurs naturally but I attended to the ways in which resistance was relationally positioned within stories. Ungar states "… to say I am resilient is to be mistaken – the "I" of which we speak is a cultural artefact, a product of history and is socially, politically and relationally constructed" (2005, p.xxiv). It was stories told about resistance that I understood were relevant to this study. Stories opened up possibilities for appropriating, challenging, disrupting and resisting dominant narratives and created new narratives about women seeking asylum.

Understandings of resistance, borrowed and adapted from Katz (2004), have allowed for an exploration and study of women asylum seekers' stories that considers the narrative frameworks of resistance, reworking and resilience. Despite my understandings of resistance embedded in the women's stories, I had fears about the worrying attribute of resistance that has asserted a tragic story and demanded an aspirational heroic figure (Khalili, 2007). Conlon suggests that people seeking asylum are sometimes burdened with the narrative of being "… heroes in the face of omnipotent forces" (2007, p. 206). Heroic and martyred figures are frequently endowed with attributes of nobility, courage and dignity, cultivating both pity and respect (Sayre, 2005). Expectation of resistance has given rise to euphoric celebrations of "the resourcefulness of human spirit" (Langer, 1991, p.xi).

I was also concerned about academic contributions to the relationship between narratives of tragic stories, heroic figures and resistance. Lifton cautions that listeners should not glorify and heroicise survivors, which potentially "diminishes the survivor and interferes with our understanding both of what is particular to his or her ordeal" (1980, p.113-114). Furthermore, Conlon highlights concerns with the asylum context as a site that makes recounting stories of resistance "a thorny matter" (2007, p.204). Exploring these complex challenges took me a long time in the research process and therefore it was a long time before I was able to listen to other aspects of the women's stories. 'Letting stories breathe' provided the method by which another narrative emerged which reflected the disintegration and pain of the storyteller. I began to pay attention to this particular narrative, which I have identified as the narrative of ruination.

Hearing the narrative of ruination

Contrasting with narratives of resistance (Katz, 2004), I developed an understanding that the narrative of ruination did not reflect transformation or the capacity of individuals, but an unheroic, degraded and damaged self (Langer, 1991). Life was storied as shattered (Frank, 1995) which created a fragmented and divided sense of self (Langer, 1991). The women told stories of severe losses, both human and material (Dyck and McClaren, 2007). Applied both to the stories that the women *told* and *the ways in which* they told their stories, hope and renewal were absent from the narrative of ruination.

A tendency to hear narratives of resistance (Katz, 2004) and confusion and chaos within the narrative of ruination had played a part in previously inhibiting me from listening to these stories (Frank, 1995). Das comments that "even the most articulate

among us face difficulties when we try to put ambiguous and jumbled thought and images into words. This is even more true of someone who has suffered traumatic loss" (1990, p.348-349). Like the storytellers, I was often left unprepared, disorderly in my responses. Unclear about how to make sense of these stories, listening to the narrative of ruination was a rupture to the research process, both emotionally as well as intellectually. Taking a long time to listen to, understand and write about, Andrews (2014) suggests that she has allowed "inconvenient data" to remain "buried for decades" (2014, p.29-30). However, the reflexive process that I utilised within the Listening Guide, alongside other reflexive practice, and 'letting stories breathe' played a central role in helping me to listen to and begin to make sense of the narrative of ruination.

My role as a researcher, analysing and writing about the pain of violence, death and isolation, was challenging. I found myself haunted and disturbed (Doucet, 2008), and whilst I have argued earlier in this thesis that stories are co-constructions (Maynard, 1994; Somers, 1994), I discovered a profound separation and an absence of common ground (Langer, 1991). At times the listening process was paradoxical and the more I tried to listen, the less I felt I could make sense of what the women were telling me (Goldenberg, 2002). It was not disbelief at the events embedded in the stories that impeded my ability to listen but rather that women provided endless stories that emphasised that the world can be a terrorising and terrifying place in which many women and children are persecuted, killed and do not receive any form of protection.

In the process of listening, at times I struggled with feeling lost (Andrews, 2014). How could I analysis and make sense of a story about rebel soldiers opening fire on six civilian homes? A story about amputees and civilians being given the choice

about which section of their arm would be hacked off? A story of women and children being forced to run as bullets are fired and a baby girl, running away alongside you, falls down dead? A mother, her body dying and decaying… and the young daughter sitting with the body with no one to help? A young boy asking his neighbour for a cooking pot so that he can cook a human head? A young woman whose external female genitalia are sliced and removed with glass on her wedding night and she is raped by her husband that very night? Daughters sold by their fathers? A woman pushed from a four storey building by her employer? These stories were some of the stark moments in a multitude of stories told by the women in this study.

There were times when I felt I could not bear to listen, so manifest were some stories with suffering. During these moments I was also confronted by the emotion of feeling quite cowardly in the face of terrorising stories. Langer recalls his own sense of listening to holocaust testimonies, feeling "naked before their nakedness, defenceless in the presence of vulnerability" (1991, p.xiii). I deeply questioned what sense I could make of these stories and I was painfully conscious of my belief that I should not have been so unaware and that as researchers "we should not come to the encounter unprepared – yet we do" (Langer, 1991, p.20).

Forging understandings, when many of the women telling the stories were themselves struggling to make sense or meaning of their stories, and to willingly enter into telling and listening to the narrative of ruination, took courage on all sides (Andrews, 2007b). Not wishing to undermine the implications of distressing stories or anguished storytellers by sanitising accounts or making them safe for listeners (Langer, 1991) and in order to make sense of the women's stories, I turned to the work of Arthur Frank's (1995) 'The Wounded Storyteller' and Lawrence Langer's (1991) 'Holocaust Testimonies'. Frank's (1995) work has explored stories of critical

illness, told in relation to the body. He outlines 'the chaos narrative' positing a storyline which "imagines life never getting better" (1995, p.97) and revealing "vulnerability, futility, and impotence" (Frank, 1995, p.97); life manifest with moments of irreparable "wreckage" (Frank, 1995, p.110). Some of the storylines found in the chaos narrative (Frank, 1995) served to develop my understanding of the narrative of ruination.

Langer's (1991) work provided me with two specific narratives – 'divided selves' and 'diminished selves' – in relation to the narrative of ruination. Suggesting that atrocity may have a ruining effect on a person's ability to draw on narrative meaning, Langer has outlined narratives of 'divided selves' which refer to the problems faced by storytellers in recapturing and sharing their stories about harrowing aspects of life and suffering with "anguished memory" (1991, p.39). Through the concept of 'diminished selves' (Langer, 1991), narratives of ruination exposed the ways in which the women told stories, which threatened their sense of self. Denoting "unheroic memory" (Langer, 1991, p.162), in direct contrast to accounts of heroism or martyrdom, 'divided and diminished selves' disrupted tributes to human dignity and spirit "cast[ing] a long, pervasive shadow over [the] future" (Langer, 1991, p.172).

Incorporating the narrative theories provided by Frank's (1995) 'chaos' and Langer's (1991) 'divided and diminished selves', these characteristics of storytelling underpinned my understandings of the narrative of ruination. Developing the narrative of ruination I was able to include and explore the women's stories about harrowing and unheroic aspects of life and about being unable to construct or reconcile their lives in relation to stories. Incorporating the anguish and problems faced by storytellers who struggle to make sense of their stories provided insight into the severity of the situations suggested in the women's stories.

168

The work of Langer was also particularly helpful in identifying the "desire to redesign hope from the shards of despair" (1996, p.52). Emphasising the role the listener plays in stories, Langer cautions the "needs of the spectator to be met" (1996, p.52). Suggesting stories are marginalised through sanitising accounts in attempts to make them safe for listeners, he argues that victims become polarised in stories, re-presented as martyrs and heroes or, in some cases, traitors and collaborators. Alongside the infinite variety of nuanced stories Langer (1991) has called for consideration of 'meaninglessness' in the complexity of the stories, contending that his theoretical approach to stories should not be limited or restricted to Holocaust stories alone.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have identified the Listening Guide (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, 2003) as the central method of data analysis used in this study. I have introduced the Listening Guide as a relational method and outlined the distinct listenings which provided an in-depth approach to analysis (Doucet, 2008). I have discussed the strengths and limitations of this particular method, outlining the ways I developed aspects of each of the listenings in order to address some of the limitations of the listenings for the purposes of this study.

I have highlighted the significant challenges to the final stage of data analysis, including how I composed analysis, developing a method called 'letting stories breathe'. I have concluded this chapter with a discussion about hearing stories of persecution and sexual violence and an understanding of how the women's stories were framed by narratives of resistance (Katz, 2004) and the narrative of ruination (Langer, 1991; Frank, 1995).

In the following four chapters, I present the narrative of resistance, reworking, resilience and ruination. I outline each of these narratives separately and explore how women reflected these narratives within their stories, rather than representing types of women (Frank, 2010). The women who participated in the research tended to tell stories that were dominated by one of these four narratives but, ultimately, most women drew on all four narratives to tell their stories. This fluidity exposes the relationships between narratives, with one giving rise to the other within stories of challenge, change, survival and disintegration.

The narratives are largely explored in relation to the stories of the participants. Whilst some of the participant's quotes appear more often than others, every woman has been quoted on more than one occasion in the following four narrative chapters. Particularly keen to make the women's accounts as visible as possible, I have included a number of strategies; whilst I have conformed to the Harvard system, conventionally referencing by indenting long quotes cited in the literature, I have indented 'all quotes' from the participants in order to maximise the visibility and impact of their stories. In addition to each of the chapter headings, I have included a series of sub-headings accompanied by quotes from different participants. Similarly to the rationale behind the chapter headings (discussed in the Introduction) these quotes do not include a reference to any of the individual women and all of these quotes can also be found elsewhere in the chapter with the appropriate reference.

Chapter Seven:
The narrative of resistance

"I work for freedom (Zain)"

Using delineations of resistance (Katz, 2004), in this chapter I explore the first of the narrative chapters, the narrative of resistance. The narrative of resistance was represented in stories of challenge, enabling the women to suggest a particular sense of self through stories of the ways in which they lived their lives. Rather than focusing on the disintegrating aspects of their lives (Langer, 1991; Frank, 1995), as will be explored in Chapter Ten through the narrative of ruination, the narrative of resistance was used to affirm women's self-worth and, paradoxically, stories of persecution and violence formed a reason for continuity of self and resistance.

This chapter aims to explore how the narrative of resistance was central to stories of women's engagement with organised resistance. Constructing accounts of themselves within protagonist roles, the women positioned themselves as actively engaged in overt initiatives. Illustrating their role in disrupting conditions of exploitation and oppression, the women included individual and collective acts in their countries of origin and the UK. They spoke of having agendas of liberatory and emancipatory change (Katz, 2004).

Also important was the acknowledgement that, as women, they faced particular challenges to their engagement with resistance activities. Aware of some of the ways in which their lives had been affected by gendered expectations, the women claimed they had actively utilised some of those expectations to build relationships and develop community resources. Whilst on the surface these activities may not be considered 'resistance', the women claimed that these activities had sometimes led

to the transformation of communities and collective acts of resistance (Scott, 1985, Riessman, 2000). Furthermore, the narrative of resistance enabled the women to remember their loved ones, many of whom they said were disappeared, their whereabouts unknown or, in some cases dead or murdered. Finally, they suggested that, by participating in the research, the interview was a site of protest and telling stories was considered an act of resistance to demonstrate their feeling of solidarity towards other women and to suggest they had committed themselves to improving the situations of other women. Given the consciousness-building and explicit oppositional agendas (Katz, 2004), the narrative of resistance was rarer than those of reworking, which will be explored in Chapter Eight, and those of resilience, explored in Chapter Nine.

Organised resistance

"… trying to protest… to voice up so that maybe someone can listen… (Precious)"

Enabling the women to tell stories, the narrative of resistance was utilised by them to position themselves as activists and campaigners, incorporating a vast range of political and social issues. Indicative of Katz's (2004) concept of resistance, the women's stories were characterised by casting themselves in a protagonist role with the agenda of liberatory and emancipatory change. Zain said she worked to end early and forced marriages:

> You know they [girls] are forced whenever she is twelve
> years of age, they get married by force and children. You
> trust me in the fifteen of age, I saw so many girls they
> have three children in the fifteen of age. So I took wise at
> this age. It's wrong…. So I am totally against my culture. I
> work for freedom… for girls and women…(Zain).

When I constructed an 'I' poem from this quote, Zain's sense of self-worth and her belief in challenge was emphasised:

I saw
I took wise
I am totally against my culture.
I work for freedom… (Zain).

Similarly, other women drew on the narrative of resistance to claim opposition to the views and practices of others (Riessman, 2000). Given the daily struggle of women to create a life free of persecution and sexual violence, their stories were extremely diverse. The women placed great emphasis on a deeply relational sense of their lives and explored their personal lives. Whilst literature on the persecution and sexual violence of women seeking asylum has highlighted the destructive effects on women's sense of self (Johnsson, 1989; Cole et al., 1992; Kelly, 2000; Amnesty International, 2004a, 2004b, 2005; Peel, 2004; Smith et al., 2009; Canning, 2010, 2011a, 2011b), here, however, women included accounts of situations and events that had led them to become champions of certain agendas. Bintou laid claims to challenge, telling stories about her resistance to the arrangement of polygamous marriages in her country of origin as well as to the role of inheriting your brother's wife and children. Precious said she was a campaigner for "gay rights" as a direct response to the treatment of her youngest brother:

… my young brother who is under my responsibility, the
last born brother, he's gay… you know how it is, gay
issues in Africa are most renowned in my country… It's
unacceptable. It's a taboo. It's something which you can't
even talk about it. It's something like something even a
family member cannot relate to you… I had to fight hard
against these attitudes for gay rights (Precious).

In the same way, other women talked about the central role of family members and their own personal situations as compelling factors in initiating them into their

173

actions. Utilising their personal experiences, the women warranted their entitlement to speak out (Phoenix, 2008). Shimmar's story was replete with her own analysis of the undocumented status of early marriages and the fate of girls brought to the UK to be married. Drawing on her own story of being locked in the marital home, unable to open the front door and forbidden to look out of the window, Shimmar critically argued for more help for women:

> Woman need help here…. government need stop the
> British guy get the Indian girl to come here. Just stop it.
> Just I want to tell if you and me organise more. You have
> to help the women. You don't think that like the woman
> like if she can broken her life, she want to get a way, she
> want to like to start her life again… woman like me they
> are helping to stop it and help woman (Shimmar).

Providing a form of testimony (Frank, 1995) arising from her own analysis, Shimmar emphasised her relational position to other young women facing similar situations. As Skultan's points out; "testimony is a judicial term which carries with it special claims to truth. In historical testimony the individual experience is recalled only because it stands for the experience of a much larger group" (1999, p.311). This had potential relevance to the ways in which Shimmar and the other women made connections with other women in relation to their own situation.

At the forefront of some of the women's stories was the importance of being concerned about the 'rights' of certain groups of individuals. Drawing on the narrative of resistance, they revealed further aspects of how they wanted to be understood as political activists. Several women put forward a description similar to Z and Lucy:

> … I was involved, especially with the woman's rights…
> (Z).

> I joined human rights work… there were country wide activities… I believed this was now where I belonged (Lucy).

Being involved with struggles for human rights was entwined with a sense of dignity and self-respect. Presser has identified how a story can offer an understanding of the storyteller as an "essentially good person" (2004, p.86). However, the women's accounts were far more elaborate than claims of decency (Sandberg, 2009). Whilst the narrative of resistance was integral to their claim of themselves as people to be respected (Sandberg, 2009) and morally decent (Presser, 2004), challenge was another central aspect of the narrative of resistance:

> I love to fight for people (Precious).

> The fight was not by gun, the fight is by paper (Z).

Casting themselves as heroic figures and 'moral agents of change' (Skultans, 1999), the women forged traditional versions of resistance where they were actively engaged in heroic struggles (Presser, 2004). Unlike Skultan's (1999) study of the stories of Latvian refugees, it was women, not men, who told stories of themselves as heroic figures. They provided the listener with an understanding of women seeking asylum that refuted passivity and is different from contemporary understandings of women seeking asylum in the UK that I explored in chapter two.

I suggested in Chapter Two that dominant narratives have stigmatised women seeking asylum in the UK (Banks, 2008; Griffiths, 2010). In constructing a more positive sense of self and their lives, the women wanted to be seen as having genuine motivations and trustworthy agendas. Reflexive individuals (Letherby, 2002) displaying an acute awareness as of the stigma attached to being an 'asylum seeker', the women suggested they were all too aware of dominant narratives of

being 'bogus' or merely 'economic migrants' (Souter, 2011). Claims about their

political pasts allowed the women to make declarations about their moral selves in

the present (Riessman, 2002). Moving beyond stigma, making overt and moral

claims about themselves as political activists who had been engaged with organised

resistance, did not appear to be a transient period in some women's lives. For

several of the women activism was a feature of their lives which, they suggested,

had been consciously chosen with great personal integrity (Yarrow, 2008) and

pursued over a considerable periods of their lives:

> I chose to be a human rights activist… (Precious).

> I've been like… a human rights activist for a long time…
> (Lucy).

Sustaining a commitment to activities that sought to change and improve situations

across the globe, the women presented themselves as activists in terms of life

purpose (Andrews, 2008). Inseparable from their sense of self, the women avowed

action and support for political, social and community advancement (Prindeville and

Bretting, 1998). The women authenticated their activist consciousness in relation to

stories of public and political activism. Talking about subverting oppressive practices

the women outlined their roles in organised, outright rebellions against institutions

and regimes. Whilst accounts of overt, organised demonstrations were unusual,

Precious spoke of how she had been part of organising oppositional activities in her

country of origin:

> … trying to protest the government to do things, to voice
> up so that maybe someone can listen… started having
> meetings, like underground meetings and then we had the
> protests… we had demonstration at the University
> campus (Precious).

Resistance was explained as a defiant and oppositional stance, subverting and resisting violations of human rights as well as promoting conditions that sustain human rights.

The women's sets of circumstances as 'asylum seekers' had brought some of them to understand how they were positioned in particular and precarious ways (Singer, 2009, Muggeridge and Maman, 2011; Lewis et al., 2013). The narrative of resistance provided the women with a critical lens for viewing the situations they said they faced in the UK. Explaining their sense of being activists, the women cast themselves as organisers and collaborators of oppositional activities in the UK, which they claimed sought to address injustices and oppressions within the asylum system and decision making process. Naomi, Bintou, Precious and May spoke of organising meetings, conferences and seminars in the UK, focusing on issues primarily affecting women and children seeking asylum in the UK.

Of particular concern to the women was the issue of immigration detention. Emphasising how they were liable to be detained again in the UK, Naomi highlighted how she and her children had been detained during their time claiming asylum. Drawing on the narrative of resistance Naomi included accounts of speaking to the media and actively campaigning against the immigration detention of children. Presenting herself as a diligent campaigner, she highlighted multiple activities which she had taken part in alongside her son:

> I was quite rigorous in writing and my son was always
> writing… used his case as a campaign to parliament…
> also went with the Bishop of ▮▮▮▮▮▮ … campaigned a lot
> … I really working in a place whereby I was like putting
> my life down for the sake of helping other people (Naomi).

Despite her personal fears and the associated risks she had identified, Naomi positioned herself as resourceful by telling stories of publically speaking out against immigration detention in the UK. Stories such as Naomi's rejected notions of risk as manifestations of individual vulnerability or traumatic failing and served to highlight social disadvantages and inequalities (Aranda et al., 2012).

Unlike the isolation manifest in the dominant narrative of the dehumanised hate figure, which I outlined in Chapter Two, the narrative of resistance provided the women with a way of suggesting their involvement with various organisations and groups. They contended that their activities and responsibilities were in conjunction with others and essentially relational. Staking claims in collective activities and co-ordinated campaigns with networks of other activists, the women aligned or embedded their activities within individuals and groups which had some sort of relationship with larger social and political movements. Solidarities were not just suggested in relation to fixed individual interests but were represented as practices that formed between different activities and struggles (Skultans, 1999).

Constructing solidarity, including transnational solidarities (Featherstone, 2003), was one of the central functions of the narrative of resistance. Despite their displacement from their countries of origin and the potential for feelings of dislocation from groups that they had previously organised and been active in, these setbacks did not prevent the women from sharing common causes with others across the globe. Andrews states;

> "… [activists] derive a sense of being part of something larger than themselves… not as an individual but as a collective effort… this is sustained by a collective solidarity with others in the present and across time" (2007b, p.65-66).

The narrative of resistance was a way of the women socially positioning themselves in relation to other activists. Expressing some of the fundamental ways in which they felt they had demonstrated resistance in their lives, the narrative of resistance allowed the women to cast themselves in the role of activists who had been and were able to remonstrate, protest and object in a wide range of different public settings and places. Previous literature by Crawley (2000a) suggests that the persecutory activities of women seeking asylum "largely take place in the private sphere' (p.17). In addition, research by Ceneda and Palmer (2006) brought awareness of the more subtle aspects of the political activity of women seeking asylum which has often been overlooked. In contrast, these women positioned themselves as actors at the centre of political activities and social protests, outlining how they were active in trying to change and improve situations. In doing so, they disrupted stories that may have confined the protest of women seeking asylum to 'private and personal' abuses, claiming the public protest space as their own.

Refuting the ways in which the Home Office has discredited women's political activities as 'low level' and of no interest to authorities (Crawley, 2001), the women claimed that their activities had provoked authorities and people in positions of power, leading to grave persecutions which necessitated them seeking asylum. Zain stated:

> Basically, my reason is this… they [authorities] were
> looking for me where I am. So they made a final program
> for me. They will find me and they will stone me… (Zain).

Zain's evaluation of her persecution served to emphasise the importance of the political activities she had taken part in. In a similar way, Lucy outlined the consequences of her political activities:

> I testified back at that tribunal … I had to get out … I was receiving very many death threats... (Lucy).

Illustrating the status of her activities, Lucy suggested that attention had been paid to her at a state level and threats had been made to her life. The reference to persecution for her actions allowed Lucy to construct a sense of herself as a person whose actions had been taken seriously and elevated her political significance.

Defining themselves through accounts of their public and political affiliations and activities was a way of increasing the visibility of women as activists (Yarrow, 2008). The narrative of resistance allowed the women to make claims about themselves and their actions that elevated a moral self, minimising the stigmatised threat associated with them being 'asylum seekers' (Banks, 2008; Sandberg, 2009; Griffiths, 2010). Representations of women seeking asylum raised the importance of political consciousness and resistance activities as prominent aspects of their stories. In doing so, the women asserted subjectivities that are not incorporated in contemporary understanding about women seeking asylum in the UK. These particular stories stood in contrast to dominant narratives told about and for women seeking asylum and the women utilised the narrative of resistance to refute their passivity a victims and dependency or secondary status to their husbands (Bloch et al., 2000; UNHCR, 2008). Telling stories of conscious and organised resistance (Katz, 2004) the women formed a basis for understanding the stories of women seeking asylum in the UK.

Gendered resistance

"… if everyone did it, the government would collapse! (Z)"

Scholars have highlighted that domestic concerns have predominantly been seen as the concerns of women, emphasising the role women have had in building

relationships and community resources so that people support, develop and help themselves (Tronto, 1993; Prindeville and Bretting, 1998). Prioritising and reflecting similar concerns, the women told stories that demonstrated their commitment towards caring for and enabling communities. Suggesting that meeting the social, economic and political needs of their community members was a priority, the women constructed a sense of civic responsibility (Prindeville and Bretting, 1998).

Some of the activities the women described did not explicitly demonstrate resistance but they attempted to show how they had contributed to building resistance (Katz, 2004). They emphasised their role in enabling substantial numbers of people living in former war zones and facing extremely poor living situations to increase financial stability and move out of poverty in, what the women claimed, were sustainable ways (Mayoux, 2001; Zeller and Meyer, 2002). The narrative of resistance created opportunities for a range of stories about advancement and progress for individuals and communities. The women said they had redirected assets to themselves and others, deliberately shifting and changing the traditional flow of resources (Katz, 2004). Gloria's quote is illustrative of this concept as she described how she had set-up two institutes; one to train and skill boys in order to prevent combat and another for developing adults' skills:

> … young boys who were fighting and giving them six months training for each time there would be 2-300 boys every six months… I also set up an institute training women and men. Learning them how to cook kitchen. Teaching them how to sew. Making industrial things like soap (Gloria).

Similarly, Queenie reflected upon her commitment to galvanise projects and assist them with micro-finance (small loan systems) from microcredit programmes. Developing co-operative groups with women, Queenie highlighted how she had

arranged finance and credit programmes whereby women controlled their

businesses in ways they had not previously been able to do. Despite the research

which has challenged finance programmes for failing to enable women to overcome

gender subordination (Mayoux, 1998; 2001), she suggested the importance of her

role and how training programmes and education opportunities had helped to

increase the skills of women in their community.

Aware of gendered expectations, the women suggested that many girls across the

globe were primarily expected to finish education and fulfil roles and responsibilities

within the home. Arguing for the ways in which they had offered the possibility of

change in their countries of origin, the women claimed they helped improve the lives

of women:

> … imagine if you're not highly educated and not
> university degree, but it opens the world free for other
> things to make your life better and a lot of like [country of
> origin] women used to have what we call cross-border
> training. It improved their lives a lot. Some built homes,
> educated their children, managed to go and buy goods
> and come back to sell… (Queenie).

Illustrating that their own morality orientated towards 'responsibility' and a sense of

their own capacity and purpose within communities, the women told stories about

bringing resources to communities:

> … they [women] fought for that where they could get a
> document, apply for the document, pay whatever come
> through without having to be harassed, because some
> women used to prostituting themselves just to get the
> results. Yes their lives improved (Queenie).

The narrative of resistance provided the women with ways to suggest that they had

brought about longer-term effects for individuals and communities. Gloria described

how the initiatives which she had helped set up and run changed the future trajectory

of men and boys who had been destined to become soldiers:

> Train them. Give them their start-up kit. If you are tailor,
> learning how to sew, at the end of your course they will
> give you machine and the materials to go and start your
> life… not to fight… (Gloria).

While the women may have focussed on individual and community transformations,

they included accounts of achievements which led to more overt resistance initiatives

and opposition activities which had far more radical potential (Katz, 2004). Queenie

stated that the women she worked with began campaigning in order to overcome the

previous constraints imposed on them:

> … slowly started changing this sort of thing, because
> women were campaigning for it (Queenie).

Not only did the women suggest they had inspired and built resistance, but they told

stories of themselves in positions of leadership. Whilst women seeking asylum are

not allowed to work in the UK (unless they have been waiting for a decision on their

case for more than a year) and are rarely acknowledged in prominent public

positions or as having entered high status professions (Stone-Mediatore, 2003),

Naomi told stories about the prominent public role she had held within her country,

holding public office and representing formal political organisations. She offered

details of her work towards progressing gender-awareness and the advancement of

women in the workplace. In order to demonstrate knowledge of her direct

responsibilities Naomi listed some of the multiple goals of her work:

> My first responsibility was to make sure all organisations
> had a gender officer and also their constitutions had
> gender rights and they were now looking into equality and
> giving equal opportunities within their organisations…
> (Naomi).

Naomi elevated her position further, claiming her role was a partnership with the United Nations and had international backing in the form of finances. Engaging with stories of governmental and non-governmental affiliations, Lucy also sought to give credibility to her employment in a politically important position, stating:

> I had a lot of supporting documents from the University of ▮▮▮▮ and also from the ▮▮▮▮ ambassador in ▮▮▮▮ in the Human Rights Commission (Lucy).

Laden with a critical awareness and consciousness of what were 'traditionally' viewed as women's roles and responsibilities within families, communities and societies, the women named political affiliations and organisations, elevating their status as paid workers in influential roles.

Despite their stories of status, some women suggested they were persecuted not only because they were politically active in opposing social and political structures but also because these roles disrupted and resisted gendered ideologies (Crawley, 2000a, 2000b):

> They don't want to listen to a woman. They say it's not your role… (Naomi).

> Some people can buy protection but being a woman, I wasn't protected (Precious).

Resisting the gendered roles in which these women said they had been cast (Katz, 2004), did not always bring about desirable situations. Consistent with research conducted with women in migratory situations, the women were "abused when they violate[d] the boundaries of the definition of acceptable femininity" (Akipinar, 2003, p.425). For Zain, resisting wearing traditional 'feminine' dress (also discussed in Chapter Eight) had meant sustaining injuries and broken limbs:

> They beaten me with rod, with cricket bat. My hand they
> also broken. My leg also broken by them, my feet also. …
> So very complicated life… (Zain).

Even though Zain's story was saturated with violence, she remained defiant and claimed her resistance and bravery:

> But very bravely, if I may say bravely, I do fight with
> them... (Zain).

Many of the women were defiant in their challenging of different situations, regardless of the violent outcomes. Despite unequal status and persecutory treatments, they argued that this had not prevented them from taking part in resistance activities.

The women told stories of how they had exploited gendered expectations "the very grounds on which they are cast" (Katz, 2004, p.247). Wilfully collaborating with groups who organised resistance and subversions, they utilised 'traditional' roles fulfilled by women in order to avoid their part in supporting resistance activities being discovered by authorities. They explained how they had explicitly drawn on gendered differences, which were often accompanied by the 'low-status' of being a woman. Conscious awareness of their exclusion from the political and public spheres of life (Prindeville and Bretting, 1998) enabled the women to collude with activist activities in ways which attracted less suspicion and attention.

I suggested in Chapter Two that more nuanced activities, such as hiding people, passing messages, providing food and administering medical care, have been types of resistant activity that have been disregarded, trivialised and minimised (Bhabha, 1996; Muggeridge and Maman, 2011). However, Lucy emphasised her role in subtle activities and cultivated stories around her about being concerned with rural villages,

localised resources and community health. She spoke about how she had utilising her 'caring' role, describing how she participated in resistance by taking part in such activities as protecting people who authorities might be looking for, passing messages between groups and individuals as she moved easily between different villages and providing training and health awareness whilst also distributing political and campaigning information. Lucy argued that, being a woman, she was less likely to be searched, checked, stopped or questioned and could carry out activities more safely than the men who were members of the group she worked with.

Unsettling the traditional roles of women in families and communities whilst locating her story within the home and community, Z reflected accounts of her commitment to more subtle resistant activity such as hiding, feeding and clothing guerrilla fighters in her home. Outlining how her activities held conscious political value, Z said she believed that the accommodation and subsistence she provided were vital for the advancement of the causes that she supported. Most specifically, a mother herself, Z emphasised how she had assumed the role of caring for a new-born baby. Taking advantage of the gendered notion of women as care-givers (Elshtain, 1987), a baby had been born to one of the women fighters and Z said that she was able to look after this baby without attracting undue attention. Z claimed her actions enabled the woman fighter to return to her resistance role.

While stories of organised resistance were also situated in public spaces (Katz, 2004), the women's stories, such as those of Z and Lucy, also reflected the importance of the home space. Dominant perceptions of women in war zones have represented women as central in 'keeping the home front' and as primarily 'non-combatant' (Elshtain, 1987). Part of a broader group of activists identified who seemed to be involved in revolutionary armed resistance, Z elaborated on her role as

a woman in oppositional activity that challenged the government. Including a story of a ritual of resistance led by women, Z said they had sung each night in the villages and towns after dark. From their homes, women would gently sing and call out to each other:

> Mimi, mummy… a special call that means 'help me'… (Z).

Placed within women's homes and echoing across townships and villages, this ritual was intended to create and instigate opposition without being individually identifiable. In an extremely potent account of resistance, Z highlighted the power of women's political resistance from within the domesticated space of home, arguing that this ritual was so powerful that:

> … if everyone did it, the government would collapse! (Z).

Resisting invisibility

"Let them be seen as people… (Lucy)"

A number of the women told stories about how their loved ones were disappeared, their whereabouts unknown and displaced, "bodies out of place" (De Alwis, 2009, p.377). Diane spoke of how her mother was missing and, whilst her brother was not a political activist, his whereabouts were unknown as a consequence of activism within the family. Z described brutal accounts of the murder of her brother and husband for their anarchist activities in opposition to the government, as well as other 'disappearances' of family members:

> I'm the family of anarchists because my brother was dead,
> killed and my husband was killed and also I was
> imprisoned, all families are disappeared (Z).

By talking about those who were dead or had been murdered, the women's stories

formed characters and suggested important relationships with these ghostly figures

(Doucet, 2008). Naming people who had disappeared and been murdered was a

way in which the women resisted their invisibility. Illuminating this point further, Lucy

told me she was writing a book:

> I am trying to put a human face on the victims so they are
> not just statistics. Let them be seen as people who
> suffered, ahhh like their children. I've even put the names
> of the children, their ages and their school… people from
> another tribe without names, without human faces (Lucy).

Questioning the silence and disrupting the ways in which murdered children had

remained unnamed, Lucy suggested she was challenging the situation.

Naming their loved ones and giving details of them in a whole variety of roles,

including them as members of the political opposition groups or particularly

persecuted groups, the women claimed them as mothers and fathers, sisters and

brothers, daughters and sons and beloved friends. The power of representation

became a poignant articulation of ongoing relationships and the women drew on the

narrative of resistance to remember their loved ones. Claiming a role in their lives, in

a similar way to some mothers in Argentina who embroider the names of their loved

ones who have disappeared on to their headscarves and walk with their photos

pinned to their jackets, "more often carried next to the heart" (Schirmer , 2010,

online), demanding information about their disappeared children (Flynn, 2006), these

women reinserted the disappeared and the dead. Refusing to forget their loved ones,

the women resisted their invisibility through telling their stories.

Where the women claimed there was little or no evidence to identify the perpetrators

responsible for what had happened to their loved ones, they told stories as if to

expose secrets (Mautner, 2000), highlighting what they considered disappearances and murders. Schirmer notes "'disappearance'... is a form of censorship of memory by the state" (2010, online), yet censorship was challenged and disavowed by the women. Suggesting that their loved ones were often victims targeted by security forces, police, members of the wider society and family, the women's stories challenged and countered efforts to overlook or obliterate the crimes they felt had been perpetrated and perpetuated.

Providing substantial details, the women outlined how 'disappearances' took place in contexts where states had denied that individuals and whole groups of people were being abducted, disappeared, tortured and murdered. Precious spoke of the police refusing to recognise her activist friends who were subsequently murdered. Naomi and Baelli identified places where they claimed domestic violence and the murder of women were not even considered crimes. Anne-Laure and Zain raised the issue of same-sex relations which had criminalised women and resulted in violence, torture and the death of individuals and their families. Z spoke of military tactics whereby commanders had demanded payment for bullets before the bodies of people they had executed would be released. Despite the painful and complicated contexts within which the women's loved ones were subsumed, the stories of these women were evidence that testified to a 'loved one's' existence.

As women seeking asylum in the UK, the participants contended that they recognised that their loved ones and their own stories about them were often at the borders of visibility (Tyler, 2006). Precious stated:

> They think we're weak. They think we just need to be
> supported. They think maybe we can't make decisions...
> they don't notice us (Precious).

Refuting innate weakness the women suggested that by participating in the

research, the interview was a site of protest. Contesting their marginalisation from

the public and political spheres, the women disrupted the way in which the asylum

system and decision making process and media contexts in the UK may have

deprived them of the ability to tell their stories or have their stories heard (Woolley,

2014). The narrative of resistance allowed the women to demonstrate a sense of

their own capacity by describing their motivations for taking part in the study. May

claimed she wanted to improve the lives of women seeking asylum in the UK:

> I like to take part in this research because want to improve
> the policy for women refugee. I like the voice of women to
> be heard and I like for women to be respected (May).

Raising awareness of the concept that women refugees' voices have not been

heard, May started her story with a clear standpoint of being listened to and

improving respect for women. Including an account of overcoming the acute and

extreme power constraints imposed on her life, May sought to emphasise the

importance of being a source of inspiration for other women:

> … no matter who you are, no matter where you are, all
> you have to do is have a view, walk towards it and be
> determined… I believe there is nothing you cannot do no
> matter what you go through in life (May).

Constructing an 'I' poem from May's quotes, a sense of hope and possibility

emerges:

<div align="center">
I like to take part
I like the voice of women to be heard
I like for women to be respected
I believe there is nothing you cannot do no matter what you go through in life (May).
</div>

May's poem is indicative of Katz's (2004) concept of resistance, reflecting consciousness-building and explicit oppositional agendas. Similarly, the women suggested their stories had something to share, imaging transformations they emphasised their strength and visions for the future:

> I really struggled in my life and it was in just 17 when I came in UK, was really small girl... I want to struggle in my life. I want to set my life. If there something wrong in your life then you have to die? My thinking not like that. If someone do wrong to you, if someone broken your life you have to again stand up (Shimmar).

> My daughter can be a doctor. Yeah, my son can be a president, and I have to stand strong (Precious).

The sense of self-worth and personal strength highlighted by both Shimmar and Precious was a concept repeated in many of the women's stories. They implied that their accounts contained lessons to be learned (Phoenix, 2008). Appraising the interview itself the women contended that they were helping me and had something to offer to the wider public and other women:

> I'm one of the women whom people should read my story … I thought I should contribute to this research so that my story can be part of a lesson… So what I want in my life, I want to keep fighting, speaking out and struggling for what is right for all women (Naomi).

In the same way, Anne-Laure sought to identify herself with other women to highlight their chances and possibilities in relation to her story:

> I wanted to talk about women and only talking about what's happened can another woman understand… It's also about showing other women what other women have lived and it's also showing other women the chances or possibilities (Anne-Laure).

The narrative of resistance was vital in understanding the women's sense of their sustained commitment to improving the lives of women. Women seeking asylum were the ones telling these stories and asking to be listened to.

To further emphasise the importance of their stories, some women identified the progress they felt their resistance and others' had achieved. Queenie drew attention to a successful campaign she said she had been part of in her country of origin which had ensured the police would respond to requests for help from women with domestic violence. Shimmar spoke about how she had supported her friend to achieve a conviction against her mother-in-law[37].

Despite achievements, some women also indicated they had faced great sadness and disappointments but implied that they continued to feel solidarity towards improving the situations of other women. Bintou and Queenie were particularly keen to identify that they realised telling their stories might not improve their own situations:

> I know I may not benefit from it now, but in future being a woman I want some people to, whatever the outcome is, if it is positive that women can benefit from it, that's why I wanted to tell my story (Bintou).

> I would like, out of all this, that maybe, not 100%, but even 1% of what I said can be contributed to making refugee woman that comes, or asylum seeker, their life a little bit easier (Queenie).

Signifying altruistic intentions, the women emphasised how important they felt the study was. Claiming that their participation was associated with grave personal risk,

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37 Shimmar claimed her friend was another young woman who had been forced to marry and was violently abused. At the time of interview, the law governing forced marriage in the UK was the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 (FMCPA 2007). Between November 2008 (when the FMCPA 2007 came into force) and June 2011 only 339 Forced Marriage Protection Orders (FMPO) had been recorded and only five breaches of FMPOs have been recorded since November 2008, with only one breach resulting in a prison sentence (Family Law Week, 2011, p.33). Shimmar's claim was a hugely significant achievement.

the women spoke about potentially being identified by telling their story for the wider

public. This suggestion was supported by stories of how they were being tracked by

political agents and was used to illustrate ongoing situations of persecution and

violence. The women claimed they could be endangering others within their country

of origin and the UK. Furthermore, they highlighted how they had concerns about

their asylum claim and the possibility of jeopardising being granted legal protection.

Explicating how she had previously spoken out, I formed an 'I' poem from Lucy's

story of how she had been at risk of losing her life:

> I was receiving very many death threats
> I left my house with only a small bag I always remember that
> I would move from room to room looking at my things wondering will I ever come
> back again to this house of mine
> I knew I would never (Lucy).

Illustrating very tangible risks, crucially, the narrative of resistance helped

participants to suggest that their accounts were larger and more significant than their

own individual stories (Andrews, 2007b). The women spoke of their sense of the

interview as an opportunity, despite the associated risks.

Reflecting concerns about the lives of women in situations across the globe, the

women overtly brought themselves into relation with other women, including me.

They encouraged me to re-tell their stories and make use of their accounts:

> What I would just like to say is I would like you use me as
> a case study… to enlight people about refugee and most
> especially about women refugee… I think use this
> opportunity now, maybe to pass the information (May).
>
> Make a difference Kate, make a difference. We believe in
> you (Naomi).

Forging alliances through the narrative of resistance, they challenged me to take up the opportunity in solidarity, to re-tell and use their stories, taking some form of action as a result of what they told me.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented a discussion about the women's stories in relation to the narrative of resistance. Differing from Katz's (2004) use of the term, which locates resistance as an activity or practice with an outcome and an exceptional attribute that belongs to some people, resistance was a representational tool that the women utilised to tell stories about themselves and their lives. Demonstrating the active role the women played in the construction of their stories and suggesting that dominant narratives told about women seeking asylum currently overlook and obscure women's own stories altogether, this chapter has attempted to demonstrate that the women told stories within which they wished to be viewed as protagonists and activists engaged in organised resistance and building resistance. They illustrated their engagement in overt initiatives in stories, making claims of disrupting conditions of exploitation and oppression. Striving to be viewed as capable, the women spoke about having agendas of liberatory and emancipatory change. Illustrating their multiple and complex roles, the women included individual, collective and organised acts in their countries of origin and in the UK. Furthermore, the interview itself was an event for construction and a site of protest.

Despite its emancipatory character, the narrative of resistance did not necessarily equate with stories of victory. Stories were not simply orientated to transformative or successful stories and neither did the narrative of resistance negate or minimise stories of persecution and victimisation. Although the women suggested that they

were victims of persecution, they drew on the narrative of resistance to tell stories that strengthened their sense of self, forged solidarity with other women and located themselves in social and political movements.

Drawing on the narrative of resistance the women refuted pity and resisted being vilified or labelled as entirely vulnerable or merely as victims. In this sense, the women's construction of their listening audience included me but was imagined as much greater than just me. The women wanted their stories to be re-told and passed on, suggesting they were entrusting me to take their stories and not only to record them but to expose them to a wider audience. Given the consciousness-building and explicit oppositional agendas (Katz, 2004), as well as the explicit forms of power that women seeking asylum may be up against, the narrative of resistance was rarer than those of reworking and resilience.

The next chapter will focus on the narrative of reworking and explore the ways in which the women's stories reflected change and indirect resistance.

Chapter Eight:
The narrative of reworking

"I decided I wouldn't (Baelli)"

In the previous chapter I explored the narrative of resistance. Using delineations of resistance (Katz, 2004), in this chapter I present the second of the narrative chapters, the narrative of reworking. Less ambitious than the narrative of resistance and less ambiguous than the narrative of resilience (explored in Chapter Nine) the narrative of reworking was represented in stories of change. Consistent with Katz's (2004) concept of reworking, rather than suggesting they had fundamentally or overtly challenged power relations, the women told stories of how they altered power relations in the smallest of ways, through negotiations, transgressions, subtle subordinate acts and indirect acts of resistance (Bosworth, 1999; Katz, 2004).

Stories of change revealed the ways in which the women said they had sought to improve, and had improved aspects of their lives. However, the futility of reworking did little to celebrate the potential achievements of resistance or the day-to-day ordinariness of just 'getting by' (suggested by the narrative of resilience, explored in Chapter Nine). What emerged from some stories of change was risk, uncertainty and associated losses (Eastmond, 2007). Establishing themselves as women who had reworked their situations did not always include effective or positive changes in their lives but entailed forging stories that contributed to making visible the capacity of women to create change.

Unwilling participants

"I fled three times (Baelli)"

Persecution and sexual violence were common in the women's stories. Structured around incidents and events that diverged from what they saw as being socially, politically and culturally permissible and acceptable in their lives, the women suggested a lack or absence of consent and an unwillingness to participate. Baelli explained how, despite severe constraints imposed on her, she avoided being frequently drugged:

> So one day he gives me this liquid and he told me to drink
> it, drink. I decided I wouldn't drink it. I made out that I'd
> drank it but I stuck it by my foot so that I wouldn't have
> this in me. I made out I'd drank it. He thought I'd drank it
> but I hadn't. He went to his room and I took the cup and I
> hid it in my bra and I went to my room (Baelli).

Constructing an 'I' poem from this story highlighted how Baelli represented herself as creating change in her life:

> I decided I wouldn't drink it.
> I made out that I'd drank it
> I stuck it by my foot
> I wouldn't have this in me
> I made out I'd drank it
> I hadn't
> I took the cup
> I hid it in my bra
> I went to my room (Baelli).

Suggesting her role in small-scale acts (Bosworth, 1999) Baelli's story highlighted that she had improved a small aspect of her situation.

Embedded in the women's stories was a sense of their abilities to alter power relations in even the smallest ways. Jen discussed that, in becoming the fourth wife of a man, she was threatened with 'female genital mutilation' (FGM) (see Appendix

197

One). Attempting to prevent being subjected to this practice, Jen said she repeatedly became pregnant:

> The following times he forced me to go to circumcise and I said, 'no circumcise I'm pregnant now'. He said if you're pregnant you don't have to go to circumcise… Anytime he just talk about circumcise I have to try pregnant... to stop the circumcision (Jen).

Suggesting that she had reworked her situation by becoming pregnant, Jen also described multiple miscarriages which she attributed to violence from her husband. Negotiating difficult choices when faced with brutal constraints, Jen remained resolute about negotiating and influencing her situation despite being told by the co-wives that, whether she was pregnant or not, she would be "circumcised". She said she requested money to host a party and explained how she had taken the money the family intended for the party to enable her to leave the country:

> So I said, 'me I am not going to circumcise. If you want me go circumcise you have to give me money'… I take a taxi and slip over the border in the morning… just slip to the border (Jen).

Emphasising understandings of coercion and non-consent (Bletzer and Koss, 2010) Jen, like the other women, claimed an ability to negotiate, influence and subsequently change her situation.

Highlighting the problematic conditions of their lives the women emphasised the ways in which they had undermined constraints and mobilised to improve situations and circumstances. For example, the narrative of reworking was reflected in stories of the difficulties they said they faced living within cultural and religious frameworks where they believed heterosexuality was compulsory (Yip, 2004). The women explained their fears of the condemnation, rejection and violence directed towards

those who did not conform to strict cultural and religious frameworks of heteronormativity. Exposing situations that they implied were unjust the women explored how they had reworked their situations by avoiding judgements and suspicion about their sexuality, claiming these decisions were essential for their survival.

The ways in which the women said they presented themselves to others, were attempts to reflect their abilities to rework their situations. Highlighted in an 'I' poem, Anne-Laure said she had negotiated with her mother that she did not have to marry a man:

> I told them I was no longer a virgin
> I'm the only child of my mother
> I had to be a virgin to be married (Anne-Laure).

Anne-Laure, like many of the women, suggested that she told particular stories that conformed to cultural and religious acceptability but served a specific purpose of protecting herself.

Stories about negotiating sexual relations through strategic avoidance (Riessman, 2000) and mitigating situations (Woodiwiss, 2009) were used to demonstrate the women's attempts to minimise sexual violence and persecution. Gloria suggested she had married a man, developing strategies in order to be publicly perceived as heterosexual. In the face of potential intolerance or rejection because of her sexuality, Gloria said she maintained a culturally acceptable public persona but was also able to have intimate, private relations with women. She implied she had the capacity to maintain aspects of her life through negotiations and transgressions.

All the women who spoke about the risk of persecution for their sexuality gave accounts of the necessity for secrecy. Even in the UK these stories were told to me as secrets (Mauthner, 2000). Claiming she had eventually been accused of sexual transgression, which had put her life at risk, Gloria said she eventually fled the country in an attempt to secure her safety:

> I left that country for two reasons, the husband is one and
> the secret that I have now (Gloria).

Gloria said she was also reworking her situation by keeping a public persona whilst having relations with women and she implied she had improved aspects of her life but was still burdened by her "secret".

Some of the women not only suggested they had changed their own situations but that they had changed the lives of other people. Precious said her brother was gay, which had been negatively viewed by her family and community as rejecting cultural and religious values. She claimed that she had been targeted for his sexuality because of her travel to the "West" and the ways in which homosexuality was viewed as an importation of immoral behaviours and an unwelcome Western disease (Yip, 2004). She said she had felt responsible for her brother and had attempted to change his situation to improve his safety:

> … I took my brother… I have to get away from here,
> because even the way I'm looking at these things now, I
> can't fight with these people anymore... I said, 'Okay. You
> go. We go South, but make sure no one knows where you
> are. Don't talk to people just be on your own. I know it will
> be tough, but this is the only thing you can do at the
> moment (Precious).

Helping her brother to hide, Precious suggested she had showed capacity to change his situation. Similarly, the women said they found different strategies to keep

themselves and others safe. For the most part they drew on the narrative of reworking to tell stories about how they sought to find practical, pragmatic solutions and responses to persecution that were quite unplanned. Diane claimed she had been a victim of 'domestic servitude' and 'forced labour' (see Appendix One) (Lewis et al., 2013). Drawing on the narrative of reworking, she suggested that one day the door was unlocked and she ran out of the door and away from servitude:

> I saw the door open. I just ran… (Diane).

Changing her situation, Diane often spoke of how she had fled situations. An account of simply 'fleeing' was a motif frequently used in the women's stories. Love said she was the victim of sexual abuse and, when her husband brought home two other women, she described how she just decided to leave and took her child in her arms and fled the house:

> The door was open. I was with a nightie. I took my child and I was pregnant, eight months. I took my child and I went outside. I ran away from the house… (Love).

Persecuted, with histories of sexual violence, claiming asylum was storied as an act of reworking their situations and trying to end the violence and persecution in their lives. Seeking asylum was a way in which the women attempted to change their situations and Jen and Diane stated:

> Now I'm fighting for safety (Jen).

> I struggling for asylum (Diane).

The women spoke of the persecutions that they said had necessitated them seeking asylum. Their hopes were often centred on securing safety in relation to receiving legal protection. Illuminating the broad set of circumstances and situations whereby people in positions of power, across the globe, engaged in sexual violence and the

persecution of women, the women told stories about how they had been unwilling participants. At times their negotiations and transgressions suggested they had changed their situations.

Resources

"I did not cover my hair in public (Love)"

The women spoke about the different resources that had helped them to rework their situations. Through the materials available to them, they described how food and "bodily rebellion" (Chawla, 2007, p.14) had been a particular form of reworking. The women suggested they had reorganised aspects of their everyday lives and implied that they had the capacity to affect their own futures. Shimmar said she had refused to eat, losing drastic amounts of weight. Identifying herself as a "baby girl" or "small girl", she elevated the visibility of her distress in attempts to make the family notice and take care of her. Shimmar also contended that her status would have somewhat improved in the family if she had been able to give birth to a son. Equating a son with reworking her economic situation, she suggested that her status could have been secured within the family. Chawla suggests "once a son was born, a woman would feel more included in the family because she had been instrumental in producing an heir who would provide spiritual continuity to the family and economic stability to herself" (2007, p.8). Shimmar elaborated, explaining how she had strived to become pregnant, eventually achieving her goal:

> I've got a baby in my stomach and oh my God I'm so
> happy, I said 'I get everything in my life now' (Shimmar).

Whilst she constructed accounts of how she had been very controlled and subjugated within the family environment, Shimmar suggested that she had still made daily decisions and undertaken small acts to rework her position.

Clothing was a resource that the women said they used for reworking aspects of their lives. Love said she refused to cover her hair in public when a strict dress-code was imposed. She also claimed that in different places she wore a hair scarf which, she felt, served to rework men's attentions away from her. Similarly, Zain's story was replete with expressions about the ways she had dressed to assert herself. Constructing an 'I' poem from her account, I have attempted to show how she represented herself through a number of bodily rebellions (Chawla, 2007):

> I wear the pent shirt like a boy
> I don't accept their things on woman
> I challenge also them
> I will never change my mind
> I am smoking on the street
> I say no
> I will never follow
> I want to follow my life my own style (Zain).

Zain's description of her outfit and of smoking in public brought a visibility to her defiance and self-efficacy. Speaking against the feminisation of women in relation to more traditional dress-codes, her insistence about wearing 'boy's` clothing was a way of demonstrating her disregard for expectations about presenting herself in public places as a woman.

Refusing and subverting what the women perceived as obligations was central to the narrative of reworking. Diane claimed she had reworked her situation by refusing to wear an electronic tag (see Appendix One) as a condition of being released from detention. Despite the severe consequences of losing her liberty, Diane presented herself as defiant to change the situation:

> I start blaming the immigration and the woman [Home Office official] say 'Bring this lady'. They bring me in the office. They say 'Why you blaming?' I say 'You, you blame me as well. You tell me congratulations, but you gona release me with tag. What is that? I feel still I am in detention if I come out with tag (Diane).

Adopted as a defence against the imposition of being issued with an electronic tag,

Diane refuted passivity and, most importantly, claimed that she had reworked her

situation and had not been 'tagged'. Whilst she was surveyed in many ways (she

said she had been imprisoned as a result of refusing the electronic monitoring), her

capacity to speak out and regain a small aspect of control was viewed as a personal

victory. White states "although dominant groups may control the social institutions

that regulate… those groups cannot control the capacity of subordinated peoples to

speak" (1991, p.55).

Presenting themselves as having the ability to rework their environments was

important in the women's stories. From within a hospital for the "mentally ill", where

she claimed she had been incarcerated, Love suggested she had felt constrained by

the situation and limited in her available choices. She explained how she had made

a particular decision and had decided to learn to smoke:

> I used to go to that room and ask old lady to teach me
> how to smoke. … It was a bad course, but I really enjoyed
> it to be honest [laughing]. I can't wait. When I see that old
> lady going into that room I go straight away after her and I
> sit with her (Love).

Smoking was presented as a time of change and Love described how it offered her a

new sense of self that also resisted former constraints:

> They will kill you if they found you smoking… It's me,
> because everybody refuse me. I want to be me now. I
> don't care. If my dad was in front of me I don't care about
> him, I will get the cigarette and smoke. So I stayed in that
> hospital for four months. I learned how to smoke (Love).

Love spoke about smoking as a defiant act in which she utilised the resources

available to her.

Resources were not always physical and there were numerous examples of the narrative of reworking reflected in the women's stories of religious, social and spiritual support. Faith groups and places of spiritual support emerged as public spaces where the women constructed a sense of self and were provided with a form of belonging. Lucy, Precious and Z spoke of regular involvement with their local church which, they claimed, provided social contact and spiritual support. Drawing on the narrative of reworking, the women were able to suggest they took part in regular religious activities, circumventing some of the isolation they said they associated with dispersal and claiming asylum in the UK.

Describing threatening and difficult situations, several women included stories of prayer as a private spiritual resource. Drawing upon a history of religious belief, Naomi elaborated on how she and her children had been taken to detention facilities and her account began with Home Office officials and police entering her house by force. Distressed at the situation, Naomi spoke about the contempt shown towards her and the physical restraint used against her and the children, including the enforced separation. Steeped in feelings of shame and humiliation in the presence of many male officers, Naomi claimed she had been forced to sit and wait, wearing only her bedclothes, whilst the children were woken. She described how she had started to pray:

> Then all I could remember was to pray, so as they [Home Office and police] were saying things I was praying … I was gone from there (Naomi).

Elevating stories of prayer, Naomi suggested she had found ways which sustained and transformed her into another consciousness. Langer states "spiritual resistance … does not require any control over one's physical destiny, dwells in a realm

detached from environment, and transcends the need to confront its ravages" (1991, p.149). Naomi suggested prayer had enabled her to transcend, "I was gone from there", transporting her away from the chaos and brutality of the situation.

The narrative of reworking offered the women a way in which to suggest they looked after themselves and changed aspects of their situations despite the environment around them. May explained how she found solace in prayer. During her time in prison she had bought incense from the prison shop, praying in her room as she burned it:

> I pray and I burn incense. Catholic incense that we use to pray in traditional catholic pray method… just to scare evil spirits away when you are praying so that your prayer can be answered when you are praying… (May).

Provided with a narrative framework to tell a story of her ritual, May was able to describe how she kept herself safe, supported and protected. Demonstrating themselves as spiritual, the women used prayer to highlight this attribute.

Talking about having close and supportive relationships with other people, the women said others had helped them transform their lives and change their situations. Migratory movements and personal mobility (Andrijasevic, 2010) were important aspects of their stories with regard to illustrating reworking. The women described how they had overcome some of the limited legal, social or political protection and different constraints to their mobility. Stories included accounts of how they had arranged travel documents and visas, booking different modes of travel. Paying substantial amounts of money for transit, the women said this had frequently involved engaging with agents who could smuggle them across borders. The associated risks of paying people for transit meant the outcomes had been uncertain and unpredictable. Consistent with the findings of Andrijasevic (2010), whose work

has explored women's accounts of sex trafficking and agency, the women claimed that some aspects of reworking their lives through legally regulated systems of migration had made them vulnerable and unsafe.

Friends and family members were amongst those identified as providing assistance and the resources necessary for the women to rework their circumstances. Commonly used to highlight the collective interaction of trusted individuals, the narrative of reworking was utilised to illustrate the ways in which they had overcome (in part) individualised persecution and violence. Extracting herself from the risks posed to her by the co-wives in her husband's family, Jen explained how her mother and one of her friends had helped her to plan to leave:

> My mum told me and my friend told me 'get money and
> you run. Go anywhere because you suffer…' (Jen).

Similarly, Bintou spoke of friends and family who had supported her with financial resources to enable her to leave her country. Baelli claimed she was also aided by a friend who came to support her with medical assistance, then helped secure her a flight out of her country of origin to the UK.

The women told stories about the support they had received at different stages in their journey or in transit, as well as during their time in countries where they claimed asylum. Similar accounts were found in Kibria's (1990) research with Vietnamese refugees who points out the vitality and importance of women's social groups and community networks in sustaining them and helping them to cope with situations.

Unlike Kibria's (1990) research, it was not just women and community members positioned within these women's stories and they suggested that sometimes 'strangers', people they did not know and did not have any previous connection or

relationship with, who had offered support. Sharing local knowledge and practical

resources, the women maintained that people were willing to extend their time and

consideration towards helping and improving their situations. Baelli spoke of a

woman who had seen her at a bus stop and tried to help her:

> This lady said, 'okay. In this country we're not allowed to
> help people with no papers, but I can't leave you like this
> and I can see that, from my heart, I just can't leave you'…
> She took me home and said, 'Go and have a shower.
> Anything you want just let me know. I'm going to take you
> to hospital and get you treated', and basically she looked
> after me (Baelli).

Embracing the support of others, Baelli was able to construct a positive sense of

self-worth and recovery through others helping her to change her situation..

Material places were also central to the women's stories of what had helped them

adjust to new environments, orientating them as they familiarised themselves with

new places and new people. Lucy spoke of how she visited the Town Hall, helping

her connect with material places that she had known from her country of origin

> Even some times I go to this Town Hall and I just like …
> going there and like ahhh… sitting there on those
> benches and just in the town hall and it helps me
> reconnect with my life when I was in the municipal council
> (Lucy).

Lucy's evaluation of going to the Town Hall enabled a construction of herself as able

to manage her wellbeing and make positive changes. With practical resources and

the role of other people a feature of the women's stories, the narrative of reworking

was utilised to demonstrate their capacity for negotiation and change.

Retooling and redistributing

"I don't want to be illiterate or my kids to be illiterate either (Jen)"

The narrative of reworking provided the women with a framework to describe how

they retooled themselves through material social practices (Katz, 2004). Some of the

women claimed they closely followed social and political developments within their

countries, accessing different forms of media. Queenie explained how she scoured

the internet for information, longing to return and contribute her skills and knowledge

to the place that she called 'home'.

> … when I put on the news, it's to hear if anything good is
> happening in ███████ or something has changed…listen
> to [the news] a lot just to hear if there's any change there
> (Queenie).

Queenie, like the other women, suggested the news and internet were resources

that helped them to maintain relations to their countries of origin and follow political

developments. In a similar way, Lucy said she was:

> … addicted to ███████ news on the internet (Lucy).

Following daily reports about their homelands, the women said they had used

different media technologies to retool. Precious spoke about how she used

international databases as sources of information, getting access to information

about changes in the UK legal system and actively engaging in researching her own

immigration situation. Email allowed her to have regular contact with other

community supporters with whom she said she could share thoughts and ideas.

Retooling in relation to volunteering, the women told stories of their roles within local

community groups and organisations. They explained how they had reduced the

isolation that they had felt by being detained, dispersed and excluded from paid work in the UK. Precious emphasised a way of 'learning' in relation to volunteering:

> I try to be involved in so many things. I go to women's organisations. I do some voluntary things like work. I talk to people… I learn more, I'm learning so much. I found people who are trying to tell me that I've got something in me (Precious).

Discussing activities, like volunteering, enabled Precious to suggest they gave her a sense of self-value through other people's affirmation.

Reworking their educational aspirations and work possibilities, the women were able to suggest that formal education in the UK had enabled them to rework their situations and improve their anticipated futures. These stories sometimes pivoted on accounts of previous formal education which varied greatly. Some of the women said they had no formal education whilst others explained that they had formal schooling as younger children. Anne-Laure spoke of how the hard work of her mother to ensure she received a formal education was one of the reasons she had not had an early marriage:

> … the reason that I wasn't forced [in to a marriage] earlier, twelve or fifteen, is because I was going to school. My mum paid for my studies. She used to sell water and make things a bit like a donut. Like a donut. She sold them for three, five or ten pence. This is how she managed to send me to school and not to marriage (Anne-Laure).

Evoking the role of her mother, Anne-Laure suggested her life had been changed through this important relationship.

For some women, other expectations, such as marriage and responsibilities within the home, had precluded them from continuing their formal education into their teenage years. Inconsistent with the findings of UNICEF (2004), which have

210

suggested that the education of girls has not been a priority for many communities and families across the globe, the women said the education of girls was important. These aspirations were often formed from stories of their childhoods where some of the women said they had very little or no form of formal education and, as a result, could not read or write, described in terms of loss. They identified formal education as valuable and aspirational aspects of life within which they could rework their situations. May suggested that by the age of thirteen her family had no longer had the finances to enable her go to school and all formal education had been stopped. Drawing on the narrative of reworking, May implied that the promise of being able to return to formal education sustained and inspired her in relation to years of sexual exploitation and domestic servitude.

Education was a central feature of the women's stories, suggesting that formal schooling could transform their futures. Some said they were starting again because their qualifications from their countries of origin did not translate to the requirements in the UK; they were reconsidering their careers and educational opportunities in the light of this (RETAS, 2013). Queenie represented herself as a skilled woman who was volunteering rather than doing paid work:

> …as a refugee I'm volunteering on those jobs and I think I'm qualified to it's just I don't have that UK working experience and two they ask you for your education certificates. I can't get them from home. It's not possible (Queenie).

In a similar way, Zain suggested she had educational and career aspirations and was studying for a Master's in Business Administration (MBA) at college in order to rework her situation:

> I complete my level 6 so now I'm waiting for level 7. So in
> the future, Inshallah [God willing], when I get a decision
> positive I will continue my studies (Zain).

The narrative of reworking was utilised to suggest optimism about the potential for upward mobility through education (Warriner, 2004, 2009). It was not just their own education that was relevant; the women also spoke of their children's education, explaining how they had offered their children a better future.

Aligned with Katz's (2004) concept of reworking, "steeling children for the future was at the core of various determined projects of reworking… conscious, collective and active response of expanded schooling was a strategy of reworking" (Katz, 2004, p.249). Placing great emphasis on the role of education for children, the women equated formal education with choices and the potential to build their children's futures, suggesting they were ensuring their children's futures would be transformed and improved. Jen explained how she was determined that her children would not be illiterate:

> I don't want to be illiterate or my kids to be illiterate either.
> I don't want that. No. That one won't happen to my kids to
> go to school … I just send money. I send it for my friend to
> give to my mum so my kids can go to school (Jen).

Intending her children to be educated with the 'remittances' (see Appendix one) she sent home, Jen's concerns were to rework the situation of her children and she claimed she was protecting her children from being "illiterate".

The narrative of reworking was used by the women in relation to stories of financially supporting children to go to school, but finances in general were a great challenge to the women, who claimed they had been constrained in the asylum system through the limited resources made available in financial payments. Consistent with the

findings of a national parliamentary inquiry into asylum accommodation and subsistence (2013), they suggested an inadequacy of financial support. Drawing on the narrative of reworking, they suggested they had established ways of making small adjustments to their financial situations. Redistributing the meagre resources that were available to them, the women shared payments and resources that they had bought with their small budgets. Reconstituting available resources (Katz, 2004), Fatou shared bus tickets with another family:

> Sometimes ask, 'do you have ticket?' Sometimes she tell me yes. Come wait for my son he has ticket. Sometime he gives me ticket, come town. Sometimes he tell me, no, I'm going back town. Depends. But sometimes they give me, my ticket, day rider (Fatou)

Other similar exchanges were described as a resource that went wider than the family. Through emerging "webs of care" (Katz, 2004, p.246), Precious spoke of how she shared travel tickets she had with friends:

> … he call my boyfriend say, have I got ticket? I say, 'Yes, I'm coming' and my partner give him the ticket (Precious).

Sharing cooking and combining resources to provide for each other were part of the stories the women told. Conlon asserts "reworking involves pragmatic responses in dealing with circumstances that are overtly understood as problematic and in need of change" (2007, p.220). Positioning themselves as pragmatic and practical, the women reflected the narrative of reworking in stories of redistributing resources, revealing creative strategies to sustain and enhance their living situations and the circumstances of others.

Circumventing

"I don't want to be a refugee (Precious)"

The women spoke about circumventing dominant narratives which suggested they did not feel those narratives adequately represented them or their lives. Letherby points out "involvement in research can be a way of anonymously 'putting the record straight' (2000, p.105). As discussed in Chapter Two, the motivations of people seeking asylum have been interrogated by the general UK public, the media and the government, leading to suggestions that those who seek asylum may be disguising their economic motivations for entering and staying in the UK (Kea and Roberts-Holmes, 2013). In their struggles to account for themselves in the UK, as well as to be recognised and respected by the wider public in the UK, the women refuted the notion that they had entered the UK with any other intention but to find safety. They did this by claiming that the concept of seeking asylum in the UK had been unfamiliar to them and they had been unaware of international frameworks of protection:

> I was originally running away and to be away from whatever was going through. I never knew about asylum (Naomi).

> That man told me 'do you want claim asylum?' I said 'what is asylum?' I don't know. I never ever know what is asylum... I said 'you know what I don't know what is asylum' (Jen)

Emphasising the persecutions that engulfed their lives, the women drew on forceful moral stories, depicting themselves as innocent of the asylum system and worthy of compassion and concern (Eastmond, 2010).

Important too was stories of refugees. Some women suggested they faced a problematic assumption that it was men who were refugees and not women:

> They [general UK public] think they're [refugee] men.
> They don't think women are refugees as such, but most
> people would identify to say, refugees are men. Definitely
> most times. Oh are you a refugee? How did you come?
> They think maybe a man is the only one who is able to
> flee and woman have no reason to flee, but she has
> (Queenie).

Here, Queenie implied that the general UK public not only assume refugees are men but she also indicated that there is the question of how she had the resources to become an 'asylum seeker'. The suggestion here was that the dominant narrative about refugees overlooks women altogether in public perceptions, assuming they have no reason to seek asylum and no capacity to 'flee'. Queenie's account is consistent with scholars who have highlighted that it is men and not women who are identified as refugees, as discussed in Chapter Two. Whilst the majority of asylum applicants in the UK are men (Freedman, 2008; Singer, 2009, Home Office, 2011; Muggeridge and Maman, 2011; Querton, 2012; Ali et al. 2012), dominant narratives have established a masculine norm about people seeking asylum which widely overlooks women (Bhabha, 1996; RWLG, 1998; Crawley, 2001). Evaluating the situation, Queenie indicated these broad assumptions were problematic but suggested she tried to rework this particular narrative:

> … once they get to know you, hear your story, they start
> thinking different (Queenie).

Claiming she was able to change some aspects of the dominant narratives about refugees, Queenie suggested she reworked people's understandings about refugees in the UK. There were ways in which people seeking asylum and those who are refugees have been characterised that the women said were problematic and

upsetting. The women understood that people seeking asylum and refugees are

dehumanised and marginalised across the globe. For example, Lucy suggested the

term refugee was used in derogatory ways to insult people in her country of origin:

> It's not a good term. Back in ▮▮▮▮ we think about
> refugees are just like people fleeing, living in those
> camps, and every time we want to make a point, when
> somebody mistreated you, you said 'Why are you treating
> me as if I am a refugee? This is my country you know'. It
> was something dehumanising. It felt very dehumanising
> term (Lucy).

Given the negative association with being a refugee, some women said they were

shocked to find themselves identified as 'refugees':

> I never thought that would be me… a refugee (Lucy).

> …. it's so difficult being a refugee… I never imagine…
> never a refugee… (Queenie).

Seeking asylum and becoming a refugee were often constructed as unanticipated

outcomes of persecution and violence. The women's understandings of the

vilification and negative popular opinion of people seeking asylum, as discussed in

Chapter Two, were deeply problematic and they gave numerous accounts of the

ways in which they felt they had been badly treated:

> I think people who don't realise you're a refugee they treat
> you different. Once they realise you're refugee it's another
> story altogether… there's a lot that I would like to do, but
> as a refugee it's not easy (Queenie).

> You are not welcome… not in every office (Bintou).

> You feel dehumanised when you are seeking asylum. You
> don't have dignity (Lucy).

Multiple accounts of examples of their mistreatment for being perceived as refugees

emerged in the interviews. The term 'refugee' was a label the women did not accept

easily and the interview itself represented an opportunity for them to rework such representations. Rather than internalise the stigma associated with being a refugee (Banks, 2008; Sandberg, 2009; Griffiths, 2010), the narrative of reworking provided the women with a way to shape their stories and negate some of the detrimental meanings associated with them being identified as refugees.

Unlike the narrative of resistance which they utilised to challenge oppression, the narrative of reworking was used to reposition themselves outside of dominant narratives about refugees. Precious rejected the 'label' of refugee. In this 'I' poem, Precious refused identification as a refugee:

> I don't want to be a refugee
> I don't want to be a refugee
> I don't want to
> I don't want to be it ... it's not nice to be
> It's not nice.
> I want to be free
> I want to be called a woman
> I want to be called a somebody (Precious).

Providing defences, Precious stated how she wanted to be viewed and provided a vision of what she is or could be. Similar too was the label 'prostitute', which Jen suggested was synonymous with refugee. She refuted the stigma of being considered a prostitute:

> I don't want no one call em that name like refugee
> prostitute. Your mum do prostitute… no no no. I want nice
> name, your mum work hard to give them survive but not
> prostitute. Nobody can make me that (Jen).

Jen's story demarcates an understanding of the 'deviant' behaviour of mothers who are seen as prostitutes and suggests she fears the severe consequences of what it would mean to be 'named' a prostitute (Andrijasevic (2010). Countering the potential stigma, Jen contested the identity entirely.

Given that an interview with me indicated that the participant was seeking asylum or a refugee, the women said they constructed alternative stories about themselves to tell other people in order to hide aspects of their identity (Letherby, 2002), circumventing or side-stepping dominant narratives:

> I always call myself love-seeker not asylum-seeker (Love).

> People think bad about asylum seekers. I don't tell anyone I am an asylum seeker… say I'm just study here (Shimmar).

Recognising that women seeking asylum have been vilified and perceived as a threat to UK 'values' (Cohen, 2002; Hunt, 2005; Yuval-Davis et al., 2005; Tyler, 2006), Lucy attempted to disrupt this dominant narrative by emphasising the dignity, morality and social principles of women seeking asylum:

> I had everything going on back home… I was in the municipal council … it is only my principles that forced me out (Lucy).

Similarly, identifying that women seeking asylum are frequently represented as a threat to the UK's economic resources (Jordan and Düvell, 2003; Clayton, 2006; Sirriyeh, 2008, 2013), Caroline highlighted different aspects of the contributions she said she had made to other women's lives in the UK. She suggested that she had been a domestic worker in other women's houses and maintained a profile of herself as hardworking, contributing and self-sufficient, a profile that is in stark contrast to some of the contemporary understandings of women seeking asylum in the UK, as discussed in Chapter Two.

Giving differing accounts of their presence in the UK, the women said they negotiated negative stories about being 'asylum seekers' and 'refugees'.

Circumventing dominant narratives, they subtly changed what they viewed as negative connotations.

Counter-conduct

"… we had no rights in this country (Baelli)"

The narrative of reworking was reflected in contradictory and counterproductive outcomes within the women's stories. Unlike the narrative of resistance which, at times, resulted in stories of liberation, the uncertainty of reworking exposed problems and outcomes which were unexpected and unwanted (Conlon, 2013). In this sense the narrative of reworking resonated with Conlon's (2013) proposals of counter-conduct as stories that exemplify risks and uncertainty. Calling into question and acting as a form of protest to the situations and circumstances within which the women found themselves, reworking or counter-conduct were contingent on the situations within which they were embedded. For example, Z's father and missionaries played a central role in ensuring she received a formal education and preventing her from entering an early marriage:

> I was there [at school] because my father was a police
> man. He was very conscious on this area. He want me to
> be educated and within the society… I continued to go to
> school instead of being married and have children… (Z).

Whilst Z claimed she had gained a formal education, which she said was unusual for girls from her area, there were also huge risks associated with being educated which made her extremely vulnerable to attacks and being murdered:

> I managed to continue my education so that's the problem
> and also the other side of the fascist government… used
> to kill every educated intelligent people, hunting them
> everywhere … (Z).

219

The women told stories about people who had helped them but who had brought about specific vulnerabilities, reducing opportunities and growing risks of persecution. Baelli said she had been helped by her friend to become liberated from her marriage, as discussed earlier in this chapter. She secured the relevant travel documents and boarded a plane accompanied by a man who she thought her friend trusted. Suggesting some form of transaction had taken place, Baelli claimed she was trafficked into another country for sexual exploitation:

> … we were told that we weren't to leave the house, we weren't to go outside, we weren't to speak we were just to sit and wait because we had no rights in this country, we had nothing (Baelli).

Reworking did not always improve their situations and sometimes the women spoke of suffering beatings and extreme abuse; the ways in which change had brought different kinds of hardships. Shimmar said she had fled her marital home, describing how, without shoes or adequate clothing in the snow, she had slept at a bus stop in the UK:

> … two nights I'm just sleeping on the bus stop tonight on the snowing. Was very hard thing… you know then my weight just 48 kg. My weight is 48 kg…. very, very slim girl, small girl. Baby girl honestly… I got no shoes and clothes not jacket I just get a suit Indian suit and very snowing (Shimmar).

Claiming she had overcome barriers by fleeing, Shimmar also explored how she had experienced different sufferings as a result of her decision. Similarly, Baelli also described how her situation did not improve despite her activities to change things. She said she had attempted to flee her husband's home, contravening and resisting the religious and cultural expectations of marriage (Yip, 2004). Telling stories of

fleeing her husband's home was a way of convincing others of her role in defying her

husband and striving to alter the conditions of her situation:

> I fled three times and have been caught three times; my
> husband's a very powerful man (Baelli).

Baelli suggested that she was caught and returned to her husband every time,

despite her attempts to rework her life. The narratives of reworking often resulted in

a futile outcome. Indeed, highlighting the futility of attempting to hide her sexuality

and keep herself safe, Anne-Laure explained how others had become aware that

she had transgressed heteronormativity. Claiming that she experienced violence and

persecution, she said she was subjected to corrective rape and faced potential

murder:

> I was raped…. My friend... my female friend was killed. If
> they caught me they would have also killed me… It was
> due to the fact of who I am. They did not accept… A week
> after I fled into this town I was told that my female friend,
> my girlfriend had been killed (Anne-Laure).

The narrative of reworking rarely (if ever) directly challenged in profound or liberatory

ways, yet discrete stories of reworking often led to stories of punishments and

persecutions, placing women in huge danger.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented the narrative of reworking, the second of the

narratives of resistance (Katz, 2004). Rather than imply the women had overtly

challenged power-relations, as described in the narrative of resistance, and different

to the stories of survival found within the narrative of resilience (explored in Chapter

Nine), the narrative of reworking provided the women with a way to talk about

change. Characterised by stories of persecution and violence, I have explored the

ways in which, negotiating and transgressing aspects of their situations, the women

emphasised their ability to adjust and alter power relations in the smallest ways. I

have also suggested that these stories served to highlight the futility of reworking and

to reinforce risk and uncertainty in their lives. Rather than minimising stories of

persecution and victimisation, the women suggested that they faced unexpected or

unwanted problems and outcomes (Conlon, 2013). Repercussions, punishments and

persecutions were central to the stories the women told about reworking, as was the

visibility of the ability of women to create change.

The aim of the next chapter is to explore the narrative of resilience which relates to

stories of women's survival in the face of constraints and abuses.

Chapter Nine:
The narrative of resilience

"… sit on a chair… eat little spinach in fridge… touch phone (Shimmar)"

In the previous two chapters I explored the narrative of resistance and the narrative of reworking. In this chapter I present the third and final delineation of resistance (Katz, 2004), the narrative of resilience. Unlike the narrative of resistance and the narrative of reworking which relate to stories about challenge and change, the narrative of resilience is reflected in accounts of the ways in which the women said they survived. Perhaps the most subtle aspect of resistance, the narrative of resilience related to the women's sense of endurance in the face of constraints and damaged identities (Letherby, 2002).

Focussed on the continuity of difficult and painful experiences, this chapter explores the ways in which the women talked about separation and living apart from their children. In spite of separation and living apart these stories were told in order to establish and maintain a sense of being a good mother and were used as a means of constructing a defence against being accused of being a 'bad mother' (Kielty, 2008; Lockwood, 2013). Important too were stories of arrest, charges brought against them, sentencing and imprisonment, which the women told to emphasise the ways in which they had managed and endured situations, as well as suggesting they had been misunderstood and misinterpreted (Letherby, 2002).

Exploring the ways in which they had avoided regularising their immigration position in the UK, the women highlighted their survival strategies in the face of indignities, humiliations and life threatening situations. Characterised by stories of gender-specific and gender-based violence (Crawley, 2000a, 2000b), the narrative of

resilience was used by the women to establish and reinforce their claims that they had suffered greatly but had found ways to survive. Aranda et al. state that "…resilience occurs in the presence of adversity" (2012, p.550). Preserving a sense of dignity, the women expressed a consciousness of their victimisation and of injustices (Skultans, 1999). Innumerable accounts of small examples of resilience were present in their stories, illustrating resilience as nothing exceptional or extraordinary but merely the ways in which the women got on with their lives every day within and beyond the UK.

Living apart

"My son was left behind… (Queenie)"

Although the women were not directly asked about whether they were mothers, stories of separation and living apart from children were central to the narrative of resilience. None of the women had all of their children living with them and by living apart they suggested they were breaking with deeply held beliefs about mothering. Reinforcing the tenacious link between women and domestic responsibility (Doucet, 2000) the women told stories of being carers; child-centred, emotionally involved and devoted mothers to their children. Popular cultural understandings of motherhood were central to the ways in which the women negotiated these stories. Arendell states "… intensive mothering ideology remains, despite cultural contradictions and diverse arrangements and practices, the normative standard, culturally and politically, by which mothering practices and arrangements are evaluated" (2000, p.1195). The narrative of resilience was, therefore, premised on dominant narratives that ultimately uphold a gendered order of society, with women in attendance as care-givers and as caring labour.

The women constructed stories of motherhood as central to who they were and they gave a huge amount of detail about how they fulfilled their roles as carers. Consistent with Lockwood's (2013) study of mothers in prison, in which she identified the narrative of the wounded mother, a major preoccupation for the women in this study was to defend themselves against being seen as bad mothers (Kielty, 2008; Lockwood, 2013). Prioritising stories of care-giving to signify good mothering and presenting accounts of how, prior to living apart, they had performed everyday care-giving, stories included ritualised practices around dietary concerns, food preparation, hygiene and bedtime routines (Falicov, 2007). Precious explained that she used to bathe her children. Diane said she had prepared her brother's dinner. May claimed she had bought and administered medicine to her brother. Stories were set against a backdrop of adversity (Aranda et al., 2012); for example, dinner was prepared even when food and money were scarce and medicine was purchased at huge financial cost whilst the family lived in poverty.

Suggesting that they had made self-sacrifices in how they provided for those they loved, the women outlined how they tried to ensure basic needs of others were met, even when they were unable to meet their own. Consistent with studies where threats are posed to women's identities as good mothers, such as Wilson's (2007) study of women who were HIV positive and Lockwood's study of mothers in prison (2013), the women's stories of self-sacrifices were used to defend their role. Self-sacrifices were aspects of the mundane and routine activities of day-to-day family life and caregiving.

Despite stories of good mothering (Kielty, 2008; Lockwood, 2013), the women also told competing, inconsistent and contradictory accounts of their lives as mothers

prior to seeking asylum. Z suggested that she had left her children in the care of her

mother when she went and studied abroad for six years:

> I receive my University place. Yeah. I left my son and my
> daughter and my mum behind, because even though if I
> live there I will not be able to help and support them to let
> them grow so I decided to go away, left them behind… six
> years (Z).

Naomi also said she had travelled abroad and worked extensively, living apart from

her children:

> I was travelling. I was all over. Within the Southern region
> I was all over. I've been to India, I've been to … I have
> travelled through this job and it was a well-paying job
> (Naomi).

Precious, too, implied that she had lived apart from her children when she was in the

UK to receive training:

> … the first time I came into this country, England, I came
> to for a study (Precious).

Most importantly, whilst the women implied there had been previous times, including

substantial periods that spanned years when they lived apart from their children, they

contended that becoming an 'asylum seeker' was the central factor that had deprived

them of the daily practices of mothering. Telling nostalgic stories about their care-

giving and time in their homelands, seeking asylum represented a shift in the

women's family-lives and caring roles. Displaced from those they cared for and

loved, the women suggested that they had faced disruption from living together with

their children and had transgressed from what family life ought to look like. Whilst

there is literature that explores how seeking asylum can involve many interrelated

family members in the care of children across different national borders (Falicov,

2007), the women outlined how their choices had been fraught with painful pitfalls

and difficult decisions. Striving to make sense of their decisions, some women claimed they had brought one or two of their children with them but had faced uncertain and potentially dangerous journeys to seek asylum. Suggesting that it had been necessary to separate from family members, and in all cases live apart from some or all of their children, the magnitude of these accounts served to highlight that these were situations that demanded resilience and the women framed their stories accordingly.

The narrative of resilience was used to outline the painful decisions about children (Schen, 2005), whilst stories were further complicated when the women spoke about making choices between which of their children would come with them and which would not. Love gave an account of the process of deciding which child to bring and which child would remain:

> I pick up my child who was twelve month old baby with me
> and because of the amount of money I had I couldn't get
> both children. I brought one and I left the other (Love).

Establishing that finances influenced the decision, Love suggested the logic of her decision given the restraints she had faced. Highlighting issues of accountability, similarly, Bintou provided a rationale for her choices, illustrated here through an 'I' poem:

> I brought the eldest son and the eldest daughter,
> I had two boys and two girls
> I know is a problem, they target the first born
> I could not bring two boys and leave two girls
> I bring the first boy and the eldest girl (Bintou).

Accounts of deciding which children to bring and which to leave were primarily storied as difficult but, constructing meanings within the narrative of resilience, the women spoke of being fair and rational. These stories were reminiscent of Frank's

'memoir' in which he suggests; "trials are not minimised, but they are told stoically, without flourish" (1995, p.120).

Whilst separating from children was often constructed as a process that had been done practically, the women also emphasised emotional care and consideration for their children:

> I started preparing and saving money to move away and I
> had to take my children away and hide them somewhere
> (Naomi).

For Naomi care for her own children was suggested by her account of preparation, financial considerations and the practicalities of hiding the children. Formulating a sense of moral identity, the women suggested that they were good mothers (Kielty, 2008; Lockwood, 2013) who had taken account of threats or risks to their children. Gloria and Caroline said they had waited until their children were adults before they had left their country of origin:

> … during that time I can't leave those kids. They are too
> small. The reason why I left now is because they are
> grown-ups… The eldest is 30 and the second is like 25
> and the last one is 21 (Gloria)
>
> She was a grown woman. I knew I could leave…
> (Caroline)

These stories implied that Gloria and Caroline had fulfilled their responsibilities as good mothers (Kielty, 2008; Lockwood, 2013) by waiting to leave until their children were adults. Similarly, despite her story of painful heartbreak, Queenie emphasised that she had been living with and caring for her son in what she believed were the important early stages of his life:

> I think when a child's at the early ages, that's the most
> important… (Queenie).

Reinforcing herself as a good mother (Kielty, 2008; Lockwood, 2013) by underlining how she had been there for the "important" years, Queenie drew on a perception that a child's need for their mother is during the early years of their children's lives (Wilson, 2007). Several of the women suggested that growth and age distinguished the end of childhood and the start of adulthood, which consequently changed their children's need for their mother (Wilson, 2007).

Also relevant was who would care for their children. Although the women acknowledged the importance of their role as mothers they implied that, in terms of day-to-day care of children, maternal nurture is the more vital component for child well-being. The narrative of resilience provided them with ways to frame their stories of how they had placed their children in the care of other-mothers (Collins, 2000). Precious said she had left her children in the care of her sister and extended family. Queenie gave a detailed description of how she had left her son with his grandmother (her mother), ensuring that a travel document was arranged for him to be able to leave the country and seek asylum in Canada. Discussing the plurality of mothering arrangements and maximising family connections, the women said that their children were cared for and loved by large, cohesive families and extended family members (Falicov, 2007).

The women's stories contributed to understandings of the complexities of mothering arrangements which are rarely included in discussion about women who live separately from their children (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997; Lockwood, 2013). Affirming that they had made good choices, several of the women maintained that the people who loved and cared for their children were the ideal other-mothers (Collins, 2000). These particular accounts also allowed them to suggest that they were shielding children from the implications and effects of living apart from them.

Whatever choices the women said they had made about living apart from their children, separation was always constructed as a difficult decision, endured rather than embraced.

Separation (and reunions) in relation to migration may create stories about an ambiguous and inconclusive type of loss that can increase women's sense of vulnerabilities and relational stresses (Falicov, 2007). Gustafson reminds us that "few mothers are more stigmatized than those living apart from their children" (2005, p.1). In order to claim the good mother position and defend themselves against potential accusations of bad mothering (Kielty, 2008; Lockwood, 2013) because of the possibility of their children coming to harm if they came on uncertain migratory journeys with them, the women suggested that leaving their children as they fled was a safer option for their children. The narrative of resilience framed their stories, pivoted on fear of persecution for their children:

> The next thing is like I'm going to die and then if I'm going to die, what is going to happen to my kids? What is going to happen to my children? (Precious).

> It was awful, really awful, and I was getting scared for my son (Queenie).

The women told stories of how they had sought to secure their children's survival, and their own, through separation. Presenting themselves as protectors of their children, the women's accounts were similar to the ones found in Kielty's study of narratives of non-resident mothers; highlighting their decisions to leave was constructed as "an act of 'real' love" (2008, p.375). Queenie said that the conditions that necessitated her to seek asylum meant that living apart from her son was an important aspect of his safety:

> … just feeling he is safe outweighs all this, what you go
> through (Queenie).

Whilst some women claimed that they had other-mothers (Collins, 2000) in the form of grandmothers and other close female relatives available to care for their children when they left, others said they were not in the same situation, with varied diasporic histories as well as different access to family support. In order to explain their resilience these women told stories about how they had been forced to make quick decisions about their migration and had left in hurried circumstances:

> … my son was left behind… it was just if you can get out
> because then I didn't know what was going to happen
> (Queenie)

> I had to do it as fast as possible (Naomi).

Constructing stories about the speed of decision-making involved with living apart, Naomi and Queenie both suggested that they had little or no control over what might happen in the future and that they were not entirely responsible for where their children then lived. Some women said they were unaware of the whereabouts of their children or had left their children in the care of people they either did not fully trust or even suspected might harm their children. Also, a number of the women implied that, as time passed, the circumstances of their children's care had sometimes changed without their consent or involvement.

Suggesting that they had had very limited choices about their children, resilience was storied around accounts of enduring the painful concerns for their children's fate and the possibility of their children's suffering. Making sense of separating, the women contended that they could meet the challenges they faced living every day with the separation. Constructing themselves as resilient mothers, they claimed they stayed in touch with their children. This form of resilience was constructed as a

continuum of mothering (Lockwood, 2013). Implying that they created mitigating

situations (Schen, 2005) that reduced the impact of separation from their children,

some women suggested that they maintained intense relationships with their

children. Lucy spoke of her frequent contact with her daughters through emails,

phone calls, text messages and letters. Queenie spoke of her devotion to her son

and how, as often as she could, she wrote letters and made phone calls:

> I ring and write whenever I can (Queenie).

Similarly, Jen explained that she communicated regularly with her children, which

ensured that her children knew she was their mother:

> I just tell them. I'm your mum. Remember me…. If you go
> there today and tell them I'm your mum they'll say yes
> (Jen).

Existing studies contend that increasing numbers of women in migratory situations

maintain intense relationships with their children and families during separation

(Falicov, 2007). Describing a multitude of roles and presence in their children's lives,

the women suggested that they sustained emotional or economic relationships with

children and loved ones, which was often not easy, but they suggested that the

quality of relationships was important. In relation to intimate accounts of how they

remembered, reflected and considered their children, the women strove to

emphasise an emotional presence. Particularly as their children grew older, they

suggested that they felt a loss in their children's shift from childhood to adulthood.

Queenie said she was full of grief as her son grew from a child to an adult:

> Absolutely heart-breaking… The problem now is he's a
> grown man… It's very emotional. I try to talk to him at
> least once a week. Just see what he's doing. But I don't.
> He tells me but I'm not there to see it, yeah, for me it's
> really heart-breaking (Queenie).

The women's desire to tell me what was happening to their children and to suggest their familiarity with their children was a way in which they expressed their good mothering (Kielty, 2008; Lockwood, 2013). However, claiming that they actually knew what was happening to their children raised other complex issues. Many women highlighted their efforts to ensure that their children enjoyed a loving childhood in spite of living apart and the dilemmas they encountered in trying to fulfil this aim. As suggested by Lockwood (2013) in her study of mothers in prison, it can be particularly difficult for women to reconcile the constraints and complexities in which mothering has been restricted and the aspects of mothering that are beyond their control.

The women said it took huge amounts of strength and endurance to maintain their mothering role and sustain their bonds with their children. Highlighting their determination to remain present in their children's lives they spoke of how they were concerned, and at times terrified, about the danger they might put their children in if they contacted them. In addition, they suggested that they potentially placed a huge risk on the people who were looking after their children. The women implied that sustaining contact with their children was sometimes done covertly:

> I'm your mum and don't tell anybody I talked… My friend,
> tell them don't tell anybody you talked to your mum (Jen).

Jen claimed she protected her children and their carers by swearing them to secrecy about the ways she stayed in touch with them. This account also served to illustrate the ways in which she valued her role as their mum.

Describing the ways in which they protected and cared for their children, some women told stories of how their worst fears had been realised when their children and loved ones became targets of persecution and violence. Lucy spoke of how she

had a personal mobile phone which she used only to communicate with her daughter. She said her daughter's phone number had been disclosed to a third party as well as her emails intercepted. A series of 'unknown' calls were made to Lucy's daughter's phone along with threatening emails, which eventuated in an attack on the building where her daughter was in hiding:

> They broke into doors and now I… just imagine she calls me and tells me now: 'Mum they are now… they've come now to the second floor. What do I do?' … You can imagine now, you are just... just helpless. As a mother you are helpless. Imagining that now they are breaking the doors (Lucy).

Reinforcing the threats and precariousness of the situations that women may face, the women implied that they endured great fears for their children. The narrative of resilience was reflected in stories of enduring fears and living with a sense of precariousness about their children.

Changing their situation for the sake of their children and emphasising their efforts to return to 'normality' (Wilson, 2007) formed no part of their narratives of resilience. The women did not imagine that their migration from their country of origin was temporary and they hoped their life in the UK would be permanent. Where a few of them spoke of hope for reunification with their children, they hardly dare speak the words and stories were told with great reverence:

> I am hoping my sister and my first born daughter might be able to come out… we might be able to have a reunion by December (Lucy).

> I am just hoping if my case can finish tomorrow or today and so that I can be reunited with my kids, and that's my wish (Precious).

'Hope' for reunification was largely absent in the women's stories and the overwhelming implication was that they believed they could face permanent separation from their children. Most of the women emphasised how they wished for their children to live in safety. Jen said she hoped for her children and mum to live happily and well, with access to an education and enough food. Despite stories of intensive' mothering (Arendell, 2000) fulfilling this ideal was a source of conflict for the women and they constantly negotiated the 'good mother–bad mother' dichotomy (Kielty, 2008; Lockwood, 2013).

Misinterpreted

"I am not guilty… (May)"

The women told stories of how they had been arrested and imprisoned or detained in the UK. The narrative of resilience was used to emphasise the ways in which they endured and survived arrest, charges brought against them, sentencing and imprisonment. Whilst Lockwood (2013) suggests that women have attributed imprisonment to unjust sentencing, the narrative of resilience differs in that the women suggested they had endured being misinterpreted (Letherby, 2002). Rather than deliberately or directly violating the law, they claimed that the offence for which they had been charged was entirely unintentional. Drawing on the narrative of resilience, in an 'I' poem constructed from her account, May repeatedly states:

> I am not guilty
> I didn't do anything
> I am not guilty (May).

Providing accounts of the severity of misinterpretation (Letherby, 2002), criminal activities were broadly contested and the women claimed they lacked intention of the crimes they were accused and convicted. Constructing an 'I' poem from Diane's

story of detention served to show her awareness of her damaged identity (Letherby, 2002):

> I am not a criminal
> I came for help (Diane).

Refuting her criminalisation, which she associated with being detained, Diane disrupted dominant narratives which have allowed for the implementation of immigration detention by conceptualising people seeking asylum as dangerous and therefore a threat to the UK (Mallock and Stanley, 2005). Diane suggested simply that she had come "for help".

Acutely aware of the stigma attached to being criminalised (Lockwood, 2013) and the potential damage to their identities (Letherby, 2002) the women used their accounts to negate being viewed as criminals by contending that they were actually victims of crime who had endured sexual exploitation and domestic servitude, and survived (Andrijasevic, 2010; Lewis et al., 2013). Charged and convicted of working illegally, May told me she had been the victim of 'child trafficking' (see Appendix One) and had been brought into the UK to fulfil a range of roles including domestic servitude and sexual exploitation. Deflecting from any potential stigma (Sandberg, 2009), May suggested she had been forced, coerced and deceived (Bletzer and Koss, 2010). The construction of an 'I' poem from May's story highlights that she said she had had no contact with anyone and knew very little about life in the UK:

> I don't live with people
> I don't talk to anyone
> I only talk to the man that brought me here
> I was at home and he didn't allow me to move or talk or even greet people (May).

This story served to illustrate May's isolation and innocence in the UK, suggesting that she was a victim. Attempting to explain to the police what had happened she

implied that she was someone who wanted to tell a "truthful" and "accurate" (Altheide and Johnson, 1998) story of her victimisation and oppression. She wanted me to know "how it is" (Letherby, 2002, 4.1), and arrest and imprisonment were constructed as unfair and unjust.

In contrast to the story May told about defending herself and trying to explain to police officials her situation, Jen said she had refused to talk to the police. She claimed she would not talk to the police about her fears of persecution. Implying that the requirement to tell her story in an asylum system represented a loss of power (Fivush, 2010), Jen said she had stayed silent when asked about claiming asylum:

> No, I will not tell you my business. It's not your business.
> It's too painful to tell you my business. I will not explain
> myself to man[38] (Jen).

Refusing to speak, particularly to a male officer, was recounted as an act of resilience. Plummer (1995) draws out attention to "the power to tell a story, or indeed the power not to tell a story, under the conditions of one's own choosing" (1995, p.26). Given the limited choices that women seeking asylum may have, silence may have enabled women to gain control over how, when, where and to whom they told their story.

Whilst silence has been defined in many ways, including as an imposition on women or a way to control, reprimand and make them invisible (Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Edwards 1998; Riessman, 1993). I drew very different conclusions about the use of silence in some of these women's stories. Silence was a way in which they described their resilience about their situation, reconfiguring their choices. Some

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[38] An extended version of this quote was also used in Chapter Three to explore the relevance of gender in the interviews.

women spoke of remaining silent or even denying to authorities that they had children, a husband or other family members. Whilst this may be attributed to feelings of relative powerlessness because of, among other things, women's immigration status in the asylum system, the narrative of resilience reflected the complexities of perceptions of safety and associated risks. Caroline said she did not disclose to the Home Office that she had a daughter who was living in South Africa, concerned that such a disclosure might prevent her from being granted asylum:

> They [UKBA] might think I was trying to get my family into the UK (Caroline).

Critically aware of the ways in which the grouping of women and children together has been a dominant narrative told about women seeking asylum (Freedman, 2008; Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2009), as discussed in Chapter Two, Caroline claimed she withheld information in order to secure her protection. Caroline suggested that she had utilised silence as a strategy of survival. Harnessing the narrative of resilience, the women told stories of using silence as a means of being accommodated in some of their limited choices. Whilst Jen equated her refusal to speak with being arrested and detained, her recognition of her situation and her choices, limited as they might appear, was extremely powerful. Suggesting that the women survived in creative and resourceful ways, resilience lay in choosing not to tell a story.

Whilst some women remained silent in the face of police and Home Office officials, others tried to make their stories understood. However, as discussed in Chapter Two, being an 'asylum seeker' was seen by some women as "pending recognition" (Tyler, 2006, p.189). Emphasising the length of time she had waited to be recognised (Tyler, 2006) and for a decision on her case (she suggested she had waited for seven years without a response), Bintou constructed an account of how

she and her children were simply 'lost' in the asylum system. Bintou also suggested

how, after those "long years", she and her children were refused asylum in the UK:

> They have not returned to me to say my appeal has been
> abandoned or anything… So we went ahead with the
> interview and then after three weeks they came with a
> refusal and they said my claim has been abandoned…
> they have never told me that. They never sent to me, not
> to my solicitor (Bintou).

Constructing stories of uncertainty about whether their claims would be understood

and accepted, the women implied that the asylum system filled them with fear:

> … It's not enough for them [UKBA] just to hear this but
> they've got to understand what we've lived through. It's
> not just listening it's about understanding. So they talk,
> they talk, they talk and they question you, and question
> you, and question you, but they have no idea what you've
> been through… I hope they understand me… (Anne-
> Laure).

Anne-Laure claimed that she doubted she would be understood and, similarly,

Shimmar was consumed with uncertainty, fixated on a comment made to her by the

case owner:

> She said 'you don't look you struggle like that in your life
> 'cos you're good' (Shimmar).

Repeating the sentence over and over again, Shimmar suggested that she was

trying to work out what it meant and appeared worried that she would not be

recognised (Tyler, 2006) as a refugee. Like Anne-Laure, she was deeply concerned

that she had been misunderstood in the interview with the UKBA. Shimmar said she

was distressed and upset, enduring feelings of doubt and insecurity about how the

case owner viewed her asylum claim and the possibility of refusal.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the individual's asylum story can strengthen their recognition of their victim status and the production and maintenance of victim status are central to the ways in which people are recognised as refugees or not (Tyler, 2006; Kea and Roberts-Holmes, 2013). Shimmar's story highlighted some of the central complexities that women seeking asylum face. On the one hand she said she needed to be viewed as vulnerable and in need of protection in order to be granted her asylum status, yet she also constructed herself as resilient, producing accounts of her ability to survive and offering accounts of exceptional resilience to the ways in which she had been treated. As discussed in Chapter Two, women seeking asylum must prove they are a "reliable, rational speaking subject whose word is dependable" (Szörényi, 2009, p.175) whilst "bearing witness to one's own oppression" (Oliver, 2001, p.93). This tension was exemplified in the infantilising statements Shimmar used:

> Was really small girl… I was very small girl, very small girl… you know then my weight just 48 kg. My weight is 48 kg. Now weight is 58 kg. Very, very slim girl, small girl. Baby girl honestly…. I'm very small girl and I don't speak English... When she showed me my married photo my picture from my marriage I cried 'cos I little I am really small girl, really small girl and I put on lipstick and that and wearing suit and I look like doll (Shimmar).

Referring constantly to herself as a: "girl" and a "child" and her body as "child-like" and 'small', Shimmar attempted to represent herself as a child rather than a woman. Suggesting that she was helpless and lacked the capacity to be a woman, she attempted to reduce the threats that may be associated with of 'adults' seeking asylum (Mallock and Stanley, 2005). Telling stories about looking like a 'doll' implied she was controllable and non-threatening (Andrijasevic, 2010), Shimmar was able to suggest that she had been manipulated into the activities of adults and being a 'baby

girl', should be offered protection. Emphasising childlike qualities, Shimmar deflected

dominant narratives associated with adulthood and reinforced her childlike

vulnerability to try and make herself understood and recognisable (Tyler, 2006; Kea

and Roberts-Holmes, 2013).

Defining their situations and representing themselves through their own stories was

important to the women. Lockwood suggests that stories can be helpful for the

women in order to differentiate themselves from other women; "…distinguishing

between the 'self' and 'other' is integral to constructing a moral identity, particularly

for stigmatised or deviant groups" (2013, p.181). Similar to the women in Lockwood's

(2013) study, May suggested significant differences between herself and the 'other'

women in prison, implying that they differentiated themselves from her too:

> Some ladies start bullying me that I do pray a lot so they
> report me to the prison officer that they believe I am doing
> voodoo because I pray and I burn incense (May).

Providing a story of the misinterpretation (Letherby, 2002), May explored the

negative cultural stereotyping. Rejecting the stories told to her by the young women

and contesting that she was not practising witchcraft, she projected back onto the

young women themselves the connotations of 'danger' and 'backwardness' (Jones,

2000):

> Whenever they [other young women in prison] are fighting
> I go to them, I preach to them to stop fighting, that they
> should change their lives. That they are privileged being
> here. That in my own case, the opportunity they have, I
> don't have it. So I try to use my counsel with them to
> change their way of living with everything… they are white
> girls. White girls, so they have to come to my house…
> they have to come to understand my religion, that my
> religion should be respected (May).

241

In telling this story May attempted to set herself aside from other young women prisoners and constructed a moral sense of self through stories of religious practice and being a moral guide for them. Conformity to the prison rules was a central aspect of May's story. Shifting any potential focus of her story away from her conviction and the accusations made against her, May attended to her own sense of morality and highlighted her moral character.

The narrative of resilience was utilised by the women who did not accept the refusal of their asylum claims. Consistent with previous research that has explored women's responses to being refused asylum (Amnesty International, 2004b, Singer, 2009; Ali at al., 2012), the women questioned the legitimacy of decision making and the ways in which their asylum claims had been misunderstood. These stories functioned to directly refute the decision on their asylum claim. As previously discussed in Chapter Two, assumptions have spawned notions that there are 'true' or 'false' asylum claims. The women reflected these by arguing that they were the 'right sort of person' with a 'genuine' claim. Defending their position as legitimate asylum seekers, they sought to establish their authenticity and credibility (Herlihy et al., 2002; Herlihy and Turner, 2007; Crawley, 2007, 2011b, 2011c) as refugees who 'belong' in the UK (Yuval-Davis et al., 2005; Gedalof, 2007). This was often done by telling stories of the consequences they or their children faced if they were refused asylum and removed from the UK:

> … if she [daughter] goes back to the ▮▮▮▮▮ now she'll be circumcised again… she'll be cut [FGM] (Bintou).

> I will die if they deport me (Diane).

> I will be killed back home (Anne-laure).

Highlighting the risks of persecution, sexual violence and death, the women tried to cast doubt on the negative legal determinations on their asylum claims and implied that they met the requirements and qualities of being a 'refugee'.

Safety and risk

"The only thing you could do is claim asylum… (Bintou)"

Some women said they had been reluctant about claiming asylum and did not initially claim. They suggested that they had avoided any attempt to regularise their immigration position on the basis that this was the best survival strategy to be able to remain in the UK. The work of Faircloth et al. (2004) is helpful here in reminding us that life threatening events may give rise to deeply personal responses which are not always constructed as disruptive but instead become embedded within narratives of endurance. The women's sense of self was revealed as tenuous and contingent on the notion of the potential protection afforded through claiming asylum.

Highlighting the risks they associated with claiming asylum in the UK, they focussed on their ambivalence about the reality of the protection that could be provided, as well as raising concerns about the risks they felt the asylum system imposed on their lives:

> I was scared to be honest. They come and take you, send you home (Caroline).

The advice of friends, family and professionals played a vital role in the decisions the women said they had made. Gloria suggested that she had been told by other people who were subject to immigration processes in the UK that she would risk being arrested if she claimed asylum in the UK:

> I was scared … everybody is so scared about this immigration issue. When you come, the way they put it before you, when you see a policeman coming you will hide… people were saying 'oh, don't go there. If you go there they will arrest you… they will send you back' (Gloria).

Elevating the notion that the UK asylum system posed particular threats to women, Bintou said she had been worried for herself and her children in claiming asylum. Ciambrone (2001) has proposed that women may construct particular threats to their situation as more or less pressing than other concerns. For example, women in Ciambrone's (2001) study constructed HIV as less of an immediate threat, being preoccupied with more urgent issues such as domestic violence, cancer or homelessness. Assessing what she perceived as an immediate threat (Ciambrone, 2001), rather than seek asylum Bintou said that she had sustained herself and her children for a considerable period of time in the UK. Having exhausted all other ways of protecting herself and her children and faced with the possibility of forced return, Bintou felt that there was no other option than to claim asylum and follow the advice of a solicitor:

> That's what my solicitor said. The only thing you could do is claim asylum (Bintou).

Highlighting that claiming asylum would not have been Bintou's primary choice, she emphasised that it was a decision to be endured. Similarly, Gloria said that she had been in the UK without regularising her immigration status for a number of years. Her central concern was the risk of being returned to her country of origin:

> … thinking of sending me back to Africa in my country is like sending me back to my grave (Gloria).

Claiming that returning to her homeland meant a death sentence, Gloria said she

had been determined not to surrender her autonomy and choices in the UK. With the

support of friends in the UK she said she had lived well in the UK:

> Well naturally I didn't come to claim asylum… when I
> came I didn't claim… She [a friend] said no problem. I will
> give you the support for it. I was there for a year. No job.
> She said, don't worry to work. You don't have children
> here. Your children are back home. I said, I need to send
> something for them. She said, that's not a problem, we'll
> do that for you. You should know that if someone goes to
> your house, you do everything for that person, so when
> you are here and you are in trouble, we need to help you
> until you get settled. So, I was there. Opened an account
> and they did it (Gloria).

Gloria suggested that the consequences of claiming asylum posed greater risks to

her than those posed by her previous living situation. Caroline also suggested she

felt the same way. Despite describing how she had been homelessness on several

occasions, as well as frequently having her wages withheld or being given

accommodation and food only in exchange for her work, Caroline claimed that she

had been reluctant to claim asylum. She said that she had survived for more than six

years in the UK in conditions that were preferable to the risks she associated with

claiming asylum.

Indignities, humiliations and survival

"… lost everything… (May)"

Work and finances were the topics of stories in which the women spoke of how they

had endured unsafe situations that, they claimed, had led to indignities, humiliations

and threats to their lives. A number of them gave accounts of their work roles (Lewis

et al., 2013) including caring for 'other' women's children, cleaning 'other' women's

houses and working in low-paid employment with vulnerable adults. Most women

said they were undocumented when they worked in these roles, which resulted in low wages or unpaid labour. May suggested that she had worked without wages:

> I do cooking, the washing and after doing every washing I
> don't have to eat the food or if they let me some to eat
> and in the night if I go to sleep I have to sleep in the
> kitchen or I have to sleep in the store (May).

Many of the women said that they lacked legal papers to participate in paid work so they worked within informal arrangements as domestic workers. Suggesting that they were fearful and lacked an understanding of legal systems in the UK, these women implied that they had been dissuaded from seeking legal status to work. Even when they said they were paid for their work, the women said it was at the lower end of occupational earnings and often involved high levels of coercion (Bletzer and Koss, 2010).

Drawing on the narrative of resilience, work was storied as providing just enough to survive in order to sustain themselves and the women remained resilient. Caroline said she had spent more than six years in the UK caring for other people's children, undocumented and without contact with any services in the UK. Her account highlighted her resilience, since these jobs frequently isolated her from her communities and friends. Not receiving actual payment for her work, Caroline said she endured her situation by surviving on food and accommodation in exchange for work. Like several of the women, she viewed herself as resilient and cited work as necessary in order to sustain herself and to survive.

Some of the caring responsibilities that the women carried out on behalf of their employers were compatible with the conventional responsibilities and roles of parenting, including waking children in the morning, dressing children, taking them to school, collecting them from school, helping with homework and feeding them. Some

women claimed they went much further with their roles, in order to give them purpose. Caroline spoke of how she openly showed affection for the little girl and baby she cared for, kissing them on their cheeks and hugging them. Through examples of emotional care (Anderson, 2001), she said she developed strong emotional ties to the children, important elements in her resilience to bear aspects of her situation.

Caroline claimed she was often left for long periods alone with the children and the children's mother did not see the children every day. Caroline was critical of this, saying she had particular blame for the children's biological mother who she felt did not express enough love for her children and who was absent from them for too long. Stories such as Caroline's allowed the women to be critical of their employers, especially those who were not employed themselves and who still did not provide daily caregiving for their own children. However, Caroline's story was also rather more complex. Consistent with Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila's study of Latina transnational motherhood, the women had criticism of employers' parenting whilst "…cling[ing] to a more sentamentalized view of the employers' children than of their own" (1997, p.566). Caroline said she had no contact with her own daughter. Speaking about the loss she felt when her work was terminated and she no longer had any contact with the children she had grown to love, Caroline said she was very emotionally attached to the children and felt a huge sense of protection for them, grieving when she was asked to leave the home. It could be that intense roles with other women's children meant she worked long hours, leaving little room for developing relationships and facilitating contact with her own child. Whatever Caroline's feelings, her story of giving care to her employer's children and supporting

them to thrive was one of resilience which, she suggested, had helped her to get by each day.

Telling stories of adversity (Aranda et al., 2012), the women highlighted their resilience by suggesting they did not entirely comply with expectations placed on them and found ways to survive. Shimmar talked about coming to the UK as a child, travelling on an adult passport, for marriage. She said she did not play any part in arranging the marriage and her family planned the event. Applbaum (1995) identifies that arranged marriages are common in many Asian cultures. Chawla asserts that Hindu marriages are generally organised by parents and elderly kin, founded on the socio-economic wellbeing of the joint family and the "discouragement of individualism" (2007, p.8). Being expected to move to the UK and live with a new family, the structure of the marriage created a constraining framework of power within which Shimmar felt in a disadvantaged position. She said she endured a very low status in the household, giving accounts of violence and cruelty at the hands of her husband and in-laws who hit her, starved her and locked her in their house. A central preoccupation was that she was not allowed to speak outside the home and was rarely spoken to in the home. Shimmar said she was not allowed to touch the telephone in the house to call her family back home, whilst her mother-in-law called her extended family to tell them she was happy and well. Yet Shimmar included stories of her acts of resilience (Katz, 2004):

> … sit on a chair… eat little spinach in fridge… touch phone (Shimmar).

Suggesting she found small ways to recuperate and preserve some dignity, Shimmar's story resonates with Katz's concept of resilient acts, enabling her to suggest not only "material and spiritual survival" but also allowing her to focus on

stories about "the recuperation of dignity in a range of small transactions" (2004, p.246).

In a different story, but similar in meaning, Diane outlined how, in a chance moment, she had managed to make contact with another young woman from within the house in which she had been locked:

> I saw one Ethiopian girl, she was passing the road. I shout. I call her. I tell her 'please'. She give her telephone number. The house. Because I want to leave the house. I beg the girl. I tell her about my problems (Diane).

In stories of survival the women strove to explain the risks to their lives. Williams argues that the "conditions which one has from birth or early childhood... are integral to an individual's biographically embodied sense of self" (2000, p.50). Survival was often a tenuous story which teetered on the edges of life and death and, in many cases, the women suggested that they simply stayed alive:

> She [employer] don't give me food. She locked the fridge and I eat the baby food (Diane).

Eating baby food was storied as a form of resilience through which Diane survived, whilst very little changed about her immediate suffering. Similarly, other women told of acute poverty, living on the brink of starvation, thirst and disease.

Often with limited access to formal schooling and education, small forms of resilience enabled the women to survive as they diversified their skills and knowledge. May suggested that she and her mother had tried to develop their skills to earn money:

> We start selling fruits. I have to sit… when we moved there we spent about six months selling fruit… (May).

The distance between "intention and actuality, between hope and achievement and between effort and circumstance" (Katz, 2004, p.151) was highlighted in the

249

narrative of resilience. Aspirations of hope often came to nothing within the narrative of resilience.

Diminished wealth and reduced resources were features of the narrative of resilience. Losing material and financial elements of her life, Anne-Laure's story included an account of the reduction in space in her home afforded to her and her mum, a diminishing area within which they lived each day. Framed within the narrative of resilience, Anne-Laure talked about how she withstood these changes in order to ensure her mother's wellbeing:

> I shared my space with my mum and basically I slept on
> the floor. We got by (Anne-Laure).

May's life in Nigeria was constructed in a similar way, exposing a significant rupture (Langer, 1991) because of the unexpected death of her father:

> My father died … we lost everything… (May).

Rather than a sense of continuity, in her story May evoked her father's death as the catalyst which framed how her material life began to reduce from the wealthy standards of having a huge house and a father with a healthy business earning plentiful money which enabled her to go to school and live in luxury. The diminishment of her family's living situation was the basis of her narrative of resilience. Enduring difficult conditions as the family home could not be paid for or maintained, May, her brother and mother moved into one bedroom in a rented house. Subsequently, unable to pay the rent, the family became homeless and lived on the streets.

Frank (1995) suggests that when disruption occurs a person may lose their sense of where they have come from but storytelling can function to repair the disruption to

their sense of self. Similarly, Riessman argues that "when biographical disruptions occur that rupture expectations for continuity, individuals make sense of events through storytelling" (2004, p.10). New conditions and situations emerged for the women and they suggested that 'small' narratives of resilience helped to sustain them through emerging situations, finding ways to survive adversity (Aranda et al., 2012).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the final delineation of resistance (Katz, 2004), the narrative of resilience. Distinguished from the narrative of resistance and the narrative of reworking, I have highlighted the ways in which the narrative of resilience related to the women's stories of survival and endurance in the face of abuses, victimisations and persecutions. Storied as nothing exceptional or extraordinary, and characterised in stories of the ways in which women got on with their lives every day within and beyond the UK, the ordinariness of resilience was exemplified in accounts of mundane activities and reflected in accounts of small and innumerable acts in the face of powerful constraints.

I have suggested that the narrative of resilience is characterised by stories of gender-specific and gender-based violence (Crawley, 2000a, 2000b) and was used by the women to establish and reinforce their claims that they had suffered greatly, finding ways to survive and preserve a sense of dignity. As Aranda et al. point out, "recognizing and validating difference in resilience does much to challenge or disrupt the dominant or normative discourses and criteria and gives voice to marginalized stories" (2012, p.553).

By extensively talking about individual survival and endurance the women seeking

asylum negotiated individual situations, making stories of collective resistance

unlikely (Riessman, 2000). Collins (2000) argues that whilst individual women may

endure or even change their individuated situations and, as I have outlined in relation

to the narrative of resilience and reworking, it is resistance and collective action that

have the potential to sustain improvement in 'all' women's lives and are necessary

prerequisites for liberation. However, the narrative of resilience enabled women to

suggest a sense of their own endurance in the face of constraints and damaged

identities (Letherby, 2002).

The aim of the next chapter is to explore the narrative of ruination. The last of the

empirical chapters, the narrative of ruination is represented in stories of disintegration

and applied both to the stories that the women told and the ways in which they told

them.

Chapter Ten:
The narrative of ruination

"… destroyed, degraded, gone (Naomi)"

Standing in some contrast to the narratives of resistance (Katz, 2004) which framed stories of challenge, change and survival, in this chapter I present the fourth and final narrative chapter, the narrative of ruination (Langer, 1991; Frank, 1995). Applied both to the stories that women told and the ways in which they told them, the narrative of ruination is reflected in the disintegration of the story and the storyteller, appearing to be the antithesis of storytelling, resisting all comforting conclusions (Langer, 1991).

Differing greatly from the narrative of resistance, in which stories of persecution and violence form a reason for continuity of self and self-worth, the narrative of ruination is embedded in stories of persecution and violence which form the basis of an exploration of the destruction and discontinuity of self. Unlike the narrative of reworking, this narrative does not suggest opportunities for change but rather is reflective of the chaos narrative (Frank, 1995). Also, different to the narrative of resilience, the narrative of ruination does not highlight the women's capacity for survival and endurance but suggests the precariousness of their lives and that their sense of self is fundamentally threatened (Langer, 1991).

Whilst narratives of resistance (Katz, 2004) may have offered some protection for the listener, constrained by disintegration (Langer, 1991) and chaos (Frank, 1995) the narrative of ruination calls the listener to bear witness to a painful accounts and characterises stories that are without any hope of life getting any better. Similar to Lockwood's (2013) stories of suspended mothering, the listener is required to "be

present with and acknowledge their own discomfort with hearing these stories" (Lockwood, 2013, p.256). Although the storytellers were actively telling stories, the narrative of ruination was utilised to emphasise their sense of utter powerlessness. Harder to tell and harder to listen to than stories framed by narratives of resistance (Katz, 2004), the narrative of ruination protests and exposes the inadequacy of ways in which to story atrocities and despair.

Dismantling illusions of choice

"I was forced…. (Baelli)"

The narrative of ruination was used by the women to tell stories that defused and dismantled any illusions about choice. Individual capacity was refuted and the preservation of choices was obliterated. As illustrated in the previous three narrative chapters, the women reflected upon episodes of persecution and violence. However, framed with the narrative of ruination, stories of persecution and violence were accompanied by a sense of helplessness and hopelessness. Baelli explained how her mother was unable to intervene when her sister was sold by their father and then, later, when Baelli herself was also sold:

> … my father forced my sister into a forced marriage as
> well and my mum was there and nothing she would have
> said would have stopped it. She didn't have a say in this...
> Mum was still alive when I was forced into this marriage…
> My mum was stood there and she doesn't know... she
> wouldn't have known how much money was given over…'
> (Baelli).

Struggling to reconcile her mother's victimisation and the deprivation of her choices, by representing her mother as doing and saying nothing Baelli suggested some of the powerlessness in women's lives.

Consistent with Langer's (1991) concept of unheroic memory, Precious explained how she decided to give a lift to two children, friends of co-activists which concluded with grave atrocities against them all. The children had accompanied her because their mother thought it would be safer for them. The group were leaving a public demonstration and feared recrimination. Precious claimed that their car was stopped by police and she said she had feared they would torture her and those travelling with her. Suggesting that she had tried to save the children, her story concluded with the children being made to remain with Precious as well as the police assuming she knew two other men passing in a car:

> …. they [police] go and pull out those guys and they say, 'You have to come with these guys [Precious and the children]. We think you know them', and I said 'No, no, no, no' (Precious).

Precious lamented how her cries were in vain and she described how she and the men were taken, along with the children and all were subsequently tortured. What could have been a story about the belief in courageous, well-intentioned heroic gestures (Langer, 1991) collapsed into an account of futile miscalculation. Precious mourned, suggesting that whatever decisions or choices may have appeared accessible she could do little to challenge or change such situations.

Any desire the women may have shown to story themselves as responsible for their own destinies proved problematic and painful:

> Home Office they say no. After that they kick me from the house. Miserable times. I was in London begging food because I don't have anything. People when they throw food in bin I go there and I eat. (Diane).

Having explained how the Home Office had refused her asylum application Diane's story was structured around deprivation of choices. Refusing to talk any further about

how she existed on the streets of London, her story was tainted by a sense of her own powerlessness which, she implied, had led to a sense of self-worthlessness:

> You know just my life is just disgusting. I can't say more…
> (Diane).

Reflecting some of the tensions that emerged in trying to explain how she survived, rather than celebrate what could potentially be seen as her resourcefulness, Diane lamented herself with disgust. Gloria also outlined her sense of helplessness, suggesting she had been stranded for several in a city in her country of origin that was occupied by rebel soldiers. She included stories of houses that had been bombed, civilians executed and the unfolding of a mass genocide. Gloria alluded to the power and force of the rebel soldiers:

> … those of us who don't have the opportunity to go out,
> and you are forced to be there, you are forced to be like
> them. You have to accept them and then you will live with
> them. That was how we lived…. (Gloria).

Describing her acceptance and indifference to some of the violence that she had encountered, Gloria implied that violence and atrocity became everyday events. Langer argues that acceptance of certain situations and circumstances depends on "unreconciled understanding… one of the most disruptive being that violence, passivity, and indifference are… unsurprising expressions of the human will" (1991, p.168).

Whilst the women had also told stories of the ways in which they had managed to stay alive and fend off death (Langer, 2006), the narrative of ruination was used to imply that they did not have a "luxury of moral constraint" (Langer, 1991, p.150). The principles of choice and dignity were defunct and Gloria refined her story with accounts of fear and terror at the situation she found herself in:

> I was there in the beginning of the war until the last day of
> the war in that country. I saw everything that happened.
> Everything… My dear war is not good… They were killing
> people and it was, it was, it was not like a secret thing. If
> they see you they will catch you in the street, like when
> they caught me before, I didn't know what to do then…
> (Gloria).

The futility of resistance (Katz, 2004) was highlighted in Gloria's explanation of her dependence on the soldiers that enabled her to live. The narrative of ruination was used to indicate that she had been forced to adopt a particular lifestyle rather than to illustrate the endurance that the narrative of resilience suggested.

Whenever stories were framed within the narrative of ruination, stories of challenge, change and survival were absent and, instead, stories of simply being alive were sometimes told incredulously:

> It is amazing I am alive… (Gloria).

> I was lucky to be alive and get out (Lucy).

> It was a chance thing (Diane).

The narrative of ruination was used by the women to suggest that they understood themselves to be alive primarily because of luck and chance. However, positioning events and situations around "choiceless choices" (Langer, 1991, p.26), the women were left with questions unanswered. Gloria wondered if she could have found a way out of the war zone:

> It was after everything has finished, everything has
> ended, it was then I asked myself could I have gotten out
> somewhere else … (Gloria).

Choices amounted to nothing more than gestures or decisions that had been made without hope or possibility. In other words, stories about the deprivation of choice

exposed doubt, confusion and regret. Precious described how she had left her children as she fled her country of origin. Her story was fraught with her sense of guilt and betrayal about the senselessness of deprived choices:

> … it was really, really hard. The choices are hard. That's why I said sometimes I feel I betraying everyone … maybe it makes sense, maybe it doesn't make sense… I don't know what to think now… (Precious).

Precious did not seek comfort in her story but suggested that she had failed and therefore judged herself harshly.

Consistent with Langer's (1991) concept of choice, the narrative of ruination was utilised to expose that believing in choices is an illusion that betrays victims. Seeking to expose the magnitude of deprived choices, Z said she had left behind her mum and her children:

> I left three children and my erm, mother…. It was tough to leave children and older mum. She should be looked after. In our country, there is no any kind of support for children and for older people. I was the only person responsible for my mum and for my children… (Z).

Z wrestled with her story of leaving loved ones, alluding to her own sense of remorse and recrimination. Her story dismantled her sense of mothering conventions (Lockwood, 2013) by constructing an account of how she had recognised her responsibility for her mum and children but had left them.

Highlighted in the narrative of ruination was the profoundly negative and distressing impact of separation from loved ones. Whilst the narrative of resilience explored in Chapter Nine was utilised to tell stoic stories (Frank, 1995) about separation and mothering, the narrative of ruination was used to reveal unending suffering. Guilt was

258

a hallmark of the women's stories when they were living apart from loved ones and the narrative of ruination within their stories exposed their choices as irreconcilable.

Diminished self

"I'm living like dead life (Diane)"

The narrative of ruination was used to reflect "the diminished self" (Langer, 1991, p.162). Stories included surviving the extremities of ethnic and religious fighting and the atrocities of genocide and war, the "undertow of historical circumstances" (Katz, 2004, p.151). The women said they had feared that they could be killed at any moment and that their lives could have been extinguished. Anne-Laure suggested that her family, the police and the government had a particular kind of power:

> I was raped by the police and I had no way of speaking
> out…to kill you is an honour because they have that
> power (Anne-Laure).

Similarly, Bintou spoke of how her own life and the lives of other women had been considered to be without value and, therefore, she had been positioned as irrelevant:

> They [family] can kill me you know. Nobody would stop
> them. They would just bury me and that's it. That will be
> the end of it. That will be the end of it (Bintou).

Located in ordinariness, the women suggested that persecutions and victimisations took place across the globe. They included accounts of people who made attempts on their lives whose powerful positions meant that their own deaths would be irrelevant to the authorities. Diane spoke of working for a woman who tried to kill her:

> … she [the woman Diane worked for] was trying to kill me.
> She was pushing from the building (Diane).

Diane described herself as one of many women working in domestic servitude whose lives could be taken from them without legal recourse. These types of

treatment are well-documented phenomena in places where there is a poor record of punishing abuse against domestic workers and a high number of murders (Human Rights Watch, 2012). Common too were stories told by the women of multiple attempts on their lives, sexual violence and threats made by people employed by the state or in senior positions of authority, suggesting that this was not particular to their own story but rather reflected the status of women:

> So the police can come and rape you and the next day you might see them but you have no rights to say he or they raped me. So if you do or if you were to say something a car would come in the middle of the night and take you somewhere, eliminate you and no one would know anything… (Anne-Laure).

Enduring terrorising situations, the women told harrowing stories of how other women, children and men did not survive:

> A little baby died. I don't know who owned that child. It was about six or seven years. She was running behind me. The gunman. She was shot dead behind me. She died and there was no one to pick her up (Gloria).

These stories served to emphasise the status of those who, the women thought, were considered "disposable people" (Bales, 2004):

> They are killing a lot of people and no one cares. No one tell police. No one. Sometimes the police doing it (Diane).

The women's lives were storied in ways reminiscent of Agamben's (1998) conditions of "bare life", where a human life is rendered bare and legally abandoned, reduced to such a point that it does not count. These stories identify how 'bodies' are abandoned "excluded by and from judicial law" (Pratt, 2005, p.1054). The lack of state protection and the lawlessness of the situations that the women spoke about served to highlight that there would have been impunity if women had been

murdered. Kameniar asserts, "life is so devoid of value that s/he can be killed with impunity… the power of life can be taken from her" (2009, p.289).

Feelings of abandonment were storied as part of the women's sense of diminished self and ruination, even seeking asylum in the UK:

> I lost my identity. I did. I feel I don't fit anywhere at the
> moment. Even though I'm safe, I'm in limbo (Queenie).

Losing a sense of who she was, Queenie's account suggested that the diminished self "casts a long, pervasive shadow" (Langer, 1991, p.172) over her story. Stories of the past colonised present situations, invading and occupying future possibilities. Lucy also told a story of being forced out and victimised:

> I've been forced out, by my own community, my family
> also, my extended family because they call me a traitor…
> I've been victimised by my own community, everyone that
> I knew, even my friends everybody, my family… I am left
> here with nothing (Lucy).

Similarly, Z talked of what it meant to be a refugee. Aligned with Darling's (2009) analysis of becoming 'bare life' through seeking asylum in the UK, Z suggested becoming a refugee was 'bare life' (Agamben, 1998):

> … you feel you've been thrown out from your mum's
> womb. So when mum is cruel sometimes to her unborn
> baby she give abortion. That's what I feel. So being a
> refugee is a huge challenge in life (Z).

The narrative of ruination testified to the women's sense of isolation, abandonment and rejection. Precious and Diane suggested that their sense of self had been greatly diminished and they asked similar questions:

> Where am I? (Precious).

> I don't know what I did. What did I do? (Diane).

The narrative of ruination was often a way of asking rhetorical and iterative

questions, illustrating a loss of direction and purpose. Adapting the metaphor of a

shipwreck, Frank (1995) suggests that stories reflect when an individual loses a

sense of where they are going, where they have come from and who they are. Diane

stated:

> Just there is no future now (Diane).

Reflecting that their sense of self had been lost, the women suggested they had

been "hammered out of self-recognition" (Frank, 1995, p.103). Fatou explained how

being an asylum seeker placed her in situations whereby she was rehoused and re-

dispersed several times. As noted by Feldman (2013) and Refugee Council (2013b),

dispersal policies in the UK asylum system have put the health of pregnant women

and their babies at risk because of the requirements of constant moves around the

UK, leaving women isolated and without the benefit of essential healthcare or their

support networks. Fatou suggested she could see no future worth anticipating since

the death of her baby and a refused asylum application had ruined her:

> Nobody will help you. They tell you whatever, they tell you
> gona suffer, suffer and suffer. I will die like that, I know. I
> will die (Fatou).

Fear of death and dying were ever present in the narrative of ruination. Unlike

studies with women who spoke of the potentially fatal nature of their situations but

highlighted the importance of surviving, such as mothers affected by cancer (Billhult

and Segesten, 2003) and women with HIV infection (Doyal and Anderson, 2005), the

narrative of ruination was used by the women in this study to suggest they were

going to die soon. Frank states that "suffering is literally a dead end… monadic self-

enclosure" (1995, p.176). The women told stories that conveyed a sense that they had been denied a future and faced a death sentence:

> It's like I'm living like dead life. Dead life. Nothing (Diane).

Diane's story of an agonising existence propelled the listener to understand her as "dead life". A story of impotence, Frank has identified the "non-self-story" (1995, p.105).

One may have imagined that the narrative of ruination would have been alleviated by stories of being granted asylum but this was not always the case. Lucy made sense of her new found legal status as a refugee, constructing accounts of grief for the life she said she had lost and being absent from her present self:

> … everything I know is back home. It's only my physical
> form that is in the UK honestly. Everything I do, even my
> mind is still back home… (Lucy).

Driven by a sense of anguish, Lucy claimed she had been plunged into deep distress. For Lucy, clarifying what was in the past and what made sense about the present was a huge challenge. Similarly, Love also suggested she had completely lost sense of who she was:

> I went mad. I felt like I lost everything in my life [Crying]
> (Love).

Love utilised the narrative of ruination to emphasise loss. Other women too spoke of severe losses, both human and material (Dyck and McClaren, 2007) and their sense of self was diminished. Suggesting they were profoundly isolated, similar accounts have been found in Knudsen's (1993) research with Vietnamese refugees who told stories about their powerlessness and great suffering and in Eastmond's (1993, 2007) study of women refugees, whose stories were characterised by struggle and

suffering, accounts of illness and depression. Rather than creating common bonds across stories with other women seeking asylum, as the narratives of resistance attempted to, the narrative of ruination meant the storyteller positioned herself as diminished.

Haunted

"I don't know if she alive or if she dead (Anne-Laure)"

Evoking the presence of victims in their lives, the women's stories were replete with and haunted by ghost figures (Doucet, 2008). In Chapter Nine I suggested that the narrative of resilience served to connect and reinforce the women's relationships with the ghosts of their loved ones and created a way in which the women resisted their invisibility. In contrast, the narrative of ruination was used by the women to suggest that they were haunted by ghosts (Doucet, 2008) and felt lost in thoughts of the past. Consumed by stories of her daughters Lucy said she felt herself becoming absent from her life in the UK and suggested she did "crazy things":

> Sometimes even I ahhh, ahhh, like now, we do so many
> crazy things like… to feel that you've not talked to another
> human being all day or for two days you've not talked to
> anybody…. Sometimes even I … you get to a point where
> you feel that you need to talk and I talk to myself… (Lucy).

Constructing accounts of how she mourned her persistent isolation Lucy, like many of the women, found that unanswered questions arose about whether her loved ones were alive or dead. Owing to the women's sense of their persecutory histories there was the notion that loved ones had been just lost or hidden from them. Highlighting complex feelings the women suggested that they felt overwhelming terror and fear when there was no information about their loved ones:

> I don't know, because I am here. The son is with my
> husband's brother. The daughter is with my husband's
> sister. I don't talk to them. I don't have any access to
> them. No information from my mum… (Bintou).

Bintou and Naomi said they had had no contact with and received no information about their children. The narrative of ruination was used to suggest they were painfully constrained. Relying on others for contact with their children the women also implied that information and contact had been denied them:

> They [brother and sister-in-law] didn't allow me to talk to
> her [daughter] (Naomi).

Along with having no access to or being denied information, the women spoke of disappearances - Lucy's daughters, Precious' brother, Anne-Laure's mother, Baelli's sister, Z 's husband, and Diane's brother and mum. Loss and absence were conflated with endless hauntings (Doucet, 2008) and mourning, overwhelming grief and an impasse of melancholy (La Capra, 1999).

Conciliation and resolution were exposed as impossible within the narrative of ruination. For the most part, the narrative of ruination captured the women's sense of limbo and suspension. Fraught with uncertainty and doubt the women said that they suspected their loved ones had already perished and would not be found. Constructing an 'I' poem from Diane's story, her sense of her mother being dead is suggested:

> I don't know if she alive or if she dead
> I don't know… maybe dead (Diane).

Diane's account about her brother and mother is indicative of Frank's (1995) chaos narrative. Characterised by a loss of hope and a sense of despair, she returned to this situation throughout the interview, increasingly incorporating accounts of

265

destructive and disruptive events, actions and circumstances. Whilst stories of continuity can emerge despite disruptive events (Faircloth et al., 2004; Lockwood, 2013), Diane's story related to her sense of self that was greatly reduced with every destructive and disruptive event. Similar to Lockwood's notion of women's lives "spiralling out of control" (2013, p.226), Diane's doubt about her family's unknown fate constantly troubled her and haunted (Doucet, 2008) her story.

The narrative of ruination provided the women with a way to suggest that there was always the possibility that their loved ones were not alive and that their loss would be permanent. Encompassing accounts of victims who had not survived or who were not present to tell their own story, Diane told of her father's death, her brother's death and the suspected death of her mother. Similarly, Anne-Laure said she suspected the death of her mother:

> So it's only my mum and myself and I have no idea where
> my mum is up to now and I feel very lonely. I don't know if
> … I think they killed my mum…. (Anne-Laure).

Anne-Laure suggested that she was isolated by the loss of her mum and loneliness was central to the narrative of ruination. Baelli described the ruination of her family as one by one the women in it were abandoned, exploited, disappeared and killed. She suggested that she had been deprived and had no hope for reunification:

> In my heart I don't know what I want. The things I want
> can't happen. Even God can't make that happen…
> (Baelli).

The disappearances of Baelli's only sister and mother were a constant reminder of a shattered life which she struggled to bring together in her story. In a rare moment, Baelli sought to affirm her own life:

> I know that I'm living (Baelli).

266

Baelli's own claims of living were used to juxtapose the potential death of her sister and mother, exposing some of the anguish of storytelling. Highlighting a paradox in the women's stories, accounts of their loved ones' potential deaths were not always viewed as final but rather deeply relational to those who had survived. Langer states;

> "… the concrete meanings of words like "survival" and "liberation" blur, because they cannot be separated from the doom of those whose "preoccupation with survival" failed… Individual "successes" are inevitably tainted by this conjuncture, "I'm alive" … simply lacks the moral resonance of "I survived" (1991, p. 23, original emphasis).

Also, consistent with Lifton's (1967, 1980) concept of survivor guilt, the women suggested that they had feelings of guilt for surviving and potentially outliving their loved ones. Through narratives of resistance the women explained how they had done their best to survive, change and challenge; the narrative of ruination was used to suggest that living was in contrast to the deaths of others. May suggested a slow spiral towards every material and living person in her life being reduced to nothing. Drawing on the narrative of ruination, death of family was central to understanding May's story:

> … So I was with my mum for three days sitting down with her and she's already give up [died] because I don't know what to do. I can't dig. I can't bury… (May).

Constructing an account of the destruction and death of her family May suggested she was left alone with only the dead body of her mother. Left with a death imprint (Lifton, 1967), the women's accounts were saturated with loss and deprival (Langer, 1991).

Damaged

"I felt a refugee back home (Love)"

The women used the interviews to establish and reinforce their claims that they had unhappy and abusive histories. Unlike Skultan's (1999) study of Latvian refugees who politicised their narratives through defining their histories in relation to large public historical moments rather than personal experiences, the narrative of ruination was not used to map public events or collectivise women's experiences. Reinforcing a damaged identity (Langer, 199; Letherby, 2002), Love suggested that isolation and exile had been manifest since childhood:

> When you ask someone who is the closest person to you
> they go my mum or my dad… for me, with those people I
> felt really… I felt a refugee back home (Love).

Situating victimisations as symptomatic of the complex and persecutory nature of their lives, the women invested in the concept of women seeking asylum as being irreparably damaged. The narrative of ruination was used to disrupt any notion that there might be opportunity for recovery, repair and personal growth. Unlike 'restitution narratives' (Frank, 1995) the narrative of ruination suggests that construction and reconstruction are futile. Whilst Riessman states that "when biographical disruptions occur that rupture expectations for continuity, individuals makes sense of events through storytelling" (2004, p.10), the narrative of ruination was used to suggest that the damage could not be repaired.

Emphasising damaging conditions, the women told stories about religious conflicts within their family histories that had brought persecution in early childhood:

> My mother's family have never liked me because my
> mum's a Muslim and my father wasn't a Muslim. So after I
> was born and my father died they actually chased my

mum out of the village when my mum was pregnant they didn't want her there because they knew that she was pregnant to a man who wasn't a Muslim (Anne-Laure).

Like Anne-Laure, religious persecution formed an intrinsic part of the story that May told to explain her victimisation:

My father came from a very traditional Muslim home and my mother is from a catholic background, a very strong Catholic background. Both of them chose to marry each other which the two family is not happy with. So, when they chose to go with their love I think the two family disowned the both of them… All I know is that we're all alone… I think religion was the really capital of threat to my family (May).

Similarly, Diane said that her mother and father had different religions and came from different countries. When Diane's father was killed she made sense of the persecution she and her mother faced through her story of religious intolerance:

My father, he a Muslim and she's [mother] Christian… So they burn the house. My father is dead. My brother run… I think do this, because they don't like he married a Christian (Diane).

The women's accounts illustrated the importance they attached to establishing and reinforcing stories of personal religious and childhood persecutions.

Embodied pain (Uehara et al., 2001) shaped the women's stories and stemmed from various forms of gender-based and gender-specific violence (Crawley, 2000a, 2000b). Providing evidence of their violations and bodily damage, the women showed me the scars on their bodies and talked about their broken bones unhealed, deep grooves and welts on their bodies, skin broken, violated and marked through burns, assaults and beatings. Jen and May claimed they were bitten several times by men and showed me their scar tissue. May said she had cigarettes repeatedly put out all over different parts of her body:

269

> …whenever I refuse he start putting out cigarettes on my body. If I'm shouting he put cigarettes on my body, all over my body… There was a day when I start shouting and my voice was so loud and he bite me on my back (May).

The physical and psychological pain that the women described indicated embodied injuries. Women drew on the narrative of ruination to tell stories about their body disintegrating and deteriorating. Some of the women included accounts of their bodies being so damaged that they had found themselves unable to urinate or walk and bleeding profusely. Baelli described how pain had prevented sleep:

> I couldn't sleep and I was screaming in my sleep. I was just so troubled I just couldn't sleep. It was just like when my father gave me away. I just couldn't sleep… my whole body hurt and I felt so bad and I just couldn't understand what was going on in my body but I was really bad. I felt awful, pain and everything. Also I had lots of pain where I'd been cut and that didn't go away (Baelli).

Baelli's story of her pain tainted much of her story. She suggested that sudden and debilitating attacks were frightening for her and she never fully felt in control of her body. Anne-Laure indicated that rape had left her traumatised:

> That [rape] stays with you forever, for life. It traumatises you. Especially somebody you don't know takes you and rapes you. You feel like toilet paper, used toilet paper (Anne-Laure).

Similarly, Diane and Precious constructed an overwhelming sense of physical and psychological damage, propelling their stories towards an imminent fatal ending. Both women implied that they remained constrained by the damage of the past which impeded any future:

> I've got a lot in my head. I don't know how to sort myself out (Precious).

> My brain is damaged now. I can't do anything. I don't
> have any future… (Diane).

Precious gave an account of how her chaotic thoughts constrained her and her damaged body overwhelmed her (Uehara et al., 2001). Marked by acute and debilitating symptoms, Diane outlined various illnesses, pains, depression and ways in which she had lost control of her body and mind. Shaping a vision of the extent of her damage in the stories of Diane's sheer quantity of illnesses, there was no containment, treatment or solution (Uehara et al., 2001). Enumerations of illnesses were bottomless, suggesting all was wrong in her mind and body (Frank, 1995). Scarry reminds us that "physical pain has no voice, but when it at last finds a voice, it begins to tell a story" (1985, p.3).

Pain and assaults of the past were frequently a source of pain and assault in the present:

> I still feeling the pain every time … and I will still be feeling
> the pain every year and go through it (May).

Recalling images and events over and over again, the women suggested that their bodies were still damaged and they relived their experiences again and again:

> Every time I see, I recall this image of my mum being
> raped and myself at the same time… (Anne-Laure).

Consistent with the study of Herlihy and Turner (2007) who have highlighted that when people witness highly emotive and traumatic events they may involuntarily recall those events over and over, Gloria suggested that she had involuntary responses to loud bangs and noises:

> Like Christmas time, those boys are shooting those
> things. It affects me. It affects me so badly… like if I hear
> gunshot I will go to the toilet four, five times (Gloria).

271

The women told stories of how they relived particular experiences that were not subject to conscious recall (Hellawell and Brewin, 2004). Despite being sensitised to particular moments in their lives which they repeated in their stories, some of the women said they were unable to speak about what they found profoundly immoral, degrading and shameful events. Herlihy and Turner (2007) point out that "when people feel shame they find it difficult to disclose personal information" (2007, p.4). There was a reluctance to tell some stories and it may have been that the women could not bear to speak them out aloud or for me to bear witness (Blackwell, 1997). Precious attempted to tell me about how she was tortured but could not utter the fullness of her story:

> I was, I was having my menstruation at that time and um, I had pads and stuff and this guy put the dirty stinking stuff and put it in my mouth, let me sniff it... I said... with horrible words and ... (long pause)… It was a nightmare. It is up to now, a nightmare… I can't… (Precious).

With the final words "I can't…" Precious stopped speaking, irrevocably unfinished and her language shattered (Scarry, 1985). Uehara at al. have argued that women face situations so unprecedented saliently, chronic and ubiquitous that making sense of their lives can mean "los[ing] the ability to think about oneself within such a context" (2001, p.33). For Fatou, having spoken of being "forced" to do many things she did not want to, at times she said she simply could not tell her story any more:

> I can't talk. I feel bad…. Sometimes I just sit down and keep quiet. I don't want to see anybody or talk to anybody. That's my life sometimes… (Fatou).

Indicating that the fragmentation of her mind and body created obstacles and challenges, Fatou suggested she could not overcome her situation.

Stories of degradation and damage oscillated between anguish and impassivity. It was not uncommon for the women to imply disassociation from their bodies (Frank, 1995; Aristizabál and Lefer, 2010). Conjuring up a sense of numbness, acceptance and bleakness, there was a ceaseless tyranny in the ways that events and situations were constructed:

> There were different categories. If you are so young and beautiful, the women, they will ask your father to rape you first. After raping you they will take you out. Give you to one of the men. That was the suffering of the women. The men, they were forced to take drugs (Gloria).

Gloria constructed this story calmly, emphasising the gendered way in which women and men had been treated and highlighting the meaninglessness and senselessness (Langer, 1991) of the events. Her story was filled with bleak passivity. In contrast, emotions of anger, fear, terror and shock were also present in some women's stories. For Lucy, her sense of the capacity of human beings had been drastically altered and her fear of all people was acute:

> … very good people, religious people, intelligent, professionals all decided to kill other people just because they don't belong to the same tribe … today they are good and tomorrow they just become even worse than animals… this was just killing because somebody has told them to do it… frightening (Lucy).

Suggesting that the summation of events and persecutions in the women's lives had left them with great suffering, they claimed that they were "hostages to a humiliating and painful past" (Langer, 1991, p.xi). Contending that they would always be affected, the women suggested a level of irreparable damage to their identities (Letherby, 2002), embodied pain (Uehara et al., 2001) and an overwhelming sense of destruction (Scarry, 1985).

273

Disruption and degradation

"… you feel you've been thrown out from your mum's womb… (Z)"

As discussed in Chapter Nine, some women suggested that they felt a deep mistrust of the potential protection afforded through the UK asylum system. Identifying a number of UK policy and practice related concerns, the women focussed on stories of how their safety and the safety of their children had been compromised and threatened. Having no right to work, the women said they were forced to live on minimal 'subsistence payments' (see Appendix One). For Jen, being refused the right to work as an asylum seeker was constructed as a disruption to her role as a mother. Jen said she had spent the last seven years earning money and sending remittances for her mother and two children in her country of origin. Expressing deep distress that claiming asylum meant she was no longer working and earning money, Jen suggested that the requirements imposed on her by the UK asylum system were a direct threat to herself and her children:

> I have to work to survive. Told me no…. I tell them, how do I pay my rent? How do I survive? How do I eat? My kids are there. If you put me here now, right now, no working of anything, my kids. I have mum to look after. I have two kids [crying] (Jen).

Stories of poverty and hardship within the UK asylum system were further aspects of ruination that the women highlighted. Fatou identified the voucher system which, she claimed, was not enough money to survive on:

> It's not easy. Have voucher it's not easy. How you gonna buy [crying]. Very hard, not easy … I can spend Tesco, Sainsbury, Asda -they're expensive. Boots. Yeah £35. The problem is okay for food if you're alone. £35 is not enough money (Fatou).

Fatou, like some of the other women, suggested that she found it hard to buy essential things. Emphasising their own suffering and the degradation they felt along with other women, their stories were consistent with the Parliamentary inquiry into asylum support for children and young people (2013) which states that some people seeking asylum in the UK "…have no access to any support at all and many others where the level of support is inadequate to meet basic living needs" (2013, p.iii).

Further risks to women and children were identified by the women in relation to stories of detention. Consistent with Lockwood's (2013) research about women in prison, the narrative of ruination was utilised to construct detention as a major disruption to and source of degradation in the women's lives. Stories of the perceived injustice of the asylum conditions were drawn upon to illustrate the ruination to the women's sense of self and their lives. Ongoing threats to her sense of self were expressed by Naomi, who had been detained with her children in the UK as part of the asylum system:

> The respect I used to receive from my kids went. I didn't understand at first until when they saw me being humiliated by the officers… I can say it is no longer the same, no matter what, it was destroyed, degraded, gone and honestly to be an asylum seeker, you become useless… you become useless, you lose your dignity (Naomi).

Highlighting a loss in mothering status through the narrative of ruination, Naomi's sense of powerlessness over her detention with her children was suggested. Identifying feelings of humiliation and loss, both Naomi and Diane spoke at length about the distress and suffering they experienced when they were detained by UK immigration authorities. Diane spoke of "many bad things" that were done to her when she was incarcerated. Literature on detention facilities in the UK reflects the

widespread development and use of the detention of those seeking asylum (Cohen, 2002). Detention centres have been based on large mixed populations, leading to concerns about the disregard for the safety and security of detainees held in immigration detention facilities (Mallock and Stanley, 2005, BID, 2009, 2013).

Beyond the incarceration in detention facilities in the UK, the women told stories of confinement which restrained them and caused them to feel very restricted within their lives outside of detention facilities. Gill (2013) and Smith (2013) have argued that prisons and detention facilities are not the only form of confinement or manner of restraint, identifying the notion that confinement includes not only the restriction of free movement of the body but also of the mind. Disruption to the women's lives, owing to the asylum system and immigration surveillance in the UK, have generated stories about confinement "independent of physical restriction" (Gill, 2013, p.27). Detention has perpetuated harm to women after release from detention (Smith, 2010; 2013).

Dispersal was another concern shared by the women, who claimed they had their lives disrupted through the dispersal process. The women claimed they had built up networks of support and established themselves within communities or networks, only to be dispersed to other places across the UK. Gloria expressed distress that claiming asylum had resulted in being forced to move away from London and placed in shared room accommodation. She suggested that she had become very ill because of dispersal and was eventually hospitalised:

> It was a nightmare and that's how things became worse. There's no one to explain your problems to. She [room-mate] can't speak a single English… Was left alone in the room. I think I became very ill. That's when I was taken to the hospital. Spent three weeks in the hospital (Gloria).

Gloria was not alone in identifying different harmful aspects of UK asylum policy. Fatou spoke of the distress at the level of surveillance in her life and having to report at an immigration centre every week throughout her pregnancy:

> Even the day I'm having my baby I go to sign in ███,
> that very day. Yeah. Eventually go to sign in ████. I
> don't expect that day, but I enter on the bus. It's very far
> … very far journey like this… Before every week. Since I
> had baby, every week, every week… All that good seven
> months I'm going every week, every week (Fatou).

Fatou's story focused on her baby, who was born very prematurely and was hospitalised for more than seven months. During this period Fatou said she had continued to visit the baby every day but one day a week she made the long journey to sign at the immigration offices forty miles away. She emphasised that even on the day she gave birth, she went to report. This painful story of weekly reporting culminated in an account of how Fatou's baby had subsequently died, suggesting the disruption and degradation of her life caused by seeking asylum.

Refused and dismissed

"…they came with a refusal and they said my claim has been abandoned (Bintou)"

In Chapter Nine I explored the ways the women utilised the narrative of resilience to imply that they had to endure being been misunderstood (Letherby, 2002). However, the narrative of ruination was utilised to explore the multiple ways in which they felt their legal entitlements to protection had been systematically undermined, eroded or refused. The responsibility for their asylum claim being refused was positioned firmly with the decision making process and there was little hope of reprieve. As I have explored in Chapters One and Two whilst the right to claim asylum is absolute, the right to receive protection is not (Clayton, 2010).

Attempts to invalidate the decision on their asylum claims were directed towards UKBA caseworkers and individual court judges. Naomi and Bintou both spoke of what they considered was a culture of disbelief (Glidewell Panel, 1996; Amnesty international, 2004b, Hynes, 2009; Souter, 2011) in the Home Office. Naomi raised particular concerns about the influence of dominant narratives on the decision making process:

> I just feel it is inhuman, not to believe people's stories… I feel the caseworker have got a lot of mistrust… (Naomi).

Naomi implied that mistrust was the context that led to her case being refused. Other research has reflected similar issues and concerns;

> "… the culture of disbelief has arisen from the Home Office's acceptance of the familiar and widespread assumption among politicians and the general public that large numbers of asylum claims are unfounded, mendacious or 'bogus', and are made by 'economic migrants' as a means of improving their standard of living" (Souter, 2011, p.48).

Reinforcing the perspective that there were problems within the Home Office, the women suggested that the conduct of their asylum interviews lacked basic care and respect (Crawley, 2013). Recounting gross insensitivity by the Home Office about their asylum claims, the women suggested that they continued to feel deeply distressed:

> I have this problem. They said they don't believe me. I am liar. I am this. I am that. I don't know why. Everything I tell them they don't believe me (Diane).
>
> The judge when we went to court yes the judge he called me a liar … this hatefully untrue (Bintou).
>
> Even when you're fleeing, even if you end up in a hole for security or safety - that's what you do. So now I'm fighting for safety (Anne-Laure).

The narrative of ruination was sometimes used to highlight the influence of dominant narratives impacting on the asylum decision making process (Singer, 2009, Muggeridge and Maman, 2011). May suggested that problems were accelerated by the inexperience and lack of skills of the case-owner who took her asylum statement:

> … unfortunately the immigration boy that came, I can say
> he was twenty two twenty three, a very early age…
> immediately he write it on my immigration statement that
> she is lying… he wouldn't listen to me as a woman
> seeking asylum (May).

Suggesting that her case was easily dismissed because of the lack of dignity or value placed on her as a woman and an 'asylum seeker', May said she had been refused asylum but identified that she had a number of physical injuries and was in shock, which caused her to bleed profusely during her initial asylum interview. Her point was to assert that "a professional" and someone older would have experience and understanding of her asylum claim. Lucy also said she had very negative accounts of making her claim for asylum:

> The lady who I met there at the Home Office was very
> rude and I really broke down because I tried telling her my
> case but to her she just thinks that ▮▮▮▮▮▮ is a tourist
> attraction so she doesn't... she seemed not to know that
> there is another side of things and another side of it. So
> she started screaming at me, it's rubbish what I'm telling
> her... it's lies… (Lucy).

Lucy's story hinged on the aggression, dismissive behaviours and rudeness of officials. Emphasising the degradation she felt, Lucy indicated that she was so upset by her treatment that she almost abandoned her claim. Consistent with the literature on decision making processes on women's asylum claims, as discussed in Chapters One and Two, both May and Lucy highlighted a lack of gender sensitive approaches

within the UKBA policies and practices towards women (Singer, 2009; Singer and Chandler, 2010; Querton, 2012; Ali et al. 2012).

The narrative of ruination fuelled stories of scepticism and acute frustration about being misunderstood (Letherby, 2002), refused and abandoned:

> The next day they dismissed my case. They say you are
> not allow to do appeal. That is the mistake. From that day
> is the mistake (Diane).

Diane said she saw a mistake in the decision on her asylum claim. Similarly reflecting some of the ways in which women have faced substantial difficulties being granted asylum in the UK (Crawley, 2000a, 2000b; Singer, 2009, Muggeridge and Maman, 2011; Hargrave, 2013), Fatou felt that the evidence she had gathered had not been understood properly and that, despite a Judge ruling on the medical grounds for which she had provided extensive evidence, the Home Office had refused her asylum claim:

> They say it's not enough for them (Fatou).

Each woman who received a refusal on her asylum claim or was denied a visa from the Home Office suggested they felt a sense of dismissal and faced great hardships:

> … when I went to apply they refused me and it was hard
> Kate, hard. I couldn't… I didn't know what to do. What am
> I going to do now? The next thing is like I'm going to die
> and then if I'm going to die, what is going to happen to my
> kids? What is it going to happen to my children?
> (Precious).

Precious questioned the diminished possibilities of her future and the precarious situation of her children's future. Similarly, Bintou explained how her asylum claim was refused:

> We went ahead with the interview and then after three
> weeks they came with a refusal and they said my claim
> has been abandoned… that case has been abandoned …
> even if they mention the appeal has been abandoned they
> have never told me that. They never sent to me, not to my
> solicitor… all abandoned (Bintou).

Bintou highlighted how, in the refusal of her claim, she was also abandoned. Langer points out that "memory excavates from the ruins of the past fragile shapes to augment our understanding of those ruins" (1991, p.128). Bintou suggested that she felt she and her family were cast aside, abandoned and vulnerable to removal; a situation she said would lead to their deaths. Like Bintou, Diane included desperate stories about the asylum system in the UK. The refusal by the Home Office to grant her asylum was storied as a devastating event in her life. Diane expressed misery:

> I came here for help. If they don't want to help me they
> have to explain why me… everybody is like me is asylum
> you know. If they don't help, why just every time my life
> they send me miserable letters. If I open it every time they
> refuse, refuse (Diane).

Constructing the refusal of her asylum claim as an irreparable disruption and the consequences of the negative decision as utter dismissal, Diane said she could see no way forward with her life. The ever present risk of deportation was an unbearable anticipated future in Diane's story. By casting doubt on her asylum story, this pivotal point of refusal revoked any hope for Diane and her life plummeted towards ruination:

> Every time just I cry. So many times, you don't believe me
> I was just trying to kill myself. Many, many times. But I
> didn't die. I don't know. I did it very hard to die because it
> was too much for me and 2009… 2008 I been on tribunal
> court and they refused me… the judge he say just he
> cross it. He say 'Your case is dismissed. You are not
> allowed to do anything in this country. As soon as
> possible you have to leave' (Diane).

Shrouded in dismissal and rejection, Diane's story removed any possible hope that claiming asylum might have provided.

Refusal' was represented by the women as a profound rejection to their sense of self, storied in their loss of sense of who they were and the dismissal signalled a lack of hope for any story of the future. Taylor argues that "in order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become and of where we are going" (1989, p.47).

Chaos and confusion

"No one can understand… (Anne-Laure)"

The narrative of ruination not only applied to the stories that the women told but also to the ways in which they told their stories. Reflected in the disintegration of the story and the storyteller, the ways in which the women told their stories became disjointed and difficult to follow at times. Similar to both Frank's narrative of "chaotic bodies" (1995, p.102-104) and Langer's narrative of "anguished memory" (1991, p.39-76) the women were not always able to construct coherent narratives. Within the narrative of ruination, narrative structures were frequently chaotic or abandoned (Frank, 1995).

Injustices that had provided the women with narratives of resistance (Katz, 2004) were dismantled and they struggled to retain and tell their stories. Anne-Laure became a faltering witness whose sense of self was frequently characterised by statements about not knowing. An 'I' poem from Anne-Laure's story illuminates her pain, doubt and confusion:

I don't know
I don't know when I will see her [mum] again
I don't know if I'll see her alive or dead… (Anne-Laure).

282

Whilst professing "I don't know", Anne-Laure frequently became overwhelmed

(Uehara, 2001) with trying to finish her story and it became an "incommunicable

ordeal" (Langer, 1991, p.25). Similarly, highlighting two 'I' poems from Diane's story

illustrates how she was consumed by the same doubts and full of fear:

> I don't know…maybe he run…
> I don't know
> I don't know
> I don't contact her
> I can't contact her
>
> I scared now
> I can't think
> I'm not comfortable
> I don't know what to do
> I don't know who to talk
> I don't know why, why my case.
> I don't know why
> I don't know (Diane).

The narrative of ruination framed negative self-statements of 'I don't know'.

Also present in the narrative of ruination was but long pauses and stumbled,

unfinished sentences. Scarry (1985) suggests that acute pain resists language.

Inconclusive stories and permanently unfolding tales full of incomplete sentences

were central to the ways in which the storytellers reflected the narrative of ruination.

Deprived of narrative frameworks, stories did not always emerge and events or

feelings could not be explained:

> Since I've been here I've seen lots of changes and I left
> my country for ... to find something better and I can't really
> explain, but since I've been here...I can't quite explain
> what it is that I feel at the moment (Baelli).

Expressing an uncertainty, Baelli suggested that she could not recognise herself and her story was left unresolved. The impact of decisions simultaneously affected the women's capacity to tell certain stories:

…too difficult to hold it and to deal with that (Z).

Jen too felt the situation was "too hard" and she tried not to think about it:

I have two kids [crying]. Look after… Only my kids… I don't even think about this. I don't think about this in UK. I think about my kids. I'm a mum. If I see people with kids I want to kill myself 'cos I don't know my kids… oh my kids [crying]. To leave your kids that is too hard (Jen).

Jen spoke desperate, tearful and chaotic expressions of grief. Highlighting the inadequacy of storytelling, Good reflects on "when the intensity of pain can only be expressed in cries and the contorted body" (1994, p.30).

Diane's story about being unable to move beyond chaos and confusion became increasingly confused and confusing to listen to "a mosaic of evidence that constantly vanish[ed]" (Langer, 1991, p.21). A sense of surveillance and threat was reflected in chaotic accounts of multiple attacks, the possibility of a police presence, and her fear of being constantly watched, told without sequence or structure; I was uncertain who was watching who, when and where. There was a timeless quality to Diane's story and events unfolded without any chronology and linkage yet with disturbing and unsettling qualities:

I am giving up now. Especially last night. I went to sleep. I can't sleep. Many police around my house. I am not killing somebody. I am the one who was attacked. I am the one I go and I report. What is the problem just they come around my house and sit down. They are looking at me. What is this? I don't know. I don't what to do. I am very angry. I don't know what to do (Diane).

284

Overwhelming aspects of her story eroded its coherence. Frank describes this as "chaotic bodies" (1995, p.102-104) whereby people are subject to uncontrollable forces on their mind and body and are unable to story the situation. Uncertainty and distress in Diane's storytelling were evident.

Reflecting on the present, with seemingly no hope for the future and without understanding the past, Frank notes the "incessant present" (1995, p.99) in some stories which refute a future worth talking about. Reflexive narratives, which might have allowed the women to talk of themselves, were simply absent and an imagined future remained too painful. In a similar way, stories told by Cambodian refugees (Uehara et al., 2001) and Bosnian refugees (Eastmond, 1998; Mosselson, 2010) did not contain hope for the future.

Whilst telling stories may be a critical vehicle for making meaning and sense of our lives (Riessman, 1993; Plummer, 1995, 2001), the narrative of ruination was not always successful in making sense or meaning. Even with great conscious effort, the storytellers were unable to communicate their stories and the narrative of ruination caused havoc with their storytelling. Struggling to make sense of how, despite leaving dangerous situations, they and other people continued to be persecuted and even murdered, the women told stories about their terror. Precious's story was filled with fear and she spoke about two of her close co-activist friends who were both murdered in 'safe' countries outside of their country of origin:

> … the worst thing is like they're guys who are anti-government they were in South. These guys, they were found dead in the morning in their rooms... somebody can just fly from ▮▮▮▮▮… you know they can do anything (Precious).

As if to emphasise the extremity of her terror, Precious' stories began to shift and change as she gave accounts of how friends and family, as well as co-activists, were picked up and tortured and murdered. In contrast to the narrative of resistance, which was used to name and identify those who were dead or had been murdered as a way in which to resist their invisibility, the narrative of ruination was used to suggest the women's feelings of responsibility for the deaths of others (Langer, 1991). Responsibility for others' deaths was one of the few ways that the women could make sense of these stories.

In efforts to call the listener to witness atrocities, the women were graphic and detailed in their storytelling, drawing on stories of cruelty, humiliation and destruction. Illustrating gratuitous brutalities, the women's stories seemed to intentionally wound and offend by assaulting the senses "…dar[ing] us to accept the condition of vulnerability" (Langer, 1991, p.28). Precious unsettled sense of security emerged and succinct but brutal accounts punctuated her story; the use of a red-hot iron imprinted on her body; children witnessing her sexual assault; her brother tortured; her aunt's house firebombed. Recounting seemingly endless flows of violations became part of the interview and these violations were painful reminders of the sheer volume and magnitude of suffering and pain within these women's lives.

The chaotic way in which some stories were communicated meant that the women almost lost the sense that I was there as a listener. For Shimmar, refusing to speak about the death of her unborn baby was a forceful point:

> I don't want to talk about it... about that. Oh my god I
> can't...I don't want to remember that thing…. No never
> (Shimmar).

286

Despite this statement Shimmar's story seemed to spill forth and she recounted violence directed against her by her husband and his family; threats were made to her and to her own family which she felt resulted in a miscarriage and her baby was killed by her marital family. Engulfed with grief and despair as she told this story, at times Shimmar seemed more in dialogue with herself than with me. The manner in which her account emerged within the narrative of ruination, was eloquent and poignant and born out of grief, chaos and confusion (Frank, 1995).

While at times I may have struggled to make sense of what was being storied, the narrative of ruination also failed the storyteller who often descended into chaos. Eastmond (2007) suggests that those seeking asylum may struggle to create a sense of continuity, "… a struggle between the moral imperative not to forget and the extreme pain of remembering" (2007, p.259). Raising the issue of 'narratability' (Frank, 1995, 2010, 2014a, 2014b), literature on the role of trauma and memory has indicated that the violation of people's bodies and minds may constrict storytelling in relation to the fragmentation of memory (Langer, 1991). As the women struggled to make sense of their lives there was an utter disintegration of values and hope for a better ending. Langer states that "witnesses struggle with the impossible task of making their recollections… coalesce with the rest of their lives" (1991, p.3).

The narrative of ruination served to reveal impossible situations that imagination struggles to interpret and stories were shredded by emotion (Letherby, 2000). The women were frequently unable to assimilate their sense of self within the stories. Whilst the narrative of resistance offered a way to talk about challenge, change and survival, the narrative of ruination challenged the assumptions underpinning these narratives. The inadequacy and fragility of narrative frameworks left women narratively constrained by chaos and wreckage (Frank, 1995).

The wound is a source of stories[39]

"Sometimes you feel that you will not be understood by other people (Z)"

There was no comfort and protection in the narrative of ruination for either the teller or the listener. I listened heavy hearted, at times bereft and often with profound despair. The women resisted any attempts to reach a "comforting conclusion" (Langer, 1991, p.69). Offering no hope or resolution, these were inevitably difficult stories to hear (Frank, 1995). Whilst I may have wished to mediate and find some hope or resolution in the women's stories, they defied these impositions. Langer has specifically identified a tendency in interviewers to guide the storyteller towards stories that resonate with "the resiliency of the human spirit" (1991, p.32). Drawing on soiled situations and refuting grace in hopeless circumstances, words of comfort or nuanced responses of support were rebuffed by the women in the interview. Frank notes "chaos stories erect a wall around the teller" (1995, p.103) and I recognised that the distress of listening to the narrative of ruination and seeking alternative narratives may have been symptomatic of my own desire to hear other narratives.

What I came to believe is that to understand the narrative of ruination we, as listeners, need to find a way to handle our fears and confusion, entering into imagining what we think is unimaginable. The narrative of ruination exists because of the women and their efforts to pull together the threads of their stories to try and make sense of anguish and pain, suffering and despair, sometimes without end. For many of them, their reflections sometimes took place even when they appeared to lack the ability to tell their story or the understanding to give meaning to the stories of their lives (Uehara, 2001). This included the women reflecting on the present with

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39 This title is taken from an Arthur Frank quote from The Wounded Storyteller (1995, p.183).

seemingly no hope for the future and without understanding the past (Langer, 1991;

Frank, 1995). It is precisely in the narrative of ruination that the storyteller exposes

the listener to severe and painful accounts of their lives.

Reflecting a counter or anti-narrative (Somers, 1994; Frank, 1995, 2010; Miller,

2005), the narrative of ruination railed against the limited stories available to women

seeking asylum. The inadequacy of ways in which to story atrocities and despair was

exposed. Making sense of our lives is a role for storytellers but stories that do not

make sense severely limit storytellers. The women wrestled to speak about events

and situations whilst facing the constraints of physical injuries and psychological

fear, despair, anguish and confusion. Reminded of the inadequacy of narratives

available, Z illuminated this issue:

> When I said painful that's so easy to say that word ummm
> when you out it in words it's so simple, really simple… I
> mean, the painful word I don't know what kind of word I
> should have to use to explain the painfulness…. I am
> using the painful, painful, painful, I don't know another
> word (Z).

It was not just the lack of words available to Z but also her scepticism about whether

she could be understood:

> … sometimes you see yourself you do not belong.
> Sometimes you feel that you will not be understood by
> other people. They don't understand. Nobody
> understands who hasn't had this kind of experience (Z).

Places, events, situations and circumstances which deliberately seek to destroy or

disable human beings leave the storyteller with the burden of how to shed light and

tell the story. Langer states "the anxiety of futility lurks beneath the surface of many

of these narratives" (1991, p.xiii). Whilst Frank (1995) argues that stories can heal

and that wounded storytellers are engaged in recovering their voices and witnessing

their situations, the narrative of ruination defies any sort of healing within the story or for the storyteller. Gathered here in this thesis and presented together, a "communal wound" (Langer, 1991, p.204) that has not and will not heal, are stories told in relation to the narrative of ruination.

Listening to the narrative of ruination challenges the listener to abandon orderly responses. Langer states that such stories play a role, "forcing us to redefine our role as audience throughout the encounter" (1991, p.21). Similarly, Frank (1995) suggests that listeners are those who care and therefore become willing witnesses to a story. The storyteller who dares the listener to listen, comprehend and witness the narrative of ruination compels their audience towards acknowledging a painful, chaotic reality. As Anne-Laure said:

> It's not enough just to hear this … got to understand what
> we've lived through. It's not just listening it's about
> understanding (Anne-Laure).

The denial of hope and possibilities for the future places a compelling responsibility on the listener. If no one is in control (Frank, 1995) and no one wants to hear, the telling of ruination becomes a powerful story, compelling the listener to recognise and witness conditions that may have previously been beyond words, abandoned, marginalised or left unheard. The narrative of ruination reflects stories that attempt to tell about suffering and ruination, potentially creating a relationship (Langer, 1991; Frank, 1995; Plummer, 1995, 2001). Empathic bonds can be forged between storytellers and listeners, expanding those bonds outwards as the stories are retold.

Those who listen can go on to tell others, widening the story, and I suggest we can all be changed by listening to the stories of women seeking asylum. Goldenburg asserts;

> "Culled from a language still foreign to them, and often punctuated by anguished silences, whispers, sighs, shrugs, palms open to sky, angry emphasis, ironic smiles, tears, and silent weeping, these narratives are powerful attempts to communicate what cannot finally be communicated – in any language. Still, we have listened to the words, transcribed them, read them over and over, analyzed them, quoted them, taken them into ourselves. They change us, drive us, inspire us -- every day. They give a voice to the silenced and will not be still. Neither will they let us be still. They challenge us all to do justice to them, and to do justice -- and live justly -- in an unjust world" (2002, p.216).

The narrative of ruination is important to stories which can help us appreciate our own (potentially privileged) situations, challenge our concerns and increase our compassion for others, whilst perhaps being transformed and compelled by what we are told. Langer argues;

> "To share this dissonance with a perception built from the ruins of mutilation without being crippled by it ourselves is the summons we face when we embrace the legacy of these testimonies, which bear witness to the simultaneous destruction and survival…" (1991, p.38).

Storytellers who evoke pain and horror for the listener may also create the potential for compassion and bonds that compels the listener to respond.

Whilst the losses outlined in these stories do not call for hope or renewal, this does not mean that the listener cannot understand. The narrative of ruination can undo a negation of such stories and begin to break down the chasm that separates listeners from some of the stories told by women seeking asylum. These are not unimaginable or incomprehensible accounts. Those who find themselves drawing on the narrative of ruination may be immersed in chaos and not hear the call their storytelling can offer to others but, as Frank suggests, "… the wound is a source of stories, as it

opens both in and out: *in*, in order to hear the story of the other's suffering, and *out*, in order to tell its own story" (1995, p.183, original emphasis).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented the fourth and final of the narrative frameworks, the narrative of ruination (Langer, 1991; Frank, 1995). I have explored the ways in which the narrative of ruination applies both to the stories that the women told and to the ways in which they told their stories, reflected in the disintegration of the story and of the storyteller.

Contributing to our understandings of the devastating situations and circumstances within which these women storied their lives, I have explored how the women's stories dismantled illusions of choice and highlighted deprivation of choice. Differing greatly from the narrative of resistance, I have outlined the ways in which the narrative of ruination is embedded in stories of persecution and violence, stories that form the basis of exploring the destruction and discontinuity of self and suggest the precariousness of the women's lives and their sense of being fundamentally threatened (Langer, 1991).

Not simplifying or attenuating the stories of the women seeking asylum, I have explored how "the wound" (Frank, 1995, p.183) was a source of stories for the women which compel an audience towards acknowledging a painful, chaotic reality. Forging empathic bonds between storyteller and listener, I have suggested that the narrative of ruination does not mean that the listener cannot understand and does not reflect unimaginable or incomprehensible accounts, but that those who listen can forge bonds with storytellers, respond to their stories and go on to tell others; thus we can all be changed by listening to such stories from women seeking asylum.

The aim of the next chapter is to provide a concluding discussion for the overall thesis, reflecting on the key contributions and making a number of recommendations for future research.

Chapter Eleven:
Concluding discussion

"I always think… I understand… I know (Precious)"

Introduction

The main aim of this research is to increase our understanding of the stories of women seeking asylum in the UK. This chapter provides a concluding discussion for the study and explores the key contributions of my thesis. Reflecting on the research process, I make a number of recommendations for future research.

Women's stories

Nirbhaya[40]

The daily struggle of women seeking asylum to create lives free from persecution and sexual violence is central to the participants' stories. Highlighted throughout the empirical narrative chapters, I have attempted to reflect that, although the women also spoke of many different persecuted groups, it was the gendered nature of violence targeted at women and girls, as well as the routine use of sexual violence that was emphasised in their stories. They discussed many different political, cultural and historical situations across the globe and the ways in which they had been targeted and abused. Consistent with the findings of Canning (2011a, 2011b), multiple forms of sexual violence and persecution were described as widespread and remained a prevalent social problem across the globe, including accounts of events in the UK and in the women's countries of origin. The women suggested that

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[40] Nirbhaya means 'fearless one'. It was the name given to Jyoti Singh, a young woman who was raped by a number of men on a public bus in Delhi, India, subsequently dying of her injuries in December 2012. This title was chosen because this section specifically focuses on stories of persecution and sexual violence and I wanted to remember 'Nirbhaya', showing solidarity with the international struggles of women, children and men across the globe who have taken up this name as a symbol of the work for women's lives to be free from persecution and sexual violence (see Southall Black Sisters, 2014).

persecution and sexual violence were some of the situations that had made it necessary for them to seek asylum. Some of the women described how persecution and sexual violence were still very much part of their present and everyday lives.

In Chapters One and Two I explore the increased globalisation of rights-based approaches, such as the development of the United Nations and the creation of a number of international human rights conventions including the Declaration of Human Rights and Refugee Convention. I also discuss that, in the latter half of the twentieth century, there has been a growing international awareness of the vast, systematic and disproportionate prevalence of persecution and sexual violence against women and girls across the globe, alongside attempts to define discrimination against women and set up agendas for international action to end such treatments (CEDAW, 1979; United Nations, 1979; Platform for Action, 1995; UNHCR, 1991, 1995, 2002a, 2002b, 2006, 2008, 2009). Despite these developments the women said that they had been discriminated against and their rights had been violated. They also claimed that states did not provide adequate protection or, in some cases, condoned or had been directly involved with the persecution of women.

Listening to the women's interviews I was also aware that, across the globe, the 'ordinary' and 'everyday' perpetration of rape, sexual violence and murder against women and girls, by their families and communities, was being reported in the media (UNHCR, 2013a, 2013b; Integrated Regional Information Networks, 2014), including some high profile cases in Northern India, Sudan and Pakistan (The Guardian, 2014). Given these particular and powerful contemporary stories, I make a number of recommendations for further research in this area. Although there are international and domestic conventions, legislation and policies intended to prevent, eradicate and

respond to persecution and sexual violence against women, the women suggested there remains a gap in implementation. Some reports even point out that persecution and sexual violence against women and girls are increasing within both the domestic sphere and conflict zones (Amnesty International, 2004a, 2005; Canning, 2011a, 2011b).

Addressing issues of gender-based and gender-specific violence (Crawley, 2000a, 2000b) requires urgent attention. Assuming that gender-based and gender-specific violence should never be seen as an inevitable aspect of conflict or war or within domestic arrangements, there needs to be further research on sexual violence and the persecution of women which starts with the stories of women. In order to continue and renew the agenda for global action, I maintain that there is an urgent need to move towards bringing individuals, families, communities and states across the globe to account for the persecution and abuse of women, predominantly pushing for more adequate recognition, challenge and an end to these violations. Despite changes in UK national legislation with the introduction of the A.I. (discussed in Chapter Two) and a number of domestic initiatives and developments to specifically target domestic and sexual violence against women and girls[41] (Home Office, 2013b) it is vital that the UK government does not overlook or marginalise women seeking asylum (Singer, 2009, 2014). For example, whilst sexual violence in war and conflict has been well documented, the women indicated that authorities in the UK continue to show disbelief at disclosure within their asylum stories (Glidewell Panel, 1996; Hynes, 2009, Souter, 2011; Canning, 2011a, 2011b). In order to ensure that the UK government fulfils obligations to respect, protect and fulfil international

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[41] The UK Government published a vision of how it would tackle the issue of domestic and sexual violence in November 2010 - 'A Call to End Violence against Women and Girls' and in March 2011, publishing eight-eight actions that would take the strategy forward.

obligations to women and girls, further work should be urgently done to ensure that women undergo a fair process in the asylum system, alongside opportunities for adequate support for women around persecution and sexual violence whilst seeking asylum and living in the UK. It remains vital that we continue to strive for the rights of women seeking asylum to be considered as important as other women's rights, and for all women's rights to be seen, respected and protected as human rights (Platform for Action, 1995).

Particularly pertinent to the stories of women seeking asylum is the possibility of legal protection (Herlihy and Turner, 2007). I suggest that stories not only shape our lives but that our survival may depend on telling the 'right' story (Qwul'sih'yah'maht, 2005; Woolley, 2012). Exploring the role of credibility and authenticity (Herlihy et al., 2002; Herlihy and Turner, 2007; Crawley, 2007, 2011b, 2011c) in an asylum claim, I argue that being granted asylum depends on the ability of the individual to tell a verifiable victim story, forming the basis of recognition for asylum (Herlihy et al., 2002; Querton, 2012; Kea and Roberts-Holmes, 2013). Narrowly defined terms may be problematic for women seeking asylum telling stories about their lives, depriving them of the opportunity to express themselves and to fully comprehend the necessary conformity of their story when claiming asylum (Woolley, 2012). The particular concerns about women's representation of persecution and sexual violence towards them could be addressed more fully within academia, investigating ways to better protect and support women seeking asylum.

Narratives

Women's stories were unique and varied, shifting and changing according to the ways in which women made sense of their lives and themselves, and how the listener made sense of the stories. Accommodating both agency and intentionality

(Doucet and Mauthner, 2008), the women drew on four central narratives and the narratives of resistance, reworking, resilience and ruination had deep resonance in their stories. Assisting the women in "holding one's own" [42] (Frank, 2014b), the narratives of resistance, reworking, resilience and ruination are not independent but work in relation to each other. None of the women's stories conformed exclusively to any of these four narratives and accounts included all of the narratives, contesting and confronting each other in multiple ways.

Maintaining the relationship between the narratives creates a useful analytical framework for exploring the stories of women seeking asylum. Hearing these narratives as singular (or dominant) risks the stories of women being fragmented or the women being represented as 'types'. Therefore, these four interconnected narratives should be heard as necessarily relational to each other, the narratives acting as resources for telling and listening to stories (Frank, 2010).

Discussed through the work of Cindi Katz (2004), Arthur Frank (1995) and Lawrence Langer (1991), theories of resistance and ruination have been explored, adopted and adapted in response to the women's stories. I suggest that researchers need to be transparent about the development of narratives to enhance an understanding of storytelling, recognising that stories are not created by individuals themselves but reflect and draw upon available resources (Frank, 1995, 2014a, 2014b; Plummer, 1995, 2001; Phoenix, 2008). We cannot claim to know the possibilities or limits of a woman's capacity for telling stories and some things may have been lost from these women's stories by grouping them together. Nevertheless, there is much to be

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[42] Arthur Frank used the phrase "holding one's own" in a Lecture (2014b). 'Holding one's own' emphasises the storyteller's capacity to base their story within a narrative framework that has a broad cultural recognisability and therefore they can make themselves understood. Frank (2014) suggested that 'holding one's own' has the potential to reduce the diminishment of an individual's sense of self as well as being more than simply coping.

gained from identifying what such stories tell us about the ways in which women construct their sense of self and their lives and the narratives that shape and inform those stories.

Further research adopting resistance, reworking, resilience and ruination to explore the stories of women seeking asylum is recommended in order to develop these narratives. A longitudinal study exploring the narratives of women seeking asylum could enable consideration of how the context of narrative frameworks may change over time. Such research could potentially form the foundations for the development of practice and services to support women seeking asylum.

Whilst the narrative frameworks of resistance, reworking, resilience and ruination were developed from the stories told by the women in this study, they are useful concepts with potential transferability to exploring other women's stories. There could be particular gains to be made from utilising the narrative delineations of resistance and the narrative of ruination, particularly where dominant narratives and stereotypical representations have impacted on women and where there are narrow understandings about the multiple and complex stories that women tell and that can be heard.

<u>Narratives of resistance, reworking and resilience</u>

In Chapters Six, Seven and Eight I explore how the women's stories reflect the narratives of resistance, reworking and resilience. Examining the ways in which the narrative of resistance is represented in stories of challenge, the women constructed a particular sense of self through stories of the ways in which they live. Used to affirm the women's sense of self-worth, stories of persecution and violence formed a reason for continuity of self. Rarer than the narratives of reworking and resilience,

the narrative of resistance was used by the women to construct accounts of themselves within protagonist roles, positioning themselves as actively engaged in overt initiatives which have agendas of liberatory and emancipatory change. Stories that reflect the narrative of resistance were used to illustrate the women's roles in disrupting conditions of exploitation and oppression. The women included accounts of individual, collective and organised acts in their countries of origin and in the UK.

Through stories of outright and direct resistance the women told of organised resistance through forms of social and political activism. Claims made about the types of activities that the women took part in and the networks they were part of direct the listener to understand participants' "oppositional consciousness" (Katz, 2004, p.251). Seeking asylum and struggling for better living conditions were storied as acts of resistance (Scott, 1985, Riessman, 2000) to persecution and violence. Prioritising and emphasising their activities, knowledge, skills and expertise, the women claimed public spaces as their own, evoking the relational role of organisations, networks and activities. Suggesting they were aware of gendered expectations, the women outlined how they have actively utilised some of those expectations to build relationships and develop community resources, pointing out that these activities have sometimes led to transformation and collective acts of resistance (Scott, 1985, Riessman, 2000). Stories of sustained commitment to activities of change and improving situations across the globe allowed the women to construct themselves as moral agents. Enabling them to remember and resist their loved ones invisibility, participating in the research provided the women with a way to claim the interview as a site of protest.

Meeting some of the challenges posed to them as women seeking asylum and the tensions between how they construct themselves in relation to how others position

them, the women drew on the narrative of resistance. The women said that they perceived there to be risks associated with telling their story but that they came forward to participate in this research anyway. Whilst the narrative of resistance is reflected in stories that had varying outcomes, the women were able to make particular claims about their sense of self which stand in stark contrast to the dominant narratives told about and for women seeking asylum in the UK.

Drawing on a more nuanced delineation of resistance (Katz, 2004) I have explored the narrative of reworking. Represented in stories of change, the women sought to establish and reinforce their claims of having capabilities and being resourceful. The narrative of reworking is less ambitious than the narrative of resistance and less ambiguous than the narrative of resilience, reflected in stories of indirect resistance. Shaped around the women's negotiations and transgressions, rather than attempts to fundamentally change or challenge power-relations, I highlight how, although victims of persecution, their presentations of themselves contrast with dominant narratives of passive, helpless victims (Malkki, 1995, 1996; Eastmond, 2005). Whilst people may be victimised, Hitchcock (1993) argues that their significance not only resides in their status as victims but in the transformations they may bring about. The women provide insight into the ways in which they perceive violence and persecution and how they want to be understood as women who have reworked aspects of their lives because and in spite of their victimisation.

Seeking to establish themselves as women who have reworked their situations in a multitude of circumstances, the women offer the listener a sense of their abilities to change and transform their situations, as well as to explore their associated losses (Eastmond, 2007). This way of telling stories also allowed the women to highlight the futility of reworking rather than the celebratory potential for the achievements of

resistance. Whilst telling stories of reworking does not always include effective change, it did entail the women forging stories about their capacity for change.

Reflecting the third and final delineation of resistance (Katz, 2004), I have explored the narrative of resilience. Unlike the stories about challenge and change that emerged in the narratives of resistance and reworking, the narrative of resilience is reflected in stories of survival. The most subtle aspect of resistance within this study, stories explored the women's endurance in the face of constraints and abuses, asking the listener to witness their survival. Aristiȥabál and Lefer assert that "if you have lived through physical or emotional violence and survived, you have resisted the attempt to extinguish your being" (2010, p.100).

Exemplified in accounts of gender-specific and gender-based violence (Crawley, 2000a, 2000b), the narrative of resilience emphasises the ways in which the women recuperated and recovered themselves. Storied as nothing exceptional or extraordinary, they spoke of small assertions of dignity and innumerable accounts of resilience; the ways in which they simply got on with their lives every day within and beyond the UK. Shaping extensive talk about survival and endurance, the narrative of resilience makes stories of collective resistance unlikely (Riessman, 2000). Positioned as witnesses of injustices (Skultans, 1999), the women drew on the narrative of resilience to shore against ruination[43], expressing a consciousness of their persecution whilst not directly undercutting their subordination and victimisation.

In taking up some of the concepts offered by Cindi Katz (2004) and, in the light of my research, I have a number of observations to make concerning resistance. Katz's

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[43] The idea of 'shoring against ruination' comes from T.S.Elliot who states at the end of his poem 'The Wasteland "These fragments I have shored against my ruins" (1922, line 430).

302

(2004) delineations of resistance, reworking and resilience were primarily concerned with observing and accessing people's personal resources, capacities and potential for promoting change, sustaining themselves and their communities when faced with adversity (Aranda et al., 2012). As discussed in Chapter Five, Katz (2004) located resistance as an exceptional attribute that belongs to some people in addition to the more commonplace attributes of reworking and everyday resilience. Privileging it as an innate attribute, Katz (2004) positioned resistance as something that one has or does not have, something that can be explored through observation and practices.

Moving away from Katz's (2004) concepts about observation and practices of resistance, my interest in the analytical role of resistance in this study is premised on a different notion. Believing that people tell stories and that all stories are influenced or shaped by narrative frameworks (Plummer, 1995, 2001; Phoenix, 2008), the analysis of resistance is central to understanding the stories of the women. Selbin suggests that "what is imperative… is that along with the material and structural conditions which have guided our investigations of resistance, rebellion, and revolution, we must find a place for the role of stories (and narratives)" (2005, p.4). Taking a Listening Guide approach, it was helpful to listen carefully to the women's stories and to identify and subsequently name narrative frameworks in order to understand the ways in which the women enable listeners to understand their stories. As a result of this conceptual shift, I have attempted to extend Katz's (2004) concepts of resistance, aligning resistance, reworking and resilience within a narrative framework and utilising narrative approaches to explore the concept of resistance (Frank, 1995, 2010; Plummer, 1995, 2001; Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, 2003; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008; Andrews, 2014).

A narrative approach to resistance can offer a complex and nuanced rendering of individual women's stories, acknowledging that women have access to different narrative frameworks and facilitating further understandings about their stories through the narratives which have shaped them. Shifting the concepts about the 'practices' of resistance by individuals (Riessman, 2000; Katz, 2004) to the narrative role of resistance creates the possibility of understanding the ways in which women appropriated, challenged, disrupted and resisted dominant narratives. I contend that researchers should try to open up spaces within which we can 'recognise', listen to and understand the diverse, creative and pragmatic ways that women negotiate their own stories, better serving participants if future research were to open up the potential for them to tell their own stories about their lives.

The narrative of ruination

In Chapter Nine I present the fourth and final of the narrative frameworks, the narrative of ruination (Langer, 1991; Frank, 1995). Differing from the stories of challenge, change and survival that were framed within the narratives of resistance, the narrative of ruination reflects the disintegration of the storyteller and of the story. This is the narrative least told and applied both to the stories that the women told and the ways in which they told their stories. Resisting all comforting conclusions that might simplify or attenuate stories (Langer, 1991; Frank, 1995) and speaking of compounding chaos (Frank, 1995), the women struggled to tell their stories. Aristizabál and Lefer have suggested that"…disassociating, dividing yourself and separating from your body, is what help[s] you live through trauma" (2010, p.100). Through the narrative of ruination storytellers isolate and marginalise their situations. Frank (1995) argues that both telling and listening to stories can play a role in healing wounded storytellers. In contrast, the narrative of ruination suggests that

some storytellers defy any sort of healing and can be heard as an anti-narrative (Frank, 1995).

Despite appearing to be the antithesis of storytelling, I also argue that the narrative of ruination is not an unimaginable or incomprehensible account. Those who draw on the narrative of ruination may be immersed in chaos but "the wound is a source of stories" (Frank, 1995, p.183). No matter how overwhelming or insurmountable the task of telling, listening and making sense of these stories may be, the narrative of ruination offers a framework within which to understand the ways the women present aspects of themselves that enable listeners to understand their stories.

Arthur Frank's (1995) 'chaos narrative' and Lawrence Langer's (1991) narrative of 'divided and diminished selves' have been central in providing the conceptual basis for my discussion about the narrative of ruination. Whilst Frank (1995) developed the 'chaos narrative' to look at critical illness and Langer (1991) utilised narratives of 'diminished and divided selves' to explore holocaust testimony, these concepts are very helpful in exploring the stories and the ways in which the women tell their stories. Railing against the limited narratives available to women seeking asylum, the narrative of ruination highlights an absence of narratives within which to allow their stories to emerge fully.

The impact of ruination on them as storytellers posed a particular challenge for me, leading me to hear more anguish, pain, confusion and deep sorrow than I ever wanted to imagine. In making sense of the narrative of ruination listeners need to find a way to handle fears and confusion, "find[ing] some entry into the realm of disrupted lives and becom[ing] sensitized to the implications of such disruption" (Langer, 1991, p.20-21). Seeking recognition and provoking the listener to reconsider their role and

how to be an audience to the story is the challenge of listening to and understanding the narrative of ruination. The denial of hope and possibilities for the future places a compelling responsibility on the listener. Those who hear the narrative of ruination can be changed and altered by such stories, "challeng[ing] us all to do justice to them, and to do justice - and live justly - in an unjust world" (Goldenburg, 2002, p.216). Storytellers who draw on ruination not only potentially evoke pain and horror for listeners but hold the potential for compassionate and bonds, demanding that the listener recognise and witness stories that may have previously been beyond words, abandoned, marginalised and left unheard. Langer argues; "…built from the ruins of mutilation without being crippled by it ourselves is the summons we face when we embrace the legacy of these testimonies" (1991, p.38). Those of us who are willing to listen are obliged to bring into perspective our shared humanity and bear witness (Blackwell, 1997).

The Listening Guide

An approach to research

Utilising the work of Andrea Doucet and Natasha Mauthner, I specifically took a Listening Guide approach (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, 2003; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008) to the research. I made every attempt to locate women at the heart of the research, keeping their perspectives alive and elevating the notion that women's stories are worth listening to (Brown and Gilligan, 1992). Engaging with research participants, I was working from a relational approach to storytelling that also sought to identify empowering understandings about women's lives. Emphasis was put on the content and the direction of the interview being with the participant. Beyond what may have been heard as 'real' or 'true', the Listening Guide approach

allowed the women to construct their own stories about themselves and their lives. Valuing their interpretations, I have attempted to explicitly recognise the capacity of the women and their status as active participants, trying to ensure at all stages that their stories are not rendered as passive accounts within the research process (Stanley, 1993; Hunt, 2005).

The feminist and relational characteristics of the Listening Guide provided me with a radical way of listening to and understanding the women's stories, which I utilised for exploring the relationship between stories and narrative frameworks. Analysing narrative frameworks reveals the heterogeneous aspects of their stories and has helped me to understand better the stories told by the women, defying simplistic generalisations. Positioning the stories told 'by' women seeking asylum as important has challenged the dominant narratives told 'about' and 'for' women seeking asylum. Exploring relational understandings about storytelling I have been able to listen to the influence of narrative frameworks on their stories.

A central assumption of this thesis is that researchers need to explain their role in the research process. Acknowledging the role of the researcher in relation to the study and trying to highlight rather than obscure my participation (Doucet, 2008; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008), reflexive approaches are a central aspect of the Listening Guide approach (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003; Gilligan et al., 2005). I write in the first person throughout this thesis and, relying on reflexive accounts, I have explained how I drew on Doucet's (2008) metaphor of 'gossamer walls' to delineate research relationships. I have sought to demonstrate the usefulness of reflexivity for making visible the stories of women seeking asylum, whilst critiquing my own stories as a way to make transparent my partially known assumptions and unfolding awareness (Kimpson, 2005).

Interrogating assumptions about the status of reflexivity and attempting to expand understandings of reflexivity, I have outlined the role of reflexivity beyond a means of merely turning inwards towards oneself (Harding, 1987, 1991; Letherby, 2000, 2002; Finlay and Gough, 2003). Helping to fully embrace honest, credible and ethical research processes, I have elevated the idea that researchers' accounts are no less distorted and no more truthful or accurate (Altheide and Johnson, 1998) than any other stories. I point to the importance of recognising that, whilst there are multiple ways in which reflexivity may be presented in the research process, there are limits to what we can suggest can be achieved through reflexivity. Despite the importance of reflexivity I suggest that reflexive accounts should not become the sole purpose of research but rather should contribute to noticing, questioning and increasing transparency about the understandings researchers bring to their research.

An approach to data analysis

In adopting, adapting and developing the Listening Guide as a method of data analysis I have attempted to contribute to understanding the potential, as well as the limitations, of this particular approach. I discuss in Chapter Four how some scholars have indicated that this method is extremely time-consuming and so have adopted a flexible approach to the number, types and order of the listenings (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008; Edwards and Weller, 2012). Having carried out all four listenings across all the data, and given their explicit relational nature, I advocate that each listening is intrinsically linked and analysis benefits from utilising all of them in, potentially alongside further listenings (Edwards, 2001; Deery, 2003). When the listenings are considered in relation to each other critical and reflexive understandings of narratives can be developed and, therefore, a minimum of all four listenings should be relationally maintained.

Expanding aspects of each of the listenings for the purposes of the study was vital.

For example, Reading One, which I outline in Chapter Five, combined two key

intersecting elements and provided a method of listening to the interview data as "a

reflexive reading of narrative" (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008, p.405). Listening Guide

scholars have suggested that the second element, a reflexive listening, is a discrete

stage of data analysis carried out in practical terms utilising a worksheet technique

(Doucet and Mauthner, 2008). My use of this technique pointed to the worksheet as

highly restrictive. Whilst reflexive practice may take place at certain and specific

points in the research process, I contend that reflexive accounts should not be

confined to narrow and specific stages of the data analysis. In this study I have made

every effort to bring reflexivity into all aspects of the study process, utilising a

reflexive journal as well as forms of peer support (Wincup, 2001; Rager, 2005) such

as having regular meetings with the Listening Guide Study Group to create a

collective and interpretive community (Doucet, 2008). The multiple reflexive

practices, which I discuss in Chapter Five, greatly enhanced my attempts to be

reflexive, providing a way to widen practice beyond the worksheet and serving to

broaden a methodological understanding of reflexivity.

Expanding other aspects of the Listening Guide for the needs of the study were the

adaptations I made to Reading Two, which I explore in Chapter Five. This listening

for 'I' was a way of exploring how a participant presented herself, before writing

about her (Brown and Gilligan, 1992). The value of staying with a participant's story

and focussing on 'I' created more time in the research process to listen to the

women, acting as a route into relationships, rather than having any implication of

accessing an 'inner self' (Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan et al., 2003). I contend that listening

for 'I' should be within a relational research approach and that the 'I' listening does

not stand in isolation but needs to be overtly brought into relation to the other three listenings. This aspect of analysis can also be used as a reflexive process for researchers' own accounts. For example, the 'I' listening allowed for sections of my own journal to be analysed, widening my reflexive practice and providing me with another way of listening to my role within the research process (Letherby, 2002), particularly useful where I was struggling to make sense of my interpretations and helped me to focus on how I reflected on myself.

Letting stories breathe

With very limited guidance within the Listening Guide about how to bring the readings together across the data-set, I have provided details about my final stage of data analysis. Unhappy with suggestions about re-positioning the Listening Guide within a thematic or coded system (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, 2003; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008), I developed a final step of analysis. Borrowing from some of Frank's (2010) theory of 'letting stories breathe', I recognise that stories "may not actually breathe" (Frank, 2010, p.3) but this concept can be utilised to try to be sensitive and patient, creating time and space for stories to be revealed gradually as we develop our understandings slowly (Plummer, 2013).

I paid close attention by shifting my focus from analysing individual transcripts to bringing the entire data-set into a research relationship. The practicalities of the method included re-reading all the interviews alongside the information gathered through the four listenings (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008) and creating interpretive, short summaries (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998; Brown, 2001) about each participant; some of these details are in Chapter Five Creating an arc across the whole study, by re-visiting the narratives that frame the

women's stories, allowed me to engage and make sense of the stories in relation to each other.

'Letting stories breathe' has enabled me to outline that whilst the women's stories have been woven together through different narrative frameworks, four key narratives have emerged which I explore in Chapters Seven, Eight, Nine and Ten. However, this research was never intended to be the final word on the narratives of women seeking asylum; acquiring new ways of appreciating the richness and depth of stories, researchers should look at developing further narrative frameworks reflecting the many and varied lives of women seeking asylum. I maintain that, as researchers, we should continually be seeking to develop new stories and I suggest that dominant narratives are there to be questioned and space sought to incorporate many different stories. As part of this approach I argue for 'more' stories and 'more kinds' of stories (Plummer, 1995, 2013). As Letherby points out; "the project is never complete" (2002, 6.3).

Central to the final stage of analysis, I have outlined the critical shift I made in understanding my research, which I discuss in Chapter Six. I was coming to know more about the women's 'stories' rather than assuming knowledge about their 'lives'. 'Letting stories breathe' helped me to move to a position where I suggest that one cannot fully know another person or people. The nature of research claims is always partial, situated and subjective, leading to modest accounts (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). Plummer states;

> "Whatever else a story is, it is not simply the lived life. It
> speaks all around the life: it provides routes into a life,
> lays down maps for lives to follow, suggests links between
> a life and a culture. It may indeed be one of the most
> important tools we have for understanding lives and the

wider cultures they are part of. But it is not the life, which
is in principle unknown and unknowable" (1995, p.168).

As a result of this methodological shift in my understanding, rather than making

claims to accessing knowledge about the women's lives, my work has been informed

by paying attention to stories, in particular the narrative frameworks that shape the

women's stories. This shift of perspective is a contribution to developing

understandings of the challenges of multiple research relationships and of what can

be known by researchers.

Whilst, ultimately, lives and events are unknown and unknowable (Plummer, 1995,

2001; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008), that is not to say that stories do not play a role in

the material reality of life. There are "experiencing subject[s]" (Stanley, 1993) and,

indeed, stories shape and form material realities (Stanley, 1993). For example, in

Chapters One and Two I explore the ways in which dominant narratives have

impacted on UK immigration and asylum policy and general attitudes in the most

negative and punitive ways, playing a part in the increasingly negative treatment of

people seeking asylum. Specifically, I aim to raise questions about the ways in which

dominant narratives have paved the way for constraining hospitality and introducing

conditionality (Sirriyeh, 2013) through harsh measures brought to bear in policy and

practice terms, severely restricting people's access to even the most basic services

and rights (Hunt, 2005). Within contexts such as these I suggest that researchers

need to develop challenges and changes to the situation.

Some ethical and methodological challenges

I explore ethical and methodological challenges throughout this thesis, but I draw

attention to three particular areas of relevance to this study: participant visibility and

how we, as researchers, represent women's stories and our work to wider

audiences; participation in the research process; and anonymity in relation to the use of pseudonyms for participants.

Visibility

Particularly keen to make women's stories as visible as possible and in order to maximise the impact of their stories in the research, I have utilised a number of strategies. Each chapter has an overall heading, alongside a quote from one of the participants, as I discuss in Chapter One. I have also included a series of sub-headings in the empirical chapters which are each accompanied by a quote from a different participant. In addition, in Chapter Five I focus entirely on the participants, as a strategy to raise the visibility of the women who took part in this study. Within the empirical chapters I present the stories of the participants by breaking with the Harvard convention and indenting their quotes. As the author of this thesis my own story may be "the loudest" (Letherby, 2002, 3.7) but I propose that these strategies, alongside others, can elevate participant stories in the ways we represent our work to wider audiences, raising their visibility and maximising their impact.

Interpreters

The role of the interpreter is explored in Chapter Four where I discuss the advantages of including her in the research process. I consider the practical ways in which I worked with an interpreter including the practicalities of the interview situation. Exposing some of the problems that arise when the researcher speaks English and has very limited multi-language skills, I suggest that working with an interpreter can increase participation. This approach can ensure that women are not overlooked and excluded from research because they speak languages other than English, wish to be interviewed in another language or because the researcher does

not speak the same language as the participant (Edwards, 1998; Marshall and While, 1994).

Taking account of the emotional wellbeing of the interpreter, I suggest a number of practical arrangements such as producing a guidance sheet to determine the choice of interpreter and a guidance sheet for interpreters to establish agreements prior to the interview. I met with the interpreter in advance to discuss the context and values behind the study. I was keen to include the interpreter's responses to the study, both before and after the interview process which created an opportunity to consider the ways in which emotion may be relevant to making sense of a participant's account.

Interpreters are often excluded from discussion and rather than skirting over their existence I seek to elevate the interpreter's visibility within this study and make her role as transparent as possible in order to explore the stories that have shaped the study. I highlight some of the ways the values and beliefs of the interpreter, as well as the relationship between the interpreter, participant and researcher, can inform decisions made about interpreter involvement in the research process. Recognising that interpreters form part of and contribute to the shape and meaning making of the narratives within a study can help account for some of the ways interpreters are key informants. Their role in the research processes, like those of the researcher and participants, may be variously shaped by narratives and without discussion the interpreter's subjectivities are present but nowhere identifiable.

Tasked with enabling women to participate and tell their story and to support the researcher to hear and understand the participant's story, a reflexive approach to the role of interpreter provides a useful tool. Reflexive research accounts often include the story of the researcher and the participants so acknowledging the interpreter,

and the ways they bring their sense of self and their relational understandings to the research processes, can also be a source of information and discussion. Interpreter subjectivities affect both the interview and the participant's stories, as well as how the researcher understands the stories. Given the considerable power that researchers have over the narrative accounts of their research, interpreters should not be overlooked, marginalised or made invisible within accounts of the process and wherever possible, their role made reflexively visible

Participation

Participation was an important aspect of many decisions made within the research process. This was achieved to varying degrees with the women at different points in the study. Whilst the pilot and the debriefing sessions after the interviews provided many insights into the research process, there are more overt and active ways in which to engage women in research participation (Birch and Miller, 2002). I am not suggesting, however, that the popular participatory approach of discussing and editing transcripts with participants would have been appropriate in this study. I did not attempt to engage participants in amending or checking their stories. The implication of consulting with the women about their stories might have been that they would have offered more accurate, truer or better accounts (Altheide and Johnson, 1998). This approach would have created a tension within the methodology of the study given that stories are understood here as always incomplete, partial accounts, with no story being true for all time storytellers select and cast themselves in particular roles in relation to who they think is listening (Plummer, 1995, 2001; Stanley, 1993; Mauther and Doucet, 2003; Andrews, 2008, 2014). However consultation or access to my interpretations of their transcripts may have led the

women to feel they had been recognised (Tyler, 2006), not just as the subjects of research, but for their role as active participants (Letherby, 2000).

Whilst I have honoured the commitments I made to participants, reflecting back over the study there are additional ways in which the women could have participated within the research process. I have presented my work over the years in many different places and I have been given the opportunity to talk freely and discuss it with the audiences. There may be advantages for participants, who wish to remain anonymous and have no desire to talk to a broader audience (Letherby, 2002), having a researcher elevate their stories for others. However, in order to increase participation and choice I am considering ways in which the participants, who want to, could be involved with the dissemination of this research.

A group who did not feature in my study were those women who are part of the asylum process as dependents. This raised concerns for me that these women remain unheard and they may be some of the most marginalised women in the UK asylum system (Bloch et al., 2000). It is possible that my willingness to recruit with an open strategy that employed the terms 'asylum seeker and 'refugee' perpetuated the marginalisation of some of the least 'visible' and most 'silenced' women (Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Edwards 1998; Riessman, 1993). I suggest that future researchers give careful consideration to those recruitment and sample strategies which might potentially overlook specific groups of women.

<u>Anonymity</u>

In Chapter Four I explore my commitment to using pseudonyms for participants, a decision which, as I explain, was taken as a protective measure for the women participating. Anonymity, through the use of pseudonyms for participants, is

frequently assumed to be an essential feature of ethical research (BSA, 2002; BPS, 2009, 2010; ESRC, 2010). However, I have since come to question some of the assumptions around privileging anonymity that I brought to bear in this study. I propose that whether or not to use pseudonyms is a particularly salient issue when researching with women seeking asylum.

I highlight in Chapter Four that some women requested that I use their own name rather than a pseudonym, raising a number of unexpected methodological and ethical issues around anonymity which did not appear to be addressed by ethical guidelines on the practice of research. I had put in place a participatory exercise whereby the woman participant could choose her own pseudonym. This decision overlooked the possibility that the women participants might wish to be acknowledged in the thesis and in subsequent publications; I assumed that respondents would prefer anonymity (Grinyer, 2002). The women's own challenges about anonymity raise concerns with assuming anonymity to be an 'ethical' approach to research with women seeking asylum. I suggest that research, which emphasises ethical decision making in the ways in which participants are recruited, should offer opportunities for participants to choose when and how they present their account in their own terms, reflecting carefully on the role of anonymity with participants. Assumptions that privilege anonymity need further exploration, specifically when doing research with women seeking asylum.

In the context of the asylum system where the securitisation of identity has become increasingly complex (Schuster, 2003; Adjana, 2013; Sirriyeh, 2013), governments have been developing and implementing information systems and technologies as a means of managing and controlling the movements and identities (Adjana, 2013) of people seeking asylum. For example, biometric profiling is a central aspect of

recording data about people seeking asylum on the 'Eurodac database' (see

Appendix One) and within the UK there is routine use of the biometric identity card

known as an asylum 'Application Registration Card' (see Appendix One) which

records standardised details about each person seeking asylum, as well as a

memory chip which contains their fingerprints. These heterogeneous identity cards

each contain a number or code by which an individual's identity is subsumed within a

wider, standardised database. Given the levels of surveillance afforded through

information systems and technologies, people seeking asylum in the UK are placed

within a particular context of control and identification. In addition, the UK asylum

claims process places women's asylum accounts in multiple contexts to be

scrutinised, judged, interrogated and frequently disbelieved, denied or refused

(Glidewell Panel, 1996; Amnesty International, 2004b, Crawley and Lester, 2004;

Herlihy and Turner, 2007; Souter, 2011). Creating pseudonyms to 'protect' women's

identities may have suggested a refusal of recognition (Tyler, 2001) or disbelief at

their stories (Glidewell Panel, 1996; Hynes, 2009, Souter, 2011).

Researchers can seek to address some of the potential power hierarchies between

researchers and participants through a more participatory approach to anonymity

whereby women choose their own pseudonyms (as opposed to pseudonyms being

allocated by a researcher or transcriber on an arbitrary basis). Whilst some complex

practicalities may arise when women choose their own names (Mosselson, 2010;

Lockwood, 2013) or when mixing real names and pseudonyms in publications, there

is a balance to be considered between protecting participants from potential harms if

their identity is revealed whilst listening to the wishes of participants and taking

seriously the potential loss of ownership (Grinyer, 2002) of their stories. In the

context of the UK, where stories about women seeking asylum are regularly

318

underreported and, if stories of people seeking asylum are reported they are distorted in a way to attract vilification in the media, had I taken up the suggestion of some of the women participants that they keep their own names I might have enabled the women to "retain [greater] ownership of their stories" (Grinyer, 2002, p.1) and a sense of recognition (Tyler, 2001).

A call for stories

I had ambitious aims for this study, a number of which were realised. However, reflecting on some of the assumptions that I brought to the research process, overwhelmingly I have found my expectations disrupted and challenged by theories of storytelling and the stories of the women. Andrews states that "one of the most challenging aspects of listening is the ability to suspend the expected tale, and leave oneself open to hearing a new kind of story" (2007b, p.166). I suggest that research should not endeavour to fulfil the researcher's expectations or assumptions but rather create new approaches and reveal different understandings, which may even surprise the researcher.

Itself a narrative account of my doctoral process, this thesis tells the story of how listening to women's stories and reflecting on what can be known and how it can be known changed my methodological and theoretical orientation. Whilst this is only part of my learning, I have been compelled to recognise that my study of the stories of women seeking asylum could not be separated from a reflexive approach with my own story and sense of self. I experienced a critical shift in my understanding, as I suggest in Chapter Six, realising that researchers cannot 'fully know' the participants that they study. Paying attention to stories and unpacking the narratives which frame them, my study and analysis shows how women's stories were mediated by

narratives that located their stories in multiple ways. Although this study has emphasised individual women's stories, all stories derive their meaning from broader narratives providing a rich and complex sense of the social world. Mauthner and Doucet (2008), among others, taught me that researchers can deconstruct dominant narratives and analyse stories in order to expose how we are all influenced by dominant narratives. I realise too that I construct stories about women seeking asylum and this is also influenced by dominant narratives in the UK.

What I learned from my research process has influenced me personally and professionally and I feel that I have been transformed through the research. As a lecturer and facilitator, I now attempt to bring into focus the ways in which stories have been constructed over time in particular political moments in history, however temporal and partial those accounts may prove to be. Acknowledging too the emotional content of research within an asylum context and recognising the emotional demands of research with women seeking asylum, I suggest that omitting to account for and explore the emotion that arises for researchers in the research process represents a marginalisation of aspects of storytelling which could enrich the analysis.

I promote the notion that stories may be the most political resource that we have for making sense and meaning of the social world and therefore we should consider very carefully the stories we listen to and tell. I seek to engage with other stories that invite different perspectives and rely on a multitude of representations, contributing to individuals claiming agency and for listeners to hear stories that have been marginalised and overlooked. This approach to storytelling can lead to greater scrutiny and the challenge of narratives which dominate and inform our thinking,

particularly when those narratives stereotype and disempower individuals and groups of people such as women seeking asylum.

I began this thesis with particular concerns about the ways in which women seeking asylum have been represented and treated in the UK. In Chapter Two I outline the dominant narratives told 'about' and 'for' women seeking asylum in the UK. Exploring how the 'dehumanised hate figure' has come to typify people seeking asylum and how women have been cast in narratives as 'gendered embodied victims', I have highlighted some of the potential problems and limitations with these dominant narratives. Silencing, marginalising and misrepresenting women seeking asylum, dominant narratives have stereotyped those who come to the UK to claim asylum and bring vilification and hatred to bear on those who seek safety. I suggest these narratives have been utilised to authorise and introduce punitive policies and tough responses that negatively impact people seeking asylum and enact all manner of harsh treatment against them. Concerned with the impact of the ways in which those seeking asylum have been represented by the UK public, media and government, and in order to address some of these social and political injustices, doing research with women seeking asylum was a choice that was not only intended to acknowledge and value the specificity of women's stories (Bosworth, 1999) but was embedded in efforts to challenge dominant narratives.

Believing that women seeking asylum should not be represented as a homogeneous group about whom negative representations potentially disable other forms of recognition (Hunt, 2005; Tyler, 2006), I advocate that researchers should challenge generalisations, problematising the impacts and effects of dominant narratives. Such approaches have the potential to develop new ways of conceptualising women seeking asylum and to expose dominant narratives in ways that leave them open to

other ways of knowing, being and shaping stories. Central to this approach is including the stories of those who have been excluded from the formation of those narratives.

Dominated by dehumanising and disempowering narratives and fraught with risk and harm directed towards those seeking safety, many of the women in this study represented themselves as politicised individuals. They firmly located themselves in the midst of political struggles, bringing an awareness and challenge to their situations. Critically, what a person chooses to tell about their life is intrinsically linked to how she constructs a personal sense of self within a political context (Andrews, 2007). Recasting dominant narratives available to them, the women's accounts exposed some of the political contexts within which their stories were told. I listened and heard the ways in which they storied their part in challenge, change, survival and disintegration. Where little meaning could be found for the teller or listener, the stories provided insight into chaos, suffering and pain, compelling the listener and challenging them to make a difference.

The relationship between the personal and the political confronted me throughout the research process. The study of stories holds great political significance when researchers consider how power is at work in all stories, questioning who gets to tell their stories, the ways in which stories are heard and who is silenced (Plummer, 2013). Having a story heard can depend on the ways in which certain stories are privileged and others are marginalised. Whilst anyone may engage in telling stories, being an asylum seeker and a woman can greatly influence your story being excluded and silenced, limiting the capacity of listeners to understand the story, just as storytellers may be limited from telling different stories.

Creating times and spaces where women seeking asylum can tell stories that do not have to conform to the particular demands of the UK asylum system is important. Such stories may be superfluous to an asylum application but may potentially contain much to develop our understandings of the stories of women seeking asylum in the UK. Far from suggesting that women seeking asylum do not suffer persecution (because many studies highlight this), this research illustrates that whilst telling and listening does not come easily, women's stories do not begin when they claimed asylum in the UK nor can their lives be entirely contained within their asylum claim stories (Sirriyeh, 2008, 2013). I maintain that researchers need to improve the conditions within which women seeking asylum can tell stories about their lives. The women in this study found themselves in situations where they felt they could come and participate. Yet a number of women were unable to participate as they found themselves re-dispersed, detained and removed from the UK, as discussed in Chapter Four. Opportunities to participate may be lacking in the situations of other women seeking asylum in the UK. Feeling listened to and appreciated and having their stories taken seriously by a researcher may well be important for women whose stories are frequently disbelieved.

I am not suggesting a simplistic solidarity with women seeking asylum, but I hope to highlight the profound tensions and ambiguities of conducting research in an asylum context in the UK. I argue for the value of the personal and political nature of storytelling through reflexive accounts located in narrative understandings. Being explicit about situating ourselves within stories about asylum, as well as staying grounded in women's stories, has the potential to expose and disrupt the dehumanising and 'othering' of women seeking asylum. This approach can lead to humanising research that works towards respect and the recognition of human

differences. Listening to accounts of those who may have been stigmatised and positioned as 'other', and standing in opposition to the marginalisation of those who routinely experience inequality and persecution within their lives, can help us all see the need for and possibilities of social and political change. If we can work with epistemological and theoretical transparency alongside reflexive practices that enable researchers to explore and make visible some of their own stories, we have the potential to produce dynamic, radical and rigorous research that embraces the subjectivities and exploration we subject participants stories too.

Participating in this research, the women used their stories in powerful ways. Frank notes that "… stories, are people's dignity [resistance] and their calamity [ruination]…. Storytellers depend on their own stories to salvage their lives from calamity wrought by others' stories" (2010, p.146). Inspired by listening to the stories of the women in this study, I hope to have unsettled, disrupted, challenged and resisted dominant narratives, contributing to creating a space where women seeking asylum can tell their own stories and potentially tell different stories about their lives.

I've gone through a lot
I know
I don't want to die every day
I want to be free
I want to be called a woman
I want to be called a somebody
I always think
I understand
I know
(Precious).

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Appendices

Appendix One:
Definition of terms[44]

Age-disputed

A person applying for asylum can have their age disputed when they claim to be a child with little or no evidence, or their claim to be a child is doubted by the UKBA.

Appeal

Most people seeking asylum have a right of appeal to the First Tier Tribunal against decisions made by the Home Office. The first tier Asylum and Immigration Tribunal hears and decides on these types of appeal. Decisions can be appealed in the second tier (Upper) Tribunal on points of law. In some limited circumstances a decision of the Upper Tribunal can be challenged on a point of law in the Court of Appeal. However, some applicants do not automatically have a right to an appeal inside the UK. These applicants are usually only allowed to make an appeal after they have been removed from the UK.

Application Registration Card

A biometric identity card allocated to individual people seeking asylum in the UK, providing a form of identity and surveillance that is also used to control the distribution of social benefits and welfare services.

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44 The definitions of terms are intended as a basic explanation of terms, many of which are used across the refugee sector in the UK. Whilst most of the definitions are not legal definitions, they either derive from the law or have been adopted or adapted from a range of sources, some of which I have indicated.

Asylum	A policy term for protection granted by a State on its territory against the exercise of jurisdiction by the State of origin, based on the principle of non-refoulement and characterised by the enjoyment of internationally recognised refugee rights, and generally accorded with limit of time.
Case resolution	A process set up by the Home Office to deal with unresolved cases of those people who claimed asylum before April 2007. Originally expected that case resolution would take until 2011 to complete, a significant number of cases remain unresolved to date.
Child trafficking	A form of human trafficking, child trafficking involves a child under the age of 18 years (CRC) and includes the recruitment, movement across or within a country, transportation, transfer, harbouring, and/or receipt of a child, whether by force or not, for the purpose of exploitation.
Corrective rape	A form of sexual violence used against women because of their perceived sexual identity. It is often carried out in the belief that it is necessary that women are raped in order to preserve heterosexuality and to 'cure' women of 'unnatural' sexual behaviour. In some communities, corrective rape affords rapists great respect and they are congratulated for carrying out this activity.

Destitution	The situation of people seeking asylum who are lacking the means to meet basic needs of shelter, warmth, food, water and health for a variety of reasons. A person can be destitute if they are homeless or do not have adequate accommodation or any means of obtaining it (whether or not their other essential living needs are met); or they may have adequate accommodation or the means of obtaining it, but cannot meet other essential living needs. The inability to access statutory support mechanisms may mean that those people who are destitute have reliance on friends, family and charitable groups for basic subsistence and/or accommodation.
Detention	Imprisonment in the UK within a range of facilities including prisons, holding cells, immigration removal facilities and pre-departure accommodation. Detaining someone requires the enactment of the Immigration Act, 1971 c.77.
Discretionary leave	A form of immigration status granted to a person who the Home Office has decided does not qualify for refugee status or humanitarian protection but where other temporary protection reasons have been legally recognised.
Dispersal	The process by which the Home Office moves a person seeking asylum or a family to initial accommodation while

they apply for asylum support. If the application is processed and approved, they are moved to dispersal accommodation outside of London and the South East of the UK. A person seeking asylum can be dispersed and re-dispersed on a no-choice basis many times during the time their asylum application is being processed.

Domestic servitude	An unequal exploitative relationship whereby the person in servitude is unable to leave of their own volition.
Early marriage	Early marriage (and therefore forced marriage) of a child under the age of 18 years (CRC). As a child under the age of 18 is legally recognised as not capable of giving her valid consent to enter into marriage, early or child marriages are considered to be forced marriages.
Electronic tag	A device that is attached to a person seeking asylum, allowing their whereabouts to be monitored and reporting their position back to the Home Office. The Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc) Act 2004 s.36 governs the use of electronic monitoring as a bail condition from a detention facility.
Eurodac database	An EU-wide database used to control asylum applications through an automated fingerprint identification system.
Exceptional Leave to Remain	A form of immigration status in use before April 2003. It was granted to people seeking asylum who the Home

Office decided did not meet the definition of a refugee as defined in the Refugee Convention but where other temporary protection reasons have been legally recognised.

Family amnesty

A category announced by the Home Secretary on 24 October 2003, to allow certain families seeking asylum in the UK to stay. The main applicant of the family must have applied for asylum before 2 October 2000 and must have had a least one dependent child under 18 (other than a spouse or civil partner) in the UK on 2 October 2000 or by 24 October 2003.

Fast track

An asylum claim is considered suitable for the fast track process where it appears, to the UKBA, that the claim can be decided 'quickly'. Applicants in the detained fast track are held at an Immigration Removal Centre and the initial decision on their claim and any appeals happen at a fast pace.

Female genital mutilation

Female genital mutilation (FGM) comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.

Forced labour

All work or service which is exacted from a person under the menace of any penalty and for which the person has

not offered himself voluntarily (The International Labour Organisation).

Forced marriage	The absence of free and full consent of one or both parties in the marriage. Also, where the victim may lack capacity to give full and informed consent, or she may lack capacity to consent to sex within a marriage, constitutes another form. Physical force is not a necessary element of forced marriage. Some situations may constitute forced marriages by virtue of duress, which may be physical, psychological, sexual or emotional in nature, or by virtue of more subtle factors at play, such as fear, intimidation, social and familial expectations, or economic forces (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women).
Fresh asylum claim	A fresh claim for asylum can only be made when appeal rights are exhausted. To be considered as a fresh asylum claim, the application must include new information.
Gateway Protection Programme	Operated by the United Kingdom Border Agency in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), this Programme supports the resettlement of up to 750 refugees in the UK each year. The Programme is entirely separate from the standard procedure for claiming asylum in the UK and applications

	for resettlement under this Programme are made directly to the UNHCR.
Humanitarian protection	A form of immigration status granted by the Home Office to a person who does not meet the criteria for refugee status but has been legally recognised as having a need for protection.
Internally displaced	A person who has been forced to leave their home as a result of armed conflict, internal strife, systematic violations of human rights, or natural or man-made disasters and who is within the territory of their own country.
Refugee	A person who, because of a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group, is outside their country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country (1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees).
Refused	When an asylum application has been fully determined, but the claim has been refused and the are no other protection claims awaiting a decision.

Remittance	Sums of money sent in payment or as a gift. The term is often used to describe the money sent by people living in migratory situations to family, communities or individuals in their homeland.
Removal	Taking a person who is not a national of the state and removing them from its territory to another country or territory after refusal of admission or termination of permission to remain.
Safe third country	When the Home Office believe the person applying for asylum is not a national or citizen and they believe a person's life or liberty is not threatened by reason of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. It is also one from which the Home Office believe a person would not be sent to another State in contravention of her rights under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol. If a person seeking asylum in the UK travels through any of these states en route to the UK, they may be returned there on grounds of having travelled through a safe third country.
Sexual exploitation	Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual

exploitation of another (UN Secretary-General's Bulletin on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse).

Stateless

A person who does not have a nationality or the absence of a legally recognised link between an individual and any state. Many stateless persons have never crossed an international border and have not sought asylum.

Subsistence payments

A person claiming asylum in the UK does not have the right to work, and those who are assessed as destitute may qualify for Home Office asylum support which provides "no-choice" basis accommodation in dispersal areas and a weekly subsistence cash payment. Some people seeking asylum choose to receive subsistence support only, which enables them to avoid being dispersed to accommodation.

Temporary accommodation

The Home Office has an obligation to provide accommodation to asylum seekers while their cases are resolved, and to transport them to this accommodation. Access to social housing was restricted in the UK in 1993 (Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act) removing statutory obligations of local authorities to provide accommodation for people seeking asylum. Housing options for people seeking asylum were further affected in 1999 (Asylum and Immigration Act) which introduced a centralised system of housing and welfare

support for asylum seekers run by the Home Office and which dispersed people to accommodation all across the UK.

Trafficker	A person who recruits and/or transports a person/people by threat or coercion in order to have control over another person/people for the purpose of exploitation.
Trafficking	The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a person, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation includes, at a minimum, the exploitation or the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs (The United Nations protocol to suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children, 2000, article 3).
UKBA	The United Kingdom Border Agency is part of the Home Office, formerly the Borders and Immigration Agency (BIA), and before that, the Immigration and Nationality

	Directorate (IND). The UKBA was disbanded in 2013 and is now called 'Visas and Immigration'.
Unfounded claimants	When the Home Office classifies an asylum claim "clearly unfounded", they believe that the person seeking asylum comes from a safe country and would not face a risk of being persecuted. There are certain countries where asylum claims are automatically certified "clearly unfounded".
White list	A list of countries drawn up by the Home Office where it believes that persecution does not take place. People seeking asylum from these countries are likely to have their asylum application refused and are unlikely to be allowed to stay in the UK should they choose to appeal.

Appendix Two:
Publications and presentations

The following publications, a number of which are based on my doctoral research, have either been published or have been accepted for publication:

Warwick, I., Neville, R., and Smith, K. (2006) My life in Huddersfield: Supporting young asylum seekers and refugees to record their experiences of living in Huddersfield. Social Work Education, 25(2). pp. 129-137.

Smith, K. (2010) 'A cup of tears': The effects of detention on women seeking asylum in the United Kingdom (UK). MSc Social Research and Evaluation (SW), University of Huddersfield.

Smith, K. and Jones, A. D. (2012) *Experiences of asylum seeking women and their children in United Kingdom detention facilities: A matter for rights enforcement. sociology and social work.* Romania: Scientific Annals of the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University.

Smith, K. (2013) Harmful practice: Detention and women seeking asylum in the United Kingdom. In: S. Wray and R. Rae (eds). *Personal and Public Lives and Relationships in a Changing Social World.* Cambridge: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, pp. 18-39.

Smith, K. (2014) Narratives of resistance. Listening to women seeking asylum in the UK. In: L. Aiello, J. Charnley and M. Palladino (eds). *Displaced Women: Multilingual Narratives of Migration in Europe.* Cambridge: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, pp. 27-44.

Smith, K. (forthcoming a) Stories told by, for and about women refugees: engendering resistance. *Migration and Activism Special edition. ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies.*

Smith, K. (forthcoming b) Making sense of stories: Narratives of women seeking asylum. In: J. Woodiwiss, K. Lockwood and K. Smith (eds). *Feminist narrative research: Opportunities and challenges.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

I have been offered a contract with Palgrave (2014) to co-edit a book – 'Feminist narrative research: Opportunities and challenges'. This edited collection will explore the opportunities and challenges of doing research that is at the same time both feminist and narrative, looking at stories that are told by, for and about women.

I have presented the following papers and posters, based on my doctoral research:

'Making sense of stories: Narratives of women seeking asylum'. Troubling Narratives: Identity Matters. University of Huddersfield. 19-20 June 2014 (paper).

'Not born a refugee: Narratives of women seeking asylum in the UK' Research café, University of Huddersfield. 12 June, 2013 (paper).

'Stories told by, for and about women refugees'. Feminist Symposium, University of Huddersfield. 8 March, 2013 (paper).

'Not born a refugee'. Research Festival, University of Huddersfield. 11 - 13 September 2012 (poster).

'Gendered positioning and constructing narratives: Women refugees'. Opportunities and Challenges in Feminist Narrative Research: A Symposium Event, University of Huddersfield. 22 June 2012 (poster).

'Narratives of resistance: Listening to women seeking asylum'. Equinox conference – An Academic Conference for Teaching, Learning and Research, University of Huddersfield. 10 May 2012 (paper).

'Not born a refugee: Narratives of women asylum seekers'. Equinox 2012 conference – An Academic Conference for Teaching, Learning and Research, University of Huddersfield. 10 May 2012 (poster).

'Narratives of resistance: Women seeking asylum in the UK. Displaced Women: Multilingual Narratives of Migration in Europe', University of Glasgow. 28-30 March 2012 (paper).

'Narratives of resistance: Listening to women refugees in the United Kingdom'. Migration and Activism: Geographies of Resistance stream, Association of American Geographers, New York City. 24-28 February2012 (paper).

Appendix Three:
The Listening Guide Study Group

The Listening Guide Study Group (LGSG) was primarily formed by me and two other PhD researchers who had an interest in narrative approaches to research and identified as feminists. Our fourth founding member had already used the Listening Guide in her doctorate and offered her support. Established as a postgraduate student-led group, the LGSG has continued to meet on a monthly basis. Mauthner and Doucet (2003) have argued that political and institutional contexts play a role in shaping decisions within research processes; their own work was deeply influenced by similar opportunities.

Creating practical time and space for discussion about theory and methodology relating to the use of the Listening Guide, the LGSG provided on-going peer-support to develop researcher capabilities, capacity, knowledge and skills around the Listening Guide. Part of the role of support has been the emphasis on reflexive practice. Mauthner and Doucet (2003) claim their reflexivity was enhanced by peer-support in their own doctorates. This particular focus of the group greatly supported the intellectual and reflexive development of my study. The benefits of time-scheduled meetings, and our commitment to regular contact and discussion time beyond the monthly meetings, have been invaluable to developing my understanding and thinking.

As a unique group we did not find any other groups meeting across the UK with this specific focus. Other students and academics from within our own institution and outside, including internationally, heard about the LGSG and contacted us to provide understanding and support for their own work. Having expanded membership, the

LGSG now has postgraduate students and staff attending regularly from across the UK. The diversity of disciplines and practice backgrounds of the members provided unique opportunities for researchers to come together.

To enhance our skills, understanding and development of the Listening Guide, the core members of the LGSG at the University of Huddersfield decided that we would run our own Feminist Narrative Symposium. The LGSG applied and secured funding to set-up and run a full-day research symposium[45]. We identified facilitators (which included Dr. Natasha Mauthner and Dr. Ruth Deery) as well as three other eminent academics who were feminists and narrative researchers, who all agreed to be part of the event which was hosted at University of Huddersfield (June, 2012), attracting practitioners, academics and researchers from interdisciplinary subjects across Britain. After the conference, I was part of three members of the event who drafted a proposal to Palgrave to co-edit an edited collection, based on the papers presented, called 'Feminist narrative research: Opportunities and challenges'. We have been offered a contract to produce the edited collection which is due out in 2015 and which will explore the opportunities and challenges of doing research that is at the same time both feminist and narrative, looking at stories that are told by, for and about women.

Core postgraduate student members of the LGSG went on to form a Feminist Network at the University of Huddersfield, alongside a number of members of staff. Following on from the success of Symposium, the Feminist Network set up another event to celebrate International Women's Day entitled 'Women's stories: Women's Lives' (March, 2013). This event showcased feminist research at the University of

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45 On the 22 June 2012 the Listening Guide Study Group hosted their first Feminist Narrative Symposium event.

Huddersfield and members of the LGSG presented work alongside wider members who attended the event.

Postgraduate students who have been involved with collaborative work developing Gilligan's research, which started in 1984, include: Dianne Argyris, Jane Attanucci, Betty Bardige, Lyn Mikel Brown, Elizabeth Debold, Andrea Doucet, Carol Gilligan, Dana Jack, Kay Johnston, Natasha Mauthner, Barb Miller, Dick Osborne, Pamela Pleasants, Annie Rogers, Amy Sullivan, Mark Tappan, Jill Taylor, Deborah Tolman, Janie Ward, Grant Wiggins, and David Wilcox (Gilligan et al, 2003, p.158).

Appendix Four:
Information sheet

Introduction:

- Please ask questions at any point. The aim of this study is to examine what women refugees say about their experiences of life before and after becoming a refugee.
- I am very interested in the life experiences of women refugees and I am studying for a PhD.
- This study is being supported by the University of Huddersfield and is funded by the Economic Social Research Council.
- You are invited to participate in this study.

Benefits:
- There are very few studies in the UK that look at the experiences of women refugees.
- The interview is an opportunity for you to tell your story and talk about your experiences.
- It is hoped that this study will lead to greater knowledge and understanding of the experiences of women refugees.
- The study findings may also help influence the development of services, policies and international development.

You can take part in the study if:
- You are over 18 years of age.
- You are a refugee or asylum seeker at any stage of the asylum process in this country.
- You understand the process and purpose of the research.

Process:
- Taking part in this study is voluntary. There will be no payment for participation.

- The process will involve an interview which will be about one to two hours long. An interpreter will be present if you so wish. The interview will be audio-taped.

- During the interview you will be asked some general background information. You will then be asked to describe your life before becoming a refugee and what your life is like as a refugee.

- Your interview recording will be kept on a computer which is password protected and deleted after five years.

- No person, other than the researcher and the transcriber will have access to the recording of your voice.

- After the interview the taped recording will be typed up and analysed by the researcher. You can have a copy of your interview if you wish. The purpose of the study is use the information to form the basis of a thesis which will be submitted with the support of the University of Huddersfield.

- Parts of the study may be used in future publications such as in a book and/or in presentations at conferences. I will try to make the findings of the study as widely available as possible.

- At no time will actual names of people be revealed. Your own identity will be protected at all times. No information that could lead to you being identified will be included in any report or publication resulting from this research. You need to identify a pseudonym that will be used.

- Your own words will be used and will not be changed.

Safeguarding

- I have a duty to protect individuals from harm. I will have to break confidentiality if you tell me information that causes me to have serious concerns about: your own safety or the safety of other people who may be endangered by your behaviour; or the health, welfare or safety of children or vulnerable adults.

Two copies of this Information Sheet.

One copy to be retained by the participant and one copy to be retained by the researcher

Appendix Five:
Statement of support

- There are no known risks if you choose to take part in this study. However, sometimes talking about experiences may be upsetting. Should you find this too upsetting, your wellbeing is a priority and we can stop the interview.
- If you wish, you can ignore any questions or remain silent during the interview.
- We can agree a time to take a break, maybe after 45 minutes or an hour.
- If you feel upset or distressed because of the interview then there are support services which can help you. I will provide you with information, or help you to access support from a local service.
- I will support you with a debriefing session to discuss the interview experience including any emotional, psychological and physical distress or discomfort which may arise during the research process. This will take place straight after the interview.
- It is your right to withdraw from the study at any time, and you do not have to provide a reason for your decision.
- The research will have no influence on your claim for asylum or any other aspect of your immigration status, whether you participate or withdrawal from the study.
- If you do not wish to participate in an interview, this will **NOT** affect the service you receive from the service that referred you (state service) and you will not give up any rights or benefits which you had before entering the study.
- Any information you provide for the study will **NOT** affect any services you receive.
- This Statement of Support has my name and contact details, should you wish to speak to me in the future about the research.

Further information:
You can get more information and ask any questions about the study:

- Researcher: Kate Smith, the University of Huddersfield.

- Telephone: ▮▮▮▮   Email: ▮▮▮▮

If there are any problems that are not resolved between us, then you can contact:
Research supervisor: Professor Nigel Parton, University of Huddersfield: ▮▮▮▮

Two copies of this Statement of Support. One copy to be retained by the participant and one copy to be retained by the researcher

Appendix Six:
Consent form and participant contact information

(2 pages includes participant contact information)

Title of Research Study: The experiences of women refugees

Date: _____

Declaration (please tick if you agree)

- I have understood the Information Sheet and received a copy.   ☐
- I have given a pseudonym to protect my identity.   ☐
- All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.   ☐
- I have understood that you will break confidentiality if you have serious concerns about my safety or the safety of children or other people.   ☐
- I freely and voluntarily agree to be part of this research study.   ☐
- I have received a copy of this agreement.   ☐

Participant Name: _____   **Signature**: _____

Researcher Name: Kate Smith_____   **Signature**: _____

Participant's name: _____

Pseudonym: _____

Contact no. _____

Do you want a copy of the transcript?   Y / N

Address for transcript:

_____

_____

I agree with the above information _____

(Participant)

Two copies of this consent form should be completed.

One copy to be retained by the participant and one copy to be retained by the researcher.

Appendix Seven:
Holding, containing and bearing witness

Given my experience as a frontline worker and manager I have many years of training about 'witnessing' painful and frightening stories. For the most part, workers and organisations I have known are often compelled to take action and be 'helpful' as a result of disclosures. Blackwell asserts that "presentations of extreme distress following horrific and traumatic experiences tend to evoke a powerful wish to be helpful and an associated fear of impotence" (Blackwell, 1997, p.1). Whilst helping might be an important part of a worker role, in the research environment the immediacy of 'helping' the participant is not the focus of the research interview. I do not feel it was my role to be helpful to each woman but rather to bear witness, a relational role to the woman and context. Therefore, by listening to women's stories, I placed myself in relation to each participant and drew on the concept of 'holding, containing and bearing witness'. Familiar to me, I have practiced, developed and trained other workers from frontline practice on this approach and whilst the concepts were developed from therapeutic individual and group work between clients and therapist, the collaborative processes lent themselves extremely well for research interviews.

Holding

'Holding' was an important step in the process of witnessing and was central to each interview. My presence in the interview and my recognition of each woman participant in her narrative aimed to create a 'holding' in each interview. Blackwell states "It is through the communication [and] through attempts to put into words with

them their experience, their feelings and their sense of who they are in relation to us, that they are going to feel held" (1997, p.4).

Women seeking asylum may have been violated, abused and fleeing terrifying circumstances to seek safety. These experiences can raise complex or simple emotions that surface in remembering and retelling the story of the events. Blackwell notes: "Political repression in general and torture in particular attempts to create alienation. It tries to alienate its victims from themselves, from their family, their friends, and their community" (1997, p.2). Blackwell (1997) identifies that people who have been violated or held in harmful ways may have been made to feel helplessness. Therefore, the delivery of physical, material goods and resources is not the role of holding, rather 'holding' is situated in a relational and emotional environment.

Containing

The process of 'containing' was my own reflexive awareness of the participant's emotions and feelings. 'Containing' means I was able to bring awareness to the unspoken narratives in my prompts or discussions with the women. Blackwell outlines the principles of containing and states:

> We begin to create the possibility of our clients reclaiming those feelings, beginning to think about them and integrate them into their sense of themselves, their identity and their history…. Containment takes place in a dialogue which seeks to find words for hitherto unspeakable feelings and experiences as they are projected into the counsellor, social worker, psychotherapist or whoever. Thereby becoming shared and available to the intersubjective field of that dialogue (2007, p.4-5).
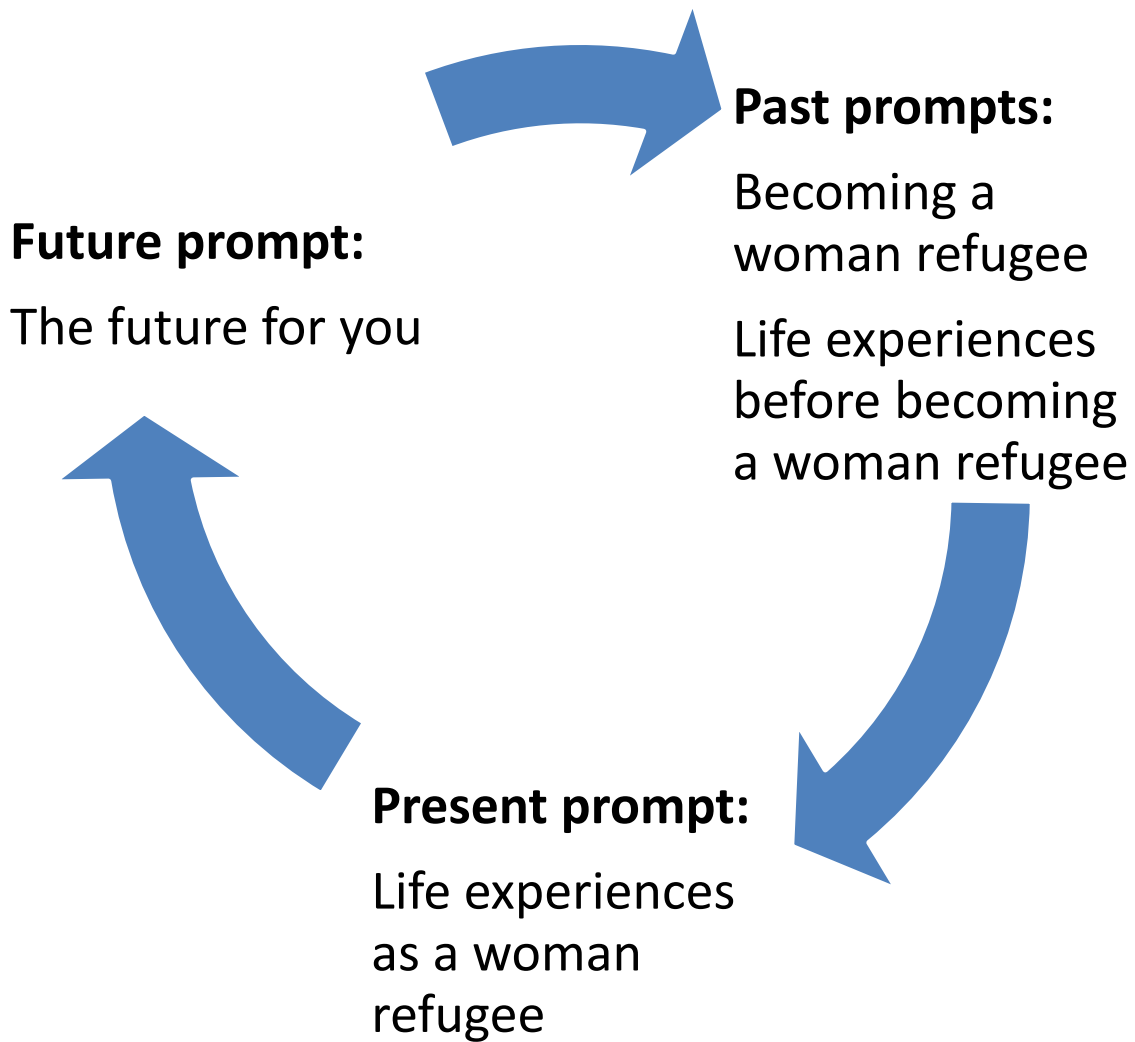
Women who have survived torture, endured violating and extreme experiences, may feel abandoned and alone, finding it difficult to process and reflect on those stories, particularly the emotional content of such stories. In the interview situations with me, women selected accounts to recall and re-tell. At times, this was with force and consciousness, bringing sadness and grief that caused silence, speechlessness or tears. At moments in the interview there were narratives that were just out of reach from becoming spoken and relational in the moments. Therefore, 'containing is important for reclaiming, speaking out and co-constructing a story.

Bearing witness

The bearing witness model is a relational activity which engages with the personal and political witnessing of the participant being interviewed and an exploration of the context from which the story is constructed. This level of recognition supports an understanding of the interview, particularly when fragmented aspects of a story contain elements of the past and present, with the past persistently emerging into the present and the present containing the possibility of the anticipated future. Blackwell (1997) recognises the influence on narrative that the role of past and present and future can have, particularly for people whose lives and whole communities have been displaced by torture and organised violence; "what we are often dealing with is a present which is overwhelmed by the past: a past that contains the present and the future, holding them in abeyance in a state of induced terror, grief and outrage" (1997, p.7). The personal process of listening to a story and witnessing the storyteller becomes a political process that acknowledges the context of the story (Andrews, 2007b).

Appendix Eight:
Interview prompts

Prompts structured around past, present and future

Past prompts:

Becoming a woman refugee

Life experiences before becoming a woman refugee

Present prompt:

Life experiences as a woman refugee

Future prompt:

The future for you

Appendix Nine:
Guidance sheet (for the choice of interpreter)

The choice of interpreter will be influenced wherever possible by the following factors:

- The competence of the interpreter, including the spoken dialect and language relating to the woman participant.

- Any previous experience the woman participant has with the interpreter, either informally or within professional settings.

- Being known and trusted by the woman participant.

- Guided by requests made by the woman participant.

- Having an understanding and respect for the research process established by the researcher meeting and talking to the interpreter.

- Matching the interpreter to the participant. Consideration will be given to ethnicity, gender and age with regards to the interpreter and the woman participant, particularly if the researcher is of a different ethnicity and age.
  Note: matching race and or gender is too simplistic a way to predict the full impact of the role of the interpreter (Phoenix, 1994).

- Working to the professional code of ethics of interpreters.

Appendix Ten:
Guidance sheet for interpreters

This guidance sheet is to be used to clarify the role of the interpreter in the interviews.

- A triangulated seating arrangement will be used.

- The style of interpreting required is the first person style (direct speech). Avoid using third person (indirect speech) as much as possible.

- Provide as much emphasis, tone and expression as the woman participant.

- Go beyond language translation and use knowledge of the cultural aspects of the interview to inform the researcher. Meaning is the priority.

- Use a consecutive interpreting style whereby only one person speaks at a time.

- Be part of a debriefing and evaluation after the interview to support wellbeing.

- Verbally translate the written information in the interview- Information Sheet, Statement of Support and Consent Form.

- The whole process will take place at a leisurely pace to support everyone in the process.

- The interview should last between one to two hours.

- You are expected to adhere to the code of ethics for interpreting.

Two copies.

One copy to be retained by the interpreter and one copy to be retained by the researcher.

Appendix Eleven:
Small section of my reflexive research journal[46].

This reflexive account is not about individual incidents or isolated events, but taken overall is another aspect of the context within which this study took place. This reflexive commentary is an attempt to be unmask some of my motivations behind conducting this study. This first-person account was written to demonstrate my own sense of myself and the impositions of the asylum system in the UK which brought me to consider my own privilege and provided me with ways in which to consider women's stories in the UK. As Doucet and Mauthner have argued, a relational understanding of narrative and of the self, positions stories "in relation to other subjects and to the material reality of everyday life" (2008, p.403). Thinking through and acknowledging privilege within the UK potentially exposes some of the relational hierarchies in society.

> The conditions and situations I have faced in my life as a UK citizen living in the UK may look very different to some women seeking asylum. I have, for example, been able to live with my family in a home that we have chosen, without fear of dispersal or separation. I have had friends and family to stay at my home. I have not been tagged, neither have I faced any form of surveillance within my home that I am aware of. I have not had to report on a regular basis to immigration authorities. If I have wanted to or needed to move home, I could have done this at any time and chosen the place I live. I have been able to shop in places I had chosen, spending money in cash; I do not expose my immigration status that may attract discrimination or misunderstanding during shopping for essential living items. I have

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46 This listening has been typed up to make it easier to read but was originally hand-written.

been able to afford all my essential living items as well as going to supermarkets with foods that fit with my tastes, choices and cultural traditions. The shops I buy my clothes and the places I have my hair cut don't accept 'asylum' vouchers; I have been able to choose where to shop, how to spend my money. Since I have been an adult, I have had access to a bank account, cheques, credit cards and cash; I suspect I was seen as a 'good' investment for financial reliability by banks and other official and legal money lenders. No aspect of my immigration status in the UK has prevented me from accessing formal education, legal or medical support and help. I have voted in every local and national election and I could run for election. I recognised that I construct stories from a place of privilege; it has never been assumed that I speak on behalf of all the people of my background. By luck, by virtue of where I was born, my national status, my skin colour, all of this gives me the privilege of believing that if I am targeted, detained, mistreated, assaulted, or killed, someone in authority will respond and take action – I will not be overlooked in these matters. I have called this privilege and it has lessened the likelihood that I will be subject to any kind of deep rooted inequalities and discrimination in certain areas of my life because of aspects of my identity. Due to certain privileges, I am likely to have an automatic advantage in the UK over some women in the UK. For example, it has been easy for me to spend time demonstrating and protesting governments, including in the UK over various and particular issues. I have opening criticised the UK government and other governments worldwide, candidly talking in public without fear of being arrested, detained or deported. When I have been stopped in my car I am fairly sure it was not because of suspected immigration status. Breaking the law would not have resulted in my deportation.

Appendix Twelve:
Gifts-in-kind

During the ethical clearance period of the study, I had factored into my study a small gift-in-kind (an individual toiletry pack stated in my ethical approval process) for the women participants so they would get some form of remuneration for their time, as well as their travel where there had been expenses. However, half way through the preliminary process a few issues arose in my sample which meant this was no longer appropriate. The issues raised in the preliminary study related to the women who had different skin types and whose hair treatments that vary greatly. Also, I became increasingly aware of ongoing challenges that related to body trauma from torture, rape and female genital mutilation which included welts, scars and scar-tissue across women's bodies, and the different relationships that each woman had with her body and skin as a result. Whilst I had reserved a small budget per participant for a toiletries pack, this no longer seemed an appropriate purchase for me to make. As a result I put in a request and was granted financial support for field work from a specific fund within the School of Human and Health Sciences to give gift-vouchers to each participant.

Appendix Thirteen:
The Listening Guide Reading one - element one

A sample of listening to the story, trying to understand what is happening[47].

Baelli

The main events of this story encompass: life in the UK and life in ▮▮▮▮▮, with stories of gender-specific and gender-related persecution of women aspects of both places. The subjection and status of women is relevant to the opportunities and constraints within the story. Narratives are constructed around death and possible death. Individual resistance, acts of survival and women's collective resistance are also central features of the story. A narrative of women rescuers punctuate the storyline, but are starkly contrasted by the role of men who are conceived within a narrative of disinterest and disregard, direct persecution, sexual violence and torture. However, the story also highlights the role of women as torturers who perform FGM. The role of the powerful and the powerless is prominent, despite acts of survival.

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47 This listening has been typed up to make it easier to read but was originally hand-written.

Appendix Fourteen:
The Listening Guide Reading one - element two

A sample of a completed reflexive worksheet[48].

Lucy[49]	I can hear she was very ill.
It was not a good experience at all. At all! At that time, I... I... ummm... from November last year I got sick and I was admitted in... at St. James hospital for two months. So immediately I came out from hospital, that was in January 18, I just rested for about two weeks and then went to rather claim asylum.	I sense she feels she was too ill to have made the journey to claim asylum.
So when I went to Croydon I was very sick. I was very weak, and ahhh... the lady who I met there at the Home Office was very rude and I really broke down because I tried telling her my case but to her she just thinks that ▇▇▇▇▇▇ is a tourist attraction so she doesn't... she seemed not to know that there is another side of things and another side of it. So she started screaming at me it's rubbish what I'm telling her... it's lies. You know I was felt to to feel like I am a criminal.	I can hear feelings of distress and being treated very badly. I hear her frustration at the lack of understanding of her situation. I hear her trying to raise her voice but being overpowered. I understand she 'broke' down – perhaps an unfamiliar way of her responding. I understand she locates her story within an overwhelming power.

I can hear her feeling criminalised and unfairly spoken to. I remember hearing other women's stories of this type of humiliation and poor treatment. |
| **Yes** | |
| And I was like almost telling her to hell with it, I don't want to stay here in this country, because you can imagine like, even in my own community I've been forced out, by my own community, my family also, my extended family because they call me a traitor. | I can hear resistance and anger at the treatment. I also feel resistant and angry.

I sense her feelings of isolation and rejection. I hear a heroic story beginning…. |

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48 This listening has been typed up to make it easier to read but originally my comments in the second column were hand-written against the typed transcript in the first column.

49 Details have been blacked out in order to respect the anonymity of details within the account of the participant.

Appendix Fifteen:
The Listening Guide Reading two

A sample of reading two using a two-step approach from the Listening Guide.

1. The first person 'I' has been highlighted along with the additional verb and any accompanying words that seemed important[50] (Gilligan et al., 2003).

Me: You came on your own? No family with you?

Diane: Yes. I don't have family. My father is dead. My mother is in prison. I don't know. I don't contact her 'cos I can't contact her. I don't know if she alive or if she dead. I don't know.

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2. The 'highlighted' lines have been placed into a poem.
   Diane's 'I' poem:

I don't have family

I don't know.

I don't contact her

I can't contact her.

I don't know if she alive or if she dead.

I don't know

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[50] This listening has been typed up to make it easier to read but originally the 'I' statements were underlined using a coloured pencil.

Appendix Sixteen:
The Listening Guide Reading three

A sample of listening to how women spoke about relationships and a sense of how women understood themselves.

Baelli[51]

Sister, father, mother

Baelli identifies her sister was forced into marriage by their father: "my father forced my sister into a forced marriage". She identifies the powerlessness of her mother in this event: "my mum was there and nothing she would have said would have stopped it. She didn't have a say in this". The threat of 'forced marriage' is then used against Baelli: "at the time my father said to me: 'Even if you want this or not, you're getting older and this will happen to you'".

This narrative emphasis's the power of her father and the relative powerlessness for the women in the household. None of the women are able to prevent the forced marriage and Baelli concludes that the whereabouts of the sister is unknown and Baelii states: "and right now I cannot tell you if my sister is alive or dead". The possibility of 'death' is prominently linked to the event of forced marriage and lack of status or value of women.

The theme of possible death related to 'forced marriage' is a continued possibility throughout the subsequent narrative about Baelli's own marriage. This reinforced the role of the powerful and the powerless to the extent that the lives of the powerless (women/girls) hold so little meaning in terms of equitable social relations, that they can be killed and disappeared from their loved ones.

Network of rescuers

Baelli identifies several people who play a role that is central to her survival. There are very few people in these networks. The first network emerges in ▮▮▮▮▮▮ and made up of two women whom she knows very well: a friend from childhood and her mother. The second network emerges in the UK

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51 Details have been redacted in order to respect the anonymity of information within the account of the participant.

and is also primarily made up of women; a woman whom she does not know but who speaks her mother-tongue and the subsequent network of women and national support agencies, including the police, whom this woman supports Baelli to access.

It is the friend who helps her leave her husband's home and helps her access medical treatment: "So my friend, ever since she came to see me and she told my husband that I had problems, I was ill and she would help me... she took me for treatment". This friend also accesses financial resources to help Baelli to leave the country: "my friend also put money towards that to help me to escape". It is at this point in the narrative that Baelli notes her mother, who contributed "four big gold chains" to secure her passage out of ███████.

The narrative of the role of two known 'rescuers' play a central role in Baelli getting medical treatment, leaving her husband and leaving ███████.

Appendix Seventeen:
'I' poem created from a section in my reflexive journal

This section of my journal was concerned with my role as a researcher speaking for and about 'others'.

I find myself ever conscious

I construct myself and reconstruct the women

I find myself fluctuating

I attempt to reflect on my sense of identity

I am white

I reside and was born in the UK

I am not a refugee

I was 37 years old at the time of the interviews

I attempt to reflect

I am already uncomfortable

I attempt to consider the differences and commonalities

I am a mother of two children who live with me in the UK

I do not hold a religious persuasion

I realise this process could continue

I could find many ways

I reside in a land that has a long history of colonisation, arms trade and wars which can be seen to have contributed to the displacement of people around the world and the creation of refugees.

I do not 'belong'

I am positioned as speaking about 'others'

I enter a contested site

Appendix Eighteen:
Interested in the study slip

To be completed by women asylum seekers and refugees who are interested

in the study

Name: _____

Contact (circle): **My telephone / Worker telephone / My friends telephone**

Telephone number: _____

When is the best time to call? _____

When should I not call? _____

What should I do if someone else answers (circle): **Leave a message / Ask for me / Put phone down**

If you do not answer the phone, should I leave a message on the answer machine (circle): **Yes / No**

(My number will not show up when I call you. This is to stop someone else tracing the number if you do not answer).

Any comments: _____

_____

_____

_____

This form will be kept confidential. Your details will be held by Kate Smith: Researcher

Please post in the addressed envelope.

No stamp required because this is pre-paid.

FAO KATE SMITH (███████ / ███████) School of Human and Health Sciences, The University of

Huddersfield, Queensgate, Huddersfield HD1 3EX

Appendix Nineteen:
Letter of invitation

Date

Dear   ,

I am delighted you will come and talk to me about your life experiences. Please find enclosed a poster and an information sheet with more information.

The study is funded by the Economic Social Research Council and supported by the University of Huddersfield as part of a PhD study, and has been granted ethical approval from the Social Research Ethics Panel at the University of Huddersfield. Taking part in this study will have no influence on your immigration status.

The interview process will involve an interview which will be about one to two hours, and will be very informal. I would like to tape record the discussion to make sure I record the story in your own words. The interview is an opportunity for you to talk about your life experiences. Your personal stories and experiences are the most important part of this study. It is my hope that by telling your story, services, policies and those organisations responsible for international protection for women can be better informed and improved for women refugees everywhere.

We can decide together on a good, safe place for the interview – there is a good room on campus at the University if this suits you. Taking part in this study is voluntary and there will be no payment. Your name and identity will be protected at all times. Your interview recording will be kept on a computer which is password protected. No person, other than the researcher will have access to the recording of your voice.

Please feel free to contact me for more information:

1. **Telephone/ text:** ▓▓▓▓▓ **(please leave a message if I do not answer)**
2. **Email:** ▓▓▓▓▓

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I will call you again in ▓▓▓▓ as we agreed.

Kate Smith

Researcher

Appendix Twenty:
Recruitment leaflet
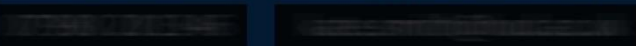
Appendix Twenty One:
Sample of a page of an interview transcript

1. **How was it claiming asylum?**
2. It was not a good experience at all. At all! At that time, I... I... ummm... from
3. November last year I got sick and I was admitted in... at St. James hospital for
4. two months. So immediately I came out from hospital, that was in ████,
5. I just rested for about two weeks and then went to rather claim asylum. So
6. when I went to ████ I was very sick. I was very weak, and ahhh... the lady
7. who I met there at the Home Office was very rude and I really broke down
8. because I tried telling her my case but to her she just thinks that ████ is a
9. tourist attraction so she doesn't... she seemed not to know that there is
10. another side of things and another side of it. So she started screaming at me
11. it's rubbish what I'm telling her... it's lies. You know I was felt to… to feel like I
12. am a criminal.

13. **Yes. Mmm…**
14. And I was like almost telling her to hell with it, I don't want to stay here in this
15. country, because you can imagine like, even in my own community I've been
16. forced out, by my own community, my family also, my extended family
17. because they call me a traitor. What made me come out here is there was
18. ahhhh... there was some ethnic cleansing in ████ after the elections in ████
19. and my community they get targeted as a smaller community in our area and
20. in two days they had killed about forty people, but I chose not to be on the
21. other side of my community and I helped the policing of evacuating the
22. trapped people. Ahhh I stayed with them in the displaced people's camps, and
23. then after that, after a coalition government was established, they formed a
24. tribunal that was collecting information on what really caused the violence and
25. I testified to that tribunal, but I testified on camera (sniff), but when they
26. published their final report they exposed my identity and that is when I started
27. getting death threats and I had to just get out. So, you can imagine how ahhh,
28. I've been victimised by my own community, everyone that I knew, even my
29. friends everybody, my family and then now here where I am trying to ehh, to,
30. to search for a safe haven and the lady, she really doesn't want to
31. understand. She starts screaming at me, telling me what I'm telling her is:
32. 'Rubbish (laughs), those things don't happen in ████. Aw, I broke down and
33. started crying, but unfortunately I had a lot of documents... supporting
34. documents from the University of ██ and also from the ████ ambassador
35. in ████ in the Human Rights Commission. So I lifted out my documents and
36. I tried to present them to her. She shouted at me: 'Do you expect me to read
37. all this stuff?' (laughs). Fortunately the letter that was on top was the... from
38. the ████ Ambassador and it had their... their letterhead and so that attracted
39. her attention and she grabbed it and looked at it and after she read now from
40. the ████ Ambassador telling, aaaa explaining how they'd been taking care of
41. me, in safe houses, that's when she kept quiet and she started behaving
42. again and accept my story.