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Lives worthy of human dignity: investigating the impact of UK Asylum Policy on the well-being of asylum seekers in the North East of England.

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Lives worthy of human dignity: investigating the impact of UK Asylum Policy on the well-being of asylum seekers in the North East of England.

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January 2013

Thesis submitted for the award of Master of Professional Practice

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Declaration

I, Chris Carroll, declare that this thesis is my own work and the material included has not previously been submitted for a degree at this or any other university. The thesis does not exceed 30,000 words in length.

Acknowledgements

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Abstract

This practitioner research project aims to explore with asylum seekers, their experiences of the UK asylum process. It seeks to identify what the key issues of well-being are for asylum seekers and, to examine these alongside some of the theoretical literature on well-being and existing asylum policy. The research arises from my work over nine years with one project supporting asylum seekers and refugees in North East England.

Using biographical narrative interviews, I explored with ten asylum seekers who were users of the project how they experienced the asylum process while they waited to hear the outcome of their applications, and the effect of their experiences on their emotional and psychological well-being. The narrative interviews located asylum seekers' experiences of the UK asylum process within the context of their whole lives. This provided insights into the interconnectedness of past, present and imagined future, and the impact this had on people's psychological and emotional well-being as they experienced the asylum process. An analysis of some of the theoretical literature on well-being provided a foundation for gaining an understanding of the concept of well-being, and a touchstone for the analysis and discussion of participants' accounts of their experiences.

Findings indicated that two sets of issues need to be simultaneously addressed in order to make provision for asylum seekers' psychological and emotional well-being, incorporating: (i) changes in policy; and (ii) changes in how current policy is implemented. Acknowledging the depth and complexity of the psychological and emotional impact of seeking asylum, a recommendation at practitioner level would be to introduce a mentoring scheme for asylum seekers throughout the asylum process, and particularly through the transition from asylum seeker to integration in the UK.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1
Overview of the study

Introduction

This study is concerned with the psychological and emotional well-being of asylum seekers and, specifically how aspects of the experience of seeking asylum affect people's well-being. It is based on analysis of some of the theoretical literature on well-being and a small empirical study using biographical interviews with ten asylum seekers who were users of a particular project in North East England. Previous studies have identified aspects of asylum policy that affect asylum seekers' psychological and social well-being (McColl et al 2008; Steel et al 2006; Laban et al 2004; Stewart 2005; Gill 2009; Silove et al 2000). In this study, through exploring theoretical approaches to well-being, I aim to arrive at an understanding of 'well-being' as a concept, and to position theories of well-being alongside participants' accounts of their experiences, and alongside asylum policy and process. Through the examination and discussion of findings in the study, theories of well-being will be applied to participants' experiences, enabling a more empirically grounded understanding of the nature of 'well-being'. In this context, placed alongside asylum policy, theories of well-being will provide a perspective from which policy can be evaluated in terms of its provision for people's psychological and emotional well-being.

This chapter provides an overview of the study by outlining the background, research questions, aims and objectives and research approach, and provides an outline of each chapter.

Background and rationale

The idea for this research came from my own observations, and conversations with asylum seekers over a period of nine years (2000 – 2009), during which time I worked in a project offering support to asylum seekers and refugees in the east end of Newcastle

upon Tyne, UK. Those who visited the project presented with needs and problems ranging across the whole spectrum of the process and experience of seeking asylum.

In the course of working with some of the clients over a prolonged period I observed a progressive loss of dignity and self worth in people who found themselves in situations without choice and feeling utterly powerless, worn down by an asylum system that did not appear to acknowledge them as full human beings. The phrases these clients began to use in our conversations (for example: "I'm not free, I want to be free"; "I am no longer a man; everything is done to me"; "People talk so much about human rights, am I not human?") indicated that they struggled to hold on to their sense of 'self' or identity.

This led me to reflect on the question of what it might mean to feel 'fully human', and whether this would mean different things to different people or within different cultures. To what extent, if any, does a person's psychological and emotional well-being relate to their sense of feeling 'fully human'? And, within the context of experiences of the asylum process, are there links to be identified between aspects of asylum policy and process and the psychological and emotional well-being of asylum seekers?

Research aims, objectives and research questions

The primary aim of this study is to examine the impact of asylum policy in the United Kingdom on asylum seekers' psychological and emotional well-being. It also aims to place the human being at the centre of the asylum process by providing time and space for asylum seekers to tell their stories, not as collations of facts, events and dates, but as lived experiences that evoke human responses and emotions. In addition, the results of the research will both inform and challenge my own professional practice. The objectives and research questions are as follows:

Objectives
1. To locate people's experiences of seeking asylum within the wider context of their life histories;
2. To identify links between people's experiences of seeking asylum and their psychological and emotional well-being;

3. To explore connections between people's psychological and emotional well-being and notions of what it means to be 'fully human';

4. To make links between participants' accounts and conceptualisations of well-being, and theoretical approaches to well-being;

5. To reflect on participants' accounts of well-being, and on theoretical approaches to well-being, within the context of UK asylum policy.

Research questions

Central research question

To what extent does asylum policy in the United Kingdom make provision for the psychological and emotional well-being of asylum seekers?

Research question 1

How does the experience of living between asylum application and decision affect people's psychological and emotional well-being?

Research question 2

How does the experience of seeking asylum in the United Kingdom impact on asylum seekers' sense of autonomy, choice and freedom?

Research question 3

How important are the concepts of 'autonomy', 'choice' and 'freedom' to notions of what it means to 'be human'?

Research approach

Most asylum seekers who arrive in the United Kingdom are suffering trauma as a result of events and experiences that forced them to leave their country, and often as a result of their journey to this country. Their experience of the UK asylum process does not take place in some kind of vacuum; it is an extension of the same story that brought people here.

Bearing this in mind, an intensive qualitative approach using narrative methods has been employed in the study. The use of narrative techniques for interviews was important for providing 'whole life' contexts in which participants' experiences of seeking asylum could be better understood and explored. Furthermore, narrative interviews provided opportunities for issues to be explored in depth.

Chapter 2

Chapter two presents the context for the study by providing an overview of asylum policy in the United Kingdom. The reader is guided systematically through the stages of the asylum process from making a claim for asylum to the asylum decision – and beyond.

Chapter 3

Chapter three sets out the theoretical framework for the study. Tracing the concept of well-being back to early Greek philosophy, I examine the way in which theories and approaches to well-being have been developed, and how both subjective accounts and objective circumstances can be viewed as indicators of people's well-being. Particular emphasis is given to the capabilities approach and its development (Sen 1985, 1992, 1993, 1999; Nussbaum 1986, 1993, 2006, 2011).

Reflecting on theories and approaches to well-being, I go on to explore ways in which the characteristics of well-being identified in theory, resonate with notions of what it means to live a 'fully human life'. Finally, drawing on the theories of well-being that have been outlined and discussed, I formulate a working concept of well-being which I use as a touchstone for the discussion of findings in the research.

Chapter 4

In chapter four I describe the natural history of my research, locating myself in the role of practitioner researcher. I justify and describe the shift following the pilot phase of the research from semi-structured interviews for the pilot, to biographic narrative interpretive method (Wengraf 2001) for the remainder of the interviews and analysis of interview material. Throughout this chapter I acknowledge and discuss challenges and difficulties I faced as researcher, and how these have contributed to my own learning and development.

Chapter 5

Chapter five draws on participants' narrative accounts of their life experiences to provide insight into the broader context of their experiences as asylum seekers. It is a chapter in which the 'human being' is located at the centre of the asylum process, and in which the psychological and emotional effects of past trauma and loss are acknowledged and considered alongside the psychological and emotional impact of living "between air and ground", in suspended animation, during the period between asylum application and decision.

Chapter 6

Findings discussed in chapter six are explicitly linked to aspects of asylum policy and process which participants identified in relation to restrictions to and, in some situations the complete removal of, their freedom, choice and autonomy. The effects on participants' self esteem, dignity and well-being of consistently being denied freedom and choice are examined in depth, and I reflect also on the relationship between the concepts of autonomy, choice and freedom and what it means to be 'fully human'.

Chapter 7

In chapter seven close examination of the relationship between theory and data demonstrates how theories of well-being validate both participants' subjective accounts of well-being, and the effect of their objective circumstances on their sense of well-being. Similarly, illumination of participants' experiences and the effect of those experiences on well-being can be seen to add validity and depth of understanding to theory. The concepts of autonomy, choice and freedom are discussed in relation to theories of well-being, participants' experiences, and UK asylum policy.

Drawing together all of these strands, answers to research questions and the central research question are put forward, with recommendations for asylum policies that contribute positively to asylum seekers' psychological and emotional well-being, and affirm them as 'full human beings'.

Chapter 2

Asylum in the UK: Policy and Process

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of current asylum policy in the United Kingdom. There have been several Acts reflecting the changes and development of UK immigration and asylum policies. However, it is the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 that provides the frame of reference for this study, since it is within the context of this Act that participants have experienced the asylum process.

This chapter comprises an outline of the Asylum Process, as described by the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA), providing the context and frame of reference for discussion of findings later in the study.

Background

The 1950 UN Statute establishing the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (Resolution 428 (v), adopted by the UN General Assembly on 14th December 1950), and the parallel legal instrument of the Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in 1951, according to Zetter (1998: 46) "constitute a defining moment in the response of the international community to people who are subject to forced displacement." Although refugees had existed for centuries, these instruments created, for the first time, an internationally agreed legal definition of a refugee, conceptualised in terms of persecution and defined in relation to the state.

Article 1 of the 1951 convention applies to: "any person who, owing to a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside his country of nationality and is unable or unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."

The convention, while creating the status of a refugee, does not provide the right to asylum; that is the responsibility of the receiving state to determine. The receiving state is allowed discretion in determining the status of refugees and the right to asylum, and in interpreting their responsibilities and obligations to refugees set out in the convention.

The definition of a refugee applies only to individual claims to a well founded fear of persecution. Whilst in many countries ethnic conflict, systematic political oppression and the suppression and abuse of human rights have affected large numbers of people, no one is granted Refugee Status on the basis of simply having fled such places; he or she must be able to substantiate an 'individual' claim to Refugee Status. The burden of proof is on the individual.

The UK Asylum Process

Asylum applications peaked in the early 2000s, increasing from 4,256 in 1987 to 84,130 in 2003. There was a decline in applications in 2005 when the number was 25,710, and then little change until 2009 when applications declined further, falling to 17,916 in 2010. The total number of applications in 2011 was 19,865. These numbers include only 'main applicants', excluding 'dependents' (family members accompanying the principal person making the application). (Binder 2012: 5).

The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 in the UK states that:
> A claim for asylum is a claim by a person that to remove him from or require him to leave the United Kingdom would be contrary to the United Kingdom's obligations under:
> (a) the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees at Geneva on 28th July 1951 and its protocol, or
> (b) Article 3 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms agreed by the council of Europe at Rome on 4th November 1950 (Freedom from inhuman or degrading treatment).

The United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA) is the department set up by the Home Office to manage immigration and asylum in the UK. Six stages to the Asylum process are identified by UKBA.

1. Screening

The screening interview takes place as soon as possible after a person has entered the UK and asked to claim asylum. It is conducted by immigration officers either at the port of entry or at the asylum screening unit in Croydon. The person seeking asylum is asked to state briefly why they have left their home country and why they fear death or persecution if they return to their country. They are expected to produce a passport or travel document to establish identity and nationality. Failure to do so immediately reduces the credibility of their asylum claim. Documents are retained by UKBA throughout the decision process. Fingerprints and photographs are taken. An interpreter is provided for the screening interview if required.

If UKBA decides that an application can be dealt with quickly, and the person making the application is 'suitable for detention', the case is placed into the Detained Fast Track (DFT) process and the person seeking asylum is placed in detention immediately the screening process is completed.

Asylum seekers who are not placed in detention following the screening interview are given temporary accommodation in a hostel or reception centre until they are allocated a 'case owner'.

2. *Case Owner*

From March 2007 every new asylum application is placed with a single member of UKBA staff who deals with every aspect of the claim from beginning to end – the case owner. The case owner is responsible for:

- Interviewing the asylum seeker, including the substantive asylum interview;
- making the decision on the success or failure of the asylum application;
- managing support for the asylum seeker during the time their claim is being processed;
- providing official documents;
- representing UKBA at a tribunal hearing if an appeal is made;
- arranging either a) integration into life in the UK, or b) return to country of origin, either voluntarily or by enforced removal.

At the first meeting with the asylum seeker the case owner explains the asylum process, arranges the issue of the Application Registration Card (ARC), and sets out reporting requirements. The case owner is also responsible for making arrangements for dispersal, accommodation and financial support.

3. *Dispersal*

Asylum seeker accommodation is contracted out by UKBA to housing providers in dispersal regions in the North West, Midlands, North East, Wales and Scotland. Accommodation is provided on a no choice basis: if someone refuses the accommodation they have been allocated they are no longer eligible for housing or financial support.

Asylum Support

On arrival at the accommodation they have been allocated asylum seekers are introduced to their support worker, someone employed by the housing provider, who shows them around the accommodation and either takes them to, or explains how to get to the nearest shops and the post office where they are required to collect their weekly cash allowance. Asylum seekers sign an Asylum Support Agreement confirming that they understand and will keep the conditions of receiving support, which entails that they: a) live at the allocated address; b) collect cash support weekly from the allocated post office; c) obey reporting requirements.

The property is inspected on a monthly basis by the housing provider. An asylum seeker is not permitted to spend more than four consecutive nights away from the property. If anyone is suspected of not living at the allocated accommodation they are recorded as an absconder and become liable to detention.

Cash Support

Cash support is collected weekly from an allocated post office on presentation of the ARC card. The card is activated weekly when the asylum seeker attends the Immigration Reporting Centre. If someone fails to report at the Immigration Centre the card is not activated and no cash is available that week. Weekly support amounts are fixed and in 2012 the amounts were as follows:

- Qualifying couple (married or in a civil partnership)   £72.52
- Lone parent aged 18 or over   £43.94
- Single person aged 18 or over   £36.62
- Person aged at least 16, but under 18 (except a member of
      a qualifying couple)   £39.80
- Person aged under 16 and classed as an Unaccompanied
      Asylum Seeker Child (UASC)   £52.96

The rate for a single person aged 25 or over where the decision to grant support was made prior to 5th October 2009 and the person reached age 25 prior to that date, is £42.62. However, this rate is not offered to anyone who applied for support after 5th October 2009.

An extra £5 per week is paid for babies under the age of 12 months. Pregnant women and children aged between 1 and 3 years receive an extra £3 per week.

4. *Asylum Interview*

The substantive asylum interview provides the opportunity for asylum seekers to explain more fully their reasons for seeking asylum in the UK and to provide evidence to support their case. Questions are based on the asylum seeker's statement which will have been prepared with the help of an immigration solicitor. Interpreters are provided. The person's solicitor is not usually present at the interview although it is possible to request that the interview is recorded – the request must be made in advance of the interview. Everyone is given a copy of the transcript of the interview to take away. Following the asylum interview the case owner makes a decision regarding the outcome of the asylum application.

5. *Asylum Decision*

If the asylum application is successful the asylum seeker is granted five years Leave to Remain in the UK. Under current asylum policy s/he is not awarded refugee status at this point and cannot apply for British Citizenship. During the following five years the person will have access to employment, training and higher education and welfare

benefits. At the end of the five year period s/he can apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK (ILR).

If the asylum application is unsuccessful the asylum seeker is notified in writing in the 'Reasons for Refusal' letter. This letter sets out the reasons why an asylum application has been refused, drawing upon the asylum interview material, the evidence provided, information on the asylum seeker's country of origin, and existing case law. Asylum seekers currently have the right to appeal against this decision. However, they are not guaranteed to be able to secure legal representation at this stage, and increasing numbers of asylum seekers find themselves going through the appeals procedure without the support of a solicitor. In 2010, 74% of initial decisions were refusals. 27% of appeals against initial decisions were successful (Binder 2012: 5).

6. *Appeals*

After the receipt of the 'reasons for refusal' letter asylum seekers have ten days in which to submit an appeal to the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal. The asylum seeker must appear in person at the hearing, with or without legal representation. The asylum case-owner attends the hearing as the UKBA representative. A first-tier tribunal immigration judge hears the case and supporting evidence before deciding whether or not the appeal against the UKBA decision is successful. The outcome of the appeal (determination) is received in writing, usually two to three weeks after the hearing date. Both parties are able to challenge the decision made by the first-tier tribunal by applying to the Upper Tribunal, although access to this level is more difficult for asylum seekers.

When an asylum appeal is unsuccessful the case is classified as 'Asylum Rights Exhausted' (ARE). The asylum seeker's entitlement to accommodation and support is ended and a 'removal' letter is issued.

Whilst the removal (end of line) letter marks the final stage (before enforced removal) of the asylum process in the eyes of UKBA, in reality, this means the closing of an asylum case on paper: the shifting of a file's location from the 'active/open' shelf to the 'file closed' shelf. For the asylum seeker it means the shift from having a place to live and financial support to destitution.

Destitution

For many 'failed' asylum seekers "you must now make arrangements to leave the UK" is not a viable option. Regardless of the reasons their claim has been refused by UKBA, they, themselves, feel afraid and unable to return to their home country. UKBA's concern is that the asylum seeker vacates his/her accommodation and that UKBA is no longer responsible for providing financial support. No one asks where the asylum seeker will live or whether they will be making arrangements to leave the UK.

At this point many 'failed' asylum seekers become invisible. They are no longer part of the official asylum system. They are not permitted to work and have no recourse to public funds. Most people in this situation rely on the help and support of friends and charities or voluntary sector support groups to survive, sleeping on sofas or floors wherever they are welcomed, and receiving small amounts of cash and weekly food parcels from charitable groups and organisations. Many asylum seekers manage to survive for several years in this situation, living as 'non-persons'. Some go on to make fresh asylum claims which entitles them to receive Section 4 Support.

Section 4 Support

In certain circumstances asylum seekers who no longer qualify to receive support under section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 can be awarded short term support under Section 4 of the Act. Strict requirements must be met in order to be eligible for Section 4 support:

You must be destitute and satisfy one of the following requirements:

- be taking reasonable steps to leave the UK or placing yourself in a position where you can do so;
- you cannot leave the UK because of a physical impediment to travel or for some other medical reason;
- you cannot leave the UK because, in the Secretary of State's opinion, no viable route of return is currently available;
- you have applied for a judicial review of your asylum application and have been given permission to proceed with it;

- accommodation is necessary to prevent a breach of your rights within the meaning of the Human Rights Act 1998 (Immigration and Asylum Act 1999)

Section 4 support comprises provision of suitable accommodation plus a section 4 'azure payment card' to use to buy food and essential toiletries to the value of £35.39 per person per week. Accommodation is usually a room in a shared house or flat and, although Section 4 is designated as short term support, in reality it can be for a prolonged period of time. No cash is given under Section 4 support. In 2011 the total number of people who were granted Section 4 support was 3788.

Concluding remarks

The New Asylum Model (NAM) was introduced in 2006, but was only introduced for all new asylum claims (excluding those in the detained fast track) from April 2007. The UKBA website (2012) states:

> We now aim to conclude all new asylum applications within 6 months. This means that within 6 months:
>
> - a successful applicant will start integration into life in the UK; or
> - an unsuccessful applicant will return home, either voluntarily or by enforced removal.

However, UKBA is not able to meet this target. The process of seeking asylum can take much longer than six months. For people awaiting the outcome of a judicial review or who have been left behind at the back of the queue whilst current applications are dealt with, the process can take many years. UKBA acknowledged this in a report for the Asylum Improvement Project in 2011, stating:

> Until June last year, we were focussed on a single target to either grant or remove asylum seekers within six months. This distorted the system and actually discouraged case-owners from concluding older cases. We have now replaced the old target with a suite of performance indicators to ensure the whole system remains in balance and that all unconcluded cases are progressed through the system. (UKBA *Asylum Improvement Project: Report on progress*, May 2011: 6)

The report also states that "54% of applicants are now either granted asylum or removed

from the UK within six months" (p 6). There is no mention of the remaining 46% of applicants who do not fall into these categories.

In reality, the process of seeking asylum does not fit neatly into stages or into a six month time slot. There are waiting lists for Section 4 accommodation which means people remain in destitution whilst Section 4 applications are being processed and until suitable accommodation is allocated. Many Section 4 applications are refused, and applicants remain destitute and 'invisible'.

Since 'end of line' applicants who do not agree to voluntary return to their home country are not removed immediately, there are a great number of 'failed' asylum seekers living in destitution: invisible and below the radar. It would appear that, through rendering asylum seekers destitute, UKBA make it more difficult and, in some cases impossible, for themselves to locate and remove people from the UK.

The focus of this chapter has been on the policy and process of the asylum system, which is inevitably a bureaucratic system for supporting people seeking asylum and deciding on the outcomes of their applications. Like all bureaucratic systems, it is 'impersonal' at the level of policies and procedures. But it is dealing with individual people who have specific and complex emotional and material needs. As the brief overview of the policy and process indicates, it is not designed to focus on the person, other than as a 'case'. This is common in all bureaucratic systems, whether relating to allocation of welfare benefits to citizens or collection of taxes. However, the asylum system, which is working with people who have no citizenship rights and who are particularly powerless and vulnerable, seems deliberately not only to de-personalise the process, but to de-humanise the people being processed. Applicants for posts with UKBA as 'immigration case-owners' are told: "You will be at the forefront of delivering the Immigration Agenda, directly contributing to securing our border and controlling migration for the benefit of our country" (UKBA - HEO Immigration Case-Owner Candidate Information Pack). Fundamentally, it seems, UKBA is operating with two 'p's rather than three. Their operation is based on 'policy' and 'process'; the third 'p', the 'person' does not form part of the equation.

In the findings chapters of this study the third 'p', the person, is placed within the context of policy and process, by considering the impact of asylum policy and process on the daily lives of asylum seekers, and on their physical, psychological and emotional well-being.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework: towards conceptualising well-being

Introduction

This chapter provides a brief overview of the concept of well-being, identifying those theories and approaches to well-being that have informed the formulating of research questions and interview questions, and have provided a touchstone for the discussion and implications of findings. Particular emphasis is given to the Capabilities Approach, and its development by Amartya Sen (1985; 1992; 1993; 1999), and Martha Nussbaum (1986; 1993; 2006; 2011), which has been central to this research. Whilst critiques of the capabilities approach are acknowledged and discussed briefly, there is not the scope within this chapter for detailed analysis of all the arguments.

Having discussed theoretical approaches to well-being, I go on to consider the relationship between characteristics of well-being and the notion of what it means to 'be human' and to live a 'fully human' life.

Finally, whilst acknowledging the challenges associated with conceptualising well-being, I identify principles from within the various approaches to well-being discussed in this chapter that, together, have contributed to my formulation of a working concept of well-being that can be applied to this study.

Rationale

Previous research in the area of well-being in relation to asylum seekers has addressed notions of psychological well-being, social well-being (measured in terms of ability to participate within a social context and levels of social exclusion), and economic well-being (measured in terms of adequate resources, including housing). Several studies have identified common factors that affect the daily lives of asylum seekers: delays in processing applications (McColl et al 2008; Steel et al 2006; Laban et al 2004; Stewart

2005), stress of reporting to immigration centres (Gill 2009), and being denied the right to work (Silove et al 2000; McColl et al 2008). These studies have drawn on a range of vocabulary associated with well-being and illbeing: mental health, anxiety, depression, peace of mind, psychological health and psychological stability. Wellbeing has frequently been identified or measured by its absence.

In this study I aim to explore how theoretical approaches can help us arrive at a better understanding of what 'well-being' is, especially in relation to the experiences of asylum seekers. In this short study it is not possible to address fully the breadth of discussion and arguments concerning conceptualisations of well-being within social sciences and across disciplines; this would constitute a study in itself. However, a growing awareness and appreciation of the complex nature of the concept of well-being, and an understanding of "the ways in which well-being is in a permanent process of construction" (McGregor 2007: 332) has both inspired and informed my approach throughout the study.

Towards a concept of well-being: perspectives

The concept of well-being features in early Greek philosophy. 'Eudaimonia' is the Greek word often translated as 'happiness' or 'good fortune', although 'human flourishing' is considered to be a more accurate translation and has become an area of interest within social sciences concerning exploration of the nature of 'being human' (Nussbaum 1986; Bruni 2008). 'Eudaimonia' comprises 'eu' ('yea' or 'well-being') and 'daemon' ('spirit' or 'minor deity'). However, the meaning of the Aristotelian 'eudaimonia' goes beyond the notion of 'good daemon', and is used to express "the highest end that a human person can realise" (Bruni 2008:123).

The World Health Organisation (WHO), founded in 1948, produced a definition of health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO 1948: preamble to the constitution). Philosopher, Elizabeth Anscombe (1958) translated eudaimonia as 'human flourishing', but it has taken several years since then for the term to be broadly used by health professionals and sociologists to challenge conceptualisations of health and well-being.

The term 'well-being' has evoked debate and discussion within social sciences and across disciplines concerning the problems and challenges associated with definitions and measurement, and ways in which well-being could be targeted as the outcome in policy formation (Fleuret & Atkinson 2007).

Understanding well-being: eudaimonic and hedonic approaches

Approaches to understanding and measuring well-being broadly fall into two categories: happiness - the subjective well-being approach (SWB), and the eudaimonic approach. Within the eudaimonic approach self reported happiness (SWB) is recognised as only one component of well-being; whilst to be happy is important and of value, it is not seen as an end in itself. The eudaimonic interpretation of well-being suggests a concept that is something more than simply personal feelings of happiness. It involves relationships with others and interactions within society, placing emphasis on non-material pursuits.

The hedonic concept of well-being is concerned with subjective happiness based on the experience of pleasure versus displeasure, ranging from a relatively narrow focus on bodily pleasures to a broad focus on appetites and self interests (Deci & Ryan 2001). Subjective well-being is concerned with people's evaluation of their lives in terms of life satisfaction, feelings and emotions, not necessarily linked to economic circumstances such as poverty or deprivation. Flavio Comim (2008) recalls an encounter during his research into the well-being of the population in one of the poorest neighbourhoods in a large Brazilian city: a man who showed every sign of suffering multiple deprivation when asked to rate his 'happiness' on a scale of '0-10' answered that it was 20, "I am very happy because my church brothers have been treating me very well recently" (Comim 2008:140).

Whilst subjective well-being research has been associated with the hedonic concept of happiness it also draws upon eudaimonic principles of well-being (for example: Self Determination Theory, Ryan & Deci 2000). Diener and Lucas (1999) argue, however, that the adoption of eudaimonic criteria allows experts to define well-being rather than allowing people to tell researchers what makes their life good. Deci & Ryan, on the other hand, refer to a number of studies (Compton et al 1996; King & Nappa 1998; McGregor & Little 1998) in which "evidence has indicated that well-being is probably

best conceived as a multi-dimensional phenomenon that includes aspects of both hedonic and eudaimonic conceptions of well-being" (Deci & Ryan 2001:148).

Theoretical approaches to well-being

The hierarchy of needs theory

Maslow (1954) argues that overall well-being depends on basic needs being met. He identifies five areas in his hierarchy of needs: 1) physiological needs such as food and shelter, 2) safety, 3) love and belonging, 4) esteem, and 5) self actualisation. He argues that there can be no sense of overall well-being without basic needs such as food and shelter being met and that these must be met before attention is given to the other needs in the hierarchy. This differs from the needs framework within which Self Determination Theory operates, which implies that all three basic psychological needs that have been identified as "those nutriments essential for psychological growth and integrity" (Ryan 1995) need to be addressed simultaneously for a person to thrive.

Self Determination Theory

Self Determination Theory (SDT) claims that, in addition to basic physical needs that are required for human flourishing, human beings have basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy (Ryan & Deci 2000). The need for competence involves experiencing opportunities that enable a person to engage in challenges that "extend physical and psychological functioning" (Vansteenkiste, Ryan & Deci 2008:192). The need for relatedness concerns feeling a sense of belonging that, according to Vansteenkiste, Ryan and Deci, "is satisfied only by the experience of supportive, caring relationships in which people feel significant and respected" (ibid). The need for autonomy involves being able to exercise choice and to experience a sense of volition and personal value in what one does (Vansteenkiste, Ryan & Deci 2008; Ryan & Sapp 2007). This approach focuses on the developmental and social conditions that are conducive to psychological growth, integrity and well-being versus those that produce unhappiness. Within the framework of SDT social environments can be seen as autonomy supportive or controlling, effectance supporting or over challenging or inconsistent and, relationally supportive or impersonal or rejecting (Ryan & Sapp 2007). Psychological needs are considered to be innate in the sense that they are an aspect of

23

human nature and universal in that they apply to all humans in all cultures (ibid:78). SDT places particular importance on supports for autonomy which "allow an individual to address all needs better" (Ryan & Sapp 2007:91).

The Theory of Human Need

The Theory of Human Need (Doyal & Gough 1991) whilst acknowledging the necessity for cultural variety in meeting needs, identifies a universal set of needs or capabilities that are potentially applicable to all people, and if these needs are not satisfied then "serious harm of some objective kind will result" (Gough & McGregor 2007:13). This 'harm' is described as an impediment to successful social participation: the lack of freedom or opportunity to interact with others. The basic needs required to enable an acceptable level of participation in some form of life are identified as physical health and autonomy; both are considered to be important in enabling individuals to act and participate. Doyal and Gough argue that autonomy is impaired by severe mental illness, poor cognitive skills, and blocked opportunities to engage in social participation. Although the Theory of Human Need conceptualises basic needs on a universal level, it is acknowledged that satisfaction of needs is not independent of the social environment; in fact, the two are closely connected. This is evidenced in studies relating to the well-being of asylum seekers (Palmer & Ward 2007; Stewart 2005; Independent Asylum Commission 2006; Schuster 2004; Levy 1998).

The Capabilities Approach

The capabilities approach was developed by the economist Amartya Sen (1985; 1992). In his critique of crude utilitarian approaches in economics that focus on distribution of goods per se rather than on people's capacity to use and enjoy the goods, Sen questions the usefulness of using only one variable (for example, income) in the evaluation and measurement of inequality. There are, he suggests, a plurality of variables on which we can focus (income, resources, rights, liberties, quality of life). He stresses the importance of considering what a person can do with goods and resources rather than seeing the holding of goods in itself as an indication of well-being. A further distinction is made between achievement (what we manage to accomplish) and freedom (the real opportunity that we have to accomplish what we value). Sen argues that in the social

24

welfare approach to well-being the tendency is to focus only on achievements (for example, preference fulfilment, consumer satisfaction), with individual freedom being valued only as a means to achievement (Sen 1992: 21-31).

The conception of well-being within a capabilities approach concerns the positive freedom to live a flourishing life, encompassing the notions of choice, power, freedom and potential. According to Sen (1993: 31):

> The capability of a person reflects the alternative combinations of functionings the person can achieve, and from which he or she can choose one collection.

'Functionings' are part of the condition of a person, in particular the various things that he or she manages to do or be in leading a life. Some functionings are elementary (adequate nourishment, basic physiological needs being met), and some more complex (achieving self respect, being socially integrated). The capability to choose a particular set of functionings involves what Sen calls 'agency freedom', defined as: "what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important" (Sen 1985: 203). Sen regards agency as more than a contributor to well-being, arguing that process freedoms must be evaluated with respect to each valuable functioning, and agency evaluated not only as a general capability but also with respect to different functionings that people might wish to achieve. Within a capabilities approach, "Freedom is explicitly acknowledged as an intrinsic and as a central value" (Sen 1999: 244).

Critiques of Sen's capabilities approach

There has been a number of critiques of Sen's capabilities approach. Ronald Dworkin (1981) argues for equal access to resources rather than capabilities as a means of increasing well-being equality; John Rawls (1982) defends the notion of a person's access to 'primary goods' as the most appropriate and accurate measure of well-being equality.

Cohen disagrees with Sen's emphasis on freedom as the ability to achieve valuable functionings as a central feature of well-being, arguing that it "overestimates the place of freedom and activity in well-being" (Cohen 1993: 25). He suggests that the well-being of people can be increased without the person having to *do* anything or be

involved in any kind of choice (for example, when someone is a passive recipient or beneficiary of something such as receiving better nourishment through a feeding programme). Cohen argues that if capabilities are merely freedoms which the person has the discretion to exercise, then states of the person "which he neither brought about nor ever was in a position to bring about" will not count as objects of fundamental concern for capabilities theory (Cohen 1993: 28). Sen does not dispute the fact that a person's well-being can be increased in such a way without the active involvement or choice of the individual but views being a passive beneficiary, not as an end in itself, rather as a stepping stone: the means of increasing a person's capability set, once a particular basic capability has been realised. Sen refers to the notion of freedom without control as "effective freedom". He argues:

> Freedom has many aspects. Being free to live the way one would like may be enormously helped by the choice of others, and it would be a mistake to think of achievements only in terms of active choice by *oneself*. A person's ability to achieve various valuable functionings may be greatly enhanced by public action and policy, and these expansions of capability are not unimportant for freedom for that reason. (Sen 1993: 44)

Kaufman (2006) uses the example of a political prisoner being released to refute Cohen's argument that freedom "obtains only when it is the agent who secures the conformity of the world to its will" (Cohen 1993: 124). As Kaufman (2006: 295) argues:

> According to Cohen's criteria, the prisoner's release does not enhance her freedom, since: (i) she has not exercised a power; and (ii) her choice did not produce her release. Nevertheless, her release has removed a constraint on her ability to pursue her ends, and it would seem that any reasonable account of freedom must view her release from imprisonment as an enhancement of her freedom.

All means to well-being are important but are not the end in themselves. They are important in creating conditions and resources that enable a person's freedom and choice. Cohen's argument relates to particular contextual examples of what Sen refers to as 'effective freedom'. It does not address the universal concept of freedom which is central to Sen's capability approach. Sen's agency freedom is aligned with autonomy

26

within Self Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan 2001). It is not a means *to* well-being: it is a component *of* well-being.

Robert Sugden (2006; 2008) also expresses concern regarding Sen's usage of 'freedom' within a capabilities approach, particularly his (Sen's) concern "with our capability to lead the kind of lives we have reason to value" (Sen 1999: 285). Sugden asserts that certain 'values' can be imposed on individuals or decided for them, creating a situation where: "A person's actual desires can be overridden by other people's judgements about what he has reason to desire" (Sugden 2008: 319). He draws attention to Sen's emphasis in capability theory "on the malleability of the desires of the persistently deprived", suggesting that Sen "is seeking to persuade us that the persistently deprived have reason to value things that they do not in fact desire" (ibid: 305). Sugden uses this argument to suggest that such an approach, rather than providing opportunities for freedom, leads to restrictions on freedom:

> The idea that 'we', as ethical theorists can claim to know better than some particular individual what is good for her seems to open the door to restrictions on freedom. (Sugden 2006: 34)

Sen, in response to these criticisms, draws upon the notion of 'adaptation' or 'adaptive desires': the ways in which the persistently deprived may modify their desires in keeping with the situations in which they find themselves. Such individuals, he argues:

> may all have learned to keep their desires in line with their respective predicaments. Their deprivations are gagged and muffled in the interpersonal metric of desire fulfilment. In some lives small mercies have to count big. (Sen 1985: 191).

My understanding is that the capabilities approach embodies both agency freedom (opportunity and ability to make choices) and effective freedom (being a passive beneficiary of something that may enhance opportunities for agency freedom). In certain situations it may be necessary to make provision for basic capabilities to be met, that are not overtly or consciously desired by the individuals concerned, in order to ultimately raise not only quality of life, but also future expectations and aspirations. For example, a child who has been consistently deprived of attention and affection, and possibly punished for demanding these in the past, will eventually condition himself to no longer expect affection and adapt his desires accordingly. Would it be acceptable to

never seek to change the situation for fear of "overriding his actual desires"? As Sen points out, "It is difficult to desire what one cannot imagine as a possibility" (Sen 1993: 5).

Sen recognises that adaptation is a "specific problem of some importance that has to be addressed" (Sen 2006: 88). The scope of this chapter has allowed only a brief and relatively simple discussion of what is a complex ethical issue. It does, however, raise the question of whether an agreed list of basic capabilities should be endorsed within the capabilities approach.

Development of the capabilities approach: Martha Nussbaum

The philosopher, Martha Nussbaum, through identifying a list of ten central capabilities, seeks to develop a version of the capabilities approach that "focuses on the protection of areas of freedom so central that their removal makes a life not worthy of human dignity" (Nussbaum 2011: 31). Her reasoning derives from the Aristotelian conception of the proper function of government, according to which its task is to make available to each and every member of the community the basic necessary conditions of the capability to choose and live a fully good human life. This raises two fundamental questions for Nussbaum:

1. What is it to inquire about the human good?
2. What circumstances of existence go to define what it is to live the life of a *human being*, and not some other life?

Nussbaum continues:
There is no way to answer it but to ask ourselves which elements of our experience seem to us so important that they count, for us, as part of who we are (Nussbaum 1988: 266).

She asserts that at a bare minimum, an ample threshold level of ten central capabilities is required:

1. *Life:* Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.
2. *Bodily Health*: Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.
3. *Bodily Integrity*: Able to move freely from place to place; secure against violent assault; Having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of

reproduction.

4. *Senses, Imagination, and Thought*: Being able to use the senses, to imagine, to think and reason – and to do these things in a "truly human" way.....Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid non-beneficial pain.

5. *Emotions*: In general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety.

6. *Practical Reason*: To engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life.

7. *Affiliation*: (A) Able to live with and toward others; (B) Having the social bases of self respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others.

8. *Other Species*: Living with concern for and in relation to animals, plants and the world of nature.

9. *Play*: Being able to laugh, play, and enjoy recreational activities.

10. *Control over one's environment*: (A) Political – Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association. (B) Material – Being able to hold property and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. (Nussbaum 2011: 33-34).

From this list Nussbaum emphasises two capabilities that play a distinctive role: "They organise and pervade the others", ensuring that 'human dignity' is a thread that runs through the other capabilities. These are 'practical reason' and 'affiliation' (ibid: 39).

Sen's response to Nussbaum's initial proposal to draw up such a list was to defend capabilities as a "general theory", arguing that "The fact that the capability approach is consistent and combinable with several different substantive theories need not be a source of embarrassment" (Sen 1993: 48). He characterises the capabilities approach as a general approach to the evaluation of individual advantage and social arrangements, and not as a well defined theory. Sen stresses the role of agency, the process of choice and the freedom to reason as important factors in the selection of relevant capabilities. In this way, each application of the capability approach generates its own list of capabilities; he explicitly refuses to defend "one pre-determined canonical list of

capabilities, chosen by theorists without any general social discussion or public reasoning" (Sen 2005: 158). When the capability approach is used for policy work, it is the people who will be affected by the policies who should decide on what will count as valuable capabilities in a particular context.

Building on the premise that the capabilities approach focuses on what people are actually able to do and to be, defining achievement in terms of the opportunities open to each person, Nussbaum calls attention to the distinction between *internal capabilities* (characteristics of a person) and *combined capabilities* (real opportunities for choice and action in a person's specific political, social and economic situation). "Social, political, familial, and economic conditions may prevent people from choosing to function in accordance with a developed internal capability: this sort of thwarting is comparable to imprisonment" (Nussbaum 2011: 31). Asserting that some living conditions deliver to people a life that is worthy of the human dignity that they possess and others do not, she calls for policy choices "that protect and support agency, rather than choices that infantilize people and treat them as passive recipients of benefit" (Nussbaum 2011: 30).

Wellbeing and 'Being Human'

Ryan and Sapp (2007: 72) define health or well-being as "not simply a physical issue – a matter of bones, tissue and medicine. Rather, to be healthy entails not only physical capabilities but requires such psychological attributes as hope, vitality and confidence, attributes that allow one to engage in one's surroundings and to thrive within them".

The theory of human need (Doyal & Gough 1991) identifies physical health and autonomy as the basic needs required to enable an acceptable level of participation in some form of life. Ryan & Deci (2000) claim that the psychological needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness are required for human flourishing. Within the capabilities approach "freedom is explicitly acknowledged as an intrinsic and as a central value" (Sen 1999: 244). The components of these theories are not mutually exclusive, rather their convergence enables us to better understand well-being as a multi-dimensional, multi-faceted concept, encompassing notions of quality of life, opportunities and capabilities, freedom and human flourishing.

In her exploration of the concepts of 'diaspora', 'humiliation' and 'belonging', O'Neill (2007: 8) identifies 'humiliation' as "a concept that is becoming a key focus in interdisciplinary research related to the asylum-migration nexus." Lindner (2004: 29) defines humiliation as "the enforced lowering of a person or group, a process of subjugation that damages or strips away their pride, honour or dignity", and contends that: "One of the defining characteristics of humiliation as a process is that the victim is forced into passivity, acted upon, made helpless."

Martha Nussbaum, when compiling her list of central capabilities sought to consider "which elements of our experience seem to us so important that they count, for us, as part of who we are" (1988: 266). From the list she stresses the importance of 'affiliation': having the social bases of self respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others" (Nussbaum 2011: 33). Her list incorporates notions of freedom, senses, imagination, emotions such as loving, grieving, experiencing longing, gratitude and justified anger. She is concerned with self respect, dignity and non-humiliation, and with the freedom and capability to engage in critical reflection about the planning of ones' life (2011: 33-34).

These characteristics of well-being seem to me to be characteristics that reflect something of what it means to 'be human'. As human beings we exist and operate within and across physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual dimensions. We have inherent needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy; it is important for us to have volition and control over our lives and circumstances. When one or more of these aspects of 'being human' are denied or thwarted it somehow diminishes what it means to 'be human', and to live a fully human life. Returning to Nussbaum's question about "what it is to live the life of a human being and not some other life", we perhaps need to attempt to define what could be meant by "some other life". At its most impoverished, 'life' could be defined as simply existing, something that breathes and functions at a very basic level; at the other end of the spectrum we can draw on the Aristotelian interpretation of 'eudaimonia' as, "the highest end that a human person can realise". At numerous and various points along this 'scale of life' human beings function, develop and interact with one another. The quality of life experienced depends greatly on

opportunities, capabilities and circumstances that create and develop characteristics of well-being commensurate with "a life worthy of human dignity".

Concluding Remarks

What do we mean by well-being?
This chapter has offered a brief outline of perspectives and theories of well-being: eudaimonic and hedonic approaches, Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, self determination theory, the theory of human need, and the capabilities approach as developed by Sen and Nussbaum. I acknowledge, however, that the various approaches to conceptualising and measuring well-being are open to much greater comparison and discussion than the scope of this study allows.

Well-being is, I believe, intrinsically linked to what it means to 'be human', both in the subjective sense of how it feels to live a fully human life, and in the sense of where each human life is placed in terms of physical conditions, family, community, societal and political contexts. It is a concept that needs to embrace human and cultural diversity, and too large a concept to be confined within any one theory. Well-being must be perceived and desired as a process as well as an outcome, and take into account both the objective circumstances of the person and the impact of those circumstances on their subjective well-being.

I have deliberately written in terms of theories *towards* well-being rather than definitive theories *of* well-being. Like 'being human', 'well-being' is a concept whose whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Gough and McGregor (2007: xxi) acknowledging its complexity, write: "For some it is a broad and attractive term, for others it is messy, imprecise and conceptually dangerous" (preface to *Well-being in Developing Countries: From Theory to Research*).

I agree that, like human life, well-being as a concept can be "messy, imprecise and conceptually dangerous". However, it is these dynamic, fluid, and risky characteristics of well-being that make it genuine, authentic and worthy of exploration. The concept of well-being has provided an exciting, inspiring and challenging

32

framework for this study, and has enabled me to develop my own learning and understanding throughout.

Well-being: a working concept

In applying this framework to my research, I draw upon all of the theories outlined in this chapter to enable the formulation of a working concept of well-being, within which participants' experiences are evaluated and discussed. This involves taking on board subjective measures of well-being (how people feel about their experiences) as well as the objective circumstances of the person. I am particularly interested in the principles underpinning the capabilities approach, not least because of the combination of Sen's passion for justice and Nussbaum's consistent and wholehearted affirmation of "a life worthy of human dignity".

Nussbaum (2005: 171) describes "flourishing human living" as "a kind of living that is active, inclusive of all that has intrinsic value, and complete, meaning lacking in nothing that would make it richer or better". In formulating a concept of well-being I have identified what I believe are some core characteristics of human well-being that need to be present before any notion of "flourishing human living" can be addressed: 1) to have basic needs (such as food and shelter) met without humiliation or stigmatisation; 2) to be free to achieve what one is capable of and to be involved in decisions regarding one's life; 3) to have the freedom to choose, imagine and dream; 4) to be able to live from day to day without fear; 5) to have a sense of dignity and self worth that enables one to feel 'fully human'.

These characteristics do not, by any means, constitute a fully formed concept of well-being, rather I use them as a starting point for exploration and discussion of the findings throughout this study.

Chapter 4

Methods: The natural history of my research

Introduction

In this chapter, as well as describing and discussing the research methods I have employed during the research, I reflect on my own professional and emotional journey from practitioner to researcher. What follows is a charting of the natural history of my research, encompassing my own development as a researcher through engagement with both the research process and with methodological and conceptual theory. My understanding and application of theory developed throughout the research process, causing me, at certain points, to re-evaluate my own position, reconsider research questions, interview questions and techniques, and to constantly revisit the data, exploring in increasing depth the relationship between data and theory.

Setting the scene

The questions being explored in this study are concerned not only with factual details of participants' experiences but also with the psychological and emotional effects of these experiences on people's sense of well-being. The complex, multi-dimensional nature of such questions demands an intensive qualitative approach which not only provides for the unique voice of each interviewee, but also, as Silverman (2010: 307) suggests, provides "a valid, reliable and conceptually defined qualitative study that can give policy makers a reasonable sense of how, at one moment in time, their clients are responding to a particular service". Silverman (2010: 268) asserts that to achieve quality in qualitative research "demands theoretical sophistication and methodological rigour". The issue of quality is addressed and discussed throughout this chapter.

The people who took part in the study were all users of a project supporting asylum seekers in the east end of Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. I was known by all of the

participants prior to the research, having worked with them in my practitioner role for at least two years, and with some of them for eight years.

It would not have been appropriate to use questionnaires for the gathering of data that referred to personal, subjective accounts of how the experience of seeking asylum actually made people feel. Furthermore, English was not the first language of the interviewees and many would have found it difficult to understand the written language of a survey or questionnaire. Consequently, in order to better understand the 'human' experience within the asylum experience, I initially decided to use semi-structured depth interviews as the means to gathering data. Interviews were tape recorded with the permission of interviewees, and the transcripts were discussed, checked and agreed with interviewees. Extracts from interviews included in the thesis are verbatim quotes. These interviews were tested out in a pilot study.

Following the pilot phase of the study, I made the decision to incorporate participants' narratives in the data, adopting Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (Wengraf 2001). This took me a step further in ensuring that the 'human being' was placed at the centre of the research, and also challenged me, in my engagement with the data, to be open to "literal, interpretive and reflexive 'readings' of interviews" (Mason 2002: 78). Importantly, adopting a narrative method located my 'self' further within the research: listening to stories is something I do well, and with which I felt comfortable.

Selection of participants

The model that best fits this study is theoretical sampling. Participants were invited to take part because of their particular experiences of seeking asylum, and those experiences were examined in the light of particular theories and approaches to well-being.

Theoretical sampling
Theoretical sampling, introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967), in its general form, according to Mason (2002: 124) "is concerned with constructing a sample which is meaningful theoretically and empirically, because it builds in certain characteristics or criteria which help to develop and test your theory or argument". Mason (1996: 92)

suggests choosing a sample that can represent a wide population: particular "processes, types, categories or examples which are relevant to or appear within the wider universe". She further defines the sample as being "designed to provide a close up, detailed or meticulous view of particular units which may constitute cases which are relevant to or appear within the wider universe".

This study is based on ten case studies drawn from one organisation, with the aim of getting 'in depth' information about the psychological and emotional impact of experiences of the asylum process. The people who took part, whilst they all shared common experiences of asylum policy and process, had also experienced, at various times, different aspects of asylum policy. Asylum policy and process, and its effects and consequences, applies to the wider universe of asylum seekers; experiences of the process described by participants are relevant more widely.

Recruitment of participants

I decided to recruit participants for the research from the organisation where I worked for nine years as a practitioner, and invited people to take part in the research who knew me well and with whom relationships of trust were well established. I was aware of people's pre-flight experiences and of the psychological and emotional stress caused by their experiences. Bearing this in mind, I did not approach anyone who, during the research period, was receiving therapy for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). I did not want to risk either contributing to their stress or compromising the work of professional therapists by asking inappropriate questions. I also considered whether people possessed adequate English speaking skills to enable them to engage reasonably well with the interview process.

Of the people I initially approached, only one person declined to take part in the research. All of those who did take part were very eager to share their stories and experiences.

Introducing the participants

The participants comprised four women aged between 28 and 46, two of whom had been granted Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK (ILR), and two of whose asylum decisions were still pending at the start of the research (but have since been refused

asylum), and six men aged between 25 and 43 years. All of the men who took part have
now been granted ILR, although this was not the case at the start of the research. The
table below shows the countries from which participants have come, their length of time
in the UK at the start of the research, languages spoken, and asylum status at the start of
the research. Participants' names have been changed in order to preserve anonymity.

Name	Country of Origin	Age	M/F	Languages spoken	Length of time in UK	Alone or with family	Asylum status at start of research
Abdullah	Tunisia	42	M	Arabic, French, English	7 years	Alone	ILR
Ahmat	Chad	35	M	Arabic, French, English	11 years	Alone	ILR
Ashna	Iraq	28	F	Arabic, English	4½ years	With husband	Awaiting asylum decision
Etienne	Cameroon	43	M	French, English, Bangou	8 years	Alone	ILR
Franck	Democratic Republic of Congo	25	M	French, Lingala, Portuguese, English	9 years	Alone	ILR
Helène	Cameroon	35	F	French, Medumba, English	7 years	Alone	ILR
Kawa	Syria	36	M	Kurdish (Kurmangi), Turkish, Arabic, English	6 years	Alone	ILR
Marguerite	Cameroon	29	F	French, Bulu, English	3 years	Alone	Awaiting asylum decision
Muna	Ethiopia	46	F	Amharic, English, Japanese	6 years	Alone	ILR
Reza	Iran	39	M	Farsi/English	11years	Alone	Awaiting asylum decision

Addressing ethical issues in the research

According to Renzetti and Lee (1993: 6):

> Experience suggests that there are a number of areas in which research is more likely to be more threatening than in others. These include where research intrudes into the private sphere or delves into some deeply personal experience.

The nature of the questions being explored in this study alongside the vulnerability of the people taking part emphasised the need for sensitivity on the part of myself as researcher. I felt that my practitioner experience had contributed to the development of sensitivity when working with people who were struggling to come to terms with the effects of cumulative loss, and often traumatic experiences, and, in planning and designing the research, I sought to embed this sensitivity within the research process. However, reflection and evaluation following the pilot phase of the research revealed an area where I had failed to demonstrate a sensitive awareness of the past experiences of the participants. This issue will be addressed in the discussion of the pilot phase later in this chapter. In this section, I outline the ethical considerations that underpinned the research design.

At every stage of the research I have been aware of the impact of cultural differences. In some cultures it is considered dis-respectful to say "no" to a request. I tried to get around this by telling people about the research topic and inviting anyone who was interested in taking part to approach me, as well as directly inviting individuals to be participants in the research. All participants were given information sheets, explaining the purpose of the study and assuring them that they would not be named in the study. Signed consent was obtained from all participants, who understood that they had the right to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. The information sheets and consent forms were explained and discussed thoroughly. For all of the participants English was not their first language; it was extremely important to ensure that they understood what the research was about and what it was they were signing.

Whilst all those who took part in the study were eager to share with me their stories and their feelings, I was conscious that doing so left people open to the risk of becoming upset, depressed or re-traumatised. This led me to discuss the study with therapists from Freedom from Torture (formerly Medical Foundation for the care of Victims of

Torture) who agreed to have three clinicians available to whom I could refer any of the interviewees who may have been affected or suffered trauma either during or following their interview. Whilst it has not been necessary to take this up, I am extremely grateful to the staff of Freedom from Torture for making this option available.

I, as practitioner researcher, and the interviewees came to the interview situation with prior knowledge of one another. I had worked with some of the participants for several years prior to undertaking the research project; I knew their stories and experiences. I was faced with the ethical decision of whether I should utilise my prior knowledge of participants and include in my analysis stories and experiences that I knew about even though they had not emerged in the interview situation, or, at least, provide interview prompts to elicit the telling of these stories. I made the decision to work with the interview material as presented, even if I was aware of events or experiences the interviewee did not mention. Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (Wengraf 2001) of interview and analysis (which is discussed fully later in the chapter) enabled me to adhere to this decision.

Locating myself: practitioner research

> To adopt a research perspective one needs to stand back, to see a wider picture than
> is necessarily visible from the individual practitioner's workload (Fuller and Petch,
> 1995: 185).

It was often difficult as a practitioner to keep in focus the 'wider picture'. My work with asylum seekers over a period of nine years involved crisis management on an almost daily basis. Despite pressure and time constraints I was aware of the importance of relating to the 'whole person', the 'human being', and not simply the problem or crisis to be solved. I came to realise that the asylum seekers who attended the project not only needed help and support through the process of seeking asylum, they also needed their stories and their lives to be validated by being genuinely listened to. Having observed over time some of the effects the experience of seeking asylum had on people, I made the decision to step out of my practitioner role in order to study in depth the psychological and emotional impact of the asylum process on asylum seekers' sense of well-being.

Roles and relationships do not change overnight. Whilst, through a deliberate change of employment, I was able to step back from my practitioner role professionally, this was not the case emotionally. Not only was I still perceived as a practitioner by participants in the study, but also I found myself having to acknowledge the way in which my identity had become intrinsically bound up in the work I did. Moving away from the project in which I had played a key role left me feeling confused, sad and depressed. I had to somehow see myself as a researcher without having grown into the role. If I could not think of myself outside the practitioner role, how could I expect participants to do so?

Progressively during the course of this study, I have reached the understanding that the transition from practitioner to researcher does not exist, and that I am a practitioner doing research. I have not come to the research from a neutral position; I have come as a result of my concern for the psychological and emotional well-being of people seeking asylum. Acknowledging my subjectivity, I have taken reflexivity seriously, constantly questioning how much I use my existing knowledge and experience, and have been as open as possible in my scrutiny and analysis of data.

Advantages of doing practitioner research

Fuller and Petch (1995) and Fox et al (2007) identify some advantages to practitioner research which are summarised as follows and linked to my research:

1. *The practitioner researcher brings with her an in-depth knowledge of the field both from her professional background and her insider position.*

My professional background and intensive work with asylum seekers has given me in-depth knowledge not only of the issues faced by asylum seekers but also of the ways in which their daily lives are affected by asylum policy. This has enabled me to examine closely existing asylum policy and provided a framework for the study.

2. *Day to day experience gives insight into, and knowledge of, the real problems which face both clients and service providers.*

The insight gained from day to day experience has been a large part of the motivation for this study. I would agree that this is an advantage of practitioner research as long as practitioners remain aware of their subjectivity and are careful not to compromise the reliability and validity of the study through over-reliance on experiential and anecdotal evidence. Whilst this research was born out of my professional observations and

concerns, this was a starting point for reviewing other studies that have been carried out in the field as well as theoretical literature relating to the research questions. It is the relationship and connections between experience, theory, professional practice and data that validate the research. Whilst I did bring to this study in-depth knowledge and experience of the field of working with asylum seekers, I found that the concepts and theories which I explored in the literature added another dimension to my work, making sense of my own and participants' experiences, and enhancing both my understanding and my practice in the field.

3. *Trust has been established with clients.*

Trust does not come quickly or easily, particularly in the context of asylum seekers who, frequently, have suffered betrayal and have found themselves unable to trust anyone. Participants in this study have chosen to trust me in the sharing of personal stories, damaged emotions, hopes and fears. I do not think this would have been the case if trust had not been established and built up over a period of time during my work with them. The greatest area of trust was that I was undertaking this research for them and not for the UK Border Agency.

4. *The practitioner researcher often has existing, well-established relationships with clients.*

I would definitely count this as an advantage in this study. I have known all of the participants for at least two years, and some for eight years. During that time, as well as assisting with problems, I have been interested in and concerned about their feelings and well-being. This study is seen by them partly as an extension of my concern, and as an opportunity to give more time to the exploration and discussion of 'what it feels like'.

Challenges to practitioner research

Fuller and Petch (1995: 183), considering the challenges presented by practitioner research ask: "Can practitioners overcome difficulties stemming from their lack of experience and their putative insider bias, and produce results of reasonable rigour?" They go on to suggest four areas of challenge faced by novice practitioner researchers: 1) technical knowledge; 2) discipline and time management; 3) understanding and managing the shift from practitioner to researcher role, and 4) awareness throughout the research process of the values embedded in her (the researcher's) own thinking and the potential for bias.

The challenges presented by Fuller and Petch, apart from managing the shift from practitioner to researcher role, are relevant to everyone undertaking their first piece of research, whether from a practitioner or an academic perspective. The main challenge for me as a practitioner has been to develop confidence within the academic environment; at the beginning of the research I was extremely conscious of the huge theoretical gap in my knowledge. I had to learn the required skills as I progressed through the research process (and am still learning). Many of the theories, concepts and methodological approaches that I encountered through reading, attending lectures, and in discussions with supervisors and other post-graduate students, I was discovering for the first time. During the course of the research, through actually getting on with the work and through the support and advice I received from my supervisors, my understanding of theory and methods developed as these were applied to the research itself.

Time management, I think, will always be a challenge, particularly for part time researchers, but again, this has simply been a part of the overall experience and learning for me along with the acquisition of technical knowledge. As I pointed out earlier in this chapter, I have taken reflexivity seriously throughout this research and been aware of the values I bring to the research, seeing this acknowledged as subjectivity rather than "potential for bias".

It has been helpful for me to be aware of the challenges identified by Fuller and Petch. These have stimulated and encouraged reflexivity, which has contributed to the overall quality of the study. With regard to the question posed by Fuller and Petch (1995: 183) at the start of this section, I wish to answer "Yes". When challenges are acknowledged and become opportunities for learning and development, combined with the skills and experience practitioners bring to their research, they can "produce results of reasonable rigour".

The pilot study

In order to test out interview questions and responses I arranged to interview four of the ten participants who had agreed to take part in the research. I was interested in the psychological and emotional impact of the experience of seeking asylum in the UK.

Based on my observations as a practitioner and my reading on theories and approaches to well-being, I prepared nine interview questions which I hoped would facilitate discussion around this topic. The first interview question asked the interviewees to describe how they felt when they arrived in the UK. The questions which followed were intended to explore how feelings were affected and changed over time by the experience of seeking asylum. These questions addressed people's hopes and fears, which elements of their experience in this country had helped them to feel good, and what had made them feel bad, unhappy or anxious. The penultimate interview question invited interviewees to talk about how they felt at that point in time with regard to their experience of seeking asylum. The final question was not explicitly linked to the experience of seeking asylum. It asked interviewees: "What is important for you as a person for having a good life, and what do you think is important to help you feel like a full person?" The interviews were lightly structured. I used interview interventions and prompts during the interviews to encourage amplification and depth in the issues being discussed.

Lessons from the pilot interviews

I conducted these first interviews in participants' homes where I felt they would be relaxed and would have a sense of control. I had visited their homes before in my practitioner role and also as a guest on occasions. I found it difficult in the setting of people's homes to establish myself in the researcher role; I was welcomed by interviewees as a friend and honoured guest in their homes and presented with lavish meals. I was aware of the importance of hospitality and of the welcome that is always extended to guests in the cultures of the interviewees and felt unable to refuse their generous hospitality and risk causing offence. I knew from previous experience the importance to people, who often feel 'done to' and of little worth, of being able to 'give something back' through offering hospitality. I accepted that hospitality was part of the event for people; the interview sessions lasted around three hours.

When I began to transcribe the interview material I noticed that the depth of the responses and the flow of conversation varied considerably between the interview questions. The answers to questions relating to people's experiences as asylum seekers were often lacking in depth, answered quite precisely and almost in a vacuum. The most fluid, animated responses were in answer to the final question regarding what is

important for feeling like a 'full person'. These answers were not explicitly linked to the experience of being an asylum seeker, rather they were relevant to every human being in whatever walk of life.

It became clear that, whilst there were advantages to knowing the participants well, this prior knowledge had been a disadvantage in the interview situation. It occurred to me that, because I already knew about the participants' experiences, they had assumed that I would not want them to tell me what I already knew. This situation created for me an ethical dilemma of considering how much I could or should use my own prior knowledge of participants in interpreting the information given in the interviews.

As a result of this reflection, I arranged a second interview for each of the participants. I adopted a narrative approach for the second interview, inviting people to tell their stories, selecting the starting point for themselves. I explained that they could talk about anything they wanted to, anything that was important to them and that I wouldn't interrupt at all, but would take some notes and perhaps ask them some questions afterwards. Interviewees spoke about their lives in these interviews with much more depth and emotion than had been evident in the initial interviews. When I began to code and analyse the data from both the initial and the second interviews conducted in the pilot I was able to make connections between people's narratives and their experiences of seeking asylum, and to begin to identify links between data and theory.

I discussed my reflections on the experience of the pilot study with my thesis supervisors. We considered whether the semi-structured interview had been the best approach to gain the contextual, detailed stories of participants' lives. Perhaps a more open 'biographical narrative' approach would be more suitable. Further reading on the topic of research models and interview techniques (Silverman 2010; Mason 2002; Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou 2008; Wengraf 2001) enabled me to better understand the relationship between research models, interview techniques and the data generated in the interviews.

I now realised that by limiting the questions in the first pilot interview to people's experiences after their arrival in the UK I had neglected to acknowledge either their personal histories or their interview histories. It would have been perfectly reasonable

for interviewees to assume that I was either not interested in their personal histories or that, as a practitioner, I knew all that I needed to know. As Wengraf (2001: 44) comments:

> Both researcher and interviewee come towards the interview carrying all the positive and negative 'personal history' that each has.... The interviewer needs at least to get clear for herself the collective history which she shares with the interviewee and the histories which she imagines that they might well not share, prior to designing the interview.... History as a dimension includes feared and desired and expected 'futures' which may be affected by the interview interaction in the present.

It was inappropriate to attempt to isolate interviewees' present experiences, considering only their experiences of the asylum process. It became evident during the course of the study that there is barely any sense of 'present' for the interviewees in terms of how other people perceive the present. Interviewees are caught between memories and flashbacks of loss and trauma in the past and the fear of a possible future.

Alongside participants' narratives and personal histories, I had not appreciated the impact of their interview histories on the research interview experience. According to Wengraf (2001: 18):

> I am only likely to provide 'relatively safe interview experiences' for myself and my informants if I am fully aware both of the current social positioning of myself and my interviewee and ready to detect the impact of any collective and individual past experiences and 'potential interview identities' which I and they ineluctably bring to the interview.

In many countries from which interviewees have fled the term 'interview' is synonymous with 'interrogation' or 'torture', leading to imprisonment and possibly death. Their interview experiences since their arrival in the UK would have been cold, factual and threatening, involving police, immigration officials, UK Border Agency staff and court appeal hearings. In none of these situations would interviewees have been encouraged to acknowledge or speak about feelings or well-being. Each of these interviews would carry weight, their outcome having some impact, positive or negative, on people's asylum applications. It will have been extremely difficult for participants to feel positive and relaxed approaching any kind of interview.

Conducting the pilot study was immensely valuable in that it provided a methodological as well as a theoretical check point. Reflection on the interview experiences led me to further inquiry into qualitative methods and approaches, and finally to adopt Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method for the remainder of the research.

Narrative Approaches

Narrative inquiry as a method of analysis, according to Manning and Cullum-Swan (1994), is thought to have taken hold during the twentieth century with the Russian formalists' study of fairy tales and Strauss's analysis of myths. Bornat (2008) equates the beginning of the turn towards narrative approaches with the group of sociologists known as the 'Chicago School' (Strauss, Becker, Goffman and others) and their work over the first 40 years of the twentieth century which focused on the collection of direct testimony and observation under realistic conditions. At the same time Mead (1934) in his notion of 'the self' stressed the significance of language, culture and non-verbal communication alongside a focus on social interaction and reflection in the development of the individual's sense of who they are.

Fritz Schűtze (1977, 1992), influenced by the work of the Chicago school, is associated with the originating work that led to the development of the biographic interpretive method. According to Bruner (1986: 8) narrative inquiry's emphasis on how people understand themselves and their experiences began in the mid 1970s when "the social sciences had moved away from their traditional positivist stance towards a more interpretive posture". The interview method and its analysis was further refined by Rosenthal (2004) and developed into Biographic Narrative Interpretive Analysis. Biographic Interpretive Method has been developed by Chamberlayne and King (2000), Chamberlayne et al (2000, 2004) and Wengraf (2001). In his development of the method Wengraf details the complex procedure for interpreting biographical data.

Narrative Methods: advantages and challenges

Eastmond (2007: 250) comments:

> As representation, rather than documentation of reality, narratives become
> methodologically more complex, but also open up theoretically more interesting
> possibilities: for one, they make room for a more dynamic view of the individual as

subject, acting in the world and reflecting on that action.... They can tell us
something about how social actors, from a particular social position and cultural
vantage point, make sense of their world.

In this statement Eastmond acknowledges the challenge of the methodological
complexity involved in using narratives in research whilst recognising that narratives
have the advantage of moving beyond "documentation of reality" and exploring
subjective responses to experiences within personal, societal and political contexts. A
further advantage of narrative approach is that it enables such responses to be located
within a holistic 'life experience', and to be understood as resulting from the combined
influences of past, present and imagined future.

Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou (2008: 5), discussing the way in which narrative
stories are co-constructed during the interview by both researcher and interviewee, raise
a challenging question for narrative researchers:

Are narratives shaped by the audiences to whom they are delivered, and if so, to
what extent?

Consideration of this question requires constant reflexivity on the part of the researcher,
thorough, painstaking and careful analysis and interpretation of data from multiple
perspectives, and acknowledgement that "We as narrative researchers are crucially a
part of the data we collect, our presence is imprinted upon all that we do" (ibid: 17).
This could be construed as a disadvantage of using narrative approaches but, as
Eastmond (2007: 260) points out:

Many of the complexities of a narrative approach, notably the tension between
empirical and interpretive demands, between reality and its representation, are those
which most qualitative approaches have to tackle.

As Coffey and Atkinson (1996: 46) emphasise:

The move from coding to interpretation is a crucial one. Interpretation involves the
transcendence of 'factual data' and cautious analysis of what is to be made of them.

Narrative researchers must explicitly and seriously take up the challenges of
interpretation, and of their responsibility not only to address validity and reliability in
the research, but also to do justice to the lives and stories of the interviewees. Whilst
undertaking narrative research is complicated and involves challenges, as Eastmond

(2002: 248) comments: narratives "provide a site to examine the meanings people, individually or collectively, ascribe to lived experience".

This study: why a narrative approach?

Eastmond (2007: 251) emphasises the importance of narratives in beginning to understand the experiences of forced migrants in the way that "narrative can help us explore the radical discontinuities in the lives of displaced people, as well as the struggle to make sense of disruptive change." Good (1994: 145) suggests that: "predicament, human striving, and an unfolding in time toward a conclusion is central to the syntax of all human stories". This is not true in the case of asylum seekers' stories. Asylum seekers are, in fact, as Eastmond points out: "in the midst of the story they are telling, and uncertainty and liminality, rather than progression and conclusion, are the order of the day".

Kohli and Connolly (2009: 73), in their discussion of transitions for young people seeking asylum, point out the distinction between 'change' and 'transition', defining 'change' as "what happens to you" and 'transition' as "the ways in which you make sense of what has happened to you". 'Change' is described as being external, situational, event based and defined by outcome. It can happen quickly. 'Transitions', on the other hand, are internal, psychological, based on experience, defined in terms of processes, and always take time. They emphasise the importance of acknowledging and unpacking cultural, social and political aspects of past lives, reasons for leaving and the journey itself. Whilst Kohli and Connolly's work relates specifically to young people seeking asylum, I believe that it is equally important for adult asylum seekers to be able to make sense of their experience of transition through making connections between past and present experiences.

Through this study I aimed to explore not only points on the journey towards seeking asylum, but also the psychological and emotional impact of the journey on people. An intensive narrative approach was required to enable these connections to be made. By adopting a narrative approach in this study I sought to offer time and space for interviewees to begin to 'relocate' themselves within their own stories. The narrative interview allowed individuals to tell their stories in their own way and to decide for themselves what were important and central issues for them.

Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method

I adopted biographic narrative interpretive method (as expounded by Wengraf 2001) for interviews with the six participants who had not taken part in the pilot phase of the study. Whilst this was a complicated method to adopt as a novice researcher, after considering some advantages and limitations of BNIM I felt it was the most appropriate for this study.

Advantages

1. BNIM is person centred. The interviewee's choices regarding sequence and language throughout the narrative are respected and upheld. This was particularly important for this study since it allowed for the cultural diversity of interviewees, enabling people to tell their stories from the perspective of their own culture.

2. The five stages of analysis of interview material demand a thorough, systematic, in-depth engagement with and interpretation of the material. This provides rigour whilst, at the same time, preserving the authenticity and uniqueness of each narrative.

3. This method sets out clearly and systematically the steps that must be followed from interviews to analysis of material. This was helpful to me as a novice researcher.

Limitations

1. BNIM is time consuming both in terms of the interview processes and analysis of material.

2. This is a complex method requiring a great deal of patience and commitment from the researcher.

3. The amount of time required for this method places restrictions on the number of participants the researcher is able to include in the study.

Interviews

This approach comprises three sub-sessions over two interviews, the second sub-session occurring relatively soon after the first. The third sub-session requires analysis of the results of the first two sub-sessions and takes place separately at a later date.

Sub-session 1

This session was based on a single question, inviting interviewees to tell their own story. Wengraf (2001: 113) defines this as the "single question inducing narrative" (SQUIN). The idea is that the interviewee maintains control of the interview. He or she is not interrupted at all. The session ends when the interviewee has finished telling his or her story. Wengraf makes this point emphatically:

> The interviewee's primary response is determined by a single question (asking for a narrative) which is not followed-up, developed, or specified in any way during that sub-session. In this first sub-session, after the posing of the initial narrative-seeking question, interventions by the interviewer are effectively limited to facilitative noises and non-verbal support.

At the start of sub-session 1, I explained to interviewees that it would be the first of three interview sessions, agreeing with them that the second session would follow after a short break. I emphasised the fact that they could talk about whatever they wanted to in this session and phrased the question as Wengraf (2001: 119) suggests: "I would like you to tell me your life story, all the events and experiences which were important for you. Start wherever you like. Please take the time you need. I'll listen first, I won't interrupt, I'll just take some notes for afterwards."

Without exception interviewees began their stories with reminiscences of safe and happy times, describing the way life was for them "before my problem", and moving on to describe their present lives as asylum seekers. Questions that had been part of the pilot interview were being addressed in depth in the narratives, without any prompting or intervention from me.

The intersession gap

At the close of sub-session 1 there was a fifteen minute break, during which the interviewees could rest while I looked over the notes I had made during the session. My task was to highlight topics that had been raised by the interviewee during the course of the narrative and to prepare further narrative-pointed questions that would induce more narrative and elaboration of the topics. Wengraf (2001: 131-135) refers to these questions as "topic questions aimed at inducing narrative" (TQUINS), emphasising that they must be only 'narrative-pointed' questions aimed at extracting more story from the topics raised in sub-session 1.

Sub-session 2

The biographic narrative interpretive method sets out rules to be employed by the interviewer during the session: 1) topic questions raised during this session must follow strictly the order in which they were raised by the interviewee in sub-session 1; 2) the interviewer must use only the words (the language, key words and phrases) used by the interviewee. Wengraf (2001: 139) is very clear about the importance of adhering to these rules, he comments: "There are no exceptions to these rules: never go back to earlier topics, never combine topics. Always use their words and phrases for topics, never paraphrase or replace." He stresses that these rules are important because "the gestalt of the individual being interviewed must not be destroyed by the intervention of the interviewer" (Wengraf 2001: 138).

Adhering to Wengraf's rules facilitates and encourages ownership of the narrative by the interviewee, capturing the 'whole life' experience, the person's individual, unique experience: their understanding, their feelings, their perspectives rather than those of the interviewer. Although the interviewer may not understand why the sequence is as it is, she must respect the way in which the interviewee has chosen to tell his or her story.

Sub-session 3: preparation and interviews

The third session was conducted as a fairly fully structured depth interview. According to Wengraf (2001: 60):

> On the spectrum of interviewing, from the point of view of the interviewer designing the session, interviews vary from lightly structured to heavily structured; even more extremely, from the completely unstructured to the fully structured. The degree of 'structuring' refers to the degree to which the questions and other interventions within the interview are pre-prepared by the researcher.

He distinguishes between two meanings for 'depth':

1) To go into something 'in depth' is to get a more detailed knowledge about it.

2) To go into something in depth is to get a sense of how the apparently straight forward is actually more complicated, of how the 'surface appearances' may be quite misleading about 'depth realities'. (Wengraf 2001: 6).

I needed to address both of these meanings through the interview questions in order to gain understanding about how it felt for participants to experience life as asylum seekers, and how their subjective accounts of how they felt mapped on to theories of well-being.

In sub-session 3 interview questions are designed to address the theoretical concerns of the research and do not need to be explicitly linked to the narratives. Before formulating the interview questions for the session I undertook some preliminary analysis of the interview material from sub-sessions 1 and 2, identifying common and recurring themes both within and across the narratives. Referring back to the central research question, the three research questions and the theory, I began to see how the relationship between data and theory might be demonstrated in participants' accounts of their experiences.

I designed ten interview questions: the first four questions were concerned with the concept of well-being and where interviewees placed themselves on the scale of well-being; the next five questions related directly to aspects of the asylum process that had come up in sub-sessions 1 and 2, and the final question asked interviewees to consider what had a positive effect on their sense of well-being. By using material from the narrative accounts that had been produced in the two previous interview sessions I was able to base the third interview around issues that had been raised by the interviewees themselves which, I believe, facilitated fluent, in-depth responses to the questions. The interview was fully structured. I kept strictly to the ten pre-prepared questions for all of the six interviewees. However, interventions within the interview were not pre-prepared, any interventions I used were appropriate and relevant to each particular interview. The third interview took place two to three weeks after sub-sessions 1 and 2.

Analysis and interpretation of interview material
Data analysis within biographic narrative interpretive method involves precise and complicated techniques. I have attempted to follow the five stages of analysis outlined and discussed by Wengraf (2001: 234 – 293). In order to illustrate how I understood and applied the method, I have included in my discussion examples of my analysis of interviews.

1. *Lived life*
This first stage of analysis is concerned with the chronology of experiences in the lived life. It involves collecting up the stories the interviewee has told and attempting to establish some kind of order and sequence to the events to form a coherent whole.

Phoenix (2008: 65) points out that the analysis of narrative texts "attends not only to 'life' stories but also to material that is not neatly storied into beginning, middle or end or that appears incoherent". In the narrative interviews for this study all of the participants chose to 'begin at the beginning' by describing their lives before they made the decision to seek asylum. The narratives progressed mostly with a strong sense of chronology; however, at times when interviewees became upset or very emotional several experiences appeared to be combined, or one particularly important experience was recounted again in the middle of another topic.

2. *Told story*

In Wengraf's words (2001: 239):

> When we come to analyse a person's *told story*, we address not so much the events and actions, the happenings, that occurred in a person's life, but rather the way in which those events and actions were experienced and *are now understood from the perspective of the person giving the interview.*

This stage of analysis involves identifying when a topic is changed or the way a topic is spoken about by the interviewee has changed. These changes were most apparent when interviewees spoke retrospectively about the psychological and emotional effects of the experiences they had already described. An event or experience that had been described during the course of the narrative re-emerged at a later point in the interview and was seen by the interviewee from a different perspective. An example of this was a man who, during the course of the interview, described how being destitute for a number of years had left him feeling barely human; he didn't know how he'd managed to live through that time and felt that he had been permanently damaged by the experience. Towards the end of the interview, speaking about the same experience, he reported that he believed he was a stronger person because of it. Both of these perspectives are valid. I do not read them as being in opposition to each other, rather the interviewee is able to see a different perspective from outside the situation. Bruner (1987: 100) emphasises the fact that narratives should not be viewed simply as a record of what happened but rather as "a continuing interpretation and reinterpretation of experience".

3. *Thematic field analysis*

Wengraf (2001: 273) cites Gurwitsch (1964), who in his explanation of the notion of a 'thematic field', "stressed the way in which any particular theme or topic derives its

significance from the 'thematic field' from which it emerges and from which it takes its colouring". During this strand of the analysis themes and topics, their interrelation and their relation to the story as a whole, are identified and explored. My appreciation and understanding of thematic field analysis developed as I scrutinised and constantly revisited the interview material. I recognised, for example, that for one of the interviewees, every experience she described brought her back to her realization of how much she missed her mother.

4. *Microanalysis of verbatim texts*

Close up and detailed study of very small segments of text helps in exploring the relation of the lived life to the told story. It involves examining the significance of the speaker's choice to continue their account in the way that they did by considering how other alternatives were not chosen. I found that studying the very short phrases used by interviewees to either introduce, conclude or connect topics and themes often related to the thematic field of the interview. Short connecting phrases were frequently identified as being equally as important, in creating depth in the interviews, as detailed descriptions of events or experiences. In some interviews I felt that a short, simple phrase which the speaker used contained within it an entire frame of meaning. The most powerful example of this was the interviewee who, having begun her narrative by talking, animatedly and in detail, about life as it used to be ("I had a very nice life; I was free") moved on to talk in detail about her difficult and negative experiences as an asylum seeker in the UK. The phrase she used to connect the themes was: "Suddenly bad things happened in my life." This was the only story she offered in explanation of why she had left her country. My instinct and her body language told me not to ask for any more of that story.

5. *Identifying the case structure*

The final stage of biographic narrative interpretive analysis is, through reflection on the results of the previous four steps, to identify a non-narrative representation of the structure of the case (Wengraf 2001: 295). Wengraf suggests that this involves the researcher unpacking each interview in depth and identifying the central topic for the interviewee. I did this by assigning a title to each of the narratives which I felt characterized interviewees' accounts of their past and present experiences. Some of the

titles I used were: "life", "damage and loss", "living in the gap between dream and reality" and "house arrest".

Alongside the complex biographic narrative interpretive analysis I analysed and coded the data in terms of answers to the three research questions and the central research question. Throughout the whole of the process of analysis I referred back to theory, establishing connections between data and theory, and identifying the ways in which data validated theory, and theory supported and made sense of data.

Concluding remarks

Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method is complex and time consuming, but fitted well with the aims and topic of this study. The use of narratives evoked fluent, articulate, in-depth accounts from interviewees. The multiple tiers of analysis demanded serious, in-depth engagement with the interview material, encouraging and enabling me to 'see' the data in different ways.

The findings resulting from this analysis are discussed in chapters five and six.

Chapter 5

Frames of meaning: experiences in context

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the research question: "How does the experience of living between asylum application and decision affect people's psychological and emotional well-being?" Recognising that people do not begin the process of seeking asylum with their psychological and emotional well-being unimpaired, this chapter seeks to locate the experience of waiting for an asylum decision within the broader context of life histories. It is also a move towards the validation of participants' stories, recognising the whole life and the whole person, in order to better understand connections between past, present and imagined future.

The period between making an application for asylum and waiting for a decision is a time when asylum seekers are attempting to adapt to a different culture and lifestyle, coming to terms with flight and pre-flight experiences and traumas, and living with the fear and anxiety of not knowing their future. This constitutes the complex landscape in which asylum seekers exist from day to day. In this chapter the psychological and emotional impact of living with not only past and current losses, but also the loss of hope in an imagined future is examined.

Recurrent themes

Participants' narratives revealed something of the complex, multi-dimensional experiences of loss with which they were attempting to come to terms. Some spoke in detail about events prior to leaving their country whilst others were reluctant or unable to do so. Each interviewee told their own story in their own unique way, however there were embedded within every narrative, references to the loss of being part of a family, loss of language and culture, home, job and career. People identified events that had brought them to a point where life could not remain the same.

Portraits: two stories of loss

Kawa

Kawa is a 36 year old Kurdish man from Syria. He was imprisoned and tortured for three months in Syria following his arrest at a demonstration for Kurdish rights. He described this as:

> The time that changed my life. When I got home from the prison I was shocked and afraid. I felt like everything is gone and I couldn't talk about anything or about my experiences with my family. I had to hide to save my life.

Kawa walked for a day and a half across the mountains and across the border into Turkey. He was not welcomed there but knew he couldn't return to Syria. He learned that the authorities had arrested and tortured his younger brother in an attempt to find out where he had gone. Another brother was killed. Kawa paid an agent to bring him to the UK, a journey which took eleven days. He commented:

> It was horrible. I didn't eat. I didn't know where I was; I couldn't see anything but I felt I was safe for the first time in many months.

This outline summarises the opening section of Kawa's narrative in our first of three interview sessions. He began by identifying a turning point in his life, "the time that changed my life", and went on to speak about the consequences of that change and the sense of loss he felt. He returned home feeling "shocked and afraid" following his arrest and torture. He did not give an account of his experience in the prison during our interview, an experience he had also been unable to share with his family. All he could say was that he "felt like everything is gone". The organisation *Freedom from Torture* defines 'torture' as "taking a person's life without actually killing them". This definition makes sense of Kawa's description of how he felt. His experience was one of immense loss, a blanket feeling that "everything is gone". The "everything" was never explicitly broken down or unpacked, but there was a sense that Kawa had actually lost something of himself: his identity, his ideals, hopes, and his sense of freedom and safety – in essence, life as he knew it.

During the interview Kawa spoke of the overall sense of loss he felt, having left his country, culture, family and career. There was an overriding sense of the loss of his

homeland and everything associated with it "before his problem". He spoke animatedly and with great passion about places and customs in the Kurdish regions of Syria. He showed me video clips from the internet, describing places and past experiences in great detail. He located his village and his former home on google earth, telling me about his favourite walks, his neighbours and friends. He recalled proudly his work as an electrical engineer, the responsibilities and duties he once held, and his friendships at work.

I felt that through sharing the story of his former life Kawa was able to re-establish some of the identity he had lost, reminding himself of his capabilities and past achievements. He described himself as a person "fighting to survive", made stronger by the difficult experiences he had endured. His strength is a fragile strength, held together by both hope and loss. There are times, he explained, when not only a sense of loss but also the feeling that he, himself, is 'lost' overwhelms him. In his words:

> I feel I am lost, I have nothing. No family, no chance, no choice. My heart is still broken. I feel very bad.

The basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy, described in Self Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci 2000) are not being met in Kawa's life. His competence as an electrical engineer is not being exercised; he has lost the sense of belonging (relatedness) which he once shared with his friends, neighbours, work colleagues and family, and he feels that he is no longer able to exercise choice in the way that he once did.

Ahmat

Ahmat is a 35 year old man from Chad. His experience of loss is dominated by the trauma of seeing his father murdered in front of him. He explains:

> The worst thing happened in 2000 when my father has been killed. He was killed in front of us. It is very sad when you see these things, very very sad. It is the worst thing that happened.

During our interview Ahmat made five explicit references to the murder of his father in front of him. He listed other losses he had suffered: the opportunity to complete his higher education studies, his freedom and then his health, dignity and self esteem through torture. Finally, through having to flee his country, he lost his language, culture

and family. As he recounted these multiple losses and the trauma attached to them, Ahmat repeatedly compared each one to "the worst thing". They were bad but nothing compared with his witnessing the murder of his father. Everything was linked back to that event.

Ahmat's account of loss provides an example of the third stage of analysis of interview material in BNIM - thematic field analysis. Gurwitsch (1964: 319-323) defines the thematic field as:

> the totality of items to which a theme points and refers.....and which forms the context within which the theme presents itself....The *appearance of a theme* must be described *as emergence from a field* in which the theme is located as occupying the centre so that the field forms a background with respect to the theme. The theme carries a field along with it so as not to appear or be present to consciousness except as being in, and pointing to, the field.

At the centre of the field of Ahmat's experiences of trauma and loss is located his witnessing of the murder of his father. Whilst this event is contained within that field, it is undoubtedly for him "the worst thing".

Family and belonging

All the participants, at some point in their interview, described life "before their problem", sharing memories of happier times, stories of childhood and family life. Those who had brought photographs were eager to show them and to point out family members. This was with an edge of sadness and an unmistakable sense of loss. There was also a sense that it was very important for people to be able to share some of their past and family life, that it identified them as human beings rather than just asylum seekers with a label and a problem. Ashna (age 28, from Iraq) explained how hard it felt to live without family:

> We think about our family. We've got family as everyone has. It's really hard to stay away from your family for five years and more. I have a mother and I'm afraid I'll forget about her. Sometimes I can't remember what her face is like. That's really hard. It's as hard as you could possibly imagine to live without family.

The absence of a sense of belonging and being part of a family was a recurring theme throughout the interviews. However, participants expressed their feelings that the asylum seeker support project they regularly visited provided some sense of family and belonging. This was extremely important to them, and something they appreciated and valued highly. Ahmat (age 35, from Chad), speaking about the project, explained:

> They are like my family here. Since I came here this is like my house. I cry sometimes because I have too much stress. When I'm at the support group, it's not the problem I have that is the most important thing for me; it's the fact that someone will always sit down and talk with me. It's respect, and that makes it like a family.

Alongside the loss of family and friends, participants described the pain and stress of not belonging. Many had experienced verbal or physical abuse (sometimes both) from strangers on buses and in the street, neighbours and people in shops. Marguerite (age 29, from Cameroon) commented:

> Sometimes the neighbourhood wasn't good for me. People there were treating me really badly, sometimes banging on my door, throwing eggs at my window and dumping rubbish outside my door. I was so scared of them. I felt I wasn't safe; they could do anything to me.

Nussbaum's list of ten central capabilities was created through her desire to develop a version of the Capabilities Approach that "focuses on the protection of areas of freedom so central that their removal makes a life not worthy of human dignity" (Nussbaum 2011: 31). Three of the capabilities listed were absent for Marguerite in the situation she described:

- *Bodily Integrity*: Able to move freely from place to place; secure against violent assault.
- *Emotions*: Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety.
- *Affiliation*: (A) Able to live with and toward others; (B) Having the social bases of self respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others.

Lost years

At the time of the third and final research interview, eight of the ten participants had been granted Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK (ILR), two of them having been granted ILR during the course of the study. Participants were unanimous in identifying the psychological and emotional effects of waiting for their asylum decision as the most difficult and stressful aspect of the asylum process. Even after Leave to Remain had been granted, talking about the waiting time evoked powerful emotions for interviews.

Many of the participants felt that a part of their lives had been lost, not in the sense of being eradicated or non-existent, but rather in terms of what life could or should have been like for them had they been allowed opportunities and freedom to flourish. Instead they felt that they had been immobilised both by fear and by restrictive asylum policies. Ahamat (age 35, from Chad) waited eight years to receive his asylum decision. He described how he felt during that time:

> It terrorises your brain. It controls everything. You're just sitting like in prison, just a life in prison – not able to do anything. Eight years that means you don't have any life. I was totally traumatised, just waiting, waiting. You cannot feel human. It's very difficult to live through that time. It goes on affecting you after you have status. It's lost time, you can't get it back.

Reza (age 39, from Iran) explained how after waiting for ten years for his asylum decision, he now felt that some of the psychological and emotional damage he had sustained during that period would never be repaired. He commented:

> There's been nothing positive over these ten years. The time has gone really slowly. There's no happiness, you have no energy and your hope is gone. One year is too much: ten years is terrible. I'm never going to be the same person I was ten years ago. I still can't stop thinking about it. It's a prison, the prison of just not knowing. It was like being tortured every day. It's always on your mind. Maybe physically you have your needs met – food, home – but emotionally there's a lot of damage. I'm sure I'm a different person because of this experience. I'm not strong like before, I'm not happy. It's a long time, ten years, and this waiting becomes a huge part of your life. I can't do the things I need to do. Because I was an asylum seeker for a long time I couldn't do anything for myself and I've lost so much of the experience I had,

and so much confidence in myself. After so long you begin to forget about who you are and lose your skills. That gap has been really important.

Life on hold

Earlier studies (McColl et al 2008; Steel et al 2006) have identified prolonged waiting for the outcome of an asylum application as having an adverse effect on psychological well-being. Stewart (2005) conducted 45 in-depth interviews with asylum seekers with the aim of understanding the everyday experiences of asylum seekers living in the UK, and particularly their vulnerability over time. She refers to asylum seekers' existence "in a permanent state of 'in-betweenness', a liminal condition" (p 501), where daily life is dominated by the immigration decision and fear of deportation.

Interviewees in this study spoke of living in a state of suspended animation. They felt unable to engage with life in the present; the present was swallowed up by their overriding and immobilising fear of an unknown future. Despite English not being their first language, interviewees' portrayals of how it felt to live with 'life on hold' were illuminating and articulate. Etienne (age 43, from Cameroon) compared his situation to "someone who has a death sentence". Helène (age 35, from Cameroon) described the waiting time as "five years of complete nightmare". She continued:

I was spending all evening, all night crying. I spent all my life crying, all those five years of crying day and night. And having a baby and crying with the baby in your arms is not a good sign. Even when I was bathing the baby I was crying at the same time. It's terrible. The baby knows nothing about the situation but I couldn't hold my tears, I couldn't.

For Etienne and Helène, Nussbaum's central capability of "not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety" was not accessible.

Ashna (age 28, from Iraq) summed up how it felt to live with this sense of suspended animation:

Our lives and our feelings are turned off. We just wait. It's like when you watch television and press the pause button, everything stops, life is turned off. Also, I feel somehow that I'm frozen, I'm just not moving, even my age. I'm now 28 but I still think that I'm 24. I'm getting older from the outside but when I look back and see

what I've done in these four years I don't find anything to talk about. I've done
nothing. I'm just waiting.

Concluding remarks

This chapter locates participants within an immense and unrelenting landscape of loss in
which multiple and complex experiences of loss of past, present and imagined future,
merge to compose the context in which people live between asylum application and
decision. The sense of living with life on hold appears to add to life a dimension that is
only fully understood by those who have experienced it. The greatest and saddest loss
that interviewees identified seemed to be the progressive diminishing of identity and
self .

Whilst this chapter has focused on experiences of loss, Ahmat's comments about the
support group highlight the need for a sense of family and belonging, and the
importance of projects that are able, in some way, to address that need.

In chapter six the daily lives of asylum seekers are examined, specifically in terms of
how living as an asylum seeker impacts on people's freedom, choice and autonomy.

Chapter 6

Freedom: dream and reality

Introduction

This chapter focuses on two research questions: 1) How does the experience of seeking asylum in the UK impact on asylum seekers' sense of autonomy, choice and freedom? 2) How important are the concepts of autonomy, choice and freedom to notions of what it means to 'be human'?

'Freedom' constitutes one of the frames of meaning within which asylum seekers' lives are placed. They wait, hoping for a future that will enable them to live and embrace a life free from fear, persecution or danger. This is the 'big' (upper case) 'freedom'. Paradoxically, while they wait for a decision regarding their application for asylum, they are denied the multiple, small freedoms that are taken for granted by ordinary citizens.

Participants have identified aspects of asylum policy and process that impact on their sense of freedom and have spoken of the physical, psychological and emotional effects of restrictive asylum policies. In this chapter the relationship between these policies and asylum seekers' experiences of loss of freedom is discussed within the framework of four themes: 1) Loneliness and isolation; 2) Prison and surveillance; 3) Stigmatisation and 4) Destitution. Finally, the overall loss of freedom as a dimension of life and the question of how important this dimension is to one's sense of feeling fully human is considered.

The areas of asylum policy referred to in this chapter (dispersal, accommodation and financial support, reporting to immigration authorities, section 4 support, destitution) are outlined in Chapter 2 of the thesis which can be referred to for further detail.

Loneliness and Isolation

Following dispersal and allocation of accommodation, asylum seekers are faced with the task of adapting to life in the UK and within the communities in which they are

placed. Stewart (2005) argues that asylum seekers' ability to adapt and to 'belong' is hampered by their social exclusion. She defines social exclusion in this context as "a process that is simultaneously social and spatial" (Stewart 2005: 504). Referring to restrictive asylum policies as mechanisms of exclusion and policies of deterrence, she concludes that: "Asylum seekers are paradoxically excluded from the cityscape within which they are forced to exist" (Stewart 2005: 507).

Many of the respondents in this study described feelings of loneliness, isolation and 'not belonging', echoing Stewart's findings. Their sense of isolation and loss, having fled their home country, was exacerbated by their experiences of dispersal and the absence of any choice in the accommodation they were allocated.

Dispersal

Dispersal is the policy adopted by the UK Border Agency for the allocation of asylum seekers to particular UK cities where they are obliged to stay during the period when their asylum application is being processed. Accommodation is provided on a no choice basis; if someone refuses the accommodation they have been allocated they are left with nowhere to live and no financial support. Participants in this study described how dispersal was difficult and unsettling for them, especially those who had begun to establish support networks within the places they lived on first arriving and from which they were subsequently moved. As Helène commented:

> I had been moved to Newcastle. I had to keep travelling back to Birmingham for appointments with the solicitor. That's how my life in Newcastle started. When they put me in the house in Walker I didn't know anybody at all. I spent many days and weeks on my own in the house. I couldn't even go out. When they brought me to the accommodation they showed me the Post Office and one shop, that's all. Once a week I collected my money from the Post Office and did my shopping in one shop and then went back to the flat. I had no courage. I had got used to Birmingham where I had gained confidence but here in Newcastle I was afraid again. I didn't know how I would be able to cope. (Helène, age 35, from Cameroon).

At the time of her interview Ashna had been in the UK for four and a half years with her husband. The couple was dispersed initially to Leeds and then to Newcastle. During the interview Ashna was anxious to convey her gratitude for the roof over her head; she

didn't wish to appear to be ungrateful, but she also spoke of the emotional and psychological effects of living in the accommodation and of not having any sense of choice or autonomy. She commented:

The Home Office can say whether or not I can stay in this country but why can't I have the right to say where I want to live? I've tried to study English, not very well, but now I'm losing Arabic words. I don't have friends here. Where are the Arabic friends here? Where are the Arabic families? There are maybe three or four. They're all getting depressed. No one wants to speak to other people. It's not right. If we were living in another place like London where there is a big Arab community it might be easier for us. I'll never forget the first eight months when I was here. I forgot how to have a conversation with a woman. All my husband's friends were single and they would come here and he would visit them but I didn't speak a single word in my own language with any Arabic woman for eight months. That upset me very much. I just cried and I felt that I'd forgotten how to speak. I needed someone to help me; it was really sad. Just imagine for eight months not being able to speak with a woman. Every day I just spoke with my husband about our case and what the future might be for us and we both got depressed. This wasn't my dream; this wasn't what I had hoped for. I felt like I was living completely alone in this world.   No friends, no women to talk with. (Ashna, age 28, from Iraq).

Ashna's account of her initial experience of living in Newcastle was one of acute loneliness. The environment was new and strange, the future was uncertain but the worst aspect for her was summed up in the comment: "No friends, no women to talk with." leading her to say that she had "forgotten how to speak". She had come from a culture where great importance is placed upon relationships with other women. In many ways in Arab countries men and women inhabit different worlds; female friendship and companionship had been a huge part of Ashna's world and it was now absent from her life. Not only had she lost the companionship and support of other women but also, alongside this, her sense of cultural identity. She went on to describe what it was like to live in the high rise flat she had been allocated:

In this block where we are, all of the neighbours take drugs. They bang on doors at two and three o'clock in the morning. There is no neighbour I can have a relationship with. I can't get in the lift because some of the people are really horrible. I need to be with my husband all the time. I can't go anywhere alone. It's not safe for me to

go and buy milk or anything. The people here don't like me wearing my muslim scarf. They say, "Why are you wearing that in this country?" They don't respect me, but nobody cares. It's like being in prison but the door is open.

Vansteenkiste, Ryan & Deci (2008: 192) argue that the psychological need for relatedness "is satisfied only by the experience of supportive, caring relationships in which people feel significant and respected". It is clear from the transcript that Ashna feels neither significant nor respected; in fact she feels that "nobody cares".

McColl et al (2008) identify the policy of dispersal as a key factor in their research on aspects of the asylum system which can compound the impact that social isolation, poverty and cultural alienation have on the mental health of asylum seekers. They discuss the knock-on effects of dispersal in terms of destabilising social networks and disrupting continuity of care.

Palmer & Ward (2007) discuss the effects of dispersal and the lack of adequate, suitable housing on asylum seekers' feelings of isolation, vulnerability and loneliness, describing asylum seekers and refugees as being amongst the most vulnerable and socially excluded people in our society.

Prison and Surveillance

Cohen (2006: 20) asserts that "Lack of immigration status and absence of freedom are becoming synonymous". He is referring specifically to the increasing numbers of asylum seekers who are 'imprisoned' in detention and removal centres. Whilst the participants in this study were not physically held in detention centres, they spoke of being treated like criminals and of living such restricted lives that they felt as if they were in prison.

Participants spoke of how they were watched and monitored by UKBA and of the restrictions placed upon them in terms of accommodation, reporting to immigration authorities and the denial of the right to work or to undertake higher education. Abdullah (age 42, from Tunisia) described the way this felt:

The situation in which I live is a real psychological torture. There is no physical

torture, but imagine if you are not allowed to live anywhere, without permission to move to another city or permission to visit for longer than four nights. It's like house arrest. So many times we have to prove we are in the place we have been allocated to live. We sign at immigration, we collect our money every week at the post office – that's a way of controlling us – because if we don't go at the time we are told to go we can be arrested. The card is electronic, linked to the Home Office, they know when we've been into the post office. We have to be visited by asylum seeker unit staff at least once each month. At least six times in four weeks we are checked up on. We have to prove we are in the place we have been allocated. Who knows how many other ways we are watched and checked? I don't feel free.

Reporting to Immigration

Asylum seekers' weekly cash allowance is collected from a nominated post office on presentation of the person's ID card (ARC). The card is activated only by the person reporting to an Immigration Reporting Centre at a designated time either weekly, fortnightly or monthly. If someone misses their appointment at the Reporting Centre the card is not activated and no cash payment is available at the post office. As well as feeling that having to report to Immigration is a restriction of freedom, all of the respondents described the fear and emotional stress they experienced whenever they had to attend their reporting appointment, as Ahmat, (age 35 from Chad) indicated:

> Every month when you go it means there is a plane ready to send you back to your country. That's all you are thinking about all the time. I know many people who cry every time they have to go to Immigration. Everybody is really scared there. You sit down to wait for your turn. Sometimes they call you into a room for an interview. They take photographs of you. That means you are ready for when they deport you. It's so hard. You feel very, very scared. Every month when I had to sign I had big stress. You came from stress and they want to send you back to it.

Helène (age 35, from Cameroon) spoke emotionally during our interview about how she felt she was treated by staff at the reporting centre:

> The way you are treated at the Immigration Reporting Centre shows you that you have no rights whatsoever. Why do they have to make us like criminals and treat us so badly? We haven't done anything wrong; we are just asking for support. No

matter how badly they treated you, you couldn't speak up. You just had to listen to
them and stay quiet.

No Right to Work

For many respondents denial of the right to work increased their sense of feeling like a
prisoner. As Marguerite (age 29, from Cameroon) commented:

I'm forced to get benefit from the Post Office and some people make it clear that they
are not happy about it. I would like to be able to get my money by working for it.
It's horrible because you are not in prison but you feel that you are in prison. You're
not free. I think it's very, very horrible when people don't have freedom.

Denial of the right to work, as well as restricting freedom and choice, has been
identified as a factor that contributes to stigmatisation for asylum seekers (Silove et al
2000; McColl et al 2008).

Stigmatisation

All the participants in this study have spoken of the feeling of stigmatisation that
pervades all aspects of daily life as an asylum seeker. Negative coverage in the media
and consequent public perception of asylum seekers has resulted in the label 'asylum
seeker' carrying negative connotations. The stigma of being perceived as an asylum
seeker rather than as a 'human being' brings with it a loss of dignity and self worth: a
feeling of not being a full human being.

Reza arrived in the UK from Iran in September 2000. During our first interview in
February 2011 he described how it felt to have lived as an asylum seeker for over 10
years. At the point of this interview Reza was still waiting to hear the outcome of his
asylum application. He commented:

It's really bad when you feel you just can't do ordinary things. This support, I can't
say it's not enough. For asylum seekers it's about feeling safe, having a roof over
your head and enough food to survive. That's what I tell myself; I'm happy with that.
It works for a short time but after you've been in that situation for a long time it's
difficult. You need things like clothes and shoes. You can survive for a short period
but then it's really hard. You wish you had the freedom to even buy a pair of shoes.
You're always looking at things that you couldn't possibly buy for yourself.

Eventually when the situation goes on and on it makes me feel really small and

uncomfortable. Freedom is the first thing I need. That's, I think, a basic right for me,

choice. You can't choose to move, you can't go for a holiday, you can't get married if

you have a girlfriend; you can't have a good life. You can't live a full life; you can't

have a fair life. It's really bad, just bad. Without freedom you can't do anything.

(Reza, age 39, from Iran).

This comment exemplifies the notion of 'vulnerability over time' (Stewart 2005). Reza

articulated that it was the on-going experience of not living a full life that eventually

wore him down and made him "feel really small and uncomfortable". It was not only

about poverty of resources, not being able to afford clothes and shoes; it was

intrinsically linked to what Reza described as the basic rights of freedom and choice.

The restrictions he went on to list (moving house, going on holiday, getting married) are

fundamental freedoms that are taken for granted by most citizens, who would be

outraged at the prospect of being completely excluded from even the possibility of these

things.

During his interview Reza used the phrase "I'm just asylum seeker" four times. Asylum

seeker had become the term by which he identified himself and by which he understood

he was perceived by others. He commented:

I've been here 10 years and when I talk to people and meet somebody the first thing

they ask me is, 'What are you doing for your life?' I just say, 'I'm asylum seeker, I'm

not doing anything.' And that really worries me, that makes me feel really small in

this country. You're not comfortable if you're just asylum seeker. When I was in Iran

I had work; I could answer when I was asked ,'What do you do?' I could answer and

feel proud of myself. I was doing something I loved. Here I'm just asylum seeker.

Sometimes I lie because I don't want to say I'm asylum seeker. I feel worse then than

when I admit to being asylum seeker because I feel ashamed that I have lied. I have

no confidence in myself.

This text highlights the absence of all of the three psychological needs for competence,

relatedness and autonomy, identified in Self Determination Theory as required for

human flourishing (Ryan & Deci 2000). Reza was extremely conscious of his status as

'just asylum seeker' and all that is associated with the term 'asylum seeker'. His need for

competence was no longer satisfied; he compared his current situation with how he felt

when he was able to do something he loved and to feel proud of himself. His life

without choice and without the freedom to make decisions for himself left him feeling that he couldn't do anything and couldn't relate to other people without feeling shame and embarrassment because of his asylum seeker status. When he tried to get around this by lying about his circumstances he felt worse than ever.

Section 4 Support

Section 4 Support comprises provision of accommodation plus a section 4 'azure payment card' to use to buy food and essential toiletries to the value of £35.39 per person per week. No cash is given. Spending with the azure card is limited to certain shops, usually large supermarket chains, and is monitored so that UKBA can track where a person has shopped and what he or she has purchased. Check out operatives are aware that the card is only used by asylum seekers; those who shop with it feel stigmatised, ashamed and embarrassed. As Kawa (age 36, from Syria) pointed out:

About the azure card, blue card: that place is only understood by asylum seekers. I lived without cash for almost four years while I waited for a decision on the judicial review. You can't buy anything from the pharmacy. You can't go to the butcher to buy meat. Maybe you want to buy traditional food from your country, special meat or bread, you can't buy it without cash. You can't go anywhere. You can't always visit your friends because you have no cash to buy travel tickets or pay fares. You feel you are sub-human. You don't feel you have rights. You wish you could do something to support yourself but you can't. The Home Office don't think about that. They create pressure for us to take away our choice. It's very hard to live without any cash. I can't buy a bus ticket for £1.50. And they know that if you have that card you're an asylum seeker. You feel small and you feel that nobody cares about you. Everyone looks at you in a bad way; you don't really feel human. That feeling – sometimes I just wanted to cut my throat in front of them all. Sometimes I could exchange a voucher for cash with someone who could use it to buy things but they only paid me £30 cash for a voucher worth £35. I have £30 to survive; he has an extra £5 for nothing.

When the azure card was first introduced asylum seekers were allowed to use it to pay for store gift cards or vouchers. These could be sold on for cash which provided the asylum seekers with more choice about how to spend their allowance. Because people were not always paid the full value of the vouchers some voluntary sector groups and

charities initiated schemes where they paid the full rate for vouchers and gift cards from asylum seekers on section 4 support and sold them on to individuals who were part of a scheme to support asylum seekers in their situation. This worked very well, providing people on section 4 support with a degree of choice, autonomy and dignity. However, UKBA changed the rules, prohibiting the use of azure cards to purchase store vouchers of any kind. Since this did not alter the amount of support received, one can only deduce that this rule was introduced in order to restrict the freedom and choice of asylum seekers on section 4 support. Speaking of the pressure and stigma of living without cash and, subsequently, with extremely restricted choice, Kawa referred to feeling sub-human, small and that nobody cared.

Sabina Alkire, in her discussion of approaches to measuring freedoms alongside well-being, argues that "any adequate measure of freedom must consider not only the functioning and autonomy directly related to it, but also whether the process undermined other basic capabilities and human rights (for example, if the process of obtaining food was degrading or dangerous or dis-empowering)" (Alkire 2007:99). The experience of shopping with the Section 4 azure card, as described by Kawa and other interviewees, felt both degrading and dis-empowering for them. Living on £35 per week was difficult in itself but made worse by the fact that recipients were restricted in terms of what they were able to purchase and where they could shop, denied access to cash, and subject to the stigmatisation associated with the azure card.

Sen (1985, 1992, 2002) views agency not as one dimension of well-being but as being central to the process of freedom. He asserts that the activity of choosing can be a valuable part of living in itself and the extent to which a person is free to choose how to live his life is closely related to human well-being. He writes:

> We are, of course, interested in outcomes such as being affluent, or creative, or fulfilled, or happy, but we can also value being able to choose freely, or not having interference by others in the way we live. (Sen 2002: 623)

Destitution

Following a negative determination of an asylum application, many asylum seekers are not returned to their country of origin. They are, instead, forced to leave their

accommodation and their right to financial support is removed. Destitution can be long term since the people affected are no longer on the radar; they become invisible – non-persons. These people have no right to work, no recourse to public funds, nowhere to live and no means of helping or supporting themselves. They are left powerless, at the mercy of friends and charities. Many are referred to as sofa surfers, spending one or two nights each week with different friends. In Newcastle there are a few charities who provide destitute asylum seekers with a small cash payment (£15) and a food parcel each week.

Being destitute is physically and psychologically damaging and utterly humiliating. Over time individuals become worn down as the last vestiges of freedom and choice are taken from them. What more can be lost or taken away apart from life itself? Four of the participants in this study experienced periods of destitution: one person for three weeks whilst waiting for a Section 4 application to be processed, one for two years and two people for six years. A fifth participant has been made destitute during the course of the study.

Franck arrived in the UK at the age of 16 and was initially supported under the rules for unaccompanied asylum seeker children. By the age of 19 his asylum application had been refused and he was made destitute. Franck lived for six years without any accommodation or support whilst he struggled to re-open his asylum case. He was eventually granted Leave to Remain in the UK in 2011. He now feels that there is a huge gap in his life caused by those years of destitution, fear and uncertainty. He explained that he is left struggling to rebuild his life:

> It was a bit hard: no right to work, I have to beg in charities, like I was crazy. It was the hardest experience I ever had in my life. I mean no respect. You can't do nothing; you have to beg. I'm thinking that I am a little person. It's not life for someone. I was living just for the sake of living. It was a hard experience. It's still hurting now. I'm struggling for life. I was too young (16) when I came; now my age is going up and no plan has been done when I was young so I've missed a big part in my growing up. Now I'm just struggling to catch up. (Franck, age 25, from DRC).

Etienne came to the UK from Cameroon in 2004. He was not told how to claim asylum by the people who brought him. Etienne was told that, because he had not claimed

asylum immediately he arrived in the country, his story was not believed and he was not eligible for any support from UKBA. He was imprisoned for two months for working illegally. He was destitute for six years before eventually being granted Leave to Remain in the UK. He commented:

> Being in a situation like that I think was the most difficult time of my life. You wake up in the morning and you don't know where you'll be at the end of the day and when you go to bed you don't know if – because always they come in the night – you don't really know if you will be there tomorrow. Your life is just nothing because you just don't know what's going to happen the next day, the next month or the next year. Truly it's a really difficult situation. I can't even imagine now how I managed to live through that time. I have no words to explain what it's like. You're not a human being, just something breathing. (Etienne, age 43, from Cameroon).

Interviewees described the experience of destitution in terms of being "the hardest experience I ever had in my life" (Franck); "the most difficult time of my life" (Etienne). When the experience of destitution in this country is described in these terms by individuals who have fled their homelands, lost family, friends, culture, career and possessions, it gives some idea of the physical, psychological and emotional impact it can have on people. It becomes a part of the whole experience of loss and suffering, building upon pre-flight and flight experiences and trauma: an accumulation of loss, layer upon layer upon layer. All the interviewees who experienced destitution spoke of the permanent effect it has had on them. As Etienne commented:

> I'm not the same person now. When you are trapped in the same situation for years and years you end up having some trouble. Mentally I'm not the same, because if you spend nights and days without sleeping for many months and wake up night after night, every hour, just thinking about what could happen to you, it's something really difficult. Even now I still feel the consequences of that situation. I have headaches all the time; I still can't sleep as a result of all that time when sleep was too difficult. (Etienne, age 43, from Cameroon).

Freedom: 'Snapshot' and 'Movie'

Participants have spoken about their experiences of aspects of the asylum process that restrict or remove freedom, choice and autonomy and described how they feel they have

been affected psychologically, physically and emotionally. These discrete areas of asylum policy and practice present 'snapshots': images of a particular situation at a given point in time. However, each loss of freedom combines to form part of a bigger picture (the 'movie'), in effect, the multiple small freedoms that make up the larger concept of freedom. This image of the cumulative effect of the loss of freedom in so many aspects of life is summed up in Ashna's comment: "It's all a part of my life: when I'm losing the little things I'm losing big things." As she said:

> This is not the life I hoped to live. In my opinion life is not just about a house and enough food. It means more than that. It means a decision I can take; it means that I don't agree to be as a child who just waits for another person to provide food and clothes to wear. I need to be something. I want to make my own decisions. I want to be my own. This is not me but I have no choice. I can't have the choice to work and look after my own needs. It's about choice and being able to provide my own needs. It's all a part of my life: when I'm losing the little things I'm losing big things. If only I could have had rights for these four and a half years. I might have had certificates and maybe a job. But they won't let me do anything. Do I not have the right to decide what I'm able to do? If only they knew. I'm a person, I'm human. (Ashna, age 28, from Iraq).

Ashna described not only the absence of choice in specific areas of her life but also what she felt was the loss of a whole dimension of her life: the freedom to choose and to take decisions – an important and vital component of what it means to be human. "I need to be something. I want to be my own." She referred to life as "a decision I can take". She longed for a sense of freedom and autonomy: "I don't agree to be as a child". Her need to be something encompassed the psychological need for competence as well as autonomy (Ryan & Deci 2000). She had lost something of herself, something that defined her as a free person with control over her own life; she no longer felt that she had ownership of herself or her life. "Do I not have the right to decide what I'm able to do? I'm a person, I'm human." Through her choice of language and the structure and sequence of the sentence she used, Ashna made an explicit link between the right to make decisions and being human.

Ashna's connection between having the freedom to make choices about her life and feeling like a full human being resonates with the question raised by Nussbaum (1988:

266): "What circumstances of existence go to define what it is to live the life of a *human being*, and not some other life?", which led her to draw up her list of ten central capabilities (outlined in chapter three of this thesis). Nussbaum's list, whilst concerned with the meeting of basic needs such as food and shelter, demands that all needs are met in a way that enables "human dignity". Nussbaum emphasises 'practical reason' – to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life – as a core capability.

Throughout the asylum process, asylum seekers are denied the capability of 'practical reason'. Participants have described the feeling of living with 'life on hold' during the period between asylum application and decision as immobilising, dominating all of their thoughts and leaving them with a sense of powerlessness and a level of anxiety that renders them incapable of engagement in critical reflection about the planning of their lives. From the moment they enter the United Kingdom asylum seekers begin to experience loss of control over their lives through the restriction and removal of freedom and autonomy. The ongoing thwarting of internal capabilities, especially 'practical reason', had the effect over time of diminishing Ashna's sense of 'being human', and leading her to believe that she was no longer perceived as 'being human' by others. The answer to Ashna's question is "No". As an asylum seeker, she does not have the right to decide what she is able to do: she is denied the capability of 'practical reason'.

Like many of the participants, Ashna felt accepted and supported when she visited the asylum seeker support project. She commented:

> The only light that appeared for me was *Common Ground*. *Common Ground* was my job, my park, my restaurant; it was everything for me. The people there were so welcoming and so kind. Those people treated me as a person and I felt human. In *Common Ground* they are like a family. You don't feel like you're just taking. They make you feel like they need something from you too, and you can help them.

For Ashna, being like a family involved reciprocity: "You don't feel like you're just taking", suggesting that it was important for her to be able, and permitted, to give and to receive. She was *treated* as a person and she *felt* human.

Concluding Remarks

The Theory of Human Need (Doyal & Gough 1991) identifies autonomy as a basic human need that is required to enable an acceptable level of participation in some form of life. Self Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci 2000) identifies competence, relatedness and autonomy as the three basic psychological needs required for well-being, and calls for an approach to policy that focuses on the developmental and social conditions that are conducive to psychological growth, integrity and well-being versus those that produce unhappiness. Nussbaum (2011: 20) describes capabilities as "not just abilities residing inside a person but also the freedoms or opportunities created by a combination of personal abilities and the political, social and economic environment".

The experiences described by participants (dispersal, strict conditions for receiving support, reporting to immigration centres, denied the right to work, denied access to cash on Section 4 support, destitution) do not characterise "developmental and social conditions that are conducive to psychological growth, integrity and well-being", nor do they imply a political, social and economic environment that either recognises the personal abilities asylum seekers possess or seeks to create freedoms and opportunities for people.

Silove et al (2000) discuss the effects of "evolving policies of deterrence" on the health and psychosocial well-being of asylum seekers. Identifying policies of enforced dispersal, restricted access to work, education and housing, and treatment of asylum seekers by immigration officials they found that: "Hardships associated with the refugee application process and harsh living conditions in the post-migration environment were associated with ongoing symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, anxiety and depression." (Silove et al 2000: 606)

Twelve years later, findings from this study identify these, now 'evolved', policies and their effects on the well-being of asylum seekers, explicitly in terms of respondents' sense of freedom, choice and autonomy. Furthermore, the cumulative effects of multiple, ongoing restrictions to freedom, choice and autonomy result in the overall loss of freedom, not only as a dimension of living but also as an aspect of living a fully human life.

Chapter 7

Asylum policy and well-being: Conclusions and recommendations

Introduction

The aims of this study were:

1. To examine the impact of UK asylum policy on asylum seekers' psychological and emotional well-being;
2. To place the human being at the centre of the asylum process;
3. To inform and challenge professional practice.

Through addressing the objectives outlined in chapter one, these aims have been fulfilled.

The use of Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method has not only ensured that people's experiences of seeking asylum have been located within the wider context of their life histories, but also enabled a thorough engagement with and interpretation of the interview material. Narrative interviews captured the uniqueness and authenticity of each individual story whilst, at the same time, illuminating the issues and challenges which many asylum seekers face during the time between their asylum application and decision.

Participants' subjective accounts of their experiences of the asylum process and its effect on their sense of well-being have been examined alongside theoretical conceptualisations of well-being. Interviewees' accounts of their experiences and feelings have been validated by theory, whilst empirical evidence has illuminated and added depth to theory. Notions of what it means to 'be human', and how feeling 'fully human' relates to a sense of well-being have been considered within the context of participants' experiences and theories of well-being.

Drawing upon the findings discussed in chapters five and six, and the theoretical approaches to well-being discussed in chapter three, I go on to consider answers to the research questions and to suggest some recommendations for future practice.

Discussion of the research questions involves consideration of the findings in chapters five and six in relation to: 1) experiences within the context of the 'whole life'; 2) theoretical approaches to and conceptualisations of, well-being; 3) the working concept of well-being formulated in relation to this study and outlined in chapter three of the thesis.

Research Question 1: How does the experience of living between asylum application and decision affect people's psychological and emotional well-being?

Analysis of interview material using Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) clearly demonstrated the interconnectedness between past, present and imagined future for the interviewees. The research question relating to people's experiences of the asylum process, therefore, needs to be considered within the context of the 'whole life' narrative, locating the experience of seeking asylum within the life story of the person rather than confining the whole life and the whole person within the asylum process.

At the start of this research I was interested in finding out 'what it feels like' to experience the UK asylum process. It seemed appropriate, therefore, to think specifically in terms of psychological and emotional well-being. It now feels to me that to isolate psychological and emotional well-being from the overall concept of 'human' well-being is extremely difficult within the context of this study. The circumstances that asylum seekers have faced prior to seeking asylum, their experiences of flight and their experiences as asylum seekers in this country have impacted on every area of their well-being: physical, psychological, emotional and social. These strands of well-being are interconnected and interdependent; physical well-being affects every other area of well-being; it is difficult to experience social well-being if the other areas of well-being are not being met. With this in mind, the influence of physical and social well-being on the person's psychological and emotional well-being is implicitly acknowledged when discussing the psychological and emotional well-being of interviewees.

Findings

Chapter five located interviewees within their 'whole life' histories as people coming to terms with multiple experiences of loss, and attempting to adapt to areas of change within their lives. The most difficult aspect of the asylum process for them was identified as being the sense of suspended animation experienced during the time they waited for the outcome of their asylum applications. This was clearly damaging to their sense of psychological and emotional well-being, often impacting on their ability to engage fully with other areas of their lives and consequently, affecting their social well-being. It was not only the act of waiting that had an impact on psychological and emotional well-being but also the prolonged length of time that people were left without being given an asylum decision. Experience of the asylum process, especially when it was prolonged over several years had the effect of causing people to begin to believe, themselves, that they were nothing more than asylum seekers, that the term 'asylum seeker' defined their whole lives, and that their real identity had become completely lost somewhere within the experience.

Research Question 2: How does the experience of seeking asylum in the UK impact on asylum seekers' sense of autonomy, choice and freedom?

In chapter six specific aspects of the asylum process were examined in relation to their effects on asylum seekers' sense of autonomy, choice and freedom. Interviewees described a process that they felt denied them control of their own lives, referring to their experiences as "like being in prison but the door is open", "you're not free", "I want to make my own decisions, I want to be my own". Many felt that they were losing their skills and competencies, and along with them their confidence and sense of self worth through not being permitted to work or study.

The theories and approaches to well-being outlined and discussed in chapter three all suggest that some level of freedom and choice about how one lives one's life, and having opportunities to use and develop existing competencies are important aspects of human well-being. Although Maslow (1954) argues for a hierarchy of needs, he nevertheless, includes 'esteem' and 'self actualisation' as 'higher' needs within the five areas of need he identifies.

The capabilities approach, whilst explicitly acknowledging freedom as "an intrinsic and as a central value" (Sen 1999: 244), commensurate with autonomy in the Theory of Human Need (Doyal & Gough 1991) and Self Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci 2000), is particularly concerned with "our capability to lead the kind of lives we have reason to value" (Sen 1999: 285). Most of the central capabilities endorsed by Martha Nussbaum are absent in the daily lives of asylum seekers, particularly 'affiliation' - (A) Able to live with and toward others; (B) Having the social bases of self respect and non-humiliation; being treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others - and 'practical reason' - To engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life. (Nussbaum 2011: 33).

Participants, in describing their experiences of the asylum process, have spoken about the effect on their psychological and emotional well-being, of the denial of choice and autonomy and the thwarting of internal capabilities. Whilst the basic physiological needs of food and shelter were being met, respondents felt that they were stigmatised as asylum seekers, not afforded the social bases of self respect and non-humiliation, and not treated as people whose worth is equal to that of others.

Research Question 3: How important are the concepts of 'autonomy', 'choice' and 'freedom' to notions of what it means to 'be human'?

During sub-session three of the interview process (a fairly fully structured depth interview) participants were asked: "Have you ever felt that you were not able to be a 'full human being'?" Nine out of the ten respondents spoke about experiences during the asylum process that had caused them to feel less than fully human: the stigma of shopping with the azure card and of being forced to receive benefit rather than being allowed to work, the humiliation they felt as a result of the way they were treated by officials at immigration reporting centres, the ongoing lack of control over their own lives particularly in terms of not knowing what their future might be, and the ultimate loss of freedom, autonomy and human dignity experienced by those who had been destitute. Respondents' answers to the question: "Have you ever felt that you were not able to be a 'full human being'?" referred to situations where they had been denied these basic psychological and human needs. Etienne (age 43, from Cameroon), speaking about his experience of being destitute for six years, during which time he felt that he

81

had been stripped of almost every trace of dignity and freedom, used the phrase: "You're not a human being, just something breathing." Etienne's comment suggests that the concepts of autonomy, choice and freedom are important to notions of what it means to 'be human' and that their absence greatly diminishes capabilities and opportunities for human flourishing.

Being Human: beyond the circumstances

It is important to acknowledge at this point that whilst nine of the ten participants referred to situations in which they had not felt 'fully human', Abdullah (age 42, from Tunisia) was very clear in his answer to the question regarding this:

> Regardless of my situation I always feel fully human. I get my self esteem from my understanding of who I am as a human being, not from my social status. If I link my self esteem to my life conditions I lose identity. I won't know who I am. For me, what gives my life meaning is not related to my life conditions, it is related to my understanding of what life is and who I am as a human being.

Abdullah's comment serves to remind us that 'being human' is not a condition that is wholly dependent on any set of circumstances. Whilst it is evident from the findings of this study that circumstances and the way in which they are experienced can affect and diminish a person's sense of feeling 'fully human', '*being* human' is something that is greater than, and extends beyond, circumstances. Participants have expressed eloquently their psychological and emotional responses to aspects of the asylum process, describing how experiences have made them feel less than a 'full human being'. In their articulation of these feelings they have demonstrated that they are thinking, reflective, passionate human beings. Like all human beings, they should be afforded lives that are "worthy of human dignity" (Nussbaum 2011: 30).

The degree to which a person is able to feel 'fully human' depends not only on how she perceives herself but, to a great extent, on how she is perceived and consequently treated by others. Being human is, therefore, a mutual experience and a shared responsibility. Aspects of the asylum process, as described by respondents, have left people feeling that they are not being perceived as full human beings, that they are valued less than the rest of society. The psychological and emotional result is a feeling of humiliation and a sense of diminished humanity.

Central Research Question: To what extent does asylum policy in the United Kingdom make provision for the psychological and emotional well-being of asylum seekers?

Findings from this research, validated by theoretical approaches to well-being, indicate that psychological and emotional well-being or illbeing is influenced by a number of factors: past experiences and their effect on the person, current circumstances (including physical and material hardship), the social and political context in which a person is placed, and each person's emotional and psychological make-up and resilience.

Asylum: policy, process and people

Nussbaum (2006: 295) writes:

> The problem is that most of the time we are distracted, not well educated to understand the plights of other people, and not led, through an education of the imagination, to picture those sufferings vividly to ourselves.

At the close of chapter two of this study I suggested that the UK government's asylum agenda is driven by 'process' rather than by 'the plights of other people'. Asylum is a political issue; it is perceived by politicians and presented in much of the media as a problem to be managed and controlled in order to preserve the well-being of UK citizens. The securing of borders has become the primary function of UKBA; the well-being of asylum seekers, if it is of any importance at all, is secondary.

Having placed asylum policy alongside theories of well-being and participants' experiences of the asylum process, my observations lead me to suggest that policy, and the way in which it is implemented by UKBA, works in opposition to the principles underlying theories and approaches to promoting well-being that have been discussed in this thesis. Findings suggest that asylum policy creates barriers to people's capabilities and to the basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy within self determination theory. Most of the central capabilities endorsed by Martha Nussbaum are absent in the daily lives of asylum seekers, and there is little evidence of the 'agency freedom' which Sen views as being central to his version of the capabilities approach (Sen 1985, 1992, 2002). Little or no attention is paid to asylum seekers' past and on-going experiences of suffering, loss and trauma; in fact, they find themselves

living on the edge of a society where the least care and attention is given to one of the most vulnerable, fragile and marginalised groups within it. In this society, where the concept of the 'citizen' appears to be placed far above the concept of the 'human being', asylum seekers feel that they are perceived as being of little worth and importance.

Mapped against asylum policies of dispersal, the strict conditions for asylum seekers receiving support, the indignity of living without access to cash, treatment by officials at immigration reporting centres, and the ultimate humiliation, degradation and misery of being made destitute, the findings in this study do not indicate that asylum policy in the UK makes provision for the psychological and emotional well-being of asylum seekers. At best this could be construed as stemming from the lack of awareness and insensitivity of policy makers. At worst, it involves deliberate policies of humiliation in an attempt to create barriers for those seeking asylum.

Recommendations

Speaking of the political implications for a capabilities approach, Nussbaum (2011: 65) writes:

> Capabilities approach insists that all entitlements involve an affirmative task for government: it must actively support people's capabilities, not just fail to set up obstacles.

The gap between this statement and current UK asylum policy is immense. To begin to address such a gap requires a radical change in the government's perception, and treatment, of asylum seekers. Perhaps a realistic starting point would be to remove some of the obstacles that already exist for asylum seekers. There are two sets of issues that need to be addressed in order to achieve this, relating to: a) changes being made at the level of asylum policy, and b) changes in how current policy is implemented. The findings from the study could be used to support campaigns that are seeking to change existing asylum policy, and particularly in addressing the issue of the length of time asylum seekers wait for their claims to be processed. Based on the findings, I suggest some recommendations at the level of practice:

1. Practitioners in both statutory and voluntary sector organisations need to acknowledge the history and the 'whole life' context in which asylum seekers experience the asylum process, recognising the distinction between 'change' and

'transition'. Awareness of the need for a holistic approach which places the 'human being' at the centre of the asylum process should be incorporated in the training and induction of paid and voluntary staff. This could be further developed by establishing a network or forum of practitioners around the well-being of asylum seekers, where ideas, insights and concerns could be shared and discussed.

2. Insights gained from the relationship between theories of well-being and interviewees' accounts of experiences in this study should be drawn on to ensure that provision for asylum seekers' psychological and emotional well-being, as well as their physical well-being, is embedded in organisations' policies and practice. The term 'well-being' is being used increasingly in a broad political context and is beginning to appear frequently in the descriptions, aims and objectives of community and voluntary sector projects. It is important to set up a workshop or seminar around the findings of this study before formulating policies on well-being, ensuring that 'well-being' is embedded within an organisation as a way of working rather than simply as a policy requirement.

3. Recognising the connection between the concepts of 'freedom', 'choice' and 'autonomy', and asylum seekers' subjective accounts of well-being, practitioners and organisations should encourage and enable a participatory approach with asylum seekers in decisions regarding service provision, aims and objectives.

4. Opportunities need to be created for asylum seekers to explore and to use their capabilities. I envisage a project along the lines of Pathways to change. This is discussed in detail in the "Professional Evidence" appendix to the thesis.

Importantly, practitioners, within every area of practice, should seek to ensure that asylum seekers are perceived and acknowledged as capable, strong and courageous human beings, rather than as passive victims of circumstance. Whilst acknowledging asylum seekers' stories of trauma and loss, we need also to recognise their strength and resilience.

Limitation of the study

This study is based on asylum seekers' experiences and perceptions of the asylum process and its impact on their objective circumstances and subjective well-being. It does not provide the opportunity for policy makers to either justify or defend the

reasoning behind their decisions, and whilst outlining the current context in which the asylum process operates, the scope of the study does not allow for detailed and close examination of asylum policy. A possible area of future research would be to explore the 'other side of the coin'.

Concluding Remarks

An aim of this study has been to explore how theoretical approaches to well-being can help us arrive at a better understanding of what 'well-being' is, particularly in relation to the experiences of asylum seekers. Through the mapping of theories and approaches to well-being on to participants' accounts of the psychological and emotional effects of their experiences, both theories and experiences of well-being have been validated. Freedom has been identified as a crucial and central component of human well-being, and closely linked to notions of what it means to live one's life in a 'fully human way'. These theories and approaches to well-being, mapped on to asylum policy and the way in which it is implemented, expose an asylum system that appears to work against the provision of opportunities for freedom, well-being and human flourishing. The outcome of such a system, for those caught up in it, is the progressive erosion of competence, pride, dignity and self esteem: attributes that count towards what makes us human. Consequently, those being awarded Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK and becoming British citizens are people who are damaged, not only by past experiences and trauma in their home countries, but also by their experiences and treatment as asylum seekers in the UK.

At the centre of asylum policy there exists a lack of acknowledgement of the whole person, the human being with past as well as present experiences: skills, gifts and competencies as well as needs.

A multi-stranded approach is required, involving government, media and the public, if we are to begin to repair some of the damage that has been done to those (already damaged human beings) who have come to seek asylum in the UK. Perhaps the first step is recognition of our shared humanity, that 'being human' is a shared responsibility, and that treating someone in such a way as to reduce their capacity to be 'fully human', in fact, diminishes our own humanity.

Buchanan (1992: 133) argues that the quality of qualitative research "lies in the power of its language to display a picture of the world in which we discover something about ourselves and our common humanity". Through the voices of the participants in this study we are challenged to reflect upon what 'being human' is and what it is not, and perhaps to reclaim, in some way, our common humanity. The poem below is included for all those who have shared a part of their lives through this research.

REAL

I'm not a symbol
I'm not a statistic
I'm not the inches in somebody's column.

I'm not admirable, but
I'm not pitiable either.
I'm simply human.

If you turned me inside out,
you'd find fury, fear, regret and sorrow
struggling with the love and the longing,
hope and wonder,
and all my neediness.

Please take these things seriously.
Don't pietise or glamorise or trivialise or sermonise.
These are the marks of my life,
gift and loss,
wound and offence.
Please respect them.

I am at odds with all that requires me to be a symbol.
I insist on being real.
Kathy Galloway

Interview questions – pilot study

Preamble

- Introduce the study. Explain that I am interested in feelings as well as events. How do you feel as a person in a particular situation?
- Give assurance that this study is nothing to do with the Home Office.
- The study is anonymous; no individual will be identified.
- The interview will be tape-recorded, with your permission, to ensure that the record of what has been said is accurate. Data will be stored securely and kept anonymously.
- We will meet to go over the material after the tape has been transcribed to make sure the information is accurate and you are happy with the content.
- The findings from the Study will be made available to academic and professional audiences.
- It may contribute to improvements in the way people experience the Asylum Process.
- This interview will not influence the outcome of your Asylum claim in any way.

Personal Details

- Name
- Contact details
- Country of Origin
- Languages spoken
- Age
- Gender
- Date arrived in UK/alone or with family

Questions

The interviews will be semi-structured, conversational and free-flowing.   The areas of the questions are deliberately broad as I wish to avoid the risk of influencing peoples' answers through my own knowledge, perceptions and experience as a practitioner. It is important that participants are given the space to talk about their own issues and feelings.

Question 1: Can you describe how you felt when you arrived in UK?

Question 2: What were your hopes when you arrived in UK?

Question 3: What were your fears when you arrived in UK?

Question 4: What has made you feel good since you came to UK?

Question 5: What has made you feel bad since you came to UK?

Question 6: Have you felt welcome in UK?

Question 7: How could your experience of seeking asylum have been made better?

Question 8: Is there anything you would like to say about your own experience and how you feel now?

Interview questions for sub-session 3
Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method

Fairly fully structured depth interview

Question 1: What is important for you to feel good in yourself?

Question 2: What would you say you need to live a full life?

Question 3: What would you say makes it difficult to live a full life?

Question 4: Have you ever felt that you were not able to be a 'full human being'?

Thinking about the answers you have given, I'd like you to answer some questions about your experience of the UK asylum process.

Question 5: Can you tell me about your substantive asylum interview? What was that experience like for you? How did you feel during the interview and afterwards?

Question 6: Tell me, please, about your accommodation and support whilst you were waiting for your asylum decision. How did you feel during that time?

Question 7: How often did/do you report to Immigration for your signing appointment? Can you tell me about that experience and how it made/makes you feel?

Question 8: Have you ever been destitute – without any accommodation or support? If this is the case, can you tell me how you felt at that time?

Question 9: Can you say something about how you felt and what it was like for you waiting for your asylum decision? How do you think this affected your life?

Question 10: What has helped you to feel like a 'full human being' and given you strength during your experience of seeking asylum?

Master of Professional Practice
Professional Evidence

Introduction

This piece constitutes a reflection on how work in the thesis informs professional practice. It is about the value of the research for me personally, as a practitioner, and about how it could contribute to 'professional practice' in the field of asylum support work.

I begin by describing the establishment, growth and development of a voluntary sector project, working to support asylum seekers and refugees. Reflection on my observations and experiences whilst working in the project led me to conduct a piece of research that, I hoped, would lead to a better understanding of the psychological and emotional experience of seeking asylum.

Having outlined the background to the research I go on to discuss the insights I have gained, not only from the research findings, but also from the research process itself, and to consider the implications of these insights for future practice. Finally I suggest the outline for a project in which some of the issues identified through the research might be explicitly addressed.

Myself as practitioner: the beginning of a journey

My first encounter with asylum seekers was not planned. I worked as a community worker, based in an office at the back of a church, in a socially and economically deprived area of the city. It was the spring of 2000: the Home Office had recently initiated their policy of dispersal for asylum seekers. I went to investigate the persistent knocking on the church door – it was usually local children. I opened the door to discover two young men. One from

Zimbabwe, who was of the Christian faith and spoke perfect English; the other from Iraq, who was Muslim by faith and did not speak a word of English. The two men had only met the day before, when they had been brought to a terraced flat (opposite the church where I worked) during the early hours of the morning. They were strangers to one another, from diverse cultures and with no common language. All they had in common was that they were both asylum seekers. They were 'lost'. They had no information about the area, buses, shops, and they had no warm clothes; they stood shivering. Dominic (not his real name) from Zimbabwe, explained that they had recognised the building as a church and hoped they might find some help there.

At that time the word 'professional' could not have been applied to either my knowledge or my experience of asylum policy and process in the UK. I responded in the best way I could to the two strangers at the door. I took them shopping, introduced them to the local community centre and found them some warm clothes from amongst the church jumble sale donations.

This encounter inspired the founding of a project offering support to asylum seekers who were dispersed to the area. The initial steering group for the project comprised interested and sympathetic church members, local clergy, two local residents, a local authority community development worker and myself. We were able to generate some start-up funding fairly quickly and began the project in a local community centre two mornings a week, offering clothing and household items (these were all donated in response to flyers left in community buildings and churches), and a café area with free drinks and biscuits. The project was initially intended as a way of making people feel welcome and providing a space where they could meet together. However, as relationships were formed and trust began to develop with those who attended, people started to ask for other kinds of help: finding a solicitor, buying school uniforms for children, and support through many aspects of the asylum process. Myself and the other volunteers at the project had to learn on the job, and we had to learn quickly. We attended conferences, training days and seminars. We contacted the Refugee Council for training, and we visited other asylum seeker support projects in the region. We continued this way for three years, during

which time the numbers of people attending the project went on increasing and with them, the complexity of the needs they presented.

By the end of those first three years we had held an inaugural general meeting, appointed a board of trustees, acquired charitable status, raised sufficient funding to be able to rent premises of our own (now open five days a week), and employ a project coordinator, full time project worker, part time case-worker and ten volunteers.

As the project grew we needed to address issues of professional development, both for project workers and volunteers as practitioners, and for the project itself to uphold its reputation for good practice. This involved ongoing training for staff and volunteers and thorough and precise tracking and evaluation of the work of the project. Strong working relationships were established with other agencies (statutory and voluntary), health professionals and immigration solicitors. The work of the project was acknowledged and highly respected by staff at the Immigration Appeals Tribunal Court.

The ethos underpinning the project had been from the start, to emphasise the importance of equal dignity and respect for all human beings, in recognition of our shared humanity. This ethos has always remained, but an emphasis on professionalism, maintaining high quality case-work, and meeting the criteria and outcomes for funders was not without some cost to the open, family atmosphere that had been such a distinctive feature of the project in its early days.

In April 2012 the contract for housing asylum seekers in the region was transferred to G4S. This meant that many of the asylum seekers who lived very close to the project were moved out of their accommodation and relocated to other parts of the region. In addition, fewer asylum seekers were being dispersed to the area in which the project operated. The board of trustees agreed that the work of the project should be evaluated in the light of these changes, and made the decision to close the drop-in premises at the end of 2012, whilst maintaining the strand of the work supporting destitute asylum

93

seekers. This decision was ratified at the Annual General Meeting, and it was agreed that the trustees would continue to meet with a view to exploring a possible new direction and focus for the work of the charity. I return to this in the final section of this piece.

Insights from the research: validating experience, adding flesh to theory

I think the over-arching outcome of the research experience for me, has been an appreciation and growing understanding of the reciprocal and interdependent relationship between theory and experience (or data). Neither can be complete without the other: there is a shared dimension to theory and to experience which can only exist when the two are interconnected and interwoven. The application of theoretical knowledge and understanding has added a crucial dimension of validity to participants' accounts of their experiences. Experience has brought depth to theory, adding flesh to skeleton words, so that a word has the potential to illuminate as well as define a concept. This has been helped immensely by the fact that I have come to the theory as a practitioner; it has resonated with my own observations and experience, making better sense of the practitioner's world and perspective.

The research process

Through doing this research I have come to 'see' and to 'hear' differently. The use of biographic narrative interpretive method (Wengraf 2001) for interviews and analysis demanded that I looked closely at the interview material from different perspectives. Participants' stories and histories placed their experiences of the asylum process within the context of a whole life. Although this was something I felt I had been aware of before the research, I had not appreciated the extent to which past experiences were very much a part of the way in which people experienced and understood the asylum process.

During the interview sessions I came to appreciate in a new way, the importance for participants of 'being heard'. It was not only about the facts of their experience or circumstances, it was about how that particular experience made people feel. I was moved by the rich, complex and poetic language

people used to describe how it felt to be deprived of freedom and choice and the unimaginable fear and stress of not knowing one's future. I was left with a far greater awareness of the extent of the damage to participants' lives, and of their vulnerability and fragility. Most importantly, I began to gain an understanding of the 'aftermath' of the experience of seeking asylum. How grief, trauma and emotions that have been buried or suppressed whilst people go through the process of seeking asylum, resurface after Leave to Remain has been granted, making it extremely difficult or impossible for people to move on.

Implications for practice

As well as enabling me to develop the skills required for exploring the research questions, the research process has motivated me to reflect throughout on the purpose of the research, particularly in terms of its contribution to practice. In this area the ability to understand, discuss and apply the relationship between theory and experience is of the utmost importance. Here, I draw on the basic need for physical health and autonomy, identified in the Theory of Human Need (Doyal and Gough 1991), the basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy in Self Determination Theory (Ryan and Deci 2000), agency freedom within the Capabilities Approach (Sen 1985, 1992, 1993, 1999), and the emphasis on human dignity within Nussbaum's development of the capabilities approach (1988, 2005, 2006, 2011). The components of well-being that are identified and discussed within these theories can be identified repeatedly during participants' accounts of their experiences of the asylum process. Being able to refer to theories of well-being and to apply theoretical language to participants' accounts, helps make sense of their accounts in a broader context. The correlation between these accounts and the theory being applied to them contributes to the body of research which has tested and affirmed theory.

Using the research in relation to practice and policy
The term 'well-being' is being used increasingly in a broad political context and is also beginning to appear frequently in the descriptions, aims and objectives

of community and voluntary sector projects. One of the aims of my research was to better understand well-being both as a concept and in relation to people's experiences of seeking asylum and, as I have pointed out in my reflection on the research, I have gained considerable knowledge and understanding of theories and approaches to well-being which has provided the foundation for a cogent discussion of the findings in the study.

I believe that some knowledge of the theory which has been applied to participants' experiences in this research would assist organisations and voluntary sector groups in articulating a concept of well-being that is relevant to their particular practice and objectives. With this in mind, I intend to produce a summary of my research, outlining the main theories I have drawn upon, and the findings from the research, which demonstrates the relationship between theory and experience. I would like to offer the opportunity to discuss the research findings and the relevant theory through workshops. These could be organised and disseminated through the existing network of groups and practitioners working with asylum seekers. One desirable outcome from the workshops would be ongoing discussion and the sharing of ideas on how to establish and develop ways of working that support asylum seekers' well-being. Alongside this, I wish to emphasise the importance of seeking to locate experiences of the asylum process within the context of people's stories and life events, taking into account as well, their fear and anxiety concerning their future.

I also feel that it is important to share these research findings with statutory organisations and with policy makers. I will begin this process through contact with local Members of Parliament - preferably face to face discussion rather than simply presenting a written summary. A desirable outcome of this process would be for policy makers to be willing to even begin to consider ways in which provision for asylum seekers' psychological and emotional well-being might be embedded within policy, or at least to seek ways of implementing existing policy that better encourage and support well-being.

Prior to the presentation and discussion of findings from the study with practitioners and policy makers, I would like to discuss the findings with the participants from the study and with other asylum seekers and refugees who have used the project where I worked and, from which all of the participants were recruited. Through this discussion, I would hope that together we could consider appropriate and effective ways of beginning to work at implementing some of the recommendations from the thesis at both practice and policy levels, and to clarify and prioritise the issues that have been identified.

Finally, I will ensure that insights from this research inform future training of volunteers and trustees within the charity with which I am involved.

Asylum and beyond: repairing damage, creating capabilities

As I reflected earlier, an important outcome of the research for me has been a greater awareness of the cumulative effects of trauma and loss on asylum seekers' psychological and emotional well-being. Findings have demonstrated how this not only affects people whilst they wait for their asylum decision, but also how it can continue to affect their lives after Leave to Remain is granted.

Having worked with many individuals from the time of their dispersal through to their being granted refugee status, on to citizenship and beyond, I have observed how some people were able to move quickly into higher education (with some outstanding results being achieved) or employment, whilst others struggled to establish and maintain a new home, manage finances and enter the job market. There are projects which assist people in the transition from asylum seeker to being granted Leave to Remain in the UK, focusing on the practical issues of finding somewhere to live, obtaining a National Insurance number, claiming Job Seekers Allowance and looking for work. The work of such projects is extremely important in enabling people to begin the process of moving on. However, it is only the beginning of a long and complex process. Alongside the practical aspects of moving on, people are faced with the challenge of coming to terms in some way with past traumas and with their experiences of the asylum process in this country, and the psychological and

emotional damage they have suffered and continue to suffer as a result of their experiences.

Moving on: sharing the journey

In the opening section of this piece I explained how the trustees of the charity were challenged to consider a different focus for their work supporting asylum seekers and refugees. I have not been involved in the project as a practitioner throughout the research process. Having completed my research, I have been invited to meet with the trustees and, drawing on the findings from the research, to explore with them possible future projects and ways of working. The project from the start has involved being alongside people and sharing their journeys during the period between asylum application and decision; it seems appropriate and makes sense to continue to share those journeys with people who have been granted Leave to Remain. Drawing on insights from the research, I outline a proposal I intend to present to the trustees for consideration and discussion.

Pathways to change

The findings from the research indicate that there are two strands that need to be addressed in order to facilitate the moving on process. The first involves the validation of people's stories and experiences, and acknowledgement of the psychological and emotional effects of those experiences. The second concerns recognition of people's strengths, competencies and gifts, the internal capabilities they possess, and exploring with them ways of encouraging and enabling the use of their capabilities.

Personal mentoring

The project might consider whether it would be a good idea to set up a mentoring scheme. The ideas that follow are intended as thoughts and suggestions as a starting point for discussion of how this might look and work in practice, and ways in which a mentoring project could be set up and developed.

People who approach the project for help or support would be offered the option of being matched with a 'personal mentor'. This person would stay alongside the person they are mentoring as that person worked through the process of moving on and integration into life in the UK. It would involve a lot of listening and simply 'being with' the person, as well as exploring together issues that need to be addressed in order to facilitate moving on. I envisage that mentors would be drawn from a bank of appropriately trained volunteers. The findings from the thesis and the theories and approaches to well-being that are examined in the thesis will form an important aspect of the training of volunteers. The 'being alongside' need not demand that the mentor him/herself provides advice and support for every issue that is raised; it would involve signposting and referral to other agencies who are able to help. For many people who come to the project the most important aspect would be regular contact with their mentor and the building up of a relationship of trust. There should not be a rigid programme or strategy for moving on. It is important to recognise that progression would not be the same for everyone, that people would need time for reflection, and some sessions would involve simply being together, when the mentor may be listening to stories and experiences in a way that validates the story and affirms the speaker.

Creating capabilities

Findings from the thesis indicate that throughout their experience of seeking asylum, asylum seekers are denied the basic psychological needs of relatedness, competence and autonomy (Self Determination Theory - Ryan and Deci, 2000), and that internal capabilities are thwarted as a result of these psychological needs not being met, and also as a consequence of the many restrictions asylum seekers face in their day to day living. Participants described feeling that they were losing skills through not having opportunities to use them and how, in the process they felt they had lost their sense of identity, confidence and self esteem. To begin to address these needs, the project would explore with its users, ways of providing opportunities for people's capabilities to be recognised, developed and used. In a sense it would act as a capabilities broker, matching and introducing people to projects, groups and organisations where capabilities can be developed and individuals

enabled to flourish. Within the network of groups and projects working with asylum seekers and refugees there are arts projects, writing projects, music groups and sports activities. The task of matching people to particular projects might involve drawing on existing contacts within the network, as well as being prepared to research new projects and contacts.

Getting started

The charity has sufficient funds for start up costs for a pilot project of approximately one year. During that time potential funders would be approached for securing follow on funding for the work. It is in the area of seeking funding that I believe the work in the thesis will be crucial in demonstrating from findings which are fully supported by theory, the importance and value of the work the project is seeking to do. Alongside the work from the thesis will be on-going evaluation of the work of the pilot project.

Appropriate volunteers who would act as mentors would need to be recruited and trained. Again, an understanding of the theory examined in the thesis, and an appreciation of the significance of the findings in relation to how we 'hear' and understand people's stories and experiences would form an important aspect of the training. 'Listening', in its fullest sense would be explored and discussed, with participants from the study as well as other asylum seekers and refugees. From the beginning of the project, asylum seekers and refugees would be involved in setting aims and objectives and, agreeing and planning the best approaches to working with individuals and delivering the project's aims and objectives. I would envisage that some people who have, themselves, worked through the transition from asylum seeker to refugee, would become mentors. Many of the participants in the study spoke of their desire to be able to "give something back", and articulated messages of hope to people who were struggling in the midst of the asylum process.

Drawing on existing relationships and goodwill with other practitioners (professional counsellors and therapists) we would ask whether they could work with the project in providing sessions for people, perhaps making

themselves available to the project for one afternoon a fortnight – this is not out of the blue; it has been discussed with practitioners and offered in the past.

There would, of course, need to be thorough planning, discussion of boundaries, aims and objectives, policies, volunteer induction and job descriptions, and a defined budget for the project in place before any work began.

The idea I have outlined has not yet been proposed to the trustees of the charity. It may be rejected outright, but it is more likely to evoke discussion and to result in the pilot of a project along the lines of those described. I do not feel that I have managed to fully portray, in the outline of my thoughts in this piece, the inspiration I have gained through the work in the thesis, and the excitement I have felt as I have begun to understand and apply theory to experience and findings. I believe that the explicit links that have been made between theory and experience will provide a dimension to funding applications that is frequently missing.

Concluding Remarks

The valuable experience of conducting this research has constituted an important stage in my own personal journey of professional practice. To a great extent the 'process' has been the 'product', but there have also been numerous insights which I feel should be shared with other practitioners. The research experience has left me with a greater commitment to challenge areas of policy and practice where provision is not made for asylum seekers' psychological and emotional well-being, as well as, through my own practice, to seek ways to remove barriers to well-being and capabilities. It has provided not only the inspiration, but also theoretical knowledge and empirical evidence to support the setting up of a new project.

Through the research experience I have been encouraged and better equipped to reflect on my own personal journey. I described in the opening section of this piece my first encounter with asylum seekers who I recognised as human

beings who were in need of help. I had no professional knowledge or expertise to offer them, only an acknowledgement of our shared humanity. Over twelve years since that initial encounter I have amassed a store of knowledge, competence and expertise. The research experience has added a further dimension to my knowledge and made an immense and important contribution to my professional practice. However, it has also enabled me in a profound way to relocate the 'human being' at the centre of the asylum process, and in doing so has brought me back to where I started.

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We shall not cease from exploration

And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time.

T. S. Eliot

Four Quartets

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