UNDERSTANDINGS OF IDENTITIES AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS FROM FORCED MIGRANT BACKGROUNDS: A DIALOGICAL NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology (DCounsPsych) in the Faculty of Humanities

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List of abbreviations

DNA: Dialogical Narrative Analysis
DLR: Discretionary Leave to Remain
HE: Higher Education
HP: Humanitarian Protection
FM: Forced Migrant
FMBS: Forced Migrant Background Student
Abstract

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Understandings of identities among university students from forced migrant backgrounds
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**Background and objectives:** This study set out to explore identities among university students from forced migrant backgrounds. Issues related to identity have been found to contribute to the specific and significant challenges this student group can face in higher education. The research question was: how do students from forced migrant backgrounds understand their identities. Focusing on identities, through a dialogical narrative lens, offered a route into investigating the subjective and intersubjective experiences of forced migrant-background students, as well as processes of change associated with being at university, and how wider discourses may impact upon them.

**Methodology:** Three participants from forced migrant backgrounds who had recently completed university studies were recruited. Semi-structured interviews were employed to generate data. Interviews incorporated the use of an artefact: participants were invited to bring an object which represented something about their identities. Data were analysed using dialogical narrative analysis. This involved focusing on aspects of positioning, the use of small stories, and multivoicedness, in the interview encounters. Attention was given both to what participants said about their identities, and the ways in which they constructed these identities.

**Analysis:** Analysis of participants’ narratives is presented individually and structured according to interrelated themes, each conveying some aspect of their identities. Themes include ‘activist and ambassador,’ and ‘not representing what is expected.’ Commonalities identified in ways of expressing, understanding and adapting identities across the narratives are also presented, in the form of five elements which fit together to form a narrative synthesis. The elements are: education as important for identity; being different; identity transformation, as part of being a university student; using new power and identities to react against injustices; and, facilitating this, identity choice and agency. Reflexive considerations, fundamental to the dialogical narrative research approach, are discussed.

**Discussion and conclusions:** A key contribution to knowledge is that despite facing adversity, forced migrant-background students make use of their identity transformations - attributed in part to their university participation - to respond proactively to societal forces which may discriminate against them and others. Methodologically, both dialogical narrative analysis and the use of artefacts are found to contribute to investigating issues of identity. Indications for counselling psychologists include the importance of promoting awareness among practitioners of the complex issues forced migrant students often face. For higher education institutions as well as counselling psychologists, the importance of providing adequate support for these students is emphasised. It is highlighted that research into forced migration issues fits with counselling psychology’s commitment to social justice, in terms of supporting groups at risk of marginalisation. It also aligns with calls within the discipline for increased attention to issues regarding race, culture and ethnicity, which intersect with forced migration. The wide-ranging potential benefits of supporting students from forced migrant backgrounds towards educational success are outlined.
Declaration

I declare that no portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the study and its context

Conflict and crises worldwide have left an unprecedentedly high number of 65.6 million people forcibly displaced from their homes (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] 2017). Of these, 22.5 million are recognised as refugees; over half of these refugees are under the age of 18 (UNHCR 2017). The formal definition of a refugee, set out in the 1951 United Nations Convention, is a person who:

\[
\text{Owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.}
\]

(UNHCR 2007: 14)

The legal definition of refugee is used in contrast to that of asylum seeker; an asylum seeker is a person who has applied for asylum but whose application has not yet been concluded. 6,516 applications for asylum were lodged in the United Kingdom (UK) in the first quarter of 2017 (Refugee Council 2017a). Over a thousand of those were from unaccompanied children. The UK is currently home to tens of thousands of people, many of them children and young persons, who were forced to leave their home countries under extremely difficult circumstances. They often will have faced a combination of adverse events before, during and after migration, frequently cumulating in complex mental health problems (Burnett and Peel 2001).

Though by no means a straightforward issue, education has been identified as a key factor for integration, an equitable education system even being argued to help neutralise the effects of broader social inequalities to some extent (OECD 2012). Access to Higher Education (HE) is a human right, and according to the UNHCR (2015), the benefits of HE include that it “contributes to solutions and post-conflict reconstruction, promotes social, economic and gender equality and empowers refugee communities” (p. 1).

Despite showing high motivation to attend HE, refugee and asylum seeker students encounter many barriers in accessing it, and often face a host of new challenges during their journey through HE if they make it (Earnest, Joyce, de Mori and Silvagni 2010; Stevenson and Willott 2007). Inherent in many of these challenges are issues around
identity. This is perhaps unsurprising, considering the many different theories relating to the effects of migration on identity. As well as being a migrant, being a refugee or asylum seeker carries its own social and political positionings, often intermixed with assumptions to do with race, ethnicity, religion and nationality. Being a student brings a certain identity in itself. Bowen (2014) posited that engaging in HE functioned as a means to manage psychic and physical displacements for refugee students, and served purposes of social mobility as much as education. As will be illustrated in this chapter and the next, much has been written about what a forced migrant or a university student is or should be; I was interested in finding out from individuals themselves how they understood their identities. This chapter outlines terminology used in the thesis, and provides context on various issues related to asylum and to HE. The rationale for the study is discussed, and I locate the research in terms of personal and disciplinary interest and relevance. I then present the research question and aims, and outline the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Use of terminology in this thesis

Before going further, I will explain the use of some key terms in this thesis.

1.2.1 Forced migrant and forced migrant background

The term ‘refugee’ has adopted a number of different understandings and meanings in different contexts, but it is essentially a legal designation (Malkki 1995; Zetter 2007). The term ‘refugee’ has been problematised; Zetter (2007) argued it has become overly politicised, pejorative, and rather than a human right it has been transformed into “a highly privileged prize which few deserve and most claim illegally” (p. 184). In acknowledgement of such points, during the research process I concluded the term ‘refugee’ has too narrow a scope and does not sit well with the aims of this thesis. I opted to predominantly use the terms ‘forced migrant’ or ‘forced migrant background.’ ‘Forced migrant’ functions as an umbrella term. I understand it to refer to all people who have been forced to migrate from their homes; this includes those:

- whose asylum claims have not yet been lodged or not yet decided.
- granted refugee status, discretionary leave to remain or humanitarian protection.
- forced to migrate for environmental reasons.
- who were internally displaced, or trafficked.
In adding the word ‘background’ I acknowledge that the forced migration might have taken place at any point in their life. The focus is on the lack of choice involved in migration, which I believe is key, rather than on designations conferred by the Home Office or any such system. I do use the terms ‘refugee’ and ‘asylum seeker’ at many points, however. When these were the terms employed in particular studies, I follow their terminology. I also use them when the asylum status of the individual is relevant, as without doubt their status will have repercussions and meanings in their life. Hereafter I abbreviate ‘forced migrant’ to ‘FM’ and ‘forced migrant background student’ to ‘FMBS.’

1.2.2 Home student and international student

At the time of writing, in the UK ‘home student’ refers to a university student from the UK or the European Union (EU). Home students generally have access to student finance; student loans or grants to support their studies. ‘International student’ (sometimes called overseas student) refers to a non-UK/EU student. In the UK system, international students are generally charged considerably higher tuition fees compared to home students, and do not have access to student finance.

1.2.3 Higher Education

‘Higher Education’ refers in this thesis to education on programmes leading to qualifications, or credits which can be counted towards qualifications, which are above the standard of GCE A-levels or other Level 3 qualifications (Higher Education Funding Council for England, n.d.). It is not as broad a scope as ‘Further Education,’ which can include qualifications such as awards, certificates, diplomas and other vocational, competency-based qualifications.

1.2.4 Identity/identities

Identity is slippery to define. For the purposes of this study, broadly, I understand it as the ways in which a person describes and presents themselves, as well as the ways in which others construe them. Identities are conceived of as relationally produced and socially constructed; negotiated and validated (or not) through interactions with others. This follows the ontological approach taken, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 3. I use the plural ‘identities,’ seeing people as having multiple identities rather one, and being interested in these multiple and various ways of understanding
identities – from person to person and for each individual person too - rather than trying to reach any one definition of what is someone’s identity. Some literature I reference cites particular definitions of identity, in which cases I outline their definitions.

1.3 The asylum system in the UK

Next I will describe some of the context of the asylum system in the UK. Of initial decisions made on asylum claims in the first three months of 2017, 31% were to grant asylum, 0.8% were to grant humanitarian protection or discretionary leave, and 66% were to refuse asylum (Refugee Council 2017a). Humanitarian protection (HP) is granted should it be decided there is “a reasonable degree of likelihood” that the person would face a “real risk” of serious harm on return to their country of origin (Home Office 2017: 10). Discretionary leave to remain (DLR) is used in the case of “exceptional and compassionate individual circumstances that may justify leave on a discretionary basis” (Home Office 2015: 15). The burden of proof lies with the applicant. Decisions may be appealed, but nevertheless the UK asylum system is considered “very tough” (Refugee Council 2017b: 5). It is common to wait over six months for an initial decision on a case, with it being known to take up to ten years through the appeal process (Liebling, Burke, Goodman and Zasada 2014). Thousands of asylum seekers are imprisoned in detainment centres during that period. They are usually not permitted to work, and asylum seekers commonly report feeling like life is on hold as they wait for an outcome on their application (Morrison 2016). After five years, currently a refugee can apply for settlement in the UK, but this being granted cannot be assumed. A recent system change means that, even when granted refugee status, cases will be reviewed after five years with a possibility of ‘safe return’ to one’s country of origin. As a result, refugees have less security around their future than before, which impacts on employability and education plans (Yeo 2017). Refugees make up a very small proportion of the UK population: about 0.24% in 2015 (Refugee Action 2017).

1.4 Higher Education and forced migrants in the UK

Asylum seekers wishing to pursue HE in the UK are considered international students. They are therefore expected to pay the higher tuition rate and do not have access to student loans or grants (Refugee Council 2013). Persons granted refugee status or HP
are classified as home students for fee purposes. Since February 2011, persons with DLR, who were previously considered home students, are charged international student fees. The Refugee Support Network (2012) said this change prevents young people who often have overcome significant educational challenges from realising their potential. The system for accessing HE as a FM can be complex, and understandably, many find themselves lost in it (Doyle and O’Toole 2013). The number of refugee students attending HE institutions in the UK is unknown, because they are not recognised as a ‘specific social group’ and therefore not traced (Morrice 2013b).

1.5 Rationale for the study

As aforementioned, young refugees have been found to hold strong aspirations for HE, often as a proactive response to overcoming disrupted education trajectories and as a means to improve employment opportunities (Shakya et al. 2010; Stevenson and Willott 2007). The same studies found FMBSs must often surmount numerous obstacles to reach HE, and that they frequently prove to be highly motivated and dedicated students. Being denied the right to education for several years due to situations of conflict, exile and asylum often translates into solid dedication at university (Lenette 2016: 1312). Lenette lamented that little is known about how these students navigate their educational trajectories, and this represents a significant barrier to HE despite their aspirations and potential. Writing in the Australian educational context, Lenette (2016) put forth two key reasons why universities and society in general should care about understanding and addressing the specific needs of refugee students. The first is moral obligation; supportive educational trajectories can result in better settlement outcomes, increased social cohesion and help redress some of the “personal and social disadvantages of detrimental public discourses” (p. 1312). Lenette’s second point was that it makes economic sense. Third-level qualifications mean refugees are more likely to be able to contribute to the socioeconomic advancement of the country, and the world in general - as well as prevent their own further marginalisation, through significantly improving their quality of life.

I concur with Lenette in that not enough is known about FMBSs’ experiences in HE. What research has been done suggests they face a myriad of challenges. Some are akin to those commonly experienced by international students; adapting to a new
language, culture and unfamiliar teaching styles. Additional to these are challenges unique to FMBSs. These include dealing with insecurity over being allowed to stay in the country; worry about loved ones in danger back home; and shame over being a FM, due to negative stereotyping (Harris and Marlowe 2011; Morrice 2013b). In response, students report often hiding their FM background. This secrecy, combined with having very different life experiences and responsibilities compared to other students, can make it difficult to build peer relationships. Such problems can affect FMBSs’ ability to concentrate on coursework. Mental health problems including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), reported at a high rate among refugee populations (Porter and Haslam 2001), can further impede studies. Lack of staff awareness and university support have been cited as other factors causing stress for FMBSs and impeding progress in HE (Earnest et al. 2010). Educators have even been found to often overlook the skills and resourcefulness of FMBSs, instead focusing on their deficits (Hannah 1999; Shapiro and MacDonald 2017).

The different needs of FMBSs compared to other students appear to commonly go unacknowledged by staff and institutions; essentially amounting to unequal treatment and misrecognition of these students’ life experiences, backgrounds and identities (Harris and Marlowe 2011; Mangan and Winter 2017). Bowen (2014) suggested HE results in further displacements for FMBSs, critiquing the idea that university is a means to facilitate social and cultural integration. Many FMs to the UK find their previous professional qualifications unrecognised, resulting in a sense of invalidation (Morrice 2013a). Indeed, Kirk (2004) found almost a third of refugees entering the UK had university qualifications, with even more having had professional or managerial occupations; yet figures for unemployment and underemployment among refugees are high. Those who have researched FMBS issues highlighted a need for further qualitative investigation, to gain a more complete picture of their HE experiences (Bowen 2014; Ferede 2010).

1.5.1 Rationale for the focus on identities

Focusing on identities presents a means to tease out the complex issues FMBSs engage with on entering university. I have observed that many studies on FMBS experiences in HE circle back to identity issues. In asking how someone understands their identity, we are likely to find out about many areas, including what is important to them, how they
interact with others, how they perceive and respond to their treatment by various institutions and society at large. FMVs are so often reduced to numbers and figures, or grouped together as though a homogenous category, when this is far from the truth. Studies which seek out and honour individuals’ accounts serve as an antidote to these portrayals. While participants had forced migration backgrounds, the purpose was not to ask them about this, but to more broadly investigate their own personal ways of understanding their identities. Coming from a counselling psychology research viewpoint also, the identity focus represented a psychological route to explore issues to do with forced migration.

FM identities are presented and positioned in a range of ways in wider discourses, making it an interesting area to investigate from a contrastingly more personal perspective. Notions of place, homeland and boundaries are central to identity conceptualisations and salient in the case of FMVs. Agier (2008) observed that the collective ‘refugee’ identity imposed upon FMVs is one connected to nowhere, without cultural or geographical foundation (p. 29). Refugees have been said to lose not only their homes and states, but their place in the world (Bauman 2002). In a discussion about constructing the FM, Witteborn (2011) observed that asylum seekers are ‘frozen in place’ socially and semiotically, unable to move while awaiting an asylum decision. Witteborn (2011) described how they are constructed as dangerous, and how “in an age of risk...the wrong migrant needs to be kept out through border protection...and social isolation” (p. 1154). The uprootedness of refugees has even been pathologised, blame being placed on the refugee for their movement, rather than understand their movement against the socio-political context (Malkki 1995). Ideas of agency, control and choice are central to these discursive locations. Tribe (2002) reminded us that non-refugee migrants have usually made a positive choice to move from one country to another, with time to prepare practically, systematically and psychologically (p. 241). For FMVs, such preparation has often not been possible. Further, we locate our identities in time as well as space, in the narratives we tell ourselves about our past, present and future lives. This too may be disrupted for FMVs. Morrison (2016) noted how his asylum seeker friend struggled with his past, present and future; making sense of the loss of his past life, adjusting to a new life in the UK, and simultaneously planning an uncertain and uncontrollable future (p. 12).
Bowen (2014) described refugee identity as “constructed through conflicting yet concurrent discourses” (p. 25). Essentialising discourses construct refugees variously in accordance with the popular tropes of “tragic victims, superhuman agents or opportunistic, criminal invaders” (Student, Kendall and Day 2017: 6) – caricatures which dehumanise, and ignore the complex individual factors at play in each person’s life. Descriptive, in-depth accounts like the current study seek to disrupt such two-dimensional constructions. Nevertheless, these dominant narratives are likely to impact on FMBSs in their identity navigations, including in the university setting. With so many stories told about them, and identities imposed upon them, I wished to do research which approached them in a relatively open manner to see how they would construct their identities.

1.6 Socio-political context of the study

FMBSs have been personally affected by the socio-political environment, and it is important to locate this research within the wider context which inevitably exerts its influence on the research. The categorisation of refugee has been said to be doubly political; political reasons for leaving one place combine with being met with a political response and categorisation conferred upon them in the country where they seek refuge (Monnier 1995). As already outlined, discourses around asylum issues often construct FMBSs as a threat to the very fabric of society. A study on UK media image and community impact showed asylum seekers were commonly associated in the media with terms including bogus, cheat, illegal, failed and flood (Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees [ICAR] 2004: 14). Perhaps unsurprising then is that research into public attitudes found most respondents held negative views about asylum seekers, including that they were “a threat to British culture” and coming to “scrounge on welfare” (Hobson, Cox and Sagovsky 2008: 14). Reporting of asylum issues by newspapers is regularly cited by refugee support organisations as one of the biggest problems affecting the quality of life of FMBSs in the UK (ICAR 2004). Hostile public attitudes affect the wellbeing of FMBSs, who fled persecution in one country only to encounter it again in this socially-sanctioned manifestation.

The British public voted to leave the EU (popularly known as ‘Brexit’) in June 2016, just two months before I began interviewing participants. Donald Trump was campaigning to become president of the United States (US) at that point, an election he had won by
the time I interviewed the final participant. Both the Brexit vote and Trump’s election were widely perceived as representing rejection of immigrants. Stopping the ‘influx’ of FMs to the UK was portrayed as one motivating factor for the Brexit outcome, with right-wing party rhetoric suggesting the UK needed to ‘take back control of its borders’ by leaving the EU (e.g. Stewart and Mason 2016). Reports of racially motivated attacks increased in the UK around that time (e.g. Weaver 2016). Tense debates concerning issues of immigration, identity, belonging, and national security were ubiquitous in the media throughout 2016. This was the backdrop against which I was interviewing participants who were FMs to the UK. In summer 2017, a spate of terrorist attacks, including one in Manchester, brought the same issues back into the spotlight.

1.7 Context around internationalisation of Higher Education

Juxtaposed with the above, there is a type of migrant whom HE institutions in particular are increasingly welcoming to the UK. Internationalisation has been called the most revolutionary development in HE in the 21st century (Seddoh 2001). In 2015-2016 the UK was the second most popular destination for international students in the world, attracting 12.5% of those worldwide, with a yearly economic benefit of £25.8 billion in gross output (Universities UK International 2017). The same report presented student mobility as a positive; “mobile students” apparently more likely to be in employment and have higher salaries six months after graduating (p. 18). International experience, whether through internationally mixed classes or travelling, provides opportunity to build global networks; desirable in terms of boosting employability. Much research has explored international students’ experiences, possibly with the aim of rendering universities as attractive as possible to them. International students could be understood as the ‘right migrant’ - who will spend money and usually return home, having helped give a global cosmopolitan feel to the university experience of home students. This contrasts with discourses about FMs, portrayed as the ‘wrong migrants,’ to be kept out at all costs; yet universities tend to equate the needs of the two groups.

1.8 Relevance to counselling psychology

Counselling psychology is a discipline with roots in humanistic practice, and strongly influenced by human science research (Orlans and Van Scyoc 2009). I believe the current study is consistent with the discipline’s commitment to aim to understand more about individuals’ experiences as “socially and relationally embedded beings”
Cooper (2009: 120). Cooper (2007) argued that the core ethical commitment underlying humanistic practices is “humanisation; a commitment to conceptualising, and engaging with people in a deeply valuing and respectful way” (p. 11). According to the British Psychological Society’s (BPS) Professional Practice Guidelines for the Division of Counselling Psychology (BPS 2005), the discipline develops models for practice and research which seek “to engage with subjectivity and intersubjectivity, values and beliefs,” and “to respect first person accounts as valid in their own terms; to elucidate, interpret and negotiate between perceptions and world views but not to assume the automatic superiority of any one way of experiencing, feeling, valuing and knowing” (pp. 1-2). As well as these, it seeks to “recognise social contexts and discrimination and to work always in ways that empower rather than control and also demonstrate the high standards of anti-discriminatory practice appropriate to the pluralistic nature of society today” (BPS 2005: 2). The current research subscribes to, and acts on, all such values. First person accounts are sought and validated; the research concerns itself with studying subjectivity and intersubjectivity in detail, along with values and beliefs. Difference in worldviews and ways of knowing - the pluralistic nature of society - are respected and explored throughout this thesis. The research also seeks to promote understanding of social contexts affecting FMBSs, and ultimately to support them by raising awareness of their experiences.

For a group which by definition has been subject to persecution and then frequently faces misrecognition even in HE (Mangan and Winter 2017), it seems especially important that counselling psychologists understand the unique combination of issues these students encounter should they present for therapy, and are not ignorant of their needs. Increasingly employed in educational settings (Danchev 2010), counselling psychologists are likely to encounter FMBSs en route to, or in, university. An array of challenges has been documented in working therapeutically with FMs generally, including stigma associated with therapy, and trust issues (Tribe 2002). Research indicates higher levels of psychological distress among refugee groups than among non-refugee immigrant communities (Carswell, Blackburn and Barker 2011). This is hardly surprising considering how reviews of the health needs of refugees outline the atrocities and adverse events experienced, including sexual assault, disappearance of family members and friends, and famine (Burnett and Peel 2001; Davies and Webb 2000). The migration journey itself is often traumatic. Particularly relevant for those
working with FMBSs is the suggestion that post-migration stressors, like lack of social support, are the main ones accountable for the severity of PTSD and sometimes the primary source of stress for refugees (Gorst-Unsworth and Goldenberg 1998; Steel, Silove, Bird, McGorry and Mohan 1999).

Being a student brings its own pressures, and international students have been found to seldom seek counselling despite experiencing significant stress, with calls to engage them more proactively (Yakunina, Weigold and McCarthy 2011). In cross-cultural and cross-racial counselling, discussing issues of race and ethnicity are often actively avoided, experiences of racism even being minimised; this is itself a form of discrimination and misrecognition, and directly addressing these issues has been found preferable to clients (e.g. Thompson and Jenal 1994). It has been noted that in counselling psychology, discussions and explorations around race, ethnicity and culture are not as open and consistent as those in other areas in the field (Ade-Serrano and Nkansa-Dwamena 2016). All of these issues are likely to arise and intersect with forced migration-related issues should FMBSs come for therapy. Ade-Serrano and Nkansa-Dwamena (2016) highlighted the negative outcomes which can occur when “individuals’ stories, contexts, nuances, and indeed whole identities are not taken into account” (p. 5). Lack of understanding and support from HE staff, and lack of acknowledgement of the emotional side of their experience, were cited as factors preventing FMBSs’ success in HE (Earnest et al. 2010). Lenette’s (2016) argument, discussed above, underlined the need for tailored support for FMBSs’ mental health and wellbeing. To my knowledge, no research exists specifically from the counselling psychology discipline on FMBSs’ experiences in university, despite calls for increased attention to diversity, multiculturalism and social justice (Moller 2011). The better and more holistic an understanding counselling psychologists have of the unique issues this group faces, the better placed they will be to support them psychologically. Supporting these students to succeed is not only an ethical imperative from the point of view of counselling psychology, but likely to benefit society as well. The better FMs’ mental wellbeing and engagement in HE, the more likely they are to gain employment in appropriate disciplines, feel accepted in their new country, and the better and more equal a society we will have overall.
1.9 Reflexive statement

At this point I will say a little about the development of this thesis. Being reflexive and transparent about where I am coming from is important given the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the study, discussed in later chapters. Starting a doctorate and considering thesis topics, I was interested in researching in the area of migration. Having been fascinated by studies about diaspora and culture during my psychology degree, I did a masters in contemporary migration studies. Working for a large international humanitarian organisation also cultivated my awareness about political and environmental situations around the globe and how they impacted on the lives of ordinary people. I have travelled quite a bit, and recently migrated myself, from Ireland to Manchester. All of these experiences piqued my interest in the intersections between identity and ethnicity, and how these change when we move to a different place. I previously conducted research looking at a primary school as a site of multi-ethnic integration, and investigating similar issues in a HE setting seemed an interesting progression. My original thesis proposal was about identities among international university students. However, after going through the thesis proposal process, I noticed I was less enthused than I had hoped to be about my topic. Learning that international students were perhaps the most highly-researched migrant group, and a relatively privileged one, made me question the social contribution of my thesis. My thesis supervisor, knowing my interests, suggested I could focus instead on FM students. This appealed to me instantly. I was surrounded by international students and many services cater to them, but never heard about FM students, despite asylum and integration issues being very socially relevant. As I went on to find out, through reading, and meeting university staff, FMBSs are indeed something of an invisible group at university.

Past academic and research experiences had stirred up my interest in the complex legal, social, cultural and personal issues FMs often encounter, and my wish to do something to help them. Encountering FMs at placements, I experienced the mix of practical and emotional challenges which often comes into therapeutic work with this client group (Guhan and Liebling-Kalifani 2011). All in all, I developed an interest in the psychosocial side of forced migration, both from the point of view of FMs and of those living in the ‘host country.’ The responses FMs stir up in others has long intrigued me. For instance, the public, the media and politicians often appear reluctant to accept the
fact that most FMs fled for their lives from horrific situations. To some extent, I believe FMs in a country like Britain are a physical reminder that we live in safety and security compared to many other parts of the world, where situations are so unbearable that people leave home and embark on life-threatening journeys. Perhaps this is a fact that people would like to forget, but the presence of FMs makes this more difficult. I hoped this thesis might shed some light on these issues for me. The topic also represented a relatively unfamiliar area for me to learn about, as well as a somewhat complex and challenging topic to investigate, which I welcomed. There is an element of ‘othering’ in my motivation here, in that I approach the ‘researched’ and their stories as ‘different’ and unknown to me. However, I think it is important to be honest about my starting point, and I believe that curiosity about people with a different background to me is a positive thing, which also fits with the philosophy of counselling psychology.

Another reason this research area appealed to me was because it makes it impossible to ignore how political and social events and decisions have a huge impact on people’s lives. Indeed, politics cropped up throughout the participants’ interviews. These factors are too frequently ignored in psychological research, which has even been criticised for maintaining the status quo of political agendas and cultural prejudices (Fox, Prilleltensky and Austin 2009). Counselling psychology has been urged to align itself more explicitly with a social justice agenda (Winter 2015). In the interests of transparency, I briefly locate myself politically. This research appealed to my political and social justice leanings, in that I could hopefully do research which might help improve the situation for FMs. I empathise with FMs and think their treatment in countries like Ireland and the UK is unacceptable. While recognising the complexity involved in causal and maintaining factors for the ‘refugee crisis,’ I am convinced European countries could and should do more to help FMs, both on arrival to Europe and in their original countries. From a counselling psychologist, as well as a human, standpoint, I believe we have an ethical responsibility to do all we can to prevent further marginalisation and traumatisation of people who have already endured a lot. My hope is that this thesis might expand people’s awareness about FMBSs’ situations, generate responses and dialogue, and contribute in the long run to improving their situation in HE. Chapter 5 is dedicated to my reflexive considerations while undertaking this piece of research.
1.10 Research question and aim of the study

At this point I will state my research question.

- How do university students from forced migrant backgrounds understand their identities?

It is simple, open-ended and exploratory, as I wanted to approach participants with as much openness as possible and allow them to help direct and shape the research. As will be explained in Chapter 3, I was interested in both what they said about their understandings of their identities, and the ways in which these were communicated in the interview encounters.

1.11 Structure of the thesis

Having provided some rationale and background to the topic, the next chapter outlines literature related to identities among HE students, international students and FMs. Following that, Chapter 3 presents the methodology used to investigate the research question. Chapter 4 is the analysis of participants’ interviews. Chapter 5 returns to reflexive research considerations first addressed in the current chapter. Finally, Chapter 6 discusses how the analysis relates to existing literature, as well as broaching limitations, suggestions for future research, indications for counselling psychology and HE from the study, along with key insights and concluding remarks.

1.12 Chapter summary

This chapter introduced the area of the research. A rationale was offered for the focus on identities of FMBs. It also set the scene for the thesis, on various different levels; from the basis for my personal interest and stance as researcher, to the socio-political atmosphere at the time of the research. Context was provided regarding the system of political asylum, as well as its intersections with HE, in the UK. Some points were presented stating the relevance of the topic to the discipline of counselling psychology, wherein the research is located. I also discussed the structure of this thesis. Next, I review some relevant literature.
2 Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines some of the literature which has addressed issues around forced migration, identity and being a student in HE. A vast literature exists on theories of identity, including on migration and identity - these are not covered in detail, but some are discussed briefly in the context of studies presented. Few studies have specifically concerned themselves with identity issues among FMBSs, so I drew on a range of literature which looks at issues set in play by the terms ‘forced migrant,’ ‘identity’ and ‘university student.’ As a starting point, I consider some research around identity and university students in general. I then introduce some relevant literature in the field of international student research, before looking at studies which investigated identity among (non-student) FMs. Lastly I outline research which focused specifically on HE students from FM backgrounds, and said something relevant to this study regarding identity. At the end of the chapter I summarise key points from the literature. The current study took an in-depth analytical approach which attended to the nuances of individuals’ narratives. The literature review reflects this, in that when presenting certain research I outline the specifics of individual participants’ cases, when they seemed relevant to framing the current study.

2.2 University student identities

On beginning university a person moves into a new life-sphere, which often necessitates a re-evaluation of their own identity and ways of acting (Lairio, Puukari and Kouvo 2013). Becoming a student indicates a process of learning and change in the form of completing a course. Being a HE student suggests an individual is on a trajectory towards working life, to being a contributing member of society with a specific professional career.

University students have been found to perceive their time at university as formative when it comes to identity. A Finnish study by Lairio and colleagues (2013) asked an open-ended question of participants: how they saw their time as university students from the perspective of life construction. The most common theme in responses was reflection on personal identity matters. Within this, students discussed increased independence, responsibility for their own actions, and ability to face difficulties. They also saw university as a transitional time; “an intermediate phase before starting an
adult and responsible life,” or as one respondent described it, a “rootless” time, as she
did not know about the future (p. 122). For some, it offered an environment where it
was safe “to find oneself and try out different roles” (p. 122). Associated with freedom
before the responsibility of working life and adult roles, some portrayed it as a time for
accumulating extracurricular experiences such as travel. A fifth of the responses
described the time as constructive for social relations, providing a sense of belonging
to a reference group and community - interacting socially and experiencing belonging
being an important part of identity construction (Wenger 1998). At the same time,
university could be experienced as lonely, with mass lectures and different pedagogical
approaches experienced as isolating by some. The strain of study was mentioned;
mainly how it combined with other stressors, like relationship problems. Respondents
discussed how the development of their thinking and learning had taught them to
think critically and independently, reporting a personal level to this, including realising
that the learning never ends, and to trust their own ideas. The authors commented
that since the basic function of universities is to develop students’ thinking, it was
interesting that many students highlighted the significance of this from the orientation
of constructing their own lives. Lairio et al. (2013) argued that it was important
university students have the opportunity to construct their identity, particularly
professional identity, in order to better navigate into working life. Most of the
respondents were female undergraduates in the final stage of their studies, which may
have influenced the responses and mean the findings may not generalise readily to
postgraduate students, for instance. I presented this study to frame ideas of university
studenthood in western societies. FMIs are likely to have undergone experiences
requiring high levels of independence and responsibility, so embarking on a university
course may hold different meanings for them and bring a different set of challenges.

2.3 International students, cross-cultural issues and identities

I turn now to international HE students. I discussed briefly in Chapter 1 how
international students represent a particular group of migrants. For international
students, education is the primary motivation for moving countries, and the intention
is often to return to their country of nationality. This gives them an ‘in-between,’
temporary migrant status. There is an obligation to integrate to some extent in order
to be educated, but on the other hand, there is no benefit to becoming too ‘attached’
if the student expects to leave the country at some point in the not-so-distant future.
This lends a sense of liminality to their student experience, as studies below illustrate. While there are some marked differences in their experiences compared to FMBSs, overlaps exist too, and FMBSs are often subsumed under the international student umbrella by peers and university services. I discuss some international student identity-related literature which seems relevant.

In Australia, Fotovatian and Miller (2014) explored construction of institutional identity among international PhD students through informal conversational data. Students reported their fear of being misunderstood, or judged as rude, due to their English language ability, therefore staying quiet and not being their ‘true self.’ Findings included that international students were stereotyped in advance of arrival, and assumed to be passive and quiet; and students with English as a first language would speak slowly to them, which participants reported disliking, as differential treatment. The international student identity label imposed by the institution was portrayed as amplifying the social, cultural and physical space between them and ‘local’ students, constructing two separate groups. A sense of commonality among international students has been found to make them feel like they came from the same place, even if they did not, due to a shared sense of being foreigners in the country they were studying in (Miller 2004). Students’ long-term goals influenced their interactions with peers and how they negotiated identity. Identity was seen as partly imposed by the institution and pre-existing expectations held by staff and other students, and partly negotiated through interactions, including electronic communications. The main thrust of the research, and another paper by Fotovatian (2012), was that in this particular context, international students were treated as the same as each other and different from Australians. The term international student could be associated with markedness, difference, otherness, deficiency in English, passiveness and compensated achievement (Ryan 2005).

Pham and Saltmarsh (2013) explored identity among Vietnamese university students, also in Australia. They underpinned their work with Hall’s (1990; 1996) approach to identity. Hall proposed identity as shaped by historical experiences and culture; the process as one of becoming rather than of being; and identities as constituted within representation rather than outside of it. Using in-depth interviews, Pham and Saltmarsh (2013) set out to explore how students made sense of their experiences and
their representation of their social and personal circumstances. The authors took the approach that narratives represent a process of people in conversation with themselves and making sense of their lives at a particular moment in time. They adopted a narrative approach to thematic analysis. As per Lairio et al. (2013), findings included self-development in terms of increased self-reliance and independent decision-making. Students associated their university experience with becoming stronger, better at asking for help, more social, and being better able to stand up for themselves (Pham and Saltmarsh 2013: 135). In line with other studies (e.g. Gu, Schweisfurth and Day 2010), from interacting with other students, respondents discovered traits and behaviours that were different from their own, which facilitated change in their own attitudes. As in Fotovatian and Miller’s (2014) research, participants were found to align themselves more with other international students than with those from the local culture, with whom they reported finding it difficult to bond. The Vietnamese students perceived themselves as outsiders, ‘others,’ in the country and university they were studying in. While motivated to integrate with Australians, the barriers they faced in doing so made them more aware of their cultural identity; unremarkable when someone resides in their own home country, it becomes salient on moving to a foreign cultural environment (Sussman 2002). Despite feeling they did not fit in, the students were able to embrace attributes of the host society to achieve academic goals. The study highlighted the complex processes by which Vietnamese students engaged in continuous negotiation with their surrounding networks: self-analysis of their own values and beliefs, self-reflections and self-orientations. Hall’s (1990) theory was drawn on, to observe “the diaspora experience is not defined by essence or purity, but...by a conception of identity which lives with and through difference” (p. 235). The construction of identity presented here was an ongoing representation of ever-changing internalised viewpoints (Hall 1996), which the participants continuously repositioned in light of the viewpoints of others. Pham and Saltmarsh (2013) commented that it is critical for research on international education to delve deeply into international students’ self-perception and actions in complex social environments (p. 138). Worth noting is that this study was concerned solely with Vietnamese students in Australia.

Brown and Brown (2013) came from a counselling perspective and carried out a qualitative investigation of identity conflict experienced by five international students...
at a university in the south of England. Cultural or collective identity was a central theme to this study. According to the literature, identity conflict can undermine student wellbeing and trigger feelings of sadness, low self-esteem, anger and defensiveness (Kim 2001; Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001). Cultural identification was described as recognition, categorisation and self-identification as a member of a group, which induces a sense of pride and affirmation and serves to differentiate from other groups (Ward et al. 2001). Identity conflict can be provoked in meeting a new culture with unfamiliar norms; in this paper the focus was on unexpected and often disturbing images of one’s national culture which might be encountered (Ward et al. 2001). Ward and colleagues linked positive self-perception and integrity of the national group. Bauman (2001) pointed out that group identity offers confirmation of the self, and changes in what constitutes that identity can be destabilising. Hinshelwood (2005) explained individuals adopt ideals or ‘internal objects’ (for example a football team) which perform powerful psychological functions at both a personal and group level; he refers to nationalistic states of mind, emphasising the ways in which ideologies continue and exist as internal realities in powerful ways. Suggesting that cultures of origin are centrally important to our private and personal sense of self, Brown and Brown (2013) found that real and perceived challenges to national self-image were particularly unsettling, and this was connected to a threat to collective identity. This appeared to be tied to the student’s degree of cultural identification, and their country’s global standing. Using thematic analysis, Brown and Brown generated a range of themes related to students’ responses to derogation of their national identity, including re-identifying with the culture of origin or allying with the west. The implication is that global political factors affect the everyday lives and identifications of international students as they go about their day-to-day university life. It raises questions as to how such global political factors might affect the identifications of FMBSSs, who have left their countries of origin under difficult circumstances.

The next study I discuss did not feature international students, but a group for whom going to university holds much personal and cultural meaning, and also involves encountering an unknown culture. Weiner-Levy (2008) addressed identity transitions among Druze women in Israel, a Muslim traditional society where people live in small rural communities. Cross-cultural bridges occur when the women leave to attend university in a modern city. A phenomenological narrative methodology and open-
style interviews were used. Participants largely recounted how, in going to university, something changed in their mentality and approach to the world and others. The altered way of thinking accorded the opportunity to discover their ‘inner selves,’ and aspects of their identity of which they were previously unaware. More specifically, academic studies and being exposed to western culture and views encouraged independent thought, legitimised inquiry and allowed knowledge and authority to be questioned (p. 141). The women acquired a new perspective from which they could review and reflect on their own needs, values and way of life. Three identity facets associated with their educational change were identified. The first was related to hybridity and feeling a stranger in one’s own home; it was very difficult to return to their old way of life. The second facet was around identity layers. ‘New’ identities were kept covert, and more traditional identities (symbolised by masks and veils) ‘covered’ their new changed identities. This led to duality and inner conflicts, with participants questioning how they would maintain their mental health, living with such contradiction. Weiner-Levy argued the effects of change were not unidirectional, and the women in turn changed their communities. Participants’ identities were suppressed yet there was a “clear self striving to be voiced” (Weiner-Levy 2008: 149). Positing that conflict and dichotomy were stable constructs of the women’s identities, Weiner-Levy acknowledged this contradicted western theoretical models, which call for harmonious configuration of identity and fail to acknowledge the complexity of identity among women in traditional societies. A closing statement from the author seems relevant to the current thesis: “understanding the inner processes they underwent - the unexpected shifts, their hopes and aspirations accompanied by loss and pain – increases our grasp of the course of change and breakthrough and the difficulties and anguish associated with success” (p. 149). Weiner-Levy also pointed out how “new and unprecedented syntheses” might be devised, and society would then be encouraged to accept them (p. 149). The Druze women were expected to return home after university, as opposed to FMs who often cannot. The research highlighted personal changes due to engagement with HE, which resulted in tension on individual and societal levels.

2.4 Forced migrant identities

Turning now to studies which looked at the identity experiences of FMs, Collie, Kindon, Liu and Podsiadlowski (2010) investigated how young female Assyrian refugees in New
Zealand expressed and negotiated their identities. ‘Acculturation’ is a term used to refer to adapting to a new culture. The authors described how migrant youth may use ‘bridge-building’ or ‘alternating biculturalism,’ in that they deal with cultural differences by adapting and behaving according to the culture that is dominant in the particular situation they find themselves (Hedegaard 2005). This might mean behaving a certain way at home and another way when out with friends. Another method of dealing with contrasting cultural demands is ‘blending’ or ‘fusing’ cultures; reaching a sort of compromise between the two (Deepak 2005). Collie et al. set out to understand the mechanisms of how these practices were achieved using ethnographic observation methods, focus groups and interviews. One finding was that participants rapidly shifted between different constructions of their country of origin, Iraq; the authors likened this to Hermans’ (2001) metaphor of different identity positions from which they were seeing, and which competed for dominance with each other. Collie et al. concluded that their methods facilitated increased attention to detail and meaning, resulting in the different, more nuanced, conclusions about identity construction they reached compared to other studies. Drawing on this, the current thesis, while using interviews alone, sought to attend to detail and elaborate the contradictions and nuances in attitudes and positioning, including towards participants’ ‘home’ and ‘host’ cultures. Collie and colleagues showed how the women attempted to attain optimal inclusion in all groups by carefully positioning their identities in a certain manner. Unlike the current research, their study focused on a group of a specific age, gender, and ethnoreligious background. Hermans (2001) recommended that acculturation researchers shift from a focus on developmental end-states, like ‘integration,’ towards a more process-oriented notion of acculturation that “can account for situated, negotiated and often contested developmental trajectories” (p. 272); a point which resonates with the aim of this thesis.

I now present some research which, like this study, took a narrative approach to research with FMs. Shuman (2012) pointed out that narratives are particularly significant for FMs, because a narrative constitutes a crucial part of the political asylum process; it may be the only ‘evidence’ someone has of their experiences, and passing the ‘narrative test’ of presenting a credible story can mean success in being granted asylum (p. 127). Eastmond (2007) argued narrative approaches in FM research illuminate the reaffirmation of self, contest overgeneralised images, and provide a way
to re-establish identity in ruptured life courses and communities. Narrative methods therefore appear particularly suited to research with FMs.

Hatoss (2012) analysed mini-narratives from Sudanese ‘refugee-background’ adults in Australia about their experiences of intergroup communications with ‘mainstream Australians.’ Two research questions asked: how do Sudanese Australians identify themselves (including identity labels and referential categories they use to refer to themselves); and how do they position themselves when confronted with the question ‘where are you from?’ and what can be learned from this. Hatoss selected and analysed participants’ stories of being confronted with the question of where they were from. In similar fashion to the current thesis, Hatoss adopted a narrative approach with a special focus on positioning. Narratives were conceived of as interactional, dialogic and living. The author argued that in interethnic contexts, membership categorisation is interactional. Through everyday interaction, people position themselves and others, and this positioning carries implicit messages about identity work (Ribeiro 2006). In line with this, Hatoss found that most interviewees, when asked to talk about any significant experiences in Australia, described situations where Australians asked them about their identities. Under investigation in the research were both the narrated event - thematic, and ‘what they say about their identity’ - as well as the narrative event - in the interview, the interaction between ‘teller’ and interviewer. Cooperative, non-cooperative and context-dependent style responses were identified among those interviewed. Some respondents reported that being asked about their origins reminded them of their status as outsider and not a member of Australian society. They reported feeling excluded and offended by it, and saw constant questioning as a subtle act of racism. Some were shown to reject and renegotiate assigned schematic identity labels. One participant recounted receiving comments which could be perceived as racist. Hatoss interpreted his response as a reaffirmation of a racialised identity assigned to him by the broader community; a response indicating his resilience. As in other studies (e.g. Ajrouch and Kusow 2007), participants felt ‘locals’ thought being black was simply inconsistent with the host country’s national identity. Participants were generally found to use “interdiscursive reflections to express, contest and negotiate their identities” (Hatoss 2012: 64). Hatoss observed that although hybrid and complex identities were developed through everyday interactions, racial features played a key role in the negotiation of new
identities (p. 65). Some community elders, despite living in their new country for over ten years, still felt ‘othered’ - one asking how long would they continue to be refugees (p. 65). Hatoss drew attention to the tension between self-identification and that ascribed by outgroup members, a theme found in numerous studies on race, ethnicity and migration (e.g. Aspinall and Song 2013; Mas Giralt 2011). Reflective considerations around the interview setting were outlined, but how the author’s identity as a white European woman might have impacted on participants’ positioning was not discussed. This seems a key omission in research explicitly focused on identity positioning.

Langellier’s (2010) paper on performing Somali identity in the diaspora was a source of inspiration for the current study. It centred on a young Muslim woman, ‘Caaliya,’ one of many Somali refugees recently settled in Maine in the US. Langellier employed a dialogical, performative-focused narrative approach to examine Caaliya’s story-telling in an interview context. The researcher set out not to ‘uncover’ Caaliya’s identity but “to follow her storytelling as it unfolded in an embodied and situated dialogue surrounded by discourses about refugees” (p. 67). It was demonstrated how Caaliya performed and announced her identity on the one hand, for instance in wearing a hijab. On the other hand, Caaliya recognised western discourses which might interpret her clothing as a sign of female oppression, and anticipated and addressed the “unspoken demands” of such discursive fields by offering a counter-narrative about her choices in the way she dressed (p. 67). Langellier discussed Caaliya’s performances of gender tensions, such as when she used humour to disidentify herself from Somali culture at some points when discussing its patriarchal investments. Later in the interview, the interviewee responded to US assumptions regarding Somali culture by defining her identity as individual rather than collective; she also forcefully disidentified from being a ‘cultural Muslim,’ a move connected with being educated and able to research - and thus critique - practices traditionally associated with Muslim culture. The interview also featured Caaliya dramatising dialogue between her and her friends, to communicate critical points she wished to make on race relations and political correctness in the US. Identity in the study was conceptualised as a performative accomplishment used to challenge static notions of differences, with Langellier highlighting Caaliya’s tactics to redefine and transform identity. Langellier concluded that, while Caaliya had lost her homeland, she retained a “vigorous anchor of ethnic identity” (p. 88). This anchor the author imagined as not attached to a fixed
point on the sea floor, like culture or religion, but to the water itself, and so could travel both with and against narratives that would inscribe Caaliya as a Somali Muslim woman (p. 89). Though a college student, the paper did not focus on Caaliya’s student identity; rather, ethnicity, race and gender were foregrounded. The interview took place with a ‘mixed’ audience of five others present; Langellier defended this as resonating with collectivistic Somali culture, but there is an argument that it might have constrained what Caaliya felt she could and should share. The context of a small city with a large, relatively new Somali population probably influenced a particular identity experience and performance too. Langellier noted that Somalis have a strong sense of national identity, of uniqueness and independence. Therefore, I propose their experiences are likely to be distinct from those of FMs from other nations, leaving a gap for more research which elucidates performances of identity among individuals from other FM groups.

2.5 Forced migrant students and identities

Next I introduce research which specifically said something interesting about FM students attending HE. Linda Morrice has published several research papers on learning, HE and FMs in the UK. I first outline Morrice’s (2013a) research on the ‘darker side of transformative learning.’ She considered the processes of transforming experiences and learning that accompany transitions to life in the UK. Drawing on a broad view of learning that goes beyond the formal and institutional, Morrice’s stance was that some of the strongest learning for FMs comes from what they have experienced and participated in, informally. She challenged the idea that learning always has positive outcomes and brings benefit to the learner. This theme I observed cropping up in various ways throughout the FMBS research, particularly evident in some studies discussed later in this chapter. Morrice (2013a) interviewed ten refugees, male and female, aged 24 - 48, every six to nine months across a four year period. From a variety of nationalities and professional backgrounds, what they shared was having a professional and educational background as an important source of their identity. They were recruited through accessing a support course in a university in the south of England. A longitudinal study was combined with a life history approach which involved collecting stories. Data was analysed using thematic narrative analysis (Riessman 2008). The aim was to explore the learning and identity processes that accompany transition, and understand how individual biography shapes and informs
strategies used by refugees in the UK. Morrice outlined how a number of models have sought to elucidate the identity shifts and adaptive processes that happen as immigrants try to negotiate unfamiliar cultural contexts. The focus has been on how they develop cultural competence, a key supposition being that as immigrants make the transition to a new life, there will be positive change. Morrice cited various theories of learning which posit essentially that when we experience an unsettling disjunction between what we know biographically and our environment, we seek to restore harmony by learning (Jarvis 2006; Mezirow 1994; 2000).

Participants indeed reported the disorienting shock of first encountering new ways, and “a process of critically reflecting on previously held assumptions and purposefully transforming [their] frame of reference” (Morrice 2013a: 260). Morrice observed how refugees have to learn the social scripts of what it means to be an asylum seeker, and then a refugee - lessons described as “particularly profound and insidious” (p. 261). In the narratives around the period before their asylum claim was determined, conflict was evident between the ideal, imagined identities they hoped to inhabit, and the reality - an identity that restricted entitlements and prevented access to economic, educational and other positive identity resources (p. 261). This echoed findings regarding the restrictions and complications associated with FM labels in other studies (e.g. Hebbani, Obijiofor and Bristed 2010). Asylum seeker and refugee identities were a source of vulnerability and shame; participants commented on negative perceptions from others who expected them to be poor, dirty and illiterate. As in Hatoss’ study discussed earlier, participants reported being asked when they intended to ‘go back’ to their country, and a lack of acceptance from British people. This led them to hide their backgrounds. A sense of loss of social status and financial independence was experienced, as the refugees were often obliged to find work in the low-skilled labour market, their previous education and work experience in highly skilled areas being discounted. The thrust of Morrice’s argument was that the narratives indicated a ‘darker’ side to becoming a refugee that transformative learning cannot accommodate. Indeed they have to unlearn and let go of much of who and what they were, and learn to live with the loss of professional identity and social status. Morrice’s study, it should be noted, was with a particular group who were highly educated before arriving in the UK and therefore had prior HE experience. This is not the case for the majority of FMs. Also, most participants were over 30, and all had accessed a
support course specifically for refugees, perhaps indicating they were well prepared compared to other FMBSs starting HE. They also did not all end up being HE students. Unlike the current study, the focus was on professional identity rather than identity in general or even student identity.

Another paper by Morrice (2013b) again concerned itself with refugee professionals in the UK. Four case studies were juxtaposed to draw out differences and commonalities across HE encounters, highlighting how pre-migratory and post-migratory experiences shaped these. The aim was to conceptualise the experiences of refugees in HE, particularly how different kinds of learner identities are constructed and enabled through engagement with HE, while others are stymied. The same method was used as in Morrice’s (2013a) research outlined above, thematic narrative analysis applied, and the cases of two male and two female participants from Iran, Iraq and Zimbabwe were presented. Through a frame of capital and habitus (Bourdieu 1977), findings included racialised low expectations as motivators towards HE, and shame and secrecy about being a refugee, as per other studies (Earnest et al. 2010; Morrice 2013a). HE was framed as often providing a sense of belonging, transforming racialised identity and proving ability and self-worth. It could also be experienced, however, as confusing and disturbing, without the necessary institutional support. Participant ‘Savalan’ established a positive learner identity, yet the emotional and financial dimensions of university life were acute burdens. As a son, there was a cultural expectation he would support his sick parents; this placed him under much pressure. Savalan was vulnerable in being unsure about being able to stay in the UK, but kept his struggles from tutors and peers, not wanting to reveal his refugee identity. Another participant, civil engineer ‘Alan,’ had a migration narrative involving sudden flight, trauma, homelessness and mental health problems. Alan gained an enormous sense of belonging and confidence from being a student, enjoying the feeling of everyone coming together to learn. However, prevented from taking part in student socalising for financial reasons, he would make excuses rather than reveal his background. This highlighted the different understandings and expectations of family and economic realities, which, Morrice (2013b) noted, “constrained and shaped their experiences as students and generated distinction” (p. 665). Essentially their background was seen to create boundaries of belonging between them and others.
Next I turn to research conducted in Australia, where the majority of FMBS education-related research has taken place. Harris, Spark and Watts (2013) set out to explore the diverse needs, experiences and backgrounds of African Australian women at university. Some participants were specified to be refugees. Ten women, aged 18 - 38, from four African countries, were interviewed; the analysis was presented as five case studies. Themes of the study included education as life-changing and as granting freedom and empowerment. One recurring issue in their accounts was to do with how women’s participation in HE threatened the status quo of male authority. The women transcended conventional gender roles by becoming increasingly independent and confident through education and employment. Participant ‘Fiduma’ stated she had become “very different” and could now solve her own problems (p. 190). Attending university also represented a break from boredom and anxiety; focusing on studies helped Fiduma keep her mind off what was happening to people ‘back home.’ While Fiduma’s account generally portrayed a positive university experience, others conveyed the complexities and struggles apparently characteristic of these women’s HE engagements, and connected in this research to racialised and gendered factors. Law student ‘Nadifa’ was a young Sudanese woman. In contrast to Fiduma, Nadifa was said to be “critically reflexive” about the ways in which she existed “outside the university system” (p. 192). Identity conflicts appeared key to this sense of outsidersness. Nadifa emphatically said she did not feel she belonged at the university, powerfully elaborating her sense of liminality there, and questioning whether she was partaking in a process of invalidating herself (p. 192). There appeared to be a racialised element to this, the authors noting her outsider status was linked to being a tall black woman in a white middle-class law student world. The sense of liminality was attributed as much to Nadifa moving away from roles typically occupied by Sudanese women as to her difference from white students. Nadifa explained how, since she was flouting Sudanese gender norms, people from her community would gossip about her, leading to tension in her family. She was said to exist “at the interstices of two cultures,” something unacknowledged in the university context (p. 192), where she felt isolated. Echoing Morrice’s points above, Harris and colleagues (2013) commented that “the pain, loss and identity struggle associated with [Nadifa’s] journey” was difficult even to describe, clashing as it did with a cultural context where HE is usually
“unambiguously associated with the opportunity for personal development, career prospects and individual gain” (p. 193).

I briefly highlight some relevant points from another participant in the same study. ‘Kamida,’ of Zimbabwean origin, highlighted the personal price paid for education. She described the balancing act between what had been gained and given up through university education. Despite the personal and financial “price” associated with it, Kamida valued her education immensely, saying it changed her life and she had become “this successful independent young woman who is fearless! Who is strong as well as happy in myself” (p. 197). She wished to see more African women role models in Australian universities, explaining she would like to help others avoid the trial and error she experienced on her own. In sum, participants were shown to have had a range of experiences, with inherent struggles. Their new student and professional identities brought about challenges, sometimes separating them from their communities and families, partly due to the way the women disrupted gender norms. Participants spoke of appreciating their newfound autonomy and strength, while simultaneously acknowledging it had come at a price.

Another paper by the same authors, Harris, Spark and Watts (2015), again in an Australian university setting, used semi-structured interviews to investigate some complications of tertiary education for African Australian women of diverse backgrounds. Ten women on a variety of courses were interviewed in English. They were encouraged to reflect on the meaning of tertiary education in their lives, such as if they had lost or gained as a consequence of it. I focus on one of two profiles presented: that of ‘Awek,’ a South Sudanese-born 26 year old who had arrived as a child refugee. With a degree and postgraduate diploma from a prestigious university, Awek was unusual in having always had her family’s support to study. Her great pride in her education was related to how extremely hard it was to get an education back home as a woman. Key recurring tensions surfaced again around women being educated causing ‘problems at home.’ Like participants in Harris and colleagues’ (2013) earlier paper, Awek indicated feeling that education broadened her mind, gave her courage, and propelled her to get more out of life. Yet she was aware of how the personal independence associated with education could make one unpopular with others, referring particularly to men of her cultural background. Her education was
framed against expectations that migrants like her will fail; Awek described ‘mainstream Australians’ being surprised to hear she had a degree and was on a career path. The authors noted Awek concomitantly navigated stereotypes and expectations at home, from her cultural community, and the wider community. A divide had grown between Awek and her childhood friends, who did not finish school and now saw her as “on a different level to them,” which she likened to “a class thing” (p. 377). “Multiple identities and multiple struggles” (Greany 2008: 54) were said to be characteristic of this group’s experiences in this particular western educational context. Harris et al. (2015) pointed out the limits of “singular idealised discourses about the relationship between women’s participation in education and social inclusion” (p. 377). The authors cited Weiner-Levy’s (2008) study I referred to earlier, arguing that discourses ignore, even deny, the “hurdles, transitions and pain” of the losses migrant students often undergo, and can overlook “intrapersonal dynamics and identity transitions associated with processes of change” (p. 139). Both pieces of research from Harris and colleagues focused on African migrants in Australia, so one can assume there would be differences in the UK context where the asylum system as well as social setting is different. All participants were women, and a gendered element was evident in their experiences connected to HE. The studies came from a sociological educational standpoint, the focus was not on identity, and their methodological or philosophical approaches were not outlined in detail; thus I believe leaving space for more in-depth analyses of a broader range of FMBSs’ experiences.

Returning to the UK now, a PhD study by Bowen (2014) was informed by participatory research methods and aimed to explore the relationship between students’ lived experience of asylum in the UK and their engagement in HE. Bowen was primarily interested in investigating how ‘refugee’ and ‘higher education’ intersect. Accounts from seven students were presented. Mostly refugees or FMs with indefinite or DLR in the UK, they were predominantly males aged 30-39, in undergraduate and postgraduate university education in England and Wales. The research drew on field theory from Bourdieu (1977) to explore how the sites and spaces of HE interplayed with personal and political identifications. A multi-method approach was utilised to generate data: an online forum, individual interviews, and a ‘week-in-the-life’ journal which had the option to include the use of photographs. The impermanence of their permission to stay in the UK was found to pervade participants’ accounts. Bowen
linked this to refugee status no longer being granted on a permanent basis. As per other already studies outlined, FMBSs reported not telling classmates about their status, believing it to be a ‘disadvantage’ which would lead people to judge them negatively (p. 155). Some held deep fears of removal from the UK; of being taken from the classroom itself by the authorities. The university campus thus became a site of exclusion and further displacement – contrasting with one participant’s description of first arriving on campus as like “being in heaven” (p. 155). That participant, ‘Jordan,’ opted to do a course in a subject he was not particularly interested in, as it represented a means to be out in the world rather than waiting for a Home Office letter in his flat. It also fell in with rules regarding education for asylum seekers. Jordan used his student identity to imply he was in the country to study, making others more comfortable with him by erasing social barriers related to being an asylum seeker. It afforded Jordan something to talk about, allowing him to “blend in” (p. 159). The implication was that being seen as an international student was preferable to being seen as an asylum seeker, highlighting the apparent disparity in social acceptability between the two labels. In the Introduction Chapter, I mentioned how FMs may become frozen in space, and indeed Jordan evoked feeling restricted both in space and opportunity because of his status, saying “you are just out there in the crowd but you cannot go where those crowds are going” (pp. 159-160). Ambivalence characterised the period after he was granted refugee status, as this identity change meant he no longer felt he belonged in the places he previously felt comfortable, such as at asylum seeker support centres. Later, while studying, he pressured himself not to waste a year - like other FMBSs, having lost time, he was very driven.

Another participant, Zimbabwean ‘David’ claimed to have no thought about being an asylum seeker or refugee, defiantly distinguishing his circumstantial identity (as refugee) from that of ‘who he was’ - emphasising his humanity and ‘blocking’ a deficit cultural capital of being defined as a refugee (p. 170). David’s story demonstrated how life at university could become a centrepiece of life in the UK, as the place he found a partner and friends. He related all he gained personally to the parliamentary decision to waive international fees for his undergraduate degree. Reflecting on the use of photographs as a research method, Bowen (2014) concluded they facilitated a depth of expression which permeated the whole conversation, giving opportunity for
meaningful participation to occur (p. 178). Similarly, the current thesis used multiple methods.

‘Amal,’ from Kurdistan, decided to enter HE as part of a longer term plan to return to Kurdistan, and this framed his account of university participation. He was observed to situate himself as a loyal son, perhaps characterising himself within a discourse around ‘deserving’ asylum seekers, as someone hard-working and self-disciplined (p. 184). Bowen discussed the fragility of Amal’s sense of belonging in the university, when circumstances prevented him from continuing his projected plan of study. Amal built up international networks cyber-socially through his academic engagement, which, the author observed, fit with Ong’s (2006) concept of ‘borderless citizenship.’ Another relevant narrative in Bowen’s study was that of female student ‘Lul’ who came alone from Somalia in her teens. After disrupted education as a child, she was particularly excited to be the first of her family to go to university. Lul’s decision to study social work was linked to her voluntary work with other refugees; connecting her own life experience, her critical reflections on social injustice, and her career choice. Developing professional identity, she had to recognise how external perceptions of her had changed by default; for instance in Somalia she had never had to think about herself as black or Muslim. Lul’s response to categorisation by others was “to try to carry her identities lightly” (p. 202) and with ambivalence. For another FMBS ‘Aro’ from Iraq, study formed part of his strategy to manage his feelings of displacement. He spoke of being asked by others from his community why he bothered studying, when so many Iraqis with PhDs were working driving taxis and other low-skilled work. He felt FMs were not considered to have potential to be academically successful by UK society, and saw this as infiltrating his friends’ mentalities. Like in Harris et al.’s (2013; 2015) work, education became a point of disconnection between Aro and his diaspora social network, and assumptions to do with what FMs can and cannot achieve were evident.

A recent piece of research by Student et al. (2017) took a collaborative auto-ethnographic approach to the topic of being a refugee student. One of the authors, an anonymous refugee student (‘R Student’), wrote narratives providing deep descriptions of his life while studying at three UK universities. These were analysed thematically by him and the other two authors. They illuminated how R Student’s past
as a survivor of genocide and his years of transience in forced migration, along with supportive and destructive relationships, intersected in complex ways with neo-liberal policies, to restrict his agency and inform his experience as a refugee student. They discussed how all refugees share the experience of losing home, and home provides a sense of security; that is, routine, predictability and coherence regarding life. It was observed that it is therefore unsurprising refugees may idealise home in their memories; it represents a time when life made sense. School provided stability in the midst of disorder and was therefore ‘precious.’ R Student wrote of detesting being called by the ‘label’ of refugee, using it only out of necessity and associating it with “cowardice, weakness...ultimately sub human” (p. 13). His assumption that others understood the complexity of the label was shattered by peers’ responses; he recounted how a good friend made a dehumanising comment on finding out he was a refugee. He found it impossible to imagine being equal to others until he was granted citizenship, though when this happened he was terrified it could be stripped from him at any time. Traumas from his past were shown to affect his interactions with the state and his supervisors. Undoubtedly an interesting study which contributes to the sparse literature in the area, its focus on one participant with a particularly traumatic life story may make it less generalisable than other studies. Limits were imposed by the student needing to hide his identity, and one wonders about what impact R Student writing both with and for his tutors may have had. However, the auto-ethnographic approach, commitment to ethical engagement and to elaborating the political forces impacting on his experiences are commendable.

2.6 Chapter summary: conclusion of review of the literature

In sum, I drew on research which addressed a range of issues, from cross-cultural student experiences, to FM professionals returning to HE, to ‘performances’ of new identities in the diaspora. Some critique was offered, as well as pointing out gaps in the literature which this study aims to address. Though growing in recent years, there remains a dearth of research on HE students from FM backgrounds. Themes across the literature include that FMBSs, having overcome numerous barriers, often dedicate themselves to their education. There are indications that students who are not native to the country where they are studying tend to find themselves separated from home students. At the same time, the multicultural environment of many HE institutions could provide a setting where FMBSs feel they belong, being a student sometimes
counterbalancing some of the problems (including identity-related ones) associated with being a FM. There were cases, though, where HE participation created divisions between students and their community of origin, while they did not feel validated or included in the university setting either. The literature suggests that issues of identity can be complex for FMs, and further complicated by HE participation, though university study can also engender new, positive, identity affiliations. A need is apparent for research which focuses particularly on FMBS identities, especially which tackles identity issues head-on by asking participants about their opinions and experiences around their identities. Existing research which discussed identity issues among this group tends to have set out with a research question unrelated to identity, such as around educational experiences and participation. Methodologically, narrative and multimethod approaches were shown to yield interesting and rich analyses, and the current study builds on these. Research to date has also mainly involved academics doing the research, rather than students interviewing other students, which I argue introduces a different dynamic. Having set the scene for the study, next I outline the method used.
3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explain methodological choices made and the rationale behind them. The theoretical approach which underpins the research is outlined first, followed by a discussion of my choice of methodology and approach to analysing the data. Lastly, the chapter covers considerations regarding trustworthiness and ethics.

3.2 Theoretical positioning

The importance of explaining the theoretical position behind the research cannot be overestimated. Holstein and Gubrium (2012) advised that every research strategy has its proper and improper conceptual precursors, which lead to particular kinds of research results (p. 6). The research question is understood to inform the theoretical approach adopted, which in turn informs the methodology chosen for the study.

The once-dominant positivist empiricist stance, which sees knowledge as objective and universal, was challenged in the 20th century. Different traditions, politics and cultural beliefs are now understood to influence what is accepted as science, or as knowledge, in different cultures and societies (Teo 2010). Varying views exist regarding what research is, and how this relates to the kind of knowledge being developed. A paradigm is the basic belief system or worldview that “defines the nature of the ‘world,’ the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts” (Guba and Lincoln 1994: 107, italics in original). Paradigms guide how we make decisions and carry out research, and are characterised through their related ontology, epistemology and methodology. Ontology relates to the nature of being; the form and nature of reality. Epistemology pertains to what can be known - the nature of the relation between the knower (or would-be knower) and what can be known (Guba and Lincoln 1994: 108). One’s beliefs about the nature of reality (ontology) influence one’s beliefs about what can be known about the nature of knowledge (epistemology). In turn, these will impact on what methods the inquirer believes will allow him or her to find out about the world: that is, the particular methodology used in research.

3.2.1 Social constructionism

A social constructionist stance was taken in this research, albeit one oriented towards a particular view of language and social practices. This philosophical view subscribes to
a relativist ontology, which “holds that reality is constructed within the human mind, such that no one true reality exists; instead, reality is relative according to each individual who experiences it at a given time and place” (Moon and Blackman 2014: 1170). Epistemologically, according to constructionism, there is no objective ‘truth’ waiting to be discovered; instead, “‘truth’, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world” (Moon and Blackman 2014: 1172). Knowledge is seen to be transactional and subjectivist (Guba and Lincoln 1994). Researcher and researched are interactively linked, and findings are created as the investigation proceeds rather than already-existing in the world and waiting to be ‘found.’ Social constructionist researchers are concerned with the social construction of knowledge itself, and with how people construct versions of reality through the use of language (Willig 2013: 17). Thus, the type of knowledge aspired to is not knowledge about the world or knowledge about how things really are, or even about how they are experienced by individuals, but rather about the process by which such ‘knowledge’ is constructed in the first place (Willig 2013: 17). Willig also pointed out that language plays an important part in the social construction of what we regard as knowledge; language is seen to construct reality rather than reality determining how we talk about or describe it.

Following Willig’s (2013) outline of the variance from radical to moderate social constructionist approaches, I position myself more towards the moderate, less relativist, side of the continuum. By this I mean I do seek to tentatively make connections between the discursive construction of a localised reality and the wider sociocultural context within which it takes place. I recognise the effects of wider cultural, political, institutional and other events and discourses on the research encounter.

3.3 Qualitative research

A qualitative approach was used in this research. The research question is open-ended and exploratory: how do university students from refugee backgrounds understand their identities? Concerning itself with issues of subjectivity and meaning, such a question is suited to a qualitative research approach. Qualitative researchers tend to be interested in “the quality and texture of experience, rather than with the identification of cause-effect relationships” as per quantitative research (Willig 2013:}
The focus is on the meanings attributed to events by the participants, rather than how participants will respond to any predefined variables set by the researcher. Elliott, Fischer and Rennie (1999) explained that qualitative research aspires not to verify earlier conclusions and theory, but rather, to contribute to a process of revision and enrichment of understanding (p. 216). Questions about processes are common; the objective is frequently to describe and possibly explain events and experiences, with participants’ as well as researchers’ interpretations of events contributing to this (Willig 2013).

3.4 Narrative and dialogical epistemologies

Within the broad scope of a social constructionist framework, I draw specifically on narrative and dialogical epistemologies, as reflected in my choice of method and analytical approach. Studies of identity in the psychological literature increasingly employ narrative (Josselson 1995; Singer 2004) and dialogical approaches (Bhatia 2002; Clegg and Salgado 2011). Dialogical and narrative traditions share an interest in how social reality is constructed through everyday interaction with others, and how social conventions and taken-for-granted meanings are constantly produced and reproduced in interactions between people (Riessman 2008: 106). I outline what each of these philosophies of knowledge entails, as they underpin my approach to analysing the data.

3.4.1 Narrative

Recent decades have seen a boom in interest in narrative practices in the social sciences (Czarniawska 2004). Bruner (1990; 1991) was a leading proponent of introducing narrative ways of knowing to psychology. He posited that we make sense of our lives through the stories we tell; that all experience is essentially storied, and we know who we are - our identity - because of these stories, too. We put events in order, in narrative sequence, to give them meaning. Polkinghorne (1995) explained narrative as “the type of discourse composition that draws together diverse events, happenings, and actions of human lives into thematically unified goal-directed processes” (p. 5). Experience is organised through narratives, and understanding these narratives is a way of understanding experience (Sullivan 2012: 120). In line with the social constructionist stance, in narrative epistemology "there are no causes to be grasped with certainty where the act of creating meaning is concerned, only acts, expressions
and contexts to be interpreted” (Bruner 1990: 118). Research on personal narratives suggests their importance not only for psychological change but for broader social change too (Squire 2012). This, Squire proposed, could be due to their binding of the personal and social realms (p. 52). This and other points outlined in the previous chapter (on page 29) imply narrative research may be particularly appropriate for research with FMs - as well as for counselling psychology research, with its social justice interests.

3.4.2 Dialogical

Dialogical approaches emerged mainly from the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. Inspired by his study of literary novels, Bakhtin’s theories went on to infuse studies of interaction in everyday life in a multitude of disciplines (Josselson 1995; Riessman 2008). Bakhtin (1984) wrote that “two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence” (p. 252). For Bakhtin, true knowledge comes only from personal participation, in the form of a dialogue with the ideas of others (Sullivan 2012). Every word and utterance presumes the existence of an ‘other,’ an audience, to hear and respond to it. As Shepherd (2011) explained, “‘dialogism’ is most commonly used to denote the quality of an instance of discourse that explicitly acknowledges that it is defined by its relationship to other instances, both past, to which it responds, and future, whose response it anticipates” (p. 2). Bakhtin (1986) believed dialogical events always give rise to something new, unique and unrepeatable - and in moments of dialogue we “not only express ourselves and ‘show’ each other the nature of our own unique ‘inner’ lives, but we also shape our living relations both to each other and to our surroundings” (Shotter and Billig 1998: 14). In psychology, embracing the dialogical has been said to represent a move to focusing more on social practices than on what is supposedly occurring in people’s heads (Shotter and Billig 1998: 13). Bakhtin posited that language informed the psyche rather than the other way around; that processes which took place through languaged activity informed inner consciousness.

Dialogical approaches adopt a view of language which bears significance for human science research, and which complicates the commonsense theory about language and meaning - that is, that language simply conveys information (Riessman 2008). Bakhtin argued that a given word is saturated with ideology and meanings from previous usage
and is never ‘neutral’ - instead, “every utterance carries the traces of other utterances, past and present, as words carry history on their backs” (Riessman 2008: 107).

Inherent in dialogical approaches is the ethical notion of unfinalisability (Bakhtin 1984): that no person should ever set out to have the last word on another or their experience, for as long as they live they can always change and be redefined. This brings a tension in research, for a research report requires things to stand still to be recorded or reported in some way (Frank 2012). Research, then, becomes inquiry and conversation; that is, dialogue (Bakhtin 1986: 113). Dialogical philosophy anticipates that the reader of a text will continue to adapt the meaning and experience of what is produced in the research, and bring forth new questions. Therefore, while the research may say something apparently final about the world, there is really no end to this cycle of new dialogue. Bringing forth new dialogues is largely the goal of such research, which fully acknowledges its orientation towards an audience. Methodologically, a focus on dialogism means a greater emphasis than in other qualitative methods on the changing boundary lines between self and other (Sullivan 2012).

### 3.5 Counselling psychology and personal standpoint on epistemological approach

The epistemological stance adopted appears particularly appropriate for counselling psychology research. Counselling psychology has philosophical roots in humanism, postmodernism and social constructionism, thus viewing truth as multiple, contextual and situated (Orlans and Van Scoyoc 2009). Narrative and dialogical research adhere to the same philosophical underpinnings, making this combination an apt mode of enquiry for research in this discipline. The emphasis dialogical research places on contextual understanding chimes with counselling psychology’s attention to how societal forces impact on an individual (Cutts 2013). Dialogism has also been heralded as a humanistic approach (Jacob 2014). Its ethical proposal that nobody should have the final word over what any other person is - authority over meaning instead dispersed and embedded (Riessman 2008) - fits well with counselling psychology’s associations with the move away from medicalised and pathologising practice.

Certainly, from a counselling psychology stance, dialogue is the ultimate tool of transformation, central to therapy and vital for psychological change and growth. Understanding and approaching research as a dialogue indicates respect for
participants’ capacity for continuing change (Frank 2012). Josselson (2011) wrote that “through narrative, we come in contact with our participants as people engaged in the process of interpreting themselves” (p. 33); it seems to me that Josselson could easily have been referring to counselling psychology or dialogical practices. The requirement also of the narrative researcher to be reflexive, and acknowledge and interrogate the part they play (Etherington 2004) - also central in dialogical methods (Riessman 2008) - is consistent with counselling psychology’s commitment to ethical, rigorous and transparent qualitative research (Morrow 2005).

Personally, the principles I chose to guide and inform my thinking in this thesis appealed to me based on my own sensibilities and interests. The epistemology appears compatible with humanistic and feminist principles to which I personally subscribe. I was drawn to narrative and dialogical philosophies due to an interest in literature, as well as interests in narrative therapy (White and Epston 1990) and dialectical behaviour therapy (Linehan and Wilks 2015), based on dialectical philosophy. I understand knowledge as created between people in a particular context and thus shifting and never essentialisable. The knowledge presented in this thesis I see as authored and constructed by me in conjunction with the participants in the study, rather than already-existing out in the world and ‘discovered’ through the research.

3.6 Participant sample

There were two criteria for participants. The first was that they were, or had recently been, university students. While I initially set out to do research with current students, I widened the criteria to having completed studies in the past two years. All of those who ended up participating had actually finished their studies in the year prior to the interview. This meant the student experience was fresh in their memories but they were also able to take a retrospective view on their overall experience of being a student. I argue they were therefore able to think about it perhaps from a more reflective stance than if they were still ‘in’ the student experience/identity (Schón 1983). I began recruiting students in the University of Manchester. I emailed and met up with numerous university staff members in an effort to find out about numbers of FM students and resources available to them. Despite enthusiastic responses, no one was able to provide such numbers. It seems there is no way of telling via the university’s records whether someone is a FM, particularly for refugees, who are
classified as home students. A staff member doing research with FMBSs at the same university reported also failing to find out numbers of these students; other UK-based studies discussed similar situations (Bowen 2014; Student et al. 2017). Due to challenges in recruiting - possibly in part due to low numbers of eligible students at the University of Manchester - I widened criteria over the course of the research to include students at two other Manchester universities. However, no one came forward from those universities and all participants were from the University of Manchester. I consider it a strength of the study that participants and researcher had shared experience of the same university setting.

The other criterion was that they identified as coming from a FM background. This I defined, rather broadly, as at some point in their life having sought and been granted asylum in the UK or another country. This could be refugee status, HP, or DLR, or could mean they had been granted citizenship but had arrived as a FM. It did not include someone still waiting for an outcome on their asylum application.

3.7 Recruiting participants

Participants were recruited to this study through a number of means. I advertised via posters (see Appendix 1) placed on notice boards around the university and public places frequented by students, such as the International Society and nearby cafés. An email was circulated via the university department email system (see Appendix 2). This email outlined the nature of my research and requested that anyone interested in participating get in touch for further information.

Given the possibly low numbers of FMBSs, I also recruited participants through personal networks or snowball sampling. According to Atkinson and Flint (2001), the primary reasons for using snowball sampling are when respondents are few in number or some degree of trust is required to initiate contact. The first point is certainly the case regarding the population of study here, and the second is arguably true too. The method is useful for accessing members of ‘hidden populations’ in society who are, by their nature, often difficult to locate (Atkinson and Flint 2001). In accessing such groups, people in positions of relative authority or proximity - privy to ‘insider’ knowledge or networks - may provide a route into the required population (Groger, Mayberry and Straker 1999). With this in mind, I employed the help of a ‘gatekeeper’ to contact potential participants. A contact I had made while researching the thesis
topic, the gatekeeper worked in a capacity supporting FMBSs, and had considerable research experience herself with this group. The gatekeeper agreed to circulate my recruitment email to her contacts. Atkinson and Flint (2001) flagged up potential ethical issues associated with using gatekeepers. The possibility of people feeling under pressure to participate was taken into consideration, and precautions taken to reduce the risk of this. These included waiting two weeks before emailing back after anyone contacted me, to allow them time to consider their decision. At that point, I sent them further information on the study (see Appendix 3). I also encouraged participants to ask questions about the research and what it involved, including offering to send them the interview schedule, so they would be well-informed before deciding to be interviewed. I also endeavoured to make it clear that it was completely their own choice whether to take part or not.

3.8 The participants
Three participants were recruited to the study. A somewhat arbitrary number, it was the number I had interviewed by a self-imposed cut-off date. Patton (1990) advised that, more than sample size, the validity, meaningfulness, and insights of qualitative inquiry can be attributed more to the information-richness of the cases, combined with the analytical capabilities of the researcher (p. 185). After each interview I had the sense that there was a lot to process, and in retrospect three was an ideal sample size. It allowed for a detailed, multi-layered analysis of the interviews, narrative approaches favouring in-depth attention to the individuality and nuances of each participant’s story over generalisability of the sample (McCormack 2004). I believe it afforded adequate ‘space’ to contextualise and explore each participant’s story in the analysis, in accordance with standards for trustworthiness in qualitative research outlined later in this chapter.

Arguments that more participants mean better research have been linked to misunderstandings about epistemology and about what qualitative research usually aims to achieve (Burman and Whelan 2011; St Pierre 2000). Mason (in Baker and Edwards 2012) advised it is better to have fewer interviews, creatively and interpretively analysed, than a larger number where the researcher runs out of time to do them justice analytically; better to offer sound qualitative analytic insights than to try to mimic quantitative ‘representative’ logic (p. 29). Jenson, cited in the same
report, similarly reflected that in research that has inspired her most, it has been the care with which data has been analysed that has most impressed her, rather than the sample size. Jenson emphasised that time is necessary to process what respondents are implying, concealing and skipping past; as well as to find the best words to portray the politics of an interview and process your own feelings, doubts and enthusiasms as researcher (p. 39). While some might argue that three is not a representative sample, trying to find a representative sample of FMBSs would seem foolhardy, FMs coming from such diverse backgrounds. That said, the participants were varied as regards gender, nationality, religion, first language, asylum status, and stage and course of study.

To protect participants’ identities, some details about them and their lives are omitted, and some details were changed. For instance, I do not provide exact ages, lengths of time in the UK, or subjects of study. Anonymity issues are discussed in more detail in the section on ethics later in this chapter. I now briefly introduce the three participants.

- **Zaram** was in his twenties and originally from Afghanistan. In the UK about ten years, he had arrived as an unaccompanied minor. He had completed an undergraduate degree.

- **Diana**, also in her twenties, was originally from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Diana came to the UK with her family as a child over a decade ago. She had studied for an undergraduate degree.

- **Muna**, in her forties, was born in Yemen. Muna had lived in a number of countries before moving to the UK over five years ago. She had recently completed a PhD.

### 3.9 Data generation

Semi-structured interviews were employed to generate data. I incorporated the use of a material object or ‘artefact’ into the interview.

#### 3.9.1 Using ‘artefacts’

Chamberlain and Lyons (2017) believe that using material objects has huge potential for qualitative research inquiry, and narrative researchers increasingly use combinations of creative methods (Keats 2009). ‘Artefacts’ have been described as
things or objects that have distinct physical qualities (Honeyford 2013). They are “created, found, carried, put on display, hidden, evoked in language, or worn,” and embody “people, stories, thoughts, communities, identities, and experiences, and [are] valued or made by a meaning maker in a particular context” (Pahl and Rowsell 2010: 2). According to Pahl and Rowsell (2010), artefacts are closely intertwined with identities, for identities “reside on a sea of stuff and of experiences” (p. 8). Material objects exert effects over time, invoking memory and nostalgia, marking transitions and histories, with their meanings often altering with time (Chamberlain and Lyons 2017). Artefacts thus presented an interesting gateway through which to begin exploring identity understandings in the interview context.

On a practical level, using artefacts was a way to begin the interview and get the dialogue going. It facilitated an immediate and ‘solid’ focus on the topic at hand, helpful considering we were discussing a rather abstract issue - identity. Employing artefacts was a means for participants to control what they brought, or did not bring, to the interview discussion. This method presents tangible products that can be revisited and revised throughout the interview, and that generate literal and/or metaphorical and symbolic visual and verbal data (Leitch 2008). Possible, too, is that it facilitates the expression of issues that might be hard to convey with words.

Offering participants multiple means of communicating their observations, ideas and emotions, expands the opportunity for both parties to “understand the complex narratives of living through specific life experiences,” according to Keats (2009: 193). Keats noted that in having multiple options available for constructing narratives, and each option being informed by the participant’s identity, choices and perspectives, deepens the meaning they are attempting to convey and ultimately enables more in-depth, multi-layered, analysis. From a dialogical perspective, this dimension generated more dialogue; between the participant and the artefact, me as researcher and the artefact, and (as images of the artefacts are presented in the analysis) between the image of the artefact and the reader of this thesis. Visual images, being non-verbal, elicit different responses from the reader compared to written text.

In practice, I asked participants to bring to the interview an ‘artefact’ which they felt said something about their identity. This could be an object, a photo, or several of such if they wished. I explained by email prior to the interview that I would ask them about
it, and what they felt it said about their understandings of their identities. I photographed the artefact, with their permission, having explained in prior communication that I would ask to photograph it. I made clear that there was no obligation to bring an artefact if they did not want to. In the event, two of the three participants brought artefacts.

3.9.2 Semi-structured interviews

Multiple reasons informed my decision to use semi-structured interviews. Interviews have been conceptualised as directed conversations (Lofland and Lofland 1984). Semi-structured interviewing involves having a series of predetermined (often open-ended) questions as an interview guide (Mann 2016). This provides some format yet should not constrain the interaction, instead allowing for probing and following up of interesting issues that might arise over the course of the interview. Techniques such as reflecting, clarifying, and querying inconsistencies were used to help direct and further the interview discussion. The interview schedule can be found in Appendix 4. Questions were formulated based on reading research in identity studies, thinking about my research question and discussing with others what would help them talk about identity. Morrow (2005) found that the fewer questions asked, the more stories and deeper meanings tend to be elicited. In practice, I found this to be the case and the interviews flowed quite naturally and I was able to incorporate questions into the discussion as it unfolded. I only used the interview schedule to prompt me occasionally, to consult to ensure I was not forgetting any significant areas. I asked first about the artefact the participant brought, then covered identity generally, student identity and changing identity. Participants were asked towards the end of the interview if there was anything they wanted to add, or if there was anything important that I had left out. I also encouraged them to contact me afterwards should they think of anything they wanted to add. ‘Narrative interviewing’ is a genre in itself (e.g. Jovchelovitch and Bauer 2000). It generally entails minimal involvement in the interview on the part of the researcher, and sets out to elicit stories/narratives from interviewees, usually of their life. This was not the approach I took, as instead I acknowledge the interview as a conversation which I as researcher co-created, rather than stood on the sidelines and observed.
3.9.3 Pilot interview

I carried out a pilot interview which allowed me to practice using the interview procedure and schedule. It gave me the opportunity to discuss the topic with someone I did not know, and reflect on and hone the questions and method I was using (van Teijlingen and Hundley 2001). I gave a presentation about my proposed thesis, and a student in the audience approached me to express interest in taking part. At that point, my thesis was on international students rather than FMBSs. I contacted the student later, explaining that my research focus had changed but asking if she would be happy to partake in a pilot interview, which she agreed to. It was recorded, and I listened to and reflected on it. Issues arising from the pilot study were taken into account and informed the eventual research interviews. These included how to involve the artefact in the interview, and what to do if a participant brings an artefact that is not appropriate to photograph.

3.9.4 Interview procedure

After arranging a time with participants via email, the interviews were held in a university building. I met the participant outside and chatted as we walked to the interview room. They were offered a hot drink and biscuits. Participants were presented with a participant information sheet (Appendix 5) and encouraged to ask any questions they might have. They then filled out a participant consent form (Appendix 6), and also completed a participant details form (Appendix 7). We then began the interview, and I explained there were no right or wrong answers, and that while I had an interview schedule the interview was intended to be free-flowing and I was interested in talking to them about their understandings of their identities. I asked if they had chosen to bring an artefact and the interview opened with discussion around this. Though no timescale was imposed, all interviews were 45-60 minutes long. They were audio recorded. Participants were thanked for participating and debriefed after the interview. I had a distress policy (Appendix 8) and information for support services (Appendix 9) but in the event I did not need to use or provide these. Interviews took place between August and November 2016.

3.10 Transcription

Transcription is not a simple clerical task but “an interpretative process, where the differences between oral speech and written texts give rise to a series of practical and
principal issues” (Kvale and Brinkmann 2008: 177). Immediately following each interview, I made notes in a reflective research notebook. I first used a listening-centred approach (Brown and Gilligan 1991) and listened a number of times to each interview, making notes, in the days after the interview when it was fresh in my memory. This allowed me to become familiar with the recordings and the nuances which gave colour and meaning to the speech, and which would be lost in transcribing to written text. I attempted to record some of the non-linguistic events such as physical gestures or facial expressions which I remembered and which contributed to the effect of what was said. I noted my personal responses and anything significant - emotions, associations, questions - that came up for me while listening (Berger 2015). I then transcribed the interviews, a process which inevitably helps one become closely familiar with the data (Langdridge 2004). A transcript is a translation from one narrative mode - oral discourse - into another, written discourse (Kvale and Brinkmann 2008: 178). I chose to transcribe interviews in a relatively detailed way. I included pauses, emphases, and overlaps in speech. I also included comments about paralanguage; gestures and tone of voice, where this seemed significant to the meaning of what was being said, for instance when someone spoke in a sarcastic or sad tone. I aimed not to ‘tidy up’ speech (Temple 2005) and preserved so-called filler sounds and speech errors. I felt that this helped to keep some of the sense of the interview interaction, although something is inevitably lost in transcribing from one mode to another. Interview extracts presented in the analysis include my contributions as interviewer, in accordance with the epistemological approach of the research, which attends to the researcher’s part in data generation. Appendix 10 contains the transcription key and an example of transcription. The essence of the artefacts was similarly transformed, from being material objects to being represented in the form of images in this research report.

3.11 Narrative and story

The term ‘narrative’ carries many meanings, and it is necessary to clarify in what way I use the term, central as it is to the study. Riessman (2008) defined narrative in everyday oral storytelling as “when a speaker connects events into a sequence that is consequential for later action and for the meanings that the speaker wants listeners to take away from the story” (p. 3). Events perceived as important are selected, organised, connected and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience
(Hinchman and Hinchman 1997). I go with these definitions in this research, and use the terms narrative and story interchangeably, as per Riessman (2008).

Narratives are ubiquitous, and can be big or small; some think of narratives as something occurring over a long passage of time such as an entire life; others find narratives in brief utterances treated as meaningful by speaker and listener (Chase 2011). In this research I considered each interview as a narrative in itself. The interview can be conceptualised as an interactional context for storytelling (Koven 2012), and I also identified and analysed the ‘smaller’ stories constructed within the interviews, agreeing with Bamberg (2012) that “identity is navigated as much in the many small stories that are successfully or unsuccessfully prompted in ordinary interaction as it is presented in extended accounts of biographical material” (p. 102). Worth noting is that stories in a text often lack clear-cut borders with definite start and end points (Riessman 2008). As researcher, I participated in the creation of stories not only through my questions and responses during interviews, but in deciding what to present as stories in the analysis.

3.12 Analysis

Now I explain how I analysed the data.

3.12.1 Dialogical narrative analysis

I drew primarily on the approaches of Frank (2005; 2012) and Riessman (2008) to dialogical narrative analysis (DNA). As well as fitting with personal and disciplinary values outlined above, DNA is particularly suited to investigating identity, dealing as it does with the construction of identity through interactive processes. It recognises the impact of the researcher, and of wider forces and discourses on the interview context. This seemed appropriate considering the research question.

Riessman (2008) outlined what she called ‘dialogic/performance analysis’ but which I include here under the acronym DNA. The approach makes selective use of elements of thematic and structural approaches to narrative analysis, which are concerned with the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of stories, respectively. In DNA other dimensions are added to these, overall constituting a “broad and varied interpretive approach to oral narrative” (Riessman 2008: 105). DNA is interested in how talk is interactively (dialogically) produced and performed as narrative between speakers. The researcher asks “‘who’ an utterance may be directed to, ‘when’ and ‘why,’ that is, for what purposes?”
(Riessman 2008: 105). Stories comprise social artefacts and DNA asks how contexts of culture or society enter into stories, and how stories are coproduced between teller and listener. Riessman pointed out that stories do not emerge from thin air, but rather “are composed and received in contexts - interactional, historical, institutional, and discursive” among them (p. 105).

Riessman emphasised the performative side of dialogue, citing Goffman’s (1969; 1974) take on symbolic interaction theory to explain how as social actors we are always “composing impressions of ourselves, projecting definitions of who we are, making claims about ourselves and the world that we test out and negotiate with others” (Riessman 2008: 106). Goffman (1974) posited that when talking we spend most of our time engaged in giving shows rather than information (pp. 508-9). Thus, identities are accomplished, constructed, expressed in ‘shows’ that persuade the audience. Hence the response of the listener (and ultimately the reader) is implicated in the art of storytelling (Riessman 2008). Storytelling responds to others - whether actually present or imagined - and anticipates future responses, including the retelling of the story, with variations (Frank 2012).

One commitment of DNA is to recognising that any individual voice is actually a dialogue between voices, and always comprises multiple voices. Hearing how multiple voices or stories find expression in any one voice is one element of this approach (Frank 2012). Bakhtin used the terms polyphony and heteroglossia to describe these concepts. Frank (2012) offered simple explanations of these: polyphony is emphasising how “one speaker’s voice is always resonant with the voices of others - people whom the speaker listens to and whose responses she or he anticipates” (p. 35). Heteroglossia, then, emphasises how stories are assembled from multiple codes of language usage and genre; the ‘others’ who can be heard in heteroglossic dialogue are the generalised others of a speech community as opposed to specific individuals. I drew upon polyphony - also called multivoicedness, which is the term I use - in analysing the data.

Frank (2005; 2012) outlined some questions concerning identity using DNA: how does a story teach people who they are, and allow people to explore what they might become? He also emphasised the question of what is at stake - how does the teller hold their own in the act of telling that particular story, in that way? Other central
questions are, why this story here and now (Bamberg 2003), and how well served are people by their stories (Frank 2012). The commitment of DNA is not to summarise findings - which Frank dismisses as an undialogical word - but rather to open continuing possibilities of listening and of responding to what is heard (Frank 2012). Analysis aims at increasing people’s possibilities for hearing themselves and others.

3.12.2 Analysing the interviews

There is no step-by-step account of how to do DNA. Analysis happens throughout the narrative research process rather than being a separate activity carried out after data collection (Etherington 2004), and is achieved through “continuous and obsessive attention” (Latour 2005: 127) to writing a well-written report. Decisions are constantly being made about what belongs, what should be set aside, how the stories fit together - that, according to Frank (2012), is analysis.

My analysis process involved analysing the transcripts one at a time and in different ‘layers.’ Holstein and Gubrium (2000; 2005) suggest such an ‘analytic bracketing’ approach whereby the researcher alternately orients to the different aspects of narrative practice, and ultimately looks at the interplay between them. Below is the order in which I oriented myself to these different aspects through repeated readings, making notes on each. Positioning and multivoicedness are explained in detail later in this section. Different readings focused on:

- What was overtly discussed in the transcript.
- How communications were achieved, through narrative resources such as the use of metaphor or small stories.
- Identifying stories told, and asking the pertinent questions of DNA outlined in section 3.12.1 above.
- Positioning.
- Multivoicedness.

As for the artefacts, they were analysed using the same DNA principles, as performances of identities, and largely based on what participants said about them. I took the artefacts as starting points in analysing each interview, which importantly
informed the direction of the analysis of each text and were returned to and reflected on throughout the analytic process.

I will explain the concepts of positioning and multivoicedness, and how these were analysed. Speakers establish positioning/alignment by constructing a connection between themselves and their experiences; in doing so they communicate “I’m the kind of person who does this kind of thing and not that,” and this can be used to imply links with certain others who share these experiences (Shuman 2012: 131). I drew on three questions suggested by Bamberg (2003) to interrogate positioning in the interview texts:

- How are characters positioned vis-à-vis one another within the reported events?
- How are speakers positioned vis-à-vis the audience?
- How are speakers positioned vis-à-vis themselves?

Koven (2012) looked at how people do, or enact, identities in narrative, using a framework for analysing the multiple voices in narratives of personal experience. She analysed how speakers manage their participation in narrating and narrated events by negotiating speaker roles of narrator of the event and character in the narrated event. Koven’s techniques informed my analysis, as did the systematic guide for analysing multivoicedness set out by Aveling, Gillespie and Cornish (2015). Aveling and colleagues’ approach involves understanding there are different ‘I-positions’ (Hermans 2001) from which one speaks and between which one may move. To take an example from this study, a person may speak as a student, as an activist for FM rights, as a husband, as a Muslim, or from any other ‘I-position’ available to him. Aveling et al. (2015) outlined how ‘voices of inner-others’ appear within speech either as direct quotes (“the teacher said ‘xyz’”), or indirect quotes which are references to the beliefs, opinions or utterances of another person or group (“that family believes xyz”). A third way others may appear in speech is in the form of echoes. Echoes refer to the way most utterances are second-hand; when there are indications that the utterance has a distinct social origin beyond the speaker (p. 678). A final pertinent aspect of speech is autodialogue; between the voices within the self (Josephs and Valsiner 1998). Examples are when someone asks herself a question or interrupts herself to disagree with what she was just saying or to quote someone else’s response.
Aveling et al. (2015) presented a three-step guide to analysing multivoicedness, which I drew upon. This involved:

- Identifying and coding the different I-positions from which the self speaks.
- Identifying and coding the voices of inner-others which can be heard in a speaker’s utterances; this means looking out for direct quotes, echoes, and asking who an utterance is addressed to.
- Examining the nature of the relationships between voices within the self. This meant asking questions such as, are the voices contradictory, mutually reinforcing, supportive, questioning? Does interaction between the voices lead to resistance, silence, or transformation? (Valsiner 2002). Dialogical dynamics and relationships between the voices were of interest here.

Examples of four layers of analysis for one page of transcript can be found in Appendix 11. It is not an exhaustive example: for instance I did not consider the extract to contain any discrete ‘small’ stories, so it does not exemplify that aspect of DNA.

Building on the picture constructed from the different layers of analysis, and bearing in mind the research question, themes were identified which seemed important in participants’ individual interview narratives. These were themes I thought were both evident in what participants overtly stated, and brought in terms of artefacts; and also in how participants communicated and constructed their identities, identified through using the DNA methods explained above. Themes were continually checked against the raw data while writing up the analysis.

Though my initial intention was not to present commonalities and merge stories, I could not help but notice similar elements in participants’ narratives. This appeared significant, so I decided to present these common elements at the end of the Analysis Chapter. They are presented as woven into a narrative synthesis where these elements link together and lead into one another. I felt this narrative still did justice to the sequence of each participant’s story as well as to their various individual identity expressions. In other words, themes in the individual narratives fit easily into the elements of the narrative synthesis. Again, this synthesis was checked against the raw data.
3.13 Trustworthiness

Fixed quality criteria such as validity, generalisability and reliability are rooted in empirical quantitative research. Epistemic differences have proven them to be incommensurable with qualitative research, and standards of quality have been rewritten and redefined in the qualitative realms (Burman and Whelan 2011). The concept of ‘trustworthiness’ has emerged instead as a more suitable umbrella term covering research standards in qualitative inquiry (Morrow 2005). Burman and Whelan (2011) explained that the challenge has been “to develop our own composition and definition of evaluative criteria and to elaborate these criteria with and through the generation of our material, starting with the initial stages of formulating our research questions” (p. 221). Essentially this means making clear what principles we are aiming for and putting forth arguments which are plausible, theoretically congruent and grounded, which support and situate our work (Burman and Whelan 2011: 220). I outline some of the thinking on trustworthiness in qualitative research, how it relates to this thesis, and measures I took with the aim of meeting these standards.

Riessman (2008) advised that the validity of a project should be assessed from within the situated perspective and traditions that frame it. There are no formal rules of standardised technical procedure for validation in narrative work, while at the same time, researchers must make arguments to persuade audiences about the trustworthiness of their data and interpretations (Riessman 1993). From narrative and social constructionist perspectives, a narrative is not considered a factual report of events, but “one articulation told from a point of view that seeks to persuade others to see events in the same way” (Riessman 2008: 187). Thus ‘narrative truth’ is not expected to be an account of ‘what really happened’ - the ‘truth’ and ‘accuracy’ of narratives takes a back seat to what is socially accomplished through storytelling (Gubrium and Holstein 2000). Narrative truths are always “partial - committed and incomplete” (Clifford 1986: 7). Therefore, constructs of validation such as triangulation, generalisability or replicability from one person to the next, are not applicable to this form of approach, and to claim that qualitative researchers are describing the ‘same thing’ is to eliminate the possible alternative ways that exist to describe experiences (Parker 2004: 97-8). Different criteria need to be engaged to assess ‘trustworthiness.’ Among those suggested are coherence and persuasiveness
Coherence in qualitative research is the extent to which the themes and categories emerging fit together and form an underlying framework for the domain under study (Elliott et al. 1999). In narrative work, coherence and persuasion may refer to the degree to which sections of a theoretical argument are linked and consistent, episodes of a life story hang together, or the persuasiveness of the interpreter’s analytic account (Riessman 2008: 189). On the other hand, Riessman reflected how life as lived does not have coherence, and aiming for this in writing can constitute a form of ‘tidying up’ someone’s account, creating perhaps a simplified or enforced sense of closure which denies some of what participants said (Langer 1991). Riessman (2008) argued that it is actually making sense analytically of both convergence and divergence which supports trustworthiness; representing coexistent realities, differences, and individualities, as much as similarities. Indeed, Squire, Andrews and Tamboukou (2008) suggested that framing research in terms of narrative is often in the interests of bringing different and sometimes contradictory layers of meaning into view, and into “useful dialogue with each other,” with the aim of promoting understanding about individual and social change (p. 1). I tried to honour divergence and contradictions in analysing and presenting the analysis, as reflected in my choice to first present each participant’s narrative individually. Persuasion, though suggested as a standard to aspire to in narrative accounts, is problematic too; determined by the position of the reader, it might change according to the historical moment (Riessman 2008).

Integrity has been put forth as another way of establishing trustworthiness (Williams and Morrow 2009). This involves articulating one’s epistemological stance and supporting it by demonstrating how methods were developed and/or used appropriate to one’s research question (Riessman 2008: 188). It also entails documenting sources and the different steps of the research; essentially bringing the reader along on the journey of uncovering a trail of evidence, critically evaluating each in relation to the other as it proceeds. Grounding claims in the data is another aspect of integrity (Elliott et al. 1999). To ground the analysis, interview extracts are presented to illustrate and support points made; direct quotes are even used as sub-headings. The idea is to allow the reader to appraise the fit between the data and the (Riessman 2008), and transparency, accountability and reflexivity (Speedy 2008). I address some of these next.
author’s interpretations of them, and enable the reader to conceptualise alternative possible readings and understandings (Elliott et al. 1999). Another general guideline for quality from Elliott and colleagues (1999) is acknowledging and attending to the context, which I believe is covered quite thoroughly throughout this thesis. Aveling et al. (2015) advised that using their method for analysing multivoicedness rests on attention to context, sensitivity, and openness to alternative explanations. They recommended extending researcher awareness through building contextual knowledge via cultural resources such as literature, music and film. I engaged with these, as well as reading up on and talking to others about the relevant issues - migration, HE, the situations in countries of origin of participants - in order to increase my understanding of the forces impacting on the interview discussions. I also met numerous others working in my own and other universities with FM and international students, including the Widening Participation Coordinator for Black and Minority Ethnic groups, to discuss their situation at the university.

Credibility checks, such as where transcripts or analyses are sent back to participants to check for ‘accuracy,’ are one measure suggested to establish validity (Elliott et al. 1999) and embody an ethical research relationship. I decided this was not appropriate here. I believe that after an interview (and perhaps particularly one discussing identity), both researcher and participant leave with a somewhat changed self-understanding (Wiklund-Gustin 2010). To return and ask them to confirm at a later date that what I understood was ‘correct’ appears to miss the point that the interview and whatever was ‘meant’ was situated and created in a particular moment in time, and that self-understandings are likely to have modified in the intervening time. Also, for instance, if misunderstandings were discovered in how I transcribed the data, there is no guarantee of avoiding misunderstandings in further communications. Josselson (2011) addressed such issues of ‘interpretive authority,’ and advised we make explicit our stance on this. I take the position that ultimately I authored the study, and made the choices about how to interpret and represent the participants, as well as myself. Relatedly, I understand a reader may take and read this text in ways I cannot predict or control.

‘Social validity’ (Wolf 1978) refers to the social importance of a study in terms of value to the stakeholders. While this thesis addresses a very specific topic, I argue that this
does not render it irrelevant to other contexts. Flyvberg (2004) and Burman and Whelan (2011) elucidated how exploring ‘small’ specific issues in depth may allow us to capture ‘the world in a grain of sand’ - our example ultimately serving to exemplify or relate to much wider issues. As Burman and Whelan (2011) reminded us, the resurgent interest in qualitative research in psychology is linked to a drive to engage meaningfully with those who have been marginalised. I concur that doing research which attends to ‘outliers’ - unusual rather than typical situations - is of social importance and an ethical imperative. Discussing quality, Burman and Whelan (2011) argued that no analysis is ever ‘complete,’ and rather than overemphasising methodological worries we should focus on the fruitfulness of our research - where it goes and what it does there (St Pierre 2000) - our task being to enliven as much as to inform others about our topic. I subscribe to the argument, too, that to describe the world might be the most effective way to begin to change it (Latour 2005: 154). Finally, reflexivity or transparency has a pivotal role to play in accounting for the production of qualitative analysis (Elliott et al. 1999), and Chapter 5 is dedicated to outlining reflexive considerations.

3.14 Ethical considerations

Ethical issues were considered at all stages of the research. I outline them here, though they overlap with discussions in the previous section on trustworthiness, and on reflexive considerations in Chapter 5. Prior to conducting the research, it was approved by the ethics board of the School of Environment, Education and Development, as were amendments made during the research. The research also subscribes to ethical guidelines set out by the BPS (2004; 2009; 2014) and the Health and Care Professions Council (2012). Yet, research is always a risky endeavour despite the efforts of ethics boards to ‘administer away’ ethical issues (Burman and Whelan 2011). According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2008), morally responsible research behaviour involves above all the moral integrity of the researcher, which they described as sensitivity to moral issues and action, along with knowledge, experience, honesty and fairness. I would like to think that a commitment to these issues, along with respect and empathy for the participants and what they brought (Gair 2012), guided the research process and is reflected in the write-up.
Regarding confidentiality, interview recordings and transcriptions were kept in password-protected documents to protect participants’ privacy. Participants were given the choice of being identified by their name in the thesis, or of having their name changed and choosing a pseudonym. The participants varied in their stated preferences regarding anonymity and using a pseudonym. To protect the identity of the participant/participants preferring to be given a pseudonym, I do not disclose the preferences of each individual participant. As mentioned earlier, in the interests of protecting anonymity, certain details have been omitted, and some details about their life stories and their interviews have been changed. This may have included changing the countries of origin of participants, while still aiming to preserve the essence and meanings of their narratives. Considering that the research addressed identity, protecting participants’ confidentiality was a complex issue which required reflective consideration and decision-making throughout the thesis process and which was discussed on numerous occasions with my supervisors and peers.

I tried to ensure participants would be as informed as possible beforehand about what the research involved before consenting to participate, as outlined above in section 3.7. Ethical issues arise too with the interview process. Interviewing people about identity is necessarily personal. I made clear in email contact beforehand that I would not be asking participants about their forced migration history or how they came to be in the UK. This brought its own issues, discussed in Chapter 5. Interviews can create a quasi-therapeutic environment, and for researchers with a therapy background, tact and ethical judgement are required to ensure participants only discuss what they are comfortable with (Kvale and Brinkmann 2008) - which I noted. Participants were debriefed after interviews, and encouraged to bring up any concerns. They could contact me to pull out of the research at any stage up until submission. I also offered to send them copies of the completed research.

Power is an ethical issue requiring consideration in all research encounters, and is discussed in Chapter 5. Claims of ‘empowering’ and ‘giving voice’ to marginalised groups can mask complicated questions, and not necessarily mirror participants’ stories of what is happening (Andrews 2007). Shuman (2012) cautioned that narrative can be used (or misused) in exploitative ways, “to create pity, or the illusion of compassion in which others’ stories become allegories for suffering but at the cost of
making the person who suffered an exotic other” (p. 131). The Introduction Chapter outlined how FMs have been represented in ways which serve to stigmatising and disempowering them. As author, I held the power to portray the participants in whatever way I chose, and was obliged to use this responsibly. I endeavoured to portray the participants and their stories as fairly and respectfully as possible, keeping a balance between what I thought participants wanted to get across, and the academic requirements of presenting this report.

I was mindful too of Burman and Whelan’s (2011) observation that our ethical accountability extends beyond our immediate academic community, and our ethical commitments commonly extend beyond the official academic timelines of our research activities (p. 218). Presenting this and related research at conferences, and hopefully publishing it in future, are ways in which I am committed to fulfilling the ethical responsibilities which I feel come with such research work.

3.15 Chapter summary

This chapter detailed the theoretical background informing this piece of research, and the rationale behind the various methodological choices made. It went on to discuss the recruitment of the participants, and briefly introduced them. The research used semi-structured interviews and incorporated the use of artefacts in these. Data generating procedures were outlined, followed by an explanation of the DNA approach used to analyse data, and how I interpreted and employed it in this study. Towards the end of the chapter, the ways in which I endeavoured to produce trustworthy and ethical research were outlined; some of which are revisited in Chapter 5 on Reflexive considerations. Now I move on to present the analysis.
4 Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines my analysis of the three participants’ interviews. Each participant is presented individually, in the order in which the interviews were conducted. I was interested in attending to the individuality of how each participant expressed and constructed their understanding of the various aspects of their identity; therefore the majority of the chapter is devoted to their individual analyses. As previously mentioned, however, commonalities across the narratives were nevertheless observed, and these are outlined at the end of this chapter. Participants’ narratives are presented under themes which each illustrate an aspect of their identities, as demonstrated, constructed and performed in the interview encounter. While this is the clearest way to present the narratives, there was no distinct delineation between themes and they often overlap and interrelate.

The interview transcription key can be found in Appendix 10, but I will clarify at this point that words quoted in bold type were ones emphasised by participants in their speech. Line numbers are provided following interview extracts, to allow the reader to gauge the point in the interview at which extracts occurred relative to each other. To provide context, at the start of each participant’s analysis I outline some details of their background, the interview circumstances and my personal impressions.

4.2 Zaram

Zaram was the first participant interviewed. Originally from Afghanistan, Zaram was a Muslim man in his twenties who had come to the UK about a decade ago, as a minor. It took several years before he was granted refugee status. He excelled at secondary school before going on to complete an undergraduate degree at university. Zaram had become something of a spokesperson and activist for FM issues, being involved in numerous campaigns. We met on a sunny morning in August 2016. A fast speaker, Zaram came across as intelligent; quick with responses and to make links in the conversation. My impression was of an attentive and thoughtful person.

The artefact Zaram brought to the interview was his UNHCR Refugee Identity Card. A personal object, we agreed it was not appropriate to photograph it, but Zaram suggested I find an image of one online to present in its place. Later in the interview he
mentioned I could show a Travel Document. Examples of both documents are presented below.

Image 1: Example UNHCR Refugee Identity Card

This above sample Refugee Identity Card says the holder is from Malaysia, and, being a sample, has the holder’s photograph blocked out. The card displays the holder’s name, date of birth, sex, country of origin, the card’s dates of issue and renewal, and contains various barcodes.

Image 2: UK ‘Convention Travel Document’ for refugees
Zaram demonstrated how these official documents represented certain conflicts and controversies for him. As we were settling in for our interview, before I had turned on the voice recorder, Zaram took out his refugee identity card to show me, saying this was the artefact he had chosen to bring. I hurriedly turned on the recorder, while asking Zaram what the card meant for him. He responded that it was enabling as it entitled him to “every right like a normal citizen as everyone else except voting,” and yet he was “bothered” by being represented by this piece of plastic. Zaram stated “it gives me the freedom it gives me so much privilege but it shouldn’t.” He argued he should have these rights anyway, as a human being. Within the first minute of the interview, Zaram said “I can tell you my story.” He then explained that when he visited ‘the Jungle’ in Calais, unlike the thousands of other FMs there, he could leave again simply due to possessing these documents. This was despite the fact, Zaram argued, that the others there might be more intelligent than him or “more useful to the world.” He used his own position to highlight the unfairness of the privilege he held relative to others simply in having been granted refugee status, and his dissatisfaction with the asylum system in general. Bringing this card to the interview allowed Zaram to enact his activist identity and ‘show’ me the point he wanted to make; it gave him the stage to speak about situations in the world which directly affected him, which he was unhappy with and was actively trying to change.

An identity card is one way of showing one’s identity, and one Zaram often had to use. Having never seen this kind of card before, I asked whether he was obliged to carry it on him; Zaram said only when travelling. This prompted an account of what happened when he travelled. Zaram explained his passport (by which I believe he meant the Travel Document, as shown in Image 2) was full of stamps as he travelled a lot, which
was unusual for a refugee. He described the following interaction with airport officials every time he returned to the UK.

**Extract 1**

"They look at my passport they are like ‘you are a refugee why are you travelling so much’ so they get suspicious and I am like ‘well I am an activist I am a campaigner I am an advocate’ you know I, I do those things I am an ambassador, and sometimes for them it’s a kind of shock." (76-80)

The airport officials ask Zaram why he travels so much, since he is a refugee. Being a refugee apparently comes with an expectation that he should not be travelling internationally on a regular basis. This contrasts with Zaram’s reality, and his response is to inform the officials of the many roles he inhabits besides refugee. The roles suggest agency and purpose; they are roles through which people instigate change in the world. He presents these roles - his many identities - as his reasons for being so internationally mobile. He has shown his document and been labelled a refugee, which, apparently in the eyes of the airport staff limits him in terms of mobility. Yet as they soon found out, they underestimated him; Zaram has far more identities than ‘only’ being a refugee, and has many good reasons to travel.

Zaram went on to describe how, despite the entitlements his documents bring, he was always questioned in airports, often for twenty minutes. He was asked where he went and for how long, and why he had these documents. His fingerprints were taken every time he returned to the UK. It was as if in being a refugee who exercised his right to travel, Zaram was treated as though a criminal or a threat to national security. In stepping outside of what was supposedly expected of a refugee, as he commented in Extract 1 above, he evoked suspicion and shock. Though Zaram did not say it, from his description I wondered if he was being suspected of terrorist involvement, and if he might attract prejudice due to his ethnicity and religion combined with being a refugee. Zaram commented that he felt there was “a two-system,” a double standard at play, which his treatment at airports demonstrated. The following extract came after this comment.

**Extract 2**

*Zaram: There’s a discrimination but without you realising it.*  
*Doireann: Yeah. Without people who who are privileged*
Z: Even those who are holding it so like refugees so I will accept OK I’m happy to cooperate
D: Yeah
Z: But then why should I
D: Yeah. Yeah yeah. Yeah it must be a strange [situation]
Z: [It is] everytime I come and then like you know? Show my passport they look at me they look at my passport they look at my card they look at the stamps they look at everything, and if there is no stamp if there is no entry or exit stamp they are like ‘why is it not exit here’ like, the thing that they will not question you on, they will question me. Just because you have a different, colour of passport

(94-106)

There is a hint of Zaram’s exasperation in this extract. He jumps in before I finish my sentence, and repeats the words “they look at” five times, as though very familiar with this pattern of interaction. There is a sense of how tedious these episodes are, and how unpleasant it must be to be put through this ordeal repeatedly. The use of positioning in the first few lines is interesting. There are shifts between pronouns – when Zaram says “there’s a discrimination but without you realising it,” I try to clarify who he means by “you.” Perhaps I try to avoid positioning myself as privileged; I refer to a neutral “people who are privileged.” At the same time, my comment afterwards, that “it must be a strange situation,” indicates how alien his situation is to me. Zaram picks this up, bringing me into the scenario by observing that the colour of my passport means I would not be questioned in the same way he can expect to be. It struck me that colour of passport might stand in for colour of skin, but either way it is about a visible difference which confers privilege. Zaram then includes himself as one of the privileged ones, saying that as a refugee he will “accept” and “cooperate” – although, then his intriguing statement “but then why should I” suggests he questions his own compliance with this system. It is unclear whether this is a statement or question, and whether it is addressed to himself, to me, or is something he would like to say to the airport officials. It implies that on some level, Zaram would like not to cooperate, or maybe to protest against how he and others are treated. Perhaps because his card is not granting him the freedom it ‘should’ and the border officials are not accepting it like they ‘should,’ he is unsure why he ‘should’ behave the way he is expected to. However, he is undoubtedly aware of the consequences non-cooperation would have for him, and it is important for him to be mindful of his reputation – issues which I revisit later. Also of note is that Zaram presented me with his card in the interview, as
though putting me in the position of a border official; allowing me, and readers of this thesis, to ‘judge’ his situation for ourselves.

In Extract 2 alone, Zaram positioned himself in four different ways:

- As someone aware of discrimination.
- As someone ‘privileged,’ who will cooperate with the authorities and accept his position.
- As a rebel or perhaps activist who questions his differential treatment.
- As someone being treated with suspicion by the airport authorities.

The conflict and tension of holding these different positions was a theme throughout Zaram’s narrative. As with his example from Calais mentioned earlier, cooperating means discriminating against others not as fortunate as he to have been granted asylum; it means being on the ‘privileged’ side of the ‘two-system’ he wants to fight against. Zaram has personal experience of being on the other, less privileged, side, as an asylum-seeking minor. ‘Privileges,’ it should be noted, are in fact rights any citizen has, as Zaram pointed out; such rights are constructed as ‘privileges’ relative to the lack of recognition of rights in the case of asylum seekers. This conflict is about trying to strike a balance between being grateful and appreciative to have these rights yet also finding ways to protest against the unfair treatment of FMs, and demand social change.

4.2.1.1 Educational activist-ambassador: “I have to give the right image”

Zaram explained that he had to fight to get to go to school when he arrived to the UK. He went on to become an exceptional high achiever, celebrated by his school, college and university. Zaram gave talks to students, using himself and his story to inspire. In the following extract he was describing what he says at these events.

**Extract 3**

*I am a living example if I can get nine GCSEs, despite English being my sixth language, despite being in school just three years and all the traumas and stress that I had, you guys could do better.*

(370-373)

His method of activism and campaigning for a better world involves once more using himself as an example, in this case of what is possible with hard work and determination. He spoke with enthusiasm about the sense of positivity and
opportunity that university education can give a refugee. Zaram outlined “how much sacrifice it is to be made a refugee and to not see your family and your loved ones and to miss out on so much.” Against this backdrop, going to university he said “changes your perception, it kind of makes life normal.” Not only does it make life normal, “it just also gives you the sense of optimism and aspirations that, it doesn’t matter where you were born.” Attending university was thus presented as a very encouraging experience for FMSs like himself. As well as through being a high-profile student involved in various campaigns, Zaram enacted his activist-ambassador role through his connections to people employed at high levels in the university. He enjoyed a good relationship with the president of the university, whose “door [was] open to [him]” if he needed help. This, Zaram said, was due to his active engagement with the institution of the university, but was “also for them to realise that you know I have a different experience of life and sometimes I might need support I might need some help and guidance.” It represented another way in which he instrumentally used his own life to educate others about the challenges faced by FMs. While praising the status of his university and the support he received, Zaram made clear that he felt the university could do more. As before, he skilfully found a balance between criticising what the university was failing to do, and discussing how great it was. He highlighted the potential benefits for FMs, the university, and the world, if more FMs had the chance to attend university.

Zaram described too how his unique identities could automatically put him in an ambassador role. He said he found it “wonderful” to be in a class with people from ten different countries, and experienced university students as generally welcoming towards refugees. With a supportive president whose door was open to him, university was portrayed as somewhere Zaram was welcomed, accepted and even celebrated. This struck me as a stark contrast to how he was received at the country’s borders. Yet university brought its own kind of tension: in class, Zaram explained, he was usually “the only refugee the only Afghan and sometimes the only Muslim for example, so I’m not only an ambassador for refugees but for Islam for Afghanistan and I have to give the right image.” As a publicly ‘different’ student, who held a multiplicity of identities, Zaram found himself in an ambassador role, responsible for not only his own image but those of whole groups. This was just one of the ways Zaram communicated a sense of duty, which I return to again soon.
The privileged experience of attending a prestigious university could apparently cause conflict for Zaram, too. Before the interview, we walked through a university building and commented on how it was not a beautiful building. Zaram reminded me of that conversation during the interview, and that there are millions of people across the world who would love to have our opportunity of attending this university. He mentioned going to school in Afghanistan sitting under the trees, saying “sometimes I get angry with my own self for being ungrateful, for not appreciating things.” It exemplified how, due to his past experiences, Zaram saw things from a different perspective. For me, it was a normal thing to chat about with another student. For Zaram, while he went along with it, apparently it generated conflict to behave in this way, and it clashed with his values to not appreciate what he had. This demonstrated how he might sometimes feel he did not fit in with other students.

In Zaram’s story his commitment to his academic work, his campaigning and even his religion, came at a cost. This sacrifice also positioned him as a worthy person. When asked how he found the social side of being a student, he said he tended to keep himself to himself, for the following reasons.

Extract 4

I was being useful doing things travelling and doing something greater, so I sacrificed my social life and I also didn’t, it didn’t fit in with me, I don’t know sometimes I did feel lonely, because I’m very different to people

(966-970)

Zaram’s description of keeping himself to himself seems somewhat ironic, as travelling and campaigning involved sharing his life story with the world - though considering the loneliness and sense of being different which he associated with this in the above extract, one can imagine how he felt apart from others. He describes his activism here as “being useful” and “doing something greater” - essentially he sacrificed a ‘normal’ student social experience for the greater good. In various ways throughout the interview Zaram portrayed himself as dutiful, responsible, committed to the greater good even at personal expense. To be an ambassador or activist, it is in one’s interests to be seen as a good person, and as already discussed, Zaram spoke of needing to represent various groups well in the eyes of others. Zaram explained also, to my surprise, that if a refugee commits a serious crime, they could have their refugee status rescinded and be deported. On this he commented, “so you always kind of live
in constant fear but I think that’s not a bad thing necessarily.” The opinion that living in constant fear is not a bad thing, apparently in the context of this preventing crime, seems extreme. However, it underlines that it is in Zaram’s interest to have others bear witness to his performing a sense of duty and social responsibility, wrapped up in his identities as activist, ambassador and even as refugee. I return now to the sense in his narrative of being different from others, this time with shades of rejection.

4.2.2 Not accepted as Afghan: “you’re just muhajir”

In the multivoiced qualities of Zaram’s speech, voices of generic Afghan and British people featured in particular. I present some analysis of how he represented these groups in his narrative, to demonstrate how Zaram positioned himself and thereby constructed his identity in relation to them.

Early in the interview, we discussed how Zaram felt ‘refugee’ was often used as a label imposed upon him. Part of his problem with the term was that it was not a chosen marker of identity; he pointed out that circumstances make someone a refugee, they do not choose it. The term for refugee in Zaram’s native country is ‘muhajir.’ Zaram explained that muhajir is “a very negative term.” It is what Afghans living in Pakistan are called, and used in “a very sad way.” To demonstrate, he did an impression of someone addressing a muhajir in a dismissive, rejecting, almost accusatory tone; saying “‘oh you you know you’re not from here ah you you’re not welcome here, you’re just muhajir.’” In explaining the attitude towards refugees/muhajirs among people from his original cultural background, he communicated how he, a refugee, might be positioned in such a society.

Despite possible rejection from Afghans due to being a refugee, Zaram told the story in Extract 5 below which illustrated how he sometimes found himself acting in a typically Afghan way. Zaram recounted a recent occurrence where he met “an Afghan guy,” a stranger, outside his house. They got talking, and Extract 5 shows him reenacting the dialogue between himself, the Afghan guy, and his (Zaram’s) wife, along with his own reflections on the situation.

Extract 5

Z: I was like ‘OK,’ I said ‘let’s go to the mosque together’ and ‘cool’ and then I was like ‘my wife is home alone’ ‘OK your wife can come and stay with my wife,’
so sometimes there are things you just automatically do without thinking about

D: Mm
Z: And my wife was like ‘why do, who is she I don’t know her I don’t,’ like well cos my wife is grown up in in, em in Belgium, she’s an Afghan Belgian. So there are certain things you think ‘why’ but there’s Afghan an Afghan within you inside that is like, ‘this is the right thing to do’

(764-775)

The stilted words Zaram reports in his wife’s speech, and the tone he used for her voice in this story, suggested she was confused, even flustered or annoyed, to learn he had organised that she spend time with the Afghan guy’s wife - a stranger Zaram had not even met. This prompted Zaram to think about why he acted in a way that is unusual to his wife. His wife’s different perspective - her not displaying an ‘Afghan’ social attitude - is explained through her having grown up in a European country, unlike Zaram. The conversation between him and the Afghan guy is depicted as flowing naturally and easily; decisions such as inviting someone to your house do not require pause for thought; solutions are arrived at instinctively by “an Afghan within you” who tells you what to do. His wife’s European identity interrupts this flow, and makes Zaram stop and think. After telling this story, Zaram reflected “but in normal circumstances that’s quite a strange thing to do,” to be so familiar with a stranger. By ‘normal’ he apparently meant British or European. He could perceive from a British perspective, but described acting instinctively from an Afghan perspective, positioning himself as a true Afghan in certain ways. Notable too is how Afghan culture is constructed as welcoming and open towards (Afghan) strangers, contrasting with stories of being welcomed and accepted – or not – by British and Afghans at other points in the interview.

Zaram told this story immediately after we discussed how his views on some political matters diverged from those of his friends in Afghanistan. At the time, the connection between that topic and the ‘Afghan guy’ story was not clear to me. Later, I realised he probably wanted to demonstrate that, while he might disagree with his friends’ views, sometimes he was very much Afghan in his ways. Following the above story, Zaram returned to the topic of how some aspects of Afghan culture he did not like and avoided engaging with – essentially, his non-Afghanness. Zaram explained his difference from his fellow nationals, saying a lot of Afghans would question why he did an interview with me, and why he worked without pay.
Extract 6

Because a lot of Afghans would think ‘why am I here why did I wake up so early today, I struggled to wake up to come in to speak to you why? It’s like unnecessary’ you know?

(792-795)

Zaram adopts a firm, questioning tone of voice to depict these other Afghans in his narrative. The way he uses the ‘I’ position despite enacting someone questioning himself suggests perhaps he identifies in some way with these questions – it has the sense of self-questioning. He explained that many Afghans are very generous people but that there can be a tendency to focus on personal gains at the expense of the bigger picture – contrasting with how Zaram portrayed himself. Zaram explained Afghans tend to tell him he really should work and support his family instead of doing activism; their voices feature, telling him in a direct manner “‘well, you know? That’s a waste of time.’” As well as having different attitudes, they seem to reject his actions, too.

Perhaps most striking for me was Zaram’s statement that he anticipated not being accepted if he went back to Afghanistan. He mentioned that he would like to return there one day, and use his education and experiences to promote peace and justice. However, he reports the Afghan social position he expects to encounter in the extract below.

Extract 7

Oh it will be like ‘you have British values you have British views excuse me don’t impose it on us and we don’t want to hear it. Take it away. You have changed.’ People will be, my own family would be very hostile to me

(615-619)

I responded to this with surprise, partly due to having formed the impression he had a close relationship with his family; cultural differences were possibly at play too. The Afghan voice in the extract above is completely closed to Zaram and his views; holding any sort of discussion seems unlikely if they “don’t want to hear it.” Ironically, the voice rejects his supposedly British values, though elsewhere in the interview he describes being told he is not really British. Following Extract 7, Zaram informed me it was the anniversary of Afghanistan gaining independence from Britain. The leader credited with this was Amanullah Khan. A successful leader and politician, Khan, Zaram
told me, spent time in Europe. This inspired him to try to modernise and westernise Afghanistan. He failed; according to Zaram, people thought he was moving too fast and did not like the change he was trying to introduce. Like Khan, Zaram was a successful, politically active man, who left Afghanistan to go west. Zaram’s own plan was also to return to Afghanistan and attempt to bring change; though as Extract 7 suggests, change may not have positive connotations in Afghan culture. Zaram said he anticipated “barriers and struggles.” By telling Amanullah Khan’s story, Zaram used an historical tale and rendered it relevant to the present day interview setting. It functioned to educate his audience about Afghan history and culture, as well as communicate the grounds for his own fears and anticipated struggles. It also transmitted something of his own ambition and identity by using the example of an innovative leader and politician. In fact, there were numerous points in Zaram’s narrative where he made connections between refugees and presidents. I interpret this as a sign of his forward-thinking, aspirational approach to political issues, without the limits many people would impose.

4.2.3 Global citizen: “we don’t need Afghans we don’t need British”

We saw how Zaram often felt labelled as a refugee, which bothered him as he considered it an “artificial part” of his identity, as he did not choose it. He had given media interviews and found journalists tended to want to call him a refugee, to ‘tick that box,’ rather than use another descriptor such as activist or student. Zaram said he could call himself many things, among them ambassador, humanitarian, young person, Muslim, and member of a particular ethnic group within Afghanistan. He stated that he saw himself as having multiple identities, and as more of a global citizen than of any one nationality. This section outlines ways in which he engaged in and enacted a global citizen identity claim.

Being a global citizen was constructed as a response to not being accepted as belonging to any nationality. Zaram’s accounts of not being accepted by Afghans were outlined, and we already saw a story of him being treated as suspicious by British airport officials. The following extract came soon after my question as to how he saw his identity.

Extract 8
I feel like I have multiple identities and now I truly feel like after being in the UK for [about ten years], I feel like we don’t need Afghans we don’t need British we need, global citizens. So the world belongs to all of us and if there’s a problem for example in Syria it affects us here, if there’s a problem in Northern Ireland it affects people across the world for example so, why don’t we focus more on creating young leaders creating global and active citizens, so now I feel like yeah even though I have multiple identities but I will, some people ask me do I feel British when I will get my British citizenship which will be two years or so time if things go to plan, I will still never feel British because even if I have a British passport, people will look at me with suspicion saying ‘well you’re not really from here, are you’

National citizenship is constructed as limited; after years in the UK, Zaram argues being British or Afghan is not “needed.” He evokes then how problems cross borders from country to country, and we need to look beyond the restrictive concept of national borders. He presents this - and creating young leaders (perhaps like himself) - as answers to problems in the world. Discussing the appeal of global citizenship leads Zaram to explain he will never feel accepted as British. After outlining his multiple identities, Zaram clarifies that Britishness is one identity he never foresees being available to him. Even if granted citizenship, people will not accept him as “really from here” - his passport will still arouse suspicious looks and exclusionary comments, reminiscent of the airport encounters described earlier. What is implied is that acceptance as British by British people, rather than a passport, would confer true Britishness - but Zaram anticipates this never happening. As at the opening of this analysis, official identification documents and what they represent are again constructed as limiting the identity claims available to a person, and associated with exclusion. Refugee Identity Cards and passports, much sought after by FMs, could be seen to symbolise freedom and acceptance; but in Zaram’s narrative they do not.

Zaram also performed his global citizen identity through showing awareness of international issues. Early in the interview he guessed I was not British. I told him I was Irish. In acknowledgement of this, and relating to me as Irish, he made reference to Ireland numerous times during the interview, even enlightening me that the Irish president had studied at our university. He used his knowledge of international issues to illustrate his points in a way which might be more relatable and relevant for me, his audience. Juxtaposed with this, at one point I accidentally referred to Pakistan as his home country. He responded graciously to this; I had the impression he might have
been accustomed to people being ignorant about his background. Zaram’s campaigning for access to education for FMs was outlined earlier. He inspirationally emphasised the great benefits for universities – as well as for the whole world - if more was done. This too was a performance of global activism, urging and addressing universities to follow his example and expand their vision beyond Britain to the bigger picture to which they could contribute.

We saw how Zaram described having multiple identities available to him. This meant he had a repertoire of different perspectives which he could shift between. For instance in discussing homosexuality, while finding it hard to accept, he tried to approach it as a Muslim who should adopt a compassionate stance towards all the creations of God. This flexibility allowed him to adapt. The theme of change ran through the interview, though Zaram emphasised “change is hard.” Though change was presented as unwelcome in the Afghan society he came from, he explained how he had changed by learning to take different perspectives. Furthermore, he was an agent of change, inspiring it in others. Zaram described how people who hear his story write to him from various countries, saying they were “empowered by it they learn so much out of it.” Their voices featured, telling him his story “changed [them].” Earlier Zaram had said “private life is a very important part of being an Afghan, you don’t want to share your life with the world.” He flouted this cultural norm in being public about his story, and engaging ‘the world’ with it. Though other Afghans’ opinion on his choice of work reportedly caused him to wonder if he was lazy, ultimately Zaram reasoned that his purpose in life was different, and the world needed people like himself who “needs to spread the love needs to spread education needs to do things.”

In all of these ways he expressed his sentiments of being a citizen of the world rather than of any one country. Zaram’s narrative communicated how he worked, changed, campaigned and ‘spread love and education,’ in order to forge the identities he expressed and performed throughout our interview.

4.3 Diana

Diana was in her twenties and had recently completed undergraduate studies. Originally from DRC (hereafter called Congo), she was the daughter of a diplomat and had come with her family to Britain when she was of primary school age. Due to changing circumstances, Diana and her family had applied for asylum after already
being resident in Britain for several years. At the time of the interview Diana had DLR, though had lived most of her life in the UK. On applying to university, she found out that changes in the law meant she was considered an international student. This meant she was expected to pay prohibitively high tuition fees and would not have access to student finance. She got to university with support from an organisation which works with HE institutions to help students in her position, through bursaries and fee waivers.

My impression of Diana was of an amiable, enthusiastic, genuine person. She had an expressive way of speaking, very much using her facial expressions, tone of voice and bodily gestures to communicate her points and dramatise stories. Diana struck me as mature in her reflectiveness, and self-possessed for her age. Diana and I met for the interview on an evening in August.

The artefact Diana brought to the interview was a piece of jewellery with Christian religious symbolism, shown below.

Image 3: Diana’s necklace

This is a photograph of Diana’s artefact. It is a silver chain, with a silver pendant, often known as a ‘miraculous medal.’ The pendant has an image of Saint Mary on it, surrounded by the words ‘O Mary conceived without sin pray for us who have recourse to you.’
4.3.1 Private faith identity: “it has always been the rock for me”

Diana was wearing the chain, taking it off to show me when asked if she had brought something. She told me how “precious” and “really special” this necklace was to her, as “a part of her faith” as a Catholic. She wore it every day. Regarding her faith, Diana explained “being brought up in a Catholic home and then, having to go through some personal stuff as well and with the family it has been something that has, it has always been the rock for me.” She elaborated that her faith was something she could turn to when she just wanted to cry. Thus she connected the chain, and her faith which it represented, to her background and family in her “Catholic home.” Using the metaphor of “the rock” to describe her faith implied it was a constant, dependable force in her life. Diana continued by explaining she “used be such an introvert” and would not talk to people about her problems - if she felt sad she would run to a church and cry, and would feel much better afterwards. The meaning of Diana’s faith was presented as to be understood against a background of past personal struggles, in her allusions to past problems and going through “personal stuff” with her family.

I enquired whether the fact Diana wore the chain around her neck was significant, in that it was visible. Since we were talking about identity, I was wondering if she thought of it as something which signalled her religious beliefs and Catholic identity to others. Diana’s response was that it was more of a private, personal matter. She said it was about her really liking to wear a necklace that she believed in so much. She described how, when feeling anxious, she would clutch the chain and it would give her comfort. It seemed to function like a portable church; an object she carried with her which helped her feel better when she needed to. Bringing this artefact granted Diana the opportunity to talk about a personal matter for her, her faith, and what it meant to her. Framed against a backdrop of the past, there were suggestions that she herself had changed. Saying she “used be such an introvert” introduces the question for her audience as to why she no longer identifies as an introvert; a question which unfolded with her own answers over the course of the interview.

4.3.2 Being different: “I do belong but to a certain extent”

At several points in Diana’s narrative, she positioned herself as different from others around her in the UK. She described how, having a ‘different’ background, when she was younger, she avoided talking about it with her peers. More recently, Diana
explained how being unexpectedly differentiated from others had shaped her experiences of belonging and of identity when accessing and attending university.

4.3.2.1 Silent at school: “just a normal girl that came from Congo”

To briefly outline the narrative sequence of the interview, we discussed Diana’s choice of artefact and spoke about the “massive importance” of faith to her identity. Then Diana talked about how her family had helped shape who she had become, by going through struggles together in solidarity, and through seeing how her parents had dealt with problems while still giving her a good life. My curiosity led me to ask what it had been like for her to move to the UK as a child. Noticing my own curiosity about this, I enquired whether others, too, had shown interest in finding out about her background. Diana’s reply was that “no,” she “never used to be the type of person that would actually tell anyone about my problem or tell anyone about my background I just kept it quiet.” Diana explained the complexity and irony of her situation. She had felt she should be in a position to be proud of her mother’s important role as a diplomat, but instead, “it wasn’t something that you were proud of it’s just something that you kinda hide so you can just like fit in and be normal.” In the extract quoted a few lines above, Diana constructed the situation as part of her identity and personality in the past, in that she “never used to be the type of person” to speak openly about her problems. We have seen her describe how she would retreat to church rather than talk to others. Diana then explained how, when you told someone that your mother was a diplomat, they were usually impressed, as this meant “your life is supposed to be all great and amazing.” However, after the other person’s enthusiasm at learning this, Diana would have to reveal the reality; that in her family’s experience it certainly was not the case. Hence, as other people could not be relied upon to grasp her situation, she tended to stay quiet about it. As she put it, this meant “people didn’t ask people just thought I was a normal girl that came from Congo.” Her silence about her background was framed against others’ failure to understand, and the irony of not having a wonderful life despite her mother’s status. This silence allowed her to pass as “a normal girl” - the implication being she did not feel like a normal girl.

4.3.2.2 Different coming to university: “home would not do this to me”

When Diana applied to university, it transpired that due to recent changes in the law and her asylum status, she was classed as an international student. Realising this only
months before she planned to start university, it came as a shock. Diana had lived in the UK for many years; she pointed out that when asked where she was from, she would say Birmingham. When I asked Diana if she felt like she belonged in the UK, she replied as below.

Extract 1

Diana: Yeah I definitely do, so that’s why I went when it kinda hit me that I couldn’t access student finance it kinda made me feel like an outsider
Doireann: Mm
Di: Like all this time I felt like I was part of you know I was one of, (Do: Yeah) you know, like a citizen here I was one of them, like, out of the many so I always felt like, so when it hit me that actually actually you’re not (Do: Mm mm) and you kinda it kinda felt like, well, I don’t know this is my home

(504-509)

Diana’s sense of belonging was interrupted by the news regarding access to university/student finance. The way she describes it is that she felt she was “one of,” “a citizen here” - as though she had felt she was one of many who belonged and had a place in the society she lived in. In saying “actually you’re not,” she changes position, as though addressing herself in the second person, in a harsh tone of voice, as if telling herself that she is in fact wrong in her beliefs. Alternatively, it could be an echo of the voice of someone from student services addressing her, with the news that, actually, she is not a home student. There is a sense of shock or confusion communicated through Diana’s stilted speech in Extract 1, which contains unfinished phrases and sentences. This and the repeated use of “kinda” perhaps indicate her hesitation to comprehend the unexpected message of being told she was an outsider. Diana went on to reflect that although she thought the UK was home up to that point, she might need to rethink this. She relayed her thought processes at the time, saying “I guess this is not home for me, you know I guess I do belong but, to a certain extent,” leading up to her statement that “home would not do this to me.” Being told she was not a home student was constructed like an act of rejection by a nation – one which was, after all, meant to be providing her and her family with refuge when it was not safe for them to go elsewhere. If Diana was not a home student, and the UK was not treating her as a citizen, it introduced the question in her narrative of where, then, was home. Over the course of the interview, Diana changed from referring to Congo as home to calling the UK home. Towards the end of the interview, Africa was being called home, and the UK a “second home” and the place where she grew up; this appeared to reflect an
adapting and shifting sense of belonging and identification. Being put in this position regarding HE had other repercussions for Diana, her choices, and her life in general, as we will see.

Diana explained she had worked hard to get to university, and going there was replete with meaning for her. Consequently, she put a lot of pressure on herself when she started university. Her habit of keeping her problems to herself and not asking for help – as she put it, not knowing how to start with asking for help – exacerbated the pressure she placed on herself. However, Diana said it was at university that she learned how to ask for help, and became more open about talking to others. Diana said these were examples of significant personal changes since beginning university. She claimed in the past she was very “picky” and careful in who she spoke to, and would not talk to just anyone about her background. In doing an interview, Diana performed her new identity as someone who was more open to sharing her story and talking about herself, even to a stranger.

4.3.3 Education intertwined with identity: “I just loved education”

To understand the impact of almost being prevented from attending university, it is vital to look at the context of this for Diana. Education had been a major part of her life up to that point, and she saw it as playing a big part in her future. I asked why going to university was so important to Diana, and here is her response.

Extract 2

*I really don’t know I never thought of why it was important but I think, I just loved education. I mean I loved reading I loved being at school and learning it was just amazing I think there’s nothing better than that*

(418-420)

She went on to list all the subjects she enjoyed, in an almost breathless tone; her enthusiasm for learning was almost palpable, as in the above extract. Diana even explained that as a child she used to have dreams about putting up her hand and answering maths questions in class, and did an impression of how her siblings laugh about it to this day. Her passion for learning was apparently part of the family lore and of her identity within the family. Diana said growing up in Congo may have contributed to her enthusiasm for education, as there there was not much to do - it was always “school church home school church home school church home.” (Interestingly, these
are three recurring motifs which weave through her narrative.) When Diana came to the UK and “found out that there’s even more subjects than in Congo I was just like (gasps) ‘ohh oh my God give me more I want more.’” She dramatised here her own childish excitement upon discovering the possibility of educating herself more widely in her new country. Clearly, education was a major part of Diana’s identity, ever since she was a child.

Another reason it was personally important for Diana to go to university related to her family very much valuing third level education. She presented some mini-narratives to illustrate this. One of these relayed how her grandfather had been wealthy enough to be able to send his children to university. It upset him that none of them took advantage of this opportunity; that is, until Diana’s mother opted to go. Diana’s father was also highly educated. Being educated was valued in the family, and Diana going to university continued the tradition. That her grandfather had the privilege of being able to afford to send his children to university highlighted the irony of Diana’s position, where she feared she might be prohibited from going at all for financial reasons. Diana went on to say how education had always been “such a great escape;” how “it’s been such a big part of me actually just to be able to go to school, and find out new things and learn like it just took my mind away from things.” Again here we see hints at personal worries or difficulties – she subtly communicates to her audience that there was something she may have wanted to take her mind off. We are reminded that there may have been a darker backdrop to some of her childhood. This sits in contrast with the innocent exuberance she enacted above about going to school, and gets across some of the attraction of school as a place of escape. Diana described how from the age of thirteen she plotted how she would get to university, through sheer commitment to her schoolwork.

The subject Diana studied for her degree had not been her original choice of subject; instead it was influenced by the news that she was not considered a home student. She had wanted to study politics; in her words, as the child of a diplomat she was “born in politics” and felt politics had greatly shaped her life. Diana had a plan to return to Congo as a politician and work to make things better for other politically-connected families in similar situations to her own. She even had a dream of being president there one day. On realising that getting to university would not be a
straightforward process, it occurred to her that this was her “only one shot” at university, and therefore she would be better off doing a course which would make her “stable” and maximise her employability. Diana reflected that in her wish to study politics: “I was thinking about other people how I can do things better for other people rather than myself.” Diana described changing her thinking; “that’s how I thought about it I’ll start with me first before starting with other people.” Being newly identified as an international student prompted a reevaluation of priorities; it was as though she realised if the UK was not going to look out for her, she needed to ensure she was looking out for herself. This decision could also be seen to symbolise choosing a different path in life, accepting a different future - and identity - to the one she had imagined for herself. It may have meant letting go of her wish to be president of Congo one day.

Diana presented herself as someone whose identity was tied up with her educational involvement. This she communicated through having so relished school all her life, and pinning her hopes on going to university. Her grandfather, parents and siblings featured in her narrative, locating her as part of a family that respected and participated in university education. She also represented herself as having a reputation for being passionate about learning. Framed in this way, the possibility of not getting to university can be understood as particularly personally devastating. We will see how Diana responded in a proactive way to the situation, which in fact opened her up to new identity prospects.

4.3.4 Finding out the other side: “I need to find out the other side of me”

I have explored some ways in which Diana adapted and changed her way of being, or her way of thinking about who she was. Being considered an international student when she applied to university became a pivotal point in the narrative of the interview. Extract 3 came just after Diana’s comment that “home would not do this to me,” which, as noted above, invited the question of then where was home for her. Diana discussed how being at university presented some answers to the identity questions she was dealing with in that period of her life.

Extract 3

And then I came to uni and then I started meeting international students from like different countries in Africa so they were starting to educate me a bit more
Diana depicts previously having had an uncomplicated sense of identity, as though she did not give much thought to the matter in the past, saying in a casual tone of voice “yeah you were just from Birmingham.” Being “hit” with being an international student initiated a turn towards finding out about her “other side.” The way Diana describes it here, there are different sides to her identity which are available to her. Being designated an international rather than home student made her more aware of her non-British, African identity, and conscious that it was a side she needed to develop. Interesting also is that Diana went to university as an African international student, and in Extract 1 from her narrative she associated being an international student with being an outsider. In Extract 3 now, she mentions meeting and bonding with other African international students. These African students Diana presents as her educators, a point I return to in the next section. I would also like to draw attention to how Diana switches between speech positions in the extract above. When talking about her old self she refers to herself as ‘you’ (“you were just from Birmingham”) and then describes herself in the third person (“just a black girl who lives in Birmingham”). It is as though she is seeing herself through the eyes of others and describing herself as they would describe her. Perhaps this functions to convince the audience that this was not just how she saw herself, but also how she was perceived by others around her, and therefore how normal and accepted an identity it was for her.

Diana explained that being deemed an international student prompted deep contemplation on her part, saying it “definitely has changed a lot I think it was from there where I started sort of like the discovery the journey of finding out more.” Being held, as she put it, “a centimetre away from [her] dreams,” she said she became aware that something was “separating [her] a little bit which is a bit kind of like, well there’s a line there there’s a really fine line there between what [she] can and can’t do.” The event revealed previously invisible barriers for Diana; she was not a UK citizen and did not have access to the same resources UK citizens had. Being in a place where she was
a minority and, as she put it, not just “the minority of Britain but the minority of outsiders makes you think even more.” Essentially Diana seems to be indicating she became aware of discrimination and perhaps racism in the system, including towards FMBSs like herself. Without saying this outright, Diana made comments such as that Britain was not the only place where racism exists. The pivotal event of almost not being able to go to university started her thinking about who she was and what this meant; then actually being at university helped her deal with this. She said it “helped [her] find out who [she] was a bit more and how to live with that and how to deal with that.” Diana said university helped in that it teaches you to critique things, to think more deeply and not just see with “plain eyes.” It was as though her own racialised identity became more clear to her, and was intertwined with the surprise and perhaps rejection experienced through realising the UK did not consider itself her home.

4.3.4.1 Achieving an identity balance: “there’s always a balance”

Diana described at this student period of her life having to think actively and make decisions about “how you fit in in the world” and “how you’re fitting in different categories.” She presented it as achieving a “balance” in her identity. Extract 3 showed how Diana realised she needed to develop the non-British side of herself. She spoke about how over time and at university she was figuring out “the culture of [her] as a person,” and felt a need to bring together the different cultural sides of her personality. She mentioned how other African students started to educate her about Africa, and she began “finding out [her] identity as an African woman.” University thus became a site of learning and transformation but through an unconventional, extracurricular type of education. Towards the end of the interview, Diana asked to say something on her views on culture, and spoke about finding role models and starting to enjoy wearing African attire. She alluded to getting tips on how to manage her hair if she left it in a natural afro style, and feeling supported in doing so as others around her were doing the same. Diana outlined the choice she made to do this.

Extract 4

I feel like I have to be that one person to represent the African side of me because I don’t think it is represented as much, so I just wanna represent it a bit more that so other people see and kinda embrace it, like I did, and just know that it is out there, you know. There’s always a balance and stuff

(655-658)
Displaying and communicating her African side to others seems to have become important. Diana appreciated how others taught and supported her to reignite and embrace her own Africanness. Now it is as though she wants other minorities to witness and respond to her “minority side” - she seeks for others to be inspired to embrace their less-represented side, and to redress the balance between minority-majority, more and less dominant (as she described it elsewhere in the interview). Curiously, her stated intention here is to “represent” her African identity to her audience, which is what I had asked if she was doing with her religious necklace at the start of the interview. Her faith (represented by her necklace/artefact) was carried with her but in a private and personal manner - but her Africanness was embodied and out there, for others to recognise in her and hopefully in themselves too. Furthermore, for someone previously reticent about sharing her story, now she announced it to others in her appearance. Reaching this point was not without challenge. About her identity, Diana said: “bringing what I know here that’s in Britain and what I know is back home as well and just bringing it into one I think has been quite a challenge but I think it’s kind of smoothly settling in.” Her choice of words is interesting, as it sounds like new syntheses of identities, like migrants, can take time to ‘settle in.’

She explained that for personal reasons she foresaw herself moving to an African country, and envisioned her African side becoming more dominant than her British side. This was quite a shift from the ‘Birmingham girl’ she talked about being earlier in her narrative. I asked, and Diana did not think her own turn towards her African side was connected to expecting to live in Africa in future; she attributed it more to societal changes along with her experiences at university. Without going into it in detail, at other points in the interview she discussed adapting her accent, speech, and attitude, to present herself in different ways depending on who she was with and what she was trying to achieve. Similarly, being African or British were presented as part of a repertoire of identities she could draw on and choose to develop further, or not. As Diana said, “just because these things are happening that maybe does not favour you, it doesn’t mean that it’s not your home.” Being challenged or discriminated against - rather than something to be defeated by – instead, in her narrative, ultimately brought about increased awareness and new, apparently positive, identifications. Diana faced the aversive situation of being told she was not a home student and, rather than be
unhappy about her national identity and the ‘problem’ it presented, she responded by embracing it and becoming more proud of it. Her hair and jewellery worn to the interview (including an African bracelet she showed me), signalled and performed this as much as her words and stories did.

4.4 Muna

Muna, the final participant, and I met for the interview on a cold afternoon in November 2016. Muna was in her forties, and had recently finished a PhD. Originally from Yemen, she left the country as a young adult. Since then Muna had lived, worked and studied in a variety of places around the world. Muna came across as a warm, engaging and self-assured person. She had a calm voice and spoke with expression and feeling. A Muslim woman, she wore western clothing and had her hair covered with a hat. She had lived in the UK for over five years. Her refugee journey, as she referred to it, had started more recently, from which I understood it began when she was already resident in the UK for a number of years.

4.4.1 Not representing what is expected: “I’m gonna talk about, not show”

Muna chose not to bring an artefact. This proved to be a central talking point which we circled back to throughout the interview. The subtitle of this section is discussed at a later point, but refers to her decision not to “show” an artefact but instead to talk about why she did not bring one. Muna described looking around her apartment the night before thinking about what to bring. She looked at pictures and models she had from Yemen, and decided not to bring them, commenting “a lot of times I don’t feel like I belong” there. She continued to ponder out loud about where she felt she belonged, which led her to explain that she had a sense of attachment to another country where her family now lived. I suggested that she seemed to have thought the artefact should represent belonging in some way; also that she associated belonging with place, particularly the place where you were born. Extract 1 depicts our conversation around this.

Extract 1:

_Doireann:_ It sounds like when you thought of bringing something you thought of bringing something from Yemen  
_Muna:_ Mm  
_D:_ And then, you couldn’t locate something or identify something
M: No no no. I mean I don’t feel like I belong there I don’t know why. There is some reason. Maybe because of, I, maybe because I wasn’t feeling happy, you could say, when I was there. Not in terms of, ah mm maybe not hap- maybe this is not the word, but, maybe because of lots of restrictions in Yemen (D: Oh right) that I felt I need more freedom (D: Mm) you know I need to be myself I need to, depend on myself and everything, so emm, yeah, maybe that’s why, I don’t know I mean it’s like, because I was thinking about it last night and I’m like, ‘why?’, I mean I love Yemen it’s my own country and I love it and, you know I get so much em, em, emotional when I see like pictures of Yemen and I remember the days and everything. But it’s just I don’t feel like I belong there.

(44-55)

Muna here questions herself aloud, describing thinking about this topic and asking herself “why?” Her self-questioning became a trend in the interview. There is a sense in this extract that Muna is narrating her thoughts as she tries to work out the answer as to why she doesn’t feel like she belongs in Yemen. She considers the restrictions associated with living there. Then she backtracks as if communicating regret at saying anything negative about her “own country,” and states her love for Yemen and her nostalgia for her days spent there. Notions of freedom and restriction, and of ‘being oneself,’ which arise here, are revisited later in this analysis. Belonging, or not belonging, has become a central issue for Muna. I had not yet asked anything about belonging, but Muna had taken up my offer of being sent the interview schedule beforehand. Later in the interview Muna mentioned that certain questions on the schedule had been on her mind, including one regarding where you feel you belong. These questions might have evoked for Muna a discourse around traditional ideas of belonging, nationality and place – she seems almost to be responding to an expectation that she should feel a sense of belonging to her country of birth. When people asked where she was from, Muna said Yemen, but as we are already beginning to see this did not seem like a satisfactory answer to her. In Extract 1 above, my use of language also links the concepts of location and identity; I say Muna couldn’t “locate something or identify something.” I commented soon after in the interview that Muna appeared to associate identity with a place or a nationality; she confirmed she thought of identity as “where you belong, where, you know like nationality or home country.” There was a sense in Muna’s narrative of being expected to be one thing and not being it; almost of being defined by what she was not, and creating a new identity in this way.
4.4.1.1 Being not-Yemeni: “I don’t represent the culture that I belong to”

Having discussed Muna’s lack of a sense of belonging or attachment to her country of birth, we went on to talk about how other people did not perceive her as Yemeni. This came up as I asked if a particular part of her identity was important to her. Muna said it was a difficult question to answer. I suggested, for example, that for some it might be an aspect of culture, religion, or family. Muna picked up my mention of culture, and appeared to associate it with Yemeni or Islamic culture. She said “the thing is with culture, em, I don’t represent the culture that I belong to.” Muna observed that “a lot of people even who know Yemeni people, when I say I’m from Yemen they say ‘you don’t look Yemeni.’” She elaborated on her point, saying:

Extract 2

I don’t know if it’s the looks the how I how I, how I deal with people how I react to things, eh how I even talk about religion, I don’t I don’t, belong to Yemeni culture. That’s why I think when when when a lot of my friends will think ‘oh you don’t look Yemeni you don’t you don’t even, talk like Yemeni people’

Muna claims here that others confirm she does not bear the signs of being a Yemeni person, in her looks, how she talks and how she reacts to others. By depicting the voices of “a lot of” friends commenting on how un-Yemeni she comes across, Muna supports her claim of being unrepresentative of her nationality; not only she herself but a chorus of friends apparently think she is not very Yemeni. Not knowing how a Yemeni person typically looks, I tried to clarify how much this untypical-ness related to her outward appearance. Muna responded that it was more than this, answering: “it’s not just about looks and the dress points it’s more about being open-minded a lot,” and it is “the way I think and the way I deal with people.” As in Extract 2, Muna suggested her way of thinking and her attitude are evident in how she interacts socially, and are part of why she does not pass as Yemeni in the eyes of others. She is saying it is not just what is on the outside, but what goes on inside her head, that is not-Yemeni; this affects her dealings with other people.

In Extract 2 Muna also mentions that how she talks about religion was one of the things that marked her as not belonging to Yemeni culture. Leading on from this, Muna explained there was a tendency among Yemenis to be quite closed on issues regarding different religious sectors. In contrast, she was “very open to different sectors in Islam
which might not be something acceptable in my culture in Yemen.” Muna explained how she considered herself as closely following Islam, praying five times a day and covering her hair. She claimed an identity as a devoted Muslim in this way. Muna described how when she visited Yemen in the past, she would disagree with others about issues to do with religious sectors. According to Muna, other Yemenis then “think that ‘oh you have changed a lot because you live abroad.’” Her alternative viewpoint was attributed by other Yemenis to the effect of living abroad, as though a person living her whole life in Yemen would not think the way Muna did. Next, Muna began to emphasise the extent of difference between herself and other Yemenis. She said others tell her “‘everything is different about you,’” and how despite there being a “big Yemeni community” where she lived, she “kept [herself] away from them” because she “[doesn’t] think we have any similarities whatsoever.” She positioned herself as very much apart from other Yemenis in the extremes suggested by her use of language here. In the context of seeking asylum in another country, it can be assumed that detaching from one’s nationality takes on a certain significance, though this was not explored in the interview.

Later in the interview, when talking about university education, Muna spoke about how in her experience, people from Arab backgrounds were often discouraged from thinking originally. Many, she said, tended to copy “what the ancestors say” and “don’t think for themselves.” She went on to describe the consequences for someone who behaves in a different way in Arabic cultures.

**Extract 3**

M: Once there is a person who’s taught questioning about this, who’s taught refusing what’s the acceptable way of things, oh, they start accusing them of being ‘you’re wrong, you’re,’ you know they they start accusing ‘you’re you’re atheist you’re whatever.’ So they start em, if you could say em, destroying that person
D: OK, destroying it
M: Yeah yeah because ‘we don’t we’re gonna stay as we are, we don’t want to change’

(571-576)

The voices of others featuring here are constructed as accusatory and destructive. They are portrayed as highly resistant to change; rather than change, they would go so far as to destroy any person who threatens to destabilise “the acceptable way of things.” These voices also deny the questioner’s religious faith, calling them an atheist.
Considering the claims from Muna earlier that she was religious but also questioned and disagreed with others about religious matters on her visits to Yemen, there is a suggestion that such accusations may have been levelled at Muna herself at some point. In this way she, and her personal relationship with her faith, are positioned as rejected by this culture which does not want change.

Muna reiterated several times during the interview that even when she lived in Yemen as a teenager it did not seem to suit her.

**Extract 4**

I’ve never **thought** that I’m attached there, it’s not **me** I mean I didn’t feel myself when I was there. Once I get out of Yemen I got out of Yemen, I felt I am living now.

(197-199)

Present and past tenses are mixed, as though Muna is shifting between speaking from the position of her younger self and her current self who is looking back. This occurred throughout her interview and I think lends a sense of her communicating her active reflection. It is as if she puts herself back in the position of being a teenager in Yemen and speaks from that position, in order to try and work out why, now, she feels the way she does about the place. Muna went on to say “it’s maybe a personality inside me that wants me to be somewhere preferred.” Similarly, she noted she did not have “anything inside [her] that, that makes [her] belong to Yemen.” The suggestion is that Muna had an inner ‘true’ self which instinctively told her what was right for her, and which could be either covered up or revealed and set free, in different places. This metaphor cropped up in Muna’s speech throughout the interview, and is discussed more in the next section.

Muna described how she felt when she first moved away from Yemen; “it’s then when I felt OK now it’s me, I’m being me, you know?” She talked about feeling the “most comfortable” in the country to which she moved, and now being more “connected” and “attached to” that place than any other. The sense Muna conveys of being comfortable and being able to be herself in that country sits in stark contrast with her description of feeling she did not belong in Yemen (as depicted in Extracts 1 and 4 above, and implied by what she said about her views being rejected by other Yemenis). This same country, Muna said, had “opened everything to Yemenis who left from after the war,” and had been “kind enough to accept people to come and live there.” The
country is constructed as accepting, kind and open. ‘Open’ is an adjective Muna used to describe herself in her narrative; Yemenis, we have seen, were presented as the opposite; not open to different or challenging viewpoints, which were perceived as foreign or ‘other.’ Aligning herself with another country is another way of disidentifying herself from her own nationality. At the same time, Muna referred to Yemen as home at numerous points in the interview, while also separating herself from it. As with the other two participants, Muna’s relationship with her country of origin and its people, is portrayed as somewhat complicated.

Later in the interview when we were again considering issues of culture, Muna commented in a slightly jokey way that she was “a different free spirit from everything around [her].” She then said:

Extract 5

I think one of the things that made me feel I don’t you know I’m more free than, apart you know from anything else is the fact that I was restricted so much in Yemen that it, it made me what I am now.

(426-429)

It is as if her former sense of being restricted in Yemen actually created the current sense of freedom she experiences, which she now understood as forming part of her ‘free spirited’ personality. Muna then stated how she wanted to be “apart from thinking ‘oh is this culturally acceptable or not is this religiously acceptable or not.’” Her use of the word ‘apart’ here implied she was detaching herself from her former culture – before she was not attached and did not belong, now she was actively distancing herself. Interestingly, we will see that she was keen to question herself in many ways, but with this statement she indicated she wanted to be free from constant self-questioning about what was culturally or religiously acceptable. The key is perhaps in the nature of the questions. There is a distinction between questions which are personal to herself and in the interest of her own development; and the questions here, which appear more to do with limiting herself by making sure not to step outside of what was “culturally acceptable.”

The idea of being not-representative was enacted by Muna’s approach to (not) bringing an artefact. I realised this when later in the interview she described being at home the previous night, looking around for something to bring and asking herself
“what do I feel inside me” and “who’s me.” Muna concluded that picking one object to bring would not be good enough, saying her identity was:

**Extract 6**

_A mixture of a lot of places a lot of things a lot of experiences, that I’m just gonna talk about, not show, cos it it doesn’t actually make sense if if I say my identity is this and that but it’s it’s a combination of so many places so many people so many experiences that I went through_ (395-398)

Muna’s decision to “talk about, not show” struck me as significant. Who she is was more complex than just showing me an object. As Muna had highlighted earlier, it was not just what she looked like but the way she thought, talked, and dealt with others, which showed something significant about who she was. So in the act of talking - rather than bringing an object from Yemen or elsewhere to look at and photograph - she both communicated that she inherently did not belong to any country, and gave herself the platform to tell her audience why this was, in all its nuances. Following Extract 6 above, Muna said she did not belong to places but belonged to experiences. This was in itself a disavowal of her nationality. It also signified an advancement from the opening of the interview, where she verbally grappled with articulating where she belonged and with discourses associating belonging with land and place. Now she was giving answers on where she belonged and how she described her identity, and my sense was that she was satisfied with the answers she had arrived at.

**4.4.2 Questioning and new identities: “you become a rebellion”**

A theme of questioning permeated Muna’s narrative. She asked questions of herself aloud at many points in the interview, to illustrate how in the past or in the present moment she pondered certain issues. Muna mentioned that she had been thinking about questions from the interview schedule before we met. We also looked at the interview schedule together at one point, so the questions were very much present during our interview.

It was illustrated how, according to Muna, others from her cultural background tended to be against challenging the status quo; even how you might be rejected and ‘destroyed’ for questioning and thereby raising the possibility of change. This is juxtaposed with Muna identifying as in favour of enquiring about why things are the way they are: as she put it, “I don’t wanna be following something without
questioning.” Muna herself stated her own understanding of Islamic teaching was that questioning actually constituted a way of worshipping.

Doing a PhD was presented as a transformative experience in Muna’s narrative. She described how it prompted self-reflection, where she questioned herself and her life. For instance, she said contemplating her connection to Yemen had only begun in recent years – she wondered aloud whether this was down to her “PhD journey” or her “asylum seeking journey.” That the two were related is interesting, as is her use of the term journey, implying as it does a move, a displacement from the way things used to be; we shall see that this was indeed how she spoke about her PhD experience. Muna expressed her opinion that in doing a PhD, part of the journey was to:

Extract 7

M: Teach you how to, take things and question them reflect on them not just take things as they are. You know you keep there’s this thinking going in your mind all the time. And I think I’ve had that as a habit now
[D: Oh yeah]
M: [I keep thinking about everything] around me. So when you, when I read what your thesis was about identity I was like ‘what? What’s my identity? Where do I belong to, who the people are, that I belong to?’ (236-243)

Muna demonstrates here how thinking more about things became a habit. Hearing my research topic activated her thinking habit, leading to an autodialogue of self-questioning, enacted in her speech here. A little later she claimed not to be a person who would “do lots of meditation and do lots of thinking and do lots of reflecting” – then changed to the past tense, saying she used not be a person who was like that, but had started an inner dialogue, and “became aware of these things inside” her. Indeed she performed the evidence of this transformation throughout our interview by questioning herself, as seen at the end of Extract 7 above for example, or in the fact that she seemed to have engaged with the interview topic and questions before even meeting me. Muna’s narrative of personal change (outlined in more detail later), and her apparent willingness to think and not just take things for granted, as performed in her speech, signalled important points about her identity to her audience. They showed how different Muna was from what was expected of ‘her’ culture, constructed in her narrative as closed off to questioning and unwelcoming towards change.
When prompted about what personal meaning she got from her education, Muna explained how it had made her stronger. Muna had experienced personal problems during her PhD, including worrying about her family living through war. A particular event happened in her life during this time, which she said “shocked [her] inside.” Muna began to pose herself existential questions such as “what is the importance of life, what am I doing?” Muna said she realised the idea behind a PhD was not the content or the study but personal transformation; as she worded it, to “build a personality” and “make you a different person.” Having to deal with problems, while simultaneously completing a PhD which encouraged reflection, meant she built new skills and was always trying to convince herself she was strong and could get through it. The result, she said, was that she became “very very strong” and even realised she had become “a fighter.” Muna said she was glad she had turned out to be this kind of person. Intrigued at her story, I asked for more detail on how her PhD had led to such an outcome. Muna elaborated that being in the UK had given her the confidence to know she was “free to protect [her] rights,” confidence she would probably not have in other countries. She explained she had disputed an issue with the university itself and won. Muna evocatively described her personal transformation by saying “you learn so much from doing [a PhD] you become a rebellion.” Her use of the word ‘rebellion’ here surprised me, but I think demonstrated the sheer turnaround she went through; from living a restricted life growing up in Yemen, to having a PhD and confidently standing up for her rights and challenging institutions now.

Muna commented that she now believed in herself a lot more, laughing while saying “so now the UK is part of my identity.” She explained then that this was the kind of freedom - to stand up for herself - which she had missed in Yemen. This link of associations pulls together previous points in Muna’s narrative. Muna’s tendency to question and challenge, as well as rendering her ‘un-Yemeni,’ was also what led her to discover her own strength and confidence during her PhD, which in turn led to a new identification with the UK. The various concepts and metaphors she drew on to depict her transformation included believing in oneself, discovering one’s true self, setting oneself free, and personal independence leading to empowerment. These all seem to evoke western discourses of personal development or self-actualisation. This brought the question for me, have westernised thinking and discourses given Muna a way to transform herself, or a way to think and talk about it which others will understand?
Either way, her personal change and her commitment to reflection and dialogue represented a non-Yemeni identity and a new version of identity, one connected to experiences rather than places. Among the metaphors of transformation employed in her narrative were: building a personality, becoming a free spirit, and excavating or discovering previously hidden aspects of herself ‘inside.’ Her use of many metaphors functioned to emphasise the sense of having undergone significant personal change. At the close of the interview, Muna commented that it had been an unusual interview but that she liked how I gave her freedom to choose what she wanted to say, adding “it’s been a very good experience, you made me think.” I could certainly say the same about her and the other participants in the research. Perhaps this underlines the dialogical core of the interview interactions; the interviews were not seen as simply a source of answers, but a place for conversations which would undoubtedly continue not only through the research process but through our lives in general.

4.5 Commonalities across participants

As explained earlier, participants were presented separately to respect the individuality of their narratives and the flow of each interview as it unfolded. I now briefly outline commonalities observed across the narratives; they are discussed in greater detail in the Discussion Chapter. I came to see them as elements which fit together to contribute to a broader narrative synthesis, which represents one way of conceptualising how FMBSs in this study understood, conveyed and performed their identities. This narrative sequence is presented now. The common identity-related elements are in italics.

- **Education as important for identity.** Highly valuing their education and their student identities was a theme across the narratives. Participants indicated some kind of struggle to do with accessing or staying in university; this was usually connected to their FM background, and provided a backdrop to their HE experiences.

- **Being different.** National identities, and issues of home and of belonging, were not straightforward. This was often in the context of one’s FM background. Tension and conflict were evident in areas of identification which participants constructed as somehow ‘not right,’ or which implied they were somehow different from those around them or out of place. Some identities were
presented as imposed upon participants; they would find themselves positioned in particular ways by others. All described experiences where they were rejected and apparently considered ‘other’ - alternately by student finance, airport authorities, British people generally, or those of their own religion and nationality. On this matter, identities were usually presented by participants as ultimately conferred socially.

- **Transforming identities.** While continuity of identity was evident through each narrative’s linking of past and present events to an imagined future, each participant also spoke about a process of identity change they had undergone. These were seen to manifest in the interview interaction too. Positive identity transformations happened while at university, though framed against a backdrop of adversity, alluded to above under ‘being different.’ Being at university was said to have helped them feel stronger and more confident. The learning at university could come about in an unorthodox manner, attributed to personal experiences and critical self-reflection as much as to formal educational means. A sense of belonging and inclusion amongst fellow students in the multicultural university setting facilitated the transformation. Transformation was not portrayed as having purely positive effects, nor was it easily achieved; it was also associated with conflict.

- **Using new power and identities to react against injustices.** The result of the transformation was perhaps surprising; participants seemed to use their newfound power and confidence to react against issues they were unhappy about. Having strengthened themselves and their identities, they took a position of fighting back against systems which had worked against them (and could easily have prevented them from getting to where they were). There is an element of defiance, and also creativity and positivity, in their response; all voiced a commitment to social change as well as personal. Participants enacted the changes they wanted to see in the world through identity performances in the interviews.

- **Identity choices and agency.** This factor enabled participants to be flexible, adapt, and generally manage difficulties in life. They each took an active role in portraying who they were, including in their choices around bringing an artefact to the interview. Considering the problems participants faced such as
negotiating experiences of having unwelcome and unbefitting identities foisted upon them, being able to take control over their identity positioning was a useful resource. It also served as a way for them to come up with their own unique new identity expressions and syntheses.

4.6 Chapter summary

This chapter presented a dialogical narrative analysis of interviews with three FMBS participants. Themes were used to outline the various ways in which participants communicated and performed their identities. Direct quotes and images were provided to demonstrate my arguments, and ground the analysis in the data. A decision was made during the research process to discuss commonalities across the three narratives, and these were presented at the end of the chapter in the form of five common themes woven into a narrative sequence. These commonalities are picked up in Chapter 6, where I discuss how the analysis relates to other literature in the field, and its implications. Before that though, the next chapter outlines my personal responses and reflections on the research process.
5 Reflexive considerations

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss reflexive considerations which arose over the course of the research. These range from how I was positioned vis-à-vis the participants, to what influenced my decisions on what to present in the analysis. While this chapter is dedicated to issues of reflexivity, I would hope that my commitment to a reflexive approach is evident throughout this thesis. The aim of this chapter is to bring another level of depth to the analysis, through giving a sense of the behind-the-scenes work which influenced every aspect of the research. Being reflexive is also central to the epistemological approach adopted, as well as consistent with counselling psychology and ethical research values. Firstly I discuss what I mean by reflexivity, as, in practice, there have been various understandings of what it involves.

5.2 Reflexivity

It is by now a well-established view that a researcher’s own subjectivity can and will influence, shape and colour every aspect of their research (e.g. Mauthner and Doucet 2003). The idea that any researcher could have a ‘view from nowhere’ and maintain a detached, objective perspective on what they study was originally challenged in feminist literature, and in recent decades has come to be widely accepted. The result of the new focus on researcher subjectivity in the research process has been an emphasis on “how does who I am, who I have been, who I think I am, and how I feel affect data collection and analysis” (Pillow 2003: 176). Pillow (2003) outlined how this in turn led to questioning the ability of a researcher to represent and to know another person, and questioning the very construction of ethnographic and qualitative texts. With the work of representation problematised in this way, reflexivity emerged as a solution; as a way to make visible the work of representation.

Etherington (2004), a researcher from a counselling background, defined researcher reflexivity as “the capacity of the researcher to acknowledge how their own experiences and contexts (which might be fluid and changing) inform the process and outcomes of inquiry” (pp. 31-32). Etherington hoped that “if we can be aware of how our own thoughts, feelings, culture, environment and social and personal history inform us” when interviewing, transcribing and writing our representations of the work, we might be able to achieve the rigour required of good qualitative research (p.
32). Practicing reflexivity in research has been compared to the expectation on a therapeutic practitioner to pay attention to how their own history and issues affect their understandings of, and reactions to, clients (Berger 2015).

Dedication to reflexivity has come to be associated with credibility and validity in qualitative research. Pillow (2003) noted reflexivity may be used to validate research, through raising questions about the research process and thus demonstrating awareness of the research problematics. Reflexivity makes available the ways in which the knowledge claims were arrived at, and through outlining the dilemmas encountered and how they were handled, allows readers to consider these for themselves. It has been argued that confronting and interrogating supposed problems in research projects can lead to better understandings of the contexts and meanings of our work (Burman and Whelan 2011). What is more, our intellectual and emotional responses to people constitute sources of knowledge in themselves (Mishler 1986). Reflexivity also promotes a compassionate and non-exploitative stance towards the research subjects, helping address concerns about negative effects of power in research relationships (Pillow 2003).

5.3 Limitations of reflexivity

A discussion of reflexivity is incomplete without mentioning some of the pitfalls associated with it, and acknowledging the limitations of what it can achieve. Concern has been voiced over the inclusion of reflexivity in a ‘tick-box’ fashion, as though a requirement which will automatically infer validity to qualitative work (Burman 2006; Pillow 2003). This has even resulted in a confessional style of reflexive engagement, whereby “‘being reflexive’ is interpreted as an invitation to tell “the whole story”’ (Burman 2006: 323); sometimes in the hope of being excused for research ‘mistakes.’ Certain approaches to reflexivity can appear self-indulgent, placing the researcher at the epicentre of their research interpretations and output (Alvesson 2003). Pillow (2003) made the interesting argument that practices of reflexivity are “critical to exposing the difficult and often uncomfortable task of leaving what is unfamiliar, unfamiliar” (p. 177). Being reflexive is not about ensuring no stone is left unturned, in that every aspect of the research has been subject to thorough investigation and that participants and researcher are fully ‘understood’ - that would be an impossible task,
and inconsistent with the theoretical underpinnings of this study. This issue I revisit later in the chapter, in terms of insider/outsider research concerns.

Reflexive efforts will always ultimately be lacking. Writing about doing ethical narrative research, Bishop and Shepherd (2011) noted that we must be honest about the fact that however deeply we might reflect, “analyse from multiple perspectives, and seek industriously to unravel and explain the factors at play, we cannot” (p. 1285). They called for a more explicit focus on the reconstructive nature of reflexive accounts, citing this as a researcher’s ethical obligation. Reflexive accounts are written with some degree of hindsight, and narrative epistemology helps illuminate how our recollections become differently coloured, “restoried by our new experiences in the social world,” including “newly acquired knowledge and attitudes,” and “shifting personal and professional identities” (Bishop and Shepherd 2011: 1286). Mauthner and Doucet (2003), in contrast, argued it is only possible to identify the impact one had on the research after it has been left behind. Either way, we cannot fully ascertain what effect we have had, partly because however we might try we can never fully capture our impact on the others involved in our research. Besides, given the social constructionist epistemology drawn upon here, all analyses are considered partial, situated contextually, temporally, and “constructed in part through guesswork” (Bishop and Shepherd 2011: 1285).

5.4 My position as researcher

Considering the approach to knowledge adopted in this study, it is important that the reader have an idea of who I am, to form some understanding of how I might be influencing all aspects of who and what I represent in this research. Dialogical narrative approaches view accounts as co-constructed, boundaries between researched and researcher being blurred (Riessman 2008). As researcher, I was the person the participants were in dialogue with and co-constructing reality with. They were responding not just to questions about identity which had been formulated by me, but to their perception of me as a person. Their responses were necessarily influenced by what they expected me to know about, be able to understand, and want to hear. I was their audience, along with whomever they imagined would hear about or read my thesis. Therefore it is important that I locate who I am and where I am coming from. Building on the outline in Chapter 1 of my personal reasons for choosing this thesis
topic, I provide some information on myself which seems relevant to issues discussed in this chapter. I am female, white, Irish, and in my thirties. My first language is English and I speak with an Irish accent. I was raised Catholic but do not consider myself as now affiliated with any religion. I moved from Ireland to Manchester at the beginning of the doctorate for which I am completing this thesis. I had not previously lived outside of Ireland, though have travelled quite extensively. As mentioned earlier, my previous work background was working for an international humanitarian organisation, one which actually worked in the countries of origin of the participants in this study.

5.5 Practicing reflexivity in this research

I drew on suggestions from Finlay (2002) and Berger (2015) about how our own subjectivity may impact on specific areas of the research, how to identify these, and how to work with them. I outline these, along with my reflections, in the sequence of the research process.

5.5.1 Pre-data collection

While forming our ideas it is good to reflect on the topic and our own relation to it, examining the existing literature as well as lived experience (Finlay 2002). Towards this I began a research journal where I documented my thoughts, emotional responses and reasoning throughout the research process. This functioned as an ‘audit trail’ of my processing and decision-making, which I could refer back to at various stages (Berger 2015). As mentioned in Chapter 3, using cultural resources also contributed to developing my awareness of the topic. Finlay (2002) recommended too that we interrogate our own motivations, assumptions and interests in the research, with the aim of identifying forces that may skew it in certain directions. I outlined some of these in the Reflexive Statement in Chapter 1.

Another consideration was that, prior to conducting interviews, I carried out a systematic review of the literature on experiences of FMBSSs in HE (Mangan and Winter 2017). The findings were interpreted to show an overarching theme of invalidation and misrecognition of FMBSSs and their experiences. This could have influenced my approach to the current study, in that I might expect the same themes to recur. The methods outlined in this chapter helped me to be aware of and hopefully avoid this as much as possible.
5.5.2 Access to participants

It was a challenge to recruit participants. As noted in Chapter 3, despite my efforts I did not establish numbers of FMBSs. Their invisibility is possibly due to a combination of low numbers, their keeping a low profile, and ignorance about their existence and needs on the part of institutions. My ‘outsider’ status, as a non-FMBS and not involved with organisations working with them, may have made FMBSs less likely to come forward. It has been documented how participants are more likely to agree to take part if they feel a sense of similarity or shared background with the researcher, or perceive a researcher as sympathetic towards them (Berger 2015; Shinozaki 2012). As explained previously, I used a gatekeeper who was involved in supporting FMs to attend university. When I first contacted her, she warned me they can be a difficult group to engage in research; the literature confirms this, for various reasons, including research fatigue (Tait 2006). It was only after the gatekeeper got to know me and learned about my background and the nature of my research that she agreed to circulate an email to potential participants on my behalf. With hindsight, I have a better understanding of her response when a stranger requested access to these students. Unlike the gatekeeper, I did not yet appreciate that their circumstances often involve dealing with complex stresses compared to other students, nor how few of them actually get to university.

I made some alterations to my research design as I went along, which I submitted to the university’s research ethics board. There had been a change in staff since I first was granted ethical approval, and at this point it was suggested that my research should have been originally deemed high risk, rather than medium risk. I was asked to provide more detail around several aspects of my research. The situation prompted me to reflect on how issues around FMs seem to arouse anxiety. I was, after all, a student proposing to interview other students from the same university on campus, which would not usually be considered risky research. I could have interviewed FMBSs under the banner of ‘international students,’ and never have known they were FMs. While this cautionary stance regarding research ethics might be about protecting FMs as a vulnerable group in society, it also could pose significant barriers to accessing them for research, and silence them, despite the need for research with this student group. The difficulty I had in finding participants meant I considered changing my research topic. I
was therefore very relieved and grateful to participants when they did come forward, leading to particular research dynamics, outlined in later sections of this chapter.

5.5.3 During data generation

The DNA approach fully acknowledges the researcher’s impact on what data is produced. So much goes on during an interview that it is impossible to simultaneously deconstruct our impact on the interviewee and how they are affecting us; anyhow, forces are at play on an unconscious and embodied level of which we could not be fully aware (Bishop and Shepherd 2011: 1285). While knowing this, I took measures to promote self-awareness. I listened back to interviews soon after they took place, and in my research journal noted thoughts, feelings, associations and general responses. Finlay (2002) suggested examining ourselves in the interview process, perhaps looking at where we behaved unusually and reflecting on why this might have been. This produced some of the reflections outlined below.

5.5.4 The relationship between researcher and researched

Next I look at some issues in the researcher-researched dynamic.

5.5.3.1 Insider-outsider and sameness-difference

McNess, Arthur and Crossley (2015) observed that “being inside or outside is often part of everyday language and consciousness” - people often define themselves in relation to what they are not (p. 300). How participants were positioned relative to me and others was a central focus of the analysis. Considering questions of boundaries which are pertinent to forced migration, it seems important to reflect on these dimensions within the research encounters. Much has been written about the advantages and disadvantages of ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ research. Being an insider researcher - that is, researching one’s own cultural group - has been associated with research being considered less credible (Russel y Rodriguez 1998). On the other hand, being perceived as an ‘insider’ and as sharing experiences and cultural insight with the researched can grant certain privileges of intimacy (Berger 2015), associated with increased levels of disclosure from participants. Then again, participants assuming the researcher’s familiarity with their situation can result in withholding of information that they take for granted the researcher will already know about (Daly 1992). Thus ‘outsider research,’ where difference is perceived between researcher and researched,
can lead to richer data as shared understanding is less likely to be assumed, and more is enquired about and explained. Part of why I chose this research topic was the perceived difference between participants’ life experiences and my own. At the same time, rather than fall into an essentialist trap of seeing identity as fixed, I prefer the idea of axes of similarity and difference. Esin, Fathi and Squire (2014) pointed out that in telling stories, individuals’ positions continuously alter, depending on the discursive resources they deploy (p. 206), and indeed this is a central tenet of the version of DNA employed in this study. Shifts occur in how the researcher constructs and presents their own identity in an interview encounter in response to the person being interviewed, and there can be surprises in how the other positions you relative to them (e.g. Shinozaki 2012). Rather than fixing on an insider/outsider dyad I feel it is more appropriate to discuss potential dynamics of sameness-difference, and their possible impact on the research process. I am white and none of the participants were white. I speak English as a first language, unlike the participants. I am an immigrant to the UK but chose to move here, can go ‘home’ whenever I want, and have not had to adjust to a new language or vastly different culture on migrating. I have never sought asylum, nor has anyone close to me. Thus very different migration choices were available to me in comparison to the three participants. In only one interview was my nationality asked about, and we both then used my nationality to make points about migration and politics. Berger (2015) advised that while some level of familiarity with another’s experience promotes in-depth understanding, researchers must “remain constantly alert to avoid projecting [their] own experience and using it as a lens to view and understand participants’ experience” (p. 230). I was keenly aware of the differential between us despite all technically having foreigner status. Being Irish, I even have privileges other nationalities do not have in the UK. I can travel back and forth to Ireland without a passport, and vote, whereas Zaram recounted the problems he had travelling even with official documents, as well as lacking the right to vote. ‘Brexit’ introduced an element of uncertainty about the future and of feeling not quite welcome for many European migrants who previously felt secure in the UK. All the same, generally my migrant status feels secure and I can move and live between European countries, while the participants would have experienced uncertainty in applying for asylum. It is difficult for me to understand what it would be like to stand in their shoes, and I
imagine they knew this and it had some effect on our conversations. It is possible that two participants perceived me as English and a member of the cultural majority. Either way, as a white, western European, English-speaking person, I occupy a privileged position in society. Participants may be less likely to say certain things for fear of being misunderstood or offending a researcher they see as belonging to a different cultural group (Ahmed, Lewando and Blackburn 2011). If that is the majority cultural group this might be exacerbated due to a power differential. This factor may have impacted on the research dynamic.

5.5.3.2 Shifting positions of similarity and difference

Returning to the idea of shifting positions, the participants and I attended the same university. Therefore we could assume a similar educational background, which can be said to be relatively privileged. Each participant acknowledged our shared student experience as common ground, from comments on the burden of tuition fees, to empathising about the difficulties of finding research participants. Yet within the student identity, we each adopted multiple different positions vis-à-vis each other throughout the interviews. One participant asked whether I would have the title of doctor in future, in what seemed like an impressed tone. In another interview, my doing doctoral-level research perhaps put us on an equal level, or even put the participant, who had completed a PhD, in a mentor position. That I was a trainee counselling psychologist was scarcely mentioned by participants; I have no idea how it was perceived, or how it might have affected the interviews. During interviews, I noticed my tendency to mention having already done some research on FMBSs, as though to imply awareness of the issues they face; but I do not know how this was perceived. Court and Abbas (2013) encouraged consideration of where the research takes place and how that may impact on dynamics. Conducting interviews in a university building, my intention was that it would be ‘common ground.’ However, since all the participants had actually finished university, it ended up as me inviting them ‘back.’ This might have underlined the academic reasons behind our meeting, perhaps making them more aware of the academic audience of the end-product - or maybe it refreshed their memories of student life. Zaram made a comment that in the past he would never have imagined he would sit in a room alone with a woman to talk. Had he not used this example to demonstrate how he had changed, I would not have
known gender was a significant dynamic in our encounter. In all, it would be unwise to say because we studied at the same university we had similar experiences, and there have been cautions against using reflexive practice to try to simply find similarities between researcher and researched (Pillow 2003). Rather, our positions are always shifting and ultimately unknowable; in Narayan’s (1993) words “the loci along which we are aligned with or set apart from those whom we study are multiple and in flux” (p. 671).

5.5.3.3 Religion, race, and refugee status

One instance where I came afterwards to reflect on my own response was when Diana brought as her artefact a ‘miraculous medal.’ I had encountered such medals before, and I associated them with Irish Catholicism and attending a convent primary school. I was taken aback by this object’s appearance in this particular context. Listening to the interview recording, I noticed I was overly complimentary about it, though also forgot what to ask. I did not name the artefact out loud, as I started wondering if ‘miraculous medal’ was an Irish term. I think in my response I was partly compensating for not having positive associations with this object, and I did not want to comment on or ask about the necklace in depth, or even mention its familiarity, out of wanting to avoid discussing my own religious beliefs. I probably did not want to risk offending the participant; realistically that was unlikely but, as mentioned before, I felt very grateful to participants for coming forward. Essentially I did not want to draw attention to differences between us. We did not return to the topic of religion after the opening of the interview, despite Diana saying it was central to her identity, and I wondered afterwards about my influence on this.

Following Berger’s (2015) recommendations, I returned to the interview at different intervals and began to notice that I had not fully engaged with Diana’s discussion around race. The way the interview unfolded, it was sometimes unclear whether Diana was referring to the consequences of being black or of not being a UK citizen. At one point she alluded to a friend becoming upset about an issue related to racial discrimination in HE, but this represented a somewhat displaced way of bringing the issue into the interview. Race and racism crop up in Diana’s narrative but are broached in an indirect way; something I did not notice until late in the analysis process, and did not include in the write-up at first. Diana mentioned at times acting ‘too black,’ and I
was unsure what she meant but also did not ask, both probably as I was afraid of sounding racist and felt I should know what she meant. As with religion, the discourse around race could potentially have been opened up more in the interview, but my hesitance to engage with these sensitive topics did not encourage discussion, despite the participant bringing them to the table.

Similarly, my sensitivity when it came to talking about being a FM brought a certain dynamic to the interview interactions. One participant began to talk about her forced migration story, then stopped and checked with me that it was alright to do so. My understanding of this was that I had emphasised so much in pre-interview communication that there was no expectation to discuss one’s FM background that she was unsure if it was acceptable to do so. My attempt to respect participants’ privacy could have functioned to silence participants. In another interview the participant’s FM identity was barely mentioned. Afterwards I wondered should I have asked about this, but ultimately was glad to let participants lead the way on what they wanted to discuss. Etherington (2007) wrote about how, in her anxiety to “get it right” she almost lost sight of the participant as “an independent actor who possesses the power to say what he feels” (p. 604). This observation I find relevant to my conclusion here. I reflected in the end that each participant gave me a sense of being in control of what they wanted to speak about or not.

5.5.3.4 Representing the analysis

At this stage, one danger is that our own sensitivities might mean we engage in “unconscious editing” of what we present (Berger 2015: 221). Berger suggested peer review as a useful practice to promote fuller engagement with our data. I took part in regular group research supervision sessions, where we discussed our data, our understandings of it, and thoughts on how to present it. Berger quoted an Israeli saying: ‘things that you see from here, you can’t see from there.’ This certainly held true in terms of my data analysis, and going back and reviewing the same interview a couple of weeks after doing the original analysis brought different understandings to light. The time lapse meant I could view the same material through a new lens. This helped me identify areas where my own experience had interacted with my understanding of what was being communicated in the interview (Berger 2015). I then reflected on changes in how I saw my analysis. This contributed to discussions in this
chapter, such as in the last section. I also tried to stay aware of my constantly changing position in relation to the study, by repeatedly asking myself, and discussing with others, my current position and how it might affect the research I was producing. This included how I felt about my research and how events in the news might influence my perspective on what I was writing. For instance, when there was a terrorist bombing in Manchester, I decided to include a mention in the analysis of how FMs could be stigmatised through others associating them with terrorism; as this issue then seemed more relevant and important.

5.6 Issues of representation: power, language and ‘voice’

Interviews are often said to be characterised by a power imbalance (Karnieli-Miller, Strier and Pessach 2009). Power dynamics are not straightforward. I wrote about my relief when participants finally agreed to be interviewed, which probably impacted on the research dynamic as I was on some level afraid of ‘losing’ them. I was dependent on the participants for high quality data (Cassell 2005), something participants were cognisant of - one asked after I turned off the recorder if she had “given me anything.” It occurred to me that there were even hidden issues of power around language in the research. Language is an area which has not been paid enough attention in research with migrants, according to Lutz (2011b). Lutz (2011b) argued that we overlook how “mastery of a language confers entitlement to the more powerful position in a communication” (p. 352). Each participant spoke fluent English, but it was not their first language. Participants mentioned learning English, and their multilingual abilities, but I never considered until afterwards the significance of doing interviews in what was not their mother tongue. That interviews and all communication would take place through English was taken for granted on my part. It was only at the writing-up stage that it struck me that, in the multivoiced stories told and analysed in their narratives, the ‘voices’ were often originally in other languages, and translated to English for me by the participants. They had to work to do this, and some of the nuances were likely to have been lost in this process of translation. This lends a whole other dimension to a research process concerned with language use; a dimension which was almost ignored. Lutz (2011b) proposed that language is “a tool of distinction in the performance of power” (p. 352), and that “migrant biographies are concerned with sense-making in the context of the sending and receiving society” (p. 355); points upheld by my reflections here on the current study. Without fluency in English, FMBSSs and their
educational backgrounds have frequently been portrayed in terms of deficit (Kanno and Varghese 2010; Shapiro and MacDonald 2017). As researcher, when transcribing I could have ‘corrected’ anything I perceived as a linguistic mistake. This would present participants as having supposedly better English to the reader, but to me it seemed like treating them and their way of speaking as wrong, rather than acknowledge the broader spectrum of language abilities in the world, and their own multilingual skills. As a final note on power, I reiterate my point from section 3.14 on Ethical Considerations, that I do not claim to ‘give voice’ to participants. Rather, I concur with Etherington (2007) in that - though dialogically coproduced - however much we “include participants’ views and voices and negotiate our relationships, in the end, the research is our work” (p. 614).

5.7 Chapter summary

This chapter looked at reflexive considerations throughout the research, from inception to writing up the report. After explaining what I meant by reflexivity, I detailed how I approached reflexivity at different points during the research process. Topics presented included issues of sameness and difference; issues of representation; and issues of power, relative to this study. I outlined examples of the ways in which these arose, and how I thought about and dealt with them during the research process - while at the same time aware that there is no single ‘correct’ way to deal with research dilemmas. Considering the dialogical research philosophy, the aim was not to imply that I have covered all possible angles of the topic under investigation, but rather to promote further engagement with the topic on my part and the part of the reader, including by discussing issues I do not have ‘answers’ for. I hoped to add another aspect to the data presented in the Analysis chapter; by reflecting on its production and some of my own understandings of the processes involved. The next chapter moves on to discussing the analysis in the context of broader considerations.
6 Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter discusses insights from the analysis and how they relate to existing literature in the field. Limitations of the study along with suggestions for future research are then outlined; followed by indications for counselling psychologists and for HE institutions. Key points and contributions to knowledge are summarised towards the end of the chapter.

I briefly revisit what was involved in the analysis. The research question was: how do university students from forced migrant backgrounds understand their identities? Three participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview method which incorporated the use of ‘artefacts.’ Data were analysed using DNA. This meant using a dialogical narrative lens to identify and analyse a variety of ways participants communicated and constructed their identities during the interview encounter. I illustrated how they positioned and aligned themselves relative to others (including me) in their narratives, such as through using multivoiced techniques; how they performed their identities in various ways; and their use of ‘small stories’ towards certain identity claims. Asked to bring along an artefact which said something about their identity, this was used as a starting point for interview discussions, as well as in approaching, and presenting, the analysis. I now discuss the significance of insights resulting from the analysis, and how they relate to previous research.

6.2 Discussion of insights from the analysis

Though presented individually, I identified shared themes across participants’ analyses, which were outlined at the end of Chapter 4. Those shared themes are used as headings under which insights from the analysis are now discussed.

6.2.1 Education as important for identity

The literature has documented that FMs commonly hold strong aspirations to attend HE (Bowen 2014; Earnest et al. 2010; Lenette 2016). This was echoed by participants in the current study. Particularly Zaram and Diana illustrated how central education had been to their lives, how much they enjoyed it and how it gave them something to focus on, an ‘escape’ when they had a lot on their minds. They spoke of education affording a sense of normality when they did not feel normal compared to their peers.
Previous studies have observed how precious school had been for FMBSs, as it granted a sense of order when life had been characterised by chaos (e.g. Student et al. 2017). FMBSs are said to recognise the value of education, often having been denied it for many years, and both Zaram and Diana reported having considered at some point that they would never get to university despite their dedication to learning. Other literature has outlined positive identity experiences for FMs connected to being a university student. For ‘Alan,’ in Morrice’s (2013b) study, being a student reportedly granted “a sense of personal agency and meaning at a time when forced migration had led to the disintegration of any biographical certainties” of his younger life (p. 664). Zaram, just like Alan, alluded to how studying gave him hope, and a sense of purpose, when other personal problems loomed in the background. Similarly, Diana’s narrative represented her strong learner identity, how central education had been throughout her life, and how it could function as a welcome ‘escape’ from her worries. The high value placed on education, and their self-portrayals as committed students, provided a backdrop against which being a university student had certain meanings in participants’ narratives.

6.2.2 Being different

All participants’ narratives distinctly evoked a sense of being ‘othered’ - rejected and denied belonging to a particular group due to some aspect of their identity. This aspect could be their nationality, asylum status, beliefs or behaviour. For Zaram it manifested in his portrayal of himself as accepted by neither the British nor Afghans. He demonstrated how he still might instinctively act in an ‘Afghan way,’ but this served to foreground how significant it was that he was in some ways rejected by others from his country of origin. Zaram depicted how much of what he did and said separated him from others Afghans, yet he conveyed his difference relative to British people too, including in his account of being treated with suspicion when returning to Britain. Ostensibly due to airport staff being unfamiliar with his documents, there were clear undertones of discrimination. It resonates with reports throughout the literature of FMs being ‘othered’ through questioning over issues of belonging by ethnic majority members. This has included repeated questions about where they are from, and when they intend to go back (Hatoss 2012; Morrice 2013b).
Boundaries of belonging, created through being marked by a refugee background (Morrice 2013b), were constructed again in the narratives of the current study. Zaram conveyed his ambivalent relationship with being a refugee. Despite conferring rights, it was not an identity he had control over, but he reported others prioritised it over his other titles. Other research has documented ambivalent and complex attitudes towards the refugee label, said to complicate matters in resettlement (e.g. Hebbani et al. 2010). While necessary to access services, gradually it becomes an “unwanted static label” (Harris et al. 2015: 375), eventually serving to “remarginalise and exclude” within their new countries (Hebbani et al. 2010: 44). Participants in many studies reported that, being from a visible ethnic minority, they felt they would never be accepted as a national of the host country, even if granted citizenship (Ajrouch and Kusow 2007; Hatoss 2012; Morrice 2013b). Zaram voiced the same sentiment, and Diana’s experience of being ‘othered’ was tied up with racialised issues too. It is similar to how, in Bowen’s (2014) research outlined in the literature review, for participant ‘Lul’ developing her professional identity was said to involve “recognising and adapting to the ways in which since coming to the UK external perceptions of her identity changed by default” (p. 202). This included how she “became a black person” (p. 202); in Somalia she did not see herself as black, or think about being Muslim. Key was that acceptance would be conferred socially by others of the majority nationality, but attaining this, for Zaram at least, was unforeseeable. These insights underline how important it is that counselling psychologists do not become another group to contribute to the ‘othering’ and alienation of FMBSs, through failing to appreciate the individuality of their situations, backgrounds and life challenges.

Zaram professed that university was a positive space, but spoke also of feeling different from other students. Reasons for this included being the only Afghan, refugee or Muslim in a class and feeling responsibility to represent these groups. Consistent too with prior research (e.g. Harris et al. 2013; 2015), FMBSs’ drive to succeed could sometimes make it difficult to relate to peers. For one thing, other non-migrant students could be perceived as not making the most of educational opportunities, and Zaram spoke about sometimes getting frustrated over others - and himself too - not appreciating how much we have in western countries. Dedication to his study and activism made Zaram different from his peers, and allowed little time to socialise. Certainly this fits with findings elsewhere, for instance participant ‘Kamida’ in Harris et
al.’s research (2013). Hard working and self-supporting, Zimbabwean Kamida could not relate much to African youths from wealthy backgrounds, who she said were only at university as their parents wanted them to go, but were not really interested. FMBSs have been reported to avoid socialising for financial or religious reasons, while hiding these reasons from other students (Earnest et al. 2010; Morrice 2013b). As the literature review illustrated, international students in general often report finding themselves separated socially from non-international students (Fotovatian and Miller 2014; Pham and Saltmarsh 2013).

For some FMBSs in Australia, advancing in HE has been conceptualised as taking steps away from one’s cultural community, resulting in alienation from that community and even tension within one’s family (Harris et al. 2013; 2015). This connects to some extent with Zaram’s and Muna’s experiences of others from their home countries disapproving of their actions when they ventured beyond cultural norms. Not directly associated with being at university, it was more to do with being open in attitude; though this in itself was linked to university participation in their narratives. The conflict of “living between two cultures” (Hebbani et al. 2010: 47) has been presented as a particularly gendered problem in the literature to date, women being marginalised for stepping outside of gender norms (Harris et al. 2013; 2015). Gender issues only briefly cropped up in the current research and possible reasons for this are discussed later. Former studies found religion to be used as an identity marker, some migrants adhering to stricter or more visible interpretations of their religion post-migration than pre-migration, possibly in an effort to differentiate themselves from other groups, or foreground religious over racial identifications (Ajrouch and Kusow 2007; Langellier 2010). All participants in the current study spoke about their religion as a constant in their lives. It did not appear to function to distance them from other groups, although in Muna’s narrative, her views on religious matters were part of the reason she presented herself as separate from others of her nationality.

The pivotal point of Diana’s narrative centred around being told she was not a home student. An ‘othering’ experience, it disrupted her sense of belonging, and she began to question where was home and what was her identity. Kissoon (2006), discussing homelessness and refugees, described how the concept of home “merges place and personality...goes beyond having four walls and a roof, and indicates a positive feeling
that derives from security, belonging, attachment or familiarity” (p. 76). Creating a home has been said to involve constructing a coherent narrative about oneself and one’s experiences (Bek-Pedersen and Montgomery 2006: 97). In Diana’s narrative, Britain had been home. When this self-narrative was interrupted, she turned back towards her original African identity, which could be seen as an effort to relocate ‘home.’ She shifted between calling different places home throughout the interview, as did the other participants. Perhaps this represented an effort to locate belonging, or a sense of identification with different places at different points; it has been observed that all FMs share the experience of at some point having lost their home (Student et al. 2017). It was as though Diana and Zaram were made refugees again, finding themselves unaccepted in the UK where they lived and had been granted refuge, and having to reorientate their sense of home. Insecurity, despite the supposed security of being given asylum, was a theme in other UK-based research (Bowen 2014; Student et al. 2017). Another way Diana communicated being different was in describing how, in the past, she stayed quiet about her FM background, suspecting others would not comprehend the complexity of it. The same issue permeates the existing research, such as when Morrice’s (2013b) participant ‘Patricia’ told of how people looked at her differently if they knew she was a refugee; hence she rarely disclosed it.

Muna’s ‘difference’ was portrayed through presenting herself as atypical for a Yemeni person. Though not straightforwardly so, not being very Yemeni appeared to be considered a positive thing, for her. Muna described never feeling at home in Yemen, and prizing her open-mindedness - constructed as distinct from a typical Yemeni attitude. This leads into the next piece of this sequence, as figuring out ways of dealing with being different could bring creative new ways of being and of identifying oneself.

6.2.3 Transforming identities

This theme related to how participants attributed personal change to their time at university, and demonstrated it within the interviews. It should be noted that the interview schedule included questions about changing identities, and thereby promoted discussions about change. Prior to applying for university, Diana identified herself as British. Starting university after going through the unsettling experience of not being considered a home student prompted self-reflection around who she was and what it meant. Diana’s response to this was ultimately to reconnect with her
African identity. University provided a setting in which to meet other students from Africa, who supported, educated and inspired her. Muna presented her PhD journey as having fostered great personal development. This was due to a combination of a relatively personal PhD topic and going through difficult times, resulting in soul-searching and existential self-questioning. This critical, questioning stance was part of her personality now, Muna claimed, and she enacted it in the interview itself. Both Muna and Diana were shown to accomplish identity changes during the interview encounters. Muna’s interest in questioning, and challenging the status quo, was constructed as unusual for someone of her cultural heritage. In this way she enacted and continued the transformation she had undergone. During our interview she went from describing wanting to bring something from Yemen as an artefact, to deciding she identified as not ‘from’ a particular place but, rather, formed through her experiences. She drew on various metaphors of change, with the effect of emphasising her transformation, and her move away from limited constructs around belonging.

Contrastingly, Diana’s university transformation represented a turn back towards her place of birth; as well as becoming more of an extrovert.

Ideas of transformation fit the common western narrative of university as a formative experience, with one of the principal aims of universities being to develop students’ thinking skills (e.g. Lairio et al. 2013). Crucially, reflection and criticality, nurtured in the university environment, were catalysts for change in both women’s narratives. This is consistent with studies such as that of Lairio and colleagues (2013), whose key findings included that time at university fostered critical thinking, with a personal element to it; and a sense that the learning never ends. Onsando and Billett (2009) suggested that, having usually lived through disturbing experiences, when FMBSs find themselves in education where searching for meaning was encouraged, they show readiness “to question the very assumptions upon which their lives are based” (p. 89).

Forming alliances with other students and being in a learning-based social environment fostered positive change, including increased independence and self-confidence, as per former studies with FMBSs (Earnest et al. 2010; Harris et al. 2013; Morrice 2009). This positive experience, here and in other research, was attributed both to enjoying a ‘positive learner identity’ as well as to enjoying the multicultural university environment where they could ‘fit in’ among international students, their
international status even being prized rather than seen as a deficit. One participant in Harris et al.’s (2013) research reported enjoying the fact that, due to there being so much diversity in terms of age and nationality in HE, she could not really stand out too much (p. 194). The same researchers found participants calling for greater solidarity among African students (Harris et al. 2013; 2015). Diana seemed to find such solidarity; she spoke about support and education she received from others about being an African woman. Some of her important learning while at university was therefore through ‘informal’ rather than academic means, which leads to my next point.

Transformations were certainly not straightforward, nor entirely positive; inherent within them were tension and conflict. This resonates with Morrice’s (2013b) observation that “there is no convenient single narrative of what it means to be a refugee in HE; instead, the experience can be marked simultaneously by both belonging and recognition, deficit and exclusion” (p. 654). As discussed in the literature review, ‘transformative learning’ has been said to have a ‘darker side’ for FMs. Morrice (2013a) posited that informal experiences are one of the strongest sources of learning as a refugee; learning can include “learn[ing] the social scripts of what it means to be an asylum seeker and then a refugee” (p. 261). Participants in this study were not newcomers relative to those Morrice interviewed, but experiences such as Diana’s, of having to accept the label of non-citizen - which had apparently not affected her before she applied to university - support Morrice’s point. For Zaram, perhaps the development and learning often associated with university happened earlier in life, or in spaces outside of the university setting. Forced migration after all has been said to involve “intense learning” - being “uprooted from former communities, culture, work and language,” one is “forced to learn new behaviours, understand new rules, and to adapt to new values” (Morrice 2013a: 252).

A price was often associated with going through HE in the literature, a theme identified in this study also. Like participants here, Kamida was finished and looking back over her education; she pondered the personal price associated with educating herself, including financial and social sacrifices made (Harris et al. 2013: 196). Yet Kamida immensely valued her education and reflected on how she had become fearless, strong and happy within herself. This particularly mirrors Muna’s narrative, in that Muna referred to growing stronger, more confident and even rebellious over the
course of her PhD. Originating in a country where their options were limited contributed to the sense of achievement and of freedom now, as with Harris and colleagues’ (2013; 2015) female participants.

Tribe (2002) reminded us that refugees must come to terms with immense losses - possibly among them the loss of an imagined future (p. 246). Asylum status has been shown to affect students’ choice of subject (Bowen 2014; Morrice 2013a). Diana changed her career plans, and imagined future identity, on realising that her status as non-British meant a stable profession would be a more appropriate choice than the one she had dreamed of. Weiner-Levy’s (2008) study with Druze Muslim women outlined how university participation caused something to ‘change inside’ them. The university period was associated with intense individual change, attributed to being exposed to teaching that encouraged independent thought, and being able to express rather than suppress their thoughts and feelings. Muna - also a Muslim woman, who described feeling restricted in her home culture - reported a similar story during her PhD, saying a ‘personality inside’ her was encouraged to emerge via the student process. The women in Weiner-Levy’s research had to return to their home culture, however, and experienced distress at having to hide the new selves they had discovered. Muna on the other hand was living in a culture where she could enjoy her newfound freedom. While she spoke of enduring a lot in order to become who she had become, she indicated satisfaction rather than regret over the change.

6.2.4 Using new power and identities to react against injustices

This was a particularly interesting issue identified during the analysis. The three participants harnessed their newfound ways of being in the world, the strength and skills they had gained, and used them to fight against discriminatory, unjust or unsatisfactory systems. It was done in a proactive, positive way, but signified a display of dissatisfaction with the way things were, and a desire to instigate change. Dialogically, it could be understood as a response to how they were treated or positioned by others. Zaram used the privilege afforded by being a student at a respected university to give him credibility when campaigning for FM rights. Within the university he used his profile and connections to make governors aware of issues FMBSs faced. I alluded previously to how FMs could find themselves frozen in place, unable to move due to social and legal constrictions (Witteborn 2011). Zaram’s
narrative supported this, in that others expected him not to travel outside of the UK, or to inhabit any role other than that of refugee. Yet he took on multiple meaningful identities, which defied a limiting identification of him as ‘just’ a refugee. He did not do what was expected of him. Zaram’s refusal to be defined in terms of his circumstantial identity is reminiscent of ‘David’ in Bowen’s (2014) study, who ‘blocked’ the deficit cultural capital of being defined as a refugee, in his case emphasising his humanity; a discourse Zaram drew on at times too.

Diana and Muna faced adversity at (or when accessing) university. Diana’s response to being deemed an international rather than home student was to look to her other ‘home,’ Africa, and become more conscious of her identity as a black African woman. She educated herself about this ‘side’ of herself and embraced it. Crucially, through choices about her physical appearance, she announced this ‘minority side’ of herself and wanted to inspire others to do the same. This seemed a subversive act, a way for her to help redress the balance; to encourage black and African people to announce (and show pride in) their identities by being more visible. This was despite the fact that being Congolese caused her almost not to get to university, and appears a dignified and defiant response to rejection. Harris and colleagues’ (2013; 2015) participants talked about the need for African women role models in HE, as well as becoming role models themselves. Kamida, for one, said she would like to be a living example, to “show [other African women]...we can do this, even in a country that’s not our own” (Harris et al. 2013: 196). Diana mentioned looking to role models for inspiration, and from what she described, became one. Zaram very much put himself out there as a role model too. Their responses, of reaffirming and announcing their identities rather than hiding them, are reminiscent of Hatoss’ (2012) Sudanese refugee participants who responded resiliently to racialised encounters. Muna faced a dispute with the university itself. She attributed finding the strength and confidence to do this to having gone through personal challenges during her PhD and ultimately proving to herself that she was ‘a fighter.’ She even spoke about becoming a ‘rebellion,’ her identity itself becoming defined by what was not expected of her and what she went against.

I now highlight a contrast with some other literature featuring FMBSs. ‘R Student’ wrote about feeling he would never be equal to others until he was a British citizen with a passport, and the extraordinary experience of suddenly gaining rights when
granted citizenship, which he credited to the “power of the red passport” (Student et al. 2017: 13). R Student was very aware of the threat of his status being stripped from him, apparently believing he did not deserve rights. His submissive stance was connected by the authors to his past as a genocide survivor. His attitudes towards both his rights and official documentation were markedly different to Zaram’s. Zaram showed dissatisfaction with the rights supposedly granted with refugee status and official documents, even including passports. When you consider the importance of such documents in the asylum process, it is interesting that Zaram constructed them as yet another method of marginalisation by the host country, and failing to confer the rights and sense of belonging that they should. Zaram took the interview as an opportunity to speak about injustices in the asylum process, rather than adopting an accepting and grateful posture towards anything given. He showed tact, however, in how he went about protesting, as though criticism had to be balanced by praise. This leads me to discuss how FMs may present themselves as ‘good migrants,’ worthy people, in response to discourses which socially reject immigrants. An example from the literature review was participant ‘Amal’ who constructed himself as a good son (Bowen 2014). The ‘committed student’ identity narrative may to some extent serve a similar function. Zaram partook in a ‘good migrant’ discourse in some ways, but reacted against it too, suggesting some of the tensions FMs have to manage. The analysis showed his depiction of sacrifices he made, and his commitment to making the world a better place, connected to identifying as a good ‘global citizen.’ A desire among refugees to ‘give back’ to society has been documented, altruism sometimes functioning as a coping strategy for traumas endured (Puvimanasinghe, Denson, Augoustinos and Somasundaram 2014). In a twist on this, Diana and Zaram aspired to return as politicians or leaders to their countries of birth. I think this indicates the ambition, hope and resourcefulness FMBSs can hold, having often overcome many barriers already. It also represents another way they turned common discourses about FMs upside down; envisioning themselves as role models and future presidents is a far cry from ‘powerless victim’ or ‘unwanted invader’ tropes.

Participants recognising western discourses which position them in certain ways, and reacting against them by offering a counter-narrative, reminded me of Langellier’s (2010) paper on performing Somali identity in the diaspora. Langellier elaborated how participant ‘Caaliya’ pre-empted and contested embodied discourses placed upon her,
for example by announcing it was her choice to wear a hijab. Participants here, too, announced their choice to show or embody their identity affiliations and address others in this way; most obviously Diana, through her African style and wish to inspire others with it. Muna too took control of questions of identity throughout our interview, outlining her outward (and inward) disidentification as Yemeni, through how she spoke and her beliefs, as much as with her clothing and appearance. Like Caaliya, Muna rebelled against discourses expecting her to be a certain way or (in Muna’s case) identify as from a certain place - that is, her birth country. The self-confident, outward-oriented ways each participant announced who they were, not only defied the usual ways of defining FMs, but also suggested commitment to social change. Counselling psychologists, with their commitment to promoting social justice, seem well-positioned to support them in this, through supporting their mental wellbeing and in other ways discussed later in the chapter.

6.2.5 Identity choices and agency

This theme related to how participants adapted their identities. It was as though, through their narratives, they drew on a repertoire of different identity positions (Koven 2012), allowing them to change according to their environment. Active identity negotiations have been discussed in a multitude of other studies with international and FM students, including several featured in the literature review. The previous section outlined how participants took control of questions of identity throughout the interviews. While Langellier (2010) characterised Caaliya’s nationality as being like an anchor to her (albeit a shifting one), Muna appeared to disown her nationality, although not without conflict over doing so. This is comparable, however, to Caaliya’s move of defining her identity as individual rather than collective. Both Muslim, both women voiced and performed their religiosity, while also their educated and sometimes critical approach to its practice, alternative to the version with which they had been raised. Zaram reported the same. Diana also chose to present her faith as a constant, but in her case, private, part of her identity.

Zaram emphasised his multiple identities. Adopting multiple roles allowed him to expand outside of the stereotypes imposed upon him and the limitations of what refugees are expected to do. It meant too he could adopt different perspectives and adapt to British life, while keeping elements of his past self and Afghan ways. Zaram
enacted identity choice too by opting to call himself a global citizen, looking beyond concepts of national borders. Other FMBSs such as in Bowen’s (2014) study found a place for themselves in a ‘borderless citizenship’ (Ong 2006), in their case in online communities. Participant Lul, referred to earlier in this chapter, responded to categorisation by “carry[ing] her identities lightly” (Bowen 2014: 202). Lul said she had acquired many labels over the years, including asylum seeker, refugee and social work student; but that “identity is like food - it is something you can make and remake” (p. 203). Bowen observed that the metaphor succinctly suggested how identity became something Lul could strategically choose and remake; but mainly she treated identities given by others with ambivalence. This fits with identity negotiations performed within narratives in the current research. While undoubtedly subjected at times to identities ‘given’ by others, they took back control by making choices themselves in the identities they assumed. These shifts also seemed to facilitate transformation over time; all exhibited personal change in their narratives.

Such diverse manifestations of identities are reminiscent of concepts of hybridity (Bhabha 1994) and plurality. For instance, in Bozkurt’s (2003) analysis of fictional literature about migration, she wrote that “the plurality in a migrant’s experience endows her with multiple subject positions that can negotiate contradicting cultural discourses” (p. iii). Bozkurt presented hybridity as the embodiment of multiple subject positions and cultural belongings, providing “an energy field of differences out of which creativity and resistance to master narratives of dominant cultures emerge” (p. iii). Hybridity was proposed as a means of agency and resistance for racialised, even demonised, migrants, and as a ‘bridging identity’ that employs many cultural sources but commits to none. Also, the recognition of difference by others must eventually give way to tolerance, echoing sentiments in the current thesis that personal change will bring about social change. Weiner-Levy (2008) stated that “one may devise new and unprecedented syntheses and encourage society to accept them” (p. 149), and indeed the participants here seemed in the process of doing so.

6.3 Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research

Now I outline some of the limitations of the current study under three different headings, along with possible directions for future research.
6.3.1 Related to the specificity of the study

Firstly I discuss the specificity of the study; in Chapter 3 I explained that this research aimed for nuanced in-depth insights, which might ultimately serve to exemplify wider issues, rather than generalisability per se. FMs are a hugely heterogeneous group, and the three participants varied in terms of gender, age, nationality, asylum status and stage and course of study. This I consider a strength of the research as between them they represented a broad spectrum of experiences and possible identifications. At the same time, they shared certain traits which are worth acknowledging as it may mean their experiences differ from those of other FM students in HE. All had lived in the UK (or other English-speaking countries) for about a decade or more. Two participants had been resident in the UK since they were minors, attended UK schools, and presumably had a high standard of English for years. A few years’ education in the host country can be significant in psychologically and educationally preparing FMs for HE, and problems with English language ability have been found to hinder building social ties, as well as participation in class (Earnest et al. 2010; Hannah 1999). Language would not have been such an issue for the participants here by the time they reached university. On a related point, most FMs to the UK are adults; many are highly educated professionals, who find their former qualifications not accepted here (Morrice 2013a). Returning to HE for them is likely to be quite a different experience, with alternative significance, compared to those who start it here for the first time like Zaram and Diana. Two participants in the current study applied for asylum after already living in the UK for a number of years. Such a situation surely presents challenges, but it seems safe to assume it to be quite a different migratory experience to that of those making dangerous journeys and arriving in an unfamiliar country, where they apply for asylum without knowing the language or culture. Also, all three participants attended the same university, where they reported a positive reception. As explained earlier, FMBSs throughout the research have been shown to often report less favourable social environments, and difficulty being accepted by their peers. It is possible that those who had had a positive experience were more likely to come forward; again rendering their narratives less representative of FMBSs in general. To my knowledge, the participants had the support of their families to study, unlike many FMBSs in previous studies outlined in the literature review. Again, I suggest students with a different background and responsibilities may have constructed their identities in alternative
ways. The three participants had all recently finished their studies. While this meant they had a retrospective view of their student experiences, their perspectives could have changed in the months since their active involvement with the university had ceased, impacting the data, so future research could focus on current students. There are suggestions that FMBSs may have lower completion rates than average (e.g. Spiteri 2015), so the fact these participants had completed their studies may impact the generalisability of insights. Similarly, the literature has repeatedly found FMs to hide their background. Those interviewed here were obviously open about being FMs to some extent, making them somewhat atypical among this population.

The participant inclusion criteria were broad as, without knowing the numbers of FMBSs in university, I wanted to be as inclusive as possible. For future research, it would be interesting to look at specific FM groups. The significance of gender on experiences of migration (Lutz 2011a) and forced migration (Crawley 2001) has been documented, including concerns over gendered barriers to accessing HE opportunities for female refugees (Hatoss and Huijser 2010). Gender was not much discussed in the current study - possibly because I did not ask specifically about it, or it seemed too ‘obvious’ an identity facet to talk about. It would be interesting to either include questions around gender in the research aims, or use a sample of a particular gender.

The literature also identified asylum status as having a significant impact on HE experiences, with Bowen (2014) observing a need for research around the impact of the change to asylum law which means refugee status no longer comes with automatic resettlement after five years in the UK. Insecurity connected to status was evident in the current study but was not an area I chose to focus on. This was partly as I did not want participants to feel pressure to discuss asylum-related issues, and as a result when they were discussed it was not in great detail. Chapter 5 provided some reflections on this. I reiterate Bowen’s call for further research looking specifically at asylum status and insecurity, and their intersection with HE engagement. In fact, it would be a pertinent area for counselling psychology research, located as it is at an intersection of social justice and wellbeing concerns.

6.3.2 Related to me as researcher

In the previous chapter I interrogated the impact of being a white European researcher, an ‘outsider’ to forced migration, though it is impossible to know what
impact this had. McNess and colleagues (2015) cautioned that “without a detailed understanding of the history and cultural underpinning of a group, outsiders may be distracted by what they see as different, and so focus on certain aspects...without real depth of analysis or understanding” (p. 304). This may have occurred in the current study, as I am not very familiar with the nuances of the participants’ cultural backgrounds; or I could have foregrounded forced migration-related issues over ones pertaining to specific cultures or nationalities. I would like to think this may have been avoided, as I inquired about the meaning participants attributed to matters they spoke about, and gave them control to talk about what they thought was important. I was after all interested in subjectivity and meaning-in-context. Participants also tended to explain relevant cultural details to me in the interviews, in that sense highlighting the research value of being a cultural ‘outsider’ as they made explicit things that might have remained implicit if talking with someone perceived as culturally ‘similar.’ However, future research concentrating on students from particular countries might yield interesting results. One other point is that it might have been useful to ask how they understood ‘identity’ at the start of the interview, or state how I defined it.

6.3.3 Related to method, and further research suggestions

In Chapter 3 I explained the rationale for not asking participants for input after the interviews, such as checking transcripts. However, it could be interesting to do so in a dialogical way. Taking inspiration from ethnographic and multimethod approaches such as those used by Bowen (2014) and Student et al. (2017), it would be interesting to more actively involve participants and coproduce the research with them, for instance involving them in design and interviewing. This would fit with a social justice oriented approach too. Using a variety of methods such as journaling, photo elicitation and focus groups would generate rich, multilayered data. Another point is that, as the three participants here had finished their university courses, further research might look at identity changes as they continued in life, perhaps entering professions or continuing studies. Longitudinal studies with FM students have proven fruitful (e.g. Bowen 2014; Morrice 2013b), fostering a more holistic picture of identity adaptations over time. I believe there is a gap in the research addressing coping strategies among FMBs. This thesis hints at some they might use, but mental health was not the focus. A study specifically targeted at understanding that would be useful. I emphasise that...
there continues to be a need generally for further research with and about FMBSs in HE.

6.4 Reflections on methodology

Some methodological reflections have already been touched upon above. Regarding the interview setting, some argue it is as valid an interactional context as any in which to generate narrative research data (e.g. Koven 2012); others critique it as inherently artificial (Briggs 1986; Schegloff 1997). Possible dynamics at play were interrogated in the last chapter, and the theoretical philosophy of the study recognises data as co-created. All the same, the distinction between contexts of positioning where identity work is done in the “safe ground of the interview setting conducted with compassionate and trusted researchers” as opposed to “real interethnic and high-risk contexts” (Hatoss 2012: 65) must be taken into account. The fact is that different settings or different researchers would generate different data, and further research might enhance our understanding by investigating identity positionings in ‘naturally-occurring’ contexts.

DNA allowed examination of both what participants said about identity and how they said it. This for me promoted a thorough engagement with all elements of the research. It meant the analysis could be supported by both what participants said, and what they did in the interview to demonstrate this - whether that was telling a story, distancing themselves from other ‘characters’ in their narratives, or using their artefact to illustrate a point. Being able to draw on the different possibilities of DNA facilitated a wide-ranging flexibility in approaching the data. Ethically and philosophically, it fitted well with the topic under investigation. DNA facilitated discussion of the ways prevalent social, cultural and political discourses played a part in how identity was expressed and negotiated; the dialogue between how participants presented themselves and what wider ‘voices’ said to and about them. The dialogical sentiment of unfinalisability (Bakhtin 1984) was reflected in participants’ stories themselves, as identities shifted and changed even through the interviews, defying definition; the approach may have attracted my attention to this. Josselson (2011) was quoted earlier as saying “through narrative, we come in contact with our participants as people engaged in the process of interpreting themselves” (p. 33); the current study certainly seemed to exemplify this. The approach also encouraged interrogating my own impact
on the research, mainly outlined in the penultimate chapter; all of which indicates DNA to be particularly suitable for counselling psychology research.

The use of artefacts added an interesting dimension. I believe it served as a useful contribution to a narrative approach, and to DNA in particular. Using artefacts facilitated discussion around unexpected meanings attributed to documents of identification by one participant, and conversation around a private aspect of another’s identity. In the third interview, choosing not to bring an artefact became symbolic of resistance to being defined, according to traditional standards at least. An unexpected element was my own response to artefacts, as discussed in Chapter 5. All in all, I felt including artefacts generated richer, more multilayered data than speech interaction alone would have, and opened up dialogue in unexpected ways. It provided another forum for participants to express their identities; something concrete to ‘check’ my analysis against; and presents another means by which the reader can respond to the data, and even assess the interpretations reached. A simple addition to the traditional interview approach, it is one I recommend for future research, particularly around identity.

### 6.5 Implications and recommendations for counselling psychology

The analysis upheld Lenette’s (2016) assertion that “refugee students can persevere with their studies amidst complex community and personal lives, given the right support” (p. 1313). Her suggestion that tertiary educated FMs act as role models to their communities was substantiated in the current study. Yet despite FMBSs’ successes and positivity, a recurrent theme in previous research was highlighted here once again: that they experience specific difficulties and tensions while negotiating their way into and through university. Supporting their mental health and wellbeing while they study is vital to help them succeed. The current study underlines the need for counselling psychologists to be well-equipped to provide support; this entails understanding the range of issues they may encounter. One way to do this would be to include training on forced migration-related issues on doctoral courses, as well as encouraging research in the area. This builds on calls for increased attention in the discipline to issues of culture, ethnicity and race (Ade-Serrano and Nkansa-Dwamena 2016; Moller 2011). Supporting FMs to enter the profession would be another way to achieve these aims.
Regarding therapy with FMBSs, being open to the individual subjectivity of each person seems key. This entails willingness to discuss areas which are not of shared understanding, while also respecting that others’ experiences may be hard to relate to, and showing sensitivity. As Chapter 5 acknowledged, some issues, including around race, and forced migration, were not fully engaged with in the interviews. In cross-cultural counselling there can be a similar tendency to gloss over issues of race, and racism in particular, in its place a rhetoric of ‘as humans we are all the same’ (Goldsmith 2002). Based on the current study, I recommend that counselling psychologists be aware of stereotypes and prevalent discourses, and ensure these are never prioritised over interpersonally-negotiated understanding. Towards this, therapists would do well to interrogate their own assumptions, beliefs and feelings about FMs if working with members of this student group. Discourses around forced migration, even ones which may seem positive, can serve to deny aspects of someone’s experience. For instance Student et al. (2017) observed that refugees may resist pity as it strengthens divisions between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ objectifies and feeds caricatures, obscures their own complicity in situations, and positions them as impotent (p. 13). Empathy, core to humanistic and counselling psychology practice, can be confused with pity, and this underlines the importance of the distinction between them in therapeutic work. Therapists must also be aware of the difference between voluntary and forced migration, and the meaning and impact of this difference. It seems vital that professionals working with FMs be familiar with how the political asylum system operates, too. Assumptions cannot be made that someone granted refugee status feels secure. A person’s relationship with their new or original culture or country also cannot be assumed, although this and prior research indicates FMs’ sense of home and belonging, arguably central to mental wellbeing, are likely to be complicated. Eleftheriadou (2010) made the point that it is not ‘culture’ per se we need to attend to, but someone’s relationship with that culture. The same could be said about forced migration, though it may bring extra layers of complexity.

While being mindful of mental health issues which might affect this group, it is important not to pathologise, or assume problems simply due to someone’s background. Removing symptoms and reactions from the socio-political context they are located within has been cautioned against (Papadopoulos 2002). Notable also is that, as these students are often ‘invisible’ in HE, we may work with FMBSs without
knowing their migration background. Counselling psychology’s humanistic ethos and commitment to social justice and supporting marginalised groups places the discipline in a good position to encourage increased awareness about these students’ needs. This could mean through raising awareness at the university policy level as well as through research. Miller (1999) suggested community-based initiatives might better serve FMs’ mental health needs, providing opportunities for social and community support. Counselling psychologists working in HE settings may therefore consider providing support in a social context specifically targeted at this group. The resilience and resourcefulness of FMBSs has been clear in this research, along with their will to help and inspire others, and a forum to do so would likely be helpful. Working with wider FM communities to support and encourage HE engagement may also be useful.

My main point is that counselling psychologists need to be fully aware of the set of issues facing FMBSs, yet also open to the subjectivity of each person’s experience. This aligns with the discipline’s humanistic roots, and with calls such as Cooper’s (2009) that we can become better at what we do by ‘welcoming the other.’ Cooper (2009) argued it is through a “desire to respect and validate the Other in the totality of their being that we start with their unique subjective experiencing; relate to them as beings who have the capacity to grow; and understand them in terms of the social, economic and cultural limitations that they might face” (p. 121). Cooper was referring to ‘othering’ practices of pathologisation and diagnosis, but it seems equally relevant to the case of FMs. I also agree with an observation made by another counselling psychology researcher, Morrison (2016); that work and research engaging with FMs, while challenging, is rich in opportunities for personal and professional growth, including the development of a social justice agenda in our practice.

6.6 Indications for Higher Education

I make some brief recommendations for education policy based on key insights from the study. I reiterate the need highlighted in previous literature for more targeted social, educational and psychological support for FMBSs in HE. Recognising them in the university records would be a first step in remediating their invisibility. I acknowledge that FMBSs may not want to be identified or treated differently, though it seems this requires balancing against supporting their needs. When granted refugee status, one is considered a home student, making it particularly difficult to know how many refugees
are enrolled in HE in the UK; yet this and prior research indicates their needs are distinct from those of other students. Support could involve providing training for university staff about FMBSs and their needs. I acknowledged that participants in this study were relatively privileged in certain ways, but for more recent arrivals it is vital that support be available regarding linguistic and educational needs. Another suggestion is setting up mentoring and peer support networks for FMBSs, and social and wellbeing support events and activities aimed at them specifically. These could help combat the many post-migratory stressors that exist (Tribe 2002: 243).

The importance of enabling FMs to have the opportunity to attend university cannot be overstated. Universities should be strongly encouraged to make this happen, for instance through providing more fee waivers, bursaries and scholarships to FM students. Universities might also reach out to FM communities to encourage participation in HE. Participants in this thesis echoed researchers in underscoring that tertiary institutions worldwide have a key role to play in restoring hope in the lives of refugees through education, as providing support throughout their studies “can lead to remarkable social, cultural and economic outcomes” (Lenette 2016: 1313). The potential benefits of HE engagement are great. Universities have been observed to “advocate strongly their dedication to cross-cultural interactions within the student body, and to the formation of their graduates as cosmopolitan world citizens” (Fincher 2011: 911). The monetary benefits of the internationalisation of HE were outlined in Chapter 1. HE institutions would do well to honour their dedication to becoming ‘international’ by fully supporting FMBSs in their educational aspirations; and with that potentially helping to ameliorate situations around the globe.

6.7 Key claims and contribution to knowledge

This thesis is located at an intersection between education, forced migration, psychology, cultural and identity studies. The theoretical underpinnings of the study consider knowledge as coproduced in social settings, and therefore situated, partial and context-specific. Those who partook in the study are, after all, still out there, telling new stories in which they discover new possibilities as to who they can be (Frank 2012: 41). Knowledge claims derived from the analysis are therefore tentative but, as aforementioned, the hope is that insights gleaned from specific instances might say something about the world more broadly.
To summarise the contribution to knowledge in narrative form, education has a special value for students from FM backgrounds. The DNA highlighted how they encounter ‘othering’ and unacceptance, sometimes linked to their FM identity. Partly by manoeuvring between different identity positions and resources, these students managed experiences such as being rejected, ‘othered’ and placed outside of groups. They described building skills, strength and confidence, fostered through going to university combined with personal challenges and conflicts in their lives. Analysis of their narratives indicated how they created new identities for themselves; a response with which they resisted and fought against discourses, systems and cultures which tried to define or position them in certain ways they did not agree with. Each narrative communicated their lived understanding of how limiting and insufficient the concept of national citizenship is, all of them reaching beyond the idea of being ‘from’ or ‘of’ a certain place. Ultimately these narratives showed how the students defied definition by others - or even by the objects they brought to the interviews - dialoguing with these definitions but setting out to define themselves in unexpected and novel ways. Not only did the narratives suggest how they subversively resist and defy, but there was a proactive element indicating how they aimed to embody and inspire positive change in the world.

I know of no previous study focusing on FM university student identities, but those which have touched on it only hinted at elements of agency, resistance to definition, and commitment to change - all central to participants’ narratives here. To borrow Langellier’s (2010) words, identity was shown to be “an unfolding performative accomplishment” used to challenge “static and essentialized (sic) notions of differences,” which highlighted tactics to redefine and transform identity (p. 67). This study’s identity focus also illuminated details of personal processes of change participants went through, and I argue it is important to increase our understanding of this. Prior research has tended to be education based, and correspondingly less focused on such personal processes. Earlier research has implied FMBSs often drop out of HE; this study suggests some reasons why these students might find HE difficult but also how they overcome problems. I believe these are important insights, and call for further investigation.
6.8 Concluding remarks

This thesis set out to explore how university students from FM backgrounds understand their identities. Three participants from varied FM backgrounds took part in semi-structured interviews which incorporated the use of artefacts. DNA was employed to analyse the data. Insights from the analysis underline both the importance of supporting these students to get to university and succeed, as well as that the layers of challenges they face may be significant. It also highlights the great ambition and potential of this student group, and how these could be used to benefit the world. The unfairness and inadequacy of the current asylum system, particularly in relation to HE engagement for FMs, contributes to their challenges. I agree with Morrice (2013b) in that the multi-layered experience of refugees in HE “cannot be fully comprehended without reference to the deep-rooted material inequalities of globalisation and involuntary migration and the associated policy discourses” (p. 654). Discourses which pathologise, dehumanise, ‘other’ or in any way arrest the possibilities available to FMs - in everyday interaction as much as on a global-political level - ultimately seem to do an injustice to humanity at large. Frank (2010) said that culture makes certain stories available to us; from these, we learn which identities are available to us. These students not only defied stories made available to them, but fundamentally made up new stories for themselves in response. It appeared that in doing so they wanted to inspire others to construct yet more new individual stories and identities; and instigate change in society on a global scale along the way.

I made clear that the goal of this piece of research was not to stand as a finalised statement but rather to generate responses and dialogue. In my life certainly the research process has been the source of much learning and reflection, and inspired many interesting conversations. Each reader will inevitably engage with the research in new and unexpected ways. Conversations prompted might be around asylum policy, migrant identities, mental health or educational involvement for this student group, or areas I have not yet considered. Essentially the hope is that this research draws attention to issues related to FMBBs, and helps instigate improved support for them.

6.9 Chapter summary

This final chapter opened with a discussion of insights from the analysis, comparing them to existing literature in the field. Differences and similarities from previous
studies were outlined, highlighting the relevance of key insights from the current study. Limitations of the study, along with suggestions for further research, were then addressed. A section focused on reflections based on the methodology used in the thesis, including observations that the methodology had facilitated deep engagement with the particular topic including through fostering reflexivity. It was noted that the use of both DNA and of artefacts appear particularly suited to research in counselling psychology as well as research on migration and identity. With the research being rooted in the counselling psychology discipline, implications for counselling psychology practice and research were discussed. Recommendations for HE providers around supporting FMBSs, based on this study’s indications, were outlined, including providing increased and targeted support. Key insights and contributions to knowledge were summed up; central was how FMBSs were shown to defy definition by others, and creatively produce their own narratives and embody new identities with which they set out to instigate positive changes in the world. Finally, some concluding remarks on the study were presented.
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Refugee Council (2017b). *Tell it like it is: the truth about refugees and asylum.* London: Refugee Council.


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Appendix 1: Poster to recruit participants

Are you a student at the University of Manchester? Are you from a refugee background?

I am seeking research participants who are students from a refugee background, for a study about identity.

If you might be interested in participating, please contact me for more info at doireann.mangan@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk
Appendix 2: Email to recruit participants

Dear student,

I am a postgraduate student of Counselling Psychology at the University of Manchester. I am conducting research with students at the University of Manchester/University of Salford/ Manchester Metropolitan University who are from a refugee background. It is a qualitative study looking at how such students understand their identities. If you have at any point in your life applied for and been granted asylum, and would be interested in taking part, please email me for more details. I would really appreciate hearing from you.

Kind regards,

Doireann Mangan.
Appendix 3: Information email for potential participants

Dear student,

Thank you for your interest in this research. This project is being undertaken as part of a Professional Doctorate level thesis in the Manchester Institute of Education at the University of Manchester.

I am looking for participants who are students enrolled in, or recently graduated from, university education in Manchester, and who are from a refugee background. For the purposes of this study, ‘refugee background’ means anyone who has applied for, and been granted, refugee status or leave to remain, in any country, at any stage of his/her life.

The purpose of this research is to explore understandings of identity.

Participants will be invited to take part in a semi-structured interview lasting between 45 -80 minutes, which will be audio-recorded. Depending on what university you are affiliated with, interviews will take place in an allocated study space at either the University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University, or the University of Salford. I will ask participants if they would like to bring an object or photograph, or several, to the interview, which for them says something about how they experience and understand their identity. Participants will be invited to tell me about what this image/object means to them and how it relates to their experience of identity. However this is an optional part of the research, and if a participant would rather not bring something, they can still take part in the interview.

While I am looking for participants who have a refugee background, I will not ask about the conditions under which you came to be a refugee, and I fully respect participants’ right to privacy.

Findings from the study will be published in a doctoral thesis paper in the University of Manchester and possibly published in scientific journals. Confidentiality is assured, and participants will not be identified in any part of the research - unless they state that they would like to be identified.

This study has been reviewed by the Manchester Institute of Education Research Ethics Committee within the University of Manchester.

If you are interested to participate, or have further questions, please contact me at:

Doireann Mangan
Doctorate in Counselling Psychology
Manchester Institute of Education,
School of Environment, Education and Development,
Ellen Wilkinson Building
University of Manchester.

doireann.mangan@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk
Appendix 4: Semi-structured interview schedule

Questions are intended as prompts for the researcher rather than as definite areas to be covered.
It will be stated that the interview is generally intended to be free-flowing and the participant is free to introduce his/her own thoughts wherever possible.

Around the ‘artefact’

Can you tell me about this object/photograph.
Why did you choose to bring it?
What does it represent about your identity?

Identity

How do you see yourself?
What is important to you?
What do you think impacts on your identity?
How do you think you came to have the identity you feel you have?
How similar is your identity to that of others around you?
Do you feel proud of your identity?
Would you say you have a clear sense of who you are?
Do your beliefs about yourself ever conflict with each other?
Do you spend time wondering about the kind of person you are?
Do you feel you ‘belong’ to a particular culture, or place?
What aspects of your identity are important to you? (E.g. family, religion, history, education, culture, interests, language, friends...)
How important are other people in how you see yourself?
Do you ever have difficulty fitting into the wider society because of your background?

Student identity

What does it mean to you to be a university student?
Do you think being a university student affects how you see yourself? And how you are seen by others? In what ways?

Changing/adapting identity

Do you see yourself differently now to who you were in the past?
Would you say your identity changes in different situations?
Can you see your identity/the way you think of yourself changing in the future? If so, in what way/s? And for what reasons?
Appendix 5: Participant information sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research study that is being conducted as part of my university course. I am currently studying for a professional doctorate in counselling psychology and part of the course is a piece of research undertaken with the aim of producing a doctoral thesis.

Before you decide to participate it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the research?

The researcher is: Doireann Mangan
Address: Doctorate in Counselling Psychology,
Manchester Institute of Education,
School of Environment, Education and Development,
Ellen Wilkinson Building,
The University Of Manchester,
Oxford Road,
Manchester,
M13 9PL.

Title of the research:
Understandings of identity among university students from a refugee background.

What is the aim of the research?
The research aims to look at how university students, who come from a refugee background, understand their identities.

Why have I been chosen?
You have been chosen as you have responded to my advertisements or emails seeking research participants, and you identify yourself as a university student or recent graduate from the University of Manchester, University of Salford, or Manchester Metropolitan University. You also identify as coming from a refugee background.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?
If you agree to take part you would take part in a one-to-one, audio recorded, interview with me. You will have been asked in advance if you would be happy to bring an object or photo, or several, which represents something about how you feel about your identity. I am interested in hearing how participants feel about their identity, what affects it, what you feel is important to your identity, how being a university student might affect your identity, and really anything you would like to share on the topic. I will ask you to tell me a bit about why you brought the particular object or photo and what it means to you regarding your identity. If you are happy for me to photograph the object/images, I will do so. I expect interviews to last 45-80 minutes.

What happens to the data collected?
The recording will be transcribed and analysed, and photographs (of objects/images) analysed in conjunction with what is said in the interviews. Findings may be presented as part of my doctoral thesis at the University of Manchester.

How is confidentiality maintained?
Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality is maintained. All collected audio and photographical data will be encrypted and stored securely in a file that is password protected. Only the researcher will have access to the file. Once safely stored the audio recording will be deleted from the audio electronic device, and images deleted from the camera. Transcribed interviews will be stored using encrypted password protected files. Participant anonymity will be ensured in all aspects of data collection, analysis, and publication. Pseudonyms (false names) will be used to refer to participants ensuring there will be no identifiable details in the thesis report. All of the data from the interview will be destroyed five years after dissemination of the findings. These safeguards are in compliance with the ethical guidelines for research from the University of Manchester SEED, the British Psychological Society (2014) and Health and Care Professions Council (2012).

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?
It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

Will I be paid for participating in the research?
There is no payment for taking part in this research.

What is the duration of the research?
The research will begin in 2016 and the projected date of completion is May 2017.

Where will the research be conducted?
In the case of University of Manchester students, the research will be conducted in the Ellen Wilkinson Building, The University of Manchester, Manchester M13 9PL.
In the case of University of Salford or Manchester Metropolitan University students, you will have the choice of coming to the above location for the interview or alternatively having the interview in a reserved study space in the library area of your own university.

Will the outcomes of the research be published?
The findings from the research will be published in a thesis report to be assessed by the University of Manchester. The findings may also be published in academic journals and/or presented at relevant conferences.

Who has reviewed the research project?
The project has been reviewed by the University of Manchester Research Ethics Committee.

What if something goes wrong?
I have a distress policy in place for my research, so that if it is felt that a participant appears distressed during the interview there is a plan in place to manage this. I also provide information and contact details for agencies providing support which may be relevant to participants when they attend the interview. Among those agencies are:

- Manchester Refugee Support Network, 129 Princess Road, Manchester, M14 4RB. Phone: 0161 868 0777. Website: www.mrsn.org.uk
- Refugee Action, Canada House, 3 Chepstow Street, Manchester, M1 5FW. Phone: 0161 831 5420. Website: http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/
What if I want to make a complaint?

If you want to make a complaint about this research:

Minor complaints
If you have a minor complaint about this piece of research, then please contact the researcher in the first instance. My contact details are:

DOIREANN MANGAN
DOCTORATE IN COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY,
MANCHESTER INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION,
SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENT EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT,
ELLEN WILKINSON BUILDING,
UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER,
MANCHESTER.
M13 9PL.
Email: doireann.mangan@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

If you are not satisfied with the response or feel you would rather contact the researcher’s supervisor first, please contact my research supervisor at:

PROFESSOR ERICA BURMAN
PROFESSOR OF EDUCATION,
ELLEN WILKINSON BUILDING,
UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER,
MANCHESTER.
M13 9PL.
Email: erica.burman@manchester.ac.uk
Phone: 0161 275-3636

Formal Complaints:
If you wish to make a formal complaint or if you are not satisfied with the response you have gained from the researcher or researcher’s supervisor, then please contact the Research Governance and Integrity Manager, Research Office, Christie Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL, by emailing: research.complaints@manchester.ac.uk or by telephoning 0161 275 2674 or 275 2046.

What do I do now?

If you have any queries about the study or if you are interested in taking part then please contact the researcher: DOIREANN MANGAN, ELLEN WILKINSON BUILDING, UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER, MANCHESTER. M13 9PL.

Email: doireann.mangan@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk.

This Project Has Been Approved by the University of Manchester’s Research Ethics Committee [Reference: PGR-95616310-Diss].
Appendix 6: Participant consent form

If you are happy to participate in the research please complete and sign the consent form below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please Initial Box</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above study and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I understand that the interviews will be audio recorded, transcribed and analysed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I understand that artefacts (objects or photographs/images) presented during the research may be photographed/downloaded and analysed, in conjunction with what I say about them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes in any written research reports.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I agree that any data collected may be passed to the research supervisor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I agree that any data collected may be published in anonymous form in academic books or journals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I agree to take part in the above research:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of participant</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Signature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of person taking consent</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Signature</td>
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Appendix 7: Research participant details form

Research Project Name: Understandings of identity among university students from a refugee background.

Researcher: Doireann Mangan
Researcher contact email: doireann.mangan@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk
Research supervisor: Professor Erica Burman
Research supervisor contact email: erica.burman@manchester.ac.uk

Name:_______________________________________________________________

Age:_________________________________________________________________

Country/countries of nationality:___________________________________________________

University, course and year of study:________________________________________________________________

Years living in the UK:__________________________________________________

Anything else you might like to add about your background (optional):

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

Would you rather I used your real name or a false name in the final piece of research?

_____________________________________________________

If a false name, suggest one here if you like (optional):

_____________________________________________________________________

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Appendix 8: Distress policy

The researcher will note the participant’s general demeanour and level of functioning when they arrive for the interview, in order to establish a baseline against which to recognise any indication of distress.

1. **First indication of distress.**
   - Offer to turn off the recorder and cease the interview if the participant wishes.
   - Report to supervisor any indication of distress during the interview.

**Has the interview been curtailed due to distress?** Yes/No:

**If yes:**
   a) Explain that it is my policy not to send participants away from an interview feeling distressed.
   b) Ask the participant if they have any comments or questions about the study.
   c) Invite the participants to talk about their concerns, and listen with empathy.
   d) Propose to reschedule a meeting after a break of a week or so.
   e) Offer information sheet on support services.

**If no:**
   a) Has the participant indicated what it is about the research process/topic of discussion that is making them feel unhappy, despondent or anxious?
   b) Ask the participant if they have any comments or questions about the research.
   c) Invite the participant to talk about their concerns or low mood, and listen with empathy.
   d) Ask if the participant would like to take a small break before continuing with the interview.

2. **Second indication of distress.**
   - Propose that it seems best not to continue with the interview as it is distressing the participant.
   - Suggest curtailing the interview and letting the participant get back in contact should they wish to do an interview in future.
   - Offer to email participant the next day to see how they are doing.
   - Offer information sheet on support services.
   - Ask if the participant has any comments, questions or concerns about the study.
   - Thank participant for their engagement.

If a participant shows distress during an interview, think about if/how the research design or interview schedule might need to be amended. Discuss this with my supervisor.
## Appendix 9: Support services

**Name** | **Description of service** | **Address** | **Contact No.** | **Email/website**
---|---|---|---|---
The University of Manchester Counselling Service | Counselling, self-help resources, drop-in sessions and group sessions. | Fifth floor, Crawford House, Booth Street East, Manchester, M13 9QS. | 0161 275 2864 | counselling.service@manchester.ac.uk. (Monday-Friday, 9am to 4pm)

The University of Salford Wellbeing and Counselling Service | Providing support for University of Salford students through advice on wellbeing and counselling. | University House, Peel Park Campus, University of Salford, Greater Manchester, M5 4WT. | 0161 295 0023 | wellbeing@salford.ac.uk

Manchester Metropolitan University Counselling, Health and Wellbeing Service | Support and advice for MMU students on health and mental health as well as workshops and courses on various issues specific to students. | Manchester Metropolitan University, Room 1.13, New Business School and Student Hub, All Saints Campus, Oxford Rd, Manchester, M15 6BH. | 0161 247 3493 | counselling@mmu.ac.uk

The International Society | Supporting and welcoming students from outside the UK. | William Kay House, 327 Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PG. | 0161 275 4959 | http://internationalsociety.org.uk/

Manchester Refugee Support Network | A grass-roots organisation directly managed by refugee communities, based in Manchester. Their work focuses on development of refugee organisations, advocacy and campaigns, and advice and orientation. | 129 Princess Road, Manchester, M14 4RB. | 0161 868 0777 | www.mrsn.org.uk

Refugee Action | Welcoming and supporting refugees, helping with legal advice, and much more. | Canada House, 3 Chepstow Street, Manchester, M1 5FW. | 0161 831 5420 | http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/

Rethink Rebuild Society | The voice of the Syrian community in Manchester; services include refugee-specific support. | Unit 7, Longsight Business Park Hamilton Road Manchester M13 0PD | 0161 312 3973 | http://rrsoc.org/
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description of service</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Contact no.</th>
<th>Email/website</th>
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<tr>
<td>Get Connected</td>
<td>Free, confidential help for young people under 25.</td>
<td></td>
<td>08084994</td>
<td><a href="http://www.getconnected.org.uk/">http://www.getconnected.org.uk/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samaritans</td>
<td>Talk to us any time you like, in your own way, and off the record – about whatever’s getting to you. You don’t have to be suicidal.</td>
<td>72-74 Oxford Street, Manchester M1 5NH</td>
<td>0161 236 8000</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jo@samaritans.org">jo@samaritans.org</a>, <a href="http://www.samaritans.org">www.samaritans.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Red Cross - Refugee Support in</td>
<td>Helping refugees and asylum seekers access essential services and adapt to life in a new country.</td>
<td>Bradbury House, 10 Brindley Road,</td>
<td>0161 8888 932</td>
<td><a href="http://www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/">http://www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancashire, Merseyside and Greater</td>
<td></td>
<td>City Park, Cornbrook, Manchester, M16 9HQ.</td>
<td>(Monday to Friday 9am-5pm)</td>
<td>Refugee-support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manchester</td>
<td></td>
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Appendix 10: Transcription key and example of transcription

Transcription key
.
Sentence final intonation
,
Clause final intonation (‘more to come’)!
Exclamatory intonation
?
Final rise
...
Pause of more than 2 seconds
[]
Overlapping speech
()
‘Background speech’ during pauses when the other is speaking

**Bold type** Indicates emphasis

(()
Editorial comments/paralinguistic features

Example of transcription:

**Researcher:** It is a sort of an abstract concept to talk to people about identity, so you know whatever you think is important you know (P: Yeah) that’s fine even though I do have questions in certain areas

**Participant:** No problem

R: Where it would be interesting to kind of go to (P: Yeah) but em so what I suppose, by the way do you have any kind of time limit or do you need to go at a certain time?
P: Em, will we be done before 8:30? [Or, 8:15]
R: [I’d say so, yeah] yeah 8:30 should be fine
P: Yeah that’s fine that’s fine
R: OK? Yeah I don’t want you to be worrying too much but so the first question I suppose I was going to ask was what what object or what thing you would have brought to represent your identity
P: Em, I guess this is ((points to chain around her neck))
R: Aw, wow
P: Wait, I can’t see, sorry ((trying to take off chain)) eh sorry I think I got it. Could you help me please?
R: Yeah sure yeah. ((Helps participant take off chain)) So your necklace. There we go yeah
P: Thanks
R: It’s lovely
P: Yeah I think, this would be. It’s really special to me
R: Yeah
P: Yeah I wear this every day I never take it off. I just changed the chain recently but yeah
R: Mm it’s lovely
P: I never take it off but em yeah that’s like, something so precious to me that’s, a part of my faith
Appendix 11: Example of analysis

Four various orientations towards analysis of one page of interview transcript, containing analytical comments (page 1 of 4).

1: Looking at what is overtly discussed

Please note: In this extract R = Researcher, P = Participant

R: I’m Irish
P: Irish so you are born in Ireland for example you could have been born in Africa you could have been born in Afghanistan but it’s just an accident of birth and it’s not my fault I wasn’t born in Europe I wasn’t born in the UK. So I just want people to kind of rethink that, the privileges we have.

R: Yeah
P: We should be able to share it. But also the global governance system is so unfair it’s so unjust like, for example a British passport or even an Irish passport will enable you to go to a hundred and seventy seven five countries
R: Men
P: Without visa an Afghan passport enables me to go to twenty four countries (R: Really) that I have not even heard the name of, even though my geography is quite good (R: Yeah yeah) so it’s just like the world is a very unfair place where eh you know, if people were able to come here legally and through civilised means and (R: Um) then it would have been easy for people I would love for Afghans to come to Ireland to come to Europe to come to Britain to study to work, (R: Yeah) to contribute just to come and visit and see this beautiful place, (R: Yeah) yeah but eh because where they’re born determines
R: I know yeah
P: Anyways
R: And it’s not equal it is because it’s
P: It’s not
R: It’s not that difficult really for me to travel
P: Exactly that’s what I mean yeah you can go to a hundred and seventy seven countries without visa. Why? Such a small island. And it’s called Island as well but (R: Yeah) small tiny place.
R: Yeah yeah I know yeah. This is true. So it’s something you feel really strongly about, clearly
P: I do indeed
R: And this is this represents your identity but it [shouldn’t]
P: (It does exactly it does like yeah)
R: [Because of the way you feel] about it yeah yeah
P: Every time I travel I have to show this and every time I come back to the UK I have to show this and eh
R: Yeah
P: Alongside my travel document
R: Oh really OK. OK. And you have to have it on you all the time?
P: Not really not necessarily, but especially if I am travelling yes I have to. And it’s funny like every time I come back to the UK they question
2: Looking at how communications were achieved

things is because, yeah so everything comes down to where you were born and I think it’s unfair it’s very unjust that, as it’s just accident of birth, you know were you born in the UK? No no you weren’t R: I’m Irish P: Irish so you are born in Ireland for example you could have been born in Africa you could have been born in Afghanistan but it’s just an accident of birth and it’s not my fault I wasn’t born in Europe I wasn’t born in the UK. So I just want people to kind of rethink that, the privileges we have. R: Yeah P: We should be able to share it. But also the global governance system is so unfair it’s so unjust like, for example a British passport or even an Irish passport will enable you to go to a hundred and seventy five countries, if you want to travel. R: Mm

P: Without visa an Afghan passport enables me to go to twenty four countries (R: Really) that I have not even heard the name of, even though my geography is quite good (R: Yeah yeah) so it’s just like the world is a very unfair place where eh you know, if people were able to come here legally and through civilised means and (R: Mm) then it would have been easy for people I would love for Afghans to come to Ireland to come to Europe to come to Britain to study to work, (R: Yeah) to contribute just to come and visit and see this beautiful place, (R: Yeah yeah) but eh because where they’re born determines

R: I know yeah P: Anyways R: And it’s not equal is it because it’s not P: It’s not R: it’s not that difficult really for me to travel P: Exactly that’s what I mean yeah you can go to a hundred and seventy five countries without visa. Why? Such a small island. And it’s called island as well but (R: Yeah) small tiny place.

R: Yeah yeah I know yeah. This is true. So it’s something you feel really strongly about, clearly P: I do indeed R: And this so this represents your identity but it shouldn’t P: [It does exactly it does like yeah] R: [Because of the way you feel] about it yeah yeah P: Every time I travel I have to show this and every time I come back to the UK I have to show this and eh R: Yeah

P: Alongside my travel document R: Oh really OK. OK. And you have to have it on you all the time? R: I don’t know about hours P: Not really not necessarily, but especially if I am travelling yes I have to. And it’s funny like every time I come back to the UK they question...
things is because, yeah so everything comes down to where you were
born and I think it's unfair it's very unjust that, ah it's just accident of
birth you know were you born in the UK? No no you weren't
R: I'm Irish
P: Irish so you are born in Ireland for example you could have been born
in Africa you could have been born in Afghanistan but it's just an
accident of birth and it's not my fault I wasn't born in Europe I wasn't
born in the UK. So I just want people to kind of rethink that, the
privileges we have.
R: Yeah
P: We should be able to share it. But also the global governance system
is so unfair it's so unjust like, for example a British passport or even an
Irish passport will enable you to go to a hundred and seventy seventy
countries
R: Mm
P: Without visa an Afghan passport enables me to go to twenty four
countries (R: Really) that I have not even heard the name of, even
though my geography is quite good (R: Yeah yeah) so it's just like the
world is a very unfair place where eh you know, if people were able to
come here legally and through civilised means and (R: Mm) then it
would have been easy for people I would love for Afghans to come to
Ireland to come to Europe to come to Britain to study to work, (R: Yeah)
to contribute just to come and visit and see this beautiful place, (R: Yeah
yeah) but eh because where they're born determines
R: I know yeah
P: Anyways
R: And it's not equal is it because it's
P: It's not
R: It's not that difficult really for me to travel
P: Exactly that's what I mean yeah you can go to a hundred and seventy
countries without visa. Why? Such a small island. And it's called island as
well but (R: Yeah) small tiny place.
R: Yeah yeah I know yeah. This is true. So it's something you feel really
strongly about, clearly
P: I do indeed
R: And this so this represents your identity but it [shouldn't]
P: [It does exactly it does like yeah]
R: [Because of the way you feel] about it yeah yeah
P: Every time I travel I have to show this and every time I come back to
the UK I have to show this and eh
R: Yeah
P: Alongside my travel document
R: Oh really OK. OK. And you have to have it on you all the time?
P: Not really not necessarily, but especially if I am travelling yes I have
to. And it's funny like every time I come back to the UK they question
4: Looking at multivoicedness

things is because, yeah so everything comes down to where you were
born and I think it’s unfair it’s very unjust that, eh it’s just accident of
birth you know were you born in the UK? No no you weren’t
R: I’m Irish
P: Irish so you are born in Ireland for example you could have been born
in Africa you could have been born in Afghanistan but it’s just an
accident of birth and it’s not my fault I wasn’t born in Europe I wasn’t
born in the UK. So I just want people to kind of rethink that, the
privileges we have.
R: Yeah
P: We should be able to share it. But also the global governance system
is so unfair it’s so unjust like, for example a British passport or even an
Irish passport will enable you to go to a hundred and seventy seventy
countries
R: Mm
P: Without visa an Afghan passport enables me to go to twenty four
countries (R: Really) that I have not even heard the name of, even
though my geography is quite good (R: Yeah yeah) so it’s just like the
world is a very unfair place where eh you know, if people were able to
come here legally and through civilised means and (R: Mm) then it
would have been easy for people I would love for Afghans to come to
Ireland to come to Europe to come to Britain to study to work, (R: Yeah)
to contribute just to come and visit and see this beautiful place, (R: Yeah
yeah) but eh because where they’re born determines
R: I know yeah
P:Â Anyways
R: And it’s not equal is it because it’s
P: It’s not
R: It’s not that difficult really for me to travel
P: Exactly that’s what I mean yeah you can go to a hundred and seventy
countries without visa. Why? Such a small island. And it’s called island as
well but (R: Yeah) small tiny place.
R: Yeah yeah I know yeah. This is true. So it’s something you feel really
strongly about, clearly
P: I do indeed
R: And this so this represents your identity but it [shouldn’t]
P: (It does exactly it does like yeah]
R: [Because of the way you feel] about it yeah yeah
P: Every time I travel I have to show this and every time I come back to
the UK I have to show this and eh
R: Yeah
P: Alongside my travel document
R: Oh really OK. OK. And you have to have it on you all the time?
P: Not really not necessarily, but especially if I am travelling yes I have
to. And it’s funny like every time I come back to the UK they question

Asks and answers himself
Addressing me as Irish - as not - African, not Afghan
Addressing "people" - not me?
Speaking of and to the problems of political global governance systems

Echo of activist discourse: "the world needs to change"
- "The world is an unfair place."
Changes position/direction: "from unfairness of the world to "if only people could come legally to"
"I would like for people to be able to visit"

I speak as an Irish person with my passport
"Why?" Addressing me or addressing global governance systems, challenge/questioning them?