MAKING A LIVABLE LIFE IN MANCHESTER: DOING JUSTICE TO PEOPLE SEEKING ASYLUM

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how people struggle to make livable lives in the conditions of existence of seeking asylum in the UK. The study is based on ethnographic research, conversations and participant observation, with people seeking asylum in Manchester. Grounding the research in their narratives is a contribution to decolonizing knowledge and doing justice to the sentience of people who are marginalized and pathologized. The narratives are brought into dialogue with feminist and decolonial philosophy and political theory, and with empirical studies of “refugeedom” from a number of disciplines, to produce a new field of connection from which to map the terrain involved in theorizing livability. While the whole thesis seeks to respond to the narratives, there is a detailed focus on three dimensions which participants emphasize as crucial to livability: settlement in Manchester; the prohibition of employment; the asylum application procedures. These are moments in which livability is claimed as both ethics and practice. From the perspective of the narratives and the ethics which permeate them, livability opens up into questions of recognition, social justice and care. People claim commonality: recognition as human, equality and inclusion in social goods, and care in public settings. These are the practical and ethical supports of livability. The narratives point also towards critiques of “refugeedom”, the policies and practices that form the discursive and material conditions within which people seeking asylum attempt to make livable lives.
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Arts & Humanities Research Council
**The Author**

Lorraine Pannett took her first degree, in comparative literature, at the University of Essex in 1970. She subsequently took a Post-Graduate Certificate in Education in English at the University of Bristol and taught for several years in further education. In 1987, she became a civil servant, later qualifying as a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, and working as a senior human resource manager for the States of Guernsey. In 2005, she returned to full-time study when she was awarded a scholarship to undertake a Master’s Degree in Social Justice and Equity Studies at Brock University in Ontario, Canada. In 2006, she received the Spirit of Brock award. She has given papers at a number of events including two annual conferences of the Association of American Geographers, conferences on ‘Good Asylum’ and ‘Journeys and Justice’ at the University of Leeds, a workshop on ‘The Feminization of Labour’ at the University of Manchester, as well as talking about her research to Manchester City Council staff and giving feedback to groups and individuals with whom she worked.
List of Abbreviations

ECHR – European Convention on Human Rights
MRSN – Manchester Refugee Support Agency
RCO – Refugee Community Organization
UKBA – United Kingdom Border Agency
UNHCR – United Nations High Commission for Refugees
INTRODUCTION: GROUNDING LIVABILITY

INTRODUCTION

My interest in livability comes from an engagement with questions raised by Judith Butler (2004). One of my points of departure in conceptualizing “sheltering norms” and “livable lives” for people seeking asylum in the UK was Butler’s ethical question: “what makes, or ought to make, the lives of others bearable” (Butler, 2004: 17). My contribution to a debate in which many academic philosophers and theorists have asked this question “from a position of power” (Butler, 2004: 17) is to consider livability from the perspective of those who are marginalized and pathologized, people seeking asylum.

In a world in which it was estimated that some 214 million people - 3.1 percent of the world’s population - would be living outside their country of birth in 2010 (United Nations, 2009), the ability to make a livable life in a new country is a personal and public issue of increasing salience. From the background of an MA in social justice, and having written a dissertation based on a life history of a Bengali woman who had come to the UK in what might be seen as relatively favourable circumstances (a desired and planned move, legal status, middle class surroundings, a good education and the ability to speak fluent English), my aim was to learn something of the way people make new lives in less favourable circumstances.

This study takes up Butler’s question as theoretical enquiry and as a practical matter with implications for public policy and research practice. In looking at an aspect of a global phenomenon as it is experienced locally, in Manchester, my work can be seen as responding, in part, to David Turton’s encouragement of “research that aims to understand the situation of forced migrants at the local level, as purposive actors, embedded in particular social
and historical circumstances” (Turton, 2003b: 15). Similarly, it can be seen as responding to Castles’ call for “participatory research methods which give an active role to forced migrants in research processes” (Castles, 2003: 29-30). The term “forced migrant” is used to connect refugees with people displaced internally and across borders for reasons of conflict, development projects or natural disasters and, as I discuss in Chapter 3, the value of this connection is contested. Nonetheless, a commitment to a participatory style of research which invites people to speak about what is important to them informs the way in which I have undertaken ethnographic research with people seeking asylum. In this way, I hoped to understand from their perspective what hampers and what supports them in making new lives in Manchester.

This Chapter introduces the concerns at the heart of my research question and research practice. It introduces some of the conditions of existence my participants spoke about, and some of the topics and concepts that will be important in the Chapters that follow. Further, it introduces some of the modes in which my participants spoke about these conditions: the ethical and political claims which suffuse the narratives. I set these claims within a context of disputes about the rights of people seeking asylum which are often merged with fierce debates about migration, the nation-state, and human rights. Representations by others of people seeking asylum are often prominent in these debates. From a different, and less heard, perspective, my participants interweave questions of recognition with issues of social justice and care as central to making a livable life in a new country.

In a study which focuses on moving within national borders, Audrey McCollum shows how grievous moving can be, even in the best of circumstances:

Moving results in extensive loss . . . loss of home in which a woman’s sense of competence and continuity may be embedded; loss of identity expressed in physical appearance and in the myriad roles involved in work and play; loss of the feelings of effectiveness and the recognition linked to work; and loss of close friends who nurture a woman, confirm her sense of self and reinforce her self-esteem. Lost aspects of self as well as lost others must be mourned, yet the mover’s grief is unanticipated and arouses self-doubts, guilt and shame. (McCollum, 1990: 22)
My participants demonstrate that the potential for what McCollum describes as “the trauma of moving” and sense of “extensive loss” are not confined to women. However, some writers emphasize that, although migrations between countries can produce crisis, catastrophe and trauma for people who move, this is not inevitable. A “welcoming” environment and the presence of people who “can contain their anxieties” can enable those who move even in difficult circumstances to “reorganize and carry out creative work in their new surroundings” (Grinberg and Grinberg, 1989: 164-165).

Peter Loizos suggests that the potential for trauma may be overstated, especially when it represents refugees as wrapped in helplessness rather than as persons like one’s self (Loizos, 2005: 45-48, 56). For Loizos, it is “additional experiences – suffering violence and/or witnessing violence – which do the lasting damage” (Loizos, 2005: 45). For people seeking asylum, the potential for lasting damage may be exacerbated when violence witnessed or suffered is not recognized by the asylum system, or when the conditions of existence of asylum themselves inflict violence. People seeking asylum in the UK find their lives shaped in specific ways by their legal situation, by discourses that construct some migrants in harmful ways, and by the effects of these discourses in the practices of the people they encounter.

However, “the experience of displacement is not only about the loss of a place, and the pain and bereavement this entails. It is also, and inevitably, about the struggle to make a place in the world” (Turton, 2004: 28). Learning about the ways in which people seeking asylum make new lives in Manchester involved learning about their struggles to make a place in the UK through being granted legal status and also about the specific conditions of existence that helped or hindered their struggles to make a place in the city.

“Manchester has often been constructed...as the immigrant city par excellence” (Kushner, 2006: 57; cf Crawford, 1962; Kidd, 2006). However, histories are selective: some immigrant groups are left out, and in many accounts “the word ‘refugee’ is avoided” (Kushner, 2006: 58). Kushner remarks specifically on the absence of refugees’ own feelings and of moral philosophy (Kushner, 2006: 202, 223). If, as he suggests, the history of
refugees has been “actively forgotten” (Kushner, 2006: 47), it is important not only to retrieve the past but also to bring the present to awareness in ways that foreground the feelings and ethics of people seeking asylum.

Castles urges “that sociologists should be concerned with forced migration because it is a central aspect of social transformation in the contemporary world” (Castles, 2003: 30). I locate my interdisciplinary study within a move away from positivism and a revival of interest amongst researchers across a range of disciplines in the Marxist imperative that it is not sufficient to interpret the world: if we are interested in social justice, we have to attend also to praxis, to social transformation and the ways in which we can change conditions of domination and oppression (cf Routledge, 2001; Carroll, 2004: 1; Harvey, 2004; Anzaldúa, 2007; Denzin and Giardina, 2009: 13; Gutiérrez Rodríguez et al, 2010). The aim of my research, to contribute to considerations of livability as both human survival and human flourishing, involves an analysis of the ground, the kinds of political and social terrain, in which they are possible. Injustice can threaten both. Asking what it means for people seeking asylum to make livable lives in the UK opens up interwoven questions of practice and ethics. It entails finding the means to help release specific situated knowledges from their subordination and disseminate them in ways that, if heard, could help to create conditions that might make life more livable for them.

Four connected questions emerge from my conversations with people seeking asylum about the routes by which they make new lives in Manchester. First, how “livability” can be theorized and the social, institutional and interpersonal conditions that hinder it or make it possible. Second, how the UK can do justice to people seeking asylum. This involves issues of recognition, the fair distribution of social ‘goods’, and care. Third, how people come through difficult transitions in their lives, in particular the resources they draw on in making lives in a new country. Fourth, what it means for researchers to do justice to their participants. My considerations of these questions are grounded in my participants’ narratives, in stories other people seeking asylum told and comments they made in an assortment of meetings and encounters in different places over nearly three years.
From working with my participants’ narratives comes one of my contributions to existing research. This is an understanding of the narratives as permeated by theorizations and values: by “ethics from below” (Santos, 2010: 228). I bring the narratives into dialogue with (i) academic philosophy and political theory; (ii) critiques of “refugeedom” (Gatrell, 2005: 203) from a number of disciplines; and (iii) official policy and statements. From this dialogue, I have created a field of connection which enables me to map something of the terrain involved in theorizing livability and its supports. In the next three sections, I introduce how I approached the issues of livability, “refugeedom” and research practice, and give a summary of the thesis Chapters.

Part of this project is to ask what it means to do justice to people seeking asylum. Here, I foreground something else I think is new, perhaps because taken for granted by researchers: doing justice requires attention not only to the content of people’s narrations but also the *sentience*, the capacity for feeling, thought, and meaningful activity evident in the ways they speak. In bringing often-separated fields of knowledge together to critique the conditions of existence of asylum or, more precisely, of *seeking* asylum, I show how they offer consistent arguments for social transformations based on principles of recognition, social justice and care.

### 1.1 Livability

I approached the dimensions of livability as human flourishing first through the narratives and then through other literature that addresses issues raised by my participants. Trying to understand the dimensions of livability as my participants spoke about them has drawn me in two directions. The first direction is towards interpretations of social justice. Social justice is a field of enquiry which can be approached from many disciplinary, theoretical and methodological perspectives. Much of the literature which addresses social justice is concerned with the fair distribution of goods and burdens in given societies and globally (Clayton and Williams, 2004). Just distribution, whether theorized as charity or as rights (Fleischacker, 2004), raises questions about the institutional and interpersonal norms and practices that shelter people’s
ability to sustain life and to flourish. More recently, recognition has come to be seen as an important vector of social justice (Young, 1990; Butler, 2004; Honneth, 2008). Nonetheless, the relationship between fairness in distribution and social justice as recognition remains contested (Fraser and Honneth, 2003). Further, specific claims for justice may not be satisfied simply by incorporation in what exists already if the already-existing is marked, for example, by white male hierarchies: “justice demands its own transformation” (Cornell, 1999: 109). My participants’ narratives invoke both recognition of common human being and equal access to social goods such as employment and education as a basis for making livable lives in the UK. Moreover, they add a strong focus on care as a public activity.

A social justice approach helps to identify some of the structural bases that support or inhibit livability. I use these to interrogate the conditions of existence of asylum. What I refer to as the conditions of existence of asylum take the form of (i) discourses, policies and rules, and (ii) interpersonal relationships. The two are interrelated: indeed policies, representations of people seeking asylum and the behaviour of the people they meet are mutually constituting and shape the kinds of encounters possible. For example, rules and services may be administered by officials whose behaviour, as one of my participants, Joshua¹, recounts, is shaped by dominant representations of people seeking asylum as criminals. Such treatment can violate people’s self-recognition - and adversely affect the services which they can access. Thus, social justice as a foundation for livability encompasses problems of recognition, distribution and “institutional support” (Butler, 2004: 226; cf Young, 1990: 37), which connect with

¹ I have aggregated information about research participants and used pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of people in precarious situations. Some of my participants chose their own pseudonym while others asked me to choose. The names, chosen or given, are: Anna, Cecile, Charles, Elizabeth, Emily, Habib, Helen, Huda, James, Joshua, Mary, Marwa, Michael, Rachel, and Sammy. The eleven countries they come from are: Armenia; Cameroon; Eritrea; Iraq; Liberia; Libya; Poland; Sierra Leone; Somalia; Sudan; Zimbabwe.
questions of needs, self-determination, self-development, knowledge and care.

The narratives have drawn me in a second direction, towards understanding something of the psychic resources of people seeking asylum. People talk about drawing strength from aspects of their socialization in the countries from which they have come. Despite their having fled their countries, the contrasts they make between the ways in which they were recognized and able to exercise agency there and the limitations of their lives in the UK help to account for what one participant, Elizabeth, describes as the “hurt” and another, Emily, describes as the “stigma” (cf Goffman, 1990) felt by so many people seeking asylum. Conversely, the ways in which they remember the past help to account for the sentience, the emotional, cognitive and conative resources, they mobilize in making livable lives.

Gramsci’s account of “‘organic’ intellectuals” offers an interesting perspective from which to approach the emotional, cognitive and practical activities many of my participants engage in as they critique and struggle against their conditions of existence, and assert values and rights (Gramsci, 2007a: 6). If the “mode of being of the new intellectual” includes “active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, ‘permanent persuader’” (Gramsci, 2007a: 10), then the varied activity of many of my participants would fit these criteria. While they do not fit absolutely Gramsci’s definitions of organic intellectuals - they do not, for example, belong to a class in a traditional sense - many of them are deeply immersed in “awareness” of the daily experiences of their group (people seeking asylum), and, simultaneously, are able to analyze those experiences by locating them in broader economic, social and political contexts (Gramsci, 2007a: 5). In critiquing their positioning within these contexts, for example by raising questions about human rights and what Joshua terms “a decent living”, they assert values that point towards social transformation. People seeking asylum make claims for social justice and livability that could apply to other marginalized social groups, potentially causing “the whole society to move forward” (Gramsci, 2007b:
60). In thinking of people seeking asylum in terms of organic intellectuals, I add to empirical studies by foregrounding the ways in which many of my participants both analyze and interpret the conditions of existence of asylum and also become involved in forms of praxis - caring and campaigning activities, for example - that work towards changing not only their individual situation but also some of the restrictions that shape the lives of people seeking asylum as a group.

I examine the ways in which the conditions of existence of asylum work on my participants’ sentence and their sentence works on the conditions of existence. An important strand in their sentence is demonstrated in the ways they speak about the importance of being recognized as human. Michael Dummett’s emphasis on what is “due” to people as human (Dummett, 2007: 26) is consistent with my participants’ recognition of themselves as holders of human and civil rights, as meriting equal access to intangible social goods such as work and education, and tangible goods such as housing and financial support, as people whose needs should be met, and as people deserving of care. They value sociality, being listened to, being able to participate in and contribute to society in the same ways as other people. Most often, however, they speak about these conditions, supportive of livability, in their absence.

1.2 “REFUGEedom”: NORMS THAT SHELTER LIVABILITY?

The narratives invoke an examination of broader aspects of the conditions of existence of asylum, the context of “public issues” that impinge as “personal troubles” (Mills, 2000: 226) on the lives of people seeking asylum, shaping or

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2 There is admonitory as well as transformative potential in the mirroring of the experiences of people seeking asylum and citizens. De Genova takes the regulation of migrants as a warning to citizens, referring to the “ever-tenuous and besieged limit within which our practices of freedom become encircled and asphyxiated...Within the global regime of capital accumulation, the more flagrant abjection of the world of denizens only shows, to the more properly domesticated citizens, the image of their own future” (De Genova, 2007b: 442).
limiting the possibilities for making new lives in Manchester. I develop my analysis of livability by considering how far these conditions of existence operate as “sheltering norms” (Butler, 2004: 34) which provide foundations or possibilities for human survival and flourishing. This involves a consideration of the category of ‘asylum seeker’ itself. I examine the way in which the systematization of categories operates to determine who has access to what rights and social goods, and connects with ethical and political debates about what is owed to non-citizens. This raises the question of whether the conditions of existence of asylum in the UK are designed as ways of “demagnetising’ the UK” in terms of perceived ‘pull’ factors (Somerville, 2007: 67), to deter and control (Bohmer and Shuman, 2007; Gibney, 2004) rather than to shelter people seeking asylum.

Understanding the impact of social and historical conditions on human lives requires that “official formulations” (Mills, 2000: 226) and “taken for granted assumptions” (Turton, 2003a: 15) are called into question. Since refugees are the objects of representations by others, important questions for the field of refugee and migrant studies cluster around ontological and epistemological questions: ‘who’ and ‘what’ refugees are, by whom, how, with what purpose and effect they are or should be – represented. This is a politically and academically contentious field within which people seeking asylum are constituted as ‘problems’ and ‘threats’ (Kushner, 2006: 7; Gedalof, 2007: 82, 83). I use the term “people seeking asylum” as one way of resisting reifying categorizations. It emphasizes that I am writing about people, but people whose conditions of existence are constructed and constrained by the asylum rules as well as by misrepresentations.3

Turton urges that we should identify with forced migrants as “‘purposive actors’ – as ordinary people”, like ourselves (Turton, 2003a: 12; cf Loizos, 2005: 56). However, the extent to which people seeking asylum can or should be conceived of as ordinary is problematic. Conceiving of them as

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3 Similarly, Knowles urges the deconstruction of race not only to facilitate analysis but also because “it is a category of political and social analysis, and not a category of human behaviour” (Knowles, 1999: 123).
“people like us, embedded in contingent social and historical circumstances” (Turton, 2003a: 10), is perhaps a way of “hearing-to-respond” (Spivak, 2000: 22) to the desire for what one young man I met described as “a life like other people”. Paul Gilroy expresses a similar view of the ‘likeness’ of people:

Until recently, no shame would have automatically attached to the simple ideals from which they derive, namely that human beings are ordinarily far more alike than they are unalike, that most of the time we can communicate with each other, and that the recognition of mutual worth, dignity and essential similarity imposes restrictions on how we can behave if we wish to act justly. (Gilroy, 2005: 4)

However, “most of the time” my participants speak about the conditions of existence of asylum as denying them the “recognition of mutual worth, dignity and essential similarity” which facilitates communications and just actions. There is justice in conceiving of people seeking asylum as ordinary in terms of human commonality: sentience; human due and entitlement to rights; the desire for livable lives and to be “purposive actors”; embeddedness in “contingent social and historical circumstances”. However, their specific circumstances (their pasts, and the conditions of existence of asylum I discuss in Chapter 3) are extraordinary and exceptional, not least in denying them recognition as “purposive actors” (cf Harrell-Bond, 1999: 158). Often, they speak about their response to these circumstances in terms of remarkable qualities of resilience and, sometimes, of a sense of God-given purpose which is itself extraordinary and which gives them extraordinary insights into the social and political fabric of the UK as it responds to migration.

Examining dominant representations and conceptualizations of asylum seekers is part of the questioning Turton advocates. I discuss the way categorization operates as part of pervasive discourses to naturalize hostile representations of people seeking asylum. In what ways do these discourses give substance to the behaviour and decisions of many of the officials involved with the claims of people seeking asylum, and many of those involved in delivering services? I consider debates about where the prime responsibility for such representations lies (Statham, 2003; Kymlicka, 2003;
ICAR, 2004; Zetter, 2007). The metaphors used to describe migration and people who move across national borders shape the ways in which asylum seekers and migrants are seen (Malkki, 1992, 1993; Turton, 2003; Ahmed, 2004; Gilroy, 2005; Gedalof, 2007), with consequences for their treatment. People seeking asylum are positioned within a contested discursive field that merges asylum and migration to construct a figure that threatens the welfare and security of citizens. Such representations, and the exclusions that flow from them and are legitimated by them, do violence to the personhood, rights and bodies of people seeking asylum. Yet, as the narratives show, people seeking asylum “categorize back” to ways in which they are represented (Malkki, 1995: 8). Such recategorizations work to resist the violence and the authority of hegemonic representations through, for example, the ethical frameworks which people apply to the encounters and the ‘denials’ which shape their lives, and through the way they create alternative ethnographies as they turn a subaltern gaze on aspects of British life.

‘Asylum seekers’ are legal and administrative constructs closely connected with notions of citizen and non-citizen connoted by the nation-state. While the concept of the nation-state is contested and vexed (Pecora, 2001; Hall, 2003; Anderson, 2006; Anthias, 2008), in practice the margin of appreciation given to national sovereignty ensures that nation-states have overwhelming power to thwart or support livability by controlling access to human rights declared to be universal. This power is demonstrated both in the actions of people who feel that they have to flee their countries, and by the authority of states to recognize or refuse to recognize people as refugees. The dominance of the Westphalian order raises questions of justice: whether citizens merit more consideration than non-citizens (Gibney, 2004); whether the citizens of some countries are entitled to more livable lives than people in other countries (Pogge, 2004); whether equal treatment is the human “due” of all people, including those seeking asylum (Dummett, 2007).

This raises further questions about the kinds of concerns UK governments are moved by. Much of the literature dealing with refugees demonstrates the ways in which domestic politics and perceptions of national interest have operated to control immigration at different periods and in different political
contexts (Bloch, 2001; Castles, 2003; Statham, 2003; Somerville, 2007). Kushner and others have critiqued the UK’s projection of itself as a welcoming place for refugees (Kushner, 2006). This is evident in my participants’ disappointment in their expectations of finding what Mary looked for: “a good country that can protect you”.

The frequent lack of enforceability of human rights prompts different responses. Some have cast doubt on the whole project of rights grounded in citizenship (Agamben, 1998). Others have argued more explicitly for conceptions of rights beyond the nation-state (Nett, 1971; Ishay and Goldfischer, 1997; Marfleet, 2006). In the context of the conditions of existence of asylum, my participants assert the universality of human rights as a claim for an inclusive justice. The demand for universality made in that moment does not preclude future extensions to concepts of rights, either in their content or in those who are seen as subjects with rights.

The global North perceives and represents itself as a magnet for peoples from the global South (cf Somerville, 2007: 67). Yet there is no ‘magnetic North’, no fixed compass point, where answers to questions about livability can be found. From a starting point in my participants’ narratives, my research has taken me in different directions: towards theories of recognition, social justice and care that have an affinity with my participants’ ethics, and towards critiques of “refugeedom”, the policies and practices that form the conditions of existence of asylum. The needle swings and swings again, pointing towards the complexities involved in elaborating social justice, complexities in the ways ‘asylum seekers’ are conceived, contentiousness in critiques of “refugeedom”, paradoxes and contradictions in the ways my participants speak about making new lives in Manchester. Under examination, livability seems to expand and refract. Yet, some of the interconnected conditions which support or “block” livability can be apprehended, delineated and asserted without foreclosing further expansion and refraction. This thesis is my endeavour to join my participants in apprehending, delineating and asserting what livability means in the conditions of existence of seeking asylum.
1.3 Research Practice

I tried to understand the situation of my participants from their own perspective through a conversational interviewing practice within which participants set the agenda and guided the discussion to matters which they considered important in making new lives in Manchester. This was supported by many hours of participant observation. Approaching people as knowledge producers and deciding how to value their knowledge are fundamental yet complex and tricky ethnographic endeavours when working with people seeking asylum who make their lives within “a culture of disbelief” (Marfleet, 2006: 233; Moorhead, 2006: 136) that positions them as people not to be trusted and refuses to validate their knowledge. I tried to ground my analysis in what my participants said, to understand in their own terms what they were telling me, and then to find theorizations that had some kind of affinity with the ethical issues they raised rather than examining how a specific theory worked in the context of the narratives. Therefore, in part, I attempted to hear and read the narratives ‘with the grain’: this produced testimony as both “documentation and denunciation” (Eastmond, 2007: 258) of the conditions of existence of asylum. Simultaneously, I recognize the narratives as having some of the characteristics of autoethnography. I understand them as self-representations that place “the self within a social context” (Reed-Danahay, 1997: 9), self-conscious productions of the self simultaneously for the self and for an audience, persuasive political endeavours (Butz, 2009: 151). The relational aspects of Mary Louise Pratt’s discussion of autoethnographic self-representation as undertaken “in ways that engage with the colonizer’s own terms” and constructed “in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations” (Pratt, 2003: 7) is also insightful in relation to the narratives. Although people seeking asylum are not colonized subjects, the way in which they are positioned within the “contact zone” of the UK, retrieves aspects of the power relations of “colonial encounters”. Thus, many of my participants experience their encounters in the metropolis as typified by “coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (Pratt, 2003: 6), to which they often respond using a language of common values.
People respond both to my research question about the way in which they make new lives in Manchester and to their representations by their others. They do this sometimes explicitly and sometimes in response to the absent presences of the conditions of existence of seeking asylum (cf Anthias, 2008: 16). As a result of this intricate approach, part of my contribution to research is to see the narratives as providing two dimensions of knowledge: (i) knowledge about the ways in which the conditions of existence of asylum position people; (ii) knowledge about the ways in which people protest and resist this positioning and seek to reposition themselves in ways consistent with their self-understanding (cf Honneth, 2008: 133-134). I show how parts of their narratives about making livable lives in Manchester respond explicitly and implicitly to political and media representations of them as threats to the welfare and security of citizens rather than recognizing them as people “whose capabilities are of constitutive value to a concrete community” (Honneth, 2008: 139).

Grounding theory in my participants’ narratives does not give them voice - they do not lack voice; rather, it makes a space which is attentive to their normative frameworks (cf Riessman, 2002a: 220), and embodies aspects of social justice in research practice. Engagement with social justice goes beyond a choice of research question to involve ontological and epistemological considerations that affect three interlinked aspects of research: (i) the ways in which knowledge is generated and interpreted; (ii) the value placed on that knowledge; (iii) relationships between researchers and participants. Thus, I argue for an understanding of participants as active generators of knowledge and their knowledge as providing valuable “new angles of vision” (Collins, 2000: 15; cf Clifford, 1986: 9) from people whose perspectives are frequently ignored in policy- and decision-making which affects their lives.

One of the focuses of feminist research methods has been to understand and validate qualitative research with subordinated groups as situated knowledge (Collins, 2000, 2004; Haraway, 2004b; Harding, 2004a, 2004b). Subordinated groups are recognized as producing not only the cry of the oppressed (Fanon, 2008: 92; cf Maldonado-Torres, 2008: 133-142) but also
knowledge which operates as “wisdom” (Collins, 2000: 258; cf Anzaldúa, 2007: 60; Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2010a: 32-33). Concurrently, there have been efforts to build on the work of Edward Said (Said, 1978) by engaging theoretical perspectives and research practices that work towards ‘decolonizing knowledge’ (Nandy, 2006; Maldonado-Torres, 2008; Boatcă, Costa, Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2010). If my work has a contribution to make in the project of decentring and decolonizing knowledge, it is to help bring to light and disseminate “ethics from below” (Santos, 2010: 228). This raises questions about how researchers can work with people to make subordinated knowledges audible or palpable to wider audiences, and, sometimes, how to make their critique into what Michel Foucault has called “an instrument for those who fight, those who resist and refuse what is” (Foucault, 2002c: 236).

Questions of recognition, social justice and care come to the fore in choices of research questions and research practices. They pose ethical dilemmas for researchers in the ways we relate to people as the subjects of our research and in the broader ways we see ourselves and relate to them as people in some ways like ourselves. I think that it would be difficult to work with people seeking asylum in ways that did not invite, even necessitate, a “decolonial ethics of responsibility”, the apt phrase in which Gutiérrez Rodríguez encapsulates her reading of Maldonado-Torres (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2010a: 167) and “collaborative engagement” (Routledge, 2001: 113; cf Routledge, 2002; Lammers, 2007). Indeed, most, if not all, of the researchers with people seeking asylum that I have met are involved in other forms of practical activity, formal and informal, supportive of their personhood and rights.

Making a “livable life” is a practical question thoroughly imbricated with ethical issues (Butler, 2004: 39, 226; cf Smith, 2000: 1150). Thus, an empirical enquiry into what it means for people seeking asylum to make livable lives in a new country raises fundamental questions about social justice and doing justice through research practice. One way of doing justice is through being attentive to the stories people tell. Many of my participants emphasize the importance of being listened to. For example, Joshua speaks about his experiences as a peer to peer counsellor with former child soldiers
in the aftermath of conflict in his country: “most of them feel free to speak with me, and we feel free to speak to ourselves because we don’t see age differences or whatever or this person will take my story and do something without me know[ing], take it as a fault.” Yet, it can be difficult for academic researchers to take their participants’ stories and not do something without their knowing, if only by bringing these stories into dialogue with research and theorizations that the researchers think give a more patterned or contextualized understanding to the collective stories. What I have tried to do is to take my participants’ stories, not as “faults” but as ways in which they have understood and theorized their experiences as people seeking asylum in Manchester. In this way, I recognize people as producers of theories about their own lives and situatedness. This approach erodes the division that is sometimes made between informants as having experiences and researchers as analysing those experiences. Researchers are shaped and reshaped by their experiences and, as I shall illustrate, participants analyze and interpret theirs, re-presenting themselves in the process (cf Mulinari and Rätzel, 2007).

1.4 Chapter Summary

In Chapter 2, I explore concepts of livability and the norms and conditions which make it possible. I have taken the terms “livability” and “livable lives” from Butler (2004). I draw on aspects of the work of Butler, Axel Honneth, Iris Marion Young, Dummett, Joan Tronto and other political theorists and philosophers which I think are consistent or have an affinity with the terms in which my participants speak about what is important to them in making new lives. Sometimes they use similar terminology, ‘care’ for example. Sometimes, as I gathered the language of my participants into common themes, I saw those themes as similar to academic conceptualizations of norms such as ‘recognition’ and ‘social justice’. I bring these conceptualizations into dialogue with the concrete circumstances of the narratives. In practice, people seeking asylum struggle for livability in conditions where regulations result in severely unequal power relations and their knowledges are despised. I consider two conceptions of livability: first, a
‘thin’ conception, concerning needs humans have in common and which, as "sheltering norms" (Butler, 2004: 34), support the possibility of human flourishing; second, I ask how far ‘thicker’ conceptions of livability can be supported by the normative and how far they have to allow for singularity, difference and the otherness of the other, for both human being and human becoming (cf Fitzpatrick, 2002: 18).

On the basis of the narratives, I discuss the foundations of livability as having three overlapping aspects: recognition, social justice and care. First, I discuss recognition of personhood. This involves an analysis of how and as what my participants want to be recognized. The terms in which they speak have something in common with the work of Honneth; however, I suggest ways in which Honneth’s theorizations of recognition need to be modified in the context of the everyday. Second, I consider how my participants speak about social justice. They recognize themselves as entitled to human rights and equality of access to social goods. Their social justice claims are similar to Young’s conceptualizations of self-determination and self-development, while their actual circumstances translate well into Young’s conceptualizations of domination and oppression. Third, they speak of themselves as deserving of care. The terms in which they speak about public services relate to conceptualizations of care in the work of Carol Gilligan, Jennifer Mason and Tronto. They refuse forms of care which seal them into enforced helplessness and exclusion. They ask for care which is attentive to their specific needs and includes them by using their knowledge and experience, enabling them to be what Mary calls “practical people in the community”.

Chapter 3 contextualizes the narratives by examining five areas of contention, “public issues” and their effects, which impinge on the everyday lives of people seeking asylum in Manchester. Here, I use conceptualizations of recognition, social justice and care as tools with which to analyze the extent to which current conditions of existence of asylum in the UK provide norms and practices which shelter livability. First, I discuss the ways in which people are constituted, categorized and conceptualized as refugees and asylum seekers and the effects of these modes of (mis)recognition. Second, I discuss the nation-state as a site of “conflicting moral claims” (Gibney, 2004:
which focus on distinctions between what is owed to citizens and what is owed to non-citizens. Third, I consider some of the ways in which shifting (and unshifting) ideas of the nation-state relate to policies designed to control access to asylum in the UK. Fourth, I examine the current asylum rules as ways in which ideas about the nation-state and non-citizens are put into practice. Fifth, I discuss some of the literature which analyzes responsibility for the conflation of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.

In Chapter 4, I discuss how issues of recognition, social justice and care permeate research with subordinated groups, posing challenges and dilemmas for researchers in terms of ontology, epistemology, research practice and personal engagement. The value of work with subordinated and pathologized groups has been emphasized from both feminist and decolonizing perspectives. I reflect on some of these theoretical issues in the context of my research practice and discuss some of the more practical dilemmas of my research practice.

I had written early versions of what became Chapters 2, 3 and 4 before I undertook any interviews. Having undertaken that work, I wrote the Chapters (5, 6 and 7) which focused on the narratives, then rewrote the earlier Chapters in the light of the theories that seemed to work well in dialogue, or translation, with the themes I had drawn from the narratives. So at the heart of my thesis, pulsing through the rest of it, are the three Chapters which focus on the narratives.

While I have attempted to retain contact with the narratives throughout my thesis (cf Bryant and Charmaz, 2010: 1), in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, I study them in more detail to show the ground and the groundwork which formed my analyses. In necessarily selecting topics, themes and narrative extracts, I have aimed for consistency with the main issues raised by my participants and with their self-understandings. The three Chapters correspond to aspects of the conditions of existence of asylum raised by my participants and reiterated in different ways in other settings. While these are by no means the only conditions of existence raised in the narratives, they are topics which were raised with frequency and intensity. Although my focus is on the way
people seeking asylum make new lives in Manchester, I cannot confine my analysis to the city. My participants talk about their experiences in Manchester - and about their memories of their homelands, their experiences elsewhere in the world, and about the UK government. In their narratives, Manchester is a site of the global and the local, a complex diasporic space (cf Brah, 2005: 194).

In Chapter 5, I analyze what people say about aspects of settlement: arrival and accommodation in Manchester; negotiating the city; language as it pertains to settlement; encounters with service providers and local people. These topics raise issues of social justice as institutional support and self-determination, of recognition, racialization and stigma, care in public contexts, and neighbourliness. My participants describe how officials imbue their decisions with ‘personal’ attitudes that retrieve hegemonic discourses that violate their self-understandings. The behaviour of officials calls into question Max Weber’s typology of modern bureaucracy as “impersonal” (Weber, 1962: 199). People speak about the variety of resources they draw on to sustain them in difficult times. “Aspects of self” may not be so much “lost” (McCollum, 1990: 22) as in abeyance.

In Chapter 6, I analyze what was to my participants and other groups I listened to the most significantly debilitating condition of existence: the prohibition of employment. I consider first the current policies which structure the prohibition of the right to work. Second, I look at some of the strategies my participants employ against the regulation of their lives. Third, I look in detail at the narratives of two of my participants, Mary and Habib, at the emotions they felt as they encountered the effects of the prohibition of employment. Finally, I consider what my participants told me about voluntary agencies. Many of my participants speak of the prohibition of employment in terms of its articulation with the exclusions brought about by poverty, especially exclusion from the possibility of further or higher education. They speak in terms of rights, fair distribution of social goods, about misrecognition of personhood and needs, about care. I relate these to Young’s concepts of oppression and domination as hampering livability. In narrating “personal troubles” and hardships, people show how “public issues” reverberate in the
effects of “employment prohibited”. However, they talk also about the range of ways in which they resist the prohibition and its effects, often drawing on opportunities provided by voluntary agencies.

In Chapter 7, I examine what my participants say about UK legislation and the asylum rules and asylum claim process. My first thought had been that the Chapter would discuss voluntary agencies as “spaces of hope”, and something of this discussion is included in the two previous Chapters. That might have provided a more optimistic conclusion. Perhaps the conclusion that I have is more true to life for the majority of people seeking asylum. Regardless of the efforts that people make within the conditions of existence of asylum, it is the decisions of the asylum application process that ultimately determine livability.

People speak about the emotions produced by the legal process, their critiques of aspects of the process, and the values that they bring to bear in making their critiques. Here, the validity of their knowledge is questioned. Power/knowledge operates in the way the Home Office both sets the rules and has the power to determine what counts as knowledge. Bound by rules in which asymmetry of power is extreme, the resistant activities in which they are able to engage are limited. I consider the operations of the UK asylum rules to provide an understanding of the contexts in which my participants are speaking, the absent presences of their narratives. Adverse presentations of people seeking asylum are mobilized in the rules which govern their daily lives: because they are suspect, they are people to be controlled and constrained.

Justice resides in a claimant’s ability to speak and be heard, to give authority to the “testifying phrase” (Lyotard, 2007: 5). I examine the ways in which the “testifying phrase” uttered by someone seeking asylum is “deprived of authority” through lack of material evidence, lack of cultural understanding on the part of case owners and judges, and a culture permeated by disbelief of people seeking asylum. Asymmetries of power contribute to anxieties and situations, “more frightening than what you have fled from” (Elizabeth), which
put human flourishing at risk. Indeed, if deportation follows an unsuccessful claim process, life itself may be put at risk.

In the Conclusion, I review what I have learned from listening to people seeking asylum speak about the issues they identify as significant in affecting their ability to make new lives in Manchester. They talk about ‘ordinary’, common, needs and desires in a context of extraordinary and exceptional conditions that shape and limit their ability to meet their needs and realize their desires. I bring my participants’ narratives and theorizings together with philosophy and political theory, empirical studies and critique to offer some conclusions about livability and its supports: recognition, social justice and care. I show that, while harms can be demonstrated with some clarity, complex webs of conditions support livability. Laws, institutions, rules, structures, histories, geographies, discourses and relationships all impinge on people seeking asylum, and on their possibilities for livable lives. What is striking about my participants’ narratives is the ethical force of the critiques they make, the *sentience* which makes them feel the “hurt” of circumstances which deny their sentience and, paradoxically, gives them the psychic resources that enable them to persist in struggling towards human flourishing.
“WHAT MAKES FOR A LIVABLE WORLD”: RECOGNITION, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND CARE

What makes for a livable world is no idle question... It becomes a question for ethics, I think, not only when we ask the personal question, what makes my own life bearable, but when we ask, from a position of power, and from the point of view of distributive justice, what makes, or ought to make, the lives of others bearable? (Butler, 2004: 17)

INTRODUCTION

When people spoke about making new lives in the conditions of existence of asylum, they spoke in ways that seemed to me to point towards connections between livability and ideas of recognition, social justice and care. In this Chapter, I explore some of these connections. My focus is on theorizations that work with my participants’ narrations and the ways in which they suggest an “ethics from below” (Santos, 2010: 228) based on normative and practical claims for justice and livability. In turn, these claims can be used to analyze the conditions of existence of asylum.

First, I conceptualize livability thinly, as a norm applying to all human life, and then more thickly as a norm particularized in the context of people seeking asylum in the UK. A thin conception of livability can be seen as universal, concerning needs humans have in common to sustain life. Second, I consider the relationship between livability and recognition. I ask what it is that needs to be recognized if people are to have the possibility of livable lives. Third, I examine the ways in which livability is supported by social justice, as a conception of rights (and therefore of responsibilities) and as a practice that requires attention to both equality and needs in the distribution of goods. Third, I suggest that social justice must include care, and ask why we should care for people seeking asylum. There is always an excess of
need and desire that overflows these categories. The human need for care exceeds its imbrication in social justice. Similarly, justice always exceeds its realization in law (Cornell, 1999: 116). Although I focus on recognition, social justice and care separately, they are deeply interwoven and mutually constituting. David Smith asserts “the interdependence of social justice and the good life” (Smith, 1999: 1150). My participants’ narratives point to the dependence of the good life on conceptions and practices of recognition and care as well as distributive justice. Nonetheless, they are inseparable: each has to be discussed - and realized - in terms of aspects of the others.

2.1 Livability

...we must ask...what humans require in order to maintain and reproduce the conditions of their own livability. And what are our politics such that we are in whatever way possible, both conceptualizing the possibility of the livable life and arranging for its institutional support? (Butler, 2004: 226)

In asking about what supports and what hinders people seeking asylum in making livable lives, I envisage livability as having two aspects. The first aspect has to do with the conditions which support life itself, which ensure that people are not driven to feel that their lives are unbearable or that other people or institutions do not cause or contribute to their deaths. So there is a sense in which livability is about the resources needed for life to continue. One of these resources is the right to seek asylum (amongst many human rights enshrined in United Nations Conventions.) Specifically, refugee status should ensure that people are protected from persecution and have access to other human rights (Loescher, 2009: 2). However, as I discuss in Chapter 3, states have installed regimes to ensure that seeking asylum is not synonymous with refugee status. Thus, my research is concerned with

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4 While my research is concerned with livability for human being and human becoming, and such livability is intimately connected to the flourishing of non-human entities, exploring these connections is beyond the scope of my present research.
struggles for livability, the protection and institutional support available, within the liminal conditions of existence of seeking asylum.

The second aspect of livability has to do with conditions which support those forms of human flourishing which are sometimes referred to as the “good life” (cf Smith, 1999: 1150; Young, 1990: 37; Honneth, 2008: 4). There is a long history of philosophies of the “good life”: what it means to live virtuously; the way people who seek to live well should treat the less fortunate, whether through charitable acts or what we would now call distributive justice (Fleischacker, 2004). Concepts related to the “good life” include what Elizabeth calls “self-actualization” (cf Honneth, “self-realization”, 2008: 13) and, more generally, well-being. There are many conceptualizations and terms, and nuances of each term, and there is often a strong prescriptive and normative tone to the discourses. In the context of my present research, however, I am concerned with the subjective experience of a good life, livability as human flourishing, and with “sheltering norms” within which people seeking asylum can flourish in their own ways and on their own terms, without suffering or inflicting harm.

While a ‘thin’ dimension of livability is concerned with needs and entitlements which human beings have in common, I emphasize also singularity. Individual subjects matter, both as ends in themselves and because society can oppress individuals through failures of recognition, unfair distribution or lack of care. However, individuals are not autonomous: while the terms on which people desire to live may be individual, lives are always lived within a social framework. Conversely, only social struggles can bring about conditions that would constitute a good and just society in which individual human flourishing is possible. Therefore, in the next Chapter and throughout my research, I ask how far the conditions of existence of asylum, as seen by

5 The World Health Organization defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community” (http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/en/index.html).
my participants, provide “sheltering norms” (Butler, 2004: 34) which support or hinder their efforts to make livable lives in the UK.

I have two reasons for drawing on a work (Undoing Gender) that so explicitly deals with livability – or unlivability - in the context of people who live on the “sexual margins”. The first is my sense of its applicability to the needs and desires of people who live on other kinds of margins (bearing in mind that for lesbian and gay people seeking asylum the margins intersect). I transpose Butler’s focus on the livability of the lives of people on the sexual margins to the lives of people who are marginalized by the legal status applied to them. One of the defining features of marginalization is that people are misrecognized: they are interpellated in ways that are hostile to their own sense of identity, or their personhood is not recognized (Honneth, 2008: 134-136). They “find themselves defined from the outside…by a network of dominant meanings they experience as arising from elsewhere, from those with whom they do not identify and who do not identify with them” (Young, 1990: 59). This “cultural imperialism” is one of the “five faces of oppression” (Young, 1990: 64) which I discuss later in this Chapter.

The second reason is that I understand Butler as concerned with a proliferation of meanings, with “possibility” as ongoing resistance to “foreclosure” in relation to livability. She portrays the conditions of unlivability more explicitly than those of livability. To that extent, livability is left as an ‘empty’ concept, adumbrated through expositions of unlivability. This raises an important theoretical and ethical question: how a view of livability as sheltered by norms can take account of human becoming which is contingent and contextual.

Butler suggests that “life itself requires a set of sheltering norms” (2004: 34, my emphasis), that both “bare life” (cf Agamben, 1998) and “livable life” require certain normative conditions for their protection. Yet a “livable life” is neither a prescriptive ideal nor an intact thing that can be found and then held in permanence. Indeed, a plural conception – of livable lives – seems more appropriate to an inclusive concept of “conviviality” (Gilroy, 2005: xv). “Sheltering norms” are contingent, relational and agonistic in the sense that
different groups and individuals have different perspectives which depend on particular histories and contingencies. It is obvious, but worth restating, that what constitutes livability is specific to the historical and social locations of groups and individuals: it may look different from different subject positions. So, livability may mean something very different to a woman in academia with an EU passport than to a woman seeking asylum in the UK.

What interests me in the context of my present research is what livability looks like from the perspective of people making difficult transitions in their lives. Moving is potentially traumatic – a challenge to livability - for people who move even in what might be seen as the best of situations, when moving is desired and takes place within a country (McCollum, 1990). My focus is on moving in the worst of situations, when people are forced through fear of political or social persecution or physical harm (which may already have occurred) to flee their countries suddenly and rapidly, leaving behind loved ones, social networks and material resources which sustain their sense of self. In this situation, the confluence of inner resources with institutional support and interpersonal care can alleviate some of the potential for trauma. Institutional support and interpersonal care impact on people’s psychic resources just as psychic resources affect people’s resilience and ability to negotiate forms of livability through the external resources that are available.

On the basis of the narratives, I conceptualize livability as necessarily encompassing liberal forms of equality and emancipation such as decent living conditions, freedom to work and access to legal aid if we want to make things better in the here and now. However, some of the narratives reach beyond those forms towards social transformations that would open possibilities for fully expanded lives. The notion of fully expanded lives is paradoxical: full expansion is related to the conditions in which the lives are lived; as those conditions change, the uncurling of possibility will begin again in the new conditions. Butler writes of lives foreclosed by punishment or the fear of punishment based on identities unintelligible to the normative gaze. Lives can be foreclosed by more material conditions, for example hunger, homelessness, poverty, unemployment, ill-health, lack of education or language. Yet, these material conditions intersect with constructed
categories of identity such as gender, sexuality, race, class - and ‘asylum seeker’. Such constructions are not neutral; their significations are not ‘natural’. The bearers of marked identities are despised and abjected (Kristeva, 1982; cf Young, 1990, “The Scaling of Bodies”).

From the perspective of “a position of power”, if people’s lives can be made unlivable by misrecognition or failure of recognition, they can be made more livable by greater hesitation, by questioning the “grid of intelligibility” and “apparatus of knowledge” applied to the person and body of others (Butler, 2004: 67). Certainly, people seeking asylum under current UK rules are not recognized as persons to whom full human rights should be accorded; only citizens can be such persons. So there is a defining lack of recognition of rights that, perhaps, comes close to the figure of “bare life stripped of every right…caught in the sovereign ban” (Agamben, 1998: 183). The situation of people seeking asylum is sometimes seen as analogous to Agamben’s description of concentration camps as zones “in which the very concepts of subjective right and juridical protection no longer made any sense” (Agamben, 1998: 170; cf Darling, 2009: 652). People seeking asylum are inside a sovereign state but deprived of rights: having few civil rights, they lack juridical protection against abuse – they can be detained without trial; they are within the borders of the UK but refused economic rights such as the right to work or payment of social security payments on the same basis as citizens. Destitution is the barest of lives – survival may depend on acts of solidarity or charity (Lewis, 2009). In contrast, livable lives are rich in the enjoyment and expansion of rights and opportunities; livable lives are interwoven with possibilities for social transformation and expanding social justice, their fabric constantly being rewoven in many directions.

However, as I shall demonstrate, an emphasis on recognition by others raises questions about other dimensions of recognition. My participants assert their personhood: they claim livability and struggle to create it. From their own perspective, they are reducible neither to the “apparatus of knowledge” applied to them, nor to Agamben’s “sovereign ban” (cf Harker, 2010), nor to the “dehumanization” of life worlds (Honneth, 2008: 67). Many were forced to leave their countries because they had claimed political,
sexual or other livability. Lack of recognition of people seeking asylum is frequently accompanied by misrecognition. People in flight from lack of protection in the countries of their birth are represented both as unworthy of human rights and as threats to the security of the nation and its citizens. They are misrepresented as criminals, threats to the welfare state, to jobs, to the security of private property, and to the safety of citizens. The “apparatus of knowledge” applied to them through the conditions of asylum and the asylum application process is marked by a “culture of disbelief” (Marfleet, 2006: 233; Moorhead, 2006: 136). Misrecognition and lack of recognition may combine to make lives unbearable, through representational violence and through the practices to which the asylum system subjects people. Yet people seeking asylum recognize themselves as having needs in common with citizens; they long for “a life like other people”.

The extent to which the asylum system can create unbearable conditions is evidenced both in cases where people have killed themselves and in the extent of mental illness amongst people seeking asylum (Palmer and Ward, 2005). My point here is not to pathologize people seeking asylum, but to emphasize that the way they are treated in the UK may make the difference between survival, well-being and “lasting damage” (Loizos, 2005: 45). In some cases, refused asylum seekers are overwhelmed by the asymmetry of power relations in the struggle even for “bare life”. For example, in 2003:

Israfil Shiri… a destitute Iranian asylum seeker… died six days after pouring petrol over his body and setting himself alight in the offices of Refugee Action in Manchester. His asylum application had been rejected and he was homeless and penniless. Israfil, who was gay, feared being executed in Iran if he was deported. He also suffered from a painful bowel complaint but, after his asylum claim was refused, he was unable to get medical treatment and was in constant pain. An open verdict was recorded by the inquest. (National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns)

The report contextualizes Shiri’s act as an effect of untreated pain and fear of execution if returned. In contrast, Foucault offers an interpretation of suicide as an act of “resistance”:

…in order for power relations to come into play, there must be at least a certain degree of freedom on both sides. Even when the
power relation is completely out of balance, when it can be truly claimed that one side has “total power” over the other, a power can be exercised by the other only insofar as the other still has the option of killing himself, of leaping out of the window, or of killing the other person. This means that in power relations there is necessarily the power of resistance because if there were no possibility of resistance (of violent resistance, flight, deception, strategies capable of reversing the situation), there would be no power relations at all. (Foucault, 2000: 292)

Perhaps such an act is incapable of final interpretation: it exists at the limits of naming (Butler, 2004: 74). I suggest only that here were norms, expressed as lack of “institutional support”, that worked to “eviscerate the conditions of life itself” (Butler, 2004: 8).

I have distinguished between livability as survival and livability as human flourishing. I have further distinguished between a ‘thin’ conceptualization of livability that recognizes what human beings have in common and a ‘thick’ conceptualization that recognizes that groups and individuals may have specific needs and desires in particular contexts. What, then, might a ‘thin’ conception of livability look like in practice?

The ‘thinnest’ conception of livability has to do with supplying those needs, for food and shelter, for protection from physical harm, which all humans have in common. These form the most basic of universal human rights due to us simply as having a common human vulnerability to hunger, to the elements, and to bodily injury. Protection should not be dependent on luck or a selective form of desert. Without the continuation of life at this basic level, there is no human being to pursue its flourishing. That is one reason why reducing people seeking asylum to destitution is regarded as shocking. Conversely, without recognition and without greater possibilities for human flourishing, even bodily existence may be at risk. It follows that, in practice, physical existence and human flourishing are mutually constituting in ways that make it problematic to stop at ‘thin’ conceptualizations of livability. This does not mean that there are not situations in which the greatest human need is for physical survival, and we are not short of examples in a world in which human survival is threatened by war and starvation (cf Pogge, 2004: 265). Rather it is to suggest that physical life cannot be separated from
notions of human flourishing even though social conceptions of the esteemed flourishing that is thought of as a good life may vary. For example, Peter Townsend puts forward a ‘universal’ definition of poverty which incorporates a relative metrics of inclusion in social activity:

Poverty can be defined objectively and applied consistently only in terms of the concept of relative deprivation...Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or which are at least widely encouraged or approved in the societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those recommended by the average individual or family that they are, in fact, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities. (Townsend, 1979: 31, my emphasis)

Townsend’s definition does not take account of harmful differences and inequalities between societies, histories and geographies, which I touch on in the next Chapter. However, the desire to be included in “ordinary living patterns, customs and activities” in the UK is at the heart of the ways in which people who spoke to me talked about their exclusion from “a life like other people”.

So, livability is about both ‘protection from’ conditions which thwart and ‘inclusion in’ conditions which support human flourishing. A ‘thicker’ account of livability must go beyond a foundation of common human vulnerability and need for protection to recognize a common foundation of human being, human capabilities and desires. Young offers a statement of two very general “values comprised in the good life” which are relevant to the ways in which my participants spoke. These are “developing and exercising one’s capacities and expressing one’s experience” and “participating in determining one’s action and the conditions of one’s action” (Young, 1990: 37). People speak about the ways in which the conditions of existence of asylum deny not only the development and exercise of their capacities, but also deny them recognition as people who have capacities.

In this section, I have offered conceptualizations of livability and reflected on the practical and ethical difficulties in thinking about ‘thick’ conceptualizations with precision. The actually-existing conditions of existence that harm people
and foreclose possibilities for human flourishing in a given situation, for example the conditions of existence of asylum, are often more evident than those which support or expand the possibilities. Honneth points out that principles of recognition are often grasped only through “violations of…normative claims” (Honneth, 2008: xii). Indeed, it may be that a claim can be made only when a norm ceases to be taken for granted - when it is violated – or when circumstances give rise to a new claim. This is the situation in which many of my participants find themselves in when they come to the UK. They have come to seek protection from violations of human rights in their countries. When they encounter the UK asylum regulations, they find further violations of human rights: lack of recognition; denials of social justice characterized by domination and oppression; lack of care. In the next section, I consider what is entailed in conceptualizing recognition - what it is that needs to be recognized - in the context of my participants’ narratives.

2.2 RECOGNITION

Justice is not only or exclusively a matter of how persons are treated or how societies are constituted. It also concerns consequential decisions about what a person is, and what social norms must be honoured and expressed for “personhood” to become allocated… (Butler, 2004: 58)

I may feel that without some recognizability I cannot live. But I may also feel that the terms by which I am recognized make life unlivable. (Butler, 2004: 4)

Butler posits a connection between justice, recognition and livability. In this section, I ask how that connection operates. From my participants’ accounts, I suggest that recognition supportive of livability has three aspects: (i) that people are seen as human; (ii) that they are seen on their own terms; (ii) that they are included in society. First, to be seen as human is to be recognized as sentient, as capable of feeling, thought and meaningful action. Recognition of people as sentient implies obligations to organize society in ways that allow them to express their sentience and that understand sentience as capacity to contribute to society. Sentience must be understood
also as vulnerability, that it carries with it the capacity to be hurt both emotionally and physically. Lack of recognition of sentience and lack of opportunity to express feelings and thoughts, to have them attended to, and to be able to develop and act on one’s capabilities constitute harms to individuals and groups. Second, seeing people on their own terms complicates recognition of them as “ordinary people” (Turton, 2003a: 12). Seeing people seeking asylum as, like us, “embedded in contingent social and historical circumstances” (Turton, 2003a: 10), but embedded in circumstances which are different from ours, introduces an understanding of the singularity of the human which modulates the idea of commonality. This understanding connects with a nuanced conception of care which is attentive to needs which we have in common and needs which are specific. Third, inclusion in society is the logical outcome of recognizing people as possessed of human sentience. Sentience as capacity for feeling, thought and meaningful action can be expressed and recognized only in social settings. The association between lack of recognition and unlivability observed by Butler (Butler, 2004: 2) is evident in many narratives as people critique the ways in which the denials of the UK asylum regime deplete their material and psychic resources.

Honneth’s conceptualization of recognition has many points of contact with the modes in which people spoke to me. Simultaneously, it raises questions about who is doing the recognizing, and in what contexts. He identifies “three independent modes of recognition”: (i) recognition “as an individual whose needs and desires are of unique value to another person”; (ii) recognition of the individual “as a person who is ascribed the same moral accountability as every other human being”; (iii) recognition of the individual “as a person whose capabilities are of constitutive value to a concrete community” (Honneth, 2008: 138-139). Honneth treats the first form of recognition as congruent with concepts of ‘care’ or ‘love’ in moral philosophy. I focus on ‘care’ as the term people used in speaking to me. However, while he ascribes recognition of the “unique value” of the individual to “another person”, my participants raise questions about self-recognition of singularity and “unique value”. Moreover, although they refer to caring for their families
and communities, their narratives raise questions about care as attention to needs and desires in public contexts. I discuss the concept and practice of care in more detail in the final section of this Chapter. I see the second form of recognition, “moral accountability”, as necessarily founded on decision-making ability, and I shall discuss this further in relation to Young’s concept of “domination”. I read the third form of recognition, the valuing of people’s contribution to society, as connected to the capacity for meaningful activity and Young’s concept of “oppression”.

Although the three modes of recognition correspond broadly to the terms in which my participants speak, Honneth’s emphasis on their independence from one another is less apposite. While recognition is composed of discrete activities that it is helpful to unravel, and lack of recognition results in precise harms, in practice the modes of lack of recognition are interwoven. Thus, refusal to recognize people seeking asylum as of “unique value” leads to denying them recognition as having “the same moral accountability as every other human being” and denial of recognition of their capabilities. Denying uniqueness is interwoven with denial of commonality: both result in denial of common human sentience and position people seeking asylum as less deserving of livability than citizens. The asylum rules construct them as threats who must be regulated in, for example, where they can live and where they can shop, and value them as less than citizens in the benefits they are given and in prohibiting them from contributing to society through paid work.

Like my participants, with their emphasis on themselves as human beings, with the rights and due entailed in human being, Honneth conceives of recognition in ethical terms. Not only is “moral injustice…at hand whenever, contrary to their expectations, human subjects are denied the recognition they feel they deserve” (Honneth, 2008: 71), “disrespect” is connected with “the sense of a threatening loss of personality” (Honneth, 2008: 71-72). Honneth traces the rôle of recognition through the Scottish Enlightenment, Kant’s concept of ‘respect’ and Hegel’s establishment of recognition as “the cornerstone of ethics” (Honneth, 2008: 129). However, it is only in recent
decades that recognition of difference has become a matter of debate and that prominence has been given to:

…the generalized insight that the moral quality of social relations cannot be measured solely in terms of the fair or just distribution of material goods; rather our notion of justice is also linked very closely to how, and as what, subjects mutually recognize each other. (Honneth, 2008: 130)

Thus, fair distribution and recognition of personhood become inextricable parts of virtuous circles of justice. There may be contexts in which competition for scarce resources constitutes some people as those who will be excluded from recognition and contexts in which lack of recognition leads to denial of social goods. Either way, unfair distribution and lack of recognition support each other in denying justice. I shall demonstrate the ways in which they are articulated in the conditions of existence within which people seeking asylum struggle to make livable lives in the UK.

Honneth connects “moral injustice” with “action that intentionally disregards an essential aspect of [people’s] well-being”. The “accompanying consciousness of not being recognized in one’s own self-understanding…constitutes moral injury” (Honneth, 2008: 133-134). In Chapters 5, 6 and 7, I give examples from my participants’ narratives of the ways in which they are not recognized in their own self-understanding in relation to work, to treatment by officials, to being treated as criminals and disbelieved within the asylum application and appeal procedures. However, the effect of not being recognized in their own self-understanding is not only a “moral injury”; disregard of their well-being may inflict material harms when they are made destitute or when, because they do not have adequate legal representation, their claims for asylum are refused.

The ability to “construct and maintain a positive self-revelation” is dependent on “agreeing or affirmative actions on the part of other subjects” (Honneth, 2008: 134). It is because humans realize personhood in social contexts that they are vulnerable to harm through lack of recognition. Thus:

…the experience of a moral injustice is necessarily accompanied by a mental shock, inasmuch as it disappoints an expectation on the part of the subject, one whose fulfillment constitutes one of the
conditions of its own identity. Because it destroys an essential presupposition of the individual’s capability to act, every moral injury represents an act of personal harm. (Honneth, 2008: 134).

Over and over, my participants and other people seeking asylum speak about actions and denials in terms that are consistent with the concept of “moral injury”. Nonetheless, it is striking that it is the very presence of the sentience which is denied that enables people seeking asylum to both feel and struggle against “the sense of a threatening loss of personality”. They feel the injury, but they also frame the harm done within reasoned assertions of rights that are consistent with demands for recognition, for social justice, and for care. These are the values and rights which I discuss in this Chapter as conditions of existence and “sheltering norms” upon which the possibility of human flourishing depends.

2.3 SOCIAL JUSTICE

There are some things which are everybody’s due. The basic conditions that enable someone to live a fully human life are the due of every human being, just in virtue of being human: these are what are nowadays called ‘human rights’. Ill health or other misfortunes may impede some from living fully human lives; they have the right that others, as far as lies in their power, should help them to enjoy the conditions for such lives to the best possible extent. (Dummett, 2007: 26)

Dummett, writing about immigration and refugees, emphasizes what is due to people “just in virtue of being human”. Like many of my participants, he connects recognition of a common human being with access to rights and social justice – and with the responsibility to care for the less fortunate. Social justice provides some of the bases of livability as human flourishing, what Dummett terms “a fully human life”. In the context of the narratives, social justice foregrounds issues of equality, fairness, rights and entitlements, which are imbricated with issues of recognition. However, the elaboration of principles of justice as absolute universals may be in tension with determining what is just in specific concrete situations. As Honneth points out in tracing the thought of Kant, Levinas and Derrida, symmetrical conceptions of equal treatment can be at odds with the asymmetry of “our moral
responsibility for the concrete other” (Honneth, 2008: 101). Treating as equal those who are not equal may produce inequality (cf Okin, 2004: 204). Attention to equal treatment and attention to the difference and alterity of “concrete others” (Benhabib, 1997: 410) have constantly to be negotiated in specific contexts. Similarly, notions of care are necessary to expand concepts of justice, particularly those concepts which are enacted within legal and administrative systems. Nonetheless, these conflicts can be productive as part of constant dialogic negotiations between theoretical principles and their practical realization in specific contexts (cf Honneth, 2008: 121). In the context of my research with people seeking asylum, equal treatment, justice, human rights and care are all facets of the complex demands they make for conditions which will enable them to make livable lives.

In thinking about the dimensions of social justice in the context of people struggling to make livable lives in the conditions of existence of asylum, I first consider distributive justice. Second, I discuss Young’s conceptions of domination and oppression as the negation of positive rights to self-determination and self-development. However, distributive justice, self-determination and self-development are interwoven with issues of recognition, needs and care. I understand these different aspects of justice as foundational to livability, as providing institutional and intersubjective support, rather than as expressions of livability in themselves. While their presence may not in itself indicate human flourishing, their absence threatens livability and may threaten the fact of life itself. Inevitably, if there is a common human being, and despite my earlier rejection of what I termed ‘absolute universals’, there must be something normative or universal in thinking about social justice as a good in itself and as foundational for livability. However, that ‘something’ operates at different scales and in different time frames. People seeking asylum claim justice in the short term: they claim fair consideration of their cases and fair living conditions while they are waiting. In the longer term, their claims may open a dialogue between the universal rights in which they wish to share and the particularities and differences of their pasts and their aspirations. My
participants have both a sense of their own singularity and an understanding that they have to struggle in order to flourish, that their flourishing can be realized only in a social context. In the here and now, that social context is Manchester. Manchester, however, has to be understood in the wider context of the UK and domestic and international realpolitik. This is something I shall consider in more detail in the next Chapter.

In conjuring up the figure of the individual, I am not retrieving the enlightenment subject as ‘autonomous individual’. What I am emphasizing is the variety of human flourishing. While such flourishing is shaped and realized socially, the variety of people’s histories and geographies means that they always elude cultural homogenization. Thus, while I envisage individuals as equal in terms of their dignity and value, in terms of their desires and capabilities I emphasize diversity and singularity. Believing that people are not substitutable has consequences for conceptualizing livability. While “the good life” is an “always anticipatory conception” (Honneth, Fraser and Honneth, 2003: 180) and therefore always provisional, relative and contextual, social justice provides some of the foundational or “sheltering” norms from which livability can emerge.

In reflecting on “sheltering norms" and the conditions of asylum, I find it helpful to think in terms of a distinction between a “positive duty to help persons in acute distress” (Pogge, 2004: 265) and its counterpart, a “more stringent negative duty not to uphold injustice, not to contribute to or profit from the unjust impoverishment of others” (Pogge, 2004: 266; cf Smith, 2000: 1153). The positive duty is akin to some aspects of care while the negative duty may be expressed in social struggles for justice. These positive and negative duties are “important for us if we want to lead a moral life and important also for the poor because it will make a great difference to them whether we affluent do or do not see global poverty as an injustice we help maintain” (Pogge, 2004: 266, my emphasis). While global poverty is not the focus of this research, it has complex effects on migrations as I touch on in the next Chapter. Moreover, relative or local poverty (and destitution in the case of people refused asylum) may well be one of the barriers to livable lives both in the country of origin and the new country. The point I wish to
emphasize is that the injustices of the asylum system are socially constructed, not natural (cf Pogge, 2004: 269). Injustices may, however, become naturalized so that citizens come to think that their due is greater than that of non-citizens.

2.4 Distributive Justice

That some people in some places are better off than others elsewhere is an outcome of geography as well as of history, (Smith, 2000, 1156).

Distributive justice is concerned with inequalities in living standards and life chances: consequently, it is most often concerned with redistribution (Pogge, 2004). At a national scale, inequality may be connected to the geographical region people come from as well as to the social circumstances people are born into. Moreover, geographical and family inequalities are frequently connected to historical events, often part of divisive colonial practices, which have privileged some groups over others (cf Pogge, 2004: 271). This is seen in the histories of some of my participants who describe how they have been disadvantaged or persecuted through, for example, clan connections, political affiliations or activity related to language. Often these divisions are a result of a colonialism which constructed or fostered differences, making them salient as “poles of world historical systems of domination” (Haraway, 2004a: 20). More immediately, my participants raise questions about distributive justice in the UK, a rich country which, as Joshua says, does not ensure equal rights for the children of people seeking asylum.

Much recent thinking about distributive justice draws on the work of John Rawls (1971) and scholars who have elaborated and critiqued his work (Clayton and Williams, 2004; Benhabib, 1997). What is relevant to this

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6 Some participants came alone to the UK and some came with partners and children. While some people did not refer to family members, I did not take that as evidence of single or childless status. At least three left children behind, and one of those also left a partner. Two have married since we spoke and two have had children.
discussion is that Rawls includes in his conception of “social primary goods” both tangible goods such as income and wealth and intangible goods such as liberty, opportunity and the “bases of self-respect” (Smith, 1999: 1156). The just or unjust distribution of tangible and intangible goods intertwines to create possibilities for or obstructions to livability and human flourishing. Two examples from my participants’ narratives illustrate my point: the prohibition of the right to work (tangible) means that some people seeking asylum cannot afford higher education (intangible) because they cannot afford the fees (tangible). Conversely, lack of recognition by administrators (intangible) may mean that people are denied benefits (tangible) to which they are entitled. Although in some situations people are moved by an absolute “desiring negation” (Young, 1990: 6) of some aspect of the world as they find it, in other situations, as Townsend points out, what matters to people may be the social exclusion or relative disadvantage they suffer, which denies them “a life like other people”.

Denial of equality in access to material social goods may overlap with other ways in which people are subordinated. In thinking of the ways tangible and intangible social goods are intertwined in the lives of people seeking asylum, I have adopted Young’s concepts of domination, “the institutional constraint on self-determination”, and oppression summed up as “the institutional constraint on self-development” (Young, 1990: 37). Although my participants did not speak of ‘oppression’ and ‘domination’, I engage with these aspects of Young’s work because her elaborations of the terms are, as I shall demonstrate, compatible with many of their own perspectives. For example:

As doers and actors, we seek to promote many values of social justice in addition to fairness in the distribution of goods: learning and using satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognized settings; participating in running and forming institutions, and receiving recognition for such participation; playing and communicating with others, and expressing our experience, feelings and, and perspective on life in contexts where others can listen. (Young, 1990: 37).

7 Going through my drafts with some of my participants, we discussed these concepts and they found them relevant.
People speak about the difficulties of housekeeping and sustaining their families’ physical well-being with the benefits they are given, but they speak also about opportunities for education and training, about using their skills, about recognition, about sociality, about being listened to. Mainly they speak about these “values” in their absence. These absences are not natural, the result of geographical differences; they are the result of human activity or inactivity which supports or inhibits livability. Critiquing these absences, my participants speak about rights, about fair distribution of social goods and economic resources, about recognition of personhood and needs, and about care: these all help to constitute livability. Rights, recognition, needs and care require analysis at different scales: while they are goods in themselves, they act also as analytical tools to investigate the rôle of policies, structure and agency in supporting or diminishing livability.

Therefore, in taking Young’s concepts as a framework of social justice appropriate to my participants’ narratives, I open up and apply her concepts of, first, domination and, second, oppression, in the context of the conditions of existence of asylum.

2.5 Domination

Domination denies what Young terms “self determination” and Fraser terms “participatory parity” (Fraser, Fraser and Honneth, 2003: 36). For Young:

Domination consists in institutional conditions which inhibit or prevent people from participating in determining their actions or the conditions of their actions. Persons live within structures of domination if other persons or groups can determine without reciprocation the conditions of their action, either directly or by virtue of the structural consequences of their actions. (Young, 1990: 38)

Domination inhibits livability at two scales: through denial of everyday self-determination; through denial of collective participation in determining social conditions. Taken as a whole, many of the “institutional conditions” of asylum are typical of domination: other people “determine without reciprocation” or participation the conditions of existence of asylum. People seeking asylum are told where to live. They are told where to shop if they are in receipt of
vouchers\textsuperscript{8}. They have to be at specific places at specific times (for example, as part of the reporting regime). They have no say in determining the rules which determine their actions. There is no reciprocity through communication or discussion of needs. Employment is prohibited: people found working may suffer the "structural consequences" of jeopardizing their claim. Thus my participants fear punishment if they attempt to better their situation by working. Nonetheless, as I show in Chapters 5 and 6, people find ways to make their lives more livable. Churches and voluntary organizations offer material support, information and advice. They offer routes to education and training, meaningful activity, decision-making and sociality. Ultimately, however, as I show in Chapter 7, power is asymmetrical: the power to determine knowledge, who is believed and who is not, who goes and who receives leave to remain is in the hands of the Home Office. Even so, some practices of domination that could be contested are intensified by absences: absences of adequate legal representation and interpreting, for example. The asylum rules dominate and exclude people seeking asylum by failing to recognize them as knowledgeable and sentient "doers and actors" capable of making or contributing to decisions about their own actions and the conditions of their actions.

Domination operates through laws and policies, bureaucratic rules and the actions of bureaucrats. This is not to say that bureaucrats hold power, although people seeking asylum may experience them as power-laden. Bureaucrats are part of a discursive diffusion of power that emphasizes professional knowledge and expertise in decision-making, that claims to know more about the life worlds of people seeking asylum than the people themselves (cf Young, 1990: 76-81). Welfare capitalism professionalizes decisions about human needs and about human being. It operates according to rules that, in a show of impartiality, remove decision-making power from those to whom the decisions will apply, and in so doing remove justice and care from the process. As Young argues, "the entrance of particular values

\textsuperscript{8} In November 2009, a new ‘Azure’ payment card was introduced. This has the same limitations as vouchers (Reynolds, 2010).
into decisions is inevitably and properly part of what decisionmaking is about” (Young, 1990: 79). I shall illustrate that asylum claim procedures are not impartial. The values that enter have to do with “managed migration” and national security, not with the security and well-being of people trying to escape persecution (cf Weiner, 1992-3).

In the next Chapter, I discuss the way in which “structures of domination”, particularly government policies, categorizations and representations of people seeking asylum, work together to produce migrant figures assembled as objects of fear. In representing people seeking asylum, officials and the media frequently ‘slip’ into mobilizing these generalized migrant assemblages. Fears of lawlessness, economic deprivation and terrorism are used to justify the exclusion of people seeking asylum from determining their own actions, indeed to justify their exclusion tout court. Politicians do little to change the perceptions of a public largely opposed to immigration. The effect of this is a popular acceptance that people seeking asylum should not be given their due, should not be recognized as sentient beings capable of making and contributing to decisions.

2.6 Oppression

Oppression consists in systematic institutional processes which prevent some people from learning and using satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognized settings, or institutionalized social processes which inhibit people’s ability to play and communicate with others or to express their feelings and perspective on social life in contexts where others can listen. While the social conditions of oppression often include material deprivation or maldistribution, they also involve issues beyond distribution… (Young, 1990: 38)

Oppression operates through specific forms of denial, particularly denial of the human capacities whose exercise, as “doing and acting”, is part of human flourishing. I take Young’s distinction between oppression and domination as an analytical tool, but in the conditions of existence of asylum denial of self-determination and denial of self-development cannot be separated. People seeking asylum experience acutely the many absences, lacks and denials Young signifies as oppressions. Opportunities to learn,
use and develop skills, to have a social life, to speak and be heard are restricted by the conditions of existence which are exerted over people seeking asylum, both as the *force majeure* of policy and legislation, and through the capillary action of many everyday encounters with service providers and officials.

The conditions of existence of asylum exemplify “the five faces of oppression – exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence” (Young, 1990: 64). Just as oppression overlaps with domination, the five faces of oppression cluster and overlap to organize the conditions of existence of asylum. In order to show the way in which these oppressions articulate in the experiences of people seeking asylum, I shall look at them in a different order from that in which Young elaborates them.

First, I consider Young’s conceptualization of *marginalization* as “perhaps the most dangerous form of oppression. A whole category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life and thus potentially subjected to severe material deprivation” (1990: 53). Marginalization based on lack of recognition saturates every aspect of the conditions of existence of asylum, and is clearly seen in the expulsion of people seeking asylum from “useful participation” in employment and their subjection to “severe material deprivation”, with damaging consequences for their ability to participate in education and social life. If *exploitation* is seen as “a steady process of the transfer of the results of the labor of one social group to benefit another” (Young, 1990: 49), the prohibition of employment suggests that people seeking asylum are not exploited in the traditional sense. While there are benefits from the voluntary labour of people seeking asylum, for political reasons the exclusion of people seeking asylum is more important than their exploitation. However, when they have limited or no means of support, they are open to exploitation through working unofficially. Moreover, they are exploited through misrecognition when they are made part of assembled migrant figures produced as culprits (cf De Genova, 2007b: 435) responsible for inadequacies in social provision, thus deflecting attention from, and therefore benefiting, those who are responsible (Finney and Simpson, 2009: 172).
The marginalization of people seeking asylum is connected to the specific oppression of powerlessness: “inhibition in the development of one’s capacities, lack of decision-making power in one’s working life, and exposure to disrespectful treatment because of the status one occupies” (Young, 1990: 58). Here Young introduces a new harm, that of “disrespectful treatment”, which I relate to “moral injury” (Honneth, 2008: 134) and to Young’s definition of people living under cultural imperialism: people are “defined from the outside, positioned, placed, by a network of dominant meanings they experience as arising from elsewhere, from those with whom they do not identify and who do not identify with them” (Young, 1990: 59). The effect of cultural imperialism is that people are denied recognition according to their “own self-understanding” (Honneth, 2008: 134) and in terms of what is due to them as human (Dummett, 2007: 26). Cultural imperialism brings the concept of oppression close to Butler’s association of intelligibility with livability (Butler, 2004: 58). Cultural imperialism denies people intelligibility on their own terms; it does not hesitate in the face of the unknowability of the other; it denies recognition of personhood; it denies people their due “just in virtue of being human” (Dummett, 2007: 26). These denials refuse the possibility of love or care; indeed, they constitute denials that there is a human being to be cared for.

Thus, the conditions of existence of asylum do violence to people seeking asylum. Misrecognition and lack of recognition do representational violence which has material consequences. As I discuss in Chapter 7, refusal to accept their knowledge, substituting it with ‘expert’ knowledge, violates their self-understanding and sense of personhood and affects the possibility of leave to remain. People seeking asylum may be physically injured by those who, blaming all migrants for inadequate social provision, resent their presence. The conditions of existence in which they have to shape their lives can damage their physical and mental well-being, harming their opportunities and capacity to make livable lives.

If social justice concerns the fair distribution of “institutional conditions” necessary for the realization of “the good life” (Young, 1990: 37), exclusion from decision-making, work, self-development, self-expression and social life
forecloses many routes to livability and human flourishing. For some people, the institutionally-constructed conditions of existence of asylum foreclose the possibility of life itself. Yet, even in the shadow of the ultimate decision-making power exercised by the Home Office, people find alternative approaches to livability through non-governmental organizations (albeit often funded by national or local government), through churches, and sometimes through relationships with individuals. However, such livability is precarious when people can be detained or deported suddenly and arbitrarily.

2.7 Care

…by focusing on care, we focus on the process by which life is sustained, we focus on human actors acting. (Tronto, 1993: 154)

The experiences of inequality and interconnection, inherent in the relation of parent and child, then give rise to the ethics of justice and care, the ideals of human relationship – the vision that self and other will be treated as of equal worth, that despite differences in power, things will be fair; the vision that everyone will be responded to and included, that no one will be left alone or hurt. (Gilligan, 2001: 63)

My participants ask not only for recognition as human, justice, equal rights, and inclusion in social goods: they ask for care. As I discuss in more detail in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, many people I met spoke of their experiences with institutions and officials as characterized by lack of care and attentiveness to their needs. When people asked for care, particularly in relation to service providers, professionals, administrators, and the rules that they work under, I understood them, in part, as speaking about recognition. What is denied when there is lack of care is that officials fail to recognize the person in front of them as capable of feeling, reason or meaningful activity, that people seeking asylum have histories as complex as they feel their own to be, that they are as worthy of respect or deserving of rights as themselves. They fail to recognize what Spivak calls “the normality of the other” (Spivak, 2000: 22):

No speech is speech if it is not heard. It is this act of hearing-to-respond that may be called the imperative to translate…But the founding translation between people is a listening with care and
patience, in the normality of the other, enough to notice that the other has already silently made that effort. (Spivak, 2000: 22)

Traditionally, care has been associated with women’s domestic work, and, as such, treated as inferior. Gilligan emphasizes that care is not only about the alleviation of troubles but that it should be seen as an intrinsic part of justice. Thus, care is a way of connecting “personal troubles” with “public issues”, an essential part of both positive and negative duties (Pogge, 2004: 265-266) to do justice. Care becomes part of a principle of including people seeking asylum in what is due to human beings. It is also an active response to marginalized others in situations of injustice brought about by denials of equality and particularity: no one should “be left alone or hurt” (Gilligan, 2001: 63). However, although a greater dimension of institutional justice would reduce some of the need for interpersonal care, there will always be an excess of calamity that justice cannot prevent or ameliorate. In consequence, there will always be a need for interpersonal care, for people to be what I term caring copresences to each other.

So, care can be seen as justice in practice. The definition of care Joan Tronto takes from her work with Berenice Fisher (1993: 103) is helpful in thinking about care as an ethical practice which ‘hears-to-respond’ to the needs and desires of people seeking asylum:

On the most general level, we suggest that caring be viewed as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair ‘our world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web (Tronto, 1993: 103, emphasis in original).

My participants are concerned with activity oriented to maintaining, continuing and repairing their “worlds” so that they can live in their new environment “as well as possible”. I cluster the concept of living “as well as possible” with Butler’s “livable life”, Young’s “good life” and Townsend’s emphasis on people’s ability to enjoy the social goods “which are customary, or which are at least widely encouraged or approved in the societies to which they belong” (Townsend, 1979: 31). However, because the personhood and ordinariness (which may include commonality, similarity and difference) of
people seeking asylum are not recognized, there is little understanding, at the scales of political policy-making, policy delivery and interpersonal relations, of them as people whose worlds require maintenance, continuity and repair, who require “welcoming” to lessen the risk of crisis and trauma in their lives (Grinberg and Grinberg, 1989: 165, Chapter 2). Provision is made, but that provision lacks the *attentiveness* - “recognizing the needs of those around us” – that Tronto argues is integral to care (Tronto, 1993: 127). Those needs cannot be understood and responded to if they are not heard as coming from “concrete” others (cf Benhabib, 1997: 410).

Tronto argues against a gendered conceptualization of care which reinforces a binary division between care and justice and relegates care to a feminized personal sphere of feeling represented as inferior to the public sphere of rationality in which justice is enacted. Care connects with justice and rights at the national scale, and with “participatory parity”, who and what are taken into account, whose voices are heard, when policies and rules are made and needs assessed. Care must take into account people’s self-determined needs (Tronto, 1993: 139; Young, 1994: 91; Fraser, 2004: 18). But self-determination is also the route by which needs and care are put on the political agenda. My participants refuse the misrecognition which (de)forms the government’s assessment of their needs: meagre living allowances, prohibition of employment, blocks to study all frustrate their desires to live “as well as possible” (Tronto, 1993: 103). They refuse the misrecognition that positions them as lacking credibility, that denies them legal equality of arms and professional support, that despises their knowledges yet excludes them from more powerful knowledges.

Jennifer Mason argues that in conceptualizing a relational ethic of care within the *family* we need to move beyond seeing it as either labour or love: we need to pay attention to the significance of “thinking and feeling in the activity of care”. Hence, Mason uses the terms *sentient activity* and *active sensibility* (Mason, 1996: 27). Mason “locates her arguments within a sociology of personal relationships, rather than a sociology of work or care” (Mason, 1996: 32). In asking for care from people providing services, my participants take care out of the domestic sphere and insist on it as an ethic and a
practice necessary to the delivery of services to the public. Thus, a conceptualization of care is augmented by an understanding of it as “sentient activity” and “active sensibility”: a bringing together of feeling, thought and practice.

Why should we care for people seeking asylum? I suggest three responses to that question, the first founded on principle, the second more pragmatic and the third arising from a pragmatic shock which reveals a principle through its violation. All three were evident to me in the active solidarity of many volunteers and paid staff who work with people seeking asylum. The first response is founded on a universal principle: that we should give people their “due” simply because they are human, like us (Dummett, 2007: 27). Yet, the universal must be tempered by recognition of specific needs (cf Werbner and Yuval-Davis, 2005: 10).

The second, related, response comes to a similar conclusion through a more pragmatic route: that recognition of common human vulnerability can lead us to a position in which we care for others in their vulnerability. We recognize that we are all sentient and vulnerable, that we depend on others in our vulnerability and for our flourishing, as they depend on us. Recognition of common human vulnerability and precarity would lead to an understanding that all lives are grievable—and therefore merit care supportive of livability—and from this to solidarity in action. Solidarity can be enacted through the “positive duty” to help people repair their worlds, and through the “negative duty” to struggle against the oppressions that have made repair necessary (and in which we may be implicated). Butler questions “the familiar as a criterion for which a human life is grievable” (Butler, 2006: 38). People seeking asylum are familiar from their representations, but what these representations lack is a sense of commonality. The “differential allocation of grief” (Butler, 2006: 37) is founded on a differential allocation of what is due,

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9 Daniel Engster connects the principled and the pragmatic, connecting a natural law theory of care with accounts of actual existence: “human beings are political animals who depend on community with others for their development and well-being” (Engster, 2004: 128).
a differential recognition of the human that sets up borders between people seeking asylum and citizens. Lives whose livability is not valued cannot be grievable. Nonetheless, there is another route. Writing in the context of losing loved ones to AIDS, Butler says that:

To grieve, and to make grief into a resource for politics, is not to be resigned to a simple passivity or powerlessness. It is, rather, to allow oneself to extrapolate from this experience of vulnerability to the vulnerability that others suffer through military incursions, occupations, suddenly declared wars, and police brutality. (Butler, 2004: 23)

Butler’s use of “extrapolate” conveys an important point: that familiarity is not the only route to understanding and care: we can care for people in their difference, but we must hesitate and acknowledge that “we cannot take the other person’s standpoint and imagine that perspective as our own” (Young, 1997: 53). In extrapolating from our griefs, we see that these may arise from a common vulnerability, either to natural disasters or to disasters caused by human intervention or lack of intervention. Thus, care recognizes that a common vulnerability connects us socially.

A third response which can lead to caring for people seeking asylum comes close to Honneth’s connection between “the experience of moral injustice”, “mental shock”, and a disappointed “expectation on the part of the subject” (Honneth, 2008: 134). A principle may be revealed only in the practice of its violation. Thus, we may be moved by “a sense of outrage which emerges from our experience of injustice when the innocent are overwhelmed by superior forces” (Turner, in Smith, 1999: 1159). However, whereas Honneth depicts this experience as destructive of the capacity to act, many of my participants and many people who work with them are provoked to activity by their sense of outrage.

Whether the motivation to care for others comes from recognizing human “due”, a common vulnerability to the precariousness of life, or a sense of outrage, a common framework of social justice and “sheltering norms” is necessary to protect people and enable them to live in their worlds “as well as possible”. Universally, these norms take the form of human rights. What prevents human rights being enacted as ways of maintaining, continuing and
repairing the worlds of people seeking asylum is lack of recognition of them as sentient beings who deserve rights. This lack of recognition is connected to denial of “participatory parity” and of just distribution. In the next Chapter, I consider some of the grounds given for such a denial: “partiality” insists that those who have not contributed, for example, to the UK welfare state should not share disproportionately in the distribution of its goods (Gibney, 2004: 19). Partiality says that citizenship trumps human due and that care should be allocated differentially.

**CONCLUSION**

In this Chapter, I have proposed some conceptualizations of livability and its supports. I have endeavoured to draw on scholarly work and put forward understandings that connect with and do justice to my participants and their narratives. I have proposed a universal, ‘thin’ conception of livability, concerning needs humans have in common. ‘Thicker’ conceptions of livability cannot be commanded, prescribed or given. They have to allow for difference and the otherness of the other. My participants speak about misrecognition and lack of recognition, about denial of social justice and care. Turned into a positive “ethics from below”, the foundations of livability can be thought of in terms of “sheltering norms”: recognition, social justice and care.

First, in engaging with Honneth’s work on recognition, I have emphasized that my participants and he treat recognition as an ethical question. However, I have foregrounded my participants’ *self-recognition* of what is due to them as human. While lack of recognition comes as a “mental shock”, I question whether it is completely destructive of the “capacity to act”; indeed, the shock can act on people’s sentience in ways that lead to reclaiming rights. I question also Honneth’s theorization of the three modes of recognition as independent: my participants’ narratives demonstrate the connection between “personal troubles” and “public issues”. Second, I have drawn on the work of Dummett and Young because they address questions of human rights, self-determination and self-development in similar terms to those of
my participants. Dummett focuses on those “things which are everybody’s due”. Young demonstrates how refusing people their due leads to the specific harms of domination and oppression; these terms befit the specific ways in which my participants speak about the conditions of existence of asylum. Third, in the context of my participants’ narratives, I have conceptualized care in terms of “sentient activity” which helps “to maintain, continue and repair” people’s worlds. My participants ask for policy-makers, service providers and administrators to show care as “sentient activity”: they speak of care as activity in the public sphere which connects with social justice and recognition. In speaking about injustice and the injuries it inflicts on their self-understanding, they assert the human due and sentience denied by the conditions of existence of asylum. In the next Chapter, I look more closely at those conditions and ask how far they provide “sheltering norms” for human flourishing.
VIOLENT ELISIONS: TURNING PEOPLE INTO REFUGEES AND REFUGEES INTO ASYLUM SEEKERS

INTRODUCTION

Sanctuary for those who come to the UK asking for protection is one of the most contentious issues in contemporary politics. (Independent Asylum Commission website, Letter from Sir John Waite & Ifath Nawaz)

…the term “refugee” conceals multiple differences of ethnicity, gender, age, occupation and social status, which were and are obliterated in the process of constructing refugeedom. (Gatrell, 2005: 203)

Accounts of asylum policy and its effects constitute a field of contention at international and national political scales, and in academia. Yet, the thoughts and feelings of people seeking asylum are often ignored (Kushner, 2006: 202). Recognition and representation are important questions for refugee and migrant studies: ‘who’ and ‘what’ refugees are, by whom, how, with what purpose and effect they are - or should be - represented. Within this problematic field, people seeking asylum have been constituted as ‘problems’. The key areas of contention I examine in this Chapter are: (i) the ways in which people are constituted, categorized and conceptualized as refugees and asylum seekers; (ii) the nation-state as a site of “conflicting moral claims” (Gibney, 2004: 82); (iii) controlling asylum in the UK; (iv) UK asylum policy in practice; (v) responsibility for the conflation of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. Throughout, I ask how the conditions of existence of “refugeedom” impact on the ability of people seeking asylum to make livable lives in a new country.

The practice of sanctuary or asylum goes back many centuries (Schuster, 2002; Arbabzadah, 2007: 5). Now, however, ‘asylum seekers’ and ‘refugees’
are legally, politically, socially and administratively constructed categories into which people with diverse histories are assembled (Gatrell, 2005: 203; cf Turton, 2003b: 6). There is doubt about the extent to which the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees as extended in the 1967 Protocol (the CRSR) can provide protection as legally enforceable human rights (Moorehead, 2006: 35). It is argued that people seeking asylum are made the object of negative representations, *misrepresentations*, that position them as requiring control through laws, policies, rules and administrative procedures. In turn, these misrepresentations are used to justify the controls. Thus, negative representations become naturalized through a recursive process. My participants are well aware of the ways in which they are represented. Although they might not use the term ‘representation’, they protest the ways in which they are misrepresented. Joshua speaks about the difficulties created by media perceptions that people seeking asylum are “like a criminal. Which is very wrong, you know.” Hostile representations form the pervasive and naturalized discourses which give substance to the behaviour and decisions of many of the people involved with the claims of people seeking asylum, and those involved in delivering services.

In the field of refugee and migrant studies, there are opposing positions, positions which talk past each other, contradictions, ambivalences and differences of emphasis, even amongst those who broadly agree that there are problems with existing national and international arrangements for the protection of people who are at risk in, or from, their own states. Immigration and asylum laws and rules are issues of fierce debate, protest and campaigns in the UK. Politicians have been held responsible for this (Statham, 2003) as have the general population (Kymlicka, 2003), while Zetter’s view is that everyone is “incorporated” in misrepresenting people seeking asylum (Zetter, 2007: 190). A lack of consensus extends to the name of the field itself, whether the “marriage” between refugee studies and forced migration studies strengthens or weakens understandings of the situations of refugees and migrants (Hathaway, 2007: 349-350). Some non-government organizations have been shown to frame representations of people seeking asylum according to the organizations’ projects, for example to show “maltreatment
and suffering” (Godin et al, 2006: 10). Conversely, they are represented as resilient people who have much to contribute (Loizos, 2005: 45-48). Negative representations and misrecognitions shape the “public issues” which operate as “personal troubles” (Mills, 2000: 226) in the lives of people seeking asylum.

In this Chapter, I enlarge my participants’ narratives by contextualizing as “public issues” the conditions of existence they refer to when speaking about making new lives in Manchester. Since my concern is to look at those conditions through the lens of their narratives, my contextualizations and critiques are necessarily limited. The ways in which international and UK legislation, policies and rules, and the media represent refugees, people seeking asylum and migrants in general help to shape the conditions of “diaspora space” as a specific “point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes” (Brah, 2005: 208-209). The specific “diaspora space” they inhabit is often typified by the “highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination”, which Pratt ascribes to “contact zones” (Pratt, 2003: 4).

3.1 CATEGORIZING AND CONCEPTUALIZING REFUGEES

The history of UNHCR...highlights the challenges and pitfalls faced by an organization vested with defending a regime premised on justice, over a period in which states have become far more concerned with order, and in which power and interests have been the dominant influences in world politics. In other words, the refugee regime is one which states would almost certainly not have agreed to at any subsequent historical juncture. It institutionalized the values of a relatively small number of negotiating states at a very specific point in history. This has left UNHCR as the guardian of a set of normative principles which have been at odds with the changing interests of states. (Loescher et al, 2008: 128)

...human rights are human rights. A human being is a human being whether you come from a third-world country or not. (Elizabeth)

Categorizations operate in the legislation, policies and rules which govern the lives of people seeking asylum. The effects of categorizations and conceptualizations impact on their daily lives, resulting, for example, in their receiving different benefits from citizens. These categorizations are, in part,
informed and justified by particular ways of thinking about ‘asylum seekers’ and the other categories with which they are popularly elided. In the first part of this section, I discuss the legal meaning given in the CRSR. The CRSR frames refugees as a legal category constructed in response to the catastrophes of the Second World War, in which some states not only failed to protect their citizens, but were instrumental in persecuting them (Werbner and Yuval-Davis, 2005: 22). The CRSR has been seen as limited in terms of: (i) the historical moment which sought to give protection to a particular category of people (Loescher et al, 2008: 1-2), and (ii) its inclusions and exclusions. In the second part of this section, I consider some of the conceptualizations of ‘refugees’, ‘asylum seekers’, ‘forced migrants’ and ‘economic migrants’ which have become sites of “conflicting moral claims” (Gibney, 2004: 82). These conceptualizations impact on the lives of my participants through the policies and rules which they inform and as behaviours they encounter.

“There have always been refugees” (Loescher et al, 2008: 1). Although the practice and idea of asylum, or sanctuary, has an ancient history (Schuster, 2002; Marfleet, 2006: 97; Arbabzadah, 2007: 5), the creation of a legal category in 1951 was new. However, in the UK, the category of ‘refugee’ has become split and full of ambiguity: it is used both as a general term to describe people who have left their countries to seek asylum, and as a specific term to designate people with the legal right to remain. Legal distinctions which mark people as ‘asylum seekers’, ‘refugees’, ‘failed asylum seekers’ have become contested politically. While legal distinctions are rejected, for example, under the slogan “no one is illegal”, they remain important operating forces in the conditions of existence of people seeking asylum and, as such, cannot be ignored.

Article 1A (2) of the CRSR defines a refugee as any person who:

…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 [sic] 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 [sic] former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.
The definition is commonly seen as falling into three parts: that a refugee is outside his or her country; that she or he fears persecution if she or he returns; that the persecution is based on race, religion, or nationality, or membership of a particular social group or political opinion (Gibney, 2004: 5-6). A further consideration is that the state is either unwilling or unable to protect them, or, indeed, that the state either perpetrates or sanctions their persecution (Gibney, 2004: 7; cf Boccardi, 2002: 4).

While it can be said that the CRSR was designed to ‘shelter’ people at risk of specified persecution, objections have been made to the Convention as a ‘universal’ declaration of rights. First, it is seen as limited by the historical circumstances of its production: a response to events in the Second World War and a “Cold War sideshow” (Hansen, 2003: 35), which privileged political rights over economic and social rights. This division is often contested on the grounds that “there is no clear distinction between desiring freedom and desiring material security” (Hansen, 2003: 36).

Second, there are objections to the categorical limits on those who can receive protection. Women and people marginalized on the basis of their sexuality face specific asymmetries of power and access to justice because they are not recognized as distinct groups that might suffer violations. Jacqueline Bhabha shows how shifting perceptions of the primacy of universal human rights and the sovereignty of the state can trap women between the two competing principles (Bhabha, 2005: 178). Judgements made by tribunals are often inflected by geopolitical considerations that affect how universal rights and cultural difference are viewed and weighed at a specific moment. Thus judgements and case law based on the Convention are inconsistent (Bhabha, 2005: 188; Moussa, 1998: 100) and, perhaps, opportunistic. Bhabha demonstrates the considerable margin of appreciation that some adjudicators give to sovereign states and cultures to dictate the personal lives of their citizens, even where these are at odds with espoused Western values, while other adjudicators may favour the application of more universal (Western) conceptions of human rights. Thus, a double standard often prevails whereby
regimes are condemned for the way they treat ‘their’ women, but asylum is not granted to women who have fled those regimes. Similarly, lack of cultural awareness often operates against women claiming asylum, for example in their ability to relocate (Siddiqi et al, 2007: 10, 47, 55).

Third, Bhabha’s concerns exemplify the paradox that safeguarding universal rights depends on nation-states (cf Benhabib, 2004: 2; Werbner and Yuval-Davis, 2005: 21; Marfleet, 2006: xiii; Back, 2007: 37; Loescher et al, 2008: 128). The protection from persecution within or by their own state which the CRSR offers can be realized only by other states’ recognizing people as refugees according their national procedures. Thus, refugee status as connoting the right to a livable life has become subject to tests. Despite the setting up of international courts to deal with some violations of human rights, ultimate sovereignty over the rights of refugees remains with nation-states. This has created some doubt about the value of rights in themselves (Hardt and Negri, 2006: 275). Moreover, CRSR rights have become embroiled in the “conflicting moral claims” about entrance policies (Gibney, 2004: 82) which I discuss in the next section.

A fourth difficulty is that the persecuted figures invoked by the CRSR slip into representations of feeble or passive victims. A further slippage, shaped partly in response to historical events, has merged passive victims into figures paradoxically active in scrounging, criminality, job stealing and terrorism. Refugees have been turned into “artefacts of policy concerns”, (Turton, 2003a: 2), racialized figures “sealed into thingness” (Fanon, 2008: 170). They have become nameless and undifferentiated (cf Harrell-Bond, 1999: 141; Back, 2007: 34), “policy objects” (Korac, 2003: 51), whose human being, sentience and desire for livability are not recognized.

10 Legal cases have set precedents which broaden the scope of the CRSR rights, for example Shah and Islam (R v IAT & SSHD ex parte Shah; Islam v IAT [1999] ZAC 629), which extended the meaning of a ‘particular social group’ to include people who “share a common, immutable or innate characteristic” or a “belief which is fundamental to their identity” (Siddiqi et al, 2008: 53).
The figure of the refugee has become both split into the legal figure of the ‘asylum seeker’, the not-yet-refugee with leave to remain, and combined into a paradoxical, mythic and metaphorical assemblage of negativities. Politicians, academics, the media and the public wage intense debates around this figure. The debate encompasses the figure itself and the story told about its locatedness in historical global processes. A common conception is that refugees are caught up in transnational or globalizing processes (Castles, 2003: 24; Marfleet, 2005: 5, 138) which have put nation-states themselves under pressure (Appadurai, 2005: 155; cf Benhabib, 2004: 4). I examine two problems which arise from this conception. The first is to what extent these global movements are new; the second, linked to the first, concerns the meanings applied to movements of people, particularly the debate which has been instigated about what constitutes a “moral community” (Turton, 2003a: 8). This debate goes to the heart of the conceptual and practical problems that notions of the nation-state pose for human rights.

Migration is not new: whether for survival, conquest, pilgrimage, trade or pleasure (or some combination of these), people have moved about the world since earliest times and many scholars see migration as an intrinsic part of human experience (Ghosh, 1994; Castles, 2003: 17; Appadurai, 2005: 27). From this perspective, it is reasonable to view “human location as constituted by displacement as much as by stasis” (Clifford, 1997: 2; cf Back, 2007: 42). Yet, movement continues to be represented as ‘unnatural’. A view of locatedness which privileges stasis leads to effects that are far from sheltering, hence the “abnormalization” of migrants and migration (Blommaert, 1998: 118-119). Malkki concludes that:

The naturalization of the links between people and place leads to a vision of displacement as pathological, and this, too, is conceived in botanical terms, as Uprootedness…Since both cultural and national identities are conceived in territorialized terms, Uprootedness also threatens to denature and spoil these. (Malkki, 1992: 34)

The metaphors used to describe migration and those who move affect the ways in which migrants are seen (cf Ahmed, 2004: 47-48, 79-80; Gilroy, 2005: 143; Gedalof, 2007: 78). Describing migrations in terms of ‘flows’ or
‘inundations’, for example, suggests “some kind of natural event, an inexorable process with its own logic and force...which we ignore at our peril” (Turton, 2003a: 5; cf Gatrell, 2005: 28). Such use of metaphor “de-personalises, even de-humanises the people we are talking about” (Turton, 2003a: 5). Consequently, it is detrimental to the creation of epistemic “sheltering norms” and to the social and political conditions within which livable lives can be constructed. However, ‘uprootedness’ has no inherent meaning: “meaning can never be finally fixed” (Hall, 1997: 270). Uprootings might be conceived in different terms. For example, the ‘English’ landscape is a historically-embedded product of geographically-diverse plants uprooted and transplanted with care to enable them to flourish in different conditions.

Despite the lengthy history and varied nature of human migrations, Arjun Appadurai suggests that “today’s world involves interactions of a new order and intensity” (Appadurai, 2005: 27; cf Benhabib, 2004: 5). The “new order and intensity” are seen both in the numbers of people living outside their own country – and in the ways people move, for example in the view that claiming asylum is “a major form of primary migration from the world’s periphery to the European core” (Statham, 2003: 164; cf Castles, 2003: 30). While these relationships may be seen as reversing the direction of colonial migrations, with the “collective amnesia” of the “colonial enterprise” obscuring “the fact that at least some of the guests of today were the hosts of yesteryear” (Curti, 2007: 60), mobility remains marked by privilege. The wealthy minority can move freely while the poor majority “are prepared to take tremendous risks” in travelling to improve their lives (Turton, 2003a: 8). However, if migrations (including those of undocumented workers) are “shaped by the needs of capitalism” (Marfleet, 2006: 57), hopes of improvement may remain hopes in the face of systems of “exclusion...associated with globalising processes” (Marfleet, 2006: 5, 138). Some of my participants remark on their downward mobility, the loss of status and living standards that results from the exclusions of the conditions of existence of asylum. Similarly, JoAnn McGregor (2008) discusses loss of status and deskilling amongst Black Zimbabweans in Britain. Mobility is not an even process (cf Brah, 2005: 35): the geographical mobility
that safeguards life may bring with it more restricted social and economic mobilities that impede livability.

Within this world of movement, categories such as ‘forced migrants’, ‘refugees’ and ‘economic migrants’ are commonly seen as “artefacts of policy concerns, rather than of empirical observation and sociological analysis” (Turton, 2003a: 2). In other words, ‘forced migration’ and ‘refugeedom’ are not ‘discovered’ but ‘constructed’ as objects of knowledge (cf Gatrell, 2005: 3). Categories are constructed as objects of knowledge in order to manage the people and situations thus denominated; what exists outside those categories does not exist or does not qualify for particular rights. Since conceptualizations affect policies and practices, the more we are able to develop awareness of our conceptualizations, the more “we can come to a better understanding of the material reality they are conceptualisations of…what they are good for” (Turton, 2003a: 6). Thus, insofar as ‘management’ of problems equates to “institutional support”, inadequate conceptualizations will lead to inadequate support.

Turton argues that forced migrants require us to think about “what is or should be our moral community and, ultimately, what it means to be human” (Turton, 2003a: 8). His view is that refugees and forced migrants have many experiences in common and that loosening the distinction allows us to focus on people and their experiences rather than on their discursively-organized status (Turton, 2003b: 9). Both groups might be seen as having lost the protection of their government and as being living challenges to the notion that the nation-state, whether the one they have left or the one they have gone to, is “a national community of equal citizens” (Turton, 2003b: 5). Shacknove shares Turton’s concern with conceptualizations and justice, arguing that an adequate conceptualization of “refugeehood” is necessary to protect all those for whom the ‘contract’ between state and citizen has been ruptured. In other words, economic rights should be on a par with political rights: if “citizens can minimally expect that their government will guarantee physical security, vital subsistence and, and liberty of political participation and physical mobility”, “then the violation of each constitutes an equally valid claim to refugeehood” (Shacknove, 1985: 281: cf Gibney, 2004: 11).
However, there have been strong counter-arguments, particularly from legal perspectives, to uphold the provisions of the CRSR that give refugees a special status (Hathaway, 2007; cf Bloch, 2001: para 6.3). Hathaway first makes what he calls a “real world” argument based on the “specificity of the refugee’s circumstances” and “fundamental social disfranchisement” (Hathaway, 2007: 350). Second, he objects to the “marriage” of ‘refugee studies’ and ‘migration studies’ as losing this rights-based orientation and as corresponding with government strategies to merge asylum with “broader migratory management goals” (Hathaway, 2007: 350). In the short term, the kind of argument made by Hathaway seems to offer greater protection and prospect of livability for people seeking asylum in the UK. My participants insist that their lives would be in danger through deliberate state action, or action from which the state cannot protect them, if they were returned. It does not help them to have their claims considered within a framework in which figures of ‘bogus’ economic migrants nestle closely with figures of refugees. Yet, a broader conception of claims to refugee status would provide stronger recognition of what is due to all humans, in terms of both needs in common and specific needs.

3.2 The Nation-State as a Site of Conflicting Moral Claims

The nation-state is the dominant mode of political organization in the modern world. Yet it is a mode vexed by contending narratives about what constitutes a ‘nation’, whether or not the ‘state’ exists, and whether the two can ever be synonymous (Hall, 2003). In this section, I focus on some of the contentions about the place of refugees and other migrants within nation-states. The first problem centres on the homogeneity of the nation-state. One view is that, because of the inevitable presence of minorities, the notion of a homogenous community is always already impossible (Dummett, 2007: 6-7). That “some residents” will be “misfits” is inherent in the notion of the nation-state (Gibney, 2004: 205). In a world where thousands of languages and other forms of diversity are mapped onto some two hundred states, even citizens may lack the protection of “sheltering norms”, as many of my participants have found. Whether or not the nation is a community which can only be “imagined”
(Anderson, 2006), it is constituted by “very real demarcations between us and them” (Benhabib, 2004: 18). Thus, refugees are seen as posing conceptual and practical dilemmas for the notion of a “culturally homogenous political community” (Turton, 2003b: 4). This tension in who ‘belongs’, inherent in the notion of the nation-state, shapes the conditions in which people seek life and livability in new countries.

Second, there is debate about the extent to which the power of nation-states is being defrayed, whether “the nation-state, as a complex modern political form, is on its last legs” (Appadurai 2005: 19; cf Castles, 2003b: 5; Benhabib, 2004: 1). If nation-states are under pressure from both global movements and locality (Appadurai, 2005: 189), their response is to keep territory and borders, cultural integrity and homogeneity under increasing surveillance and control, for example through entrance policies and citizenship tests (cf Kymlicka, 2003: 197; Bloch, 2001). A third site of tension is the relationship between national and international obligations. “Modern states are highly resistant to the moral claims of outsiders” (Gibney, 2004: 211; cf Loescher et al, 2008: 128): this applies whether the “outsiders” are people seeking asylum or international organizations such as the United Nations which report unfavourably on states’ treatment of people seeking asylum. Nation-states have enormous power to thwart or support the conditions of livability both for their citizens and for people seeking asylum.

So, the idea of the refugee “is intimately linked to ideas about rights and the concept of the nation-state” (Marfleet, 2006: 98). Indeed, refugees call “into question the fundamental categories of the nation-state” (Agamben, 1998: 134). However, there is no consensus about the links between refugees, rights and the nation-state. While, in practice, refugees are produced as ‘splinters’ in the body politic (Habib), the extent to which they should be treated as “peoples out of place” (Malkki, 1992: 33; Turton, 2003b: 4) is contentious. The phrase invokes Mary Douglas’s conception of “matter out of place” as implying “two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order” (Douglas, 1995: 36). The crux is a question of justice which addresses the notion of the national order: whether citizens merit more consideration than non-citizens, people who have disrupted “ordered relations” by crossing
boundaries. On one side, the “partial view brings to the fore the claims of citizens to maintain self-determining political communities which sustain their collective way of life” (Gibney, 2004: 230). From this perspective, the state is “defined by a responsibility to privilege the interests and concerns of its own members” (Gibney, 2004: 197, my emphasis), thus maintaining national order. On the other side, “the impartial view highlights the claims of human beings in general – and refugees in particular – to equal consideration” (Gibney, 2004: 230). Thus, the impartial view recognizes the human and what is “due” to humans rather than categories of citizen and non-citizen.

Benhabib traces to Kant the origins of the “juridical and moral ambivalence that affects discussion of the right of asylum and refuge to this day” (Benhabib, 2004: 29). The universal right to hospitality - and the corresponding moral obligation to provide hospitality – were formulated as qualified rights, conditional on maintaining the well-being of existing communities (Benhabib, 2004: 30, 36). Similarly, Derrida refers to the “paradox and aporia of a right to hospitality, of an ethics of hospitality which is limited and contradictory a priori” (Derrida, 2000: 65). The ambivalence “as to how widely or narrowly the obligation to the other should be interpreted” (Benhabib, 2004: 36) reverberates in, for example, the different positions taken by Gibney and Dummett.

Gibney interprets the obligation to the other narrowly, arguing that the state’s responsibility is “to privilege the interests and concerns of its own members” (2004: 197). States should assist refugees only “when the costs of doing so are low” (Gibney, 2004: 231). Assistance to refugees is seen as a sacrifice which must be minimized “to reduce the likelihood of backlash” (Gibney, 2004: 234). This view has material consequences for people seeking asylum: attitudes which urge responsibility to privilege citizens above refugees influence and justify the often grudging way in which officials treat people seeking asylum. In contrast, Dummett, proceeding from a Christian humanist perspective, puts forward an ethical foundation for open borders founded on “every state’s duty to those who are not its citizens: that they are fellow human beings” (Dummett, 2007: 49; cf Kushner, 2006: 234).
A view of people seeking asylum as “costs” reverberates in immigration rules which construct borders between “desirable and undesirable” people (Anthias, 2008: 7) and value migrants only when they are ‘assets’ to the nation-state (Marfleet, 2006: 137). Marfleet has characterized the UK as “cynical” and “calculating” in its approach to refugees (Marfleet, 2006: xiii), according to the ‘congeniality’ of groups to the state’s current political and economic projects, and their potential for being mobilized for these purposes (Marfleet, 2006: 106, 285; cf Schuster, 2002). When “managed migration” allows the possibility that some migrants may be ‘assets’, it is highly selective: people seeking asylum are excluded. Mary, for example, discerns a “sort of a pride within the government that ‘We…don’t need your assistance.’” There is no recognition of people seeking asylum as sentient, as having the capacity for or right to livable lives as “doers and actors” (Young, 1990: 37; cf Maldonaldo-Torres, 2008: 149; Honneth, 2008: 138-9).

People seeking asylum have come to embody various kinds of risk to the nation-state and citizens. First, migration and diaspora challenge notions of the nation-state as a ‘natural’ state synonymous with civilization and progress (Clifford, 1997: 252). Second, migrants become menacing figures who embody the fracture - and fracturability - of the ‘contract’ between citizen and state. The character of asylum seekers as seeking refuge from “violent conflict and human rights violations” turns them into “carriers of the insecurity and instability that led to their initial departure” (Gibney, 2004: 256). Third, they are represented as threats to the well-being of citizens, to the ability of states “to guarantee for their citizens a certain standard of living or life-style, a situation of at least stable and normally improving life chances” (Gibney, 2004: 209). Fourth, they are perceived as threats to national security to which Western states have responded through “the securitization of migration” (De Genova, 2007b: 440; cf Somerville, 2007: 39-42). Thus, people seeking asylum are constructed as risks to the nation-state: incapable of being assets, they require management and regulation. This turns them into “policy objects” (Korac, 2003: 51). They are labelled in ways that are both specific and generalized, which merge them with migrants to constitute both as problems (Kushner, 2006: 7; cf Blommaert and Verschueren, 1998: 68, 80-81). Constituting
migrants, including people seeking asylum, as risks removes them from consideration as those to whom “sheltering norms” in the form of recognition, rights and care are due.

Several ways have been proposed out of the impasse in which nation-states pose problems for refugees and refugees are seen as posing problems for nation-states. Micheline Ishay and David Goldfischer (1997) challenge the notion of the sovereign state as safeguarding security and the false dichotomy made between security and rights. For them, the limitations of the current United Nations Convention on Universal Human Rights, and the United Nations itself, are derived from their imbrication with sovereign states (cf Werbner and Yuval-Davis, 2005: 21). Thus, they advocate a “universal sovereignty” embodied in all human beings rather than in sovereign states (Ishay and Goldfischer, 1997: 398). This is similar to the claim made by some of my participants for equality based on being human. From a different perspective, Giorgio Agamben also doubts that rights can be reconciled with nation-states. If the “fundamental activity of sovereign power is the production of bare life”, “every attempt to found political liberties in the rights of the citizen is, therefore, in vain” (Agamben, 1998: 181). Many different perspectives and analyses lead to the conclusion that “states cannot be left with responsibility for refugees” (Marfleet, 2006: xiii). Some writers have advocated that rights can be ensured only if ‘no borders’ or open borders allow people the freedom to move at will (Dummett, 2007: 73; Marfleet, 2006: 288). Haddad points out that, in this case, there would be no refugees: since nation-states produce refugees, they must be the “the location of the ‘solution’” (Haddad, 2008: 203).

From this survey, it is clear that nation-states, at best, pose dilemmas for the incorporation of refugees or, at worst, are inimical to livability for non-citizens. The incorporation of migrants is a differential practice, strongly shaped by the degree to which they are seen as ‘assets’ to the changing projects of particular nation-states. Even so, being recognized as an asset can be a precarious condition, and even assimilation may be no protection (Gilroy, 2005: 146). In the following three sections, I look more specifically at (i) asylum policies and (ii) asylum claim procedures in the UK, (iii) responsibility for representations of
people seeking asylum in the UK and ask in what ways these shape possibilities for livability for people seeking asylum.

3.3 CONTROLLING ASYLUM IN THE UK

If people seeking asylum are indeed “artefacts of policy concerns” (David Turton, 2003a: 2), what kinds of concerns are UK governments moved by and what kinds of artefacts are they producing? Official knowledge about refugees is mobilized through legal, political and administrative discourses which construct and represent them as ‘problems’. Bearing in mind the wider questions already raised about the possibility of any nation-state providing “sheltering norms” for people seeking asylum, my next question is to what extent asylum policies and practices in the UK provide foundations for livability. In this section, I consider UK policies and the terms in which these are framed, and, in the next, some of the rules which control what people seeking asylum may and may not do.

Under Home Office Rules an asylum applicant is a person who makes a request to be recognized as a refugee under the CRSR on the basis that it would be contrary to the United Kingdom’s obligations under the CRSR for him or her to be removed from or required to leave the United Kingdom. The UK Border Agency (UKBA) is an agency of the Home Office, in its own words “formed in April 2008 to improve the United Kingdom’s [sic] security through stronger border protection while welcoming legitimate travellers and trade”. According to the website:

The UK has a proud tradition of providing a place of safety for genuine refugees. However, we are determined to refuse protection to those who do not need it, and will take steps to remove those who are found to have made false claims.

Asylum is protection given by a country to someone who is fleeing persecution in their own country. It is given under the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. To be recognised as a refugee, you must have left your country and be unable to go back because you have a well-founded fear of persecution.

The United Kingdom also adheres to the European Convention on Human Rights, which prevents us sending someone to a country
where there is a real risk they will be exposed to torture, or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

If you do not qualify for asylum but we think there are humanitarian or other reasons why we should allow you to stay in the United Kingdom, we may give you temporary permission to remain here.

In 2007, 19 out of every 100 people who applied for asylum were recognised as refugees and given asylum. Another nine out of every 100 who applied for asylum but did not qualify for refugee status were given permission to stay for humanitarian or other reasons. (At the time these figures were published, 17 in every 100 applications had not yet resulted in a final decision.)

The UKBA frames UK asylum procedures with reference to two legal instruments concerned with rights: the CRSR and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). However, immediately following the reference to the “proud tradition of providing a place of safety” in the first paragraph, there follows a series of qualifications as the figure of the ‘bogus’ asylum seeker is conjured up in references to “genuine refugees” and “false claims” which indicate a “culture of disbelief” (Marfleet, 2006: 16, 233). In the penultimate paragraph, there is reference to the “humanitarian” provision of the asylum rules. This, however, has to be read in conjunction with the final paragraph which provides somewhat opaque statistics. Home Office statistics for 2008 offer a clearer statement, that some 31% of initial or reviewed cases were granted asylum, humanitarian protection or discretionary leave to remain and 69% were refused (Home Office, 2009: 22). The odds of being refused are substantially greater than those of being accepted.

It is evident that government policies and rules come from a different perspective and pose different questions from the questions of social justice and provision of “sheltering norms” I raised in Chapter 2. The UKBA statement

11 Dummett compares British and Canadian figures for accepting claims from refugees from Sri Lanka (0.2 per cent against 82 per cent), Somalia (0.4 per cent against 81 per cent) and the former Zaire (1 per cent against 76 per cent) in 1996. He concludes that “However excessively lenient the Canadian officials may be conjectured to be, it is inescapable that the decisions of their British counterparts must fall very far short of justice” (Dummett, 2007: 37-38).
previously cited makes reference both to the CRSR and to the UK’s “proud tradition of providing a place of safety for genuine refugees”. However, the juxtaposition of “genuine refugees and “false claims” indicates that the UK, while acknowledging its international obligations to Conventions to which it is a signatory, is moved in practice by a hinterland of political and economic considerations. Much of the literature dealing with refugees demonstrates the way in which domestic politics and perceptions of ‘national interest’ have operated to control immigration at different periods (Bloch, 2001: § 2.1; Somerville, 2007: 10-23). There is “direct competition” between human rights and “the interests of the national community” which in Western Europe “has come down firmly on the side of legitimating anti-asylum policies” (Statham, 2003: 165). Despite the UK’s projection of itself as a welcoming place for refugees, this espoused ‘welcome’ has been, and is, less warm in practice (Schuster, 2002; Kushner, 2006: 3, 205). Many of my participants were, like Mary, dashed in their expectations of finding “a good country that can protect you”.

While the EU allows increasing ease of movement for citizens of member countries, there “is a sharper delineation of the conditions of those who are non-members” (Benhabib, 2004: 149). Talal Asad connects the “idea of European identity” with “exclusions”. “It is a symptom of anxieties” (Asad, 2000: 12). In the UK, anxieties about migration have led to both stricter border controls and a rethinking of national identity and citizenship. Stuart Hall sees attempts to “shore up the nation” as producing “a revamped Englishness, an aggressive little Englandism, and a retreat to ethnic absolutism” (Hall, 2003: 308). New qualifications for citizenship and “changes in discourse or rhetoric” link citizenship with, for example, ‘cohesion’ and ‘integration’ (Kymlicka, 2003: 195; cf Somerville, 2007: 42). Migration is identified as a specific ‘problem’, with a response constructed by government as a “public issue” in terms of rules and discourses. The government seeks to posit an ‘ideal new citizen’ who can be identified through tests and points, thus narrowing the notion of citizenship which is, in practice, inflected by a range of considerations (Werbner and Yuval-Davis, 2005: 4; cf Chantler, 2007: 142-143). This narrowed construction of citizenship, defining who is an asset and worthy to
belong, contributes to conditions of existence which people seeking asylum experience as “personal troubles” when, for example, they are excluded from recognition as people whose skills may be assets.

Anxieties about economic migration, terrorism and citizenship are amongst the “particular values” which enter into decisions and operate against impartiality (Young, 1990: 79). Similarly, values at a more geo-political scale operate as governmental power/knowledge through, for example, ‘white lists’ of ‘safe’ countries from which all applications will be rejected (Statham, 2003: 166). The concepts used to frame discussions about asylum - threats of economic migration, terrorism and cultural dilution - operate against livability by creating suspicion about what motivates people claiming asylum. Indeed, the very existence of asylum as a contested issue creates a mental landscape which is not conducive to welcome, neighbourliness and possibilities for livability. This can impact on people’s claims, replacing livability and human flourishing with precariousness for those whose claims remain under some kind of consideration and those made destitute - and putting at risk the lives of people returned to their countries.

Recent legislation legitimates racism and has led to the criminalization of people seeking asylum as ‘cheats’ and ‘bogus’ (Marfleet, 2006: 181). The ending of the Cold War is frequently depicted as a turning point in narratives of immigration control: thereafter, refugees “were increasingly viewed as an undifferentiated part of ‘foreigners’ or ‘illegal immigrants’, rather than as a vehicle for condemnation of enemy regimes” (Bhabha, 2005: 180). This is more than xenophobia: “if there has to be one single concept, a solitary unifying idea around which the history of postcolonial settlement in twentieth century Europe should revolve, that place of glory should be given not to migrancy but to racism” (Gilroy, 2005: 150). Simultaneously, a “repackaging” of displaced people as “helpless” and “dependent” (Marfleet, 2006: 204) has added to the contradictions of the ways in which they are represented. Of course, people seeking asylum have needs and have been hurt by experiences in their countries of origin and in the UK; simultaneously, however, they are themselves capable of defining their needs and making their lives more livable – but are denied the right and the means to do so. As my
participants show, they are synonymous neither with their circumstances nor with the ways in which they are represented in official discourses.

### 3.4 Asylum Policy in Practice

In this section, I consider the asylum claim process and the everyday way in which rules impinge on and shape people’s opportunities for making livable lives. My intention is not to explain the rules in exhaustive detail\(^\text{12}\), but to provide an understanding of the context in which my participants are speaking. Further, it is not only the rules which impinge on the lives of people seeking asylum; the rules are shaped, in part, by representations that saturate much of the media, the behaviour of administrators and the responses of people on the streets.

Despite references to the protective framework of the CRSR, the UK asylum claim process is an adversarial process in which people seeking asylum are required to establish their claims to the satisfaction of the Home Office. For new claimants, the first stage is to make a claim either at the point of arrival, or subsequently\(^\text{13}\). This is followed by a ‘screening’ interview, at which people are allocated a ‘case owner’ who will both make an initial judgement on their case and be responsible for aspects of their support. Accommodation may be arranged and limited financial support given. Subsequently, there is an asylum interview, following which a decision will be made. If the decision is to reject the claim, claimants may appeal. The Home Office has its own legal representatives available against claimants in appeal hearings; claimants may be represented if they can afford representation or access legal aid.

The failure of an appeal may be followed by a fresh claim if people can gather evidence not previously considered (for example, documentation not available earlier or evidence of some recent event in the country of origin which

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\(^{12}\) Such details can be obtained from the UKBA website and from the websites of refugee support and research organizations such as the Refugee Council and the Information Centre About Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

\(^{13}\) As a result of “exporting borders” and other measures, it is now impossible to claim asylum after having arrived legally in the UK (Somerville, 2007: 69-70).
demonstrates risk). However, there is a double condition: not only must the evidence have not previously been considered, it must, when taken with the previous evidence, have a realistic chance of success. This is the ‘fifty-fifty’ rule about which Joshua protests. Another legal challenge is possible in the form of judicial review. This is the legal process that allows a person to challenge the lawfulness of a decision, action or failure to act of a public body such as a government department. I discuss in detail what my participants say about the legal processes involved in claiming asylum in Chapter 7. For the moment, I shall comment only briefly on the asymmetries of the claims procedure and the ways in which (mis)representations of people seeking asylum seep into it.

Images of ‘genuine’ asylum seekers which constantly evoke images of ‘bogus’ asylum seekers create a background of mistrust against which people seeking asylum have to struggle for recognition as human, as people with a legal right to claim asylum and an entitlement to a fair hearing. This starting point of asymmetry of power is compounded by inequalities: lack of knowledge of the legal system; lack of material or witness evidence for their testimony; lack of adequate legal representation and interpreter assistance. In this context, ‘self-representation’ is imbued with asymmetry rather than assertiveness. People claiming asylum are so positioned that they lack equality of arms. Indeed, in some aspects of the system, they could be said to be disarmed, for example when the ‘expert’ knowledge of the Home Office, conveyed through Country Specific Operational Guidance Notes, is treated with more authority than the self-represented knowledge of claimants and appellants. The figure of the ‘bogus claimant’ is embellished by the added dimension of untrustworthiness about the events and life worlds of her own country. The authority of the asylum system suggests practices akin to those which Michel Foucault ascribes to “governmentality”: “the formation of a whole series of specific government apparatuses” and “the development of a whole complex of knowledges” (Foucault, 2002b: 220). Only knowledge ‘congenial’ to the government is recognized. In some cases, when the desired evidence and
recommendations have not been forthcoming, the Home Office has rejected research which it commissioned (Somerville, 2007: 114)\textsuperscript{14}. In other cases, evidence has been used to appear to make improvements, but in fact to make life differently difficult for people seeking asylum (Doyle, 2008). For the most part, however, ‘inconvenient truths’ are simply ignored.

Misrepresentations and lack of equality of arms in the epistemological and procedural aspects of the legal process produce asymmetries between who is believed that put livability at risk for people seeking asylum. They contribute to anxieties and situations, described by Elizabeth as “more frightening than what you have fled from”, which put human flourishing at risk. Indeed, if deportation follows an unsuccessful claim process, life itself may be put at risk.

Jean-François Lyotard’s definition of a “wrong” as “a damage…accompanied by a loss of the means to prove the damage” in his long meditation on Auschwitz and testimony is apt here. Such damage occurs if:

...the victim is deprived of life, or of all his or her liberties, or of the freedom to make his or her ideas or opinions public, or simply of the right to testify to the damage, or even more simply if the testifying phrase is itself deprived of authority...In all of these cases, to the privation constituted by the damage there is added the impossibility of bringing it to the knowledge of others, and in particular to the knowledge of a tribunal. (Lyotard, 2007: 5, my emphasis)

Justice resides in the claimant’s ability to speak and be heard, in the recognition given to the “testifying phrase”. The “testifying phrase” uttered by someone seeking asylum is “deprived of authority” through lack of material evidence, lack of cultural understanding on the part of case owners and judges, and a culture permeated by disbelief of people seeking asylum. Lyotard’s further argument that, if there is an irreconcilable difference in the idioms of the plaintiff and the tribunal, the “différend” must be kept open is relevant both in this situation and in other situations where hesitation in the

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\textsuperscript{14} Examples are: the research by Zetter et al, “Dispersal: Facilitating Effectiveness and Efficiency Report” commissioned by the Home Office, available on written application to the Home Office (www.homeoffice.gov.uk/.../2739-dispersal-reporta8cf.html); research on forced marriage (Hester et al, 2008).
\end{flushleft}
face of the unknown would be more just than rushing to judgement (Butler, 2004: 70).

Adverse presentations of people seeking asylum are mobilized in the rules which govern their daily lives: they are people to be controlled and constrained in where they can live, in their ability to work, in the level of financial support they receive, and in opportunities for study. They are objects of surveillance through reporting and inspection regimes. Livability comes under pressure from these everyday constraints, linking public policy with “personal troubles” (Mills, 2000: 226). Since 1999, people receiving support and accommodation have been dispersed around the UK, frequently to “areas of extreme social deprivation” where they are exposed to racist violence in the media and on the streets (Marfleet, 2005: 267; cf Bloch, 2001: § 3.13). This deprivation is felt by my participants: Sammy referred to the “no good area” to which he was sent and many participants referred to the inferior living conditions and status which they experience in the UK. The introduction of dispersal as a policy of “burden sharing” (Bloch, 2001: § 3.11; Kushner, 2006: 145) helps to construct people seeking asylum as ‘problems’ and as drains on resources rather than as people who can contribute to society.

Because of their importance in the lives of my participants, I devote Chapter 6 to the right to work and to opportunities for self-development. “Managed migration” refuses to acknowledge that people seeking asylum bring with them skills and the capacity to acquire new skills. Indeed, it seems that people seeking asylum are deliberately stigmatized and punished, by their liability to be detained and to be made destitute as well as by the prohibition of employment, in order to deter ‘bogus’ claims.

The asylum rules recognize neither the capabilities nor the needs of people seeking asylum. My participants speak about the ways in which they suffer from inadequate financial support and support in the form of vouchers. They are constructed as people with lesser needs than those of citizens, as people who cannot be trusted to dispose of their finances in a responsible manner. The privatization of accommodation provision and vouchers, tying public services to organizations run for profit, raises questions of “fitness” and
“accountability” (Somerville, 2007: 79). Indeed, policy doctrines such as privatization overwhelm concern not only for people seeking asylum but also for all those who need social housing.

The conditions of existence of people seeking asylum are permeated by a culture that mistrusts them and sees them as undeserving. There is a strong sense that inferior treatment, mistrust and surveillance, like non-arrival policies (Gibney, 2004: 229), may be intended to have a deterrent effect (Bohmer and Shuman, 2007: 604). Such an intention would seem to be misjudged given the ample research evidence that people seeking asylum know little of life in the UK; indeed, they may not know where they will arrive when they leave their countries (Gilbert and Koser, 2004: 3; Crawley, 2010: 5). Representations of people seeking asylum are often used in support of ‘myths’ that use them as “scapegoats” for domestic social problems for which they are not responsible (Marfleet, 2006: 158). Mythic representations are challenged both by statistical evidence (Finney and Simpson, 2009) and by ethics which require that all people are recognized as human and given their due. Myths and misrepresentations nonetheless remain ubiquitous: we find their operations in the words and actions of, for example, service providers who, in Joshua’s words, treat them “like a piece of paper or something not useful to them” or who, as Michael, Joshua and Marwa recount, tell them to “go home”.

The literature points to the marking of the asylum regime in the UK (with other Western nation-states) by geopolitical and economic considerations, deterrence, control and denial of the conditions of livability for most people who come to seek asylum. Gibney, despite accepting the privileging of citizens over non-citizens, acknowledges that in recent years “barrier after barrier” has been erected “to prevent the arrival of rising numbers of refugees, as well as individuals on the move to escape grinding poverty or lack of opportunity” (Gibney, 2004: 229). Indeed, policy over recent years has been to prevent people reaching the UK by legal means – a kind of refoulement by non-arrival (Marfleet, 2006: 250). Here again there is disagreement: Somerville refers to the principle of non-refoulement as a “bottom line…repeatedly emphasized by the courts” (2007: 148; cf Haddad, 2008: 80). For Benhabib, the principle of non-refoulement incorporates Kant’s claim that the right of hospitality (a
temporarily limited right) cannot be refused to people if refusal would result in their “destruction” (Benhabib, 2004: 35; cf Non-Refoulement Under Threat, 2006). Despite these barriers, people still arrive to seek asylum. Having arrived, they encounter other barriers to livability, fortresses within ‘Fortress Europe’. Gibney, concerned with “backlash”, suggests that politicians follow public opinion in constructing these barriers. In the next section, I survey some of the literature which accounts for the growth of increased hostility to people seeking asylum.

3.5 RESPONSIBILITY FOR CONFLATING ASYLUM SEEKERS, REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

It is the explosive mixture of governmental, state, media and public animosity that makes asylum-seeker phobia so dangerous today. (Kushner, 2006: 4)

Immigration has become a site of contention, full of animosities which increase representational and physical violence towards people seeking asylum. In this section, I ask how this has occurred, who is responsible for the production of animosity – and who should be responsible for changing it in the direction of “sheltering norms” as the foundations of livability.

Narratives of asylum policy often treat historical events, for example the end of the Cold War, as turning points. One of my participants, Charles, attests to the differences in government support between when he came in the early 1980s and now: he “was greeted as a sort of person…felt accepted, and there was the possibility to work”. With the ‘thaw’, refugees were no longer treated as escapees from regimes that denied human rights, but as threats to borders and the economic and cultural well-being citizens. The perception of these threats has intensified since 11 September 2001 and subsequent attacks in the UK, with specific impacts on Muslim communities (Somerville, 2007: 57-59).

Other accounts focus attention on numbers, difference and racism to understand the ways in which migrants have been constituted as problems. One view is that the increase in asylum seekers focuses attention in a way that numbers of displaced people at a distance does not (Gibney, 2004: 9). It is
suggested that dispersal policies “have distributed not only the local burden of paying for the support of asylum seekers but also the experience of living with asylum seekers to a greater number of localities” (Statham, 2003: 150). Appadurai suggests that “difference itself is the underlying problem”, producing “frustration” for those who seek to eliminate it (Appadurai, 2006: 11). Bridget Byrne’s research introduces the notion of a “good mix” (Byrne, 2006: 137). However, Gilroy’s view is that “racism and not diversity…made [migrants’] arrival into a problem” (Gilroy, 2005: 150). Indeed, it may be that the “proliferation of political activity on issues of immigration and asylum itself produces this as a problem of national concern in a way that is disproportionate to the numbers of people or amounts of money involved” (Gedalof, 2007: 82; cf Lewis, 2005: 1).

A prevalent view holds the media responsible for purveying negative images of people seeking asylum. A Report commissioned by the Mayor of London to assess the impact of media and political images of refugees and asylum seekers on community relations demonstrated “the relative frequency with which the message is given that people seeking asylum and refugees are bogus and illegal rather than genuine, and that they are guilty of offences” (ICAR, 2004: 35; cf Brah, 2005: 173). Evidence supported the hypothesis that:

Newspapers often present images of asylum seekers and refugees that contain language, photographs and graphics likely to give rise to feelings of fear and hostility among their readers. This effect is compounded by inaccurate and unbalanced reporting. (ICAR, 2004: 41)

Moreover, in many articles “facts were presented without a traceable source so that the story was unverifiable” (ICAR, 2004: 41). Overall, the Report found that “inaccurate and unbalanced media images of refugees and asylum seekers” are a cause of “misinformed and hostile views among members of the public” which “makes racial attacks on refugees more likely” (ICAR, 2004: 77). Much reporting reinforces hostility rather than “sheltering norms”; the

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15 Byrne’s participants wanted “‘enough’ (or a majority) of the classed and racialised norm to ensure its reproduction in children” (Byrne, 2006: 137).
heightened mood of hostility leads to resentment and harassment (usually unreported) of asylum seekers and refugees, community divisions and a sense of being in competition for scarce resources.

Yet, there is no consensus that the predominant responsibility lies with the media. Research undertaken by Paul Statham found that “British governments dominate and shape public discourse on asylum…the nature of the asylum debate – at present restrictive and stigmatising - to a large extent comes politically from the top down, rather than in response to mobilised public pressure” (Statham, 2003: 174). In contrast, Will Kymlicka’s analysis is that:

To put it crudely, many people in Britain believe that it was a terrible mistake to have admitted and granted automatic citizenship to so many non-white immigrants in the 1950s and 1960s, but luckily the country woke up in time and adopted more restrictive admissions and naturalisation policies, and must remain vigilant against the threats and burdens posed by unwanted illegal immigrants and ‘bogus’ claimants to refugee status. (Kymlicka, 2003: 203)

A number of accounts support Kymlicka’s view that public opinion shapes government hostility to immigration, that “public opinion…triumphed over government intransigence and paved the way for tight entrance restrictions on immigrants from the New Commonwealth during the 1960s” (Gibney, 2004: 207; cf Kushner, 2006: 206).

Kymlicka draws attention to a number of factors distinguishing between Canadian and British practices and attitudes regarding immigration; not least of these is Britain’s colonial past. Further, the implication of UK policies is that, while more institutional support is required to assist integration, “native-born British citizens will not be expected to make any changes in their own habits, practices or identities” (Kymlicka, 2003: 205). Gedalof makes a similar point as she refers to “a one-sided burden of acquiring a sense of belonging/identity; only one side has to effect any change or shift in the terms of belonging, only one side has to learn to see cultural reproduction as a process that involves incorporating change and difference” (Gedalof, 2007: 81; cf UNHCR, 2007: 1). If the existing population is not expected to change or given any assistance or encouragement to change, if there is no extension of “sheltering norms” towards newcomers, then refugees are left alone to make “the effort of
translation” (Spivak, 2000: 22), existing citizens are abandoned to “postcolonial melancholia” (Gilroy, 2005) and common ground, in which livability might flourish, is abandoned.

Hostile representations are both specifically-shaped responses to historical events and “woven...out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories” (Fanon, 2008: 84). As I have discussed, metaphors of immigrants ‘flooding’ into the country contribute to perceptions of “new entrants as competitors for jobs, housing and public goods, regardless of the refugees’ actual contribution to economic growth” (Gibney, 2004: 216). A ‘morphed’ asylum seeker/migrant figure is “characterised as being both a drain on public services and a threat to national identity” (Gedalof, 2007: 82, 83; cf Kushner, 2006: 7). Roger Zetter argues that differentiation and “labelling” keep “refugees and other dispossessed people at a distance” (Zetter, 2007: 190). Rather than holding a specific group responsible for this, he suggests that “we are all incorporated” in a “compact” between state and citizens with “the political project of making labels in convenient images” (Zetter, 2007: 190).

One response to this “shrill and caricature-ridden debate” (Hansen, 2003: 36) is, perhaps, to look for broad but specific measures that can be taken to change the terms of the debate. Gibney suggests that “governments can do much to expand the boundaries of moral concern by conveying the sheer desperation of the plight of refugees” (Gibney, 2004: 214, my emphasis). However, the expansion of moral concern will have failed if it is achieved by reiterations of people seeking asylum as nothing more than hapless victims rather than recognizing them as being just as ordinary (albeit in extraordinary circumstances), just as sentient and just as deserving of livable lives as citizens.

**Conclusion**

Immigration and asylum policies are part of contentious debates where academic researchers and voluntary organizations are often aligned against government policy (Somerville, 2007: 114; cf Doná, 2007: 210). While many researchers and voluntary organizations look for government to do more, their
analyses differ and their proposals for change differ accordingly. In this Chapter, I have demonstrated how people seeking asylum have been drawn into this contested discursive field. I have considered different theoretical perspectives on (i) the ways in which people are constituted, categorized and conceptualized as refugees and asylum seekers; (ii) the nation-state as a site of “conflicting moral claims” (Gibney, 2004: 82); (iii) controlling asylum in the UK; (iv) asylum policy in practice; (v) responsibility for the conflation of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. There are many areas of general agreement: (i) that refugees and asylum seekers are ‘naturalized’ rather than natural categories; (ii) that the idea and the ‘fact’ of the nation-state contribute to the ways in which people seeking asylum are portrayed; (iii) that UK asylum policies and (iv) UK asylum rules and practices are calculated to deter people seeking asylum; (v) that people seeking asylum and migrants suffer from misrepresentations. There is less agreement about: (i) the ways that the categories should be reconceptualized; (ii) the margin of appreciation which should be given to nation-states, the partiality which should be shown to citizens, and whether rights can ever be guaranteed within a hegemony of nation-states; (iii) what a better system would be; (iv) who is responsible for hostile representations and, therefore, who should provide a lead in changing representations.

All these areas of contention shape the conditions within which people seeking asylum try to make livable lives. International legal protection has meaning only insofar as it is enacted by nation-states. But they are under no compulsion to act in accordance with broad ethical principles rather than narrow and grudging legal compliance. People seeking asylum find it almost impossible to reach the UK by legal means; if they do arrive, instead of welcome, they find an adversarial asylum application system and a ‘support’ system characterized by control and denials. They are misrecognized and misrepresented, as bogus, as criminals, as scroungers, as people with nothing to give. Asylum is the subject of intense debate which merges with debates about entrance policies more broadly; indeed, it not only merges with these debates but is sometimes submerged by them. Thus, the existence of such debate positions
them as ‘problems’ rather than as ‘ordinary’ people with the same rights, needs and desires as citizens.

The language of government policies, media reporting, comments by officials and people on the streets all do, or have the potential to do, representational violence to people seeking asylum through violating their self-understandings. One of the risks of ethnographic research is that it, too, relies on representations with the potential to do violence. One of the differences is in whose voices are heard and how those voices are framed (Romero and Stewart, 1999: xviii-xix). In the next Chapter, I explore how engaged ethnographic research can provide a space for unheard voices and help to do justice to people seeking asylum.
KNOWLEDGE WITH ETHICS: RESEARCH PRACTICE

...knowledge without ethics is not so much bad ethics as inferior knowledge. (Nandy, 2006: 113)

INTRODUCTION

“What is a researcher?”
“A student.”
“Someone who comes and asks you questions and then goes away again without considering your feelings.”

This was the question and these were the answers given at the first meeting (in January 2008) of a group undertaking a community audit within one of the organizations I worked with. I did not want to be a researcher who came to ask questions and went away again without considering people's feelings. It was my intention to work in some way with the organization for the three years I would be in Manchester. There were two reasons for this. The first has to do with commitment and solidarity. I wanted to be as involved as I could in working with people seeking asylum in whatever ways my skills and experience allowed. Indeed, as the community audit project made clear to me, there were times when I had to try to put aside my urge to express technical knowledge so that other people could express and develop theirs. In the process, I learned more about the meanings people gave to their own experience. Moreover, it was clear that, whatever technical knowledge and experience I had, the group would work most effectively by approaching the community audit from the experience of its members as people seeking asylum. Within the shifting power relations of research (Johnson at al, 2006: 2), in that time and place they were the experts and I was the learner (Hynes, 2003: 13).
The second reason, interwoven with the first, involved trust. If people seeking asylum have had their trust destroyed “at each phase of forced migration” (Hynes, 2003: 1; cf Lammers, 2007: 76; Hynes, 2009), however well-intentioned researchers are, the accretion of mistrust may be extended to them (Hynes, 2003:13). Because loss of trust cannot be quickly or easily repaired, I felt that people should be able to work with me before deciding whether or not they wanted to speak to me. I did not want to make them feel interrogated and forced to answer questions as they are within the asymmetrical and adversarial power relations of the asylum application procedures. Some of what I learned over the months of the audit, from formal and informal conversations with people, from many hours of participating in or attending meetings, from listening and asking questions, provides the material of my empirical research.

Research practice involves questions of recognition and care of participants, particularly where, as discussed in the previous Chapter, conditions of existence have positioned them as the objects of social inequalities. In this Chapter, I account for and reflect on my research practice, the choices I made and the reasons for those choices. First, I consider the relationship between social justice and research practice as a form of praxis. Second, I reflect on my approaches to my research participants as active, meaning-making subjects. Third, I discuss the significances of the knowledges produced by our encounters. Fourth, I reflect on other dilemmas of my research practice, laying them as open as I can, in order to make claims for the validity of the research.

In describing some of the ways I adjusted both my practice and my theoretical approach in response to relations in the field, I have tried to indicate the fluidity of the research process. Johnson et al provide an insightful summary of reasons for preferring the term ‘research practice’:

Practice emphasises the activity itself – the doing, the process, the production. It foregrounds the shifting, changing nature of any enquiry, its ongoing and dialogic character, as well as the struggle to pose questions and listen for answers, to re-pose them, adjust method to question, see the method itself exert a pressure, stay open to others…’Practice’ also foregrounds the politics and ethics
of research, including issues around power, responsibility and identity construction. (Johnson et al, 2006: 2)

There is increasing recognition that academic writing about research practice evens out messy, selective and imperfect processes. Some scholars are revisiting their earlier work to reflect on problems which they missed or looked away from (Pratt, 2000; Riessman, 2002b). PhD students are often advised to be, or to appear, confident about their work; they are not expected to continue to question it. Yet every stage of research can feel messy because of, rather than despite, commitments to ethical and rigorous practice. These commitments turn almost everything into dilemmas, matters of judgement and reflection from which one hopes to learn how to do better.

We have to try to produce coherence out of a complicated field that, in the case of work with people seeking asylum, can easily become unbounded. With hindsight, I can see research practice as a site of repeated iterations of engagement with feeling, cognitive work and practical activity. I see these iterations also in the struggles of people seeking asylum to make livable lives. In doing this, I am making an analogy between the sentience with which we engage in human activities, not between the circumstances in which we engage in these activities.

Research practice depends on encounters and relationships which are fraught with difficulty, not least because they are “shot through with power relations and personal cross purposes” (Clifford, 1988: 25). Nonetheless, as I shall argue, it is from these encounters and relationships, and from the participatory nature of ethical research, that transformative possibilities emerge. I interpret ‘the field’ widely, as to and fro encounters with a range of people, ideas and activities in a range of places (cf Latour, 2000). Each encounter can produce ideas that are modified by each successive encounter. In this Chapter, I try to convey something of the mobility of my research practice as well as some of the more constant principles which anchor practice.
4.1 RESEARCH PRACTICE AS SOCIAL JUSTICE

...there is no position from which sociological research can be done that is not biased in one or another way. (Becker, 2004: 27)

There has been a return to concern with social justice and a research commitment to changing as well as interpreting conditions of existence. Denzin and Giardina have edited a volume on qualitative inquiry and social justice (Denzin and Giardina, 2009), while Carter and Virdee argue for a sociology which gives political accounts of social conditions and is more than “decorative” (Carter and Virdee, 2008: 676-7). More specifically, a growing body of work is directed towards “decolonizing ethnography” (De Genova, 2007a: 13; cf Asad, 1986; Said, 1989; Gutiérrez Rodríguez et al, 2010). Such work emphasizes the perspectives of the (formerly) colonized, challenging the ideologies and practices that perpetuate their subordination. I hear Turton’s call for academic knowledge “to reflect critically upon…the taken for granted assumptions upon which much policy making is based” (Turton, 2004: 25) as a push to decolonize the knowledge applied in policy-making. Decolonizing knowledge connects with feminist standpoint theory and ethnographic knowledge from the margins as ways of challenging “relations between the production of knowledge and practices of power” (Harding, 2004a: 1) which I discuss later in this Chapter. Concern with research as social justice points also towards academics as “once-distant others” moving to proximity with their subjects, becoming “locally engaged, ceasing to be strangers by becoming collaborators” (Routledge, 2001: 116; cf Savage, 2009).

“Rational reflection on justice begins in a hearing, in heeding a call” (Young, 1990: 5; cf Savage, 2009: 9). The call can summon us towards Pogge’s “positive duty to help persons in acute distress” and towards the “negative duty not to uphold injustice” (Pogge, 2004: 267). The world is not short of injustices to investigate (Carroll, 2004: 2; Pogge, 2004: 265). Researchers have choices: what to research; how to conduct research; ways to locate themselves in relation to the ‘objects’ of their research. Endeavouring to do justice to people seeking asylum, I have been moved to examine the
conditions of existence of asylum from the perspective of my participants. I enlarge their perspectives by connecting and bringing them into dialogue with other empirical and theoretical research to ask what institutional and interpersonal conditions of existence, what conceptions of justice and care, might promote livability for people seeking asylum in a new country. My research is part of a commitment to justice, but only a part of the range of activities open to me as a person. As care requires both sentience and activity (Mason, 1996: 27), “theory in itself” is not “sufficient for social and political transformation” (Butler, 2004: 204). The “theoretical” and the “activist” are “like the recto and verso of a sheet of paper” (Bhabha, 2004: 32). They support and constitute each other.

Justice requires us to practise “a certain deferral in the face of a situation in which too many have rushed to judgement” (Butler, 2004: 70). I have tried to practise some deferral in judgements, a hesitancy that lives with “unknowingness about the Other” (Butler, 2004: 35), as a practice of care in approaching my research participants. Yet, I cannot take either otherness or sameness for granted. My participants claim inclusion in what is available to citizens. Thus, justice is done in part by recognizing how people seeking asylum in the UK are produced as different, how some migrants are interpellated as the other of the nation, and simultaneously how “diaspora space is the point at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of ‘us’ and ‘them’, are contested” (Brah, 2003: 209). In that space, justice requires an approach to encounters that understands personhood as including similarity and difference, that attempts to know more while living with unknowing, that understands commonality as something created through dialogic encounters and working together (Ahmed, 2000: 179-181). Research requires both hesitancy and effort – and judgement in choosing approaches which are ethical in treating people as equal and, yet, care-ful of the context.

My endeavour to do justice has four broad aspects. The first is to acknowledge the “right to narrate” (Bhabha, 2004: xx) by attempting to ground my analysis of the conditions of existence of asylum in the decolonizing counter-knowledges produced by my participants.
Operationally, this involved inviting participants to speak about the conditions of existence they thought were important in enabling or inhibiting the making of livable lives in Manchester. However, the “right to narrate” is a necessary but not sufficient condition of social justice. Speech must be heard and responded to (Spivak, 2000: 22). Elizabeth speaks of nobody listening when she tried to obtain accommodation suited to her needs. She connects this with not being “treated properly as a disabled person”. In Chapters 5, 6 and 7, I look at some of my participants’ critiques as matters to which they want responses: Joshua said that he had spoken about “problems” which he wanted to have “clarity” about. The counterpart of the right to narrate is the responsibility to “heed” calls from the margins (Young, 1990: 5; cf Savage 2009: 9), to try to do justice to my participants’ stories.

I read the narratives, in part, as autoethnography: as productions of self both for the self and for an audience; as political in the sense that they have to do with gaining representation to achieve “greater self-determination”; and as self-representations that act as persuasive counternarrations to official and media representations (Butz, 2009: 140). Eva-Lotte Hedman and Graeme Rogers likewise observe that “refugees and other displaced populations…continually engage in their own representational and counter-representational practices” (Hedman and Rodgers, 2009: 256; cf Malkki, 1995: 8). The individual narratives come together to form a standpoint, “an achieved (versus ascribed) collective identity or consciousness” for which people have struggled (Harding, 2004a: 14; cf Hartsock, 2004: 37). Putting my participants’ standpoint and knowledges into circulation is a way of “hearing-to-respond”: I have done this by talking to conferences, city council and other local bodies, as well as giving Chapters and summaries to participants and some of the refugee and other organizations with which they are involved. By making detailed links between “personal troubles” and “public issues”, by bringing theory and other forms of research together with narrative, my participants and I can contribute to making critique an instrument for those who fight against the oppressions of the asylum system in the UK (cf Foucault, 2002c: 236).
The second aspect of endeavouring to do justice is recognizing and striving to represent the personhood of people seeking asylum. In Chapter 2, I considered recognition of personhood as involving recognition of the complexities of human being and human becoming. Simultaneously, I contextualize my participants as “historical and social actors” (Mills, 2000: 225) and consider how they struggle to shape their own lives in conditions not of their own choosing. ‘Experience’ is both “a practice of making sense” and “the site of subject formation” (Brah, 2005: 116). I shall show how my participants use feeling, cognitive work and practical activity both to make sense of their experiences within the conditions of existence of asylum and to assert their personhood and agency. A concept of agency is important to my understanding of personhood and social justice, and indeed they are mutually constitutive. For example, given the prohibition of paid employment, Elizabeth emphasizes the importance of engaging in voluntary work: it “takes away the isolation…because you are just like a person waking up to go to work and coming back.” Personhood recognizes people as active doers and makers of their own lives, while social justice understands agency – as self-determination – as vital to the foundations of livability.

In the context of academic research, doing justice has a third aspect. If I want to do justice to my participants as individuals and to people seeking asylum collectively, and if I want my work to speak to a range of audiences and encourage them to hear-to-respond, I have to attempt to work, and to reflect on my work, as rigorously as possible. This is a social activity in the sense that critique and feedback from others, participants and academics, is an important part of academic rigour. Rigour is part of the insistence on research – what my participants say - being taken seriously by policy-makers as well as academics. Traditionally, rigour includes considerations of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Baxter and Eyles, 1997). For many practitioners of standpoint theory, rigour, as “strong objectivity”, depends on critiquing and making transparent the “beliefs [which] function as evidence at every stage in scientific inquiry” (Harding, 2004b: 136).
Fourth, as a researcher and as a person I am concerned with demonstrating care towards my participants. Believing that “the founding translation between people is a listening with care and patience” (Spivak, 2000: 22), has consequences for the efforts I make to be attentive to what people say. These efforts involve sentient activity while people are speaking and afterwards as I analyze their transcribed narratives.

Researchers owe their participants care as respectful treatment and ethical research practice. I am not sure that we need to adhere to a different order of practice when we encounter people in precarious situations or known to be vulnerable (I am not thinking here of people who require, for example, specialized trauma care). Perhaps we need always to consider all our participants as vulnerable simply because they are human. Even if we are aware of some sensitivities, there may be others that we are not aware of:

A condition of our communication is that we acknowledge the difference, interval, that others drag behind them shadows and histories, scars and traces, that do not become present in our communication. Thus we each must be open to learning about the other person’s perspective, since we cannot take the other person’s standpoint and imagine that perspective as our own. (Young, 1997: 53)

The “shadows and histories, scars and traces” that people seeking asylum (and their researchers) drag behind them may be more or less present in the interview situation. It was not my intention to pick at scars by asking people about the circumstances that made them flee their country, but it was not always possible to ignore them. One scar which cannot be ignored is “the boundless universe of mistrust…much of which will remain unknown to the researcher” (Hynes, 2003: 14). Livability and care as repair (Tronto, 1993: 103) may be hard to envisage in situations where, for example, people seeking asylum are suffering from trauma-related distress, where they have had to leave loved ones, or where their loved ones have died far away and they have been unable to express care and grief for them in ways they feel proper. There were times when I felt almost overwhelmed that what I could give was so far removed from the care that people needed (cf Lammers, 2007).
Yet, there are possibilities for researchers to show neighbourliness and care, for example by taking their participants seriously as sentient human beings whose experiences, knowledge and perspectives are of value. Researchers can maintain people’s self-recognition by responding to the ways in which they represent themselves, unlike many of their encounters within the asylum claim system. Further, they can act in their personal capacities to care for their participants and other people seeking asylum by providing, for example, information, support with campaigns and social activities. While such activities may not repair people’s worlds in all the ways that they would like, perhaps they are some support in maintaining people’s psychic resources, enabling them to continue to struggle within and against the conditions of existence of asylum.

In this section, I have argued for the relationship between my research and social justice as a political and ethical project. In the next section, I consider the way in which that political and ethical project informs my thinking about the relationships between researchers and participants. In the third section, I examine the significance of the knowledges which are produced between them. In the final section, I consider translation, interpretation and other dilemmas of research practice.

### 4.2 Researchers and Participants

...fieldwork relies upon the interactions, relations and situatedness of the researcher and researched (Coffey, 1999: 7).

In this section, I consider relations between researchers and participants. While I attempt to make judgements according to principles of social justice, my attempts will be limited and provisional. Indeed, all knowledge is partial and situated (Haraway, 2004b), all research “unfinished, provisional and incomplete” (Denzin, 2001: 83). Nonetheless, my attempt is also an effort to stand aside and provide a space from which the voices of people seeking asylum may be heard (as I demonstrate, they do not lack voice). This attempt, too, is inevitably partial as the academic process requires that I shape, interpret and in some way theorize those voices to demonstrate
originality and contribution to the field. All interpretation does violence (Spivak, 1988: 206), but perhaps less violence is done (i) when researchers take a “grounded” approach which attempts to allow decisions about insightful theory to emerge from participants’ narratives (Charmaz, 2005), and (ii) when those narratives are recognized as self-representations against the violence which people experience, for example within the asylum system. Our “ability to comprehend fully the life worlds of another community or culture may never be adequate, but that should not prevent scholars from engaging in socially relevant, committed, sensitive research” (Nolin, 2006: 12).

Relations between participants and researchers are often seen as “power-laden encounters”, asymmetrical encounters with researchers positioned as dominant (Clifford, 1986: 8). While I would not argue against this, and indeed was very concerned about asymmetry as a barrier to my research, I would suggest a more nuanced understanding: that relations are likely to be complex, shifting and fluid, particularly if relations between researcher and participant are extended. Relationships are formed over time, and if, as Gill Valentine points out, “researcher and interviewee may be multiply positioned during the course of an interview” (2002: 121), positions are even more likely to shift and shift again over a longer series of encounters (cf Lammers, 2007: 73). Moreover, relationships are enacted in specific settings which can affect the encounter and the relationship. I asked participants where they would prefer to meet, believing that settings in which they felt comfortable were vital. In settings such as support groups with which they are familiar, where support is available, the asymmetry of power between researcher and researched might be less marked. In the event, people chose to meet in a variety of places: in the premises of the organizations they were involved with, in rooms at the University of Manchester, and, in two cases, in the participant’s accommodation. I have continued to meet my participants in different settings and for different purposes. Once my interviews were
completed, we were, as we had been before, co-workers\textsuperscript{16} on various campaigns and projects, and people who sometimes engaged in social activities together. Some people have shared personal information with me that I take as intimacies between friends. Although such information is not explicitly included in my research, the building of human intimacy strengthened my sense of the personhood that the asylum system denies and added to the intensity of my research.

Despite shifts in the way we are positioned, questions of power are inevitable when white researchers set out to work with people seeking asylum. I have already touched on the issue of trust and my consequent attempt to work with people before inviting them to speak to me: I made not only my position as a researcher clear from the start, but also my aspiration to work with and for people seeking asylum (Hynes, 2003: 14; cf Kirby and McKenna, 2004). But I had also to understand “whiteness as terror, as terrorizing” (hooks, 1992: 174). This came to the fore when members of one of the groups I worked with decided to exclude white helpers from their meetings because newcomers might be afraid to tell their stories in front of people whose skin colour reminded them of official interrogators. I grieved at being excluded from the solidarity of the circle in which people met. In this and other ways, I found that fieldwork is emotional work (Coffey, 1999: 158; cf Falconer Al-Hindi and Kawabata, 2002: 113). However, emotions can tug us in different directions: simultaneously, I felt the loss of attachment and that that the group was right to make its own decisions. Indeed, many participants spoke about hostile encounters with white people: they do not meet many people who are caring copresences, people who draw on their own knowledge and sentience to help to “maintain, continue, and repair” others’ worlds (Tronto,

\textsuperscript{16} De Genova argues that, “As a colearner and a coworker, the ethnographer...would aspire, with his or her ethnographic interlocutors, to meaningfully engage the world and collectively act within it” (De Genova, 2007a: 25). Thus, rather than focusing on people, ethnography should direct attention to their conditions of existence (De Genova, 2007a: 27). However, when recognition of personhood is denied, for example in the conditions of existence of asylum, doing justice requires attention to the personhood of people seeking asylum as well as to conditions of existence.
Seeing ourselves through their eyes is an experience that challenges people already there in “diaspora space” to rethink social practices.

As a white researcher, I was concerned also about “researcher matching” as a potential barrier. This is a vexed theoretical and practical issue, not least because of questions about who and what are being matched, and the contingent advantages and disadvantages of being an insider or an outsider (Twine, 2000; Valentine, 2002; Hopkins, 2007; Klesse, 2007: 46-53). I struggled with questions about my right as an outsider to undertake such research, recording in my field notes (as though to encourage myself) that similarity of colour or country of origin is “only one aspect of a complex undertaking that also includes rapport and other sensitivities…matching is no guarantee of affinity” (23 January 2008). Further, “a sense of connectedness or sameness does not always prompt the disclosure of thoughts and feelings between the researcher and the interviewee” (Valentine, 2002: 123). In practice, while the thinking process was valuable and I would not have acted differently, I am not sure that I needed to be as hesitant and anxious as I was. I came to understand that the meaning of whiteness shifts: “It is not about being a white woman, it is about being thought of as a white woman” (Ware, 1993: xiii, cited in Nayak, 2006: 418). While recognizing the ongoing dilemmas involved, I came to the conclusion that it is better to make an imperfect attempt to research for and with refugees than to make no attempt to use at least some of my privilege to foreground marginalized knowledges (cf Rich, 1986: 219). Indeed, a “decolonial ethics of responsibility” (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2010a: 167) might suggest an obligation to make such an attempt. Yet, I recognize also how much ethnography rests on the existence of inequalities and wonder what a more socially-just future might hold for a field which often depends on third-party representations of unequal others.

While self-representation and “participatory parity” might one day diminish the need for ethnography, there are other questions about the positionality of researchers in relation to their research subjects. Positivism is held to be flawed for requiring “a distancing of the researcher from his or her ‘object’ of study by defining the researcher as a ‘subject’ with full human subjectivity
and by objectifying the ‘object’ of study” (Collins, 2000: 255). In contrast, recognizing the participant’s “full human subjectivity” is vital in at least two ways. First, as I discuss later in this Chapter, it asserts the importance of an epistemology based on the lived experience of people on the margins of a society divided by gender, race and class (in the context of my research, the most salient of many interlocking axes of oppression). Second, it challenges the division that is sometimes made between ‘informants’ as having experiences and researchers as analyzing those experiences. My research demonstrates clearly the way in which people seeking asylum produce theories about their own lives and situations. I have been shaped and reshaped by my experiences and, as I have found, participants analyze and interpret theirs (cf Mulinari and Räthzel, 2007: 91). Analysis and meaning-making are human activities, not confined to academics. At the same time, as human activities, the knowledges produced are contingent and situated. Through proximity rather than through distancing, I came to perceive the people who spoke to me as “participants in a moral and cognitive venture against oppression” rather than “simple hearted victims”, as Ashis Nandy described his approach to writing about Indians under colonialism (Nandy, 2006: xiv).

Understanding my participants as knowledge producers raises two further questions. The first concerns my rôle and practice in the production of knowledge about the conditions of existence of asylum. The second links ontology to epistemology, the status of the knowledge which is produced, and I shall consider that in the next section. Like Tricia Hynes, I started from “an ontological position that refugees’ knowledge, understandings and experiences are meaningful and allow an insight into the refugee experience”. This connects with an epistemological position that refugees themselves are “experts in the refugee experience” and that interviewing them directly is “a legitimate way in which to generate data” (Hynes, 2003: 13). For these reasons I did not start off with a detailed set of questions: it was important that people should speak about the conditions of existence that they felt were important.
Asking interview questions is a tricky area within the whole tricky field of communications precisely because of its imbrication with social justice and care. I had to attend to the focus of the questions and to how I could ask them in a way that showed care for my participants. Young links feminism as “a mode of questioning, an orientation and a set of commitments” with social justice (“attention to the effects of institutions, policies and ideas on women’s well-being and opportunities”), care (“a commitment to ameliorating such harms and disadvantages”) and epistemology, (a concern with “women’s experiences, or on social and philosophical reflection that takes itself to be from women’s perspectives, as resources for developing social descriptions and normative arguments”), without claiming “common attributes, circumstances, or harms that all women share” (Young, 1997: 3). To adapt Denzin’s phrase about writing, asking questions is not an innocent practice (Denzin, 2001: ix; cf Haraway, 2004b: 88).

In consequence, finding appropriate modes and orientations of questioning is an important part of an ethical approach to research with all subordinated groups as well as an important part of the researcher’s skills, and one which requires judgements to be made. No single style of question is likely to suffice: there is no blueprint for the ‘ideal’ question (nor any benefit from insisting that certain types of question, closed questions for example, should never be asked). There is a place for interrogative questioning in the researcher’s ‘toolkit’, for example when defining research questions or engaging in self-reflection about the normalizing of whiteness and the power effects that follow from that often unseen and unspoken normalization. However, I suggest that there is value also in creating a space for explorative questioning or conversation that evokes responses which challenge assumptions and open up transformative possibilities. Sometimes I found that commenting on or summarizing my understanding of what people had been saying elicited surprising clarifications. Because it is difficult, if not impossible, to say in advance what such questions might be, researchers may need, on occasion, to abandon their scripts and follow opportunities to generate knowledge as they arise.
While my intention was to undertake research grounded in what was important to participants and I did not have set questions I asked at every interview, I am nonetheless aware of the impossibility of emptying one’s mind of knowledge, perspectives and speculations. When I heard repeatedly about specific conditions, such as the absence of the right to work, or I heard about aspects that surprised me, such as the rôle of churches, inevitably I began to make provisional analyses and interpretations. Sometimes I referred explicitly to matters or perspectives raised by previous participants, partly as an effort towards a deeper understanding and partly as a way of putting people’s narratives into circulation and extending critique of the conditions of existence of asylum. In this way, the interviews could become part of broader, ongoing knowledge production.

When participants spoke about conditions which “blocked” or supported livability, I understood these conversations as events in which specific people were speaking to me on specific occasions for specific purposes. However, that does not imply that on another occasion they would have told me or another researcher something with a completely different meaning. They might have referred to other events or spoken more or less guardedly, but the meanings of their narratives in terms of identifying oppressions and sources of support were reiterated in different settings, amongst different people and by different people. That strength of repetition by a range of people in a range of contexts, and the reiterated analyses of the harmful aspects of the conditions of existence of asylum in other literature, broadens and reinforces some of my findings.

However, the strength of qualitative research is that it goes beyond enumerating the oppressions of the asylum system. For Mary C. Savage, the “mundane density” ethnography can provide “confronts the tendency of scientism to reduce human agency and to decontextualize action” (Savage, 2009: 13). Moreover, the detail, the language and the narrative structure of what my participants say give a vivid picture of the sentience of people seeking asylum as they speak about their emotions, certainly, but also as they make rational critiques of the conditions in which they find themselves. Research with people gives access to “embodied meanings, the combination
of meaning-making with other material practices and oral forms of everyday language use”, enabling “political and ethical issues [to be] brought out particularly clearly” (Johnson et al, 2006: 205)\textsuperscript{17}. Those political and ethical issues may include assertions of human rights for people seeking asylum, not as collections of legal niceties but as understandings of common needs for shelter and food, and also for recognition, equality and care.

I need, perhaps, to make one final point. It is an increasingly common practice for researchers to analyze their own situatedness and participation in the research process. There are many sound reasons for this (Behar, 2003: xvii; Coffey, 1999: Chapter 7). It is sound practice for researchers to at least try to be self-critical and scrutinize their own motivations and behaviours and the part these play in the construction of narratives. While I have done this to a degree, I feel some discomfort with the notion of foregrounding myself in the context of this research. My concern is that such a recentring of myself as researcher would detract from the emphasis I want to put on other voices and knowledges, in a context where I have already had to omit so much.

4.3 **PARTIAL AND SITUATED KNOWLEDGES**

...there is a difference between knowledge of other peoples and other times that is the result of understanding, compassion, careful study and analysis for their own sakes, and on the other hand knowledge – if that is what it is – that is part of an overall campaign of self-affirmation, belligerency and outright war. There is, after all, a profound difference between the will to understand for purposes of coexistence and humanistic enlargement of horizons, and the will to dominate for the purposes of control and external domination. (Said 2003, xix)

I set out to use my research to make space for the narratives of people seeking asylum. Rebecca Campbell and Sharon Wasco argue that the “overarching goal of feminist research is to capture women’s lived experience

\textsuperscript{17} Efforts to protect the anonymity of my participants have foregrounded their narratives and limited expressions of the “wider range of cultural modalities that operate beyond the word” (Back, 2007: 77).
in a respectful manner that legitimates women’s voices as sources of knowledge” (Campbell and Wasco, 2000: 783; cf DeVault, 1996, 2002). Having extended that goal to include the lived experience of marginalized men, I saw my participants’ accounts of negotiating livable lives in a new country as a way of valorizing sites of knowledge that are insufficiently foregrounded in academia and in public policy decision-making. “Hearing-to-respond” to their knowledges may bring about “coexistence and humanist enlargement of horizons” (Said, 203: xix) which will nurture livability.

Feminist research methods break from conventions of positivist research and scientific ‘objectivity’, with their hidden dimensions of power, and seek new knowledges for new understandings that are concerned with justice. According to Donna Haraway, “feminist objectivity means quite simply situated knowledges” which recognize locatedness and partiality as positions for which we must be accountable (Haraway, 2004b: 86). Many researchers assert epistemological values in “methods from the margins” (Kirby and McKenna, 2004). Three values are important in the context of my decision to work with people seeking asylum. First, as Sandra Harding argues, there is a value in taking marginalized lives, “fully saturated with history and social life rather than abstracted from it”, as “starting points” that will “generate illuminating critical questions” (Harding, 2004b: 128). Moreover, foregrounding unheard voices can create “counternarratives” (Romero and Stewart, 1999) which help to decolonize knowledge. Patricia Hill Collins argues that “power relations shape who is believed and why”, that “elite white men control Western structures of knowledge validation, and that “their interests pervade the themes, paradigms, and epistemologies of traditional scholarship” (2002: 323). If this is the case, then the circulation and publication of subjugated knowledges, such as the testimony of people seeking asylum, can become acts of resistance, modes of speaking truth to power.

Second, the view from the margins is valued not only because that view is often subjugated, but also because the perspectives of the marginalized are both distinctive and more comprehensive than those of the privileged. “By living out their lives in both the dominant culture and their own culture,
members of stigmatized groups can develop a kind of double vision, and hence a more comprehensive understanding of social reality” (Campbell and Wasco, 2000: 781). bell hooks gives the example of the way "black domestic servants, working in white homes…brought knowledge back to segregated communities – details, facts, observations and psychoanalytical readings of the white Other" (hooks, 1992: 165). The “double vision” of lived experience turns knowledge into “wisdom” (Collins, 2000: 257). And it is “wisdom” which enables people who are subordinated within asymmetrical power relations to survive. Wisdom passes into a collective “Black feminist epistemology” (Collins, 2000: 256). Key to the epistemology are: “lived experience as a criterion of meaning, the use of dialogue, the ethic of personal accountability, and the ethic of caring” (Collins, 2000: 266). Part of this distinctive standpoint comes from being ‘outsiders within’ (Collins, 2004: 117; cf Mulinari and Räthzel, 2007: 111). ‘Outsider within’ status provides “new angles of vision” (Collins, 2000: 15) from which to analyze society. The dimensions of the wisdom that becomes “Black feminist epistemology” are present in the narratives of many of my participants. They draw on their daily experience as people seeking asylum to express values; they assert the importance of dialogue as speaking and being heard; they take responsibility for their actions (within conditions not of their own choosing) and want more self-determination; they claim and demonstrate care for themselves and others.

Third, knowledge or wisdom from the margins goes beyond “a more comprehensive understanding of social reality”. Understanding “marginality as a position and a place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonized people” (hooks, 1990: 151). In arguing for “politics and epistemologies of location, position and situating”, Haraway is concerned with “being heard to make rational knowledge claims” (Haraway, 2004b: 92). The production of knowledges from the margins goes beyond interpreting the world to make claims for changes that work towards social justice. Thus, many feminist researchers are concerned with “transversal politics”, solidarity and translation between groups (Collins, 2000: 246; cf Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2008). Solidarity and transversal politics are products of dialogue and translation: Haraway links “solidarity in politics” with “shared conversations in
epistemology” (Haraway, 2004b: 89). “The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular” (Haraway, 2004b: 93; cf Harvey 2000: 238). Taking responsibility for that “somewhere”, it is possible to work towards enlarged knowledge and understanding through dialogue, through, as Mary said, going out and asking questions. However, what is transformative is not simply alternative knowledge claims; what leads to transformation is the challenge to accustomed ways of knowing (Collins, 2000: 271). That, in turn, depends on “each group perceiv[ing] its own truth as partial, its knowledge [as] unfinished” (Collins, 2000: 270).

I took as a point of departure what Young calls the “asymmetrical” and “irreversible” relations between people which mean that we “cannot take the other person’s standpoint and imagine that perspective as our own” (Young, 1997: 53). Research practice consonant with this involved trying to be attentive to my participants’ self-representations and views through listening, asking questions and making comments to check my understanding. My approach was generally to hear and read what my participants said ‘with the grain’, as descriptions of reality from their subject position, to try to hear-to-respond to what they were telling me, as they told it, then when I analyzed the transcripts and later when I talked through the draft empirical Chapters with them.

Fourth, although the primary audience for a PhD thesis is, plainly, academic, I hope that my research will be a resource, or the basis for a resource, for people seeking asylum. However, as research into their perceptions of the conditions of existence of asylum, it has implications also for people whose work or actions shape the conditions within which they make new lives: policy-makers and more settled populations\(^\text{18}\) in Manchester and further

\(^{18}\) I have drawn the term ‘more settled population’ from “settled population” (Gatrell, 1999: 39) as a term for people-already-there-in-a-place which does not position them as static, as always having been there. I rejected the term ‘local people’ since the production of locality is not confined to the “scalar or spatial” (Appadurai, 1996: 178), and ‘local’ is frequently used as part of a binary which excludes those seen as non-local. ‘Host community’ (like “hospitality”) is also problematic, with its production of the immigrant as guest (ie as a temporary sojourner, someone who belongs elsewhere). In the context of migration and diaspora, ‘more settled population’ - with
afield; those who provide services or encounter people seeking asylum on the streets or as neighbours. To achieve this, translations into different genres and for different contexts may be required.

4.4 DILEMMAS OF RESEARCH PRACTICE

...how is unruly experience transformed into an authoritative written account? How precisely is a garrulous, overdetermined cross-cultural encounter shot through with power relations and personal cross-purposes circumscribed as an adequate version of a more or less discrete “other world” composed by an individual author? (Clifford, 1988: 25)

Researchers confront difficult professional and ethical decisions at every juncture of the research process, from choosing and operationalizing a research question to interpreting data, selecting the themes which will be the focus of the research, and writing up the research (Kimmel, 1988). These are all iterative processes in that each juncture stimulates thoughts and reconsiderations of earlier work and new adumbrations of planned work. In this section, I reflect on my research practice and consider some of the dilemmas involved in interviewing processes, reciprocity between researchers and participants, translation, transcription, interpretation and writing up.

My participants came from three organizations in Greater Manchester which support refugees and people seeking asylum. I helped with another organization which ran social events attended by some of my participants. Because of the nature of my main entry points in these organizations, with English as the language used for the conversations, the people I encountered tended to be activist in voluntary work, political organizations and campaigns, their own campaigns to stay, and/or well educated in their countries of origin. From the start, I was open about my research. Later, I invited people to let me know if they wished to speak to me. Thus, my

its suggestion that settlement is relative, that many of us have come from another location and will go on to other locations - comes closer to the understandings I want to convey.
participants approached me voluntarily. This may indicate that they have a strong sense of themselves as active subjects, even when their possibilities for agency are limited and shaped by the asylum rules.

I had formally-recorded conversations (tape-recorded and fully transcribed or noted and expanded from memory) with fifteen people, nine women and six men. Their ages ranged from their twenties to their eighties. The longest time anyone had been in Manchester was over sixty years, and the shortest was three months. Although my focus is on the conditions of existence of asylum now, I was interested also in the continuities and differences between past and present asylum regimes. The opportunity to speak with one person who came after the Second World War, one who was forced to leave his country in the 1980s and one who left in the 1990s gave me some insight into the continuities and differences.

When people expressed interest in speaking to me, I arranged semi-formal ‘conversations’ in locations to suit them. The informality was in the flow of the conversations; the formality was in the recording or noting of them. Although I prepared a list of topics I thought people might speak about, I did not adopt a strict interview format and an impersonal demeanour which were the same for everyone. I asked people broad opening questions, for example about their memories of arrival and then drew further questions out of what they said. Some people spoke at length, expressing views to which it seemed they had given much thought, returning to the thread of their topic after my requests for clarification or comments. Others spoke more briefly and I prompted with more questions or comments. Sometimes we ‘digressed’ to discuss practical issues about which I could give information. While I was able to record most of the conversations, some people preferred me to take notes. Notes gave me less to work with afterwards as I was able to record only a few verbatim words. Nonetheless, the word count of the transcripts and notes amounted to more than the expected length of a thesis (far more if I include the number of words in my fieldwork journals). This was the “unruly experience” I had to transform into “an authoritative written account” (Clifford, 1988: 25).
Even when people expressed interest in speaking to me, some of them asked me what good it would do them. I answered that I could not promise that it would do them any good at all; however, I hoped that it might do them or other people seeking asylum some good in the longer run if my work could contribute to changes in policies or practices. Although I could not make any promises about the ways in which my work could benefit them, nor could I pay them, I could offer support from my experience as an English teacher and as a human resources manager. In consequence, I have worked with people in a variety of ways: helping with presentation skills; giving advice about applying for work; helping with setting up a community organization; taking notes of meetings; supporting campaigns; accompanying people to meetings. I see these activities as forms of care that help to “maintain, continue, and repair” people’s worlds (Tronto, 1993: 103) in situations in which institutional care is lacking.

In addition, questions of distributive ethics can arise between researchers and participants. Lammers asks insightful questions about the convention that no material or financial assistance should be given to participants (2007). In practice, there seemed to me to be no question about giving money, paying bus fares, buying meals and other forms of material and financial assistance. One of the plays of power available to people seeking asylum is to gain support wherever they can: as Joshua said, “I am not ashamed to say I am an asylum seeker, not ashamed to tell my story…if that’s the only way you can get positive help or support.” Talking about financial problems could be a simple statement of fact or it could be an oblique way of presenting a request. I have not found any (obvious) embarrassment about accepting money, photographs or other gifts: no one has refused. Marwa talked about sharing what she had – a form of distributive justice - and in some social circumstances perhaps that would be taken for granted. In contrast with Lammers (2007: 78), generally I found that gifts are taken (as they are given) without much comment, in other words as ‘ordinary’. In a way, I think that that is how it should be. From the freedom with which people expressed their views and corrected me, I did not see any evidence that gift-giving distorted what they said: “people decide what to tell,
how to tell it, what to hide or when to be quiet” (Lammers, 2007: 73). Young usefully reminds us that “answers are always gifts. The transcendence of the other person always means that she can remain silent, or tell only part of her story, for her own reasons” (Young, 1997: 56).

Undoubtedly, having a language in common helped to develop relationships between participants and myself (with more “effort of translation” on their side than mine)\(^\text{19}\). I had to decide early on about the interviewing language. Although my participants were speaking ‘in translation’, most were sufficiently fluent in English not to struggle to express themselves. I decided not to interview in their languages because this would have involved the assistance of interpreters, in which case interview encounters would have been mediated by third parties (in Chapter 7, I discuss the effects of interpreters and interpretation within the asylum claim process). Choosing participants who could speak English shaped my sample and limited the people who were able to speak to me. Nonetheless, some of the narratives (those of Marwa and Habib, for example) contain references to experiences of members of their communities who spoke little English. However, practical considerations are hinged with questions of hegemony and power in choosing to use “English – the imperialist language required for being quoted and promoted” (Lavie and Swedenburg, 1996: 19; cf De Genova, 2007a: 51). Hegemonic forms and uses of language are an issue in other ways. The academy has a certain expectation of the language and style to be used in writing. Academic language is not everyday language, and, with my participants, I had to find ways to translate between the language of my theoretical research and my everyday research encounters (cf White, 1990), while recognizing “the two-fold character of translation as means of translation and expression of untranslatability” (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2008: 4).

\(^{19}\) The notion of a ‘common language’ is, of course, problematic: “How do we trace the (un)translatability of social positionalities in encounters based on a presumed common identity expressed, for example, by a common language or gender?” (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2006: 1).
Translation is both a way of knowing and a product of the generative dialogue that is part of ethnographic practice (Whatmore, 2003: 93). In representing my participants' stories, one of my purposes is to offer readers a partial translation of knowledges. The partial translation is derived from an encounter between my participants' perspectives and partial knowledges and other perspectives and partial knowledges. Bringing the theoretical into dialogue with lived experience may ‘thicken’ theory and offer people seeking asylum a broader understanding of their location in specific historical, political, cultural situations which have helped to shape the choices available to them. I hope that this will contribute to “enlarged understanding” (Young, 1997: 59) that will help build routes to transforming relationships between people seeking asylum and those they encounter, routes by which refugees (and not only refugees) will be able “to live in meanings and bodies that have a chance for the future” (Haraway, 2004b: 85). That “chance for the future” is the possibility of more livable lives.

At an early stage, uncertain whether anyone would want to speak to me, I considered working with focus groups because I was concerned to redress somewhat the imbalance of power between researcher and participants. On the positive side, focus groups may produce a greater range of ideas and, perhaps, more consensual views. In the event of the research being intended to inform aspects of local or national public policy, research across a broad base of groups and consensus in the findings would be strengths. On the other hand, some of the intimacy and detail of individual interviews through which insights are made vivid may be forfeited. The contribution of some members of the group may be lost or overshadowed by that of more confident members (Pratt, 2002). Given these concerns, and the potential difficulty of transcribing semi-structured group discussions without a colleague present or without the use of videotape, I decided to prioritize qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews that followed the direction of the participants. As it turned out, participant observation with voluntary organizations gave me many hours of opportunity to listen to groups (effectively focus groups) as they discussed topics similar to those raised by
my participants. Moreover, I regularly described my ongoing findings to individuals and groups and asked for their comments.

My participant observation included performances of plays, singing, dancing, poetry recitations and events when people read or performed accounts of the circumstances that had brought them to the UK. At one stage, I gave some of my participants and others disposable cameras, hoping to supplement interviews with photographic projects. While some people took photographs for themselves as much as for me, it was not sustained as a group project. Nonetheless, it raised some interesting topics of conversation. Qualitative research practices are contingent and emergent rather than blueprints. I chose from a range of practices all of which have benefits and disadvantages. One reason ethnographers spend time immersing themselves in the field is that a range of research practices undertaken over an extended period is likely to yield the richest insights; in turn, insight-yielding practices may emerge as improvisations or as basic fieldwork, interviews and participant observation, progress and are reflected on.

When I came to transcribe the interviews and check the transcriptions with the tapes and notes, it was clear that the transcription of qualitative research is a form of editing and interpretation involving difficult principled and contingent decisions. Even though I was transcribing interviews that I had undertaken, I was sometimes unclear whether to punctuate some phrases as belonging with the previous words or the ones following or whether to preserve the flow of the participant’s words. Sometimes I revised the punctuation of extracts used in my thesis in order to clarify the sense for readers who would not have the tapes. I did this by, for example, omitting sections where people corrected or repeated themselves or imposing a more formal sentence structure on long passages of narrative. Susan A Tilley emphasizes that transcription should not be exempt from the transparency that applies to other parts of the research process (Tilley, 2003: 771). I transcribed all but three of the recordings myself (these were undertaken

20 While I regularly took photographs at campaigns and social events and copied them for people, this was a form of giving back rather than of visual ethnography.
professionally because transcription took me so long). I reviewed the transcripts several times while listening to the tapes in order to check some of the words and to note the weight of feeling given to words. No one checked their transcript\textsuperscript{21}: although my participants speak fluently, they read more slowly. Later, I went back to some participants to check that I had correctly interpreted the sense of their words. I talked through some of my Chapters with groups and individuals. This was both a ‘member checking’ exercise and a way of giving back critique as “an instrument for those who fight” (Foucault, 2002c: 236).

I undertook a limited early content analysis of the main topics raised by participants, and some of their words about these topics, to present a paper at a conference on ‘Good Asylum’ (Leeds, October 2008)\textsuperscript{22}, summarizing my participants’ perspectives (with some additional comments of my own). I used this early analysis, and a description of my interviewing practice, to speak to a sub-group of the city council, and to deliver two workshops to a forum of Manchester City Council set up to integrate information about support for migrants and refugees (accompanied to the last events by a friend with leave to remain). The dissemination of this early content analysis was part of my commitment to participants and others I had worked with to give feedback to policy-makers and practitioners.

I then began a more detailed analysis of the interviews, focusing on each in turn. I summarized each interview using the participants’ own words as far as possible and then coded each interview using theoretical coding to develop a set of categories (Flick, 2006: 295). I used diagrams to visualize themes and connections between them. My original question, about how people seeking asylum make new lives in Manchester, had two dimensions: (i) what people identified as the salient conditions of existence of asylum; (ii) what strategies they employed to make new lives within those conditions. The more attentive and detailed reading I gave during the coding made me aware of the

\textsuperscript{21} Cecile, who had never heard her recorded voice, asked to listen to the recording immediately we had finished.

\textsuperscript{22} I gave a paper at a subsequent conference with a friend who was seeking asylum.
importance of emotions, participants’ conscious use of particular strategies to make livable lives, and the values and beliefs which shaped their emotional and cognitive responses to their conditions of existence. This led me to reformulate my initial questions to include a stronger focus on people’s sentience and the ethical meanings they give to the conditions of existence they identify as strongly shaping their lives. I used inductive methodology in coding and interpreting the interviews, asking what people were telling me about making difficult transitions, making new lives in Manchester in the conditions of existence of asylum. I asked what conclusions could be drawn from the similarities and differences between the participants in (i) what they say about their conditions of existence and the way they make new lives, and (ii) how they say it. I moved back and forth between my hypotheses and the narratives until I felt that I could begin to write.

While my participants are relatively few in number, I think that the richness of their narratives provides “interpretive sufficiency” (Christians et al, 1993: 120, quoted in Denzin, 2001: 11). For Denzin, this depends on “depth, detail, emotionality, nuance, and coherence” (Denzin, 2001: 11). Because my participants were raising matters they felt important, all that they said was important to me. At the end of the coding process, I had very many themes I could have written about. I felt that being faithful to the material I had, and to the people who enabled it, meant that I should write about everything. However, after I had written an enormously long first draft chapter, I knew that I had far more material than I would be able to do justice to. I had to accept that ‘everything’ would not fit into a thesis: I would have to select what to write about and what to omit (or write about in another form on another occasion). In consequence, I had to confront the need to select and edit the material I would use.

This stage of decision-making was a mixture of theoretical and practical trial and error as I wrote and rewrote. Sometimes I knew what I wanted to write – and wrote it. Sometimes, I discovered what I wanted to write only by writing. I

23 For Kathy Charmaz, “interpretive sufficiency” goes beyond the thin concept of “saturation” (Charmaz, 2005: 528).
Proceeded in part by planning and in part by reflecting on what I had written, rewriting and reshaping, going back into the transcripts, back into key theoretical texts, finding new theoretical approaches, picking up ideas along the way and making connections between parts of my material. If, as I wrote earlier, the field is both iterative and everywhere, so too is the writing process.

Deciding what to write is inevitably partial: it involves selecting a part of all that might be written about; that selection involves making judgements from a particular perspective or with a particular aim. I cannot avoid being a mediating presence. I have to decide how best to mediate the whole research process including editing, selection and writing up. Inevitably, editing and selection result in something being lost (the detailed interview structure) and something gained (a focus on some of the meanings my participants give to their stories). In accepting and making explicit the partiality of my interpretations, I have tried to bear in mind Haraway’s insistence on the need for “the ability partially to translate knowledges among very different – and power-differentiated communities” (Haraway, 2004b: 85). On the one hand, I have to take responsibility for my interpretations; on the other, I would feel that I had not done justice if participants told me “that’s not what I said” (Borland, 1991: 63). Interpretation itself is always partial in the sense that it is situated and that it does not exhaust the meanings of the narratives discussed. It is partial in other senses: that in following some strands of argument I am aware of many threads left to weave into arguments; that, having woven some threads into arguments, my own past understandings and interpretations will be affected by future encounters and undergo alteration. So I understand interpretation as always contingent, never the last word, always becoming. Despite the contingency, partiality and incompleteness of my interpretations, I have tried to "offer interpretations that people can use in their everyday worlds" (Charmaz, 2005: 528), that are “understandable to the subjects” (Denzin, 2001: 84).
CONCLUSION

In this Chapter, I have reflected on four interconnected aspects of research practice. First, I considered research practice as a form of social justice praxis. Second, I put forward a view of both participants and researchers as producers of knowledge, that the research relationship itself generates knowledge. Third, I discussed the significance and value of the knowledges produced by our encounters: as attentiveness to voices which are often marginalized; as new “angles of vision”; as modes of resistance which invite the solidarity and dialogue necessary to enlarge partialities. Fourth, I reflected on some of the dilemmas of my research practice as problems of signification and ethics as well as practicality. I have aimed for “strong objectivity” through transparency and reflexivity. I have argued that ethical engagement is compatible with empirical and theoretical research. Indeed, it is indispensable if new knowledges - especially subordinated knowledges - are to be foregrounded and the possibilities of livable lives for people seeking asylum are to become more than possibilities.
“A GOOD COUNTRY THAT CAN PROTECT YOU”: 
SETTLING IN MANCHESTER

INTRODUCTION

I came to the United Kingdom because of my experience of things that were happening in the country...And what I see of UK, what it portrays back home...is that it is a good country that can protect you. (Mary)

In this Chapter, I analyze how far my participants found “a good country” that protected both life and livability, giving them access to social goods and care through recognition of their personhood and human due. I discuss what people say about: (i) arrival in Manchester; (ii) reception and settlement; (iii) negotiating the city; (iv) the importance of language; (v) encounters with service providers; and (vi) encounters with local people. My participants engage with these conditions of existence through feelings and critique, interwoven with memories and thoughts of the future, which assert their values and ethics.

While there are recurrent collective references to specific conditions of existence, there are also “contradictions, simultaneities, and dialectical tensions” in and between their narrations (DeSantis, 2001: 2). Like DeSantis, I do not regard these “as psychological flaws or illogical thinking” (DeSantis, 2001: 16). However, whereas DeSantis interprets these features “as manifestations of the centripetal/centrifugal forces at work in their lives” (DeSantis, 2001: 5), I take them as indexes of subjective complexity as people agonize their desires for livable lives within the conditions of existence of asylum. My participants came with different backgrounds - and at periods when different asylum policies were in force. Consequently, they encountered different conditions of protection for livable lives and drew on different resources in negotiating those conditions.
5.1 ARRIVAL

While I did not wish to pick at scars by asking people about their histories, some people nonetheless interweave descriptions of journeys and of living elsewhere into their narratives. Some people’s experiences in their own country or en route to Manchester become part of the resources they draw on to make a new life in the city. Anna’s resilience, for example, comes in part from deportation to the Soviet Union when her country was invaded during the Second World War; she then became part of an army on the move across Asia and Europe. She arrived in the late 1940s with her Army unit: they were able to “stick together and there were circles...of your own unit when you went to the civilian life. You [could] still keep your friendships.” They formed a cohort whose lives were relatively untrammeled by regulations:

   We didn’t need much help, you know. We were all in our thirties or perhaps forties...and we were together in the army for a number of years so we knew a lot about each other and we didn’t have much proper officialdom, British officialdom, as far as I can remember...I don’t think there was anything that was terribly difficult to solve...

People not only bring different histories with them, they also encounter the UK at different historical moments. Charles, who “was asked to go away from” his Eastern European country in the 1980s, commented that his situation was different from now because the UK government supported the opposition movement of which he had been a member. Huda’s husband was a student when there was a change of government in their country in the Horn of Africa in the 1990s. They were free to move to Manchester and chose the city “because there is a lot of [our] community around here”, including friends who recommended them to come to the city. For more recent arrivals who need Home Office support, there is no self-determination about where they are dispersed. Looking back on his experience in the early 1990s, James said that he had been well treated by government and English people: people seeking asylum would not get this kind of treatment in other countries. Marwa, however, contrasted present conditions with the
experience of “people who came in the 1990s. At that time people, you know, refugees were welcome, very welcome…But not this time.”

People carry their histories with them. Mary came hoping to be welcomed by a self-portrayed “good country”. Other people seeking asylum bring mistrust of officialdom or people delegated to carry out policies and rules (Hynes, 2003; 2009). As I discuss later in this Chapter, mistrust is a “sticky” emotion (Ahmed, 2004). Elizabeth said that people “come in with distrust…you distrust everybody in authority, it doesn’t matter who.” She describes a journey across the UK in which people were treated “like cattle, shipped like cattle” as they were transferred from place to place. One place they stayed was “just a dumping ground” - there were six people in a room and “you could smell the flesh. You could smell the sweat and how stuffy it was”. No concession was made for her respiratory problems and other disabilities: “my health needs were not met; my accommodation needs were not met”. There was neither recognition of what is due to all humans nor care for her specific needs. However, Elizabeth moves beyond emotion to critique the Home Office as hampered by ignorance and service providers as responsible for the deficiencies in provision. When accommodation providers tell the Home Office that they have accommodation, “the Home Office is not going to know” what it is like. She goes on to analyze procedures for organizational quality control and feedback through a series of questions that lay out a prescription for what is absent. She argues that organizations should respond in ways that accommodate specific needs:

...the Home Office is well intentioned; theoretically, the Home Office has done its best to provide for us but practically, that’s another story. The people who are the service providers fall short.

Grinberg and Grinberg argue that there is a psychological relationship between respiratory problems and the new environment experienced as ‘stifling’. Similarly, digestive symptoms are indications that new experiences cannot be “digested”, while the demands of the new environment “produce ‘pressure’ on arteries and heart” (1989: 94).

A report on “The Provision of Accommodation for Asylum Seekers” refers to the suitability of the accommodation provided and the "basic standards required" (National Audit Office, 2005: 4). However, the focus is on contractual issues, risk and ‘value for money’ rather than on care for people and their needs.
My question is, who monitors them? Who monitors, who checks on the living conditions of asylum seekers? That is one thing I want, that is a question I want to put to them. Who checks on service provision? Who checks on the smaller things? Who makes decisions about what we’re going to have? How come it’s so rigid? There is no flexibility.

Elizabeth has actively documented her experiences - “I’ve taken photos” - and intends to put these “in writing to the Home Office”. She translates feelings of being thrown “into the deeper end of the pool when I can’t swim” first into a detailed critique of organizational responsibility for failures to meet her needs, then, as this section of narrative continues, into an assertion of rights under the Disability Discrimination Act, and finally into a determination to act by, for example, reporting to the government, increasing her skills and working with charitable organizations. In order to do this, she has created resources out of memories of life in her country.

…one thing that I’ve drawn strength from is my socialization. Where they say as a woman you must be strong, when you give birth they say, “You don’t open your mouth.” You feel the pain…but you bite your teeth…You don’t scream…That has made me cope. But it’s got its own problems because [my illness] is triggered by excessive stress.

Despite her physical illnesses and a breakdown, Elizabeth has reflected on her experiences and drawn strength and “wisdom” (Collins, 2000: 257) from them:

…my experience has shown me that…people will tell you that as an asylum seeker you can’t get this help but that shouldn’t be a deterrent. Push. You’ll step on people’s toes, you’ll irritate people, you’ll annoy people, but persist. I have learnt that. I have learnt to say, “I’m sorry, I don’t agree with you. Let us try and fail, let us try this and fail.” It has taught me, I’ve learnt to be assertive. I’ve learnt. At first, I used to fight angry, but I’ve learnt to fight smart. I’ve learnt to, to find my way.

26 Unlike Ganguly, I have no way of assessing whether “the stories [my participants] tell about their pasts have more to do with the continuing shoring up of self-understanding than with historical truths” (Ganguly, 1992: 30) or whether women are more inclined than men to romanticize the past.
People speak of learning to “push”, “stand firm”, “fight”, to learn and assert their rights. Over time, people’s experiences alter and their experiences alter them. I have seen women who, when I first met them, professed themselves shy or nervous of speaking to large numbers of people address a variety of public meetings confidently and eloquently. Confidence grows through support, often in voluntary agencies. “Life histories are histories of becoming” (Butler 2004, 80, my emphasis).

Like many other participants, Elizabeth’s religion sustains her:

That is what is keeping me strong. Because if I wake up at night and I can’t sleep…I have got my Bible there…What has kept me is my faith. I’ve got my music, I’ve got my Bible…I’ve learned to cope alone. But the ladies from church drop in. They check on me. And they are very supportive.

Both Elizabeth and Mary have a sense of destiny drawn from their religious faiths. Elizabeth entwines her faith with her experience to invoke a sense of vocation: “as a Christian I believe that I am going through this for a purpose to help others”. When I asked Mary what kept her going when she was afraid, she, too, stressed purpose: “the Lord puts us in a certain position for a purpose. So I believe I am here for a purpose.” Many of my participants emphasize the importance of churches in supporting their faith and their claims for leave to remain as well as supporting them materially (see Chapter 6).

Both faith and resilience may be tested. Fear, like mistrust, can “stick”. Some people carried with them fears, or memories of fear, unfamiliar sounds being interpreted as sounds from the past. Joshua described how he suffered from depression:

…when you’re new in a place, leaving everybody behind, it’s quite a difficult time, you know. It can take a while for you to cope. So, when sometimes I think back, I always remember, especially when

27 Four of my participants were Muslim and ten were Christian (one did not refer to religion).
I hear the siren or the door, you know. By then it was the festive season, the Christmas season, and they used to fire firework and I was thinking it was gunshot because I was new to it. We were very new to it so it was very distressful for us.

While Joshua was protected from actual shooting, he was not protected from being haunted by memories. Yet, over time, and with sufficient positive experiences, he pulled far enough away from the “stickiness” of those initial emotions to critique the circumstances which exacerbated his distress.

Making a new life in a new place is a temporal as well as a spatial activity: people arriving at different times encountered different rules and regimes of reception. Moreover, people arrive with different histories which, interwoven with the prevailing conditions of existence of asylum may affect their psychic resources. Some of these experiences, like Joshua’s, may hinder their capacity to make livable lives. Sentient activity, expressed as care appropriate to their needs, is needed to repair their worlds.

5.2 RECEPTION AND SETTLEMENT

People spoke in different ways about the reception and support they received in Manchester. When Mary arrived in Manchester she:

…was welcomed by, should I say, a social worker, that is someone who has been assigned by the government through the Home Office process who was going to take me, pick me up from the coach station, the house which I had been allocated by the Home Office…So the decision of the government was to give me an allowance, which was in money, and then accommodation…So the whole process was sort of monitored…

Afterwards, she referred to “going to the supermarket with the person who brought us to the house; they told us the main supermarkets, where they could be accessed”. When I commented that Mary made the person sound quite helpful, she responded that she was “very helpful”. Later, however, I made a similar comment about the way Mary referred to the Home Office and she responded differently, saying that “they were not helpful”. In the next Chapter, I look in more detail at what Mary felt she was “denied” and what she felt she might have given back to the community.
Mary’s narrative shows that she has reflected, made the effort of translation, on her approach to being in a new environment: “you don’t expect people to know who you are when you are a new person getting into an area. They just assume you are one of them”:

The first people I got to know were my neighbours, the person across the road, quite friendly, nice people. Maybe it was also the way I came out and, you know, when you don’t show on your face that you are a new person, when you meet other people, it makes it easier for them to communicate with you.

Here, Mary emphasizes thinking about how to make communication easier for others. She repeatedly represents herself as someone who wants to “understand”. She brings emotional, cognitive and physical resources to her efforts to understand – and her efforts to bring understanding to others:

Some people grow up without any communication, or never saw a black person. So here they see a black person, they don’t understand why are you here, so if those questions are not answered they have a negative attitude. So it’s a matter of creating an open space where you allow that person to ask you any question or even to touch my skin or even to feel my hair, I don’t mind. I took that as a process of understanding what is going on.

By treating “negative attitude[s]” as ignorance, Mary takes it upon herself to create “an open space” of dialogue and physical contact with potential to enlarge her own and others’ understanding (cf Young, 1997: 59).

People seeking asylum are constantly in translation, constantly making active efforts of translation to make the best of their conditions of existence (cf Spivak, 2000: 22). However, as I show later in this Chapter, few of the service providers and other people they encounter match their efforts. Hence the Independent Asylum Commission’s comment: “Efforts must be made to promote tolerance and neighbourliness towards those seeking sanctuary and assist integration at local level” (2008: 1). The Commission is using “neighbourliness” in a conventional way, as applying to those who live together in neighbourhoods. However, Savage gives the term a different inflection. Drawing on the work of teachers and pastoral workers in the liberation movements of Latin America, she conceptualizes “neighborliness”
as a question of “whose cry do I hear, toward whom do I move, whose interests do I serve” in contexts where people have “been beaten down and marginalized by unjust social and political structures” (Savage, 2009: 9). A protective framework for settlement might promote a broader conception of neighbourliness as a form of caring copresence and contest the notion that it is only migrants who need to adapt.

Marwa emphasizes the absence of official support and neighbourliness - and the importance of support from members of her community:

Actually, the people who helped me to find things were people from my community…nobody from Manchester really helped me…I think there’s not any support facilities in Manchester…especially when you are over 18 and you can’t go to school…there is no any help for you really…I just pushed myself to see things but no help really.

Both ‘pushing’ oneself and solidarity from their community are vital to many people seeking asylum. Marwa was put in an area where other members of her community lived. Unlike Mary, she announced herself as “new”, and received help: “on the road I have just seen somebody who just looked like me. And then I say hello…I said ‘I am new’ and they showed me where is Dallas Court” (the UKBA reporting centre). However, it was someone whose appearance suggested that they came from the same country who responded helpfully to her greeting.

Several people spoke of being sent to live in run-down areas. Sammy described being sent to live with people who were “strangers” to each other in a “no good area” – it “wasn’t safe”. Their windows were regularly broken. Mary said:

…I was just wondering where I was going because in 2002 most of the houses, terraced flats, in [the area] were blocked, the doors, the windows, steel shutters. Then a few houses in between where you could see, you know, beautiful curtains and people living around.

Elizabeth said of the first house that she was moved to: “I have never seen so much cockroaches. I have never seen so much filth”. Moreover, “the house had a broken window. It was just boarded. And this was in January.
Middle of winter. The rain was coming, the water was coming into the place. The place was revolting. You would go to the kitchen and find it full of water.” Nor was it suitable for someone with mobility problems.

A few people talked about being satisfied with their accommodation; others spoke of being lodged with people they were uncertain of or would not have chosen to live with, in areas they were uncertain of. Yet, there were occasions on which people relied on others with whom they shared accommodation. It was other “guys” in his accommodation who taught Sammy how to cook; when his application was refused and he was made destitute, he was helped by friends from his country he had met in his accommodation and when he was reporting.

While people seeking asylum are not alone in being subject to inadequate accommodation, what is unusual is the frequency and apparent arbitrariness with which they can be moved: people spoke of being moved repeatedly (the most I heard of was fifteen times in eight years). This “churn” (MacKenzie and Forde, 2007: 15) has the effect of disrupting already disrupted lives and connections made, perhaps with difficulty, in new areas. When people are forced to move to other districts, there is additional paperwork (registration with GPs and others has to be changed); new schools, churches, shops and routes may have to be found; post may go astray (with potentially disastrous consequences, as Cecile found); new friends have to be made. Livability has to be struggled for again.

Marwa speaks of feeling “secure”, not “in danger”. Feeling secure supports people in making new lives. However, Marwa emphasizes the contingency of her experiences: “I might say to you everything was easy for me…but not everybody's like that really.” A number of people began with positive statements about their experiences or about their responses to the conditions they experienced, but later expressed more negative aspects of their encounters. Some locate their experience within the wider experience of people they know and, like Marwa, speak of themselves as “lucky” compared with other people in their community. Speaking of ‘luck’ implies a criticism of the distribution of resources, of policies and institutional support, an
understanding that those who are well-treated are no more deserving than those who are not. Social justice cannot be a matter of luck.

5.3 “HOW I CAME ABOUT TO KNOW MANCHESTER”: NEGOTIATING THE CITY

Some people spoke of difficulties and lack of support in negotiating Manchester: being unfamiliar with maps and bus routes; finding their way, for example, to report at Dallas Court and being fearful of missing their appointments. Other people translated their difficulties in finding their way around the city - to report, to find accustomed food, advice, churches – into positive outcomes. Despite the effects of “churn” outlined in the previous section, Rachel describes the confidence she has made out of having been moved a number of times:

…I am getting used to it because of the public transport. It was quite an experience, something good for me to come out there. I go by bus, go by train, it was good. It make myself confident that I can travel alone because in the beginning I didn’t know even how to take the bus, how to take the train because nobody tell me “You take that bus. You go there.”

While this enforced self-sufficiency is a product of an inadequate settlement process (cf Korac, 2003), Rachel represents it as having positive effects.

My participants’ accounts suggest that the settlement process is erratic in responding to the information needs of people newly-arrived in a strange city. Much depends on the knowledge and thoughtfulness of case owners and accommodation providers (cf Johnson, 2003). Lack of adequate knowledge has consequences. For Marwa, finding Dallas Court was essential because “if I would miss [my appointment] they would arrest me.” So, finding the way around Manchester is not the same for people seeking asylum as for other people new to the city: they have the added dimension of fearing the consequences of not reporting on the day and time specified. Helen’s return journey to Dallas Court from a town in Greater Manchester took several buses and almost a whole day to go there and back. Different kinds of pressure were alleviated when she was allowed to report monthly rather than weekly – a small improvement, perhaps, to someone in a different situation,
but a significant one to people living under reporting regimes that structure their time in ways that evoke fear and deny self-determination.

Yet, as people cross Manchester with different purposes, so they create new spatialities and cognitive maps of the city. Mary, who describes herself as venturesome and positive, says:

> When I went to the corner shop...I had a conversation with the shopkeeper where I could find other African communities or where I could find African food. That's when this guy referred me to Longsight and...I didn't know where...Longsight was. So it was just a way of finding out, get on the buses and see where they take you to. One day I remember ending up in Bolton. [Laughs.] Luckily, I had bought a return ticket. So this is how I came about to know Manchester.

Sammy's studies and work with voluntary agencies as an unpaid interpreter have given him “access everywhere around Manchester”, not only to spaces but also to people: like many of my participants, he has met a variety of public figures – politicians, mosque and church leaders, as well as people from different communities. While refugees, especially women, are stereotypically represented as passive (Gedalof, 2007), my participants, women and men, most commonly represent themselves as active and positive agents in responding to difficult conditions.

5.4 “AT LEAST I COULD COMMUNICATE WITH PEOPLE”: LANGUAGE MATTERS

For my participants and other people I encountered, fluency in English was a key resource for making a new life in Manchester, as it is anywhere in the UK (Carey-Wood, 1997: 39). Sammy described himself as “handcuffed” by not knowing the language when he first came. However, he learned English and then took an interpreter course so that he could help other people. When James came to Manchester, it was a “really difficult time”: language, culture and the asylum system all presented problems – lack of knowledge “makes

28 Some voluntary groups working with refugees make specific efforts to enlarge refugees’ social and recreational maps of the city, for example by organizing trips.
life difficult and hard”. Yet, he, in common with many of my participants, felt a responsibility to care for others and began to volunteer with his community and help them as an interpreter.

Marwa and many other participants felt aided by having some fluency in English when they came to Manchester. English is what Mary calls the “office language” in a number of the African countries my participants came from. Nonetheless:

The English acquired by urban Africans may offer them considerable prestige and access to middle-class identities in African towns. It may be an “expensive”, extremely valuable resource to them. But the same English, when spoken in London by the same Africans, may become an object of stigmatisation and may qualify them as members of the lower strata of society. What is very “expensive” in Lusaka or Nairobi may be very “cheap” in London or New York. What people can actually accomplish with these resources is likewise affected. (Blommaert, 2007: 72)

While I did not hear anyone speak in terms of their English being disprized, I was involved in telephoning an official on behalf of someone who had not been able to negotiate agreement about changing a meeting time. When I obtained a change of time, I felt that the incident gave her the result she wanted at the cost of reinforcing white privilege. English remains an “imperialistic language” (Lavie, 1996: 19), a powerful and unevenly distributed resource and means of exclusion (Rapport, 1995: 272; cf Asad, 1986: 164; Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2010b: 63).

Marwa emphasizes the limitations - the lack of institutional support - in provision for speakers who require advanced English tuition, thus placing limits on their opportunities for desired self-development:

…it would be very nice if there was like scope for maybe over-18 people, colleges special for them or maybe courses for them...some people their English is good but they need another help – other people their English is not good, so those they can go to the ESOL classes, which is ok. For me now if I go to these classes it won’t help me – it’s all about speaking...

Consequently, she felt that there were some advantages to being compelled to learn English:
...I know a lot of people in other [countries]...the government ask them to go to learn the language otherwise they won’t, you know, accept them, so you have to go and learn the language, which is really very good, you know, even if some people may, some people will argue, say why do I have to learn. But it's really important for them as well to understand the system and everything, yeah.

Marwa explicitly links language with access to knowledge as essential for making a life in a new country. A common language is important also for conviviality and friendship when people come from different language backgrounds. Elizabeth mentions being unable to communicate with people in her accommodation who do not speak English. Rachel urges her friends "to talk English...Please, don’t come into this country and speak your language." Because he had worked for a time in the UK some years before his expulsion, Charles’ “language was not too good still but at least I could communicate with people.” His analysis was that language is “the main problem, you know, for immigrants...this is why you feel better with your people because you can talk. This is why you isolate yourself.”

Speaking in translation offers opportunities for inclusion, but can limit recognition and expression of personhood. In a study of South Asian university students in Canada, Edith Samuel (2004) found that white students regarded black students, particularly those with less familiar accents, as less competent. De Genova treats the requirement for migrants to speak English at work as “generally dehumanizing” because it displaces “the full extent of communication and creative expression possible in the workers’ first language” (De Genova, 2007a: 35). Similarly, Erving Goffman refers to stigmatized people as changing “from unexpressive and confused individuals...to expressive and understanding people within their own group” (Goffman, 1990: 32). Nonetheless, my participants perceive the ability to speak English as an important resource - a form of social capital - which gives them access to finding their way about, to information and sociality, and, as I discuss in the next Chapter, to education and employment. A lack of facilities or distribution of resources for those who want to learn is a form
of oppression which can lead to distress and “material deprivation” (Young, 1990: 38).

In common with most of my participants, Marwa’s ability to speak English made a difference to her ability to negotiate the city and its institutions:

I could read English at that time and I could understand where to go exactly, erm so that helped me a lot really. Not everybody from my community is lucky in that situation; they really struggle…they find difficult even shopping at the market, you know, they don’t know how to buy things and all this stuff.

Her ability to speak English made Marwa’s life less of a “struggle”. In contrast:

…some people they have difficulties because when they come here…[service providers] will say to you “This is a map and go there, go there”. [Sounds as though giving orders.] They don’t know what “map” is, they don’t know what it is, you can’t speak to them, say what is this, even you don’t know what they gave you. They think they gave you direction, you just take and then you go outside and then you have to look somebody who is the same colour\(^{29}\) and say maybe then that person will help you. [Excited/emphatic.] Really, I seen a lot of people, with the children as well…they don’t know where to go. Yeah. Is not easy to live in Manchester. [Cross/sad.] Yeah.

So it is not easy to live in Manchester, especially at the beginning: “it can take a while for you to cope”. Beyond “the trauma of moving”, people seeking asylum may encounter arbitrary and “distressful” conditions of existence in which individual information, accommodation, language and other needs are not recognized or met. Young comments that, despite “[h]ierarchical decisionmaking structures” many people “nevertheless enjoy significant institutionalized support for the development and exercise of their capacities and their ability to express themselves and be heard” (Young, 1990: 38).

People seeking asylum might, perhaps, be able to overlook some of the structures of domination in their lives if there were “institutionalized support” that corresponded to their capacities and needs. For example, both Marwa

\(^{29}\) Samuel describes the experience of an international student who said the first thing he looked for on campus was “someone Brown like me” (Samuel, 2004: 415).
and Mary draw attention to the differential social inclusion of adults and children. Mary said: “if the government had taken me into the community and dealt with me the same way they are dealing with the schoolchildren there wouldn't be any problems at all.”

I examine “institutionalized support” further in the next section in relation to service providers.

5.5 “JUST LIKE A PIECE OF PAPER”: ENCOUNTERS WITH SERVICE PROVIDERS

My participants talked about their encounters with officialdom in terms of interpersonal contact, policies and rules. In Chapter 7, I consider asylum policies and the asylum application process. Here, I consider encounters with providers of services connected to settlement. These encounters produce moments in which legal obligations, bureaucracy and care, or the need for care, grate against each other.

Joshua describes and critiques a number of difficulties with housing providers: “some of these workers that they employ they should try and see the inside not the outside because most of them are very, very racist and very biased”. Joshua’s experience gives some support to Gilroy’s view that what is at stake in such encounters is not “migrancy” but racism (Gilroy, 2005: 150). When Joshua complained about exposed electrical wiring:

…it took about ten months for them just to fix, just to cover, that bit. I keep on going there, they just treat you like, oh yeah, just like a piece of paper or something not useful to them, but the Home Office is paying them. Some of the things that we should have, they don’t give us, they are saying the Home Office. (My emphasis)

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30 One of the aspects I have not been able to develop is the impact of the conditions of existence of asylum on family life. My participants generally feel that their children are doing well educationally and socially, and they feel that some cultural adjustment on their part is necessary for their children’s success.
The image of being treated like a “piece of paper or something not useful” evokes Kristeva’s conception of the *abject*, that which “disturbs identity, system, order”, the excluded, “the jettisoned object” (Kristeva, 1982: 4, 2). Joshua is excluded from care as safe accommodation for his young child. Prohibiting people seeking asylum from working suggests that they are “not useful”, not assets. Mary is “denied” the ability to make a contribution; Elizabeth’s words are thrown back at her. My participants show how people seeking asylum are “jettisoned”, not recognized as being of value in themselves or to society (cf Honneth, 2008: 138-139).

Many people reported problems with housing providers’ lack of attention to complaints about the quality and maintenance of housing, to burglaries and vandalism. Worst of all, perhaps, I heard of people recently arrived being moved into accommodation from which others had been removed because of racist incidents. Sammy said that housing staff “worked for wages”: they “didn’t care”. The policy of privatizing or contracting out public services and running them for profit raises questions of “fitness” and “accountability” (Somerville, 2007: 79). It disempowers service users by fragmenting the provision of services and increasing the number of agencies they have to contact, often at some distance from their accommodation. The negative effect of privatization is seen in the provision of cards that tie particular categories of people seeking asylum to specific supermarkets. Thus, “personal troubles” are linked to “public issues” (Mills, 2000: 226). Neither poor quality housing nor the perceived dilatory responses of the Police to the reporting of incidents such as vandalism or burglaries are problems for migrants alone. However, the way the police respond may deepen the cloud of uncertainty within which people seeking asylum have to make their lives. They are unsure whether racism or bureaucratic inefficiency shapes the lack of responsiveness. Such uncertainty may add to the wariness of officials many people bring with them from the countries they have left.

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31 Santos argues that part of neoliberal economies’ response to globalization is to give social policies a low priority in the state budget (Santos, 2006: 394).
In trying to find her way to Dallas Court, Marwa sought help, unsuccessfully, from the accommodation providers. Her experience echoes Sammy’s view that the housing staff “worked for wages”: they “didn’t care”. The theme of care is one she takes up in talking about GPs: rather than sending people away with paracetamol, “they should consider, they should care.” Marwa’s and Sammy’s comments and analyses challenge normative discourses that represent the UK as providing them with protection in the form of institutional and interpersonal support. Their comments invite consideration of what understanding of care might respond to the denials and hurts, the “deaf ears” that people seeking asylum encounter in their dealings with service providers.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, when people spoke to me about care, particularly in relation to service providers, professionals, administrators, and the rules that they work under, I understood them, in part, as speaking about recognition. Elizabeth insists that “[a]n asylum seeker is a human being” with “the right to be treated humanely, humanely.” She looks for her human being to be affirmed (cf Butler, 2004: 57) through respectful treatment (cf Honneth, 2001: 113, 122) and attentiveness to her needs. Elizabeth, Marwa, Sammy and others speak of service providers as denying them the attentiveness - “recognizing the needs of those around us” – which is integral to care (Tronto, 1993: 127). Attentiveness to needs requires “sentient activity” and “active sensibility” (Mason, 1996: 27) to others as sentient beings with specific needs. In asking for care from people providing services, my participants take care out of the domestic sphere and insist on it as an ethic and a practice necessary to the delivery of services to the public. This suggests that, if service providers engaged in “sentient activity” based on “hearing-to-respond”, people seeking asylum (and not only they) might feel that their needs were being met care-fully.

When I asked Huda what she would say if she could speak to the city council, agencies or ordinary people about what would make life simpler for people seeking asylum, she replied:

…they have to get well treated…They don’t come here because they like this country…They have their reason to come here. So,
erm they have to get the good advice regarding the UK…and their rights in this country.

In practice, this means behaving – listening and responding – to people seeking asylum with patience and attentiveness. It also means, as Joshua points out, behaving with fairness in relation to entitlements, not acting in ways that “are very, very racist and very biased”. It may mean, as Emily says when the health visitor arranged counselling for her when she was depressed after her baby was born, “going on extra” to understand and act in response to people’s circumstances and the consequences of action or inaction. The health visitor recognized Emily as a person and responded to her sentience and her need for care as repair. However, this raises the question whether, from the perspective of care, what Emily perceives as “going on extra” should be an ordinary part of doing the job.

Implicit in Sammy’s comment that housing staff “worked for wages” is an assertion that work is more than instrumental to the earning of money, that some kind of commitment or engagement is required (in the next Chapter, I discuss the values that are entangled in work). James Boyd White urges lawyers to understand the power dimensions of the relationship between them and their clients, to understand something of their clients’ situation:

…the law (like the lawyer) is both central and marginal at once; it exists at the edge of our discourses, outside all of them, structurally supplementary; yet it is also the discourse of power in our official world. This doubleness is felt by the lawyer, too, who knows that her clients’ real lives are elsewhere, that these people are only here in her office because they have to be, and so on, and that in this sense the law and the lawyer are marginal in the extreme. Yet she also knows that her clients have to be there, in her office or someone else’s, for the law is the instrument of official power; in this sense it is central as nothing else is. (White, 1990: 262)

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32 In Chapter 7, I discuss the requirement for bodies that carry out public functions (‘public authorities’) to be especially scrupulous in their decision-making (to avoid a challenge that might lead to judicial review), for example, by not ‘fettering their discretion’, not taking into account matters irrelevant to their decisions or refusing or failing to take account of matters relevant to their decisions, taking into account whether people might have a ‘legitimate expectation’ to be treated in a particular way (House of Commons, 2006).
In a relationship of care with people seeking asylum, other professionals and administrators might show a similar understanding of their simultaneous marginality and centrality to the lives of their clients. What White is urging seems to come close to Young’s “ethical relation of asymmetrical reciprocity” (Young, 1997: 53). This requires a “moral humility that recognizes that [people] stand in relations of asymmetry and irreversibility with others” (Young, 1997: 59). Dialogue is the route to “enlarged understanding”, for example that people seeking asylum “have their reason to come here”, which may foster care and livability.

Through her work as an interpreter Marwa is a ‘participant observer’ of the relationship between people seeking asylum and social services: “I work as an interpreter as well, with my community…so I have seen, you know, a lot. Yeah.” The following is an extract from my conversation with Marwa:

M: And some people, some are rude as well. You say ‘I don’t know where this [is]’ and…they say to you “You came here. When you came to England, did you know where was England? So you should find yourself.” Really! [Raises voice in astonishment.] I have seen people…saying…”When you came to England did you know where was England and now you are in Manchester? So you have to find yourself your way now.”

LP: People in government offices?
M: People in government offices. Yeah. And people, if you say go and complain, they just afraid…because government people saying that - can’t complain.

While Marwa emphasize fear of complaining about the rudeness of staff, Emily accentuates the futility of complaining: service providers “won’t consider it serious” if you are seeking asylum; they take “advantage of you because of status”. Young’s definition of powerlessness derived from status resonates with Emily’s view that people seeking asylum can be oppressed by not being deemed worth listening to. People are made powerless through “disrespectful treatment because of the status” they occupy (Young, 1990: 58). Indeed, people seeking asylum have a status imposed on them. Yet, as Emily says, “the stigma is there” even after leave to remain is granted. Although Goffman’s work on stigma focuses on people with physical disabilities or histories deemed to be discreditable, I find his comments
relevant to the treatment of people seeking asylum. Because stigmatized people are seen as “not quite human”, they are discriminated against in ways that reduce their “life chances” (Goffman, 1990: 15; cf the Manchester-based research of Leudar et al on the effects of hostility on the well-being of refugees and people seeking asylum, 2008).

Goffman identifies stigma as a relationship rather than an attribute (Goffman, 1990: 13). The discriminatory effects of this relationship are illustrated in Joshua’s account of an episode when he became:

...confused along the line that I can cancel the Section 4 and still live on Social Services support, but I was misled. So [the administrator] has to stop our support for two weeks. By then, my wife was heavily pregnant...So we stayed two weeks without support, financial support. It was a very, very horrible week for us.

Joshua describes the administrator as:

...very hostile. She was not kind and she was not humanitarian. She don’t have that human feeling. She was very rude...It was a thing I don’t like to talk about because the way [she] treated us, I don’t know – she was saying it’s the government policy, but I don’t think that’s really government [behaviour]...so many people that I’ve met, my colleagues, asylum seekers, they say bad things about [her]...She even tell people to go back, tell them to sign to go back. All those kinds of things. It is very horrible. You cannot tell somebody, it is not your business. Your business is for you to attend to...the rules of the Social Services, not for you to dictate as an immigration officer, say you have to go back, sign and go back. It is very contradicted.

Some of the people I met produced outlines of institutional ethnographies, linking their troubling conditions of existence through service providers to the Home Office, government and public policy. Like Elizabeth, however, Joshua distinguishes between government policy and the actions of those paid to carry it out; he does not accept that government policy is being followed. Moreover, his criticisms make clear his normative view that public servants should follow rules – but, even where there are rules, he says, “there are

33 Benefits are provided for refused asylum seekers who give a commitment (“sign”) that they will return to their countries.
exceptions”. When the administrator tells people to “go back”, she interpellates people seeking asylum as “peoples out of place” (Malkki, 1992: 33). Joshua, however, refuses to let this interpellation “stick” to him and asserts his right to services delivered according to the rules.

I have taken the concept of the “stickiness” of emotions from the work of Sara Ahmed (2004). Ahmed conceptualizes “stickiness” as an “effect of the histories of contact between bodies, objects and signs” (2004: 90). Emotions are “social and cultural practices” (2004: 9) which “circulate between bodies” (2004: 4). In the context of my research, it is my participants’ perspectives, the social, cultural and political uses they make of emotions in their narratives that interest me. I am not arguing that emotions do not “stick”, that they are not the effect of “histories of contact”, but what is striking is the way that my participants consciously critique the circumstances and relationships within which the emotions are produced. Thus, Joshua both evokes feeling “horrible” and translates that feeling into an assertion of the values transgressed in his contact with the administrator. He represents the administrator as having violated norms of kindness and “human feeling” and stipulates that her business is “to attend to…the rules of the Social Services, not…to dictate as an immigration officer”.

On many occasions, my participants draw on conventional discourses of rights, human rights, for example, or rights for people with disabilities. These discourses may have been reiterated in training run by voluntary organizations. What is transformative about such assertions of rights is that they are made on behalf of people who are excluded from them, who are marginalized as a group. The claim for inclusion is a claim for a transformation of the conditions of existence of asylum. It is a claim that people seeking asylum make themselves, a transformative reframing of their “hurt” in a way that insists on their inclusion as human (cf Cubilié, 2003: 5). They address the people and circumstances they have encountered from a standpoint of values which resist the despising ways they are framed in dominant discourses. They refuse to let their suffering be a "silent residue of policy" (Foucault, 2002d: 474-475) or practice.
Further, their critiques, translations and reframings are not academic exercises: my participants and other people seeking asylum go beyond the analytical and take part in activities that put their knowledge to work. Many volunteer within their communities or with refugee organizations, providing information and advice - giving other people the care they would have liked. Others organize campaigns in pursuit of their claims to remain or are active in broader campaigns such as ‘Let Them Work’. Many are active in all three areas. In undertaking some of these activities, many of my participants draw once again on their feelings, using their stories and emotions to influence public opinion by contesting media representations and bringing rights claims to life. The emotional, cognitive and practical activities they undertake on behalf of others suggest aspects of the rôle of “organic intellectuals” (Gramsci, 2007a: 5, 10).

My participants’ encounters provoke questions about bureaucracy. Emily sums up a frequent view in her comment that “there can be rules but they do not implement them accordingly.” In defining the characteristics of bureaucracy, Weber identifies the presence of “general rules, which are more or less stable, more or less exhaustive” (Weber, 1962: 198). “Modern loyalty is devoted to impersonal and functional purposes” rather than to relationships with people (Weber, 1962: 199). Thus, bureaucracy “stands in extreme contrast to the regulation of all relationships through individual privileges and bestowals of favor” (Weber, 1962: 198). However, this is not what many of my participants experience. They experience service providers who are partial when they should deliver entitlements impersonally and who are impersonal when some indication of “human feeling” and recognition is called for to help repair their worlds. Young’s view that “particular values” enter into decisions (Young, 1990: 79) can be seen in encounters between people seeking asylum and service providers. The values that enter can be traced back to discourses that represent people seeking asylum as threats to national security and to citizens.

People seeking asylum and service providers are in relationships of asymmetrical power. Abuse of official position increases the asymmetry, especially when people fear to complain or when their complaints are not
considered “serious”. Some of the oppressions to which people seeking asylum are subject come from “systematic institutional processes” (Young, 1990: 38), but some of them come from people within the institutions abusing their positions. However, the mobilization of prejudice is more complex than personal bias or failure to discipline offenders. It is part of the way in which the state permeates “everyday relations between individuals” (Marfleet 2006: 278, citing Balibar). Thus, when institutions shelter service providers who abuse their positions and fail to shelter people who have a right to services, authoritarianism and lack of “participatory parity” at the national scale connect with arbitrary and unfair decision-making at the local scale.

5.6 “It’s Me Who Had a Lot of Surprises”: Encounters With Other People

…the concept of diaspora space foregrounds the entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those of ‘staying put’. (Brah, 1996: 16)

Brah’s conceptualization of diaspora space in terms of “the intersectionality of diaspora, border and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural, and psychic processes” (2005: 208) is a helpful expression of the complexity of the processes involved in making a new life in the conditions of existence of asylum. Moreover, it foregrounds, as my participants do, the importance of “psychic processes” and the way in which “multiple subject positions are contested, proclaimed or disavowed” (Brah, 2005: 208). For my participants, Manchester is a “diaspora space” where power relations are enacted in and between “the realm of macro structures”, the geopolitical conditions of existence I discuss in Chapter 3, and “the everyday of lived experience” (Brah, 2005: 242).

Most people new to an area look to people already there as potential sources of information, sociability and friendship. If they are used to different forms of social relatedness, people seeking asylum may perceive more settled populations as “rude” or not helpful if they fail to be responsive. While negative meanings have been ascribed to the concept of ‘rootedness’ (cf Malkki, 1992), we depend on making connections, whether imagined as roots
or tendrils, to sustain us. Connections - to people, to places, to knowledge - support human flourishing.

People’s narratives tell how they come with different expectations of life in Manchester. They also react differently to what they find. When Mary came, she drew on her previous experience to make sense of living in Manchester. For example, working with people had taught her not to “expect people to know who you are when you are a new person getting into an area. They just assume you are one of them.” Thus she expected to “be the first to greet” other people. However, “it was a lot of surprises, you know, it was my first experience of this area where I didn’t know anyone; yet where I came from I had a lot of networks around me, a lot of friends, a lot of connections.” Mary analyzes her “surprise” through a kind of ethnographic comparison of her experiences in Manchester and her experiences of “the British community” in her country (a former British colony in Africa):

The difference is in first of all the way you communicate in everyday life. We expect people to greet each other. You know, easily communicating. But when I came over here, it was different; people mind their own business, you know they get out and do their own business...

Cultural behaviour formerly taken for granted becomes conscious as Mary seeks explanations for the behaviour she finds, cognitively translating her surprise into a neutral expression of cultural difference\textsuperscript{34}. The meaning she gives to the lack of greeting suggests a kind of “wisdom” (Collins, 2000: 257) which protects her psychic resources in a situation where she has lost the recognition that comes from “networks”, “friends”, “connections”.

Marwa makes a similar distinction between her encounters in Manchester and interpersonal relations in her country, but is more normative in her assessment:

\textsuperscript{34} In being struck by the apparent neutrality of Mary’s assessment, I am thinking of other possible interpretations, for example Kovel’s ideal types of white racism (dominative, aversive and metaracism). Dominative racism occurs in situations of daily contact such as might occur in (post)colonial settings while aversive racism, distinguished by “avoidance and separation”, might occur in metropolitan settings (cited by Young, 1990: 141).
...here people are not friendly, even at the college, the British person wouldn't welcome you, wouldn't erm speak to you even of the same age or even older or anything, you know, they don't. So I don't think people are nice really here. Where I come from people are really very nice...when you sitting next to each other in the bus, you just say hello...you don't just sit with them. Here, if you say what time is it, one will say she doesn't know me why she asking me what time it is?

Marwa makes a strong knowledge claim: “I know other cultures”. She draws on a visit to South Africa to make a point about cultural difference: “the white people there are completely different...completely different, so when you go there, if you go to the restaurant, they say hello to you...it's more open.”

If the representation of the British (English) as unfriendly has become a stereotype, it is one which figures largely in the way many of my participants describe their encounters and “categorize back” (Malkki, 1995: 8). Marwa’s categorization is ethnographic: failure to greet people is “a culture thing maybe, they don’t do it to themselves”. Perhaps interpreting behaviour as “a culture thing” in some situations protects people from acknowledgement of racism, protects their self-recognition by constructing something inclusive out of experiences that deny them accustomed recognition. Yet, in other parts of her narrative, Marwa explicitly addresses the issue of racism, in employment for example, or in being forced to ask for help from people “the same colour” as herself. At this moment, perhaps, Marwa is more concerned with asserting sociality as a value which is found in her country but absent in Manchester, and with representing her ability to adapt, to become acculturated in her behaviour:

If you see me now at a bus stop, I won’t speak to you anyway. Inside I would like, but because of the culture, I already just adopted the culture, so erm some people they see me they think I am rude but I’m not because everywhere where I go everyone is like that, even at workplace, yeah, even at workplace.

Anna and Charles offer different interpretations. With some ambivalence, Anna describes her understanding of the English as having:

...simply a different way of making friends and so on. I think that once you’ve made friends with the English people they are indeed friends for life...I feel that at first they have to look at you to see
how you behave…[Both laugh]…well it’s just the way and I can now understand, you know, and I’m not, I’m not resentful or anything but, you know, maybe if I had to rely on the British people all the time, but…We didn’t need, you know, much support from, because there was quite a lot of us, you know. Gradually, gradually we got a good relationship with local people.

Coming with “units” and “circles of friends” after the war meant that Anna was less dependent on support from the British or the English (Anna uses both terms) than people seeking asylum now. Yet, her unfinished sentence intimates some thankfulness that she did not have to “rely on the British people all the time”.

Like Mary, Charles did not expect people to make the first move; like Anna, he was to some extent protected by coming as a welcome asylum seeker with a friend in Manchester who was able to help him find a job. When I suggested to Charles that people from elsewhere often experienced the English as “cold”, his response was:

…I never agreed with this kind of opinion, and from my experience as well. Of course, difference, it is some difference between our…behaviour, our attitudes you know, that we kiss, hug and “Oh hello!” [in loud and cheerful voice] but Englishman would be a little bit different but probably as emotional, exactly the same…I noticed that they can’t express emotions, but their emotions are exactly the same….of course this is why because I, I understood so well, probably I make some approach I make some step and Englishman make as well some step, you know, and we meet much easily than by expecting, you know, that he will be kind to me or opposite.

Although Charles disagrees with views of English behaviour as “cold”, like Anna, Mary and Marwa he has clearly undertaken cognitive work to give meaning to behavioural differences in ways that sustain his psychic resources.

Joshua has been sustained by finding people who listen to him: “one thing I believe – there are good people, there are bad people all over the world. Here it’s better, in my experience, after being here, because you have so many people that can listen to you.” He emphasizes the importance of being
listened to and of practising “the right to narrate” (Bhabha, 2004: XX) if that will gain him support:

And that's how I got I do meet so many people um outside the refugee [community] and then inside. Like outside...in my college...I made so many friends there, my tutors and everybody, and the refugee work also, made so many friends because I was not afraid to, I am not ashamed to say I am an asylum seeker, not ashamed to tell my story – and if that's the only way you can get positive help or support or whatever, you know.

Elizabeth emphasizes the importance of being heard by describing its absence: “each time I tried to get facilities nobody listened to me”; “your cry falls into deaf ears.” Young’s iteration of the social justice value of “communicating with others, and expressing our experience, feelings and perspective on life in contexts where others can listen” (Young, 1990:37) is consonant with Joshua’s and Elizabeth’s accounts. They add to Young’s formulation, which emphasizes listening as an activity that others can do, a volitional element: that listening is something which others will do. Listening alone, however, may not suffice. As Elizabeth and Joshua point out, for their needs to be met, others have to listen and to act. Service providers and other people have to join in the effort of translation if people seeking asylum are to find not only protection from gunshots but also pathways to livability.

Social contact increases confidence in social situations: confidence ‘sticks’ through repetition of speaking and listening in situations where other people are caring copresences. Rachel describes how:

As the months go on or pass by, that is when I met friends. I started to talk because I was afraid to talk to people because I don’t know anybody. And when I see them talk English, I just talk with them, and if I just want to ask something, I ask them questions.

While many of her friends are from her church, she also describes being helped by her college tutor (who wrote a letter supporting her claim for leave to remain) and “even white people” helped her in the beginning when she got lost.
Nonetheless, a sense of the “struggle” of making a new life is always present in people’s narratives. When I asked what advice Huda would give to people seeking asylum now, she responded:

They have to adapt themselves, whatever is happening. If they came here by their choice, they chose to come here, and they find it difficult here, they have to adapt themselves to stay here, otherwise they will struggle. They have to forget what's happening in the past, they have to – there is a lot of opportunity for...the refugees here. They can easily get education. They can easily get housing. They can live their life...They have to live within a different culture, different needs, and they might get some problems in dealings with different communities. They might get erm racist comment; they have to accept it - they don't have to accept it, but they have to live with it. And they have to prove them wrongly if they said they are whatever. If they get education, nobody will say anything...So you have to do your best to get on with your life here.

In Huda’s advice to “adapt”, to “live with it”, we can glimpse something of her own ambivalence and struggles. Adapting is not the alternative to struggle; it is a different form of struggle.

Huda speaks of having “to live with” racist comments. Racist verbal or physical abuse may indeed be encountered on the streets. Michael says that he encountered racism from drunken people and others – including “why don’t you go home”. He tries to ignore these behaviours, but telling people to “go home” is cruel because most would rather be in their own country if it were safe to do so. Rachel refers to an incident when a drunken visiting football fan abused her: “‘Did you think...you can run this country? [Acting the exaggerated voice.] Did you think you can overtake this country?’” Although she describes this as her “only bad experience”, later she describes another incident in which she saw off her schoolboy abusers by threatening to speak to their head teacher. One man told me that he had suffered abuse only since his wife joined him because she wears traditional clothing. Her fear has led her to ask him to lock her in the house when he goes out (cf Dumper, 2002: 1). As Ahmed points out, “Fear works to contain bodies within social space through the way it shrinks the body, or constitutes the bodily surface through an expectant withdrawal from the world that might yet
present itself as dangerous” (Ahmed, 2004: 70). People summon different resources and tell different stories to “live with” different moments of racism.

**CONCLUSION**

I have considered separately aspects of making a new life in Manchester – arrival, reception and settlement, negotiating the city, language, encounters with service providers and local people – which are not lived separately. Discourses, regulations and interpersonal encounters interlock to create conditions of existence of asylum which can support or hinder people’s efforts to make new lives in Manchester. People speak about the effects of the asylum rules as impoverishing their material and psychic resources. Institutional support does not foster “the values comprised in the good life”: “developing and exercising one’s capacities and expressing one’s experience...” and “participating in determining one’s action and the conditions of one’s action” (Young, 1990: 37). In order to receive accommodation and financial support, people seeking asylum are subject to dispersal. They are subject to stigma and to racism, not only on the streets but also from service providers. Service providers rarely demonstrate care, “sentient activity” (Mason, 1996: 27), towards them; neither do they make commensurate efforts of translation. While some people find service providers who show some understanding of their situation, many find that they are “rude” or “hostile”, using the power of their positions to ignore or belittle them or deny them entitlements. There is clearly a need for professionals who come into contact with people seeking asylum to be educated about “their culture, their customs, their rights, and particularly the experience of being a refugee” and refugees themselves are “obvious candidates” to do this (Carey-Wood, 1997: 40).

Some of my participants’ expectations of life in “a good country that can protect you” were shaken by the actuality of their experiences. Their perceptions of discrepancy between government intentions and the practices of administrators and service providers expose the contradictions within government policy between the safety and welcome rhetorically offered to
people seeking asylum and concern with the economic and security interests of citizens (Ishay and Goldfischer, 1997; Castles, 2003; Gibney, 2004; Marfleet, 2006; Kushner, 2006). Yet, it is in their efforts of translation – in their emotional, cognitive and physical activities - that people seeking asylum begin to make livable lives. Even while in many cases continuing to experience depression, fear and anxiety, they go beyond the “stickiness” of the feelings produced in them by their histories and by the conditions of existence of asylum. They go, too, beyond the feelings and representations others “stick” on them, using their sentience to contest rules and treatment which fail to recognize them as human. They demonstrate care for the self and care for others. They assert values of sociality and human rights in ways that argue for social transformation and justice.
"EMPLOYMENT PROHIBITED": THE SOCIAL JUSTICE DIMENSIONS OF WORK

INTRODUCTION

Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment. (Article 23 of The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.)

Employment prohibited. (Printed on the identity cards of people seeking asylum.)

This Chapter offers an analysis of some of what my participants said about (i) the effects of “employment prohibited” on their physical and mental well-being, and (ii) the resources they draw on to sustain themselves in the conditions of existence that are articulated with the prohibition on employment. I show how their accounts of “employment prohibited” go beyond simple narrations of its effects to provide critiques, interpretations and assertions of values. The Chapter makes no claim to be an exhaustive account of a field which has been well documented by researchers and refugee organizations. My specific focus is to ask how the prohibition of employment, and its effects, are perceived and resisted in Manchester, and to examine how people draw on resources shaped in “diaspora space” (Brah, 2005) and in spaces in other parts of the world. I consider first the current policies which structure the prohibition of the right to work. These policies are determined at European and national scales but enacted and lived at a local scale. Second, I look at some of the strategies my participants employ against the regulation of their lives. Third, I look in detail at the narratives of two of my participants, Mary and Habib. Since no interpretation is ever complete (Denzin, 2001), the use of extended narrative extracts invites other interpretations that can expand the meaning of the narratives as critiques of
the conditions of existence of people seeking asylum. The narrators struggle against the “stickiness” of their own feelings, the negative emotions attached to them as people seeking asylum. They struggle against the prohibition of employment to find other forms of work-as-meaningful-activity. In finding other forms of activity, they expand their resources to overcome, or partially overcome, some of the effects of “employment prohibited”. While the two extended narratives are specific, they also overlap and articulate with the narratives of other participants to illustrate some of what they spoke of as the connected effects of “employment prohibited” on the possibilities that shape their sense of livability. Finally, I consider what my participants told me about voluntary agencies and the pathways they offer to “learning and using satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognized settings”, communicating with others and expressing “their feelings and perspective on social life in contexts where others can listen” (Young, 1990: 38).

My participants spoke about the prohibition of employment as the most significant denial in their conditions of existence: Emily said that refusing the right to work is “senseless”, it is “like punishing you”; “it is like torture” to be unable to use or develop your skills. I examine the ways in which prohibiting employment overlaps with and inhibits possibilities for livability in terms of education, choice in accommodation and amenities, and social life. People speak also about the way the prohibition affects livability through its impact on confidence, skills and well-being. I approach the narratives through the questions they raise about recognition, care and social justice. I demonstrate how the prohibition of employment and the “blocks” to human flourishing nested within that prohibition exemplify Young’s “five faces of oppression – exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence” (Young, 1990: 64). Indeed, prohibiting employment can be analyzed in terms of domination:

...institutional conditions which inhibit or prevent people from participating in determining their actions or the conditions of their actions. Persons live within structures of domination if other persons or groups can determine without reciprocation the conditions of their action, either directly or by virtue of the structural consequences of their actions. (Young, 1990: 38)
People seeking asylum cannot work legally, and if they work illegally they put their claims at risk.

In isolating people, in refusing them the opportunity to learn and use “satisfying skills in socially recognized settings” (Young, 1990: 37), in refusing them the right to work - refusing them self-determination - asylum regulations can be seen as both oppressive and dominating. The prohibition of employment inflicts the specific oppression of powerlessness: “inhibition in the development of one’s capacities, lack of decision-making power in one’s working life, and exposure to disrespectful treatment because of the status one occupies” (Young, 1990: 58). Nonetheless, as I discuss later in this Chapter, if one of the important aspects of work is activity, then many people I encountered had found ways into activity that they found meaningful through various forms of voluntary work.

Although my participants and others with whom I come into contact describe the punitive emotional and material effects of being prohibited from employment, many also protest against them. They critique the ban and its effects and assert values by which they judge them. They draw on resources of memory or skills acquired in the past to produce domestic, family and social lives in a new place. They find resources in engagement with many forms of activity (unpaid employment) outside the domestic situation: voluntary activities and Bible study in churches; giving information and advice and undertaking office tasks at voluntary organizations; working with their communities in Manchester and for their communities in their countries; advocating and campaigning locally and nationally for refugee and other causes. It is in the light of these activities that I consider them “organic” intellectuals (Gramsci, 2007a: 10). Further, the questions people seeking asylum raise about human rights and “a decent living”, social justice and livability could be extrapolated to other marginalized social groups and work towards recognition of a common human due.

35 Young links powerlessness with the division of labour. For people seeking asylum, the fundamental division is between people who are allowed to engage in paid labour and those who are not.
6.1 MANAGING MIGRATION THROUGH DETERRENCE: NATIONAL POLICIES

Because they claim to be concerned with the welfare of societies, governments arrogate to themselves the right to pass off as profit or loss the human unhappiness that their decisions provoke or their negligence permits...The suffering of men must never be a silent residue of policy. It grounds an absolute right to stand up and speak to those who hold power. (Foucault, 2002d: 474-475).

The Universal Declaration affirms a human right to work: human rights “belong to every human being solely by virtue of his or her membership in humankind (Kallen, 2004: 13). Current UK asylum rules prohibit employment for people seeking asylum. The framers of the CRSR “stipulated that refugees should have access to national courts, the right to employment and education, and a host of other social economic and civil rights on a par with nationals of the host country” (Loescher et al, 2008: 14). However, UK asylum rules construct a category of people who are excluded from many citizen rights, including the right to work. Many researchers have commented on the importance to people seeking asylum of the right to work (Grinberg and Grinberg, 1989: 95; Robinson and Segrott, 2002; Korac, 2003; UNHCR, 2007). If “the opportunity to pursue an economically rewarding and thus socially regulated occupation” is an essential aspect of recognition as “social esteem” (Honneth, 2008: 75), prohibiting employment denies people a significant form of recognition.

The right to work was ended without debate in 2002 on the grounds (i) that it was a discretionary right that was no longer needed because claims were being determined more quickly, and (ii) that the asylum process needed to be protected from false claims by economic migrants (Refugee Council, 2005: 5). As discussed previously, the distinction between asylum seekers and economic migrants is a troublesome distinction which privileges political rights over economic rights and segregates the rights of citizens, migrants and asylum seekers (cf Hayden, 2006: 474). Despite continuing delays in considering claims, that distinction remains central to the Home Office’s justification for refusing employment:
The government believes that managed economic migration is a valuable source of skills and labour for the UK economy, and maintains recognised routes into the UK for those seeking to work. It is important to maintain the distinction between economic migration and asylum. Allowing failed asylum seekers to work would also be likely to encourage asylum applications from those without a well founded fear of persecution, thus slowing down the processing of applications made by genuine refugees and compromising the integrity of our asylum system.

(Letter from UKBA to Tony Lloyd MP, 7 August 2008, in response to a letter from me about the right to work and destitution recommendations in the Independent Asylum Commission’s third report, Deserving Dignity.)

Here again, the figure of the ‘failed’ asylum seeker lurks in close proximity to that of the ‘genuine’ refugee. The motives of people seeking asylum are suspect and they are not recognized as “a valuable source of skills and labour”. Yet, their skills and resourcefulness are amply demonstrated in their involvement in voluntary work (cf Marfleet, 2006: 289). The segregation in state policy is contradictory: whereas work is seen as a social good for citizens, who are bound to work by many constraints, it is not seen as a right or a social good for people seeking asylum. The effects of sudden and prolonged worklessness were recognized by the government’s announcement in April 2009 of £13,000,000 to provide counselling for people made jobless as a result of recession (The Independent, 2009). However, discourses of work are organized differently for people seeking asylum. While some of my participants have benefited from mental health services, inadequate resourcing of services means that people seeking asylum may join lengthy waiting lists while new stresses caused by current conditions of existence exacerbate existing conditions.

The Joint Committee on Human Rights highlighted the effects of government policies. It concluded that:

...by refusing permission to work and operating a system of support which results in widespread destitution, the government’s

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36 Again, lengthy waiting lists for services may affect other sectors of the population.

37 A joint committee of the House of Commons and House of Lords.
treatment of asylum seekers in a number of cases reaches [sic] the Article 3 ECHR threshold of inhuman and degrading treatment. (Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2007: 41, paragraph 120)

Nonetheless, when questioned about destitution on 19 March 2009, Lord West, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Security and Counter-terrorism, immediately elides economic and forced migrants into a single figure which threatens the UK:

…this is a wonderful country and I should think that there are probably millions of people around the world who for economic reasons would rather live here – and we must have some sort of control on this.

The prohibition of employment is part of a system of control, managing migration through deterrence, which confines the right to work to those who are seen as economically and socially desirable. In a subsequent response, Lord West states that:

…each individual case is a personal tragedy…Clearly these people do not want to go back to where they came from, but a large number of them came here as economic migrants and we cannot afford to allow this country to be open to all those who would like to come here as economic migrants.

Lord West attempts to segregate “personal tragedy” from “public issues” rather than seeing the connections between “personal troubles” and public policy (Mills, 2000: 226). In his next response, Lord West enlarges the threat:

When I was in Calais, I was very aware of the huge number of people who want to get into this country…this is a wonderful country, so no wonder they all want to get over here. There were hundreds of them by the fences and so on whom we had to stop getting in and we have been very successful in ensuring that they do not cross the Channel. (Hansard, 19 March 2008, Column 334-336)

In a period of question and answer lasting about eight minutes, Lord West’s responses conflate the destitution of people refused asylum with economic migration to create a threatening image of “huge” numbers of people pressing against their containment, who would pour into this “wonderful country” if uncontrolled (for further analysis of metaphors of inundation, see
Chapter 3; Malkki, 1992; Turton, 2003a; Gedalof, 2007: 78). This conflation is very different in purpose from an egalitarian reconceptualization of the rights of all migrants which does not privilege political rights over economic rights. Lord West’s responses provide support for arguments that “British governments dominate and shape public discourse on asylum” (Statham, 2003: 174; cf Marfleet, 2006: 279-81). Discourse which conflates asylum and uncontrolled economic migration as threats to national security organizes the conditions of existence encountered by asylum seekers as policies and rules - for example, in relation to employment - and the practices of service deliverers and Border Agency officers. People living under conditions of existence so organized fit Young’s definition of people living under cultural imperialism: they “find themselves defined from the outside, positioned, placed, by a network of dominant meanings they experience as arising from elsewhere, from those with whom they do not identify and who do not identify with them” (Young, 1990: 59). Moreover, such discourse ignores one of the recommendations of the Joint Committee on Human Rights: “that Ministers recognise their responsibility to use measured language so as not to give ammunition to those who seek to build up resentment against asylum seekers, nor to give the media the excuse to write inflammatory or misleading articles” (2007: § 371).

I have no evidence from my research that anything occupies people’s minds when they come to the UK to seek asylum other than a desire for a place of safety (cf Robinson and Segrott, 2002). Like Mary, many people seeking asylum cherish an image of the UK as a place of welcome. However, once they begin to absorb and confront their conditions of existence, they see the prohibition of employment as affecting their well-being, their sense of personhood, their financial situation and their quality of life. The prohibition, designed to control and manage migration, enshrines human rights as citizen rights and denies social justice to non-citizens.
6.2 ON THE MARGINS OF “A DECENT LIFE”: FINANCIAL SUPPORT

In the absence of the right to work, people claiming asylum are forced to rely on state benefits. The forms and amounts of financial support are determined at national level, within structures of domination that assume that government knows what people need without consulting those affected. This expression of power/knowledge is not simply about government determining what is best for people; it is intended to deter people from pursuing their asylum cases or from being drawn to the UK by the exuberance of the welcome and the benefits on offer. The determination of the amount considered livable (to sustain physical life) is national, but its impact – on people’s abilities to make lives that sustain their personhood – is local. Financial support, like accommodation, is an encounter with government policy, but an encounter enacted in local practices and practitioners.

In general, the amount of support given to people who are claimants within the asylum process “is based on the amount of income support paid to permanent residents of the United Kingdom by the Department for Work and Pensions”. The amount “takes into account the fact that, unlike permanent residents who receive income support, asylum applicants do not have to pay bills for essentials such as electricity, gas and water” (UKBA website). However, in her study of destitution, Hannah Lewis emphasizes that “entitlement to apply for support does not mean entitlement to receive support” (Lewis, 2009: 6). People whose asylum application has been rejected may be eligible for short-term support while waiting to return to their country. “This is known as section 4 support because it is given under the terms of section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999” (UKBA website).

At the time I was undertaking my research, this was usually in the form of vouchers which tied recipients to specific supermarkets.

People feel keenly the effects of cash benefits set at a percentage of supplementary benefit and of vouchers that can be spent only at specific supermarkets (cf Doyle, 2008). Michael has depression, but is more anxious about his high blood pressure and cholesterol level. His condition is partly hereditary, but much of it is exacerbated by his situation. The living
allowance does not make it easy for him to afford a healthy diet (cf Sellen et al, 2002). For Joshua:

…the problem now is that there is rising inflation but…the value of the voucher is still remain the same. What we used to buy before with…the voucher - and we used to shop so many things - and now just a fraction of it. So…somebody is in your country, you deny that person the legal right to work, you say, “Ok, don’t work; we will take care of you”…But you have to give that person a decent living, you know. Because this is a rich nation, and a civilized nation…kids should not face any form of deprivation whatsoever. It’s against the CRC…

Joshua offers a reasoned objection to the situation that people find themselves in, trapped between being unable to provide themselves with “a decent living” and not being provided with one by a “rich nation” that prohibits them from looking after themselves. “Social policies in Britain have long operated with a view of responsibilities which sees them as a ‘natural’ property of relationships between spouses, between parents and children” (Finch and Mason, 1993: 178). Such a view might not be far from the kinds of social or kinship interdependence that many people seeking asylum are used to. However, employment is necessary for kinship responsibilities to be fulfilled. If, as Mills argues and Joshua demonstrates, there is a relationship between “personal troubles” and “public issues”, then “personal troubles” become a proper focus of public life and care-ful action to “maintain, continue, and repair ‘our world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible” (Tronto, 1993: 103) becomes a public responsibility.

Excluding people from “a decent living” forces them into poverty. My participants’ descriptions and analyses of the conditions of existence consequent on the prohibition of employment evoke Townsend’s account of poverty as “relative deprivation” which excludes people from “ordinary living patterns, customs and activities” (Townsend, 1979: 31). Conceptualizing poverty as exclusion draws close to Young’s concept of marginalization as “perhaps the most dangerous form of oppression. A whole category of

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people is expelled from useful participation in social life and thus potentially subjected to severe material deprivation^39 (Young, 1990: 53). Thinking of poverty as both material deprivation and social impoverishment which limits the expression and recognition of personhood in a variety of social settings foregrounds the social dimensions of livability. People seeking asylum “struggle to make a place in the world” (Turton, 2004: 28). They “depend on community with others for their development and well-being” (Engster, 2004: 128). In the UK, they are denied the possibility of making a place in the world, of community with others, through employment. This denial carries with it other denials, material and social, that threaten their physical and mental well-being and impoverish their lives. Employment assumes a huge importance as an absence in itself and as an absence of the living conditions and relationships that are nested in it.

6.3 MANAGING IN A WISE WAY: RESISTING THE EFFECTS OF “EMPLOYMENT PROHIBITED”

Prohibiting employment denies people self-determination. Lack of self-determination pervades the support system and has material consequences. Because vouchers (now Azure cards) restrict where people can shop, they may face long walks in all weathers, whatever their physical health, to and from the closest designated supermarket. This may not stock foods with which they are familiar or which are to their taste.\(^40\) Goods may be more expensive than they could find elsewhere. Shopping can be an experience humiliating to a sense of personhood: when assistants see your voucher, “they just throw things into your bag” (Sammy). The restrictions are detailed topics of discussion amongst asylum seekers campaigning for permission to

\(^{39}\) Young’s sentence ends “and even extermination”. It is difficult to think of the extermination of asylum seekers as a category since it is already a category with an endpoint in leave to remain or return (voluntary or involuntary). However, perhaps some shadow of extermination can be seen in efforts to deter and reduce the numbers of people seeking asylum in the UK.

\(^{40}\) Gatrell cites Avner Offer’s point that “Food is rich in codes of communication, memory and emotion. A forcible alteration of food habits goes to the very heart of tradition, expectations and identity” (Offer, 1989: 39, in Gatrell, 2005: 57).
work. People may face long walks, but they have no cash for shoe repairs. Possibilities of care for the self are restricted: men cannot afford to go to the barber; women may get round this by doing each other’s hair and sharing wigs. Washing machines\textsuperscript{41} are not provided in asylum seekers’ accommodation, but there is no money to use laundrettes: washing has to be done by hand and dried indoors, even when there are children.

Nonetheless, at the time of my research, people found ways to negotiate these restrictions. In some places, there were organized voucher exchange schemes whereby other people living locally bought the vouchers at face value as a way of assisting refugees\textsuperscript{42}. Where formal schemes did not operate, people might receive less than the face value of the vouchers, but this was sometimes worth more because they could determine where and how the money was spent. Charities may provide clothing. Individuals may help out with gifts of cash. Churches can play a significant rôle in giving people material support as well as caring for their spiritual needs. All that was in Michael’s room when he arrived was a bed and a cupboard. With the assistance of the church, he made his room more livable by furnishing it with tables, seating and prints. Michael receives companionship from his church community: because of the infrequency of services and the distance from his home, he joined a different church from the one he had been used to (cf Nolin, 2006: 170). Elizabeth’s church gave her “that washing machine…that fridge…that table…this bed”. Material assistance can denote care as “active sentience”: a bigger fridge, for example, means that Elizabeth, with limited mobility, needs to shop less frequently.

Churches can provide inclusion in sociality. Church members help Elizabeth to get out and about: “They pick me up, they go for meals…go to prayers…in summer, we did tours, we did weekend trips…It’s a very small church, there

\textsuperscript{41} Given that 96% of the population had access to a washing machine in 2008 (Office for National Statistics), this can be seen as an exclusion from “ordinary living patterns”.

\textsuperscript{42} The introduction of the Azure cards was intended to prevent such exchanges (Reynolds, 2010: 36).
are very few people but it’s very good”. Rachel escaped from her country with the assistance of her church. When she arrived, she “just went to church and enjoyed the word of God”. Later, when she applied for asylum, church members helped her to understand the process. Then she made friends through the church and through the organization she joined: “I really feel good because I met a lot of people and it gives me confidence.” Helen’s church is supporting her claim. When I attended training to support people in court, a clergyman told me that many Christians support people seeking asylum as acts of “witness” to their faith. This is an example of a practical ethic of care that corresponds to the ethics expressed and practised by many of my participants.

From another perspective, it is suggested that interpersonal solidarity in the form of charitable support for people seeking asylum may function as a palliative for lack of socially-just institutional support. It may become an alternative to justice when the path to justice seems hard and long. Further, there is a risk that the exercise and the rhetoric of compassion at both international and local scales can sediment the object of the compassion as subordinate (Ahmed, 2004: 22: cf Back, 2007: 41). Similarly, Harrell-Bond refers to “disempowerment through being helped” (Harrell-Bond, 1999: 137). I understand these objections as coming from perspectives of justice based on equality. However, equality has both ethical and practical dimensions: ethics recognizes all people as ontologically equal; critical realism recognizes that some people are not treated as social or political equals. Faced with this discrepancy, I would argue that various forms of caring activity are necessary: people seeking asylum make their lives here and now, in conditions that are not ideal. I would amend Harrell-Bond’s objection to state that people may be disempowered through the way they are helped.

While Mary critiques the negative effects of the denial of the right to work, like many participants she made resources from her past experience and opportunities in Manchester:

With my previous experience again of working with people in [my country], of going to the market and sourcing cheap stuff, here it was working now. I had to go to the market and try to buy goods.
you know in a wise way that when it’s summer I would go for winter clothes, when you find them quite cheaply, find some nice coats about a pound, two pounds…it comes to winter I’ll start buying summer clothes. That’s how I’ve been managing.

Mary brings “wisdom” from her past – “shopping in a wise way” – to help her manage in the present. She advocates and practises thrift and care for resources: neither material resources nor human lives should go to waste. As feminist economists have observed, “a great deal of work goes into converting a pay check, or any other kind of money, into the satisfying of human needs” (Tronto, 1993: 107). Mary represents herself positively as able to manage because of her previous experience. In this way, she is able to retain some of “the feelings of effectiveness and the recognition linked to work” (McCollum, 1990: 22).

My participants perceive the right to work as remedying many of the conditions that block their pathways to more livable lives, for example education that involves payments of one kind or another. As a refused asylum seeker, Emily said that she was excluded from access to public funds; if she and her husband had the right to work, they would be able to afford childcare and she would be able to study: “all our problems would be solved”43. Beyond compulsory schooling, people seeking asylum, like many poorer citizens, encounter oppression in relation to education as funding policies “prevent some people from learning…satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognized settings” (Young, 1990: 38).

Relative poverty has consequences for educational opportunities and articulates with other restrictions, including the ability to afford recreational activities. Young refers to this as “institutionalized social processes which inhibit people’s ability to play” (Young, 1990: 38). The person who referred to his desire for a life “like other people” longed for some difference between a working week and the weekend. Sammy said that he had never been to the cinema - life was “absolutely boring”. Because she could not afford to take her daughter to the cinema, Mary “thought why not have a cinema in the

43 Now that they have leave to remain, Emily is training to be a nurse.
house through the television”. While acknowledging the restrictions on social life, Mary detailed her resourcefulness, applying her reasoning ability and her practice of thrift to new situations. Exclusion from work is a form of oppression which excludes people seeking asylum from activities taken for granted by much of the population. Nonetheless, people struggle against material deprivations and constraints which deny them recognition as “practical people”: they demonstrate their practicality by managing their material resources and finding ways to care for others and themselves.

However, the prohibition of employment and inadequate financial support or destitution can drive people to work illegally. Habib said, “asylum seekers…need to live. They have no permission to work, but in the same time they have no support so they have to work…illegally to get food and they are scared.” Illegal work puts people’s claims at risk. Further, it puts them at risk of exploitation, “a steady process of the transfer of the results of the labor of one social group to benefit another” (Young, 1990: 49). Sammy said that he understood how some people could feel “forced” to do illegal work. While he didn’t want to break the rules, he didn’t blame people who do “cheeky things”. Joshua said, “We are not allowed to work, so it’s like frustrating people. So, if people do go to work illegally, these are some of the issues around it.”

When material support is limited or withheld, and when the means of gaining support through employment is denied, basic human needs for food and shelter are denied. If people for whom employment is prohibited exert agency by finding employment, this could rebound on their claims for asylum. This leads to the production of oppressive conditions of existence in which people seeking asylum are forced to accept benefits which deny them what Joshua calls “a decent living” or, refused benefits, are denied the means of making a living for themselves. While people who are able to claim asylum in the UK may seem privileged compared with those who remain in camps, my participants draw attention to the ways in which, in the midst of “a rich nation”, government policy keeps them in relative poverty on the very margins of “a decent life”.

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6.4 “PART OF THEMSELVES WAS DENIED”: MARY’S NARRATIVE

Mental and physical well-being, recognition of personhood, financial security and some continuity of accustomed practices are constitutive of livability. Mary traces personal and collective “hurt” to the denials imposed by government policies:

I want to take the main negative part of it. Why I take the main negative part of it, looking at it six years now, what I could have given back to the community. I would say it is sort of a pride within the government that “We are ok – we don’t need your assistance. It is you who came over here who need the assistance.” But that’s not how life works. So that has hurt me so much: to be denied something which I can give back. Look at it this way: that I am running away from a problem; you go to someone that you think can help you, but that person says “No, you stop here.” So, being denied something, that I could not understand…I am focusing on the government, the system, how it operates.

Mary perceives UK Government policy, with its insistence on knowing what is best for people seeking asylum, as denying her the ability to reciprocate, to make a contribution, to use “satisfying and expansive skills” in work settings. She emphasizes that it is government policy, at odds with her knowledge of and connections with white people in her country, and not typical of all white people in the UK, that has caused her “hurt”. Prohibiting employment does violence to her self-understanding and sense of being valued which results in the bodily experience of “hurt”. In describing the effects of government policy, Mary’s self-representation alters from someone who wants to “look at the positive side of things” to someone who has been “hurt”. Moreover, denial of the right to work is not only a demonstration of power/knowledge by the state, representing itself as knowing people better than they know themselves, it is a denial of recognition\textsuperscript{44} of the personhood of people seeking asylum:

\textsuperscript{44} Indeed, in the context of differential rights for citizens and non-citizens, it may be seen as an example of a misrecognition which “functions to differentiate between subjects...those who seem to belong and those who might already be assigned a place - out of place – as ‘suspect’” (Ahmed, 2000: 23).
…people from [my country] are hard-working people and coming here, denied to work, it was really something that people felt, you know, part of themselves was denied, quite a huge thing that they were used to doing. (My emphasis)

Here, Mary asserts counter-knowledge, categorizing people from her country as hard-working in resistance to the ways in which cultural imperialism denies their personhood. She politicizes her memory, mobilizing it as a resource “that distinguishes nostalgia, that longing for something to be as it once was, a kind of useless act, from that remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present” (hooks, 1990: 147). In her study of Italian migrants in Britain, Anne-Marie Fortier refers to “elements of the past” as “temporary references in the processes of creating new terrains of belonging that will be differently re-membered” (Fortier, 2000: 175). In the moment of the denial of employment, memory serves to contest the denial of a desired terrain of belonging.

The prohibition of employment is a repeated instantiation of the block Mary found to pursuing her nursing studies:

    When I did Access to Nursing…I believe that was taxpayers’ money. It did not make me happy at all. To me it was like using the taxpayers’ money then throwing it in the bin. Because having done that study, I really wanted to give back to the community. But towards the end I was blocked, I could not go any further. So why allow me to use this money and then deny me?

Mary’s rational analysis puts “through a sieve” (Anzaldúa, 2007: 104) the ‘blocks’ and ‘denials’ of the asylum regime, catching the lumps of its paradoxes, irrationality and cruelty. The denial of work and study inhibits people’s ability to make livable lives: “when I came over here, I just that felt it was a continuation of what I was doing back home. Nothing should actually stop. That’s where I started meeting sort of areas of what I could do and what I could not do.” Mary’s desire for continuation illustrates that, while people seeking asylum are forced by their situation to make new lives, their wishes

45 Being hard-working is a common claim by migrants (cf Fortier, 2000: 146 on Italian mothers).
for new lives are wishes for security. They do not want rupture in every aspect of their lives. Work is an important “organizing and stabilizing factor in psychic life” (Grinberg and Grinberg, 1989: 95). It allows the exercise of skills, provides satisfaction and enables “self-respect”. It enables people to function as adults rather than infantilizing them as people “who need…assistance”. Work incorporates people into society and gives an outlet for their creative capacities, with “reparatory benefits to the self” (Grinberg and Grinberg, 1989: 95-96). Thus, work is vital for the recognition of people as human and, specifically, for caring for people seeking asylum in ways that maintain and repair cherished aspects of their worlds.

In a lengthy sequence, Mary describes the effects of not being able to work. When “you’ve got no access to the world outside you, you tend to focus more on your problem and that can bring illness in you. That brings depression”. However, depression is not the end of the story:

When you are depressed, what happens? You are going to use more of the government resources; you are going to the hospital now. When you go to the hospital, what is going to happen to my daughter? Someone is going to come in and look after my daughter – that’s more government resources. And not only that; my daughter will be worrying what is happening to her mother. She is not going to perform well in school. That’s another problem; so it is a bigger problem which is being created.

Many of the people who spoke to me were suffering, or had suffered, from depression and other forms of ill-health. However, Mary goes beyond describing feelings to analyze the exponential harms that are the consequences of prohibiting employment. Through a series of rhetorical questions and answers, she specifies the links in an irrational and wasteful relational chain between public policy and “personal troubles” (Mills, 2000: 226). Just as she counts the cost of not being allowed to continue with her nursing studies, Mary emphasizes that government policy on employment wastes human and financial resources.

For Mary, the government’s view seems to be that “you should appreciate what we are doing for you and you should stay here until we say it’s ok”. The government induces powerlessness by not recognizing her as an adult, as
someone with the right to self-determination and self-development. She reiterates the effect of government policies: “It hurts me...to be giving this negative a picture”; “We have been hurt”. Mary talks in terms of lack of recognition consistent with her self-understanding being felt as “moral injury” (Honneth, 2008: 133-134). Here also is an implicit understanding of government policy as exerting a form of power/knowledge in relation to the needs of people seeking asylum. Mary contrasts what might have been a genuine “thank you” to the government with its expectation that people should appreciate the passivity in which it attempts to keep them. Helen’s description of this condition is “being kept at home, like a pet”. Instead of demonstrating care as continuation or repair, government policies inflict suffering.

Mary then goes beyond critique to advocate a more care-ful way of treating people seeking asylum. What she wants is “someone who can be sort of be with you, who can take the temperature, feel the temperature, and help you through the process” (my emphasis). I suggest that when Mary is asking for someone to take her temperature she is asking for a caring relationship oriented towards repairing her world. In the context of people seeking asylum, this implies a cluster of dispositions and practices which I consider in more detail in Chapter 8. The effect of having someone to “feel the temperature, and help” would be the feeling that “you are practical people in the community”. Being a practical person is the opposite of being “blocked” “denied” and “hurt” through being unable to contribute. Mary concludes this section of her narrative by connecting “being helped by the government” with “contributing to the government and making a relationship with the community around me”. She hypothesizes a virtuous circle of positive effects against the vicious circle of problems she presented earlier.

Mary asserts an ethical basis for her critique:

…all people is the face of God...It’s not up to me to, to discriminate them...to deny them access to whatever should be available to them....a God who says he created everything in the world and everything should be yours.
Mary expresses ethical principles which foreground people’s *equality* in entitlement to enjoy worldly goods. Employment is an important part of the “everything” to which people should have access. Like many of my participants, Mary draws on religious faith, as well as memories of her parents and her “community back home”, as powerful resources to sustain her in difficult times. Like Elizabeth, she believes that she is “here for a purpose…God uplifts you for his purpose, to deliver something.” Mary grew up in a Christian family and had responsibilities within the church community in her country, which is something she has been able to continue in Manchester. Later in this Chapter, I look further at some of the pathways to meaningful activity that Mary and other people found, and the ways in which they translated their values into practice.

The hurts of government policy remain with Mary, but she resists being defined by their “stickiness”. There came a point when she decided to “stand firm”, to stop running away: “It’s how I have been brought up by my parents, the education, everything, how you communicate with people. Go out and ask the questions and meet the people who should answer you.” Mills argues that part of formulating “public issues” and “personal troubles” is to “ask what values are cherished yet threatened” (2000: 11). Mary’s narrative demonstrates the cognitive processes and cherished values she has brought with her and which she uses to challenge government policies which prohibit “learning and using satisfying skills in socially recognized settings” (Young, 1990: 38).

Mary puts forward ethics which advocate communication and understanding between people. She urges recognition of people seeking asylum in terms of their own self-understandings and, like Dummett (2007), treats all humans as equal in what is due to them. Her values are evident in both the mode and the content of her narrative. While evoking feelings of “hurt” as values transgressed, her narrative proceeds by means of logic and analysis which challenge the irrationality and lack of ethics which pervade government policy as it fails to recognize the sentience of people seeking asylum, as it excludes them from contributing – indeed, denies that they have anything to contribute.
6.5 “THE SPLINTER”: HABIB’S NARRATIVE

Habib’s narrative illustrates a trajectory which is not uncommon amongst my participants: from “client” of an organization to “management committee member”. The contrast between “where I was and where I am now…is very important”. Moving from receiving help to giving help and contributing in other ways, learning and using skills, is an important route to human flourishing. I look at extracts from Habib’s narrative in order to: (i) foreground the ways he speaks about his life, (ii) give some insights into the ways he sees himself as having changed, the emotional, cognitive, organizational and caring work involved. Whereas Mary’s narrative proceeds step by step, Habib’s gives a sense of the immediacy of intermingled feelings and cognitive activity, of past and present, as well as the tensions some of my participants indicated in their relationships with different forms and absences of work. Habib:

…started erm volunteering, because I used to go the office to get some help, filling forms…my English wasn’t good or, I don’t know, you can say my confidence wasn’t…also I was in a very, very, what do they call that, depression, or my situation wasn’t ok, er afraid of…being deported and fighting my case, confusion in my immigration case being granted, and then after four years they said, no, it was a mistake. And I have been detained, put in the, you can say it is jail, it is not a detention…and we mixed with criminals from all over the world…And then, you er know, because I take anti-depression [medication], my health is not good, not sleeping, um scared, isolated, um, so when I started volunteering, and I even - I remember that when I have started to go to the office erm er in the reception as assistant, as receptionist, and it was really looks to me something huge work, which is I don’t know if I will do it or not. Even that I, er you know, have worked for about eighteen years…I served lots of people from different languages, different regions, yeah…people they used to understand me...

Habib describes some of the impacts of the asylum regime on his mental and physical well-being: loss of confidence, depression, confusion, and fear. He had learned English in his country to help with his work, but this was interrupted when learning or speaking English became suspect activities in his country. His treatment as an asylum seeker exacerbated his mistreatment in his country, diminishing his confidence, including his ability to speak English. He lost the sense of recognition that comes from feeling understood...
by people. Habib lost “the feelings of effectiveness and the recognition linked to work” (McCollum 1990, 22). Nonetheless, he struggled to regain the connection between recognition and the deployment of skills:

...when I started [to] volunteer here...I said, “Oh my God, I don’t know if I can cope with that.” Erm, and I don’t know what to do...I wasn’t ok, I need to go out, I want to talk to people, I want to be engaged, you know, because always thinking and banging my head...and then I became busy little bit and then er my er, I don’t know, my confidence came back little bit, yeah, and I fought back...fought my case, and I won my case...and my activities became...a lot of activities.

Habib suffered from the isolation and “always thinking” consequent on “employment prohibited”, his feelings of frustration embodied in “banging [his] head”. Voluntary work and other activities began to restore his confidence.

...I am still suffering from my memory [bad memories]. And I face two things: that I want to do everything and I face in the same time um, you know, not organized very well, not very well organized. [Sighs] That is stressful as well. So, I feel I am better, but the problem still there. My memory is better but, I mean it’s not worse, so it is not, the problem is there, but it’s not as worse as it was, so there is some progress...The biggest problem, always threatening me, which makes me feel erm sad, the failure. I do hate the failure.

Habib represents himself as having made progress; however, progress is precarious. Activity makes him feel better, but is suffused with emotion and ambivalence. Fear of deportation has given way to sadness and fear of failure as he demands more and more of himself. He has taken on increasing numbers of activities, including setting up his own community organization. Habib internalizes what he feels other people are going through:

...I really progress when I strong in social life, erm community, er politics, ah, I think I feel everybody outside...Yes, I feel a lot of it. I mean I feel all of them; I feel the positive and the negative. So I feel all the people, how they feel, how they think. I feel it, erm ah, it’s affecting me inside...

Because of the precarious situation of so many members of his community, his sentience both energizes and debilitates him. Habib speaks of the costs of his constant activity (his mobile phone is constantly ringing). Habib, too,
never seems to switch off: because he is so busy, his “family is suffering”. Sometimes voluntary activity becomes an all-engrossing life work. Anna, whose husband found work as a chemist after the Second World War, describes how she chose not to engage in paid employment because his voluntary activities frequently took him away from children and home.

Habib intertwines his ambitions for himself and his community:

And I want to study also, for myself, actually. I want to, I want people to be proud of me…as much as you are educated, it is good…I tell people that they can go and learn but they have to be first…strong…But I have to…set an example. Yes, that’s what I do. Hem. [Sighs] So that means a lot…I work with [people], you know, I don’t help them, I work with them…I try to take them from one side to the other side, which is they come to the side which is the darkness of ignorance, erm lack of information, and I mean I see them in the side that I was in, so I have, you know, when I see somebody in this situation I feel responsible and I feel, and I have to do this quickly. So, now they are a lot and I am one.

He wants to be recognized, to set an example as someone people will be proud of both because of his education and because of his ethic of responsibility to others. He sees people as suffering the conditions of existence, for example the lack of information that he suffered. His commitment to work with them indicates the way that both men and women can care about people and care for them in ways that repair their worlds and recognize their sentience as adults.

Habib feels for people and he feels responsible. His religion is an important aspect of his ethic of responsibility: “I come to my deen which is the religion. I think ‘religion’…in translation of Arabic is limited word, it is not right, but deen is more in Arabic”. For Habib, religious, ethical and political understandings and practices are intertwined and come together in what he calls his “messages”. He wants his work with his community to transform the way that they are seen and the way that they see British people. His community is “not accepted”; it “is really…isolated”. His community is made to feel like:

…a splinter in your body, and that it is strange and it will bleed and you don’t want to accept, so that’s what I felt in society here. I saw very, very, yellow we call it, yellow smile; we’ve got real smile and yellow smile…False smile. People smile at you, but you feel that
they hate you from inside. And we have no trust, we have…no acceptance, yeah. We feel that we are not accepted, not trusted. And we are strangers – one day we will be kicked out, yeah. And the government, the government, we don’t trust them so we mix between people and the government as one body…But anyway, so the community was isolated, they had no participation in the society…

The image of people seeking asylum as a splinter inverts the experience of violence, as though it is the existing population rather than people seeking asylum who have been “hurt”. Ahmed’s analogy between the imagined “ideal neighbourhood and a healthy body” is insightful here: both are healthy when they are “sealed” (Ahmed, 2000: 25). Habib understands that his community is hated and mistrusted as a painful intrusion of strangeness into the imagined order of the local. His sense of his community’s isolation reiterates his own sense of rejection from the body of society. But he has learned a different message, that his community:

…don’t see that people are different from government…they see British people part of the government. That is how they see them. And that is very important. People outside of Britain they must know that British people is different from the government and there is nice people, not all of them bad. That is one of my messages; that is what I do now.

He has taken on the rôle of an “organic” intellectual: translating his “messages” into action, into care for his community, setting up an association for refugees from his country⁴⁶. This succeeded in running a number of social events and in making connections with the broader population, with other refugee organizations and with political organizations and activists. Through action and through connecting with people and organizations:

…my ideas changed, my…negativity…and talk about the British society, how it’s linked with the government, changed, so…one of my commitments is to show this to my people and bring them and touch them because I feel there is a big gap between the society and the community, our community, or the hosts and the guests,

⁴⁶ In seeing my participants as translating their values into practice, I do not mean to suggest that this is a simple linear process. I see their critique and their practice as reiterative and mutually constitutive processes.
we are guests here. So there is a big gap, no trust, no understanding, no dialogue, no relationship...So it has changed and I, people realized that a lot of British people they are very nice and they stood against the [Iraq] war...and we found how much the government was corrupt and used people er to destroy another country and lies to convince them, to get them agreeing that yeah the war is necessary...

Habib and Mary locate themselves “within a social context” (Reed-Danahay, 1997: 9), connecting their “personal troubles” and suffering with local and geopolitical “public issues” and policies. From seeing himself and his “people” as isolated, Habib makes sense of their place in a political economy that destroys another country and creates “a big gap” between people seeking asylum and the “hosts”. ‘Touching’ people becomes a transformative move, the opposite of being made to feel like a splinter. If social justice is about creating the conditions for self-determination and self-development, one of those conditions is the understanding that the personal is political, that care cannot be confined to a feminized personal sphere.

6.6 “SPACES OF HOPE”? VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS

Despite government policy, at the local scale my participants obtain support and engage in a variety of meaningful activity through churches, refugee organizations, other charities and networks of individuals. Indeed, there are so many charitable organizations oriented to or encompassing refugees in the Manchester area48 that one of the problems for people seeking asylum is knowing what is on offer, especially when they are new to the area and attended by caseworkers varying in their disposition to show care. Access to sources of information may depend on knowledge of English or one of the

47 According to Tristram Hunt (2007: 42), Benjamin Disraeli had Manchester in mind when he wrote Sybil, or, The Two Nations (1845). Between these two nations, Disraeli wrote, “there is no intercourse and no sympathy; [they] are as ignorant of each other’s habits, thoughts and feelings, as if they were…inhabitants of different planets.”
48 The MRSN/ Refugee Action Directory (June 2007) includes 80 refugee community organizations (RCOs) and over 60 support agencies for refugees and people seeking asylum.
languages into which leaflets are translated, or having someone, like Marwa, willing and able to interpret. My participants speak about voluntary organizations - churches, refugee organizations, and more broad-based organizations - as offering: (i) information, advice and support; (ii) help with meeting material needs; (iii) social activity and friendship; (iv) meaningful activity and work experience; (v) training; (vi) restoration of confidence and skills; (vii) ways of supporting and caring for others. These benefits are often mutually constitutive; for example, obtaining information from people who listen may restore the confidence to act of people seeking asylum; consequently, they may feel able to take advantage of training opportunities and participate as volunteers. Again, fluency in English makes it easier to access these opportunities. Many organizations provide opportunities for activities supportive of a "good life": using existing skills and learning new ones; giving their views and being listened to; enjoying recreational moments (cf Young, 1990: 38).

Plainly, voluntary organizations are set up with different purposes: some construct relationships in which people seeking asylum are clients; in some, they are ‘members’. According to their purposes, they can provide care through the production of "spaces of hope" (Harvey, 2000) in contrast to the oppressions of the conditions of existence of asylum. In the organizations I worked with, the circle is a common physical arrangement: people are included as equals. The circle is enlarged to ensure that no one is left outside, evoking Gilligan’s "ethics of justice and care…the vision that everyone will be responded to and included, that no one will be left alone or hurt. (Gilligan, 2001: 63). Within the circle, people can look each other in the face and make decisions about the direction of the organization and their own participation in it; they can feel respected and listened to; they can use and gain experience (cf Carey-Wood, 1997: 41).

Often people gain in several ways at once. Marwa joined a refugee organization which gave her “help and experience” and training. She learned “how the government works and what rights I have”. She has met people (Members of Parliament, for example) as an organization representative, and contributed advocacy and interpreting skills. She shares her knowledge with
her community and passes their knowledge on to organizations and people able to influence decision-making. Belonging to an organization gives Helen “courage”. She has become active in artistic performances and campaigning. The organizations that Joshua works with give him “confidence”; his activity as a volunteer keeps him “occupied”. At one meeting I attended, he referred to coming from “work” at one of the agencies where he is a regular volunteer. He has now added campaigning to his volunteering.

Joshua regards the free training he receives through volunteering as particularly beneficial. Early on in my research, I attended a meeting of a voluntary organization for refugees where members were invited to share recent experiences of training. As a former adult education teacher and someone privileged to return to education as a mature student, I was moved by their accounts of the value they put on the training they had accessed through colleges, universities and voluntary organizations. Much of the training is community-oriented: community leadership training, community audit skills, courses for translators, training for trainers, advice worker training, victim support and witness services, health and social care advocacy. Some of it enables people to acquire certification in English, maths, bookkeeping and IT, for example. I met people who were members of Reache, an organization which helps asylum seekers with a medical background through English lessons and medical training. This ensures that skills are developed rather than lost, and helps create bridges to employment for people granted leave to remain. Opportunities for training and education are highly valued as part of an ethic of care for the self and others. Conversely, denying such opportunities causes “hurt”. It “blocks” access to human flourishing.

While my participants speak positively about volunteering, Mary complicates the story. She describes how she became involved in different types of voluntary activity, first with her church, next setting up a group for women from her country. Then she attended a workshop about “voluntary opportunities” because:

…something came out in the newspapers about the government sort of forcing refugees and asylum seekers to take up voluntary
work and it was sort of a negative thing about taking up voluntary work so I was really interested in attending this workshop and really understanding what voluntary work is all about, what was behind it – are there any hidden issues or anything like that. Personally, I really wanted to go out and work so I really liked to do voluntary work.

Mary is probably referring to the Government proposals contained in “The Path to Citizenship: Next Steps to Reforming the Immigration System” (Home Office, 2008). The proposals included ‘earning the right to stay’ through, for example, community work: this was “a positive way in which newcomers could demonstrate a commitment to Britain by making every possible effort to integrate into the local communities where they lived” (Home Office, 2008: 16, §81, my emphasis). However, “some took the view that we should not ask newcomers to sign-up [sic] to things that many British citizens did not get involved in” (Home Office, 2008: 16, §82). The singling out of “newcomers” to “demonstrate a commitment to Britain” indicates a reason why voluntary work might have acquired “negative” associations for Mary. The proposals required migrants to demonstrate a “right contribution to our Country” (Home Office, 2008: 6) through, for example, English language ability and community work that is not required of those whose citizenship comes from birth. This binary between citizens and those who are not (yet) citizens replicates other binaries in what is expected of or (not) available to non-citizens. Furthermore, it is difficult not to see the potential for exploitation when people are obliged to undertake unpaid work that might otherwise require some form of public funding. At the simplest level, the value of voluntary work is in its voluntariness: it is a thread of self-determination as well as meaningful activity.

From my participants’ perspective, voluntary work can also be instrumental. Working with voluntary organizations, paid or unpaid, may be useful for cvs for both citizens and people granted leave to remain. In time, that activity, as “the right to a private life” (Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights) could be relevant to fresh claims and appeals by people seeking asylum. Moreover, experience of volunteering can open new career paths. Joshua and Marwa have become interested in community work. Marwa said
that her “mum wanted me to be like her…a nurse or a doctor…but now because I’m more involved with the communities and I feel that kind of thing I’m interested in so I’m now thinking to apply for a community and youth work degree.” Interest in community work features in several narratives. For some people it is a new pathway created out of the conditions of asylum. Education and training are partly about “self-development” (Young, 1990: 37), but they are also about routes to employment and routes to recognition: Habib wants to study for himself – and also wants people to be “proud” of him. According to their situatedness, for example differences of class, profession, and place in the division of labour, people may be accustomed to think of work in terms of self-fulfilment. Elizabeth said that her “intention was to come to this country as a qualified social worker…to come and work here for five years, and go back home. Just to self-actualize, not for anything else.”

Some of my participants see volunteering as creating pathways for paid employment in the future. Huda says that she tells people “to do some volunteering…do some volunteer work within communities. That will help. You will get a reference if you are volunteering.” Other people express keen awareness of lost opportunities: one young man waiting in an advice centre said “Who will compensate me for the lost years?” Sammy, having taken an interpreter course, emphasizes how much money he could earn if he were employed as an interpreter rather than working voluntarily in that capacity. He feels that the government should do something immediately about the right to work; he would rather work seventy hours a week than sign on for benefits. Rachel, too, would rather have the right to work than “charity”. Elizabeth believes that she “can still work…and earn a living…I don’t want to be on benefits, except some…maybe like disability living allowance…I don’t see myself living on benefits, no way.” James, with the right to work, prefers to be employed in voluntary work although it is less well paid than interpreting. Many people remain involved in advice-giving and support activities (paid and unpaid) even when they have the right to work. Voluntary work is important for many reasons: in the context of “employment prohibited”, it offers, in Sammy’s words, “friends and activities”. It may also become, as we see in Habib’s narrative, an ethic of responsibility in practice,
a way people can do justice to those more recently arrived and going through the conditions of existence they encountered. It becomes a way people can offer others the advice and support – the care – they would have liked to receive.

**CONCLUSION**

“Employment prohibited” is a “block” that that creates a distinction between people seeking asylum and other migrants and citizens. It causes suffering and affects people’s ability to flourish. People speak of the effects of the prohibition as: loss of skills; loss of confidence; enforced idleness and isolation in which they dwell on their anxieties; depletion of mental or physical well-being; lack of social contact; lack of money; loss of an accustomed daily practice that constructs aspects of self-identity (cf Doyle, 2009). These lacks and losses impact on each other, each aggravating others. Loss of skills and an accustomed daily practice may lead to loss of confidence, which exacerbates the loss of skills. Conversely, employment is seen as an activity that can help to take people’s minds off their anxieties about their asylum cases, rather than sitting isolated and dwelling on those anxieties. Joshua warns: “You sit without doing anything, you have so many things to worry about, worry to get real stress - every day it will be there.” Moreover, the harmful effects of negative experiences during the period of the asylum process may not easily be thrown off if leave to remain is granted:

...factors such as homelessness, life in a reception or detention centre, isolation and separation from family, restrictions on the right to work, dependency on in-kind benefits, and the stigma often associated with being an asylum seeker can have lasting and debilitating effects on asylum-seekers, compelling them to conduct their lives on the margins of society. (UNHCR, 2007: 3)

Activities and opportunities provided by voluntary organizations can, to some extent, offset these effects.

In this Chapter, I have used a framework of social justice to analyze “employment prohibited” as a specific organization of “diaspora space” where economic and political processes (Brah, 2005: 208) not only cause physical
and psychic “hurt” and oppression but also provoke resistance, assertions of ethics and values. Government policy which prohibits employment in the interest of “managed migration” transgresses the universal human right to work. The prohibition of employment is, for most of my participants, the key oppression in the conditions of existence of asylum. They speak of its articulation with the exclusions brought about by poverty, especially the possibility of further or higher education. People seeking asylum may be abjected – treated, as Habib says, like a splinter which the national body seeks to expel. Young’s concepts of oppression and domination provide an analytical framework whose dimensions are similar to the ways in which my participants analyze their conditions of existence. People speak about rights, fair distribution of social goods and economic resources, recognition of personhood, needs and care: these all support livability. In narrating “personal troubles”, hardships and suffering, they show how “public issues” reverberate in the effects of “employment prohibited”. They resist the effects of the prohibition, and the prohibition itself, by confronting and contextualizing their emotions – and those imposed on them - to release their “stickiness”. Drawing, for example, on memories of life elsewhere as embodying the ethics which have been transgressed, they critique their conditions of existence and assert rights and values which should include them. They find other forms of meaningful activity, self-development and sociality, often by supporting others as they have been supported - or wish they had been supported - through involvement in voluntary organizations. Some take on the rôle of “organic intellectuals”, campaigning for rights and values that could be translated to other marginalized groups.

Yet, while I am moved by people’s struggles to engage with their conditions of existence to make livable lives, I am haunted also by knowing people for whom this is not enough, whose accommodation has become, for them, an iron cage of regulation and depression. In the next Chapter, I examine the most significant aspect of the iron cage: the asylum claim procedure.
“PLEASE DON’T TALK ANY LIES ANY MORE”: ASYLUM APPLICATION PROCEDURES AND THE POWER OF DISBELIEF

INTRODUCTION

In this Chapter, I consider what my participants say about the policies, rules and practices which they encounter during the asylum application process. They identify specific issues which I have clustered together to give a sense of the repeated manifestations of oppression in their lives. First, people speak about government rules: the right to make rules and the rules themselves. Second, they discuss the enactment of the rules, their encounters with bureaucracy and bureaucrats. They sometimes distinguish between the asylum rules and their implementation by UKBA officers and legal professionals. I examine to what extent distinctions between policy and practice, structure and agency, are tenable. Third, I analyse the way people speak about power and knowledge within what they experience as a “culture of disbelief” (Marfleet, 2006: 233; Moorhead, 2006: 136). Fourth, I examine the rôle of interpreters and translations in the asylum claim process. Fifth, I discuss what people say about the asymmetries and injustices of legal aid. Sixth, I consider their evocations of the fear and vulnerability produced by the asylum process. As in the two previous Chapters, I consider the resources people mobilize against the way the asylum system conditions their existence: their sentience expressed through emotions, critiques, ethics and campaigns, religious beliefs and, simply, hope.

People discuss the right to make rules, the ethics of the rules and the way that they are administered in terms of transgressions of human rights and the human suffering they cause. Their suffering is an unheard rather than “silent residue of policy” (Foucault, 2002d: 475). Many of my participants critique the
asylum rules and their administration as failing to think about their impact on people’s lives. Conversely, the consequences can be seen as the effect of asylum policies designed to deter and restrict asylum applications and “demagnetise” the UK (Somerville, 2007: 65-68; cf Dummett, 2007: Chapter 7). In the latter case, “personal troubles” may be understood as the absence of a deontological ethic, a failure to recognize the sentience of people seeking asylum, to “give them their due” (Dummett, 2007: 27), which is deliberate rather than an oversight.

Looming over, intersecting with and permeating the lived experience of all the conditions of existence of asylum are the Home Office rules and procedures governing applications for leave to remain. My participants speak about their experiences of these rules and procedures as so unrelenting that I see them as producing “states of domination” in which “power relations are fixed in such a way that they are perpetually asymmetrical and allow an extremely limited margin of freedom”. Within that margin, people remain “in a state of domination” when the options open to them are “ultimately only stratagems” that fail to reverse the asymmetries of power (Foucault, 2000: 292)\textsuperscript{49}. In this Chapter, I examine some of the asymmetries of the legal and administrative procedures entailed in claiming asylum, the ways in which asymmetries operate, and the ways that they affect the possibility of human flourishing.

People speak about rules and their emotions, but they speak also about their values and actions. They speak about their values and actions, but they speak also about asylum rules as moments of contact that produce “coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (Pratt, 2003: 4, 6). The legal procedures connect with specific forms of (mis)recognition which shape, and limit, justice and care. As in the two previous Chapters, I use Young’s concepts of domination and oppression (Young, 1990) as a framework appropriate to the terms in which my participants speak. I ask what difference it would make to connect questions of care and justice, and

\textsuperscript{49} Foucault gives the example of the options for action open to married women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
what such a connection might look like in practice. I draw on those aspects of my participants’ narratives that deal with the emotions produced by the legal process, their critiques of aspects of the process, the values that they bring to bear, and the limited resistant activities in which they are able to engage. I do not attempt a detailed review of every aspect of the asylum application and appeal process. I focus on the aspects raised by my participants and the modes in which they spoke about them, to examine the ways in which the asylum application process positions people – and the consequences for the possibility of livable lives.

7.1 “THERE HAS TO BE A SYSTEM”: THE RIGHT OF STATES TO MAKE RULES

Although my participants did not raise explicit questions about the right of states to make rules, their presence, seeking asylum outside their countries, itself embodies questions about rules and practices which threaten security and rights, or the absence of rules and practices which safeguard them. In some cases, invasion - lack of territorial integrity - caused them to flee. Most see territorial integrity as important to their security and well-being, and do not challenge the idea of the nation-state in itself. They think of their countries with love and longing, missing the conviviality and landscapes of their previous lives. In principle, there is support for rules. For Michael it is fair for governments to be “strict”, and understandable for the British people to be nationalistic. The way Elizabeth looks at it, “no country would be normal if they granted asylum to each and every person who came into the country. There has to be a cut-off point. There has to be a system.”

In terms of the UK asylum procedures, what my participants question are rules and practices which inhibit livability or disadvantage them through denying them the equality of arms essential to fair judicial process. They are aware that policies and rules are mutable; indeed, many of them were

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50 I discussed this point with a group of people including Habib. He said that he would return to his country if his security could be assured, but made the point that he hated “borders and checkpoints” and that people should be able to move freely.
persecuted because they were seeking to make political changes in their countries. Now, as people seeking asylum in the UK, they are excluded from “participatory parity” (Fraser, Fraser and Honneth, 2003: 36) in determining the laws and policies which affect them. Young argues that, despite exclusion from decision-making, many people “nevertheless enjoy significant institutionalized support for the development and exercise of their capacities and their ability to express themselves and be heard” (Young, 1990: 38). It is possible to think of a hierarchical decision-making structure which nonetheless leaves some people free to work, to learn, to play and to express their opinions. Welfare capitalism, with its limited deliberative processes, might be seen this way. However, the use of “nevertheless” is a significant caveat in Young’s comment. Citizens may appear to “enjoy significant institutionalized support” until they have a need that “hierarchical decisionmaking structures” refuse to recognize (cf Engster, 2004: 132). People may have no means of placing an issue on the political agenda. In the context of the asylum claim procedures, they may be disadvantaged in making their case to a hierarchical body with the power to make decisions. Then the important link between “decisionmaking structures” and livability is exposed. For people seeking asylum, there is no “nevertheless”. The asylum rules restrict “institutionalized support” and constrain “their ability to express themselves and be heard”. In their case, powerlessness reaches the point of domination. Domination denies people reciprocity and imbues them with fear of “the structural consequences of their actions” (Young, 1990: 38).

People seeking asylum have no votes; indeed, politicians may act as though treating them as people with the same rights and needs as citizens is a vote loser (Somerville, 2007: 127; Dummett, 2007: 97). Thus, people seeking asylum depend on solidarity and political support from citizens secure in their enfranchisement. Many of the people I met who support people seeking asylum combine “negative” and “positive” duties towards others (cf Pogge, 2004: 267) through political activity such as anti-deportation campaigns and everyday solidarity such as advice work and social support. However, making political change is a hard task when report after report by
international bodies such as the UNHCR and domestic bodies such as the Joint Committee on Human Rights is ignored.

Here, the work of Tronto is significant. She urges that care be brought into the public sphere in which justice is enacted (Tronto, 1993). The right of the state to make rules is thus opened into a broader consideration of who and what are taken into account, whose voices are heard, when the rules are made (cf Savage, 2009: 9). If care encompasses “everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair ‘our world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible”, (Tronto, 1993: 103, emphasis in original), then that “everything” must include both public institutional support in the form of rules and the enactment of procedures and “participatory parity” in making those rules.

My participants struggle to maintain, continue and repair their ‘worlds’ so that they can flourish in their new environments. For them, care in public contexts concerns what is available to them and the ways they are treated. Their narratives are arguments that care should be part of a just political process that ensures that individuals or groups are not excluded from social goods that foster possibilities for livability.

Care must take into account people’s self-determined needs (Tronto, 1993: 139; Young, 1994: 91; Fraser, 2004: 182). Self-determination is also the route by which needs are put on the political agenda. My participants do not challenge the right of states to make rules, but they refuse the misrecognition which forms the government’s assessment of their needs. They refuse the misrecognition that positions them as lacking credibility, that distrusts their sentience, that denies them legal equality of arms and professional support, that despises their knowledges yet excludes them from more powerful knowledges.

7.2 “I’M SURE THE HOME OFFICE DOES NOT INTEND FOR THE PEOPLE TO BE TREATED LIKE THIS”: POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Many of my participants spoke about the behaviour of those charged with interpreting the rules and delivering services. Elizabeth believes that there are “systems” in place but that there is no “flexibility” and service providers
do not “think” about what they are doing. The strong contrast Elizabeth makes between Home Office provision for people seeking asylum and the practices of accommodation providers is re-iterated in comments made about a range of officials. What claims are lodged in Elizabeth’s criticisms of lack of “flexibility” and “thinking”? At one level, they go together: thinking – attentiveness to the “concrete individual” - is required if people’s specific needs are to be recognized; a flexible application of policy may be necessary if those needs are to be met (Engster, 2004: 132). However, “simply recognizing the needs of those around us is a difficult task, and indeed, a moral achievement” (Tronto, 1993: 127), especially for institutions oriented towards general provision (cf Engster, 2004: 115). Drawing on Tronto’s work, Mason suggests “attending to the well being of others”, “being attuned to the individuality of others”, “interpreting the moods of others” as examples of “sentient activity”. Within the family, thoughtfulness might be expressed as thinking about food not as general sustenance but in terms of the other person’s preferences (Smart et al, 1999: 369). While this suggests that time and proximity foster thoughtfulness towards the specific needs and preferences of others, in asking for thoughtfulness in non-family settings, Elizabeth raises questions about how the dimensions of care as a practice and a relationship can be fostered in public services.

Sensitivity to concrete individuals’ specific needs and preferences may be difficult for bureaucracies such as the UK public service which have an espoused value of impartiality. In Chapter 6, I referred to the way in which my participants described their encounters with officialdom in different terms from a straightforward following of impersonal general rules (Weber, 1962: 198-199). My participants describe officials who are personal when they should deliver entitlements according to the rules and who are impersonal when recognition of personhood and needs is desired. There is an undoubted tension between applying rules flexibly, as Elizabeth wishes, and Joshua’s insistence that social services administrators should “attend to…the rules.” Pnina Werbner and Nira Yuval-Davis suggest a double process to address the tension between universalism and recognition of difference:
For democracy to work, universalism must transcend difference, defining all subjects in abstract terms as equal before the law. But difference is then reinstated as a higher-order value which encompasses equality as a relational and dialogic ethic of care, compassion and responsibility (Werbner and Yuval-Davis, 2005: 10).

This suggests that justice and care require general rules to be translated into specific contexts, and that one way to effect this translation is through dialogue with the “concrete individuals” whose needs are at stake.

An effort to grapple with the tension between the universal and the particular is discernible in The Judge Over Your Shoulder. This is often regarded as a companion to the Human Rights Act 1998 which gives further effect to rights and freedoms guaranteed under the European Convention on Human Rights. The Judge provides three "logical principles" to be followed in making a decision: “to take into account all relevant considerations”; “not to take into account an irrelevant consideration”; “not to take a decision which is so unreasonable that no reasonable person properly directing himself could have taken it" (2006: 14, §2. 28). ‘Due process’ requires that regard be given to both precedent and to any distinguishing feature of the specific case (2006, 16: § 2.32). The notion that “[i]n law context is everything” (2006: 15, §2.30) could be interpreted as an effort to build care as regard for specificity into public administration and legal procedures.

Lack of thoughtfulness is sometimes blamed on pressure of work. Elizabeth does not accept this: “I don’t care, even if you’ve got a thousand [properties] between two of you that is not my problem. You have failed to look after me. You have failed to meet my needs.” However, she raises an important point when she speaks about workloads. In every aspect of the asylum system there are workload pressures. From Border Agency officials required to deal with nine cases a day as well as meeting numerical targets for returned asylum seekers and being appraised on income generation, to voluntary organizations pressed for time and helpers, shortages of translators, and law

51 A figure I heard a UKBA official give in a meeting with people working with migrants and people seeking asylum.
practitioners with bulging caseloads, every aspect of the asylum system is under-resourced and overstretched. In part, but only in part, this accounts for claims being processed slowly, often with crucial inaccuracies or loss of documents\textsuperscript{52} which cause difficulties - or injustice - for people seeking asylum.

While people may have some strategic intent in distinguishing between policies and those who put them into practice, there is, nonetheless, a point to be made in exposing the gap between rhetorics of welcome and the lived experience of people seeking asylum. Elizabeth takes the view that, because it does not involve service users, the government does not know what is going on: “If the Home Office got feedback…things would change.” However, the Joint Committee on Human Rights Tenth Report, cited in the previous Chapter, is only one of many reports that have pointed out inadequacies in the system. The tragedy is that the government undoubtedly does have feedback - but does not listen to it. For Elizabeth, accommodation and other services are “big business”. Moreover, they are “big business” in a context where asylum seekers are hardly even bit players in political struggles over needs. Their needs are subordinated to fiscal constraints and cutbacks, to the profitability of privatized public services and increased securitization while larger issues of distributive justice go undebated.

If marginalized groups, including people seeking asylum, understand officials as, in Elizabeth’s terminology, ‘falling short’ of what government intends, that understanding allows them discursive room to manoeuvre and appeal to government to remedy shortcomings of policy delivery. Acknowledging that government policies themselves are responsible for “personal troubles” requires a different form of response for which citizen voters need to work in solidarity with people seeking asylum. Yet, an understanding of the imbrication of policy and practice within the asylum process stands up to scrutiny in a context in which government has not responded to report after report pointing out the damaging effects of official policies and practices. In

\textsuperscript{52} Often in huge numbers: on 1 February 2009, The Observer reported the loss of 17,000 files of people seeking asylum.
actuality, both national policies and local practices cause “personal troubles”. A representative of the UKBA pointed out at a meeting organized by the Manchester Refugee Support Network (16 June 2009) that officers can be held to account for failing to meet authorized standards of conduct. However, this leaves untouched three questions: whether those standards are sufficient; whether the UKBA does enough to encourage feedback in situations where people are afraid to complain; whether the policies themselves are just.

In some cases, practices can be ameliorated through joint consultation groups set up by voluntary agencies such as MRSN (for example, in improvements to the reporting system at Dallas Court). Such improvements take away some of the “hurts” inflicted by the system, and suggest that collective agency can be successful in negotiations. Moreover, some officials do, in Emily’s words, “go on extra”. Some of my participants and other people I met told how officials helped them by, for example, enabling them to access services. Indeed, Nick Gill demonstrates the “opportunity costs” of mistrusting officials whose proximity to people seeking asylum may sometimes make them supportive of them (Gill, 2010: 1059). Gill’s point makes sense in relation to minor decisions where some play of power can be realized through discretion and individual agency. However, since officials are always answerable to regulations and managers (and sometimes peer pressure53) the extent to which they can stretch or challenge rules is likely to be limited.

Olga Jubany illustrates how racial and gender stereotyping operate in the asylum process to support a “culture of disbelief” (Jubany, 2011). Her research supports Philomena Essed’s point that it can be difficult for

53 In March 2010, allegations about conduct, hostile to people seeking asylum, of staff in the UKBA Cardiff Office were reported. (http://news.bbc.co.uk/gopr/ffr//1/hi/wales/south_east/8496759.stm accessed 4 March 2010). Cause for “significant concern” was found (www.guardian.co.uk/uk/.../uk-border-agency-investigation-concerns, accessed 10 August 2010). Jubany foregrounds the ways in which immigration officers acquire “professional knowledge” in the field, with the effect that the principle of asylum in practice gives way to deterrence (Jubany, 2011: 82, 89).
individuals to break away from “everyday racism” because it works through a complex of relations and practices (Essed, 2005: 189-190). The operation of “everyday racism” in asylum policies and regulations leaves little scope for individuals to struggle against a structural asymmetry of power which operates through rules and practices of “cultural imperialism” designed to deter and disarm.

7.3 “After I Had Told Them, That Was Turned Against Me”: Power and Knowledge in the Legal System

My participants speak about specific ways in which the legal system could be fairer: because they do not understand the legal system, they should receive competent legal advice; they should be less mistrusted, less vulnerable to adverse representations which impact on their claims; their stories should be listened to. They speak in terms that indicate powerlessness and cultural imperialism. They are oppressed by powerlessness specifically through lack of equality of arms in the decision-making process and “exposure to disrespectful treatment” (Young, 1990: 58). They are oppressed by cultural imperialism through being “defined from the outside” (Young, 1990: 59). They are defined and positioned as suspect: their motives are doubted; their stories are disbelieved. Decision-making power and the knowledge used in decision-making are in the hands of others - and used to exclude and disadvantage people seeking asylum.

Elizabeth describes how:

As a lay person you don’t understand the legal jargon, you don’t understand what, how the legal system works or how the judicial system works. You are just, it’s a cry for help and you hope that somebody will hear your cry, but nine times out of ten your cry falls into deaf ears. And when it falls into deaf ears then the problem starts because you find yourself anxious, stressed, depressed, very, very frightened and extremely insecure. It is more frightening than what you have fled from, to be honest.

54 As in the previous Chapter, I broaden the concept of powerlessness beyond Young’s context of the division of labour.
The effects of lack of knowledge are exacerbated by a system that denies personhood by refusing to hear different knowledges – or even recognize that these exist. Denying people’s knowledge denies an aspect of their sentience, and damages well-being. There are “deaf ears” rather than an effort to listen “with care and patience”, an effort that Spivak calls “the founding translation between people” (Spivak, 2000: 22). When subaltern knowledges are despised, they cannot be heard even if spoken (Spivak, 1988). Asymmetry of power and asymmetry of knowledge are recursive and mutually constituting. Asymmetry constructs the encounters between people seeking asylum and officials as meetings where “disparate cultures...clash, and grapple with each other” (Pratt, 2003 4).

Bohmer and Shuman’s view that people claiming asylum are “caught between exile and legitimate status, a liminal state prolonged by a difficult bureaucratic process that requires applicants to prove their own identity and to defend the urgency of their claims” (Bohmer and Shuman, 2007: 624) is relevant to Rachel’s narrative. Rachel’s claim was refused on the grounds that her country of origin was safe for her to return to. Her argument is that her country of origin is no longer her country because she married someone from another country and lived there for many years:

I read the reasons why they refuse – because [my country of origin] is a safe country and I didn’t demonstrate – I think what kind of demonstration must I do - I didn’t understand the demonstration. And they say there is no xenophobia, [said syllable by syllable] or something like that [there], and [the country] protect people. And then I write a letter back to the Home Office, actually to my case owner, and I tell them did you live [there] to tell me all these things? I say I grew up [there] until I was twenty years old so if you come from a place you can only talk about it...

Rachel’s words illustrate the frustration caused when knowledges clash. The Home Office insists that its knowledge about her country of origin and her subsequent history is superior to her own knowledge. It ‘knows’ which countries are risky and whether individuals are at risk: it has the power to say what things exist and to give meaning to what exists - and the power to enforce its knowledge though detentions and deportations. The requirement that people seeking asylum should “demonstrate” that they meet the
conditions for refugee status is part of an adversarial system within which people are not recognized as truth-tellers. They are assumed guilty of making false claims until *they* can demonstrate that their claims are founded. The adversarial process takes interrogation as its dominant mode and competes with the efforts at narration of people seeking asylum (Bohmer and Shuman, 2007: 622). The two cultures, two orders of discourse, cannot be reconciled.

Because Rachel’s history is complicated – she had made a new life in a new country many years previously – she was accused of lying about her nationality: “the [officer] said ‘Ok, please don’t talk any lies any more’” (cf Hynes, 2009: 105). She has no proof of her residence or her nationality because her husband was killed and all their possessions destroyed by fire: she cannot demonstrate her testimony in terms which can or will be understood by her interrogators. Here is a “wrong” according to Lyotard’s definition: “a damage…accompanied by a loss of the means to prove the damage”. Rachel’s “testifying phrase” is “deprived of authority” (Lyotard, 2007: 5) because of her lack of material evidence and because a “culture of disbelief” predisposes officials to doubt people’s stories.

Justice resides in the plaintiff’s ability to speak and be heard, to give authority to the “testifying phrase”. If there is an irreconcilable difference in the idioms of the plaintiff and the tribunal, Lyotard argues that the “differend [différend]” must be kept open. Yet, adversarial systems require that differences must be closed and decisions made. White’s view is that both parties to a dispute “must yield, in much if not in all, to a third force, the language of the law that governs the process as a whole” (White, 1990: 262-3). However, in asylum cases the language of the law is frequently the language of one of the parties, the UKBA; thus only one party, the person seeking asylum, must yield.55

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55 This statement is based on the experiences of my participants. However, there have been significant and successful challenges to asylum law and case law. Somerville gives examples of the ways in which “[m]igration policy has…been circumscribed by the law, but to a limited degree” (Somerville, 2007: 99). He argues
Rachel was told not to lie *any more*. Her credibility and her identity were suspect. Yet, interrogation can enable people seeking asylum to see the power relations at work within the asylum application system. Elizabeth says:

But you see within-country asylum\(^{56}\) is difficult. Your credibility is questionable because if that’s how they see it, if you had a genuine fear why didn’t you seek asylum *then*? What they fail to notice is that you come in with distrust, as a result you distrust everybody in authority, it doesn’t matter who. That is what I felt after I had poured out and opened up things that I wish I had never mentioned…After I had told them, that was turned against me. They were now picking up those things one by one and throwing them back at me…that destroyed me. That destroyed me and I kick myself, I think I should not have done it – I should have just kept quiet.

People seeking asylum “come in with distrust”; this is compounded by experiences in the UK. Elizabeth’s questioners extract knowledge from her only to undermine her case. They use their knowledge to destroy her world rather than help her rebuild it. They do not “acknowledge the difference, interval, that others drag behind them shadows and histories, scars and traces, that do not become present in our communication.” They are not “open to learning about the other person’s perspective” as a route to ethical communications and dialogic understanding (Young, 1997: 53). Thus, in Young’s terms, the asylum claim process denies “moral respect” based on taking account of the other and acknowledging the historical and social asymmetry between the positions of official and claimant (Young, 1997: 41). Questions are not asked to express “moral respect” or ascertain needs but to test people’s stories.

I observed cultural misrecognition and disbelief in action at the appeal hearing of a participant. My notes record that “the Home Office lawyer…focused on [the appellant’s] statements in the original hearing - despite the rebuttal letter - and was concerned with ‘facts’ (eg dates and

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that “policy makers and lawyers often lack a common language and understanding” (Somerville, 2007: 100).

\(^{56}\) Elizabeth is referring to people who have been in the UK for some time before making their claims.
contradictions), less so with motivation.” The lawyer interpreted delay in leaving the country of origin “as evidence of discreditable ‘calculation’ rather than waiting until things had quietened down, which is what [the appellant] said.” My observations of the lawyer’s approach support Bohmer and Shuman’s analysis that:

…the political asylum process is designed not to actually “find facts” but to use interrogation as a deterrent to admitting unworthy applicants. The complexity of cultural situations, displaced subjects, and political alliances become opportunities to catch applicants out on inconsistencies and question their credibility. (Bohmer and Shuman, 2007: 604)

They conclude that the “ostensibly value-neutral law comes up against the cultural differences of diverse situations. In the guise of producing knowledge, the system works as a surveillance mechanism” (Bohmer and Shuman, 2007: 604). While I agree that a “surveillance mechanism” is at work, I also see a form of knowledge being produced, but it is knowledge from the perspective, and at the service of, the Home Office. The judge in the appeal hearing I attended emphasized his independence in his opening remarks. Later, he referred to his own situation and way of thinking to challenge the appellant’s different way of thinking about where to hide, given the circumstances in which she found herself.\(^\text{57}\) Consequently, the appellant found her sentience, her feelings and thoughts, denied through cultural imperialism as “meanings…arising from elsewhere” (Young, 1990: 59) that were imposed on her actions. The judge was insensitive to difference, making an oppressive assumption of cultural commonality rather than leaving commonality and difference open to emerge through listening and questioning. His behaviour illustrates Young’s view that the “idea of the impartial decisionmaker functions in our society to legitimate an undemocratic, authoritarian structure of decisionmaking” (Young, 1990: 112).

\(^\text{57}\) One of the organizations I worked with used a rôle-playing exercise that required us to imagine we had half an hour to flee and to decide very quickly who and what we would take with us. I found myself frozen between the pros and cons of opposing decisions, and felt how easy it could be to be panicked into acting in a way that might be judged as ‘irrational’ in different circumstances.
If the judge had acknowledged an “ethical relation of asymmetrical reciprocity” between himself and the appellant, perhaps he would not have taken his own perspective and imagined it as the other person’s (Young, 1997: 53).

After the appeal hearing, my participant was concerned not only with what I thought the outcome would be, but also with her credibility as a person, whether or not I believed her account of what had happened. When state policy constructs people seeking asylum as lacking in credibility, even about their own lives, they are misrecognized. This is a form of “disrespect” which can produce “the sense of a threatening loss of personality” (Honneth, 2008: 71-72). Misrecognition of personhood reiterates other misrecognitions and failures of recognition which threaten livability – and which may threaten life itself if the person is returned. Lack of credibility is related to lack of validation of credentials. Qualifications are not recognized. Words and narrations are not recognized. People seeking asylum are not recognized in terms of their self-understanding. Possibilities for human flourishing are diminished by fear of being returned. They are diminished also when people are positioned, “defined from the outside”, as people who cannot be believed.

Even credentials in the form of professional opinions may not be validated. At the appeal tribunal I attended, the written opinion of the expert witness was rejected. Another participant told me that the Medical Foundation for the Victims of Torture had written a report finding that his physical scars were consistent with his story. The judge did not accept the evidence marked on his body. The situations described by Joshua, Rachel, Elizabeth and others, where officials claim to know better than people seeking asylum, illustrate the workings of “an epistemological power to extract a knowledge from individuals and to extract a knowledge about those individuals who are subjected to observation and already controlled by those different powers” (Foucault, 2002a: 83). The purpose of interrogation is to extract knowledge from people seeking asylum that demonstrates they are lying, thus denying
them recognition as sentient beings whose thoughts and feelings\textsuperscript{58} are worthy of respect.

Bohmer and Shuman analyse the production of “knowledge and ignorance in the asylum process” (2007: 610), identifying the ways in which asymmetry works through producing people seeking asylum as ignorant and officials as knowing. Official knowledge, however, is constructed recursively according to what is plausible or implausible to officials. Therefore, “the lawyer’s work is to make the seemingly implausible scenario make sense to the hearing officer” (Bohmer and Shuman, 2007: 616). Shuman and Bohmer’s description of this process at work in the US asylum system resonates with my participants’ experience: asylum seekers “must report a persecution credible to” officials who “have radically different discourse systems” (Shuman and Bohmer, 2004: 395, 396). Thus, it is a logical step to conclude that “the political asylum process is designed not to actually ‘find facts’ but to use interrogation as a deterrent to admitting unworthy applicants” (Bohmer and Shuman, 2007: 604).

I learned something of the actuality of the asylum process from the perspective of my participants. Such counternarratives are subordinated, rarely uttered and more rarely heard. This is a different encounter with procedures from reading the UKBA web pages. There were times when I felt that the more I knew the less I understood. This feeling has stayed with me. While I understand the urgent need for people seeking asylum to tell their stories in a credible way, I have not formed any impression of a narrative that is certain to gain someone leave to remain. There is no winning strategy. On some occasions, people’s resourcefulness, for example their contribution to the community, is ‘rewarded’ by leave to remain (particularly in ‘legacy’ cases): on other occasions, their resourcefulness is used against them on the grounds that they will be able to get by if they are returned. On the

\textsuperscript{58}Jubany observes how, while immigration officers may show sympathy towards applicants (so that they are not perceived to be heartless), emotions are generally suspect and officers interpret them in ways that support the prejudices of their subculture (Jubany, 2011: 86-87).
evidence of Home Office statistics for 2008 (Home Office, 2009: 22), thirty-one people out of a hundred whose cases were reviewed were given some form of leave to remain and were thus able to enter a different dimension of livability. However, sixty-nine out of every hundred were refused. From the statistical perspective, there is no winning strategy. Indeed, I am convinced of the opposite: that decision-making procedures are often inscrutable (and, therefore, rarely open to scrutiny) and unpredictable. They deny people the “moral respect” of seeking to understand their stories in ways that recognize them as sentient beings, worthy and capable of livable lives.

7.4 INTERPRETING JUSTICE

Cecile’s narrative brings together themes of asymmetry of knowledge, “the right to testify to the damage” (Lyotard, 2007: 5), and translations. When Cecile told me her story, or rather “the story before going to [her] real story”, I felt dizzy and baffled. I understood the words that she told me but none of it made sense (“I hear what you say, but it doesn’t make sense to me”). We went round and round what had happened until, about half an hour into our conversation, I said, “But your point is they haven’t even heard your story.” Cecile repeated “Story!” as though I had understood at last. Claimants who are “unable to present their cases in a linear, legalistic discourse are frustrating for lawyers and other advocates” (Shuman and Bohmer, 2004: 401). Sometimes, however, it may be that the story is simply hard for researchers, lawyers or officials to grasp and translate into their own understandings.

The bare bones of Cecile’s story are that she received permission to work; later on, her employer took her “identity” (card) away from her on the instruction of the Home Office, leaving her destitute and unable to access even help for the destitute because she has no documentary evidence of her status. She received a letter stating that her application for asylum had been refused and that she was liable to detention. Her ability to make a livable life has been harmed by what appear to be bureaucratic errors, for example
letters not sent or not received at a new address. Repeated instantiations of bureaucratic errors may be seen as a pattern of carelessness.

Although administrative errors caused Cecile’s problems, it is she who is held responsible and made to bear the brunt (an inversion that recalls Habib’s description of becoming the “splinter”). Nonetheless, Cecile asserts a strong ethical and legal claim for due process and rights: “According to human rights, they are supposed to do my interview, look into my case…[before] they make a decision.” She repeatedly asserts her right to be heard in a context where not only justice and human rights but the asylum rules themselves require a formal hearing:

You cannot just send someone back without knowing the background…They have to look in the story to see how risky is that for person if she been sent back because they don’t know what’s going [on]…How you send someone back according to human rights when the person’s life is in danger there or…send them back when they don’t know the consequence?

Cecile is denied justice not because her “testifying phrase” is “deprived of authority” (Lyotard, 2007: 5), but because she has been denied the right to testify.

Cecile emphasizes that UKBA staff cancelled two meetings on the grounds that her English was insufficient even though she had provided the name and contact details of an interpreter. While some participants spoke about the shortage of interpreters, a failure of distributive justice, many translation scholars raise detailed questions about the situatedness and positioning of interpreters. I have space to mention only a few of their insights which may have a bearing on the outcomes of cases. For example, Moira Inghilleri’s observation that the “asylum process involves an array of contexts in which interpreters are involved…Not one of these moments can be isolated as the critical one” (Inghilleri, 2007: 196) resonates in a context in which different interpreters may be used on different occasions; thus, there is potential for many critical moments. People seeking asylum may be caught out by inconsistencies or inaccuracies of translation for which they are held responsible and which allow officials to challenge their credibility (cf Bohmer and Shuman, 2007: 604; Inghilleri, 2007: 208). None of my participants
expressed concern that interpreters “are socially and politically situated” (Inghilleri, 2007: 207). However, research into the situatedness and practices of interpreters raises questions about interpreting as a practice in which care as expertise may be crucial in assisting people to ‘demonstrate’ their cases to officials.

Interpreters can intervene in a number of ways, whether accidentally or deliberately. For example, they may switch to the use of the third person – ‘he or she says’ (Baker, 2006: 328). This has the effect of distancing them from the content of their translations with, perhaps, a similar effect on officials. Recontextualizing what people say alters its meaning through new “effects of power and dominance” (Baker, 2006: 332). Inghilleri critiques the presumed objectivity of the asylum process and the rule that “interpreter and expert roles must be distinguished” (Inghilleri, 2007: 207). But experts are rarely present to offer explanations or clarifications, and the Home Office may reject their written testimony. The rôle of explicatory intervention about cultural differences is therefore in the hands of legal representatives who, if present, are unlikely to have expertise in this area. Baker argues that translation studies have moved beyond the idea of translation as “passive responses to cultural, social and aesthetic conventions” towards recognition of “active negotiations among participants with shifting agendas and unequal levels of control over the interaction” (Baker, 2006: 335, my emphasis). Asymmetrical power in relation to the asylum rules, asymmetrical knowledge of legal procedures and language and asymmetrical respect for their credibility all produce situations in which people seeking asylum have lesser “levels of control over the interaction[s]” involved in the asylum application.

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59 Yet, efforts are made to ensure the appearance of neutrality. One of my friends, volunteering as an interpreter with a refugee support programme, was instructed not to look at the refugee. This instruction both recognizes and denies the symbolic and actual meanings of face-to-face encounters. For Mary, looking at “all people [as] the face of God” offers a religious approach to recognizing the value of all people. “To respond to the face, to understand its meaning, means to be awake to what is precarious in another life, or rather, the precariousness of life itself” (Butler, 2006: 134). A response to the face recognizes the human, a common vulnerability, which invokes social justice and care for concrete others.
and appeal procedures. The meanings of their words cannot be heard: they are lost in translation because they do not understand the contexts in which questions are asked and officials do not understand the contexts in which they are given.

Interpreters are barred from acting as experts, from making explicit cultural translations. This compounds the “culture of disbelief” that refuses to recognize people seeking asylum as experts in their own lives. In the next section, I discuss legal aid and White’s view of the necessary relationship between justice and translation.

7.5 “YOU DON’T KNOW WHAT LEGAL TERMS ARE, WHAT EVIDENCE IS OR WHATEVER YOU SHOULD DO TO CONVINCE THE JUDGE”: LEGAL AID

My participants and other people seeking asylum speak about material conditions such as the limited number of hours allocated for legal advice, regardless of the complexity of the case, and lengthy waiting lists for legal advice from private practices and voluntary organizations. Joshua asserts that asylum seekers should always be entitled to legal aid, “no matter what their stories are” otherwise they may go unrepresented. Helen speaks about the impossibility of finding a good solicitor: she does not know who to turn to for good advice. Joshua insists that solicitors should “fight your case, not...discriminate [because]...you don’t have fifty percent60 of chances.” He thinks that is “very bad” because “most of the solicitors are acting as a judge”. Joshua, unrepresented, describes the effects of lack of equal resources: “I was just answering in my own comfort zone and [the adjudicator] is using her legal skills, which was a disadvantage to me. He analyzes what it is to be “new” in this context:

…you don’t know what legal terms are, what evidence is or whatever you should do to convince the judge...It’s your first time maybe of appearing in court, you know you have that feeling about courts...It is very, very, I mean, painful; you are feeling awful.

60 People are entitled to publicly funded legal representation (legal aid) to pursue their appeal only if it is deemed to have a fifty per cent or more chance of success.
They are taking me as a criminal, you don’t have that perception in you, it is very, very, I mean, difficult to cope with. But if you have a legal representative, they will know exactly.

To be “new” is to be disarmed by lack of knowledge and through pervasive stigmatization. For Joshua, the media represent people seeking asylum “like a victim, or like a criminal”\textsuperscript{61}, not a victim. Which is very wrong, you know.” His plea is for officials to “listen to what you have to say and then judge you straight.” The way that the asylum system relates to people seeking asylum ignores their need for legal knowledge and support, while officials fail to listen to their expressions of “experience, feelings and perspective on life” (Young, 1990, 37). Joshua repeatedly foregrounds the importance of being listened to, and the way in which representations of people seeking asylum work against their sentience being recognized and their words being responded to.

Joshua is clear that he is disadvantaged by asymmetries of power - structural, representational and interpersonal. He is disadvantaged by his lack of knowledge of the legal system; he does not know what evidence the judge requires; appearing in court distresses him. He has no representation and no support. The feeling that he is interpellated as a criminal undermines his self-understanding. All this is “painful”, “awful” and “difficult to cope with”. Compared with finding activities to take the place of employment, it is difficult to exert agency, to find resources and support to struggle against the asymmetry of power. Unequal distribution of legal representation and knowledge about the legal process of asylum produce injustice. This injustice links with the “cultural imperialism” of being taken for a criminal. Such injustices work to produce distress in already-vulnerable subjects, further diminishing possibilities for livability\textsuperscript{62}.

\textsuperscript{61} Somerville notes that “it cannot be entirely coincidental that immigration is often associated with crime in Labour policy categories, as they are both considered ‘weak spots’ in the electoral armour” (Somerville, 2007: 127).

\textsuperscript{62} As Eastmond points out, “while the criteria for judging a story convincing are usually not fully known to the narrator, the price of failure (i.e. deportation) is enormous” (Eastmond, 2007: 260).
I referred in Chapter 5 to White’s concern with attentiveness to language and power in legal settings, urging legal professionals to accept responsibility for understanding the power dimensions of the relationships between themselves and their clients (White, 1990: 262). In discussing “justice as translation”, White argues that:

…we all inhabit different languages, which cannot be reproduced in each other’s terms, and that each of us is a distinct centre of meaning and experience that cannot be reduced into the language of another. The one great human universal then, is that we all speak languages none of which can become a universal language; our universal question is how to relate to each other across this fact. (White, 1990: 263)

He suggests that the lawyer’s “task”:

…is to help [her client] tell his story, both in his language and in the languages into which she will translate it. The conversation proceeds in large part by her questioning, trying to get it straight, suggesting complexities and difficulties, as she tries to help her client understand things more fully both in his terms and so far as possible in the language of the law, in which to a large degree the matter will be negotiated and argued. The client is thus led to learn something of the language of the law; at the same time, the lawyer must learn something of the language of the client; between them they create a series of texts that are necessarily imperfect translations of the client’s story into legal terms, and in doing so they also create something new, a discourse in which this story, and others, can have meaning and force of a different kind: the meaning and force of the law. (White, 1990: 260-261)

White’s view of the lawyer’s task can be reframed as a dialogic practice of care in which the lawyer joins her client in the effort of translation (Spivak, 2000: 22). This effort includes the client as an active and, in some respects, knowledgeable agent. Like the researcher, the lawyer asks questions to understand the other person’s perspective. She then uses her knowledge of her client and of the law on behalf of the client, to create “necessarily imperfect translations of the client’s story into legal terms” in which it can be understood. In this joint effort of “sentient activity”, knowledge is passed back and forth between lawyer and client, producing greater equality of arms for the client. Care can be allied to justice and practised in the public sphere
through attentiveness to the stories of people seeking asylum, through learning how to relate to each other “across difference” (Young, 1997: 59).

Legal aid rules position people seeking asylum at the powerless end of asymmetrical power relations by limiting their access to a social good. I have shown some of the ways in which people seeking asylum understand themselves as excluded from knowledge about legal procedures – and from knowledge about what they must “demonstrate” and how they must “demonstrate” it. Allying care with justice would challenge the adversarial rules and relations at work in the asylum claim procedures and bring into question the practices of professionals and administrators and the extent to which they act as ‘translators’ willing and able to support people seeking asylum, to repair their worlds as a bridge to future flourishing (cf Tronto, 1993: 103).

7.6 “MORE FRIGHTENING THAN THE SITUATION BACK HOME”: CULTURES OF DISBELIEF AND FEAR

My participants speak about the asymmetry of power and “culture of disbelief” which permeate the asylum regime as producing emotions which impoverish the psychic resources on which their flourishing depends. When Joshua talks about attending his hearing unrepresented, he describes what he experienced as “painful”, “awful” and “difficult to cope with.” People convey their feelings both explicitly, and in the expressive tones in which they speak. In Rachel’s narration, she protests in what I hear as angry frustration to her case owner about the demeaning of her knowledge and experience: “did you live [there] to tell me all these things?” Elizabeth speaks of her “cry for help”, and finding herself “anxious, stressed, depressed, very, very frightened and extremely insecure” when that cry falls on “deaf ears”. She was “destroyed” by having her words thrown back at her. At one point, Cecile weeps and says how “disappointed” she is to have lost her job and her home. I registered anger, frustration and desperation in the cry with which she questions the procedures and asserts human rights: “How you send someone back according to human rights when the person’s life is in danger there…send them back when they don’t know the consequence?” Painful
feelings are a dimension of sentience expressive of the common vulnerability that is a part of human being.

These negative emotions contrast with what people say about the feelings produced by voluntary organizations. There they receive “help and experience” and information about “how the government works and what rights I have”. Voluntary organizations are “important for friends and activities”. They foster “confidence.” They offer the kind of social care that “generates hope” (Hage, 2003: 3, cited in Back, 2010: 448). People seeking asylum speak about voluntary organizations in terms of their providing some of the institutional conditions that foster “the values that constitute the good life” (Young, 1990: 37). Conversely, they speak about the emotions produced by the asylum application and appeal procedures as instilling feelings of precariousness and inability to cope which inhibit livability.

Many people expressed fear of going to report at Dallas Court. When I accompanied Helen there, she said that she was always nervous. Rachel explains that:

You don’t know what’s going to happen because so many people tell a lot of stories, but I trust God. But some people will tell you they will deport you, they will hijack you at Dallas Court...[They will] come in the night and they will collect you. So, they will collect me and I don’t know for what. People will say...they trap you and they take you...you don’t know what’s going on. The Home Office must give you an answer, they say they ‘consider’, and I wait and see what will happen. So, I just keep my fingers crossed and just hope for myself the best.

People seeking asylum may live with precariousness and rumour in place of knowledge. Fear circulates amongst them and “sticks”. Rachel does not know what is true or what is going on. She can only “trust God”, cross her fingers and hope. The fear that circulates amongst people is well-founded: people are taken into detention at Dallas Court; they are taken in the night, or, more frequently, the early morning. The fear of being deported is prolonged by delays. Helen describes waiting for decisions, in language drawn from her past and the memories of many of the women she was
speaking to, as “like waiting for rain”\textsuperscript{63}. However, while commonsense states that justice delayed is justice denied, speed is not conducive to justice if errors increase because faster target times for turning around cases mean that less attentiveness is given to each case. Yet, while waiting is hard, there is also a dread of what will come through the post. Mary tells of:

…a time when I would fear even an envelope coming through the letter box when it is stamped ‘Home Office’. Your heart will just pound and you feel like fainting. I heard of someone who was telling the story that they sealed their letter, their letterbox, they didn’t want to see any more of the Home Office letters.

Even Mary, so determined to “look at the positive side of things”, expresses her fear in visceral terms. Yet, she also rejects the “stickiness” of the emotion by placing it in a time which has passed.

Helen said that she might return to her house and find a letter giving her notice to move or other bad news. Elizabeth recounts how:

My experience has been more frightening than the situation back home. Because once you are rejected you’ve got this hounding idea that they’ll come and get you. Each time you hear a knock on your door your heart beats, your heart leaps because you say, “Ha, is it now?”

These accounts illustrate Brah’s perception that “the same geographical and psychic space comes to articulate different ‘histories’ and…’home’ can simultaneously be a place of safety and of terror” (Brah, 2005: 180). Some participants refer to their accommodation as home; but home is also the Home Office and the home country, illustrating “contradictions, simultaneities, and dialectical tensions” (DeSantis, 2001: 2) within and between the significations of the term. As I discussed in the previous Chapter, people seeking asylum draw strength from the values they grew up

\textsuperscript{63} “Zones d’attentes” (Agamben, 1998: 174) captures the sense of waiting commented on by several participants, but, as the narrations emphasize, waiting is not synonymous with limbo or liminal states if these are envisaged as states of suspended animation. While people wait for the various stages of their claims to be assessed, they involve themselves in voluntary work, in the training opportunities available, in artistic, sporting and social activities.
with in their home country. But ‘home’ is also the place that some officials and other people tell them, ‘cruelly’, to go back to. This racist abuse is not simply an abstraction or the idle menace of officials who are out of line; it is informed by the very material targets set for returning refused claimants and by political and media discourses that treat people seeking asylum as “peoples out of place” (Malkki, 1992: 33). ‘Home’ in Manchester is also a place of surveillance and inspection: Helen waited in all day for a visit from her caseworker. He did not come, but said that he had called and that there had been no one in. This made Helen fearful of losing her support because his credibility would be greater than hers.

Rachel describes her experience of being interviewed by the Home Office as:

Quite good interview. They screen me and I didn’t get any problem when they shout, or like I hear some people claim they been treated very badly, but not for me...Nobody did shout at me or force me to say something that I don’t want to say. They would rather ask me, ‘Do you need a break’ and I will say ‘No, I can continue, I’m ok.’ But, no, I didn’t have any problem.

Nonetheless, she retrieves something of her fearful expectations in naming what did not happen. Indeed, as Rachel’s narrative continues, her efforts to position herself as exceptional in being well-treated break down as she describes the officials’ refusal to believe her story.

The effect of the way that the asylum rules position people seeking asylum within a “culture of disbelief”, denying them knowledge, denying their knowledge and treating them as criminals is that their agency seems to falter. They can only “trust God”, cross their fingers and “hope for...the best”. Nonetheless, by speaking about the way they are treated, they can unimmerse themselves in some of its effects. To some extent, they can resist the “stickiness” of their emotions by addressing the cause of their “personal troubles” as in the system and not in them. They cannot negotiate different pathways to livability as they can by engaging in voluntary work to resist

64 When I was returning to the UK through Calais in June 2009, the first time for many years, notices in the UK immigration channels proclaimed the number of people who had been deported the previous month: a boast and a warning.
“employment prohibited”. What they can do is to learn more about the procedures through the information65 provided by voluntary agencies, engage others in campaigns on their behalf and campaign, as many of my participants do, against detention and against deportations.

CONCLUSION

In this Chapter, I have looked at the asylum claim process as one of the conditions of existence that asylum seekers encounter in Manchester, a significant condition which they would encounter wherever they were dispersed. Clearly, the asylum process is only partly about “providing a place of safety”, in the words of the UKBA. It is also about refusing protection, and, thus, about refusing care. People seeking asylum have to “demonstrate”, to prove their cases in situations where the balance of power is tipped against them by an adversarial system about which they have little information. Rather than providing “institutional support”, the system denies them “moral respect” (Young, 1997: 41). Often they cannot “demonstrate” their cases through tangible evidence or evidence which is recognizable to officials. Their credibility is doubted; their knowledge is despised. Within these asymmetrical power relations, the Home Office and its officials insist on their superior knowledge about people seeking asylum. There is no “moral humility” which recognizes the asymmetry (cf Young, 1997: 59). All these policies and practices inhibit livability by rendering people emotionally vulnerable, stripping them of recognition and material sufficiency.

Possibilities for livability are severely (and sometimes entirely) inhibited when people are forced to make their lives in conditions so much not of their own choosing, for example when they are required to report or to be at home at a specific time – and are at risk of deportation if they fail to do so. The asylum rules, and the ways that officials operate them, inhibit possibilities for livability through a series of denials: denial that people seeking asylum are sentient -

65 I note that if individuals other than accredited immigration lawyers offer advice those individuals are acting illegally.
knowledgeable, trustworthy and credible; denial that they merit social justice through equality of arms; denial that they are worthy of care as “sentient activity” that takes their specific needs into account. These denials amount to refusal of recognition that people seeking asylum deserve livable lives.

If government sometimes seems distant and abstract, the effects of asylum legislation, policies and procedures are immediate, local and unremitting. My participants foreground accommodation inspections, reporting, hearings, issues to do with solicitors and legal aid as areas where they find themselves powerless and vulnerable. Authoritarianism and lack of democracy at the national scale can result in arbitrary local decision-making which denies rights and fails to recognize difference. When I asked Huda what she thought would make life simpler, easier, for people seeking asylum, she replied, “they have to get well treated…they have to get the good advice regarding the UK…and their rights in this country” (my emphasis). Giving good advice, relevant to people’s circumstances, is an aspect of care in the public sphere. My participants ask for care which gives them knowledge and uses knowledge about them to help repair, not destroy, their worlds. Care can be expressed in public contexts through the kinds of ethical responsibility and dialogic practices advocated by White (1990) and Young (1997), practices which recognize the sentience of both self and other.

Current asylum policies and practices in the UK flow from a dichotomy of rights between citizens and non-citizens. Human rights are located in nation-states: when nation-states fail to protect their citizens, or are responsible for their persecution, and people leave their country of citizenship for asylum elsewhere, their rights remain precarious. Given widespread breaches of human rights and the impossibility of guaranteeing them while their realization depends on nation-states, some scholars have expressed doubts about their continuing validity, (Hardt and Negri, 2006: 275). Nonetheless, I draw on the concept for three reasons. First, it is one that my participants assert: for example, Cecile’s “how you send someone back according to human rights when the person’s life is in danger”. Second, it remains important to assert the importance of human being in the kinds of situations my participants describe, in which rules and individual actions can retrieve
colonialism in the form of “a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity” (Fanon, 1963: 250, cited in Gordon, 1995: 11). Third, the treatment that causes people to flee their countries and the treatment they encounter in the countries to which they flee provide compelling arguments for needs to be translated into conceptions of rights that are not dependent on governmental or individual caprice.

Turning needs into rights entails questions of inclusion in the deliberative process (Young, 1990: 34; Fraser, 2004: 182; Werbner and Yuval-Davis, 2005: 10). Because this will not happen overnight, I would not want to abandon a notion of care as a practical activity or relationship directed towards human being in the here and now. At the national political scale, the translation of rights from rhetoric to practice means that needs should not be precariously dependent on service providers or on charity: they should be rights determined through communicative justice. At the local level, service providers and other professionals can become caring copresences through recognizing the sentience of people seeking asylum, “hearing-to-respond” (Spivak 2000, 22), and making efforts of translation commensurate with theirs.

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In these three Chapters, I have looked at conditions of existence of asylum that “block” livability, and those that open possibilities for human flourishing. The debilitating effects of worklessness and the fear induced by the asylum system permeate every aspect of life, suggesting asymmetrical power relations that allow little scope for agency (Foucault, 2000: 292). However, lives can be made in difficult material and relational conditions (Appadurai, 2005: 192-3). Despite unplanned moves, unforeseen restrictions and hardships, despite poor accommodation, inadequate facilities for the learning of English, negligent service providers, despite “employment prohibited” and the extreme asymmetries of the asylum rules, lives are made. Lives are made because people seeking asylum refuse their interpellation: they mobilize affective and cognitive resources within themselves and within
support groups and churches. They engage their own sentience and ethics to remake their worlds so that they can live in them as well as possible.
CONCLUSION: WHAT MAKES FOR A LIVABLE LIFE

INTRODUCTION

What is at stake in making a livable life in a new country entwines personal fulfilment and social justice. Making a livable life presents specific difficulties when people are forced to seek asylum in another country. People who flee their countries suddenly and rapidly leave behind loved ones, social networks, ways of life and material resources which sustain their well-being. In this situation, institutional support, interpersonal care and psychic resources are vital to alleviate some of the potential for trauma, and continue and repair people’s worlds.

My research set out to investigate how people seeking asylum make livable lives in Manchester, to do justice to them and their narratives. Approaching these questions from the perspective of my participants and other people I worked with was fundamental to my project. Much is written and said about people seeking asylum. Less attention is given to what they say about themselves and their feelings and thoughts about the conditions of existence of asylum (Kushner, 2006: 202; cf Loizos, 2005: 52). They do not lack ‘voice’. Indeed, my narratives show that they have a great deal to say. People assert values and norms by which they judge the livability of their own lives. They are involved in everyday theorizing, giving meaning to their experiences, and representing themselves in specific ways in response to the conditions they encounter (cf Cook, 2007: 20). In doing this, they sometimes draw on memories of life in their countries. This is a strategic remembering “that serves to illuminate and transform the present” (hooks, 1990:147). Their narratives are addresses to power that raise fundamental questions of social justice. In their claims for rights and justice, and in their activities, they come close to being “organic” intellectuals (Gramsci, 2007a: 6) from whom we
learn not only about their lives but also about the society and world we live in. What is lacking is attentiveness to their voices. Turning what Elizabeth calls “deaf ears” to their self-representations ignores the views of people whose needs are at stake. It ignores the self-determination of needs as a source of knowledge essential for just policy- and decision-making. This neglect is articulated with, and justified by, misrecognition of people seeking asylum, sometimes as pitiable, more frequently as “peoples out of place” (Malkki, 1992: 33) who threaten the welfare of citizens. Either way, the ordinariness of “a life like other people” is denied.

I responded to their narratives by examining the dimensions of livability from different perspectives and in different contexts. In Chapter 2, I discussed conceptualizations of livability, recognition, social justice and care that seemed to relate to their ethical frameworks. In Chapter 3, I used these ethical frameworks to ask how the institutional and discursive conditions of existence of asylum in the UK support or inhibit livability. These conditions are formed and clouded by “public issues”, contentious at global and national scales, which go beyond Manchester, but are enacted and experienced locally. Thus, people seeking asylum in Manchester are not only in a new country but also the focus of disagreements about who and what they are and how they should be treated. One of my intentions was to make recommendations about what people seeking asylum valued, and should be reinforced, and what could be improved in order to make their lives more livable. Yet, as I discuss later in this Chapter, it is difficult to pick at the everyday conditions of existence without unravelling larger issues which shape “refugeedom” in the UK. Consequently, improving conditions here and now may be in tension with the social transformation needed to address the larger issues. I argued in Chapter 4 that a desire to do justice to people seeking asylum requires research practices which foreground their perspective. This requires a move towards proximity: spending time with them in their spaces, working together, and listening. Therefore, in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 I focused on my participants’ narratives to examine the conditions of existence that they repeatedly and vehemently identified as mattering to them. Sometimes there are contradictions, even within their narratives.
These show the complexity of the temporal and relational shifts and emphases of their perspectives. Analyzing the narratives opens them up to show the ways the narrators recognize themselves, asserting feeling and intellect, to produce counternarratives to the ways in which they are represented and excluded.

In this concluding Chapter, first I review what I have learned from listening to people seeking asylum speaking about the issues they identified as significant in affecting their ability to make new lives in Manchester. They talk about ordinary needs and desires in a context of extraordinary and exceptional conditions that shape and limit their ability to meet their needs and realize their desires. Second, I consider the importance of sentience and psychic resources. By spending time with the narratives, I found surprises. I had expected people to talk about rules, institutions and treatment by officials. And they did. But what I had not expected was the extent to which they talked about their experiences not only in terms of their emotional impact, but also as reasoned assertions of norms and values violated by public policy. I came to understand the narratives as demonstrating the sentience which the asylum system denies. Consequently, I consider not only the matters my participants talked about, but also the ways in which they talked about them. Their narratives invoke feelings, analyze conditions, assert rights and elaborate normative frameworks of recognition, human rights, equality, social justice and care. Making a livable life in a new country is a practical matter, but one that people imbricate with profound ethical questions. Third, I draw my participants’ normative frameworks into dialogue with the ethical and theoretical frameworks that I discussed in Chapter 2 and the debates about “refugeedom” that I discussed in Chapter 3. I looked for literature that engaged with my participants’ ethical frameworks and I examined some of the “public issues” that cause their “personal troubles” (Mills, 2000: 226). I show how the three perspectives – narratives, ethics and empirical studies of “refugeedom” – can work together in critiquing the conditions of existence of asylum. From studying my participants’ narratives, from listening to the stories and comments of many other people seeking asylum, and bringing their accounts of life together with academic works, I
suggest that the institutional and interpersonal norms that “shelter” livability (Butler, 2004: 34) have to do with recognition, social justice, care and knowledge. These norms challenge dominant representations of people seeking asylum, and the ways in which specific representations are used to produce and legitimate the conditions of existence of asylum. Finally, I reflect on what people said about making a new life in Manchester to consider some recommendations for what might be improved or done differently in the everyday. Since “we cannot know justice once and for all” (Cornell, 1999: 114), I consider also some of the dilemmas and limits of reformism. What is achievable here and now is always in tension with the transformations necessary for a more just world in which livability and human flourishing can be expanded.

8.1 THE ORDINARY AND THE EXTRAORDINARY: SPEAKING ABOUT LIVABILITY

When I invited people to speak to me about what was important to them in making a new life in Manchester, they referred to their accommodation, the areas where they lived, finding their way around the city, shopping, food and managing their budgets. They spoke about health, education and work. They talked about their families and friends, and meeting new people. They discussed their hopes, desires, and memories. They spoke about wanting to be safe and secure, about wanting the best for their children, about their faiths and beliefs. All these are constituents of livability, the foundations on which human flourishing is built. These are ordinary concerns. While they may be brought into particular focus when people move to live somewhere new, they might be discussed by anyone, new to a place or already there. Consequently, in talking about these matters, my participants were speaking a language of common interests.

However, they spoke about specific dimensions of common matters. They spoke about being sent to live in run-down areas in accommodation amongst people they did not know and of whom they felt unsure. They recounted difficulties in finding help to negotiate the city, lack of communication and sociality. They expressed anxieties about isolation, concerns for people left
behind, grief at losing loved ones at a distance. Mary wanted her family, separated by the asylum rules, to be able to “come together, strengthen each other and give wisdom to our children.” They spoke about material concerns: obtaining accustomed foods or foods to suit medical conditions; the effects of not working. Again, these might be seen as ordinary concerns. People seeking asylum are not alone in having to live in run-down areas or suffer the stresses of unemployment and separation from loved ones. In part, these are “personal troubles” common to people seeking asylum, other migrants and some citizens.

However, people seeking asylum speak about these matters from a particular situatedness: the deliberately restricted conditions of existence of asylum which dashed expectations of what Mary called “a good country that can protect you” as a site of livability. People spoke of their experiences with institutions and individuals as characterized by lack of care, lack of self-determination, and, sometimes, absolute hostility. There was little recognition of their sentience and needs, that they were worthy of human rights or that their lives were vulnerable or grievable (cf Butler, 2006: 30) and thus deserving of care.

So, people spoke about ordinary matters in contexts of extraordinary regulation and denial. Mary spoke about inequality and the questions and risks it provokes:

...when [children] see other young children being able to do anything...being able to work, being able to go to college, or use certain fashionable clothes. They come up with all these questions that you as a parent cannot answer...You cannot answer this anger being brewed within them.

They expressed frustration at not being able to access English classes that met their needs, about being excluded from higher education. These denials are compounded by other extraordinary conditions. In Chapter 7, I described how they spoke about the asylum application process in terms of controls, surveillance and the production of fear. They spoke about fear of detention and deportation, about the fear and uncertainty of waiting. They protested about lack of knowledge and support in pursuing their claims, about not
knowing who to turn to for good advice. Elizabeth described the destructiveness of having her story “turned against” her and how “your credibility is questionable”. Cecile denounced administrative processes that denied her human rights, that denied her the opportunity even to tell her story. Rachel spoke about her knowledge being replaced by official knowledge: “did you live [there] to tell me all these things?” How is livability compromised when, as Elizabeth said, “your cry falls on deaf ears”, when there is no response because there is no hearing?

These are some of the less ordinary, the exceptional conditions of existence of asylum within which routes to livability are “blocked” and people are “hurt” by denial of recognition and care, by exclusion, control, fear and uncertainty. People cried out against lack of recognition and misrecognition: “I am a person to be detained. Why? Did I commit a crime?” said Cecile. Mary described how, in being denied work, women from her country felt that “part of themselves was denied”. Habib spoke about isolation, the “big gap” between society and his community, about contact reduced to giving people food and taking the money for it. People spoke about hostility, racist abuse and physical attacks, about being told to “go home”. They spoke about lack of care by service providers. Marwa’s request for directions was met with the response, “you have to find yourself your way now”. Habib, Mary, Marwa and Huda spoke explicitly about their efforts of translation and adaptation. Charles, recalling his arrival in the 1980s, used a language of recognition to express the positive aspects: he was “greeted as a sort of person”. If people seeking asylum are to feel settled, they require care and attentiveness as sentient people with a common human due, and who also have specific needs and specific capabilities. Elizabeth connected settlement in part with support and care: “now I have settled in a way because I have got my support, the community care.” Settlement must provide security and stability as part of the conditions in which people can thrive. Security and stability are incompatible with detainability, deportability and other conditions which provoke fear, uncertainty and loss of confidence, depleting psychic resources.
8.2 **Expressing Sentience: Psychic Resources**

I have foregrounded a mode of recognizing people seeking asylum which is not often made explicit in studies: their sentience. Sometimes organizations publicize testimony which makes use of their emotions, especially negative emotions produced by their persecution in their countries or as the effects of the conditions of existence of asylum. My research highlights positive and negative emotions – and the intellect of people seeking asylum.

My participants spoke about the dimensions of *ordinary livability*, the desires people have in common. However, their common desires are lived out in conditions of extraordinary denial, control and constraint which exclude them from much that is available to citizens. While I have described these conditions in terms reminiscent of a “state of exception” (Agamben, 1998: 134), Agamben’s focus on sovereignty ignores the way people’s lives look to themselves: people are discussed as though they are synonymous with their objectifying and dehumanizing treatment by the state (cf Harker, 2010). In contrast, while I heard people crying out with hurt as they described their struggles for human flourishing, I heard them also, and importantly, theorize what is ethically and practically wrong with the conditions of existence of asylum. Through sentience and through meaningful activity, they create moments of livability which replenish the psychic resources they need to struggle on.

While people cry out against the “blocks” and “hurts” they encounter, they speak also about what they value, what helps or sustains them. They describe how, in some cases, adverse conditions roused them to “push” themselves, to “fight smart”, to know their rights. They speak of everyday activities to which they attach meanings constituted in terms of values and beliefs. Thus Rachel speaks of “trying to make the most of it”; Emily says, “You have to put your problems behind you and get on with life” because stress will “hurt the kids”. Mary speaks of encouraging her children “to leave the past behind, focus on the future.” Their resilience develops over time. Elizabeth says that she has “learnt to survive”, to “take one day at a time”. Rachel speaks about the growth of confidence through making friends and
finding her way about. People value voluntary organizations for providing practical support, skills, training, knowledge, food and childcare. Voluntary organizations also provide opportunities for meaningful activity: for Elizabeth, “you include yourself” through voluntary work, you are “just like a person waking up to go to work and coming back”. In the face of so many exclusions, volunteering gave Sammy “access everywhere around Manchester”. People draw strength from wherever they can as they reach out for contact and involvement: they value friendliness and sociality; they draw strength from their faiths, memories and communities, from the example of others, from having a sense of purpose.

Many of my participants speak of being sustained by psychic resources. In the context of the narratives, psychic resources include feelings, intellect, values and ethics, and what people describe as ‘character’ or ‘personality’, often connecting them to personal histories and social circumstances in their countries. Complex reciprocities link institutional opportunities, interpersonal behaviour and psychic resources: the conditions of existence of asylum can replenish or deplete psychic resources which are needed to take and make opportunities. Some people refer to being set apart by particular strengths of character or physical attributes that keep them going. For example, Rachel is “happy” that she has a “strong personality”; she sees herself as “confident person”, “not a quitter.” Sammy says that being young helps him. In contrast, Joshua, himself relatively young, draws on past experience: he speaks of having experienced difficult situations in the past and being used to coping. They are not people who cannot put up with difficult situations, but, as Joshua reasoned, in a “rich nation” there is no reason. Speaking of the difficulties he encountered in making a new life, James says that he had to “overcome these things to help my family”, invoking a sense of responsibility towards others that kept him going. Some people, for example Mary and Elizabeth, attribute their psychic resources to their socialization, to their parents, their communities and what was expected of them by way of endurance. Their faiths give them a belief that they have a “purpose”. Psychic resources are both necessary for making livable lives, for making the best of what is available, and also an outcome of livability.
Psychic resources are neither autonomous nor static. They can be nurtured – maintained, continued, and repaired – through care (cf Tronto, 1993: 103). They can be both depleted and replenished by the conditions of existence of asylum. Because of their imbrication in the social, subjectivity and feelings shift as they are shaped over time and in different locations by encounters with rules, institutions and interpersonal relations. This understanding helps to account for some of the apparent contradictions in the narratives. Joshua, for example, speaks of experiencing “quite a difficult time” when he first came. However, his experience with voluntary organizations gave him “some sort of protection” because people took the time to listen to him and help him. Government rules and agencies tend to deplete confidence: enforced worklessness, for example, can lead to dwelling on problems, loss of confidence and depression. Non-government agencies tend to replenish confidence: Habib, for example, “became busy little bit” through various kinds of voluntary work, and then his “confidence came back little bit”.

People’s sentience enables their engagement with the social and fosters livability. Through their sentience, people experience both the debilitating “hurt” of misrecognition and moments of flourishing. Sentience is the fulcrum that turns the conditions of existence of asylum as a specific dimension of “diaspora space” (Brah, 2005: 2008), characterized by “hurt”, “denial” and misrepresentation, into a space of some kind of livability. Resistance opens a pathway to livability as people “push” themselves to make the best of voluntary and faith organizations.

However, while livability hinges on people’s psychic resources, that hinge needs to be attached to material and interpersonal resources provided by statutory and voluntary organizations. When people’s psychic resources are depleted, they may need support even to approach voluntary organizations; such support can encourage them in taking the first step to include

66 Paradoxically, these are often funded by government bodies, as though care is an operation to mop up the “residue of suffering” caused by policy (Foucault, 2000c: 474-475).
themselves’. This is important: sentience itself needs care, and, in part, this can be achieved through some continuity of activities and values.

Sentience is nurtured when people feel that they are listened to. Joshua connects the copresence of people who “listen to what you have to say” with the power to “turn your life around”. ‘Turning your life around’ expresses a move in the direction of livability. Activities akin to “listening with care and patience, in the normality of the other” (Spivak, 2000: 22) are valued as building confidence, a sense of safety in the present and hope for the future. Marwa says, “It will help me if I express…my needs, to somebody and that person will help me the way so that I can see.” When I asked her what she would choose if she could have three wishes granted, she wanted someone to say, “Ok, you can go that place, that building, and they will give you the support”. Similarly, Elizabeth wants someone who will say, “Can we meet so that I can find out what your problems are?”

Normative claims for care and recognition, for equal access to rights and social goods, are immanent in the way people speak about being listened to. Marwa connects listening with attentiveness and care in the context of medical consultations: doctors “should consider, they should care, they should…give attention.” For Mary, the purpose of care is to “feel as though you are practical people in the community.” She treats some of her “personal troubles” as “public issues”, institutional responsibilities of the state: if the government had included her in the same way as schoolchildren, “there wouldn’t be any problems at all.” Similarly, Huda calls for people seeking asylum to be “well-treated”, to receive “good advice and no discrimination.” In practice, however, Elizabeth sees the Home Office as deficient for not involving users and, after her negative experiences, Helen asks how officials are recruited. In the narratives, refusal to listen to people seeking asylum is connected with policies and policy delivery that do not support livability. Indeed, the policies are not intended to support livability: their purpose is to ‘manage migration’.

The people I listened to recognize themselves as sentient humans, as people with values and to whom particular rights are due (cf Datta et al, 2010).
James emphasizes the importance of knowing who you are. His view that people have to “be themselves” assumes a sense of self. People speak of their feelings as ‘cries’ against the “hurt” of the conditions of existence of asylum. However, their cries go beyond sounds of pain: they articulate their pain within frameworks of values. Mary’s belief that “all people is the face of God…It’s not up to me to….deny them access to whatever should be available to them” frames equality as a moral obligation. Similarly, Charles’s view that “we differ only about our rôles, but not as a human being” asserts a commonality that resists discrimination and subordination. For Elizabeth, “An asylum seeker is a human being. An asylum seeker is a person. An asylum seeker has got feelings, emotions, and I feel that even if we are asylum seekers we have the right to be treated humanely, humanely.” Her demand for recognition of her human sentience reverberates in Joshua’s protest at negative encounters with service providers who were “hostile”, “not kind”, “not humanitarian”, who treated him as “something not useful”. His claim for equality, for humane treatment connects with his emphasis on being “useful again in the society”. Equality and respect for human dignity connect with the importance of work, being capable of making a contribution, and of recognition of that capability. People speak about themselves as sociable and desiring validation of their self-recognition through social recognition; often this is through describing the things they missed in their countries. Mary speaks of her activity in her country in terms of “networks…friends…” connections.” There is nothing startling in the norms and values people assert. They take up prevailing discourses to do with rights, equality, work, the value of education, of family and friendship. These are the espoused values of the UK, which show “interlocking understandings” (Pratt, 2003: 7) between people seeking asylum and people already there. However, the asymmetries and exclusions which characterize the “contact zone” of asylum deny the practice of “interlocking understandings”. The transformative moments of the narratives show how people seeking asylum demonstrate their sentience by expressing their sufferings at being excluded from rights and values available to others – and claiming the extension of these rights to themselves in self-recognition of their human due.
8.3 Theorizing Livability and Its Supports

I have, heuristically, gathered into five categories the aspects of livability my participants discussed. First, there are the material conditions which protect life itself: adequate housing adapted to specific needs if necessary; food which sustains physical health; access to medical care; safety and security. Second, there are factors which sustain social well-being and which are linked to recognition of people in terms of human and civil rights: the knowledge required for people to understand the city and their entitlements; equal access to work as meaningful activity, as a way of using and developing skills, and connecting with others; education and training as opportunities to develop new skills and knowledge. Prohibiting employment is perceived as overlapping with and inhibiting possibilities for livability in terms of education, sociality, and making choices. It is a prohibition that depletes skills and psychic resources, denies recognition and care – and wastes human capacity and potential. Work and education offer multiple supports for livability: opportunities to meet people and gain fluency in English, to be independent, improve the family’s standard of living and finance further study. Linguistic confidence, in turn, makes it easier to meet and communicate with people, to look for and find work, to engage in different kinds of sociality.

Third, there are factors which support psychic well-being, issues to do with recognition and being heard, which foster people’s confidence to engage with others, to make and take opportunities. The attentive listening that is part of research practice can contribute to this. Having the psychic resources to engage with others and with different activities is part of a virtuous circle as social engagement replenishes psychic well-being which, in turn, nurtures the confidence and energy which foster engagement. Fourth, there are situations in which people have specific needs and require specific care. Having needs and requiring care do not exhaust personhood; people ask for care in order to restore the well-being that will allow them to flourish “unencumbered” (Anzaldúa, 2007: 108) by contributing in ways that are socially-validated. While Anzaldúa is writing in a different context of
subordination, she connects self-determination with being “fully ourselves”. The sense of being fully oneself is a metaphor for human flourishing, of having room to grow and stretch. However, people seeking asylum, like colonized peoples, are not allowed to “develop unencumbered”. Thus, from my participants’ perspective, livability requires institutional and interpersonal support – not regulation - that allows them to use and expand their own resources. However, institutions and interpersonal encounters are simultaneously and thoroughly imbricated with discourses, values and representations of people seeking asylum that encumber them by denying their sentience, excluding them from rights and equality of access to social goods.

Fifth, there are the regulations that govern the UK asylum claims process. I put these at somewhat of a distance from the other conditions people spoke about because the extent of the regulation severely limits room for manoeuvre and agency. The policies and practices of the asylum regime in general inhibit livability by rendering people emotionally vulnerable, stripping them of recognition and material sufficiency. Nonetheless, as I have shown, people respond to those conditions by struggling towards alternative routes to livability. However, the asylum claim process offers no alternatives to those who hope for legal status. It saturates everyday life not only with regulation but also with insecurity and fear of detention or deportation. It works against them through inequality of arms and refusal to recognize their knowledge. Regulation encumbers livability because it inhibits the self-determination and self-development, the recognition of sentience and knowledge upon which livability depends.

Listening to the narratives and working with the transcripts, I understood people as discussing their lives not only in terms of material conditions, social and psychic well-being, needs and regulations - all of which are interconnected - but also, and simultaneously, making normative and ethical claims about recognition, rights, equality, social justice, knowledge and care. From this grounding, I wanted to find theoretical frameworks that resonated with the norms and values that my participants expressed and that would provide norms and analytical tools to bring into dialogue with empirical
studies and scholarly critiques of refugeedom. Inevitably, perhaps, no single body of theory provided a ‘key’ which corresponded with all the critiques and theorizations my participants made. Thus, I have translated parts of different theories which respond to the terms in which they spoke about recognition, social justice and care. While these parts work together with what people told me, and the way they told it, they do not form a grand theory of livability or the conditions that support it. I suggest that such a theory of livability is unattainable for two important reasons. First, livability is supported by a huge number of constituents which overlap and interact with each other in ways that cannot be prescribed or predicted. Second, livability is emergent, not static. It is contingent on temporal and spatial contexts in which different constituents are foregrounded, often as absences. This is clear from the histories of my participants: they expected to find livability in the UK; they found that many elements, cherished in their countries, were lost. Nonetheless, in the context of Manchester and in the specific circumstances of my participants, the repeated, and interconnected, constituents of livability were recognition, social justice, care and knowledge. I consider these in the next four sections. While these constituents are connected to other conditions supportive of human flourishing, there is no exact recipe for livability.

8.4 Livability and Recognition

There is a primary connection between livability, recognition of “animate others as persons” and social justice (Butler, 2004: 58). In Chapter 2, I drew on the work of Honneth because of his concern with the ethical dimensions of recognition. Honneth’s connection of “moral injustice” with disregard for people’s well-being works as a fitting translation into the language of philosophy of the ways in which my participants describe many of their experiences. My participants experience many of the conditions of asylum as “violations of...normative claims” (Honneth, 2008: xii) for human rights and human due. The association Honneth makes between “the consciousness of not being recognized in one’s own self-understanding” and “moral injury” (Honneth, 2008: 133-134) reverberates in the way Mary spoke about being
“hurt”, that when people from her country were not allowed to work “part of themselves was denied”. However, Mary and others suffer material as well as moral “hurt” when their “capabilities” are not recognized as being “of constitutive value to a concrete community” (Honneth, 2008: 138-139).

Many of the people who spoke to me come from countries with colonial histories to which, on occasion, they referred. However, they bring with them the consciousness of citizens, of people related to others on the basis of equal rights. Their consciousness as people with recognition and status in their countries prior to the events which led them to seek refuge elsewhere shapes the way they experience and protest the “moral injury” of an excluded and subordinated positionality in the UK. It is important to emphasize that they have already recognized themselves as sentient humans who deserve justice and equality. This is often heightened by their religious beliefs. Many of them come from positions in their countries where their self-recognition has been formed and validated by prevailing social norms. Engaging in activities which sought to change aspects of social or political norms led to persecution which jeopardized social recognition and status.

Since many people seeking asylum have already resisted taken-for-granted hegemonies, they are sharply aware of moves to dehumanize them. Helen referred to being kept at home, without work, like a “pet”, a "dog"; Joshua saw himself as being treated like “paper”; Habib was made to feel like a “splinter”. However, while the conditions of existence of asylum operate in the direction of dehumanization, people are not dehumanized. It is because they retain strong self-recognition that they feel the “moral injury” of misrepresentations and denials. Simultaneously, it is because they have strong self-recognition that they can articulate their feelings of injury by means of normative critique, protesting the conditions of existence of asylum in words and action. Consequently, there is a paradox. In one sense, they do not need to be given a priori recognition as an abstract principle since they have already recognized themselves. Yet, in positions of subordination in the UK, what they require is practical validation by others of the ways in which they see themselves: they want their conditions of existence and the people around them to mirror their self-recognition. Papadopoulos and Hulme give
an example of the importance of validation of refugees’ actual personhood in therapeutic settings, as conveying feelings of being “cared for and understood” (Papadopoulos and Hulme, 2005: 152).

While my participants have a strong sense of self-recognition as part of their psychic resources, validation of their self-recognition by others is nonetheless needed as part of care that maintains and replenishes those resources. Prohibiting employment operates as a way of refusing to validate people’s self-recognition. In contrast, Habib and others attest to the way in which voluntary organizations, particularly those which incorporate people seeking asylum as members, rather than keeping them at a distance as clients, can provide dialogic and activity-based validation of people’s actually-existing singularity, sentience, knowledge and ability to contribute. By reflecting back people’s self-recognition, not taking them and their stories, in Joshua’s words, “as a fault”, voluntary organizations support possibilities for some kind of human flourishing even in conditions of prevalent misrecognition.

Lack of recognition and misrecognition operate at the material level as denials of social justice and care. Correspondingly, recognition cannot be simply a principle which remains at the level of abstraction. If recognizing people seeking asylum as entitled to human rights and human due is to mean anything, the principle must be embodied in social justice and care as “sentient activity” (Mason, 1996: 27).

8.5 LIVABILITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The terms on which people seeking asylum are recognized, or misrecognized, position them as ‘bogus’, ‘criminal’ and threats to the security and well-being of citizens and lead to forms of control, denial and exclusion which threaten livability. Misrecognition denies people access to human rights and social goods. I have connected these denials to Young’s concepts of oppression as “the institutional constraint on self-development”, and domination as “the institutional constraint on self-determination” (Young, 1990: 37). My participants speak about the connections between “personal
troubles" and “public issues” in ways which expand, contextualize and make concrete the “very general values” comprising the “good life” which Young puts forward. An important point of contact between the terms in which Young writes and the way that people speak is that they all assert universal values. Young’s theorization of “universalist values” as assuming “the equal moral worth of all persons” and thus demanding for everyone access to the values comprising the “good life” (Young, 1990: 37) resonates with Mary’s invocation of “God who says he created everything in the world and everything should be yours.” Young’s language of political science and Mary’s Christian humanism unite as demands for recognition and equality in access to social goods.

Given the connection between recognition and social justice, the question that arises is whether moves in the direction of equal access to rights and social goods can be achieved without changes in the ways in which people seeking asylum are ‘labelled’. Changes in the outward forms of institutional provision are likely to be subverted by continuing misrepresentations. I shall return to this question when I put forward some suggestions for change later in this Chapter. My participants made situated claims for recognition in terms of commonality rather than difference. Hence, Elizabeth’s “cry” that “An asylum seeker is a human being” with “the right to be treated humanely, humanely.” For them, social justice depends on recognition as equals. In this context, Maldonado-Torres’ reading of the master-slave relationship in The Wretched of The Earth (Fanon, 2008) is pertinent (Maldonado-Torres, 2008, 143, 149). Drawing on Maldonado-Torres’ contention that the master rejects the slave as incapable of giving, that the master is the “privileged giver”, I would argue that if reforms are simply given, then something of the master-slave relationship remains. It becomes vital, therefore, that social justice is something taken, or at least demanded, through the kinds of claims my participants make. They do not beseech fairness and equality as gifts to helpless subalterns; they assert the right to justice as people whose self-recognition of what is due to them as equals is in no doubt.
8.6 Livability and Care

As Marwa suggests, care in the delivery of services is allied to “attention”, “hearing-to-respond” to people’s sentience and self-defined needs. When people speak about care, or “sentient activity” (Mason, 1996: 27) allied to care, they are speaking in specific contexts in which care takes on different meanings. People speak about care as a complex of attitudes, practices and everyday relationships which include sociality, for example the easy falling into conversation of people at bus stops and on buses. Conversation recognizes people’s desire for sociality and provides openings for needs to be expressed and support to be given. Care - “sentient activity” which helps to maintain and continue people’s worlds so that they can live in them as well as possible – is a dialogic activity. Cobwebs were traditionally used for healing wounds: webs of connection help to repair people’s worlds. However, some people are clear that care should repair their worlds, restore them to well-being, not seal them in helplessness. In that sense, they do not ask for limitless care. Elizabeth speaks of wanting support for her disability that will enable her to be “independent”. Rachel and Sammy want work, not “charity”. An ethical framework which connects care with recognition would understand that, while to be human is to be vulnerable, having needs does not render people helpless, incapable of self-determination and self-development (cf Loizos, 2005: 45-48). My participants talk about themselves as capable, “practical people” encumbered by misrepresentations and rules that do not recognize them as either capable or worthy of care.

Meaningful care is dependent on recognition. I have drawn on Honneth’s connection of recognition “as an individual whose needs and desires are of unique value to another person” with the concept of care (Honneth, 2008: 138-139). If individuals’ needs are of “unique value to another person”, they are, more importantly perhaps, of unique value to the individuals themselves. Social justice requires that policies and practices recognize both commonality and the singularity of individuals and their needs and aspirations. In contrast, current social policy operates through “bureaucratic processes which institutionalize and differentiate categories of eligibility and
entitlements” and keep “refugees and other dispossessed people at a distance” (Zetter, 2007: 180, 190, my emphasis). Distance is antithetical to the care that people ask for as expressed, for example, in Marwa and Elizabeth’s wishes for someone to listen to them and give them the specific support that they require. Distance is antithetical also to the proximity I have argued is necessary to do justice in research practice. Simultaneously, care requires attention to self-determined needs and to equality, for example in access to social goods. Constant misrepresentations of people seeking asylum as threats to security rather than as in need of security, as helpless rather than as capable, seep into everyday practices. These practices produce lack of care by ‘lumping’ people into categories that deny their specific needs or treating them as exceptions by denying them equality of treatment. Instead of helping people to “maintain, continue, and repair” their worlds through attentiveness (Tronto, 1993: 103, 127), many officials apply rules in ways that add to their struggles for basic livability – as Joshua points out in recounting how he and his pregnant wife were made destitute.

Care in the delivery of services should connect recognition of personhood with social justice by starting from the perspective of people seeking asylum (cf Tronto, 1993: 19). In practice, however, the starting point is frequently misrepresentations which have seeped into daily practices whereby officials substitute their perspectives and misrecognitions for the perspectives and self-recognitions of people seeking asylum. They fail to recognize the asymmetry of power between themselves and their ‘clients’ (cf Young, 1997: 53). Indeed, with a government-directed focus on administration, targets and deterrence rather than care, officials can justify lack of care in delivering services by drawing on stereotypes of people seeking asylum: officials see themselves as responsible to the world of the public purse rather than to the worlds of people seeking asylum. Thus, my participants’ narratives add force to arguments that care should be brought from its confinement in the domestic, feminized sphere into the field of political theory and justice (Tronto, 1993: 155, 171). The narratives represent lack of care first as “personal troubles”: officials fail to recognize the person in front of them as sentient, as having specific needs, as having a complex history, as worthy of
respect or deserving of rights. However, failure to recognize both the specificity and “the normality of the other” (Spivak, 2000: 22) is connected to “public issues” in which people seeking asylum are treated as “policy objects” and denied “institutional support” which repairs their world so that they can live in it as well as possible (Tronto, 1993: 103).

If care were allied with justice, the asylum system might, for example, cease to be an adversarial system: it would incorporate professionals and administrators able to support people seeking asylum and enable them to flourish. However, justice and care cannot shelter people against every precarity in life. Even in an ideal world, there will be situations which livability requires repair. Nor can everything be repaired. My participants cannot be reunited with relatives and friends who have died, and for whom they have not been able to grieve in socially-accustomed ways. At those times of pain, care may be expressed as holding others in a web of connectedness, respect and kindness. A caring copresence would recognize their pain even if unable to ease it.

### 8.7 Recognition, Social Justice, Care and Knowledge

Butler, Honneth, Young, Tronto and other theorists whose work I have discussed are concerned with norms from broad political and philosophical perspectives. Consequently, their conceptualizations of recognition, social justice and care leave scope for researching these concepts in specific contexts of the everyday and elaborating them from “new angles of vision” (Collins, 2000: 15). I have used “new angles of vision” to examine “the pathology of the world from the position of those regarded as most pathological and non-human” (Maldonado-Torres, 2008: 8, defining the contribution of Du Bois). My participants put the conditions of existence of asylum “through a sieve” (Anzaldúa, 2007: 104). The fine mesh of the sieve is composed of norms of recognition, social justice and care which catch irrationalities, problems and paradoxes of the conditions of existence of asylum. People seeking asylum are pathologized simultaneously as economic migrants, as helpless and as criminals. Thus pathologized, they
are denied recognition as people entitled to human rights and human due, whose knowledge counts for something.

I have argued for the epistemological and social justice value of looking from the perspective of people seeking asylum, for doing justice to their knowledges and to them as knowledge producers. I have considered the ways in which the asylum claim system denies them equality of arms through inadequate understanding of the system and through inadequate legal and interpreting support. Further, and more injurious to their self-understanding, the system denies and invalidates their knowledge of their lives and countries. Disregarding and invalidating people’s knowledge produces injustice at the national (and international) scale of policy-making and at the local scale of decision-making. The political injustice of not hearing the voices of people seeking asylum produces further injustices: “moral injury” to their self-recognition, denial of equal rights and potential risk to life itself if they are returned. Recursively, the moral injustice of misrecognition is used to defend the political injustices of not regarding them as worthy to be heard, not accepting their knowledge and not allowing them access to human and civil rights which they see as their due. As I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, people seeking asylum do not lack voice, knowledge or ethics; they do not lack sentience expressive of injustice and desire for justice; nor do they lack capacity for meaningful action. They recognize and care for themselves and others. What they are denied are the hearing and responsiveness, recognition, justice and care which support livability.

Asking about livability from the perspective of people seeking asylum in ways that value their knowledge has led me to norms of recognition, social justice and care. Even a brief elaboration of each norm shows how each has to be spoken of in terms of the others. Recognition requires that we understand people seeking asylum as human, as vulnerable and capable, as entitled to human rights and social justice, as having needs and desires which are both common and singular, as worthy of care since, at different times and in different places, we depend on each other for protection, healing, comfort and flourishing. It entails respecting people as knowledgeable meaning-makers, and working towards the “enlarged understanding” that comes from
dialogue. Social justice relies on recognizing each other as human in our commonality and our difference, that, in consequence, social goods and burdens should be distributed fairly and equally while taking people’s self-determined needs and desires for livability into account through “participatory parity”. Care depends on positionalities and relationships which recognize our social connectedness: we depend on each other in our vulnerability and for our flourishing. Care is “sentient activity” which supports people recognized as sentient, knowledgeable and entitled to human rights and social justice to live as well as possible. Recognition, social justice and care are interlocked. Recognition acknowledges that social justice and care are the human due of people seeking asylum. Social justice depends on recognition of human due and relies on care for its enactment. Care recognizes human due and entitlement to social justice. Recognition, social justice, care and recognition work together to support for livability.

8.8 Supporting Livability in Practice

Life as an asylum seeker in Manchester is not an easy thing.

(Joshua)

All my participants had something to say about the difficulties of making a new life in Manchester. “Life…is not an easy thing” because Manchester is the site where global and national discourses are enacted as the regulatory conditions of existence of asylum, and as the behaviour of some administrators and people in the street. Conversely, Manchester is a place where organizations and individuals work with people seeking asylum to resist those conditions and give them interpersonal support through recognizing them as equals, providing information, opportunities for meaningful activity which values their knowledge, sociality, and working with them on individual and national campaigns. Some organizations draw on radical and cosmopolitan traditions associated with Manchester, which “has often been constructed…as the immigrant city par excellence” (Kushner, 2006: 57; cf Multicultural Manchester website). Although Kushner (2006) and others have revealed the silences and forgetting that complicate these traditions, they nonetheless retain some influence as appeals to maintaining
traditions of cosmopolitan conviviality. Huda says that she values Manchester as a “multicultural” place where she has English friends and friends from her community. There is a continuous ebb and flow of negative and positive feelings about life in the city. While Joshua says that life in Manchester is not easy, he also says, “it’s better, in my experience, after being here, because you have so many people that can listen to you.” So, it is a place where some encounters produce feelings of being treated like “paper” and others replenish his psychic resources. Manchester is the place where Marwa had to look for “somebody who is the same colour” to give her directions. It is also the place where, for Rachel, seeing “my colour people” means that she doesn’t “feel lost or like I don’t belong somewhere.” Elizabeth expresses similarly complex feelings: “life is better in Manchester” because there are “a lot of organizations that help”, “where you can go and pour your heart out.” Conversely, she says, “Manchester is okay. But for us, it’s very hard. Because the asylum system is quite broad, it’s not just proving your case, it’s where you will live, who is going to give you accommodation, where you are going to sleep, how you are going to cook.” So Manchester is the site of complex and sometimes contradictory experiences and feelings - both injurious to and productive of livability - which are not reducible to a single statement. Looking towards the future, the question that emerges is what might be done in Manchester to build on existing institutional and interpersonal foundations of livability. Inevitably, this raises questions of whether our politics are, “both conceptualizing the possibility of a livable life, and arranging for its institutional support” (Butler, 2004: 39).

In Chapter 5, I considered what my participants had to say about arrival and settlement, finding their way around Manchester, language, and encounters with service providers and local people. These are “public issues” in the sense that they have to do with institutional action or inaction – and they are “public issues” that cause “personal troubles” because of lack of recognition and care that result in denials of social justice. So, based on what my participants said, I shall, heuristically, imagine a settlement process, akin to an organizational ‘induction’, focused on care for people who are newly-arrived.
In Chapter 6, I referred to Mary’s wish for “someone who can…be with you, who can take the temperature, feel the temperature” and help her through the process of settlement. What Mary asks for can be unravelled into a number of threads. I interpret “someone who can…be with you” as a face-to-face, proximate relationship. Someone “who can take the temperature” would have “active sensibility” (Mason, 1996: 27) to the situation and needs of a person seeking asylum, and be willing and empowered to help restore her to well-being. This would require a complex of dispositions and skills: for example, expertise and effectiveness with regard to the assessment of needs; knowledge of support available; the willingness and initiative to find ways around rules and regulations to meet needs; checking that measures taken have achieved the desired outcomes. It requires also dialogic attentiveness to the person’s sentience – her capacity for feeling and thought – as well as her expertise, knowledge and circumstances. Care is “sentient activity” towards another person recognized as sentient.

First, extrapolating from Mary’s formulation, I envisage that workers involved in helping people through the process of settlement would spend time with them and be contactable when necessary, not simply leave them with a pile of papers. Spending time might include touring the area, pointing out where relevant agencies and services are, asking questions and responding to questions, allowing for the emergence of information people need at the time when they need it. These are examples of ways in which service providers could help to take people into the community by demonstrating care as “sentient activity” and as efforts of translation attentive to people’s uniqueness and self-determined needs.

Second, Helen asked about the way administrative staff are recruited and selected. In part, this is connected to the first recommendation. How far do the recruitment, selection and training of UKBA officers, local government staff and workers employed by housing providers take into account willingness and ability to understand the situation of people seeking asylum, their entitlement to rights, recognition of and care for human sentience? From what people said, the answer is plainly that these processes are not sufficient to ensure that every encounter is consistent with rights, care and recognition.
Marwa, Joshua and others protested that complaints were not taken seriously. My own experience of suggesting to a public sector manager that there might be cause for concern was met by a refusal to hear any complaint unless it was accompanied by evidence of names, dates and other identifying information. This would be fair if a formal complaint were being made against a specific officer. However, there are ways of collecting anonymized customer feedback (thus protecting complainants) that can indicate whether there is cause for concern in a department and thus a need for further investigation and monitoring\textsuperscript{67}.

Third, as Marwa and other people emphasized, there needs to be more ESOL provision altogether, as well as more ESOL provision focused on specific needs. ESOL learners would benefit from the participation of people who know English and the language of the learners (cf Valentine et al, 2008: 386; Leikin et al, 2009). Moreover, this could help provide employment opportunities. Care-ful policies would increase people’s ability to ‘include themselves’ in social norms and activities.

Fourth, in the course of a group discussion about one of my drafts, it was proposed that Dallas Court and other reporting centres might be used to give people information. There are so many organizations and projects in Greater Manchester offering different forms of information and support to people seeking asylum that it can be difficult to know what is available when it is needed. On the basis that Dallas Court is somewhere people are required to attend regularly, there is some sense in trying to transform it from a site of regulation and fear, of depletion of psychic resources, into a resource centre for information, material support, volunteering opportunities and social networking.

\textsuperscript{67} I write this as a former civil servant who from time to time dealt with staff expressing concerns about their treatment while not wishing to be identified by making a formal complaint. In these situations, I had to find ways of letting departmental managers know that there were issues that should be looked into, while not exposing the staff member who had expressed concern.
These four examples of what might be done to improve settlement, drawn from what people said to me, are obviously a very slight list in relation to all the matters that they spoke about. What makes me hesitate about going further, to discuss, for example, “employment prohibited” or the asylum claim process, is the weight of the consciousness produced by my research that the existing material conditions of existence of asylum are underpinned and permeated by purposes of deterrence, modes of misrepresentation and a “culture of disbelief”. In these circumstances, proposing a fully supportive settlement process with well-disposed staff can appear absurd. Similarly, people deeply imbued with fear of being taken into detention at Dallas Court may not trust it as a place to access support. As a result, I am doubtful that meaningful changes can be achieved without alterations in the macro environment that would involve more wide-ranging and longer-term social transformation. Without more substantial changes, what at first sight appear to be ‘improvements’ could be subverted. At the same time, I am compelled by what people have said about the positive effects in their daily lives of ‘small’ changes such as reporting monthly rather than daily, of appointments rather than queuing for services, of sheltered places to wait. At this point, I can only keep open the “différend” (Lyotard, 2007: 9, 142) between positions which grate against each other. Yet this grating may be productive if action taken in the here and now remains conscious of larger, more transformative issues connected to human flourishing – and if the larger theorizings remember that people’s lives are here and now.

Another question, raised in Chapter 3, remains. Who should be responsible for effecting changes in the macro environment? In Chapter 3, I identified three groups held to be responsible for hostile misrepresentations of people seeking asylum: politicians, the public and the media. I referred also to Zetter’s view that “we are all incorporated” in this (Zetter, 2007: 190). However, his own work, that of other academics, and the protests of those working in solidarity with people seeking asylum, show that “we” as citizens are not so easily homogenized. Thus, there are many standpoints from which the conditions of existence of asylum can be contested and demands for livability asserted. If responsibility for misrecognizing people seeking asylum
cannot be located in a single place, it is likely that that widespread activity across many fronts is needed to change the representations. However, responsibility evaporates if everyone is held responsible without specific allocation of actions. I have suggested some ways in which service providers could offer greater support. Politicians and the media might be held more accountable for adhering to their own codes of practice. The public might hold politicians and the media to account and people might understand the importance of neighbourliness - being caring copresences - in supporting livability. Simultaneously, people are ends in themselves; yet, collectively and individually, they are instrumental in enabling and blocking the flourishing of others, upon whom their own flourishing depends. In other words, if livability is a huge and intricate web of connectedness, it is a web woven out of the social activity of institutions, groups and individuals.

Scholarly work in refugee studies which deconstructs the rhetoric and the regimes associated with people seeking asylum is part of the social activity required to work towards transformations supportive of livability. My research has brought participants’ narratives together with scholarly critique and normative theory to create a field in which the conditions of existence of asylum, while grounded in the narratives, can be examined from a number of perspectives. Research practice, narratives, critique and normative theory can work together to protest the injustices of the asylum system and do justice to people seeking asylum. These different perspectives align to insist on recognition of the sentience of people seeking asylum, and thus to claim equal access to human rights, social justice and care as supportive of livable lives. The claim is for commonality, a view of what is due to people as human, against the conditions of difference with which the lives of people seeking asylum are encumbered.

**Conclusion**

My participants’ lives did not become dormant when they fled their countries. They formed relationships, gave birth to children, acquired new skills and included themselves in life in Manchester in a variety of ways. They retained
the desires and the capacities for fulfilling lives that had caused persecution in their countries and then brought them to the UK. Clifford suggests that “diaspora women...connect and disconnect, forget and remember in complex, strategic ways” (Clifford, 1997: 259). I suggest that, for women and men, making a livable life in the conditions of existence of asylum is a complex mixture of remembering and forgetting, noticing and looking away, maintaining accustomed practices and adapting, making efforts of translation, bearing witness to, and resisting, injustice. People struggle against the specific conditions of existence which regulate their lives in the UK in different ways and at different scales, through expressing emotions, through critiquing and campaigning against public policy. In part, livability is made through struggle. While I would not want to romanticize the effects of struggling for ordinariness - things other people take for granted - their struggles demonstrate their sentience and their capacity for meaningful activity, human attributes which the asylum regime denies.

While people speak of specific features of the conditions of existence of asylum that inhibit livability, their narratives do not lend themselves to reducing livability or the material conditions which support it to a single feature or an easy conceptualization. They speak about recognition, rights, justice, equality and care – but no one of these alone and of itself conveys livability. The polyphony of their voices shows how material conditions, equal access to rights and social goods work with each other and with recognition, care, self-determination of needs and “hearing-to-respond” to support human flourishing. There is no single key that will open the door to livability. People attached many benefits to the right to work, but the multiplicity of the ‘goods’ that are attached to work, and the experience of refugees with the right to work, demonstrate that livability cannot be unlocked like a door. My research points to a web of connectedness as a more appropriate metaphor. After writing this Chapter, I became aware of Morwenna Griffiths’ (1995) use of the metaphor (Smart, 2010). While I share with Griffiths an emphasis on the complexity and intricacy of webs, Griffiths emphasizes their strength while I emphasize their fragility and need to be attached to supporting structures. This
is constructed of many interwoven threads which support each other, just as people spoke of many overlapping components of livability. If part of a web breaks, the rest can hold until the break is repaired. If there are few threads, or if there is nowhere for them to attach themselves, there is no web. Yet, even a thread is the trace of the desire for connection, for livability. If there is some thread of continuity between the old life and the new, people seeking asylum can begin to weave new lives. When there is nothing to attach to - as when work is denied or when people are moved repeatedly and connections constantly broken - attempts to weave new lives are thwarted. Extreme asymmetry of power can deny people hope of livability – and, in some cases, life itself. Yet, many are resourceful in finding activities, groups and purposes to which they can attach themselves – and which respond to them. In turn, these attachments can sometimes provide ways for them to translate their cases into terms which the Home Office can understand.

People spoke about complex lives with needs and desires which are expansive and irreducible. While the desire for livability can be expressed as desire for “a life like other people”, that desire is a moment in an unfolding fabric of desire for human flourishing. Perhaps understanding livability as irreducible, recognizing people seeking asylum as people whose sense of obligation to and responsibility for others, whose needs and desires, are as complex, contingent and unfolding as the needs and desires of those of us who are citizens, would unlock some of the barriers to livability. If we recognize people seeking asylum as people with needs and desires, as entitled to needs and desires as their human due, we might see also that even as citizens we have needs and desires that are stifled. They are stifled by, for example, lack of adequate housing and lack of educational opportunity - lack of recognition of the human to whom, in Mary’s words, difference illustrates how metaphors have always to be understood in a context which shapes their meaning.

69 Because of government targets for removals, I am reluctant to overstate the importance of campaigning and community activity. In celebrating each person released from detention or given leave to remain, I wonder who, with fewer resources, has been detained or deported.
“everything” is due. Of course, there is a utopian\(^70\), or at least aspirational, aspect to recognizing everyone as people to whom “everything” is due. Here, perhaps, it is helpful to return to the moment of desire for “a life like other people”, to think of it as a moment which suggests principles of fairness, of being treated justly in relation to the ways others are treated, within a given society and on a global scale.

I started my research with a question about livability. Entering through a door marked ‘social justice’, I found an extensive and complex architecture with recognition and care amongst its prominent features. I might have seen and heard differently if I had entered through those doors. So, there is scope for more detailed research which takes as its starting points recognition and care. Amongst my participants, both men and women were concerned with care as a public activity. Further research might investigate how far care and resistant responses to the conditions of existence of asylum nonetheless remain gendered activities. There is scope, too, for research to examine in more detail the contours of “ethics from below” (Santos, 2010: 228) generated by people seeking asylum and other subordinated groups, to provide more detailed accounts of the connections between struggle, ethics and livability.

The people I encountered mobilize resources from the past and the present to shape their lives within the conditions of existence of the asylum process. Other people seeking asylum may find other resources; some may find their resources depleted or overwhelmed by their circumstances. Even with the resources of language, education and work experience at their disposal, my participants describe circumstances that are “difficult” and “distressful”, in which they “suffered, suffered and suffered”. This invites further research to explore how people with different or fewer resources, who, for example, speak little English or are more isolated, make livable lives in the UK.

\(^70\) Another aspect of the utopian lies in its “opening up the possible” (Cornell, 1999: 167). The idea of the possible as a constantly-expanding project carries an insistence that both livability and justice have utopian dimensions as well as dimensions which respond to the “structural moment” (Cornell, 1999: 107).
“DOING JUSTICE IS NEVER FINISHED”\textsuperscript{71}: REFLECTING ON THE NARRATIVES

The people who spoke to me did not tell a single story; they told many stories, stories within stories, presenting a variety of “dramas involving themselves to an audience” (Riessman, 2002b: 204). Some people have received leave to remain since speaking to me. I cannot assume that this ends their “personal troubles”, their claims for human rights and recognition, their needs and their desires for care. Many of them are continuing their struggles for justice and to do justice through involvement in different kinds of voluntary work. Their stories have awoken stories of my own, and increased my anger and despair at the way sentient beings can be “hurt” by institutions and by individuals, treated like “paper” or “policy objects”. When I asked Huda what advice she would give to people seeking asylum, she spoke about the importance of adapting: “they have to forget what’s happening in the past”. Yet, she remembers the past and tells stories about what has been lost as well as what has been gained. Doing justice in narrative research means bearing witness to difficult moments in people’s narratives, “not looking away and choosing, instead, to document injustice, even when one is powerless to do anything about it” (Riessman, 2002b: 207). Yet one persists, hoping that adding to the polyphony of voices necessary to do justice will help to bring about change and social transformation.

\textsuperscript{71} Riessman, 2002b: 210
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