

**‘Hanging In-Between’:
Experiences of Waiting among Asylum Seekers
Living in Glasgow**

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Abstract

This thesis explores the experiences of applicants for Refugee Status in the United Kingdom who had, at the time of the research, waited for between two and nine years for the conclusion of the asylum process. Despite extensive lamentation of the delays endured by asylum applicants in having their claims assessed, little social scientific scholarship has substantively and critically engaged with this phenomenon, or even with waiting as a universal condition. The present study fills this gap in knowledge, conceptualising waiting as an informative, consequential phase in the quest for protection, hope and security.

The study is based on twelve months of participant observation among asylum seekers living in Glasgow under the dispersal regime. Narratives and tacit aspects of everyday life are presented to both draw a multi-dimensional ethnographic picture and acknowledge the asylum seekers' agency. Their waiting entails a focus on negative and positive, concrete and symbolic objects, which are located in the future. However, their inability to affect or predict the arrival of these objects produces uncertainty and passivity. Asylum seekers narrate overwhelmingly negative experiences of asylum policies, such as dishonouring encounters with immigration authorities; social dislocation; enforced poverty; interrupted life cycles; and an inability to settle and belong in the UK. Yet despite the mutually reinforcing effects of UK policy and of waiting, asylum seekers have benefited from formal support structures provided under Scottish policy. Individuals have been able to re-construct social ties; pursue educational opportunities; enhance personal security; gain greater control over their 'cases'; and undertake selective socio-cultural adaptation. They have also utilised a discourse of 'integration' circulating in Scotland to garner public support for their struggles for recognition and the right to remain. The thesis concludes by reflecting on changes occurring after a form of Leave to Remain was granted, and assesses the extent to which people were able to realise the 'normal lives' for which they had been waiting.

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* Pseudonyms

Abbreviations

AIT	Asylum and Immigration Tribunal
APIs	Asylum Policy Instructions
ARC	Asylum Registration Card
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
CMR	Case Management Review
CoSLA	Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
EU	European Union
GCC	Glasgow City Council
HOPO	Home Office Presenting Officer
IAT	Immigration Appellate Authority
ILPA	Immigration Law Practitioners' Association
ILR	Indefinite Leave to Remain
IND	Immigration and Nationality Directorate
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JCHR	Joint Committee on Human Rights
LLR	Limited Leave to Remain
MSP	Member of Scottish Parliament
NAM	New Asylum Model
NAO	National Audit Office
NASS	National Asylum Support Service
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NHS	National Health Service
OISC	Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner
PAIH	Positive Action in Housing
RAF	Ralston Asylum Forum
RAO	Refugee Advocacy Organisation
RCO	Refugee Community Organisation
RFRL	Reasons for Refusal Letter

RCIP	Ralston Community Integration Project
SEF	Statement of Evidence Form
SRC	Scottish Refugee Council
SRIF	Scottish Refugee Integration Forum
UK	United Kingdom
UKBA	United Kingdom Border Agency
UNHCR	(Office of the) United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VARRP	Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme

1. Introduction

When you are waiting, you are not on the ground. You are hanging in-between somewhere, in limbo.

– *Manal*, asylum applicant from Algeria waiting in the asylum process for six years.

This thesis is about asylum seekers' experiences of waiting for their claims for Refugee Status to be ultimately granted, enabling their continued presence and protection in the United Kingdom; or refused, potentially leading to deportation to their countries of origin. The people in question came from a number of countries, sought asylum for a variety of reasons, and were waiting in the asylum process for durations of between two and nine years. Based on twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork carried out in 2007 in Scotland's largest city, Glasgow, the research seeks to explore how these people understood and experienced waiting as a condition of prolonged duration and suspension, in which it was not possible to secure any degree of certainty of whether – or when – their hopes for the right to remain might be realised.

The research arose from the convergence of interests: in forced migration as a social and cultural phenomenon worthy of anthropological attention and in a particular bureaucratic situation pertaining to the processing of asylum applications in the UK. In the late 1980s and again in the late 1990s, there were marked increases in the number of people seeking asylum in the UK and across Europe, in congruence with a global rise in 'people on the move' (Home Office 2007; ILPA 1999; Peach & Henson 2005; UNHCR 2000). This was closely followed by the implementation of the first piece of asylum legislation in the UK, and a proliferation of instruments and measures to control and manage further arrivals. Deterrence became a fulcrum of policy; the proportion of individuals officially recognised as Refugees reduced, and protection was narrowed in scope (UNHCR 2006b). As legal and bureaucratic measures for managing asylum applicants proliferated, the process of assessing their claims became more complicated and prolonged. The time taken to process applications has recently become the focal point of much criticism of asylum policy

in Europe (Koser 1997). It has been widely lamented that applicants must wait increasingly long periods of time for an initial decision, an appeal hearing and the outcome of an appeal (see, for example, Cohen 1994; Pirouet 2001; Refugee Women's Strategy Group 2007; Stewart 2005; Zetter 2007). Politicians, the public, and auditors of governmental spending tend to conceptualise this protraction of time as a problem of bureaucratic inefficiency and costs to the tax payer; while humanitarian groups, scholars and asylum seekers themselves see it as one of suffering and injustice for applicants (cf. BBC 2002; NAO 2004, 2009; Pirouet 2001). While Kunz noted more than twenty five years ago that refugees must endure variable periods of waiting for resettlement in the country of asylum, in what he termed the "geographical, political and psychological 'midway-to-nowhere'" (1973: 139), very few studies have made this period, or its associated phenomena, a substantive subject of investigation. This research aims to fill that gap in knowledge. It intends to contribute to existing knowledge about the lived experience of asylum policies and practices in the United Kingdom (UK), and to interrogate what the protracted uncertainty of the asylum period might entail.

Locating the research within the literature

The research was developed within, and aims to contribute to, two fields of scholarly literature. The first is the interdisciplinary field of refugee studies. Emerging after the Second World War and growing inordinately since the 1980s, refugee studies has tended to be strongly 'applied' or policy-oriented (Black 2001). Refugee studies has addressed the causes, consequences, history and responses to refugees, but as Good (2007: 7) has noted, scant attention has been paid by the field to the study of asylum applicants, particularly given the volume of political debate and media coverage in recent years. Although not specifically designed to inform policy or enact change, this research contributes to policy discussions by providing critical reflections on particular policies by the people who are subjected to them. It contributes an in-depth exploration of the meanings attached to becoming an asylum seeker and inhabiting this status for an extended period of time, in the context of spontaneous asylum flight to Europe.

The second field within which the research is situated is anthropology. As a discipline, anthropology has contributed much to the study of refugees, and likewise, emergent themes from the study of refugees have contributed to anthropology (Harrell-Bond & Voutira 1992). Anthropologists have produced insightful ethnographies on the experiences of refugees in camps, resettlement and repatriation, which address the themes of social change, trust, memory, liminality, loss and regeneration (Camino & Krulfeld 1994; Colson 2003; Daniel 1996; Harrell-Bond & Voutira 1992); home-making, mobility, restriction and return (Jansen 2007; Jansen & Löfving 2007); the nature of the nation-state, its categories of belonging and their territorial range (Malkki 1995a, 1995b; Ong 2003; Peteet 2005); and the instrumental role of legal and administrative processes and categories in patterns and experiences of displacement (Coutin 2000; De Genova 2002; Kelly 2004; Malkki 1995b). This research aims to pick up on several of these themes within a framework of temporality, but diverges from more traditional anthropological studies of forced migrants 'en-masse' in national or ethnic groups, in camps and resettlement settings. In this sense, it reflects the contemporary shape and context of migration, and interweaves themes pertaining to the socio-cultural processes in migration with those of bureaucracy, policy and political economy.

Colson has asserted that a future-oriented anthropology will need to pay attention to people in transition who are uneasy about themselves in a world that ignores their quest for continuity (2003: 3). I agree with the simple reasoning behind her assertion, that as anyone may be uprooted, it is important to know what to expect; how refugees learn to live with the uncertainties, loss of trust and indignities that they endure (*ibid.*: 4). I also share her view that anthropology should not be "simply an academic subject to be valued because it trains the intellect" (*ibid.*: 13), and has much to offer outside the discipline and academia. For example, anthropologists may act as 'cultural brokers' to communicate the perspective of refugees (Harrell-Bond & Voutira 1992: 8). Located somewhere between the 'policy-oriented' approach of refugee studies and the academic domain of theoretical anthropology, this research attempts to communicate meaningfully to practitioners on pragmatic and policy issues relating to refugees, and to make a general, lasting contribution to knowledge.

While there is an immense body of anthropological work devoted to disentangling the concept of time, far less attention has been paid to waiting as a phenomenon. As Schweizer writes, “obscured by its ordinariness as much as by its alleged uselessness, waiting seems to be almost universally denigrated” (2008: 1). If such a thing as an anthropology of waiting may be imagined, it is hoped that this research will contribute to it by firstly demonstrating that this quotidian condition is worthy of consideration, and secondly, tentatively proposing what is particular and what is universal in the waiting of asylum seekers. In the following section, I review the existing literature on waiting which provided a basis for the development of my research, and identify gaps which this research aims to address.

Research into waiting in refugee studies

Several qualitative studies raise the subject of waiting in relation to asylum seekers/refugees from various parts of the world, and identify a number of components of waiting, relating to time, power and dependency, activity, and a sense of belonging or participation in the wider society. Victor Lal’s autobiographical account of seeking asylum in the UK in the 1990s traces the trials and tribulations of the bureaucratic and legal process. He writes that “the ordeal of waiting for a decision on asylum is a long, arduous, and painfully frustrating experience” (1997: 80).

From the field of social work, Lacroix (2004) analyses the ‘refugee claimant identity’ through an exploration of experiences of refugee policy among eight African asylum seekers in Canada. She finds that for a number of respondents, waiting for a decision or appeal is ‘the hardest part’ of the asylum process, due to the uncertainty and powerlessness it produces when the future cannot be predicted or planned for. She concludes that the period of waiting is a barrier to later integration. Sigona and Torre’s (2005) comprehensive report for the Refugee Housing Association into the experiences of asylum seekers in the UK has similar findings. They grasp the sense of dislocation and disempowerment experienced by those who wait through the words of one respondent: “you are like someone in the desert, you don’t know where you are, you don’t know your next move, you don’t know which direction you are heading, you are just there, waiting” (Sigona & Torre 2005:18).

They also observe that waiting induces a short-term orientation among asylum seekers, and an inability to engage in productive and meaningful activities. In a similar vein, geographer Stewart finds in her overview of the rather vague theme of ‘vulnerability’ of asylum seekers in the UK, that waiting is characterised by anxiety about the future, a sense that “nothing happens”, and the perception of exclusion from society (2005: 505-507). She argues that waiting produces a ‘suspended identity’, meaning that the asylum seeker is located in-between their former life and the life they wish to begin in the UK. Lennartson’s (2007) thorough though largely descriptive paper explores the ‘identity’ of asylum seekers who are waiting for Refugee Status determination in Sweden. She shows that waiting is a transitional situation, marked by an abnormal experience of time, passivity, uncertainty, powerlessness, and hope.

Chan and Loveridge (1987) find waiting to be a major occupation among Vietnamese in a Hong Kong refugee camp, which is conceptualised as a transitional point marking the passage between home and exile. Waiting in the camp is characterised by boredom, uncertainty, and induced passivity, and, the refugees feel that they have ‘lost track of where they are, why they are there, and who they are’. The authors suggest that in order to cope with this period, the refugees turn to the past and create a ‘cocoon’ where it can be denied that anything has changed (*ibid.*). Like Lacroix (2004), they argue that this transitional state is more than just an empty interlude; long-term periods of waiting erode psychological well-being and challenge the refugees’ ability to resettle. A related psychological study of refugees in a Thai camp considers ‘time perspective’ – the relative emphasis people place upon past, present and future, and their perception of the relationship between these spheres – as an important facet of adaptation in displacement (Beiser 1987: 438). Beiser proposes a series of ‘patterns’ in people’s perspectives. These include optimism, where the future is dominant; hope, where the future and present are equal; pragmatism, where the present is dominant; equivalent, where all are equal, and nostalgia, where the past is dominant (*ibid.*: 446). This study is important in proposing the importance not only of time orientations, but of their associated predominant emotional content.

Analogous concerns may be found in studies which examine the lived experience of people who occupy a temporary immigration status in Australia and North America. Similar themes include questions of legality and legal struggles (Coutin 2000); access, participation and equity in society and civic institutions (Marston 2003); personal sense of belonging and investment in the future; and strategies to maximise positive outcomes (Mountz *et al.* 2002). A number of these studies use the term 'limbo' (Brekke 2004; Marston 2003; Mountz *et al.* 2002; Lacroix 2004; Stewart 2005) or continue a tradition in refugee studies of employing Turner's (1969) elaborated model of van Gennep's (1960) 'rites of passage', as a means of understanding various processes occurring during particular phases in migration (Beiser 1987; Camino & Krulfeld 1994; Malkki 1995a; Turner 1999; Harrell-Bond & Voutira 1992). This is an analytical framework which I return to in the latter part of this thesis.

To date, the most comprehensive published research to attend specifically to waiting among asylum applicants is that of Brekke (2004). Funded to evaluate a European Union (EU) program to combat discrimination and inequalities, the research is formulated around a policy question: how can the apparently contradictory goals of Swedish policy, of both preparing asylum seekers for the possibility of return *and* integrating them into Swedish society, be met during the waiting period? Brekke develops a model of four kinds of orientation that arose among his respondents as a result of waiting in the asylum process. First is the 'Ideal-type' (for Swedish authorities), where the person is oriented towards both integration and return. Second is the 'Exile activist', a person who stays oriented towards his/her home country and does not aim to integrate into Swedish society, and whose goal is to return when possible. Third is the 'Bridgeburner', by whom return is not considered to be an option. This person is mentally and practically pursuing a future in Sweden. Fourth is 'The waiter', the person not strongly oriented towards a possible return, but not actively pursuing integration in Sweden. S/he is 'stuck in limbo' (*ibid.*: 49). Brekke states that in order to avoid continued suffering, after a certain amount of time worrying about whether the future will involve return or integration, one must select an outcome *as if* it was already certain, and pursue it (*ibid.*: 51). Hence, most of the asylum seekers in his study lived 'as if' they were not

waiting. The conclusion of the research is that people aim towards securing certainty in life.

Besides the fact that all of these types are, in fact, ‘waiters’, several criticisms may be made of Brekke’s typology. As Brekke himself admits, his typology represents “a crude simplification of reality” (*ibid.*: 49). People may move between categories over time, and even within a particular case, an individual’s orientation may be far more ambiguous than such a typology presents. The typology does not explicate the position that people currently occupy vis-à-vis the state. For example, as will be shown, most of my applicants appeared to be ‘Bridgeburners’ when fighting for the right to remain, but once this was secured, they exercised behaviour which indicated a more pro-active stance in relation to the country of origin. This orientation is bound up with their political position and struggles for the right to remain, rather than some fundamental commitment to a future in the UK. There is also a somewhat presumptuous conflation of choosing or wanting to stay in Sweden with ‘integration’.

In much of the research covered in this review (Brekke 2004; Lacroix 2004; Lennartson 2007; Stewart 2005; Sigona & Torre 2005), waiting was a severely under-theorised subject. This may be due restrictions imposed by the medium (journal articles) on the depth of their theses, and the fact that waiting tended to be a sub-theme. Several important questions are largely excluded from the analysis, including attention to the past (life prior to becoming a refugee, the conditions and reasoning that led to flight); aspects of the present which are inextricably tied to places elsewhere (attitudes towards the country of origin, contact with people, information and objects from the country of origin, political struggles relating to the country of origin which continue in the host country, and so on); and gendered differences in experiences of waiting. Furthermore, each study tends to merge and thus universalise the experiences and subjectivities of the research participants to some extent (perhaps again due to the mode of reporting).

A number of methodological constrictions may also be observed. A single interview tended to be used to gather data¹. As such, data are collected from rather

¹ Brekke (2004) also elicited photos from his participants, and Sigona & Torre (2005) elicited photos, and utilised data from diaries and workshops.

opaque interactions between researcher and participant which took place on a single occasion. Not one of the studies has a longitudinal component. Since all of the studies are heavily centred on time, change and continuity, I would suggest that these concepts need to be more fully embedded in the methodology if they are to be useful and revealing. Finally, the restriction of data collection to the use of interviewing results in an over-reliance on the spoken word. By focusing on what research participants *said*, to the exclusion of what they *did*, each of the studies may have identified only part of the subject's experience, and omitted important aspects of life that s/he did not think of or wish to reflect on in that specific instance. There are many experiences which are not easily verbalised but which can be articulated clearly through practice, which most of the studies reviewed here inadvertently overlook. Consequently, there was significant scope to use these existing studies as a foundation for the research design, and to develop the arising themes through a richer methodology and more developed analysis and application of theory.

Social scientific, literary and philosophical attention to waiting

A number of studies are specifically concerned with waiting as a condition. One recent anthropological collection based upon various field studies could be seen as a pilot study for more extensive and systematic research into waiting (Schilling 2002)². Schwartz's (1974) socio-economic study of waiting, in relation to organised systems such as bureaucracy and the market, is both pioneering and comprehensive. His main thesis is that structures of power and social worth are reflected in, maintained by, and consciously performed through the act of waiting: "the distribution of waiting time coincides with the distribution of power" (*ibid.*: 841). From the field of geography, Bissell describes the event of waiting as "the neglected Achilles heel of modernity" (2007: 277). His 'mobilities' approach is an attempt to contribute to a phenomenology of waiting as a particular kind of relation-to-the-world. Schweizer's recent book *On Waiting* is an examination of this "ever-present yet overlooked phenomenon" of "having time without wanting it" (2008: 2). He investigates waiting through reference to philosophical, literary and artistic works, but his deliberation

² Pers comm. Unfortunately only 1,000 copies were published, in German, and the volume has been out of print since shortly after its publication.

lacks an empirical grounding. Each of these studies tends to focus on short-term forms of waiting, or what Bissell calls “quotidian waiting events”: practices which are the often-overlooked part of our everyday corporeal existence (2007: 279). As Bissell notes, spaces of the urban built form – bus shelters, waiting rooms, roads – are engineered to facilitate these practices and to hold the inert body, and produce what might be called ‘landscapes of waiting’ (*ibid.*: 282).

Adams’ treatise on time in social theory touches upon waiting, but is limited in assuming that waiting involves knowing the unique time-scale of natural things, which allows us to anticipate and thus to use the period of waiting for another activity (1990: 122). As this thesis will show, waiting is not always accompanied by such knowledge. Adams also notes that the deferral of gratification in Western societies is a “culturally valued type of waiting” (Weigert 1981 in Adams 1990: 125). This a process which is more likely to occur when future rewards are both reasonably certain and to some degree under a person’s control, a condition not commonly found among persons living in poverty (*ibid.*: 124; cf. Day, Papataxiarchis & Stewart 1999).

Crapanzano’s (1986) controversial study of ‘the whites of South Africa’ uses waiting as a trope for the condition of approaching the end of apartheid, and in doing so, insightfully pinpoints a number of important existential aspects of waiting pertaining to power, action and time, which are usefully drawn upon later in this thesis. Studies of prisons (Goifmann 2002; Medlicott 1999) consider the way in which different kinds of disciplining of activity can produce varied experiences of time, and point to the crucial importance of what one is waiting for – such as, for example, release or capital punishment – in experiences of waiting.

Research into waiting in the context of illness and impending death has attended to the emotional and cognitive aspects of waiting. From the field of nursing, Locsin and Matua (2002) explore the experience of waiting to know whether one will live or die after Ebola diagnosis in Uganda. They suggest that in this situation, waiting is characterised by a balance between a hoped-for anticipation of life and recognition of the possibility of death. They see ‘waiting to know’ as a unique experience, with universal thematic structures of hope, anticipation, fear, meaning and suffering. Thorne *et al.*’s (1999) study of waiting for breast cancer diagnosis

among a group of Canadians finds waiting characterised by disruption in a normal sense of time, which produces a sense of being in limbo with attendant fear, anxiety and psychological tension. Like other studies (Chan & Loveridge 1987; Crapanzano 1986; Sigona & Torre 2005), they note strategies for coping, including conscious denial, a pragmatic focus on ‘getting through’, and information-gathering.

Kaufman’s (2005) study of the dying process in American hospitals dedicates some discussion to the process of waiting. She identifies three kinds of waiting in the hospital and their causes. The first kind entails waiting for information, procedures, consultations, decisions or a change in condition. A product of bureaucracy, this waiting enables things to move on along ‘the pathways’ within the hospital system. For patients and families, it is characterised by anticipation mingled with hope and dread, and takes place outside the rhythm of their lives. The second kind of waiting results from blockages in the system, which occur when families do not make proactive choices that will move things along, towards continuing treatment or towards death. Such delays are often the product of differences between medical professionals’ and families’ notions of what path the patient should take. The third kind is waiting for death as a mindful, absorbing activity, which occurs when all parties agree that the dying process has begun and death is imminent. At this time, a space for ‘waiting for death’ has been created, and families may later characterise the death as ‘good’ (*ibid.*: 148-201). This work indicates that waiting may take very different forms even within the same setting, depending upon what is being waited upon and who is doing the waiting. In contrast to other accounts, it highlights that waiting can be a positive or productive process.

This thesis conceptualises the search for asylum in terms of a life journey, which, by virtue of waiting, is disrupted but also re-imagined and re-formulated. This search can be conceptualised in terms of the concept of hope. Hage (2003) makes the distinction between two kinds of hope: societal hope and dispositional hope. My present interest is in the former. According to Hage, societal hope refers to the capacities that societies have for the generation and distribution of social opportunities. Society as nation-state distributes hope through the collective national identity, where the national ‘we’ magically allows the ‘I’ of the national to do things it can never hope to be able to do as an individual ‘I’. Hope is also distributed by

capitalist society through the promise of the possibility of upward social mobility (Hage 2003: 13). In a more general sense, hope is distributed through the production and distribution of a meaningful and dignified social life, which is only possible within society. That is, “the social world gives what is rarest, recognition, consideration, in other words, quite simply, reasons for being” (Bourdieu 1999: 240-241 in Hage 2003: 16). My postulation is that people leave – indeed, are forced to leave – when society gives them no cause to hope.

The asylum seekers who are the focus of this research left for a variety of reasons, but all shared the position of being in some way excluded from the national ‘we’. They were denied the possibility of living a ‘normal life’ in terms of bodily, social and material security, and like many people who seek asylum, their trust in others and in life itself had broken down (Hynes 2003). By trust in others, I mean a level of subjective probability that others will perform actions beneficial or at least not detrimental to oneself which is high enough for one to consider engaging in some form of cooperation with those others (Gambetta 1988: 217). Trust is necessary when others have the ability to disappoint our expectations and act with a degree of freedom, because full knowledge of their motives and responses is never possible (*ibid.*: 218). By an absence of trust in life itself, I refer to what Daniel and Knudsen call ‘mistrust’: a perpetual, conscious state of suspicion and perhaps uncertainty, which arises as a result of radical disjunction between a person’s familiar *way-of-being* in the world (Heidegger) or *habitus* (Bourdieu) and a new socio-political reality that not only threatens that way-of-being but also forces one to *see* the world differently (1995: 1). This is perhaps more usefully conceptualised as a breakdown of what Giddens calls ‘ontological security’, the

confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action. A sense of the reliability of persons and things, so central to the notion of trust, is basic to feelings of ontological security (1990: 92).

Giddens proposes via psychoanalytic theory that ontological security arises through routine and habit, initially in relation to the return of the carer in the early stages of a child’s development (*ibid.*). Searching for asylum was most immediately

an endeavour to reach a place of safety – often to save one’s life. But more than this, it was a search for societal hope and possibility, and an effort to re-establish trust in others and ontological security, in another place. This entails becoming part of a new ‘we’ and being assured protection by the new nation-state, via first the granting of admission. Waiting is conceived in this thesis as the protraction, extension and magnification of one stage of that quest. It involves hoping for and struggling towards securing a ‘normal’ and relatively secure life.

Given the relative dearth of theoretical and ethnographic material on waiting, my research was fundamentally exploratory in character. An overview of the existing literature enabled the identification of a number of themes which served in the design of the research; however, my fieldwork generated rather contrasting findings to those of existing research. I now consider the causes and extent of waiting in the specific situation I researched, before providing details of the fieldwork undertaken.

The causes of waiting

An initial consideration for any study of waiting would seem to be, why is it that people wait? In many situations, waiting is intimately bound up with social status and power, and can be understood as a ritualised expression of asymmetrical social relations (Schwartz 1979: 842-9). Unsurprisingly, it is often designated to the poor and powerless (Schweizer 2008; Obama 1995), such as refugees³. The causes of waiting may be ceremonial or deferential, such as when a sacrifice of one’s time is intentionally made to symbolise a measure of deference toward the authority for which one waits (Schwartz 1974). The more pronounced the honour of the server the longer the waiter is expected to willingly wait for him. Examples of deferential waiting are early arrival to meetings so as not to subject respected others to the inconvenience of waiting, and waiting for others to depart from a space before one does so oneself (*ibid.*).

The causes of waiting are, however, more commonly pragmatic, necessitated by the inaccessibility, due to demands or constraints on time and action, of the thing

³ A persistent assumption is evident in media and political rhetoric in some countries, that refugees are people who must – or should – ‘wait their turn’. Recently, this has taken the form of describing asylum seekers as ‘queue jumpers’; people who, by virtue of seeking asylum at the borders of the nation-state, have avoided some imagined queue in which they ought to be waiting.

for which one waits (Schwartz 1974). As Adams simply puts it, we wait because things, beings and institutions operate in a time proper to themselves, and because not everything is possible all at once (1990: 123). Although waiting is present in all of life, it is a particular characteristic of modernity's complex system of inter-dependent relations and events, in which the individual plays only a small part and exercises only limited control (Giddens 1990; Vanstone 1982). Waiting is the inevitable product of the bureaucratic appropriation of everyday life, characterised by large-scale economic systems and the segmentation of time (Moran 2004 in Bissell 2007: 282). The primary form of waiting on which this thesis hinges is inextricably tied to bureaucracy, and is a case of 'pragmatic waiting' (Schwartz 1974).

Bureaucracy is understood here in a Weberian sense, as a system of administration carried out on a continuous basis by trained professionals according to prescribed rules. This administration is employed by a governing body (cabinet) which has been elected by a corporate group (nation), to carry out its policies (Beetham 1996: 10). Lipsky coined the term 'street-level bureaucracies' to refer to administrative agencies that interact with and have wide discretion over the dispensation of benefits or the allocation of public sanctions (1980: xi). He suggests that these play an important role in everyday life in most post-industrial societies, socialising citizens to the expectations of government services and a place in the political community, determining the eligibility of citizens for government benefits and sanctions; overseeing the service citizens receive in those programs; and thus implicitly mediating aspects of the constitutional relationship of citizens to the state. In short, such bureaucracies "hold the keys to a dimension of citizenship" (*ibid.*: 4). In the UK, it is the unit of the Home Office called the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA) that is responsible for processing claims for asylum. It may be useful to conceive of the UKBA as a street-level bureaucracy in respect to immigrants, as it holds the key to admittance in terms of eligibility for protection and citizenship. Bureaucracy carries the stereotypical image of "bungling inefficiency and threatening power" (Beetham 1996: 1), aptly depicted by Kafka (1999) and vivid enough to constitute a comforting collective complaint (Herzfeld 1992). In this thesis, such an image is shown to have a reality. Though it was not methodologically

possible to study bureaucracy as such, the thesis does examine how the practical and emotional lives of asylum applicants are governed by the workings of bureaucracy.

When lodging a claim with the Home Office, the asylum applicant must wait for a series of actions: interviews, form-filling, documentation, transfer to appropriate accommodation, welfare payments, the dispatch of a decision, and so on. Usually, the decision is a refusal and this is appealed, instigating another process with its own waited-upon actions carried out by a host of actors including bureaucrats, legal adjudicators and solicitors. Most studies of bureaucracy tend to consider how they function, including the extent to which they meet an ideal level of efficiency (Herzfeld 1992). Though it is beyond the scope of the thesis to engage with such discussions, I am led down this well-trodden path by the compelling assertion that bureaucratic inefficiency is a cause of delay, which in turn produces waiting. In its review of the Home Office, the National Audit Office (NAO) found that delay was caused by problems arranging interviews; special factors such as awaiting medical referral; investigating the possible return of the applicant to a safe country; reconsideration of decisions by the Home Office; and suspension of processing of applications from some nationalities pending adjournment of appeals (NAO 2004: 24-35). The NAO also found that delays were caused for no apparent reason (*ibid.*). An Asylum Aid report goes so far as to claim that the Home Office has effectively exploited opportunities for delay, such as by seeking multiple adjournments on appeals (1999: 10). Waiting may also result from blockages in administrative processes, such when documentation is missing, when files are inaccessible, or when agreements between governments or agencies cannot be reached.

The extent of waiting

Despite extensive anecdotal evidence that asylum seekers do wait for significant periods of time, it has not been possible to obtain an indication of average timeframes, during different eras, for different populations in the UK, as has been the case elsewhere⁴, due to an absence of data. The Home Office Research and

⁴ For example, it has been estimated that in 2004, asylum claimants in Sweden waited on average 263 days for an initial decision on their application. The average waiting period for a decision on appeal

Development department publishes extensive statistics on asylum, and since 2001, asylum statistics reports have included a provision for the 'timeliness' of decisions and appeals. However, this only indicates the percentage of decisions that meet set targets⁵ (Home Office 2001).

It was similarly difficult to gain accurate information concerning the total duration of the waiting period (as calculated once it had reached a conclusion) for the sixty or so asylum seekers who informed this research. At the end of my fieldwork in January 2008, only fifteen primary applicants (and their numerous dependants) had received Leave to Remain. The average waiting time of these primary applicants was a period of five years and ten months. The shortest period of waiting was one year and ten months and the longest, nine years. Information gained since the conclusion of fieldwork indicates that at least another ten primary applicants who claimed asylum between 2001 and 2005 received Leave to Remain during 2008 and 2009. Waiting in the asylum process came to an end for most of these individuals by the granting of Indefinite Leave to Remain under a backlog clearing exercise conducted by the Home Office. Others are still waiting.

Research site

In the year 2000, a policy of dispersal was implemented for asylum applicants who, prohibited from working, could not survive without the provision of financial support and accommodation from the government. Applicants were dispersed away from the major population centre of London and the South East, to regional cities across the UK. Since that time, Glasgow has been the city with the largest number of dispersed applicants, with around 5,000 main applicants and their dependents housed each year (Home Office 2000a, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005a, 2006b, 2007). Glasgow was chosen as the field site for this research not only because of the sheer number of applicants residing there, but also due to its particular political context. Scotland has

was a further 178 days. Thus, the average waiting time for the 90% of applicants whose first application was refused was 441 days (Appelqvist 2005 in Lennartsson 2007). In the late 1990s, applicants in Quebec waited an average of 7 months for a hearing of the claim and another 22 months for a permanent residency application to be processed (Renaud & Gingras 1998 in Lacroix 2004: 152).⁵ For example, the Home Office entered into a Public Service Agreement with the Treasury in 2001, to reach and serve 60% of initial decisions made as of 1st January 2001 within 61 days (Home Office 2001).

historically had a relatively small migrant and ethnic minority population relative to south of the border, and has been regarded as long neglecting ‘race issues’ (Bond 2006; Kelly 2002). It was thus not surprising that dispersal was met with hostility among some unprepared locals, and by an absence of formal support structures. This offered an opportunity to consider how the presence of asylum seekers over a number of years has affected issues of deprivation, community cohesion, and the treatment of ethnic minorities. In other words, how has asylum become a national political issue, and how has it been approached ‘on the ground’?

Since devolution in 1997, the Scottish government has had responsibility for a range of areas of governance, a number of which apply to asylum applicants who live in Scotland. Possessing freedom with regard to the development of some policy areas pertaining to asylum has enabled the Scottish government to take a progressively pro-active stance towards asylum applicants, whilst their cases are still decided by UK-wide bodies. It was decided that the ‘integration’ of asylum seekers should be encouraged upon arrival in Scotland, in stark contrast to the policy of Westminster, which funds integration initiatives only for recognised Refugees. The existence of tensions between UK-wide immigration policy and devolved Scottish policy was expected to create interesting possibilities for the asylum seekers living in Scotland, and arguably, very different experiences of the asylum process than south of the border. The study sought to identify such issues and contribute to the small body of existing studies of asylum in Scotland, adding to possibilities for comparative analysis across regions.

Conceptualising types of migration and migrants

Much of the anthropological research on refugees has, until recently, focused on specific national groups⁶, perhaps because of the ‘mass’ character of migration, and the anthropological tendency to study a particular population, conceptualised as a ‘bounded community’ (Gupta & Ferguson 1997; Hastrup & Olwig 1997). In a suitably contemporary vein, this was to be a study of people from a range of backgrounds whose primary point of commonality was their being asylum applicants

⁶ Some scholars cited in this thesis and the groups they have researched include: Al-Rasheed (Iraqi Arabs and Assyrians); Coker (Sudanese); Coutin (Salvadorans); Fuglerud (Sri Lankan Tamils); Gow (Oromo); Knudsen (Vietnamese); Malkki (Burundian Hutus); Zetter (Greek Cypriots).

in the British asylum system who shared a geographic location and its circumscribed residential and public spaces. Participants were sought to represent a range of ethnicities, nationalities, ages, genders and histories, reflecting the current social landscape of Glasgow, where the conditions of dispersal and government intervention have facilitated asylum seekers from a variety of backgrounds meeting, befriending and forming communities of belonging on the basis of the shared categorical identity of ‘asylum seeker’.

A primary question that research of this kind must address is the way in which its subjects – people who have applied for Refugee Status – are to be conceptualised and referred to. The term ‘refugee’ – like its affiliated terms ‘asylum seeker’, ‘asylum applicant’, ‘expellee’, ‘undocumented migrant’, and so on – carries a range of meanings which derive from and reflect the settings within which it has been developed and deployed. In everyday speech, ‘refugee’ tends to be conceptualised in broad terms, as a person who has been compelled to leave his/her home, thus covering a wide range of oppressed, suppressed and malcontent persons (Zolberg *et al.* 1989: 3). In contrast, the definition of ‘refugee’ set out in the *1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* (and updated by the *1967 Protocol*) is precise, constricted, and inextricably bound up with the elaboration of human rights concepts during the mid-twentieth century (Good 2007: 5). It stipulates ‘refugee’ as a narrow category of persons possessing special rights in international law and having a special call on the assistance of the international community (Turton 2003). Article 1 A (2) of the *1967 Protocol* states that a refugee is a person who

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

Some scholars have regarded this definition as too narrow as it excludes many people who face life-threatening situations and are brutally forced into exile for reasons other than persecution (Gibney 2004: 7). Definitions based upon international legal norms have been regarded as inadequate from a social scientific perspective for

analytical purposes (Shah 2000; Zolberg *et al.* 1989)⁷. Black (2001: 63) notes that scholarly writing which uncritically accepts the definition outlined in the *1951 Convention* may

contribute to the perception of the naturalness of the category of refugees and of differential policies towards those who do and those who do not qualify for the label. The simple acceptance by social scientists of a legal definition might have some justification were this definition legally uncontested; yet as the burgeoning field of refugee law amply demonstrates, this is far from the case.

In the introduction to the first volume of the *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Zetter seeks distance from definitions developed in legal and administrative contexts, arguing that the Convention and Protocol establish only a *de minimis* definition (1988: 5). Usage developed within the field of refugee studies has since tended to employ a much broader definition, encompassing people fleeing natural disaster, social upheaval, structural violence, famine and civil war, both across and within borders (the latter usually referred to as internally displaced persons) (Black 2001). Another feature of refugee studies has been the attempt to distinguish refugees from other kinds of migrants – to pinpoint what is specific or common across migratory causes, patterns and outcomes. Such typologies tend to distinguish between refugees and labour migrants; the former conceived as resulting from political factors and the presence of force, and the latter conceived as stemming from economic factors and being more or less voluntary (Black 2001; Koser 1997). Koser (1997) notes that a debate exists over the extent to which this distinction is valid.

The ‘realist’ position sees the distinction as real, and proponents emphasise in particular the psychologically traumatising effects of flight, which manifest throughout ‘the refugee experience’ (Koser 1997: 591). In this vein, Kunz argues that it is the reluctance to uproot oneself and the absence of positive original motivations to settle elsewhere that characterises refugee decisions and distinguishes refugees from voluntary migrants (1973: 130). Zolberg *et al.* conclude that a well-founded

⁷ Definitions based upon international legal norms have also been considered inadequate from a political-legal perspective, and hence the *1969 OAU Convention* (among African countries) and *1984 Cartagena Declaration* (among South American countries) expanded the causes of refugee flight identified in the *Geneva Convention* (Turton 2003: 13).

fear of violence is the characteristic feature of refugees (1989: 33), though what counts as 'violence', by whom it is perpetrated, and through what means it is determined to be 'well-founded', are questions left unanswered. Peteet (2005) argues that refugees are usually compelled by large-scale, organised violence perpetuated by the state or paramilitary forces, whereas migrant flows are often attributed to the structural violence of poverty and discrimination, or the search for new opportunities for enhancing standards of living, income, education, etc. She states that both groups reflect a global-local connection that implicates nation-states, but whereas migrants suggest weak economies and states unable to ensure basic necessities, refugees have been excluded from the state and its protection, becoming objects of intervention by aid institutions that administer to them. Consequently, refugees are simultaneously inside and outside the national, whereas migrants usually retain their citizenship and are not the recipients of international aid/intervention (Peteet 2005: 24).

Implicit within this perspective is emphasis on the 'common experience' and 'common needs' of 'refugees'. According to Turton (2003), this runs the risk of homogenising people as a mass of needy and passive victims, mistakenly positing that there is such a thing as 'the refugee experience', or 'the refugee voice'.

In contrast, the 'nominalist' position sees the category of 'refugee' as a social construction that obscures empirical similarities between various kinds of migrants (Koser 1997). This perspective sees all migrants as on the move for a complex of social and economic reasons. An example of work in this vein is Richmond's (1993) matrix of migratory movements, which replaces the dichotomy of 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' migration with a continuum, at one end of which is the rational choice behaviour of 'proactive' migrants who seek to maximise net advantage, and at the other end of which is the 'reactive' behaviour of those whose degrees of freedom are severely constrained. His somewhat programmatic model stresses the similarity of structural positions which refugees and other migrants inhabit in relation to labour markets, restrictive immigration policies, and racism in host countries, and the structural causes of 'voluntary' and 'forced' migration (Black 1991: 286 in Koser 1997: 591). As Zetter has discerned, there are similarities in the conditions of injustice and fear in the global south that produce deep-seated perceptions of

persecution and create sufficiently compelling reasons for people to flee and seek a better life (2007: 178).

A complication in this discussion is the inherent contradiction in the notion of ‘forced’ migration. ‘To migrate’ is a verb, implying action (Turton 2003). Even people forced to leave still exercise agency (*ibid.*), yet people must demonstrate compulsion in order to be granted Refugee Status. The analytical and political decision to not strictly separate ‘forced’ migration from movement in general may contradict the insistence of many of our research subjects on the moral distinction between themselves and other kinds of migrants (Jansen & Löfving 2007: 10) – as well as their claims for protection.

While I do believe that there may be some qualitative difference between experiences of people leaving in a more voluntary capacity and those feeling compelled to leave, I also acknowledge that such boundaries can easily blur. Thus, I do not wish to impose ‘hard lines’ between ‘forced’ and ‘non-forced’ migration (Jansen & Löfving 2007: 8), instead acknowledging that both forms may be caused by violence, the latter generally structural in form and the former often political. In terms of claims for protection, political violence presently has currency whereas structural violence does not (*ibid.*). Furthermore, differences between people according to causes of flight may become less distinguishable as they move through the phases of what Koser (1997) calls “the asylum cycle”. For example, as I show later in the thesis, the prospect of losing a life built over many years in the UK and returning to a place radically changed, where one must start over with no prospects, where one’s children have never been, but where there is no threat of political violence, may be intensely feared just as is the prospect of returning to corporeal punishment, or even death.

This discussion raises concomitant questions regarding the founding of a study on research subjects who are identified and defined according to the category ‘refugee’. Malkki (1995b) has argued that using ‘refugee’ as a general category for academic analysis has a dehumanising and dehistoricising effect. Writing against functionalist and essentialist tendencies in the literature which present mobile, unstable social phenomena as essential ‘traits’ and ‘characteristics’ emanating from individual persons (Malkki 1995b: 511), she argues that reasons for uprooting are in

fact diverse, and ‘refugee’ does not ‘constitute a naturally self-delimiting domain of anthropological knowledge’ (*ibid.*: 496). For her, the term ‘refugee’ has analytical usefulness not as a label for a special, generalisable ‘kind’ of person or situation, but as a broad legal or descriptive rubric that includes within it a world of socio-economic statuses, personal histories, and psychological or spiritual situations (*ibid.*). Malkki is observing here a trend not limited to the study of refugees, but observable in other apparently ‘natural’ domains of anthropological knowledge, which assume the existence of shared ‘innate’ qualities among a ‘people’ or ‘culture’ which are conceived as stable ‘wholes’ (Gupta & Ferguson 1997).

Nevertheless, I would argue that it is possible to base research on a category of persons labelled as ‘refugees’ – or, more specifically, ‘asylum seekers’ – without succumbing to these tendencies. The problem here is not one of labelling, but of one’s methodological approach to people who are so labelled. The point that I take from Malkki is not to see the label of ‘refugee’ or ‘asylum seeker’ as designating a particular kind of person. As Jansen and Löfving (2007: 8), following Turton (2003), assert, people on the move should be treated as ‘ordinary people’ or ‘purposive actors’ rather than as ‘representatives’ of ‘types’ of displacement. Hence, our goal should not be to highlight the distinctiveness of refugees as a group, but to use the particular circumstances of refugee situations to illuminate general theories in cognate disciplines, and thus participate in the development of social science (Black 2001: 66). This entails abandoning the *assumption* of congruence between individual subjects, while still paying attention to processes involved in creating refugees and the *production* of both similarity and difference (Gupta & Ferguson 1997).

Furthermore, a legitimate reason for studying people according to the bureaucratic-legal construct of ‘asylum applicant’ is that categories carry power. Legal categories bestow certain rights and impose certain restrictions and thus to a great extent determine the life chances and well-being of asylum seekers (Colson 2003: 3; Fuglerud 1999: 90; Joly *et al.* 1992; Zetter 1991, 2007). For example, there are currently at least nine statuses which people who have successfully sought asylum in the UK may occupy, each with its own corresponding entitlements concerning the duration of permissible stay in the UK, family reunion, travel outside

of the UK, and access to further education, housing, healthcare, welfare, and so on (Brown 2008). Hence, as Jansen and Löfving (2007: 8) write,

the commonality of ‘refugee-ness’ does not lie in a uniform experience of forced migration but rather in a forced engagement with the interplay of structural factors such as state border regimes, legal frameworks regulating the relation between people and place, and humanitarian aid interventions.

By studying perhaps otherwise disparate people through the frame of legal-bureaucratic policies, and according to the resultant categories, it is possible to observe the ways in which these inform and shape subjects’ daily lives. The task of the research, then, is to seek the particular and the universal; to gauge a diversity of voices and experiences whilst identifying the common threads running through them, rather than to assume some universal ‘refugee experience’.

I follow the suggestion of Zolberg *et al.* (1989) that research which understands refugees simply as those who have been recognised as such by the UNHCR or authorities of receiving countries, will contribute to the legitimisation of current practices and exclude a consideration of policy alternatives that might give Refugee Status to others whose need is even greater. They suggest that to counteract this, scholars might adopt an ‘ethnomethodological stance’ and accept the self-definition of all those who claim to be refugees. Throughout the research process, I have had the recurring experience of being asked by various people, in reference to my participants, ‘but are they really refugees?’ My response has been, and remains, that my role as a researcher was not to assess the validity or truthfulness of applicants’ claims, nor the extent to which they could, or indeed should, be regarded under a legal framework as ‘refugees’. Furthermore, as the previous discussion shows, what is defined as ‘refugee’ or even ‘forced migration’ is variable. Thus, I have adopted an ethnomethodological stance, by implicitly – and sometimes explicitly – accepting and acknowledging my participants’ claims to be refugees.

As much of the discussion that follows deals with a bureaucratic-legal process, I find it necessary to use terms deriving from that context to indicate people’s positioning within that process. I reserve the term ‘Refugee’ for those people who have been recognised by the British Home Secretary as Refugees under the *Refugee Convention*. The term ‘refugee’ with a lowercase ‘r’ is sometimes used

with reference to other scholarly works which employ this term in varying ways. The terms ‘asylum seeker’ or ‘asylum applicant’ carry the general meaning of a person who has sought to be recognised as a Refugee, with the latter indicating that the person has actually lodged an application for asylum. ‘Asylum seeker’ in particular is sometimes used in a pejorative sense, but as I show in this thesis, its meaning is highly contextual. In the absence of any truly neutral nouns for the primary subjects of this research, these are the terms I use throughout this thesis.

Methodology

The data presented in this thesis were gathered during twelve months of anthropological fieldwork in Glasgow, which took place between January 2007 and February 2008. It is to a lesser extent supplemented by information gathered from trips to Glasgow and contact with participants since the conclusion of fieldwork. In the following section I explicitly detail the methodological approach taken in order to afford the reader the insight to judge the validity and authenticity of the account that follows (Wikan 1996: 8). As Punch suggests, rather than being self-indulgent, an open discussion of the risks and dilemmas of conducting research can be useful both to help prepare successive researchers, and to demonstrate the ways in which the researcher’s social and emotional involvement in the research setting constitutes an important source of data (1986: 14).

Research questions

The methodology was planned around a series of research questions; namely: How is time (and its passage) reckoned and experienced in waiting? What kinds of activities are individuals engaged in during the waiting period, and to what ends? How do asylum seekers *do* waiting as a practice? In what ways is the experience of waiting socially mediated? How is it understood by the actors themselves? What kind(s) of orientation(s) in place arise in light of the temporariness and uncertainty produced by the asylum application process? These questions pertained to the themes of time, perception, activity, meaning, place and belonging, which arose in the literature reviewed. In the field, a flexible and iterative approach was taken to data collection,

moving between initial research interests and emergent themes emphasised by the asylum seekers.

Identifying and accessing research participants

An ethnographic approach is grounded in the assumption that human behaviour and the ways in which people construct and make meaning of their lives and worlds are both highly variable and locally specific, necessitating long-term, embedded methods (LeCompte & Schensul 1999). Since the policy of dispersal was implemented in the year 2000, asylum seekers have been housed in particular localities of Glasgow, identifiable through Home Office and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA) data sources. I envisaged that basing myself in one of these areas would maximise opportunities to meet potential participants, and to gain knowledge of, and participate in, their local milieu. Fortunately, I was able to secure private accommodation in a suburb I will call 'Ralston', in close proximity to a number of housing estates in which asylum seekers were accommodated.

Given the marginalisation of asylum seekers and the stigmatisation of the 'asylum seeker' label, it was particularly important to approach potential participants in a sensitive and careful manner. Attending a 'community project' for asylum seekers was deemed the most appropriate method of access, as it would enable regular contact in a safe and neutral setting, where potential participants could slowly get to know me and develop an understanding of my research aims. By volunteering, I could make a contribution to initiatives intended to enhance the well-being of asylum seekers.

A plethora of refugee-related organisations were created in Glasgow after dispersal began. I noted more than twenty-five such organisations in late 2006, covering health and well-being; political lobbying and participation; legal, educational and housing advice; volunteering and vocational training; detention visitation; befriending; English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) tuition; and leisure. I cast the net wide and targeted three organisations. The efficaciousness of the first two endeavours was only limited, while the third became the site of a dynamic and rewarding fieldwork experience.

The first was an advocacy and befriending scheme for isolated asylum seekers. I explained my research and my desire to volunteer as a means of meeting participants to the programme coordinator and was subsequently given training and registered as a volunteer. Shortly afterwards, I was partnered with a gentle and kind Nigerian woman named Grace, who had applied for asylum in early 2007 and was being housed in emergency accommodation. Grace told me that she had suffered years of verbal, physical and sexual abuse from her husband and his parents, and fled with her two daughters when her mother-in-law arranged for their circumcision. Grace and I met weekly or fortnightly for three months. She was extremely vulnerable and troubled during this time, and eventually returned to Nigeria under the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRP).

The second concomitant avenue I took was attending an organised residents' group. This venture was short-lived as very few asylum seekers attended. However, importantly, it introduced me to Karim, an earnest and good-humoured middle-aged man from Sudan. Karim comes from a large, wealthy family and is married to Khadija, a refined and educated woman from the same tribe. He was educated to post-graduate level in the Middle East and had a successful career in Sudan. He became the target of political oppression as a result of his political activism, and was repeatedly detained by the Sudanese government and tortured for several months at a time. Once released, he journeyed to the UK with Khadija and their children, and applied for asylum. The family strictly observe Islam and are heavily involved in the Sudanese community in exile. After spending many sessions at the residents group conversing with Karim about his life history and my research, Karim volunteered to meet regularly with me and share his experiences to inform my study. In exchange, I offered to help him develop his English. Consequently, he became a primary research participant.

The third organisation I contacted, and the one with which the substantive part of the research was undertaken, was a voluntary sector organisation which provided various kinds of support, advice and 'sign-posting' to asylum seekers living in Ralston, and organised opportunities for 'local integration'. I will call this organisation 'Ralston Community Integration Project' (RCIP). The office of RCIP

and the function rooms hosting RCIP events, classes and meetings (henceforth referred to as the 'projects') were located on the ground floor of one of the council housing estates in Ralston. Living in Ralston afforded me easy geographical access to these projects, which a large number of locally-resident asylum seekers attended, and the opportunity to become immersed in the events and atmosphere of the local area.

In February 2007 I telephoned the RCIP office and explained to two of the members of staff the nature of my research and my interest in volunteering with the organisation in order to find research participants. I was invited to meet the staff and attend the women's group the following day. It was immediately clear that as a physical site and an organisation, RCIP was a hub of activity, and that the projects would be appropriate places to conduct participant-observation.

RCIP shared a collaborative relationship and membership base with a group called 'Ralston Asylum Forum' (RAF), which was administered and facilitated by staff from the Scottish Refugee Council (SRC)⁸ and Glasgow City Council's (GCC) Social Work Services. RAF aimed to provide a platform for lobbying on the issues facing asylum seekers and Refugees, such as asylum policy, destitution, community safety, housing, legal issues and negative press coverage. The group consisted of twenty-five or so asylum seekers and Refugees, and representatives from local organisations. Meetings were conducted on a fortnightly basis in a function room on the ground floor of one of the Ralston high rises, and followed a set agenda. I was invited by a Refugee friend living in Edinburgh to attend an asylum-related event in Glasgow at which he introduced me to Manal, a widely respected, confident and exceptionally skilled Muslim woman. Manal left Algeria with her husband and child due to threats from Muslim extremists and the unstable political situation. They applied for asylum in 2001 and after being dispersed to Glasgow, Manal became an active member of RAF. When I explained my research to her, she welcomed me to attend a RAF meeting. I was simultaneously urged by RCIP staff to attend RAF as a means of meeting asylum seekers and gaining a grasp of the issues pertinent to them.

⁸ An independent charity, the Scottish Refugee Council is the principal advocacy organisation for asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland. It plays a prominent role in the development and delivery of assistance to asylum applicants and those recognised as Refugees, in Scotland.

Subsequently, attending RAF meetings became a regular research activity for the remainder of the fieldwork.

‘Hanging out’ at the RCIP office and projects and attending RAF meetings provided an easy and efficient means of meeting a large number of asylum seekers. Indeed, during the first two months of fieldwork, I met at least thirty asylum seekers; numerous staff of statutory and voluntary sector organisations; RCIP volunteers; and long-term residents of Ralston. Although the technique of snowballing was not particularly necessary once I had established contact with RCIP/RAF, I did meet one participant, Mudiwa, through this method. Mudiwa is courteous, intelligent and wise beyond her twenty years. She grew up in an educated, middle-class Shona family who, during the late 1990s, became opposed to Mugabe’s rule. She left Zimbabwe when her parents fled to another country after receiving repeated threats and the seizure of their land by Zanu-PF thugs. She applied for asylum in the UK in 2005 with her small child.

Characteristics of research participants

The data that informs this study is derived from interaction with at least sixty asylum seekers and Refugees, and at least twenty non asylum-seeking subjects. For clarity, these participants may be placed into five broad categories, according to individual characteristics, method of access and level of engagement in the research process.

The first category includes three asylum-seeking individuals whom I met through volunteering and snowballing: Grace, Karim and Mudiwa. These three were not connected to one another or to the other asylum seekers involved in the research. After confirming each individual’s willingness to participate in the study, a regular (more or less weekly) and high level of engagement, involving participation in everyday activities and the conduct of in-depth interviews, was maintained with each. Because of this level of engagement, I refer to these three as ‘key’ participants.

The second category includes a group of around fifty asylum seekers who regularly attended either, or both of, RCIP projects and RAF meetings, for the

duration of my fieldwork⁹. They came from at least twenty-four countries in the regions of the Maghreb, the Caucasus, West and East Africa, South-Eastern Europe, the Caribbean, the Middle East and South Asia. The main languages spoken were various dialects of Arabic, French, Farsi, Turkish and Urdu, and most had a good grasp of English. Overall, roughly 75% of these subjects were women and 25% men. The majority lived with their spouse and children, reflecting the successful negotiation of GCC with NASS to receive primarily families in the dispersal scheme. The husband of the family had usually claimed asylum, with the wife and children registered as dependants. There were a high proportion of single women with children; a few single women with children left behind in the country of origin; and some single men. They expressed a range of reasons for flight from the country of origin, such as intimidation, oppression, and/or torture by the government, government-sponsored militias or non-state actors, having been targeted due to their (or family members') political activities, religious practices, or ethnic identity, as pre-empting their departure. Some individuals said that they left to escape gang violence; threats from extremist groups; the customary circumcision of their daughters; or the threat of family estrangement due to a spouse's undocumented status in the country of origin. Listening to people's many stories revealed that there were usually multiple reasons for flight, which were often not set out in the formal claim for asylum. All had applied for asylum between the years 2000 and 2005, and all had been initially refused Refugee Status. At the commencement of my fieldwork in early 2007, only two individuals had been granted Refugee Status. Most were in the process of appealing the refusal or preparing a fresh claim. A small number had exhausted all appeal rights and were either awaiting a deportation order or unable to be returned. I interacted with people in this category on the three days a week that I attended RCIP projects and RAF meetings. The level of engagement with most was general, in the sense that interaction tended to be confined to the projects and what was possible in that setting (see Participant Observation section below).

⁹ Group membership remained relatively stable until the end of 2007, when attendance at the projects dropped off slightly after some families were granted Leave under a Home Office backlog clearing exercise.

After a few months of involvement with the wider group, I identified a subset of ten individuals (including the spouses of RCIP/RAF attendees who did not attend the projects themselves) with whom I could negotiate closer research relationships: Asad and Lila, Mohammed and Nazahah, Sevda and Maksim, Amal, Noor, Delaram, and Taliba. I refer to the individuals in this third category of participants as ‘key’ participants, as I undertook more frequent and in-depth forms of interaction with them, which produced a wider range of data, and resulted in a fuller understanding of life trajectories, family dynamics, the substance of asylum claims, experiences of the asylum process, and the broader context of life. As with Grace, Karim and Mudiwa, I judged these individuals as suitable for this level of participation on the basis that they appeared relatively autonomous and therefore able to engage in the research process with minimal risk of harm. All were competent speakers of English and in relatively good mental and physical health. They represented a diversity of languages, genders, religious beliefs, educational and socio-economic backgrounds, reasons for flight, durations of waiting, ages, and stages in the life course, which were regarded as important in significantly shaping the experiences of displacement and waiting observed. A number of similarities were also shared by these participants. All lived in NASS accommodation in or around Ralston; all were parents; and all experienced separation from family members. Most had never been to the UK or learned any English prior to their becoming asylum seekers and felt themselves to be undergoing personal and cultural change. I regarded this mix of individuals as usefully informing the research of a range of experiences, whilst enabling the identification of similarities. Of course, the degree of rapport we had developed and their willingness to more actively participate was also a fundamental basis for their becoming ‘key’ research participants. Their biographies, narratives, stories and comments, and events in their lives to which I was party, occupy a central place in this thesis.

The fourth category of research subjects includes several individual asylum seekers with whom I had contact, either in face-to-face conversation or as the member of a larger audience, on one or more occasion at asylum-related events in Glasgow (other than those organised by RCIP/RAF). Some of these individuals’ orally- and textually-communicated comments, speeches and stories are included in

this thesis.

The final category of subjects includes legal practitioners; staff and volunteers of statutory services and community-sector organisations; non-asylum-seeking participants at the RCIP/RAF projects; and neighbours and friends of asylum seekers, with whom many of the asylum seekers interacted, and with whom I therefore also came into contact on a regular basis. These individuals were usually long-term residents of Glasgow and either white Scots, white English or first- or second-generation migrants. While I saw such people on a fairly regular basis, data collection activities involving them were limited to addressing specific questions to them and observing of their actions and interactions with the asylum seekers. Their importance for the research lies in the role that they played in the lives of the asylum seekers, and accordingly, some of their comments and actions, either observed firsthand or narrated to me by asylum seekers, are included in this thesis.

Methods of data collection

i. Participant observation

I conducted participant-observation at RCIP projects (three days per week); RCIP meetings (monthly); RAF meetings (fortnightly); and community events and seminars run by voluntary sector organisations (bi-monthly). As a participant-observer, I alternated between two, nevertheless overlapping, kinds of participation. Firstly, I followed the asylum seekers' patterns of activity, which, at the projects, generally entailed taking on the role of service user or participant. This enabled me to observe in a non-invasive manner regular interactions between the asylum seekers themselves, and between the asylum seekers and those not in the asylum process. Their interlocution revealed shared experiences, and the social mediation of interpretations of experiences of waiting and the 'asylum seeker' label. From repeated observations, multiple interactions and relentless explanations offered by the asylum seekers (DeNeve 2006: 68), I was able to gain gradual insights into their personal biographies, everyday concerns, ideas and beliefs on a host of matters, and their impressions of the RCIP projects and services in Glasgow. The sum total of

these insights was a broad picture of the tacit and overt pre-occupations, attitudes and values of members of the group.

Secondly, I acted as a regular volunteer, providing asylum seekers with information and advice; presenting updates on the projects at RCIP meetings; representing RCIP at external meetings; preparing for and helping to run events and classes; and performing administrative tasks. Through volunteering, I developed strong relationships with both staff and asylum seekers, and was entrusted with privileged and confidential information. I witnessed firsthand the asylum seekers' and staff's expectations of one another, attendees' motivations for involvement, and the model of service provision operating. I also gained exposure to the discourses surrounding asylum circulating in the community sector in Glasgow, and the practical implementation of Scottish government policy towards asylum seekers. Although acting as a volunteer was a part of my methodological design, I came to realise that role designation within the organisation, where *service users* were intended to be asylum seekers and all non-asylum seekers in attendance were *volunteers*, actually prevented me from acting solely as an observer-in-attendance/service user. That is, it was expected – by others and myself – that as a young, able-bodied British participant, I would 'help' by applying my knowledge, skills and labour.

I also conducted participant-observation with my 'key' participants outside of the projects, with increasing intensity as fieldwork progressed. This entailed, to the extent that was possible, doing what my participants did. I met Karim in cafés, at the library, at college, in the park, or with his family at their flat. We usually divided these meetings into an informal interview; a study session, in which we would work through reading, speaking and listening exercises to improve Karim's English; and a social session, during which we would chat extensively over Sudanese coffee prepared by Khadija about whatever was on our minds. Mudiwa and I conversed by telephone on a daily basis and regularly saw each other face-to-face, at home or in the city centre. Grace's and my meetings revolved around particular tasks – signing up at the library, locating free clothing and household goods, joining a local church, meeting her solicitor – and spending time together at her flat. Visits to the homes of my other 'key' participants tended to involve the sharing of stories, listening to

music, and contemplating photographs or objects from the country of origin. At times we would simply sit watching television or tend to the children. Sometimes the women would teach me well-versed recipes, customs, or dances; while at other times, we would review asylum case documentation and letters received from the Home Office, solicitors, or other institutions, at either my request or theirs. We also communicated via email and telephone, and often met for various activities in the city centre. I attended several parties celebrating religious and national holidays organised by the Eritrean and Sudanese communities, and a Sudanese wedding party. I also observed several Appeal Hearings at the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal, where I was permitted to take extensive notes, and sat in on a few meetings with solicitors. Such contexts provided a fuller picture and hence more in-depth understanding of participants than would have been gained had data collection been confined to the RCIP/RAF setting.

ii. Narratives

One of my intentions when embarking upon fieldwork was to gather the narratives of asylum seekers. Narratives are understood here as first-person accounts or stories of individuals' experiences (Riessman 1993). Experience gives rise to narrative, but casting experience in a narrative form is a primary means by which people organise and make sense of that experience. Stories are therefore not simply reflective of life as lived, but are creative constructions or interpretations of the past, generated in specific contexts of the present (Eastmond 2007; Riessman 1993). Scholars analysing the narratives of refugees emphasise their importance in creating order out of disorder, legitimising past actions, and making projections for the future, particularly when the future is highly uncertain (Knudsen 1990). Narratives may also be coping mechanisms, ways by which individuals may remember and bear witness, or seek to restore continuity, alleviate suffering and affect change in their situations (Eastmond 2007: 251). Studying narrative thus offers the researcher ways of identifying how the subject tries to construe a life history to reduce the uncertainty of his or her life course and secure rights towards the future (Riessman 1993: 3). For the narrator, narrative may be experienced "as a powerful, expressive act, a means of reflecting on the circumstances of one's life and of creating realities – particularly

conceptual and affective ones”; for the listener, it serves as “a window into the intentionality and creative agency of the teller” (Lamb 2001: 21). It was accordingly a fitting route into people’s experiences of migration and waiting, and their endeavours to make sense of these experiences.

Wikan (1996) highlights considerations required when using narrative techniques. She suggests that experience should not be treated as though it were transparent and accessible through people’s narratives and utterances. Every statement should be interpreted on more than a purely linguistic basis, in relation to a world of intricate relationships, urgent interests and limited assets on which they are trying to have an effect. Only by attending to the speaker’s construction of this world and intentions is it possible to appreciate their lived experience, what they believe they are doing, and why (*ibid.*: 13). Ethnographers should therefore use all of the knowledge available to them to interpret what is said. Wikan also alerts us to the need to view critically the tone and form adopted by subjects in their narratives. She asks, particularly with reference to people whose lives are characterised by suffering, anxiety, or deprivation: if we use our subjects’ own assessments and narratives as evidence of their lived experience, are we being misled by ‘a rhetoric of complaint’ (*ibid.*: 2)? How is it possible to escape the conclusion that their lives are characterised by unmitigated misery when that is what people themselves seem to be saying in the manner of their verbal and non-verbal communication (*ibid.*: 7)? For Wikan, a long-term perspective allows the ethnographer to amass data which testifies to people’s resourcefulness and resilience, and thus to gain a more holistic view than narrative alone offers. My attempt to come to terms with adequately interpreting and representing experience is to draw as thorough a picture as possible through not merely narrative but also observation, and the documentation of changes over time. A related issue is the masking and unveiling of particular kinds of information, which both the researcher and participants necessarily engage in when negotiating their roles during fieldwork. Knudsen reminds us that officials, relief workers and researchers are ‘strangers’ to refugees who are given selected glimpses and standardised versions of episodes in their lives (1990: 3). I contend that my use of mixed methods and settings, as well as roles in the field, elicited varied forms of data which make for a more complex understanding than might otherwise have been the

case. By observing narratives in different settings, different purposes could be detected, and by supplementing these with observations, differences could be discerned between what was *said* in narrative and what was *done* in practice.

Narratives were collected through interviewing, conducted several months into the research when a bond of trust with and knowledge of ‘key’ participants had been established. These lasted between one and three hours in length and included both semi-structured forms using an interview schedule, and completely unstructured, where the interviewee had the freedom to determine the range and flow of topics. Narratives were also observed in informal conversations in natural settings. In order to show that different materials have a different ontological status, I present ‘verbatim’ narratives and comments (tape-recorded or written down immediately after their utterance) in double quotation marks or as an indented paragraph, while those that I later recalled are presented within the standard paragraph, usually in single quotation marks.

I sought to make my data collection activities as discreet or apparent as was appropriate to the situation. Data were recorded through detailed note-taking when permitted, such as at RCIP and RAF meetings. In those scenarios where conspicuous note-taking was inappropriate, data were committed to memory, and written down at the first available opportunity. Interviews with all but two people, who had prior negative experiences of recorded interviews which I did not want to evoke, were tape-recorded.

Fieldwork was conducted in the English language. The asylum seekers had varying levels of fluency in English, but as most had been attending ESOL classes and practising speaking for more than two years, they were comfortable and usually enthusiastic about using English. Admittedly, targeting only individuals with English language competence has the disadvantage of excluding from the research the most marginalised people, who literally lack a voice in this society. It also undoubtedly imposed a limit on my data. Capturing my participants’ accounts in their native tongues could have provided a fuller ethnographic picture and a more nuanced analysis. However, my preference was to communicate directly in order to reduce misunderstandings and develop trust. Logistically, it would have been extremely difficult to conduct most of the data collection with the use of an interpreter.

Moreover, had I attempted to use an interpreter on a regular basis, many of my participants would have been offended at the implication that their English aptitude was inadequate, or disappointed that they would be denied the opportunity to practise speaking English with me. Occasionally, in group settings, one or two individuals would translate a joke, a saying, or general conversation between others from the native language for me; and some individuals would directly translate words or sayings from their native tongue into English to describe something or illustrate a point to me. These are included in this thesis where appropriate.

iii. Textual and visual materials

Textual and visual materials were an important source of supplementary data that I collected in the field. These included the newsletters and reports of community organisations such as RCIP; information leaflets circulated to RCIP/RAF service users concerning asylum policy and procedures; documentation issued to applicants by the Home Office; newspaper articles about asylum or particular asylum seekers; and personal notes, short stories and poems written by asylum seekers. Discussions with my participants about documentation that they were exposed to occasionally helped to clarify their interpretation of information.

Relationships and positionality in fieldwork

It is now well established that the data generated in ethnographic enquiry are the product of interaction between the researcher, research participants, and the environment they inhabit, and that ascribed characteristics of the researcher such as gender, age and ethnicity shape relationships with the people under study in important ways (Lofland & Lofland 1984: 84)¹⁰. Such characteristics largely determine how the researcher is located within the social structure and may thus facilitate or hinder the performance of different kinds of roles in the field. Various roles can be exploited to gather different kinds of data, and to garner a sense of the kinds of bias characteristic of each (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983: 97).

¹⁰ I prefer to use the term 'participant' to 'informant', to indicate that data were actively co-created by all involved in the research, rather than transmitted in a single direction as is implied by the term 'informant'.

Most of the asylum seekers followed strictly gendered patterns of behaviour. Being alone with a person of the opposite sex who was not a spouse or close relative was regarded by most as inappropriate. As such, there was little context for me to establish one-on-one research relationships with men. Given this, my relationship with Karim was somewhat unique, and its achievement can be traced to our mutual ability to openly discuss from the outset the non-sexual nature of our intentions and the settings in which we would be able to meet. I was aware, nevertheless, of there being unwanted consequences of the contact I had with Karim, such as being erroneously regarded by some members of the Sudanese community as his 'girlfriend'. In a couple of cases, relationships with women facilitated access to their husbands. For example, although I met Mohammed, a middle-aged man from a Middle-Eastern country who strictly observed Islam, before I met his wife Nazahah, it was only as a result of my befriending her and her children that I was invited into the couple's home, which enabled greater interaction with Mohammed. It was practically impossible to speak to single men in a private, confidential setting.

The kinds of information divulged to me by men and women differed, and this is a reflection not only of their divergent experiences, but also of their roles. Men tended to speak far less than women about shameful or traumatic experiences and the nature of relationships with family, children, and the wider community. Consequently, much of the data presented in the thesis is female-centred.

At twenty-five, I was older than, or around the same age as, many of my participants. However, as I did not yet have children, almost all of my participants regarded me as being at an earlier stage in the life cycle than them. The sense of 'youthfulness' that this endowed me with helped to facilitate the adoption of an 'acceptable incompetent' position, particularly in the early stages of fieldwork, which in turn enabled me to watch what people were doing, ask questions, visibly try things out myself and occasionally make mistakes, whilst maintaining a self-conscious awareness of what was learned, how it was learned, and the social transactions that informed the production of such knowledge (Lofland & Lofland 1984: 38-39). Being childless also provided a meaningful context for me to play with the asylum seekers' children. I came to realise that more than simply an enjoyable activity for me, this was regarded as demonstrative of a warm-heartedness and

affection that was valued, and in turn aided the rapid development of relationships with a number of families.

The researcher's perceived political allegiance is of particular importance in research with refugees. It was immediately obvious that most of the asylum seekers felt a mixture of fear and resentment towards the Home Office, and that were I to be seen as sympathising with the government's stance on immigration, I would most likely be regarded with suspicion or animosity. Brekke (2004) notes that his Norwegian nationality made asylum seekers in Sweden more trusting of him because it was clear that he was not an agent of the Swedish state. I found that some individuals had their own ways of assessing my position vis-à-vis immigration matters, such as by testing my willingness to attend protests outside the Home Office or to sign a petition demanding that all 'illegal immigrants' be granted the right to remain in Britain. While emphasising my own history of growing up in Australia helped to establish my distance from the British state, it was rather more my continual efforts to demonstrate awareness of the risks participants faced; the nature of their struggles; belief in them; and protection of confidentiality, that enabled the establishment of trust. By volunteering for RCIP, I was also designated the identity of advocate for asylum seekers. Consequently, people came to see me not as one *of* them, but certainly as one *with* them (Gow 2002).

My national and linguistic background shaped the kinds of data gathered. While I was not regarded as a 'foreigner' in Britain, since English is my native language and my family is British¹¹, it was certainly acknowledged that I, like the adult asylum seekers, was not Scottish. This seemed to open a space to voice criticisms of the Scottish way of life witnessed and more ambivalent feelings about living in Scotland, as such expressions would not, after all, be directed at *me*. This is significant in light of the potential for such views to be silenced, particularly by a prominent public discourse which predicated the right of asylum seekers to remain in Scotland on their 'belonging' and 'making contributions' to Scotland, discussed in Chapter 6. We frequently discussed our shared experiences of starting life in a new

¹¹ For example, whenever I agreed with Karim that the cold and wet Scottish weather was difficult to cope with, he always replied, "you don't really find the weather here difficult, not like I do, because you are British!" My 'blood' was seen by Karim to override my physical adjustment to twenty years of life in a hot climate.

place, and memories of people, foods and smells of the past, and this facilitated empathy between us. Additionally, my English skills and British heritage were regarded by some as equipping me with the useful ability to provide information on practical and cultural matters about which they sought clarification.

During fieldwork, relationships with a number of participants – primarily key participants – developed into what I would call ‘friendships’. While ‘participant’ and ‘friend’ are overlapping categories, and in some senses indistinguishable, I could say that broadly speaking, the exchange of information with these ‘friends’ tended to be more mutual and involve greater levels of self-disclosure and intimacy. Such friendships developed for a number of reasons. Firstly, anthropologists must have a recognised role in the field in order to make it possible for people to interact with them sensibly and predictably (Briggs 1977: 78 in Sluka 2007: 122). Most of the asylum seekers had no prior experience with anthropologists or long-term researchers in general. The appropriate roles available to a person like me tended to be limited to ‘friend’ or ‘advocate’ in the context of everyday life, or ‘service provider’, ‘teacher’, and perhaps ‘journalist’ in the RCIP/RAF projects setting. Of course, it was possible to try to carve out a new role for myself as ‘anthropologist’ or ‘researcher’, but my efforts and insistence were not always effective. The second reason relates to what people want and expect of one another. Most of my participants were less interested in my research – or research in general – than in what kind of person I was; whether I could be trusted; and whether I could become a friend, a confidante, someone who would inform and assist them, or an advocate for asylum seekers in general (see Hammersely & Atkinson 1983: 78). Though I fundamentally sought people to inform my research rather than companions, not surprisingly, I found myself not only deeply respecting but also connecting with, and developing a great fondness for, many of the people I met in Glasgow. Thirdly, the research was of a highly personal nature, and involved sharing considerable time, activities, thoughts, emotions and poignant events with key participants. Such mutual receptivity quite naturally engendered intimacy, understanding, trust and commitment to one another’s well-being, which are characteristic of friendships.

Developing relationships of this kind during fieldwork is not unusual among anthropologists. LeCompte and Schensul (1999: 10) write that

A hallmark of ethnographic research is that ethnographers must become intimately involved with members of the community or participants in the natural settings where they do research. Intimate involvement means building trust between the researcher and the participants and often calls for a special kind of friendship.

The success of fieldwork is in large measure determined by the ability to establish good rapport and meaningful relations, and making friends with particular individuals is one of the main ways that rapport is established during the early part of fieldwork (Sluka 2007: 121). One advantage of occupying the role of friend – in addition to the roles of researcher and volunteer – is that it elicited various kinds of responses and a richness of data. Friendship helped to facilitate what Wikan calls ‘resonance’, which is crucial to anthropological research: learning to see the world from the perspective of participants through shared involvement in everyday contexts of practical action, routines and events which are ‘theirs’ (1992: 471). It helped to dismantle the “preconception that can be a stumbling block along the way; that others are essentially different from us, to be understood only by means of their ‘culture’, and that their words bespeak different life worlds” (*ibid.*).

Friendship with participants may lead the researcher and others to question the possibility of ‘ethnographic seduction’; the inability to keep a critical detachment from the views, attitudes and positions of participants, particularly in studies involving people with high personal and political stakes in legitimising their interpretation of history (Robben 2007: 166). The danger is that the ethnographer fails to maintain a degree of independence toward the participant and identifies exclusively with her/his view of the world (*ibid.*). I do not believe this was an issue in my research, as I consciously maintained a critical view of what I observed, heard and experienced myself, particularly in the context of friendship. However, the multi-faceted nature of relationships in the field did raise a number of issues, including: when was I *not* ‘collecting data’? How did this affect the process of informed consent? How far did my responsibilities to these individuals extend? The dissolution of boundaries that friendship entailed also presented difficulties in terms

of my own well-being. During fieldwork I became extremely emotionally drained from listening to distressing and traumatic stories, providing ongoing support, sharing my participants' anxieties and fears, being powerless to effect any substantial change, and receiving messages from others that my emotional state was of little concern when compared to what asylum seekers experienced. Towards the end of fieldwork, I developed acute anxiety, for which I had to seek professional treatment.

In sum, relationships in the field involved constant work and attention, juggling commitments, retaining awareness of ethical imperatives, and considering the ways in which different kinds of relations produced different kinds of data. Enabling friendships to develop with some participants was important for developing rapport and gaining insights, and was in many ways essential for the research to proceed. However, it was also necessary to take a critical and distanced view of these interactions in order to maintain the integrity of the research and personal well-being.

Ethical considerations

Like other researchers in refugee studies, I encountered my participants at a period of their lives characterised by protracted uncertainty and disempowerment, when fear and anxiety were the dominant emotions expressed (Harrell-Bond & Voutira 2007: 289). Many had survived highly traumatic events in the country of origin and in transit. The precariousness of existence usually continued in the UK with the ever-looming threat of deportation. Accordingly, their participation in the research was treated with thorough ethical consideration. The fieldwork experience served as a reminder that while efforts can be made to anticipate and prepare for emergent ethical issues in the design of research, unpredictable conditions with which the researcher must grapple are often encountered along the way. In the following section, I provide an overview of those conditions, and my attempts to respond to them in a way that would not compromise my participants or the rigour of the research.

Informed Consent

In designing my research, I regarded that at a minimum, to ‘inform’ would entail supplying potential participants with the purposes and methods, potential risks and benefits, and anticipated uses of the research (Mackenzie *et al.* 2007) in a format that was clear and comprehensible to them, before the research ensued. ‘Consent’ would be predicated on people being free agents possessing the ability to make a decision about whether or not to participate. Informed consent would be an on-going process of negotiation rather than as a discrete act of choice in a given moment of time (Corrigan 2003), involving different forms according to the settings in which the research took place.

i. Consent from organisations

When I established contact with each of the three organisations previously identified, I introduced myself as a PhD student, gave an overview of my project, and stated my intention to use volunteering as a way of meeting potential participants. I emailed a brief project outline to each organisation’s representative. This explained the objectives, planned methodologies, ethical considerations, funding sources, intended outcomes and possible uses of the research in clear, plain English. I assumed that given their daily work with asylum seekers, these representatives would be aware of particular issues affecting individual asylum seekers that I might not have anticipated. I expected that each organisation would have an ethical code, which would be discussed along with my role and conduct. It was surprising, then, to find that each organisation’s representative showed only minor interest in my research and its potential consequences, and consented to my undertaking research through their projects with seemingly little consideration. Such organisations are working in a context of limited resources, and are keen to recruit volunteers and participate in research that will boost their public exposure, thus increasing opportunities for further funding. It may be that they regarded my research as just such a project¹². It is also probable that they believed that academic research with refugees into a topic like

¹² I often had the impression that some of the RCIP staff believed that my research would boost the organisation’s public profile. When I reminded one of the staff at the completion of my fieldwork that RCIP would be anonymised, her disappointment was palpable.

waiting, along with the ethical considerations stipulated in the project outline, indicated a sympathetic approach on the part of the researcher. Additionally, such organisations may not have been very familiar with ethical guidelines; it was not until the beginning of 2008 – six years after its inception – that RCIP produced formal guidelines for the conduct of volunteers, which contained information about confidentiality.

ii. Group consent

When I attended RCIP projects and RAF meetings, I explained my research interests, the uses of the research and issues such as anonymity in simple terms, and asked whether the asylum seekers and volunteers in attendance would be willing for me to participate and observe for the research.

At the RCIP projects, I received an affirmative response with no questions asked. At the RAF meeting, a couple of individuals asked for more detail about what I would write, and it was agreed that references made to the RAF in the thesis would be presented to members prior to submission. The group then gave me the green light to observe meetings. The dialogical and participatory format of the meeting made it more conducive to a negotiation of informed consent. Nevertheless, I did wonder whether the limited information conveyed in these settings should be regarded as ‘informing’ and the affirmative response received regarded as ‘consent’. It is possible that individuals felt compelled to agree to my presence, especially at the RCIP projects where many did not regard themselves as possessing a right to stipulate the conditions of services. However, the open communication established between staff and most in attendance (and between me and them later on) led me to conclude that most people would feel able to discuss any objections with staff if they wished to. I never had the impression that there were any objections to my research, and no one stopped attending or avoided me after I began fieldwork.

At intervals throughout the year I reiterated a brief outline of my research in group settings to remind the group and ensure that newcomers were aware; however, some people were absent when this occurred. Towards the end of my fieldwork, during one of these ‘consent reiterations’ at the women’s group, the women all immediately shouted out that yes, they were happy for me to observe and write about

the group. Their tone was slightly exasperated. I re-confirmed confidentiality and anonymity, and they all again called out 'yes, no problem'. One woman even said 'you can use my name! You can use all of my family's names! I don't mind!' This episode stuck with me because it surprised me how readily and enthusiastically they all agreed, as though my asking was an unnecessary formality. This led me to wonder whether I had not taken an overly sensitive approach all along.

iii. Individual consent

When I met individuals who I thought might be potential research participants I would introduce myself with reference to my research (as my principal reason for being present) but not directly ask whether they would participate until we became better acquainted. In response to such introductions, some individuals would suggest that I attend some upcoming asylum-related event, without actually stating whether or not they wanted to be involved. I later came to see this as indicative of their unwillingness to commit to sharing their own experiences with a stranger whose intentions they could not yet judge, and yet a desire to steer me towards the issues of concern to them.

After a couple of months, people had had the opportunity to speak to me one-on-one, hear more about my research interests and gather an impression of me as a person, and it was clear that they felt relaxed in my company. I began to ask some individuals whether they would be willing to talk to me about some of their experiences of the asylum process. Simultaneously, a few individuals began to approach me voluntarily, wanting to tell me their stories. I had initially planned to distribute a 'letter of intent' to participants at this stage. However, I did not give such a document to a single asylum seeker for a number of reasons. First, I learned that many did not bother to read written documents that they received, perhaps due to English competency but also, I believe, due to being saturated with bureaucratic letters, forms and leaflets. Secondly, written information – especially that informing people of their rights and responsibilities, uses of personal data, and so on – was often associated with matters carrying serious consequences which aroused anxiety and suspicion. It goes without saying that I did not want to trigger any such association with my research. Thirdly, presenting the individual with a letter of intent

would have seemed awkwardly formal. Instead, I progressively learned how to translate and communicate academic objectives into a meaningful framework for the various people concerned. It helped to explain the method of anthropology as listening to people's stories, learning how other people live by living with them, learning about their cultures, trying to understand what it is like to be an asylum seeker, and so on. Giving concrete examples of my interests and the outcomes of the research was also very important.

Even when individuals expressed an interest in talking to me, they were not always willing to set a time to do this, saying, for example, that it would be "too depressing". Trauma can present a barrier to the articulation of one's story. If life has been characterised by lack of control, silence may present itself as a form of control over self-presentation (Knudsen 1990: 11). It was clear that people sought a sense of control over situations in their lives and over the information they disclosed, as well as assurance that their narratives would be heard in a receptive manner. These same individuals did later tell me their stories when the opportunity naturally presented itself. This illustrates an advantage of long-term participant observation: the researcher's ability to adapt to participants and their own timing in ways not available to researchers performing short-term projects and one-off interviews.

That the multiple roles of friend, researcher and volunteer that I inhabited were not always clearly distinguished could create ambiguities in terms of consent. I faced the common issue in fieldwork of a lack of formal markers of research activities, and research subjects forgetting that I was a researcher (Lofland & Lofland 1984). The researcher role could only sometimes be emphasised through behaviours that explicitly marked data collection activities – such as taking out the notepad or introducing a recording device. Consequently, much information that was most instrumental to my understanding of the lived experiences, personal histories and views of asylum seekers was articulated through 'informal channels' (Mackenzie *et al.* 2007: 308). When appropriate to do so, I explicitly asked the speaker whether such information could be used, and at other times, exercised my own judgement. Information that was clearly conveyed to me in confidence or that has an ambiguous status and which I regard as sensitive, is excluded from the thesis. Nevertheless, the insights I gained through informal channels contributed to my overall understanding

of people's lives, and this cannot be excluded in the impressions and illustrations of people that appear in the thesis.

Informed consent is not possible for every piece of information we collect. We cannot be assured that people really understand what we are going to do with the information they entrust to us, nor can we know what data we will use and how we will use it in advance; or how our subjects' lives will change, modifying what information may harm them were it to become accessible to others (Krulfeld 1998: 24). Rather than something to be deeply troubled by (see Krulfeld 1998) to the point of potentially paralysing research and denying research subjects agency, I would argue that consent must be approached as an ongoing process which considers the specificities of the population under study, the research questions, and the research setting. As with all ethics, consent should be about thinking through and learning, not merely a checklist of pros and cons, or "dos" and "don'ts" (Harper & Jimenez 2005: 11).

Harm minimisation and reciprocal benefits

There is an enhanced risk in research into sensitive topics with vulnerable populations that methods or outcomes will cause harm to participants. Certain lines of enquiry may evoke traumatic memories; association with the researcher may inadvertently reveal the previously hidden but publically-stigmatised status of an individual; information published in research reports may damage the reputation of individuals or communities and adversely affect their entitlement to resources; and so on. In undertaking the present research, I attempted to foresee and minimise the potential for harm. I was careful with phraseology used and avoided sensitive topics until my participants raised them or I judged that it would be acceptable to broach them in a delicate manner.

Given that the release of personal information would constitute a breach of trust and also potentially threaten the safety and/or chances of some asylum seekers, all participants and organisations were anonymised in fieldnotes. Throughout the thesis, pseudonyms have been used for all participants and for some formal groups and organisations. Certain characteristics of some individuals have been altered or concealed in such a way as to protect their identity while remaining sensitive to

ethnographic integrity. Nevertheless, fieldwork took place in a public setting where I and individual asylum seekers were known by others to be involved in a research project. Consequently, despite my efforts, there is always the possibility that the ‘cloak of anonymity’ may be to some extent ineffective with insiders who are familiar with the individuals and groups discussed (Punch 1986: 46).

A number of recent papers have called for a move ‘beyond harm minimisation’ towards greater participation of, and reciprocal benefits for, refugee participants and communities (cf. Doná 2007; Krulfeld 1998; Mackenzie *et al.* 2007; Temple & Moran 2006; Voutira & Doná 2007). Most pragmatically, Harrell-Bond and Voutira (2007: 290) state that the only way they can recommend gaining the full cooperation of refugees is by convincing them “that the research is in their own best interest either because it addresses urgent conditions of survival or because it acknowledges their presence and historicity or both”. Rodgers (2004) contends that anthropologists have an ethical commitment to improving the lives of the people among whom we conduct research, while Mackenzie *et al.* (2007) specify helping to rebuild refugees’ capacity and promoting their autonomous agency as responsibilities of the researcher. Who defines ‘benefit’, by whom it should be realised, and when, are not sufficiently addressed. While ensuring such benefits is an entirely appropriate (and usually necessary) objective of research with refugees, this should not preclude consideration of practical limitations – pertaining to participants’ willingness, capacities and goals – or of researcher positionality – including reflexivity and the influence of ‘improvements’ or interventions – on research findings. Research practice or outcomes may, in reality, lack the force to enact a lasting improvement in participants’ lives, but this does not render the research irrelevant, valueless or unethical. My experience suggests that more important than achieving some ideal form of ‘benefit’ is ensuring that refugees are able to negotiate the terms of their participation and gain clarity about what they can reasonably expect from the research.

The research most obviously benefited me by offering a range of opportunities, such as to undergo emotional, intellectual and embodied development and change; to meet and form valuable relationships and connections with people; to witness events and processes that would have otherwise been inaccessible to me; and

of course, to improve my chances of gaining fulfilling and well-paid employment in the future. As has been well established, research that seeks to elicit the experiences of refugees can have many benefits for participants. It can provide a therapeutic function because the process of telling offers an opportunity to make sense of senseless and traumatic experiences, and to 'bear witness' to atrocities committed against self or others (Agger 1994; Eastmond 2007; Harrell-Bond & Voutira 2007; Riessman 1993). Many asylum seekers feel that members of the 'host society' are not interested in, or sympathetic to, their plight, and hope that involvement in research will provide an opportunity to give accurate accounts of their situations, the reasons why they came, and the difficulties of return (see also Dyregov *et al.* 2000; Hopkins 1998). These were certainly benefits for my participants. I also extended immediate and practical assistance to all participants, including help with the English language, college work, children's homework and form-filling for various applications; the provision of various kinds of information and support with asylum cases; child minding; and so on.

Taking a pro-active approach towards harm minimisation and reciprocal benefits necessitates clarifying the limits of what can be achieved by the research and researcher. It was also my responsibility to ensure, to the extent that was possible, that asylum seekers were represented in the text as whole persons, that the information they shared with me was meaningful to them, and that the research findings would be disseminated in communicable formats.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis begins by providing some of the background and context to the later chapters. Chapter 2 outlines recent British asylum and immigration legislation, policy and procedures. It attempts to critically examine how asylum seekers are conceptualised through "the state's" practice of 'immigration' by first interrogating the very notion of 'the state', and by looking at the rationales and processes involved in the development of particular policies. More pragmatically, it describes some of the material, social and economic conditions stipulated by policy, which play a crucial role in the asylum seekers' experiences of waiting; and explicates the formal procedures applicants must undergo to have their claims assessed.

Chapter 3 acts as a counterpart to Chapter 2, shifting the focus from the rationale for, and operationalisation of, asylum policies and procedures, to their lived experience by the people who are subjected to them. It follows the chronological structure of the asylum process presented in Chapter 2, but is centred on the accounts of asylum seekers of these stages. Through these accounts, the asylum seekers' limited knowledge of asylum law and process, and their reflections on life under asylum policy, are articulated. Revolving around issues of power, constraint and dishonour, the overall account that emerges engenders an understanding of the asylum seekers' (unmet) expectations of what seeking asylum would entail; conceptualisations of the deciding authorities; and perceptions of their chances of being granted the right to remain. This primarily ethnographic chapter constitutes one piece of the multidimensional and rounded picture I attempt to draw throughout the thesis, which gives space for the reader to develop insights and conclusions of his/her own. Asad's account ends with his dispersal to Glasgow, the stage of the process which is taken up in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 hones into the specific context of life in Glasgow, considering the response of the Scottish government to asylum seekers, developed and deployed in the context of devolved powers. It shows that through the asylum seekers' engagement with one refugee advocacy organisation (RAO), which was created and funded under the Scottish policy framework, it was possible for the asylum seekers to address issues of social exclusion, isolation and uncertainty, and to create what I call a 'space of sanctuary'. The importance of such a space can only be understood in relation to the marginalisation arising from displacement and dispersal, the perceived hostility of 'immigration', and fears pivoting upon the threat of deportation. The chapter thus examines the social setting through which understandings of waiting were developed, forms of hope nurtured, and action to improve everyday life and chances of securing Leave to Remain, instigated.

In Chapter 5, substantive questions about the cognitive, emotional and embodied aspects – or what might be termed the 'metaphysics' – of waiting, are addressed at length. The discussion begins with the identification of what people were waiting *for* in both its positive and negative modalities, and, through an exploration of the metaphors used to communicate experiences of waiting, suggests

that waiting is narrated as a disruptive and painful, cognised and embodied experience. The chapter also explores the sources and role of hope which kept people engaged in their struggle for asylum, and oriented them to the positive modality of their waiting. I propose that while waiting is narrated in negative terms, it may also be a positive and productive force, depending upon the extent to which it may be imbued with instrumental value. Also illustrated is the way in which the condition of waiting is intrinsically linked to the perceived quality of activities undertaken and constraints on action imposed by policies. As such, the condition of waiting and conditions of life imposed by policy are mutually reinforcing. The chapter concludes by returning to a consideration of what the asylum seekers were waiting for, in the context of disrupted life trajectories, the past and the future.

Chapter 6 is centred on the question raised by other studies, of the extent to which an asylum seeker may – and indeed, may *wish to* – develop a sense of belonging in the ‘host society’ while inhabiting an insecure immigration status. It provides a critique of the concept of ‘integration’ which is commonly employed in discussions vis-à-vis migrants, and suggests that the framework of ‘rites of passage’ and in particular the liminal phase, is a more useful and analytically sound model for understanding processes of change and adaptation taking place during the waiting period. The selective management of change and continuity undertaken by the asylum seekers in terms of behaviours, values, customs and language, is discussed in detail. It is posited that while people may have conveyed rather ambivalent articulations of the impossibility of belonging resulting from their temporary legal-bureaucratic status, they were nevertheless engaged in strategies towards building a life in the UK, and utilised normative notions of nation, identity and belonging in public lobbying towards gaining the right to remain. The essential point is that people overwhelmingly aimed to create a secure, stable life for themselves and their families, maximising their well-being and opportunities for the future.

One of my hopes when designing this research was to be able to observe the changes that occurred when people’s waiting came to an end. To my surprise, this was possible when almost all of my participants received Indefinite Leave to Remain under a Home Office backlog clearing exercise towards the end of 2007. Therefore, in the Epilogue, I provide a brief discussion of initial changes and continuities

observed after the granting of some form of Leave to Remain. It is thus possible to tentatively consider the extent to which waiting came to an end upon exiting the asylum process. A brief discussion is devoted to people's reflections on life when transitioning to a new immigration status, and a consideration of the extent to which imaginations and anticipations of what life would be like after waiting, were realised.

2. Asylum legislation, policy and procedures

Introduction

This chapter examines the ways in which asylum seekers have been, and are, constructed, imagined and treated in the British state's development and deployment of legislation, policies and bureaucratic procedures pertaining to asylum. The underlying premise is that such instruments have a fundamental structuring effect, shaping the material, social, political and personal realities of asylum seekers' lives. This effect becomes all the more pronounced as duration in the asylum process increases. Furthermore, the asylum seekers' engagement with bureaucratic and legal processes informs their conceptualisations of the authorities responsible for determining their eligibility for asylum; and in turn their understandings of the means by which, and likelihood that, protection – or the 'normal life' for which they are fundamentally waiting – might be attained. In other words, an appreciation of the particular shape and contours of waiting cannot be reached without first considering what seeking asylum entails in bureaucratic and legal terms.

To embark on this examination requires that the terms of the discussion be first clarified, and specifically, the notion of 'the state' unpacked. While the state as a subject of anthropological enquiry has become increasingly important in the last few decades, the idea of what constitutes a state remains contested, and usage is dynamic and at times inexplicit. Generalist approaches in political science see the state as consisting of organisations, or networks of organisations, designed to use power for effective processing of decisions (Halfmann 2000: 35). Marxism and political sociology postulate the state and civil society as separate institutions (Abrams 1988). Anthropology has tended not to conceptualise the state in such concrete, functionalist terms. Radcliffe-Brown saw the state as a source of mystification and argued that as "an entity over and above the human individuals who make a society" with "sovereignty" and "a will", the state is a mere ideological construct (1940: xxiii). He maintained that existing concepts such as 'government' and 'politics' were sufficient for a grasp of the political (*ibid.*). Abrams (1988) has asserted that the state is a mask for a range of power discourses and practices. He suggests that the state as a material object of study should be abandoned, but the *idea* of the state should still be taken

seriously. Political and governmental institutions constitute a loose set of ideas and practices seeking to establish political authority and legitimacy, which they are able to achieve because they are seen to be part of a larger whole which is the state, rather than for what they really are: an assembly of uncoordinated practices and claims (*ibid.*). For Abrams, the relations of political and governmental institutions (the state system) can be studied effectively without postulating the reality of the state (1988: 75). Thus, when studying the state, anthropologists may focus on two aspects. The first is everyday *practices* (of state bureaucrats and their clients), which are multi-layered, contradictory, pluri-centred and fluid (Sharma and Gupta 2006: 6-10), and through which the boundary between state and society is constructed, contested and deconstructed. Secondly, we can focus on *representations* of the state, including public cultural representations and performances of statehood which successfully present the state as coherent and singular, with clear boundaries (*ibid.*: 18). In other words, we can study the state as coming into being through, and as, both a set of practices and an idea.

There is also an important relative element to consider, which is the situatedness of conceptualisations of the state. As Harvey (2005) notes, there is no obviously Archimedean point from which to visualise the state, only numerous situated knowledges. Thus, bureaucrats imagine the state through statistics and official reports, while citizens imagine it through newspapers, interactions with government bureaucracies and the declarations of politicians (*ibid.*: 126). Asylum seekers also imagine the state through their particular interactions with immigration bureaucrats and legal practitioners, and such imaginations play a fundamental role in their perception of whether or not they will be granted the right to remain in the UK.

The first section of this chapter provides a review of recent immigration and asylum legislation in the UK, attending to prominent conceptualisations of, and responses to, immigrants. This review finds agreement with scholars of refugee studies, who suggest that despite the purported 'honourable tradition' of giving shelter to those outside of one's community fleeing persecution (Cohen 2004: 98) which is widely accepted as a virtue (Pirouet 2001: 1), recent responses to asylum seekers and refugees in the UK reveal a primary contradiction. That is, while the principle of asylum is esteemed, extensive measures are enacted to prevent refugees

from reaching the territory of the state from which they could receive protection (Gibney 2004: 2). I show how this is the case in the most recent spate of British legislation, which introduced an approach of confinement, restriction, separation from the host society, and extensive screening procedures, to deal with spontaneous applicants and to deter potential further arrivals (Silove 2003: 70). Particularly when considered with the course of immigration legislation in the earlier part of the 20th century (see Appendix 1), this review demonstrates that particular kinds of migration are welcomed or mitigated depending on the intersecting, conflicting ideologies and goals that influence the policy agenda.

I attempt to set out two ways of accounting for the path that recent policy has taken. The first relates to the rationale and ideology underpinning the nation-state system. I argue that spontaneous asylum seekers represent both a problem and an opportunity for nation-states. They are a problem as they constitute an unpredictable population, which makes claims to governments for protection and places demands on the welfare state. They are also an opportunity, as an ideological resource for the reproduction and reinstatement of the nation-state as an idea. The second means of accounting for the shape of recent policy acknowledges the importance of immigration and asylum policy as a strategic area for state legitimacy.

I have already implied that my focus here is on immigration practices performed by a range of actors who act in the name of 'the state'. Throughout the thesis I focus on bureaucratic and legal practices which assert the existence of a coherent state and the people/civil society, and, following Coutin (2000: 10), consider how these delimit the borders of national territories, create categories of immigrant/sojourner, define the nature of citizenship, and legitimise statehood. It is recognised that these practices, like the state itself, are not cohesive. For example, a policy may differ greatly in its various manifestations, such as party manifestos, written documents produced by government, institutional mechanisms of decision-making and service delivery, and what people experience in their interactions with bureaucrats (Shore & Wright 1997: 5). Much of the work of political organising is to make apparently coherent the fragmented activities of policy, so that it may be claimed that an intention has been realised and a result successfully achieved (*ibid.*). Additionally, official policy goals often mystify the real application of organised

power (Heyman 1995). Immigration practices are thus approached in this thesis through attending to their formal manifestations (in written documents, government announcements, and so on) and their lived experience, in interactions between bureaucrats and the persons they attempt to manage and in the material conditions of everyday life. By approaching the state through the study of particular concrete effects, this research is able to dig beneath the state's own version of itself (Harvey 2005). To lay the foundations for this approach, the second section of this chapter is dedicated to an overview of the specific provisions of current policy. The final section of the chapter provides an extensive overview of the procedures for processing applications for asylum, informing the reader of the structural process through which asylum applicants must pass in their quest for asylum, and the ways by which this process is concluded.

Recent trends in British legislation and policy

It may be said that as the end of the 20th century approached, a new era of migration came into being. Governments, international organisations and the public became increasingly aware of the problems faced by refugees, primarily as a result of live reportage of people fleeing from the Former Yugoslavia, Chechnya, Iraq and Rwanda and the increased scope for involvement in situations of mass displacement by a range of actors (UNHCR 2000). There was a worldwide increase in refugees from an estimated 13,068,700 in 1987 to 17,022,000 in 1991 (*ibid.*: 310). This was reflected in a distinct rise in the number of people seeking asylum in the UK, from 4,256 in 1987 to 44,840 in 1991 (ILPA 1999: 19). Measures pertaining to asylum in industrialised countries were developed and intensified. In the UK, the *1993 Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act* was the first piece of legislation to outline asylum procedures and to require compatibility of claims with the Refugee Convention. Subsequently, a further five pieces of legislation pertaining to asylum were passed¹³, indicating the growing level of public concern over asylum and immigration issues. At least four aims may be discerned in this recent tranche of legislation: firstly, to

¹³ The *Asylum and Immigration Act 1996*; the *Immigration and Asylum Act 1999*; the *Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002*; the *Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc.) Act 2004*; and the *Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006*.

reduce the number of asylum seekers applying for asylum in the UK; secondly, to place firmer controls on entry and therefore maintain the borders of the UK; thirdly, to minimise the costs associated with supporting asylum applicants, and; fourthly, to effectively manage entrants and ease their removal.

The assumption underpinning such aims is that the provision of welfare and the general economic climate in Britain are a 'pull factor' for – now unwanted – immigrants from outside the EU. Not only in Britain but across Europe, immigration debates have become focused on how to protect the welfare state against the perceived threat of this unhindered immigration (Geddes 2000). Building on a previous entanglement of economic migrants and refugees established in political rhetoric (see Appendix 1), a more intense dichotomy of genuine/abusive has been asserted, and a contention purported that the majority of asylum applicants constitute the latter: 'economic migrants' who exploit the 'asylum route' in order to enter the UK (Neumayer 2005: 49). Schuster (2003: 132) implies that the state seeks to avoid receiving refugees, who possess the legal right to seek protection, by transforming them into 'economic migrants', whose admittance the state reserves the right to control. In the mass media, the reduction in the proportion of asylum applicants granted Refugee Status has been cited as evidence of the number of 'bogus' claimants (Sales 2002: 456).

Therefore, asylum is now set in a climate of suspicion, in which applicants are seen as trying to take advantage of the host country's hospitality and as a threat to societal security, which legitimises limitations on their access to society until properly assessed (Daniel & Knudsen 1995; Fassin & d'Halluin 2005; King 2004). As Crawley (2005: 27) points out, there has been rather less public discussion about the causes of forced migration or the means by which those in need of protection can be assured access to it. Immigration policy is developed in a context where the commonly purported commitment to 'humanitarianism' practised by a benevolent and democratic state is shadowed by the politicisation of asylum and the marginalisation of asylum seekers.

The most recent development in asylum policy at the time of writing is the *2009 Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Bill*. Citizenship is presented in the Bill as an honourable status to be earned through taxation, 'contributions to community'

and other symbolic investments. This has echoes of the 18th century citizenship project, whereby the welfare state began to police the poor. Workhouses were introduced to transform the poor from an unpredictable and transitory population into reliable members of the state, through the discipline of work (Halfmann 2000: 40-1). It is evident that immigration policy may not only attempt to stipulate what kinds of people reside within the territory of the nation-state, but, in Foucauldian (1977) terms, may rely on techniques of ‘governing through freedom’ which induce subjects to become self-motivated and self-regulating. That is, would-be citizens are required to make more than symbolic gestures; their behaviour is moulded in concrete terms, through the requirement of documentary or performative demonstrations of language acquisition, tax contributions, legitimate employment, voluntary community work, duration of residence, and so on. In other words, what is novel about this era is not the fact that population is managed, but the particular shape of technologies of surveillance, management and control, now witnessed.

The restrictive approach of the UK is consistent with that taken by countries throughout the industrialised world (UNHCR 2000: 8). Indeed, one of the more recent themes in asylum policy within EU countries has been harmonisation, with a series of instruments¹⁴ implemented in all Member States so as to lay the foundations for a Common European Asylum System.

Understanding recent legislation and policy

It has not been my intention to present recent developments in UK immigration policy as though they reflect an underlying, coherent, ethnocentric project. While a number of scholarly historical accounts contain depictions of an undefined state driven by loathing of ‘others’, I would argue that the acceptance or rejection of immigrants has not been an entirely coordinated and cohesive effort. Joppke (1999: 102) asserts that the root cause of racial bias in British immigration policy is the fact that the nation was predominantly white, while large sections of the empire were non-white. Such a bias inextricably fuses intention with effect. It is difficult to

¹⁴ Instruments include Council Directive 2005/85/EC; Regulation (EC) 343/2003 ("Dublin Regulation"); Directive 2003/9/EC ("Reception Conditions Directive,"); and Directive 2004/83/EC ("Qualification Directive").

imagine any British immigration policy that would not have become subject to accusations of racial discrimination (*ibid.*). Furthermore, as Kaye (1994) has effectively illustrated, even at the specific level of policy-making, conflicts and tensions have arisen between different players. The history of immigration law is a history of intricate and calculated interventions, which should not be understood as a derivative of some apparently unified strategy, nor the by-product of some presumed, teleological logic (De Genova 2002: 424). Law-making is, rather, marked by relative incoherence in terms of strategies, tactics and compromises nation-states implement at particular historical moments, in order to mediate the contradictions in social crises and political struggles, usually around the subordination of labour (*ibid.*: 425).

I now attempt to understand the development of immigration and asylum legislation that has just been traced at two levels. Firstly, I consider the way in which asylum seekers are conceptualised at the level of nationalist ideology, and how the response to them may be read in terms of a means of re-affirming the nation-state system. Secondly, I consider the more 'micro' forces at work in the policy-making process to show that legislation, policies and particular procedures are developed vis-à-vis the relationship between the state and the populace, in a field where the state's legitimacy is constantly challenged.

Asylum migration, sovereignty and the welfare state

The ideology of Western nationalism sees culture as internalised in 'a people' and located in the native soils of that people (Hastrup & Olwig 1997). As Malkki (1997) has explicated, strong arborescent and sedentarist discourses divide the world into sovereign, spatially discontinuous units and imply that a natural congruence between people and place exists. Joppke (1999: 1) has suggested that the continuation of nation-states depends upon the restriction of international migration because it violates the principle of sedentariness upon which the modern state system is based. Halfmann (2000) argues that this territorial fixation arises from the specific modern mode of inclusion in the political system. In replacing older forms of overlapping and multiple obligations, the principle of territoriality promised to provide an exact criterion – spatial markers – for the identification of those individuals who belonged to a state. Nation-states had to make legal, financial and political investments in their

populations to transform them into citizens. In Europe, the identification and binding of individuals to the territorial state was performed largely through the welfare state, defined as “a fully fledged apparatus of the regulation of work conditions, of a social security system, of the legal framing of industrial relations and...of governmental employment policies” (*ibid.*: 42). Welfare policies imposed a territorial criterion on the politics of inclusion in the political system; as welfare states are closed systems, participation by outsiders in the rights and obligations of modern states is determined by national immigration legislation.

Immigration arises as a problem for the nation-state system because it undermines the tight relationship between the welfare state and the people; the evolutionary rationale of tying citizens to their state. The decreasing importance of territorial borders as criteria for inclusion is a problem of control as internalisation of access to the welfare state is presently insufficiently complemented by transnational rules regulating the distribution of financial burdens. The perception that open borders could potentially undermine the practices and institutions which deliver social justice within nation states leads most countries to institute immigration controls to protect these institutions (Wren 2004: 11).

Asylum applicants are regarded as lacking ties to a community of citizens (‘the nation’) and are thus conceived as incapable of participating effectively in the tasks essential to the efficient and orderly organisation of the community – obtaining security, stability, welfare and self-governance (Soguk 1999). Turton’s (2003) interesting observation that migration is most commonly communicated in terms of liquid metaphors, such as waves, flows and trickles with associated imagery of flooding and swamping, is also revealing here. As he notes, such metaphors are used from a sedentary perspective, and require us to think of migration as some inexorable process with its own logic and force, which we did not bring about but which threatens to overwhelm us (hence, we must put up barriers against it). They present migrants as an undifferentiated – depersonalised and dehumanised – mass (*ibid.*: 5). Refugee migrations are conceived as a specific problem for the sovereign state in the sense that they reflect the breach of the nation-state’s borders; the liquid threatens to seep into the container that is the state. As such, they must be regimented, lest conditions of ‘normal’, territorially bounded life irreversibly deteriorate (*ibid.*: 19).

This perspective accounts for the emphasis in recent legislation on restricting access of asylum applicants to state-distributed entitlements, particularly given that ‘spontaneous’ asylum migration is a form of uncontrolled and potentially unlimited migration.

Trouillet notes that contrary to sedentarist logic, the nation-state was never as closed and unavoidable a container – politically, economically and culturally – as politicians and academics have claimed since the 19th century, and the fiction of isolated national entities no longer reflects the lived experiences of most populations (2001: 129). Furthermore, sovereignty in Europe has to a large extent already been challenged by unification and the accelerated movement of information, goods and capital. Nevertheless, the nation-state still holds a ‘commanding power’ due to its possession of what Bourdieu calls ‘meta-capital’ (Aretxaga 2003). This is reflected in the fact that the creation of new nation-states and separatist movements is on the increase, and states are more concerned than ever to emphasise and maintain their physical, national, moral and social borders (*ibid.*). In this sense, border maintenance and deterrence may be seen as a normative practice, a means by which the ideology of nationalism and the ‘national order of things’ (Malkki 1995a) may be upheld. In European thinking, the sovereign is inconceivable without an ‘outside’ (Bauman 2002: 288). Asylum seekers are readily posited as representatives of what lies outside. The affirmation of the border through legislative processes – which institute barriers to asylum seekers’ arrival and greater controls over those who arrive – effectively invokes territoriality and sovereignty of the British nation-state. As such, asylum seekers are utilised as productive resources for the reproduction and reaffirmation of the state.

Asylum as a field of political legitimacy

The path that legislation has taken may also be conceptualised in terms of the particular political framework within which immigration policy is developed. Immigration policy decisions are made in the current context through careful monitoring (and, when possible, manipulation) of views held by the public and by major institutional leaders (Simmons & Keohane 1992: 445). A basic problem for all political systems is how to consolidate the legitimacy and authority of the party in

office (Shore & Wright 1997). Policy arises as the state engages in a variety of actions designed to retain legitimacy and deflect criticism (*ibid.*: 446). Here, legitimacy may be seen as the degree of support given to a specific governmental order and its activities, relations or claims. It is the degree of consensus about the 'rules of the game' (Cohen 1988: 3). According to Cohen (1988: 3-9), legitimacy implies the existence of a morally appropriate order that declares how authorities should and should not validly wield power. An authority above and beyond real-world relationships is referred to as the source or reason for the acceptability of unequal powers in policy; this is usually conceived as 'the people'. The dominance of popular mandate as a source of legitimacy is tied to public commentary and criticism, transmitted by opposition groups seeking power, the media and scholars. The government must work to demonstrate and to convince people that it is operating under the public interest, according to the will of the people. Hence, "legitimacy as an expression of popular support requires that rulers actively produce benefits or risk weakening their authority" (*ibid.*: 10).

Bureaucratic agencies, such as the Home Office, may also be seen as primarily concerned to secure legitimacy in the sense of meeting societal expectations about appropriate structures, practices, rhetoric or output (Boswell 2008: 473). Organisations need to secure internal legitimacy from their members whose loyalty is crucial for reproduction, and external legitimacy from their environment, which includes the political system, organised interests or consumers (*ibid.*). While the basic goal of any bureaucrat or bureaucracy is not rational efficiency but individual and organisational survival (Britan 1981 in Herzfeld 1992: 5), given the de-legitimising power of inefficiency in the public domain, the latter may be dependent on securing an impression of the former.

Simmons and Keohane's (1992) work on the immigration policy process in Canada is enlightening here. They contend that in its access to enormous organisational and fiscal resources, the state's power is immense, and this allows its interests to have a profound effect on policy. That is, it can override or contain opposition and reduce the credibility of opponents to a large extent. Nevertheless, policy and its execution are subject to criticism, and asylum as a policy area is a 'minefield of risks' (*ibid.*: 446). As Joppke writes, in Britain, "Parliamentary

openness in the formulation of immigration policy keeps law-makers within the confines of a pervasively restrictionist public opinion” (1999: 103). The argument that I wish to present is that the government’s attempts to secure and sustain its legitimacy, and the practices of public commentary and criticism which pose challenges to it – from sectors of the population who fear the arrival of immigrants; humanitarian groups who advocate for refugees; or the private sector pushing for labour – are informative in the development of particular legislation and bureaucratic procedures pertaining to asylum. Home Office bureaucrats seek to avoid embarrassment resulting from incorrect information or poor judgements on policy. They face pressures from superiors to keep crises and problems out of the press (Simmons & Keohane 1992: 446). Furthermore, bureaucracy faces a variety of contingent events in relation to asylum, including sudden influxes of applications, disgruntled civil servants with excessive case loads and the accumulation of backlogs. Its objective is to anticipate these crises and minimise their damage. However, spontaneous asylum seekers represent a kind of ‘loose cannon’ on the policy desk, in that their numbers, costs and impacts cannot be accurately anticipated (*ibid.*). This can be illustrated by a brief review of the public rhetoric surrounding asylum, and the responses of government, during recent years.

In February 2005, immigration was the single most important issue in the minds of nearly a quarter of the British population (Crawley 2005: 5). Because by this time, support of immigration was arguably anathema to majority public opinion, neither political party could afford to be seen as supporting influxes of refugees once they were identified in the public mind with immigrants (Kaye 1994: 156). Since at least the early 2000s, asylum has been constructed in the media and in public rhetoric in terms of a crisis, with at least two facets. The first is a lack of control of immigration by the government, which is seen to pose a series of threats to societal security. Portions of the media have fuelled a sense of crisis through the already-noted metaphors of ‘invasion’ and ‘swamping’ of the island of Britain by asylum seekers (Schuster & Solomos 2004: 278). Surveys identify common majority sentiments that ‘there are too many in Britain’, that ‘they get too much help’ and that ‘migration is out of control’ (Crawley 2005: 4). In 2006, for example, the news media reported heavily on the Home Office’s immigration ‘blunders’, such as the

release of foreign prisoners into society without consideration of the possibility of deportation. News reports referred to the "undermined confidence" of the public and the Home Office's "inability to protect the public". The then Home Secretary John Reid told MPs that the immigration service was "not fit for purpose" with "inadequate leadership and management systems" (BBC 2006). Meanwhile, the then-Commons leader Jack Straw shifted the blame onto asylum applicants, locating the "fundamental problem" with the "dysfunctional individuals...who do not wish to be subject to social control" that it deals with (*ibid.*). The Home Office has repeatedly responded to concerns about influxes with assurances that fraudulent claims have been detected and their authors successfully removed. Such language serves to reinforce the notion of a threat posed by asylum applicants, but presents the Home Office as securing the country's protection.

The second facet of the crisis hinges on bureaucratic inefficiency, which is posed as a problem because it incurs costs to the taxpayer and indicates a lack of order, which is antithetical to the ideal-type of a publically accountable, efficient bureaucracy (Beetham 1996). Through the media scandalising the failure to control immigration and manage costs to the taxpayer, the government's legitimacy has been continuously challenged. The celeritous increase in asylum applications in the 1990s resulted in parallel backlogs of unresolved cases. Despite administrative measures (staff intakes, more hearing venues and a public service agreement) instituted throughout the decade to reduce intervals between various stages of the asylum process, and several backlog clearing exercises, application levels remained high and backlogs continued to grow (Home Office 1997). At the end of 1998, there was a backlog of over 64,800 asylum cases awaiting an initial decision and 80,800 cases awaiting action (Home Office 1998a). In 2002 the then-Home Secretary David Blunkett admitted a £600M overspend on the immigration budget. The BBC reported him agreeing that "the overspend was down to an inefficient process for dealing with asylum seekers". The Shadow Home Secretary stated that the figures revealed that the UK's asylum system had "spiralled completely out of control" and blamed the "incompetent administration" (BBC 2002).

In 2004, the National Audit Office's (NAO) review of the Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) concluded that delays in dealing with

asylum applications incurred significant costs for the taxpayer (2004: 30). Asylum applicants were deemed a financial burden, in terms of the administrative costs of processing applications and appeals; and the provision of accommodation, welfare, legal services, interpreting and translation, and education. Reports documenting widespread erroneous and/or poor quality decision-making also propagated (cf. Asylum Aid 1999; ILPA 1999; National Audit Office 2004; UNHCR 2006a). The ensuing recommendations influenced the development of the *2004 Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants etc) Act*, which aimed to increase the speed and efficiency of decision-making, and the ‘New Asylum Model’ (NAM), which revised bureaucratic practice to improve the quality of decision-making and expedite case conclusion.

In June 2006 the Home Office estimated that a backlog of between 400,000 and 450,000 outstanding asylum cases existed (NAO 2009). The NAO would later suggest that the cost of such cases in the year 2007-2008 amounted to nearly £600M, most of which was accounted for by accommodation and welfare support (*ibid.*: 4). The Home Office’s review of the IND in 2006 resulted in a pledge to meet new targets for the granting or removal of applicants and to deal with the legacy of unresolved cases within five years (Home Office 2006c: 9). To this end the most recent backlog clearing exercise, or ‘legacy case review’¹⁵ as it was commonly called in Glasgow, was initiated in 2007. The Home Office has since consistently emphasised the progress of the clearing exercise and on numbers of NAM cases concluded and removals conducted, as evidence that it is ‘resolving the problem’. In 2008, the Immigration Minister announced “[UKBA] now remove[s] an immigration offender every eight minutes – but my target is to remove more, and remove them faster” (Home Office Press 2008).

This review shows that asylum policy and Home Office practice has been subjected to assessments, challenges and criticisms by independent bodies, the media, asylum support groups and opposition parties alike. These have centred around the growing numbers of arrivals, bureaucratic delays, backlogs of unresolved applications, administrative errors, and the subsequent financial and security costs as

¹⁵ ‘Legacy cases’ are those that were processed under the old asylum system, which was in operation until 2005.

evidence that the government has lost control of immigration and is not working in the interests of 'the people'. The state's response may be seen in both the introduction of new bureaucratic procedures (pertaining to targets, staffing, removals and the NAM) and legislative changes. These serve to demonstrate to the public that the government is dealing with a perceived problem 'effectively' and 'efficiently'. The insistence on sovereign entry and residence controls is asserted as being on behalf of the national collectivity from which the state derives its legitimacy (Joppke 1999: 5). The draconian form taken by legislation may thus be read as a demonstration that the government is meeting societal expectations and attempting to negotiate and 'sell' its policies (Simmons & Keohane 1992: 447). Simmons and Keohane make the important point that an 'ideal policy' would be one which would satisfy a broad spectrum of expectations, avoiding confrontation, criticism, challenges to its authority, and controversy. However, the ideal is never reachable. Attempting to balance different classes of migrants (such as skilled economic migrants, secondary migrants, and refugees) provides a basic vocabulary for responding to those with vested interests in immigration. That is, to those who oppose immigration, the government can assert that it maintains tight controls on entry; to those who demand a humanitarian response, it can point to favourable provisions for those refugees granted status; and to those who fear 'bogus refugees', it can point to provisions to deter and detect potential asylum applicants (*ibid.*: 448). Thus, the development of policy should not be interpreted simply as the representation of an ethnocentric agenda, but as a complex act of balancing the contradictory demands of major parties whilst maintaining legitimacy (*ibid.*).

Legislative and policy provisions

Having laid out the historical patterns of immigration and trends in successive governments' approaches to immigrants, and attempted to identify the discourses and processes which influence them, I now focus on the specific provisions of the most recent body of legislation and policies, which are grouped thematically. As these inform, shape and constrain the subjects of this study in multitudinous and immediate ways, they are discussed at some length.

Accommodation and subsistence

The *1996 Act* restricted entitlement to housing and welfare benefits to asylum applicants making a claim at the port of entry. Those who claimed asylum in-country and those in the process of appealing received nothing (Refugee Council 1998), and local authorities became responsible for supporting destitute applicants (Sales 2002: 463). In its White Paper 'Fairer, Faster, Firmer' (Home Office 1998b), the government set out its intention to reform financial support mechanisms so that they would not act as an incentive to immigration to Britain (Robinson 2003: 123). The subsequent *1999 Act* constituted a major overhaul of the system. Welfare benefits were lowered and a nationwide framework for the coordination of financial support and accommodation for asylum seekers who could not support themselves was laid out. The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) was established as a body within the Home Office responsible for co-ordinating and administering this support. The geographic dispersal of applicants on a 'no-choice' basis was a prime feature of the new framework. This was developed in the context of residence of a large proportion of asylum applicants in London and the South East of England by the late 1990s. A prevailing assumption at the time was that a concentration of asylum seekers in particular areas leads to housing shortages and pressure on local schools and health services, and contributes to social tensions which cannot be compensated through financial flows (Boswell 2001). The goals of dispersal were thus to redistribute financial and social costs between regions; to reduce social tensions in areas where asylum seekers had chosen to settle; to discourage potential future applicants; and to a lesser extent, to exercise greater control over the residence and movement of asylum seekers (*ibid.*: 3). Dispersal had gained some legitimacy as a governmental strategy for managing difference through programmes operating during the 1960s, 1970s and 1990s. West Indians and Asians living in the inner quarters of British cities were dispersed across Britain via council housing contracts with the aim of improving their access to a 'better life' and reducing white prejudices through co-habitation (Robinson 2003: 106); Asian Ugandan, Chilean and Vietnamese quota refugees were dispersed across Britain through offers of housing organised by the voluntary sector; and Bosnian Refugees and Kosovans granted temporary protection

were dispersed to housing in 'cluster areas' under organised resettlement schemes (*ibid.*: 108-121).

NASS entered into contracts with local housing authorities across the UK for the provision of accommodation. The main cluster areas at the commencement of dispersal, in terms of the numbers of applicants accommodated, were Glasgow, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool and Newcastle (Home Office 2002). Dispersed applicants are usually placed in temporary accommodation until more permanent housing is available. NASS covers the costs of energy provision and structural maintenance of its properties. Financial benefits for asylum applicants were set at a rate equivalent to 70% of national income support. At the time I began fieldwork, this amounted to £39 per week for single adults; and £91 for a couple with a child (plus £30 for every additional child). Benefits initially took the form of vouchers redeemable at specific supermarkets. The voucher system has been described as "widely loathed...cumbersome, inefficient, expensive and humiliating" (Kelly 2002: 7). Many supermarkets refused to accept vouchers or to give cash change if the bearer did not spend the sum worth of the voucher. Asylum seekers had to inform supermarket staff of their status, thus becoming publically identifiable, and some shop assistants refused to allow asylum seekers to buy what they deemed to be 'luxury' goods. The supermarkets at which the vouchers could be redeemed usually lacked appropriate staple foods, such as *halal* meat. No cash was provided for necessities such as transport and phone calls (Kelly 2002: 7). Following widespread criticism, the voucher system was replaced, under the *Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002*, by cash disbursements issued by the Post Office on a weekly basis.

In Glasgow, designated GCC staff visit NASS properties on a semi-regular basis. This can be an important point of contact for asylum seekers as they may ask for information and referral to services; report any problems with the local area or neighbours; and request repairs of their accommodation. The Home Office also conducts occasional checks of properties, for which the applicant must be present. Breaches of the asylum support agreement may result in the withdrawal of accommodation and support, a fact to which asylum applicants are often alerted.

Employment

A ban was instituted on paid employment for all asylum applicants under the *1999 Act*, but a concession allowed applicants who had been waiting for more than six months for an initial decision to apply for permission to work. According to the Minister of State (Citizenship and Immigration), the concession was removed under the *2002 Act*, firstly, as most cases were delivered a decision within six months, and secondly, to prevent abuse of the asylum system by ‘economic migrants’ seeking employment opportunities (House of Commons 2002). Since 2005, the implementation of the European Council ‘Reception Directive’ has allowed applicants who have not received an initial decision after twelve months to apply for permission to work. Applicants who do not have permission to work and are caught in gainful employment may have their claim automatically refused. Failed applicants may have their basic support terminated.

Education

Under British statutory law, local authorities must provide primary and secondary school education to the children of asylum seekers (and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children), the costs of which are reimbursed to local authorities by central government (Boswell 2001: 18). In Scotland, asylum seekers are entitled to have their fees paid for part-time¹⁶ ESOL courses, National Certificate (college) Courses and other non-advanced courses, and may undertake further courses at the discretion of a further education college (CoSLA 2007). At the time I began my research, it was practically impossible for asylum seekers to undertake tertiary studies due to the level of fees, usually charged at the international student rate. However, this changed in Scotland in late 2007, when the Scottish government decided that the children of asylum seekers who had spent three years or more in Scottish education would have the same rights of access to further education as Scottish students (Scottish Government 2007).

¹⁶ ‘Part-time’ is defined as up to 16 hours per week.

Health care

As long as an asylum applicant's case is under consideration, they are entitled to receive primary and secondary healthcare from the NHS, and to the use of an interpreter at appointments with GPs. They are exempt from charges for NHS hospital treatment. Those in receipt of NASS support may apply to the UKBA for extra free healthcare such as dental care, sight tests, and exemption from prescription charges. Failed asylum applicants may register as NHS patients at GP practices at the discretion of the practice, but are ineligible for free hospital treatment. Failed applicants should be provided free of charge with treatment immediately necessary, but may later be charged for this (NHS 2009).

Mobility, Monitoring and Detention

Recent administrative and legislative measures have presented obstacles to the mobility that is required to seek protection. For example, from 2002 all Zimbabweans travelling to the UK were required to possess a visa issued by the British High Commission. An individual suspected of intending to remain permanently in the UK would undoubtedly be refused a visa, and in any case, visa fees are high. As asylum could not be claimed at the British High Commission in Harare, such restrictions made it particularly difficult for asylum seekers to access protection in the UK (Ranger 2005). The combined implementation of visa regimes and the inability to obtain visas has forced many asylum seekers to rely on clandestine and often extremely dangerous activities, such as using forged passports or the services of people smugglers, to gain entry to the UK. Such measures have also been reinforced through the intensification of penalties upon parties who assist spontaneous asylum seekers. The update of the *Carrier's Liability Act 1987* by the *1999 Act* and *2002 Act* saw a rise in the rate of fines on the operators of aircraft or ships which carry a person who fails to produce the required visa and travel documentation upon entry into the UK, and the extension of fines to the operators of road vehicles and rail-freight wagons who carry "clandestine entrants" and fail to take measures to secure and check vehicles before embarkation to the UK (Home Office 2009).

Those who successfully reach the UK and claim asylum face a number of policy-induced restrictions to further mobility. Travel outside of the UK while an asylum applicant is prohibited. NASS regulations concerning the duration a property may be left unoccupied formally prevent many people from travelling within the UK for extended periods; informally, meagre income support is a barrier to regular or long-distance travel for most applicants. Asylum seekers tend to be dependent upon public transport as it is virtually impossible to obtain a driving licence due to identification requirements, or to meet the costs of owning a car whilst dependent on NASS support.

Increased surveillance of applicants has also been a feature of recent policy. The *2002 Act* introduced regular reporting, commonly referred to as ‘signing in’, to the Home Office for all asylum seekers. The Home Office has the power to carry out routine inspections of NASS properties. The *1999 Act* extended immigration powers of search and arrest, and detention centres became a primary feature of immigration policy.

Faster case conclusion and shorter-term protection

A feature of recent legislation is the aim to increase the efficiency and speed of the asylum process, so as to minimise the evolution of bureaucratic ‘backlogs’ and the costs of supporting applicants. The *1993 Act* created a ‘fast track’ procedure, whereby applicants whose claims are judged to be ‘manifestly unfounded’ are detained so as to facilitate fast removal, and a decision delivered usually within a couple of weeks. The *2004 Act* was specifically intended to “[inject] further speed and decisiveness into the appeals and removals processes” (Home Office 2006a), primarily through the reduction of appeal to a single tier. The New Asylum Model (NAM), rolled out in 2005, was designed to generate better quality decisions with increased speed. Human rights and justice groups have expressed concern that fast decision making is achieved at the expense of quality, raising serious questions about procedural fairness and the safety of asylum seekers who are forcibly returned (Baldaccini 2004). It has also been suggested that the NAM is likely to develop its own backlog in the near future (National Audit Office 2009).

The Home Office ran a pilot project throughout 2002 known as the Solihull Pilot in order to test the proposition that ‘frontloading’ (putting funds into early competent legal representation) would result in an improvement in the quality of initial decision-making and fewer costs incurred later on. The outcome of the pilot has been a higher case conclusion rate than in the control group; a higher initial rate of Refugee Status grants; significant savings overall; the rate of successful appeals 50% lower than control group (indicating agreement between Home Office and the AIT); and a higher proportion of refused cases removed (Pers comm.). In March 2009, the roll out of the project received Ministerial approval, but there are remaining concerns over the extent to which competence and quality will be assured, and cultural change within the UKBA will occur (*ibid.*).

In 2005, Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR), which carries equivalent rights to permanent residents¹⁷ was replaced with Limited Leave to Remain (LLR) for a period of five years, for those recognised as Refugees. The Home Office initially announced that at the conclusion of the five year period, cases would be reviewed and if individuals were deemed no longer at risk of persecution in the country of origin, they may be required to return. However, Asylum Policy Instructions now stipulate that the cases of Refugees with LLR may be reviewed at any time during the five-year period, if triggered by the Refugees’ (mostly illicit) actions or if there is a significant, non-temporary change in conditions in the country of origin. The cases of individuals granted Discretionary Leave to Remain, Humanitarian Protection (before August 2005), or Exceptional Leave to Remain (before April 2003) will be subject to mandatory review at the renewal of Leave (UKBA 2009a). If a review finds that protection is no longer required, Leave will be withdrawn and the individual may be returned (UKBA 2009b). Such changes reflect the perception that temporary admission is an ‘easier’ option for states than granting permanent residence, and perhaps also the continued assumption that repatriation is the optimum and most feasible ‘durable solution’ to refugee crises (Allen & Turton 1996; Koser & Black 1999). Most worryingly, the temporalisation of protection potentially prolongs the uncertainty faced by those recognised to be in need of

¹⁷ Indefinite Leave to Remain accords the right to remain indefinitely in the UK; full access to healthcare, education, employment, welfare benefits and public housing; and the ability to apply for citizenship after a specified period of residence.

protection, and contradicts the government's commitment to supporting the 'integration' of Refugees into British society¹⁸.

The asylum process

This research concerns the phenomenon of being stuck in the bureaucratic-legal process through which people must pass on their journey to being granted or refused protection. As will become clear, this process to a great extent structures people's experiences of waiting, in terms of what they are immediately waiting for, whom they are waiting upon, and the temporal sequencing of their waiting. During the period when the majority of my participants made a claim for asylum, applications were dealt with by the IND of the Home Office. In 2006, the Home Secretary confirmed that the IND would be separated as an executive agency after a major reshuffle of the Home Office. In 2007 it became the Border and Immigration Agency and the following year it was incorporated into the new UK Border Agency (UKBA), reflecting the potency of a political discourse of border reinforcement and protection.

I was able to observe firsthand very few of the asylum procedures to which my participants were subjected, as most people were in the later stages of the asylum process by the time I began fieldwork. Therefore, in order to present an accurate picture of the procedures they encountered, I draw upon available literature pertaining to Home Office practice during the late 1990s and mid 2000s, as well as my participants' recollections. I refer here only to procedures for adult applicants; an alternate process exists for unaccompanied minors¹⁹. Additionally, it was under the 'the old asylum model', which operated prior to the NAM's introduction in 2005, that the majority of my participants' claims were processed. It is therefore this system, rather than the NAM, that I elaborate here.

Asylum Application Procedures

A person enters the asylum process by lodging an application either at a UK port of entry or after entry by presenting in person to the Home Office. Most of my

¹⁸ See UKBA (2009c) for the government's current approach to the integration of Refugees in England.

¹⁹ Local authorities have a duty under the *Children Act 1989* to provide support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors. In Scotland, Social Services departments are responsible for this.

participants did the latter, upon the advice of an agent or other contact. The first stage of assessment is a screening interview with the Home Office, intended to establish the applicant's identity, nationality and travel route. The conduct of this and subsequent interviews has important implications for the material collected, upon which the claim is assessed, and therefore the course of the asylum determination process (ILPA 1999). At the screening interview, the applicant's fingerprints are taken and any official documents they possess surveyed. They are usually issued with a Statement of Evidence Form (SEF), asking for personal data and their reasons for claiming asylum. Applicants are asked whether they believe themselves to have a well-founded fear of persecution, or whether there is a real risk that they will be subjected to torture or inhuman and degrading treatment if required to leave the UK, and must answer 'yes' or 'no' (Rycroft 2009).

Most applicants require an interpreter, who is usually employed by the Home Office, at interviews. While vital for communication, the presence of an interpreter has an important impact on the procedure. Rycroft (2005, 2009), a Romanian interpreter who attended many asylum interviews in a professional capacity during the early to mid-2000s, suggests that at the most basic level, the unnaturally slow pace and pauses necessary for interpretation often break the flow of the narrative and can cause the applicant to forget what they intended to say. Idiosyncrasies are often not picked up or lost in translation (*ibid.*). Additionally, the applicant may be unwilling to disclose crucial information, particularly concerning sensitive matters, to an interpreter from the same country of origin; from the same or an opposing political or ethnic group; or of a particular gender (see Good 2007; ILPA 1999; Kalin 1986).

Officially, the interpreter reads the transcript to the applicant at the conclusion of the interview, and the applicant signs to confirm its accuracy (Rycroft 2009). In practice, transcripts are not always read back, and applicants sometimes sign "out of acquiescence to perceived authority rather than acceptance of their accuracy" (Good 2007: 157). As of late 2002, IND staff were not required to even read transcripts back, and many legal representatives would advise clients not to sign them (*ibid.*: 158) so that responsibility for inaccuracies would not reside with the applicant (Rycroft 2005; 2009). In the early 2000s, interviews were not tape-

recorded, hence the interview transcript was the only official record that existed (Good 2007: 158).

At the screening interview applicants' eligibility for NASS support is determined. Those eligible are placed in temporary accommodation, usually for a matter of weeks, before being dispersed to more permanent accommodation in one of the dispersal areas. Upon arrival, they are routinely asked to participate in an induction service²⁰.

The substantive asylum interview is the next stage in the process. In an ILPA study of asylum interviews which consulted 53 asylum applicants, Crawley found significant disparities between national groups in the timing of the interview, ranging from on arrival to more than two years after arrival (ILPA 1999: 13). Legal representatives and applicants reported concerns about the conduct of interviews on arrival, when applicants were usually in a state of exhaustion, distress and confusion, and thus generally unprepared to give a full and clear account of their experiences (*ibid.*: 13, 55). It was also found that consistent and mutually agreed definitions of the purpose of the interview in Home Office interviewing guidelines are lacking, and in-country and port applicants are given substantially different explanations about the purpose and conduct of the interview. In practice, interviewing officers tend to focus on assessing the credibility of the applicant, which, according to legal representatives, hinders the collection of necessary and relevant information (*ibid.*: 47-68).

The substantive interview tends to be semi-structured, involving a series of standard questions and further lines of enquiry based on applicants' responses to them (*ibid.*: 50-52). In their focus on eliciting precise, quantitative data such as dates, names and frequencies, such questions reflect an approach that is specific to Western scientific rational discourse and therefore not necessarily fitting with dominant modes of thought operating in the cultures from which many applicants come (Rycroft 2005: 230). Rycroft argues that 'richly contextualised narratives' of applicants are discouraged because they are viewed as irrelevant or because they

²⁰ In Glasgow, the induction service for asylum applicants is called the Scottish Induction Service. Delivered by the SRC, it is designed to present new arrivals with information about their rights and responsibilities while in the UK, support arrangements and basic orientation.

disturb the ‘appropriate’ chronology of the account. This decontextualises the asylum story and produces an objectified, easily categorised account (Rycroft 2005: 231).

It is assumed that genuine refugees will know which details and events are relevant to the claim (ILPA 1999: 52) and that they will have had sufficient opportunity to explain the claim during the interview (Rycroft 2005: 232). In reality, applicants may not know the criteria for determining whether an individual can be protected under the Refugee Convention and, even so, may be told not to go into detail (ILPA 1999: 51-2). There is also an assumption that the interviewing officer is neutral and that applicants can give ‘straight-forward’ and ‘truthful’ accounts of their experiences. The importance of the relationship and interactions between interviewer and interviewee in the production of the account is not recognised (*ibid.*: 52-6). UNHCR (2006a) has observed that a significant number of interviewers adopt an inappropriate tone or line of questioning, attach little importance to ensuring that interviews are gender-appropriate, and fail to give appropriate opportunity to the applicant to explain apparent inconsistencies. The presence of family members, such as spouses and/or children, during the interview also has important implications for the disclosure of information. Women in particular may only be able to communicate experiences of sexual abuse or other kinds of harm when family members are not present (Crawley 2001: 204).

Decision-making in the asylum process

i. Initial decisions

On the basis of the information gathered from the interview, documentation submitted with the claim and information about the country of origin, the Home Office must decide whether or not to grant Refugee Status or another form of protection. Such decisions are mostly guided by the Home Office’s *Asylum Policy Instructions* (APIs) manual. In the absence of clearly defined terms within the Convention itself or an international court for hearing asylum claims, the domestic courts of individual states are responsible for interpreting the 1951 Convention. The British courts often refer to legal precedents from other countries with common-law traditions, as well as *The Human Rights Act 1998*, which incorporated the *European*

Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) into UK law, and the specific pieces of immigration and asylum legislation already mentioned (Good 2007: 51). The Home Office's APIs aim to conform to present British domestic law so as to increase the likelihood that administrative decisions will be upheld if appealed. Good notes that the overall effect of the way in which the APIs are written is to steer IND staff towards "the uncharitable side" within the grey area between an asylum claim clearly in accord with the Convention and one at variance with it (2007: 97). In reaching a decision, the Home Office may also refer to the UNHCR's *Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status* (1992), which presents "a set of timeless universal principles, aiming to advise all countries on the proper approach to take" (Good 2007: 97).

As it is usually impossible for applicants to provide substantial documentary or corroborative evidence regarding the claim, decisions are reached in light of assessments made by the deciding authorities of the applicant's credibility as a witness. The claim may be found to be lacking credibility in terms of its internal incoherence; its external inconsistency with 'objective evidence' such as country guidance; and its 'inherent implausibility', based on inferences and evidence (Thomas 2006: 81). Although the 2002 IND guidelines state that applicants should be given the benefit of the doubt over falsehoods, discrepancies and exaggerations, as these may reflect a real fear of being returned, in practice, Home Office caseworkers nearly always cast doubt on credibility (Good 2007: 195). Asylum Aid (1999) found in a review of Home Office decisions that credibility was the most frequent reason for refusal.

In making credibility assessments, there is a risk that deciding authorities will disbelieve applicants due to prejudice and their own culturally-specific assumptions, unaware of the existence or importance of cultural differences between themselves and claimants (Good 2007; Kalin 1986; Thomas 2006). Kalin (1986) and Good (2007) both offer detailed accounts of cultural mistranslations during asylum hearings in Switzerland and the UK respectively, pertaining to the behaviour of the applicant; his/her reluctance to disclose information due to the internalisation of values of secrecy and suspicion of strangers; his/her structural inability to speak

forcefully and explain throughout the legal process; the identity and conduct of the interpreter; and the cultural relativity of concepts, dates and terms.

Delay in claiming asylum or reporting experiences of abuse is likely to be taken into account and may damage credibility if no reasonable explanation is given (Crawley 2001: 210). As Crawley highlights in relation to women in particular, this approach does not take into account a variety of legitimate reasons why people may not claim immediately, including anxiety, shame, lack of knowledge about procedures, or feeling safer entering as another category migrant (*ibid.*). Furthermore, recent legislation²¹ steers decision-makers towards negative credibility findings, by stipulating that certain behaviours – relating to the kind of travel documentation presented (or absence thereof), the failure to apply for asylum while in a safe country, and the timing of a claim in relation to other immigration matters – should be taken as damaging to the claimant’s credibility. Ensor *et al.* (2006) argue that the assumptions that underpin the legislation do not take into account the realities faced by asylum seekers, and that Section 8 seeks to bind the thinking of decision-makers to a government-defined framework of disbelief (*ibid.*). In this context, ‘objective’ country evidence is important in decision-making, however, the quality of country guidance information has been questioned (Thomas 2006), and expert witnesses have highlighted that the Tribunal’s expectation that it is possible to present wholly objective information concerning the conditions in countries of origin is unrealistic (Good 2007).

In the majority of cases, Refugee Status is initially refused. During the period when most of my participants received initial decisions, the percentage of overall initial decisions made that were refusal of any kind of protection was highest in 2004 at 88% and lowest in 2002 at 66% (Home Office 2000a, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005a, 2006b). The decision is communicated to the applicant in a Reasons for Refusal Letter (RFRL), which specifies the reasons for refusal and outlines the applicant’s right of appeal; or in a letter indicating that Refugee Status or some other form of protection is being granted.

²¹ Section 8 of the 2004 Act.

ii. Appeals

Before 2004, initial appeals were made to the Immigration Appellate Authority and secondary appeals to the Immigration Appeals Tribunal. Since 2004, appeals have been made to a single tier of appeal, the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal (AIT), which is made up of immigration judges who form an independent judicial body.

After receiving a refusal letter, the applicant has ten days to appeal to the AIT (or five days if in detention). Representation by legal professionals, who are skilled in constructing legal arguments, is crucial to the success of an appeal, and it is here that the applicant is more vigorously informed in bureaucratic-legalistic language. Coutin has shown that for Salvadoran refugees in the United States, the preparation of cases entails producing narratives designed to qualify clients for stay under particular types of legalisation (2000: 94). Coutin found that when clients were asked by legal advisors to describe their experiences of persecution, rarely did their narrative assume an immediately logical and coherent form. Rather, clients narrated one bad experience after another, seeming to connect them by the suffering they entailed rather than by other ordering devices such as time or causality. Legal representatives actively assisted appellants in re(constructing) a narrative for the Tribunal hearing, to produce chronological order and logical coherence by implying agency and intentionality, and thus demonstrate a rational and well-founded fear of persecution. Nevertheless, appellants face a difficult task, as to win, narratives must conform to legal prototype; but to be deemed credible, they must deviate from it and demonstrate personal nuances (*ibid.*: 97-99).

A brief meeting known as a Case Management Review (CMR) hearing is held between the solicitor, the Adjudicator and the Home Office Presenting Officer (HOPO) to establish the appeal issues. A date for the full hearing is then issued. At the full hearing, the appellant, their legal counsel, their interpreter (if required), the HOPO and the Adjudicator should be present. Members of the public may also attend, and expert witnesses may very occasionally be called in to provide evidence. The hearing begins with the confirmation by the legal representative of the appellant's details, the SEF, the asylum interview transcript, and a witness statement. Medical reports may also be presented. The remainder of the hearing is generally devoted to cross-examination by the HOPO. Usually, s/he places an emphasis on

seeking inconsistencies that will cast doubt on credibility. Adjudicators may ask clarifying questions without advancing either side's cause. Appellants' representatives then have the opportunity to re-examine, and both parties will set out their arguments fully in their final submissions (Good 2007: 112-4).

In order to be granted protection under the Refugee Convention, the applicant must show a well-founded fear of being persecuted for one of the Convention reasons or a risk of certain human rights being violated if returned. In reaching determinations, adjudicators must consider a substantial body of case law, and country guidance determinations and credibility findings are also pertinent²². Despite a lower standard of proof being expected in asylum hearings than the 'balance of probabilities' applicable in civil cases, the burden of proof rests with claimants (Good 2007: 242).

The legal process for determining Refugee Status is clearly complex. Claimants will usually face challenges in communicating their accounts and providing the required documentary evidence; as well as in understanding legal concepts embedded in reasons for refusal and arguments presented at the hearing. In practice, it is very difficult to succeed in obtaining Refugee Status. This may not be because a person has not suffered persecutory or unbearable experiences, but because of the high demands to be met for recognition. As Good (2007: 3-4) writes,

As the numbers seeking asylum in the United Kingdom have grown, there has been a steady devaluation of the gruesome currency of asylum claims. 'Merely' having a spouse or parent killed before one's eyes – or being raped without a clear political motive – counts for relatively little on the prevailing scale of persecution assessment.

The discord between my participants' belief in the need for protection, based on personal experiences, and the unfavourable conclusions made by the Home Office or AIT on their claims (including their ways of accounting for this), is noteworthy, and will be picked up in the proceeding chapter.

²² See Good (2007) for a comprehensive anthropological analysis of legal concepts, the interpretation of the Refugee Convention in the UK, and the determinations process.

The determination of the AIT should arrive approximately ten days after the hearing, but may take longer. A determination should decide the substantive issues; give sustainable reasons for those decisions; and include correct references to law, standard of proof, and any precedents considered in reaching the decision. It should also include findings of fact on the main episodes in the asylum applicant's story, a credibility finding, and an indication of how much weight was attached to each significant piece of objective evidence (Good 2007: 117). In the case that the appeal is allowed, IND caseworkers have been advised that they should accept 'with good grace' unless there is good reason to think that the adjudicator has made a legal error or that the decision is outrageous in its defiance of logic or accepted moral standards. Nevertheless, it appears that the Home Office has tended to appeal increasingly in recent years (*ibid.*). If the appeal is dismissed, the appellant may have further grounds for appeal or ultimately, the possibility of judicial review (if an error of law has occurred). The appeals process may continue for many months or years – as was the case with many of the subjects of this research – due to delays, adjournments, or multiple appeals.

The conclusion of the asylum process

The asylum process may be regarded as concluded in one of two ways. The first is the granting of a form of Leave to Remain. As already stated, applicants who qualify for Refugee Status are now granted LLR for a period of five years. During this time individuals will have entitlements equal to those of other permanent residents, including access to social benefits, social rented housing, primary and secondary health care, education as a home student, employment, and family reunion and citizenship (upon meeting certain requirements) (Brown 2008). If a person does not qualify for Refugee Status but it is deemed that they will be at risk of serious harm or a breach of their human rights²³ if returned, or if it is anticipated that there will be

²³ It is sometimes deemed that if returned, an applicant's right to freedom from torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (under Article 3 of the ECHR) or their right to respect for private and family life (under Article 8 of the ECHR) will be breached.

difficulty in enforcing their departure, a form of discretionary leave may be granted²⁴.

The second way in which the asylum process may be regarded as concluded is when the claim for asylum ultimately fails (all rights of appeal having been exhausted) or is withdrawn by the applicant, resulting in his/her voluntary or involuntary return to the country of origin. In co-operation with the Home Office, the IOM runs the VARRP for applicants with active and ultimately refused claims. The programme assists returnees in obtaining travel documentation; pays for the flight; and organises for someone to meet them at the departure and/or destination airport. It also offers returnees financial assistance for temporary housing, starting a business, taking up a job placement, or undertaking formal education in the country of origin. In the case of involuntary return, the applicant is usually issued a letter notifying them that the Home Office intends to remove them. Sometimes this specifies a flight on which seats have been booked, or asks them to visit the Home Office to have travel documents prepared. Applicants may be detained in preparation for deportation, upon reporting at the Home Office or directly from their homes by Immigration Enforcement Teams.

Several other scenarios may follow a refusal, but these constitute the indefinite continuation of an uncertain status rather than the conclusion of the asylum process. An applicant may have exhausted all rights of appeal but not be sought for removal by the Home Office, presumably due to the case 'falling under the radar'. An applicant may have exhausted all rights of appeal but be unable to return for a variety of reasons, such as country guidance decisions²⁵ stipulating that certain categories of person cannot be safely returned; the absence of an available safe passage; a lack of suitable travel documents; or ill health. People in this situation can often apply for 'Section 4 support'²⁶, which, at the time of fieldwork, was delivered in the form of supermarket vouchers to the value of £30 per week. An applicant may also have received a removal notice but attempt to evade deportation. If an individual whose case has been ultimately refused acquires new evidence to support a claim for

²⁴ As of 2003, the Home Secretary has granted Humanitarian Protection or Discretionary Leave; before that time, Exceptional Leave to Remain was issued (Brown 2008).

²⁵ The Tribunal regularly produces 'country guidance determinations' that issue advice on how appeals from particular countries are to be approached by decision makers (see Thomas 2008).

²⁶ Section 4 Support is mandated under Section 4 of the *Immigration and Asylum Act 1999*.

asylum, or if a change in circumstances affecting their claim has occurred, they may lodge a 'fresh claim' with the Home Office and thus re-enter the asylum process.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has outlined the UK's recent approach to asylum seekers. It has shown that the introduction of a specific body of legislation to anchor the Refugee Convention into domestic law and outline procedures for asylum determination did not occur until quite recently. Since that time, mechanisms for controlling and managing asylum applicants have developed considerably. The shape of particular policies may be understood as both a means by which the boundaries separating inside from outside ('us' from 'them', 'citizen' from 'refugee') are inscribed, thus re-affirming the idea of the state as a territorially bounded entity; and as an exercise in state legitimacy, in which the negotiation of public interests is crucial.

The practice of asylum policy has consequences for the everyday lives of asylum applicants. It shapes and delimits the activities in which they may engage, and informs their conceptualisations of British 'immigration' and its approach to asylum seekers. In contrast to the state-centred account provided here, the following chapter regards asylum seekers' often tumultuous accounts of the asylum process, in order to explore the lived experience of asylum and immigration practices.

3. Asylum seekers' accounts of the asylum process

Introduction

It has been argued that the tangible consequence of recent British immigration and asylum practices is to disadvantage and exclude those who manage to arrive in the UK and apply for asylum (Zetter & Pearl 2000: 675). Widespread concern has been expressed that the social rights of asylum seekers have been separated from those of other residents, contributing to the increasing marginalisation of asylum seekers (Wren 2002). Scholarly accounts often implicitly or explicitly condemn what is seen as a severe and disobliging governmental position, as reflected in recent policy and legislation. In this chapter, I do not wish to identify the shortcomings of this policy in terms of a set of abstract standards or principles (such as compliance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the liberal tradition). Rather, I wish to explore how one group of asylum seekers conceptualised and experienced the policies and bureaucratic practices outlined in the previous chapter. This helps to deepen an understanding of how flight *and* administrative and legal processes shape the economic, social and political directions of the lives of forced migrants (Kelly 2004: 97), but also the critical role of time in this equation.

The medium through which this examination is achieved is the first-hand accounts of several asylum seekers. Of these, Asad's is given a predominant position. Asad is a tall, youthful-looking thirty-year-old African man. While somewhat reserved and shy around strangers, he is remarkably open, humorous and affectionate when in the presence of family members and close friends. One of his favourite pastimes is talking – about politics, religion and social relations – and telling tales and jokes. Like many of the asylum seekers involved in this research, he often conveyed a desire to find an enduring sense of joviality and freedom, and it could be witnessed that through talking, joking, and other forms of consociation, this could at least temporarily be achieved. I met Asad through his shy and humble yet exceedingly witty wife Lila, whom I had known since my first attendance at Ralston Community Integration Project (RCIP). I mostly saw him when visiting the couple in

their home, as he tended not to participate in RCIP/RAF projects, regarding them as intended for women rather than men.

Towards the end of my fieldwork I conducted a recorded interview with Asad in his living room, while Lila prepared dinner for us and the children played in the bedroom. The interview schedule I had taken with me proved quite useless, as Asad primarily led the dialogue by presenting a long narrative, which called for little prompting on my part. Consequently, while inevitably guided by all kinds of underlying matters – not least of which was his perception of my identity, interests and position vis-à-vis asylum seekers – he to a large extent appropriated the interview, stipulating the topics that he wanted to reflect upon and communicate to others. As such, while nonetheless a product of Asad's and my interaction, the material presented here concerning the reasons for and consequences of his claim for asylum in the UK; his impressions of the Home Office; and his treatment at the hands of decision-making and law enforcement bodies; provides crucial insights into his experience of becoming and being an asylum seeker.

During the interview, Asad spoke about a range of experiences in the asylum process. Like the narratives of many asylum seekers, his original narrative was anything but linear and coherent (see also Williksen 2004). Yet, as with other story tellers, he was able to fashion the substance and experiences of his own immediate and past life into a meaningful story. In doing so, he worked out, made sense of and critiqued the broader social, political and cultural systems that impinged upon and shaped that life (Lamb 2001: 20). I have imposed on this narrative the same chronological order and structure that was presented in the previous chapter. This narrative structure is a literary device intended to do two things: firstly, to highlight the contrasts between the assumptions and objectives underpinning asylum policy and the assumptions and reasoning of asylum applicants, and secondly, to give substance and context – in the form of lived experience – to the asylum practices and procedures outlined in the previous chapter. Comments made by, or events in the lives of, other asylum seekers with whom I conducted the research, are also injected throughout the chapter. These bear a noteworthy resemblance to Asad's, particularly in their emphasis on injustice, the bad faith of authorities, and the denial of basic freedoms. They help to provide a fuller, multi-faceted and polyvocal overall account.

The chapter reveals that encounters between asylum seekers and representatives of bureaucracy are characterised by mutual mistrust and an awareness of the absence of knowledge of the asylum process on the part of asylum seekers. It identifies asylum seekers' own various explanations for the paths their cases have taken, which are underlined by social rather than legal concepts. A common thread running through the various accounts is the critique of British immigration policy, which is achieved through the evocation of notions of justice and equity. Also apparent is a common self-perception that asylum seekers are engaged in a battle with 'immigration' over their right to remain in the UK, a battle in which they are inherently disadvantaged²⁷. This has important consequences for their perception of the extent to which they are welcome in the UK, and thus the estimation of their chances of being granted the right to remain and the shape taken by their struggles for asylum.

Beginnings

Asad grew up in an African country with a huge diversity of ethnic (or as Asad says, 'tribal') groups, with a predominantly Sunni Muslim population and a significant proportion of Catholic, Protestant and Animist groups. The country's recent history is characterised by a series of bloody coup d'états and consequential changes in government. It continues to be characterised by political violence and the presence of armed opposition groups, and there are ongoing armed conflicts and tensions in its border regions (Amnesty International 2008). The government has been known to censor public and private media to prevent the publication or broadcast of information likely to jeopardise public order, national unity and territorial integrity (*ibid.*). Amnesty International reports that members of the country's security forces have carried out a "regime of murder, torture and enforced disappearance of suspected government opponents" and states that enforced disappearance appears to be a method used by the security forces to spread fear among the population and to intimidate perceived or real political opponents (*ibid.*).

²⁷ Knudsen (1992: 137) also notes that Vietnamese refugees waiting in the Hong Kong camps during the 1980s perceived themselves to be engaged in a 'battle' with the authorities for Refugee Status and resettlement.

Asad was raised in a middle class Muslim family, but interprets Islam in a more fluid way than many of his African Muslim contemporaries. He proclaims his faith in Allah and prays regularly, but occasionally partakes of *haram* (forbidden) activities, such as drinking alcohol on celebratory occasions with friends. By 'middle class', I refer to Asad's definition:

We got something to eat every day...if accident happened, we can get medicine at home, if there is an emergency...Since I grew up there was not one day we didn't eat or pay for the school. But we are not rich, we are not poor.

Asad's father had worked for the first government that came to power when his country gained independence from French colonial rule in the 1960s, but died when Asad was still a child. His paternal grandfather had fought for the French in World War II but received a meagre pension upon fulfilling his duties. Perhaps due to his family history, as well as the significant role that members of his tribe played in the national government at one point in time, Asad's own interest in politics and governance developed as he grew into a young man. He completed high school in a country where only two-thirds of the male school-age population finish primary school and half the country is illiterate, and started studies at college where he met Lila, to whom he soon became engaged. However, after completing one year at college, he decided that there was no use in continuing to study for a profession. As he said,

I'm not gonna get a good job, because I'm not one of the close [ones], I'm not one of the president's family. So a lot of people say let's forget about this course. And I go get my own business, help my brother so I can get money to look after myself.

He told me that he decided to join his brother in his trading enterprise. The two regularly travelled to the east of the country, through remote and sparsely populated areas, en route to the border where they bought and sold goods such as clothing and food. There are three main armed opposition groups in Asad's country of origin, which have formed a coalition against the ruling party. One of these groups was based in the eastern region of the country where Asad and his brother ventured. Asad also opposed the ruling government. He says that it had taken power by betraying and murdering large numbers of his tribe, who had helped to overthrow the previous

regime in a coup. The brothers were stopped by the rebels and initially asked on a friendly basis to carry out favours for them, such as delivering personal letters to relatives in the towns they journeyed to, or purchasing cigarettes. As the two regularly passed through a large town in which the national military had a major base, the rebels soon asked the brothers to provide them with information about the activities of the soldiers there. They agreed to this, reckoning that the rebels' success might lead to a favourable political change.

The Problems

Asad believes that his brother's activities were observed by civilians who were employed to provide information to the military, and this led to their capture when driving through a town in the east one day:

They stopped us, the government, the soldiers. They stopped us and they called my brother first from the car. They were talking, talking, after talking, beating now. Really beating now, this is from dying, not from living. I was running...so I get a bayonet here...in my leg (I can show you the scars if want to see). Here and here. I fell down and I don't know where I am from that time really...After that I opened my eyes in the camp. The east of [my country] is all soldiers in secret camps...after that I hear that [my brother] has died, the same time, same day, when they captured us.

Asad was never formally arrested, nor tried in a court of law. His family did not know of his whereabouts. He described the circumstances of the prison camp in a hushed tone:

They bring prisoners, they change prisoners...some of them they execute. But they don't execute them [in a way] that you can see. At night they took them. Some of them, they die, some of them they are running...You find the body there. You cannot run. There was no water there, no rain. Even if they tell you 'go, run', you can go but you will come back. Because it's a desert...And you don't know where the north or south or east is...only desert, mountains. And there were scorpions, if they bite you straight away you will die. Maybe you can walk on something like explosives [landmines]. They put it there...

I was in this camp around one year and a half...they treated me like a slave...You have to do anything, I mean anything, they tell you...they beat us. Three of my ribs have been broken when they beat me. The thing that I did there is more than punishment...every prisoner in [my country], when they say they are going to the east, [you know] this is the end of your life...Some people, they took them before me. And until now, they are still slaves there, until now...

The only thing I was hoping was that the rebels can come and attack this place, so maybe I can run with the rebels. That's the only option I have left for me...

After about eighteen months of internment, Asad had a stroke of luck. A man delivering goods to the prison, an old acquaintance of his brother, identified him and arranged to facilitate his escape by smuggling Asad out in a hidden compartment of his truck.

Asad's experience of incarceration was not regulated in the sense that he was never formally charged nor tried in a court of law. His family were never made aware of his incarceration, and he felt that his death could easily go unobserved. He moved between fear for his life and despair at the thought of living out the remainder of his days in confinement. In his mind, the punishment did not fit the crime.

Some of my other participants also spoke candidly about experiences of incarceration. For some, a catalyst event shifted their position vis-à-vis the state or other persecutory parties, and led to their containment. For Karim, a Darfurian political activist, this was the publication of a poem he had written whose simple message was that everyone should be able to have different ideas and believe in different things. The government, he said, 'didn't like this'. He was jailed for two months then released, then detained again in a 'secret camp' for six months. During this time his family had no knowledge of his whereabouts. He was repeatedly tortured, beaten and cut, leaving permanent scarring on various parts of his body, and moved between an extremely hot room and an extremely cold one. When he was released the second time, his father decided that he should leave Sudan, and made the arrangements for his passage.

Noor, a sensitive and kind-hearted woman from a country in Africa, also spoke about the catalysts for her flight from her country of origin. She was compelled to begin serving mandatory military service when still a teenager. After about a year's service, she received news from her family that her father was dying. She therefore requested temporary leave to return to her family home. She overstayed the designated leave period, thus evading her obligations to the state, and at the same time, she was 'going places and praying with friends', publically practising a prohibited religion. She was apprehended by the authorities for this and her evasion was soon discovered. Subsequently, she was taken to a military camp

and tortured until she agreed to sign a statement saying that she would abandon her religion. She was then reinstated in military service. It was not long before she decided she could not continue to carry out a life of service and deny her religious beliefs; she managed to leave the military camp once more, and travelled to the family home. This time her mother advised her to leave the country, reckoning that Noor would be killed if discovered again.

Two issues consistently appear in Asad's and other participants' accounts of 'the problems', as they were commonly called, in their countries of origin. The first is the magnitude and the intolerable nature of the predicament in which they found themselves, with a corresponding resolution that there was nothing to do but to leave. By this I mean that individuals felt unable to continue in the situation they were in as they would simply be killed, or they would be forced to endure a sacrifice that they believed was impossible or unjust to endure, such as giving up religious and/or political beliefs and activities. The second, and corresponding, matter is the belief that were they to set foot once more in the country of origin and be detected by the persecutory parties, they would face an equally intolerable situation involving threat to life and limb. These two issues appeared to retain a primary place in the consciousness of many of my participants throughout their quest for asylum.

Flight, agents, and the determination of destination country

With the help of the acquaintance who came upon him in the prison camp and a number of agents, Asad managed to escape from the camp and subsequently made his way out of the African continent to France, and finally to London. He judged Britain to be a relatively safe destination as he expected that the authorities would deal with his claim for protection with impartiality, due to its absence of diplomatic ties (and what he calls 'secret service' arrangements) with his country. There were a range of factors affecting my participants' arrivals in the UK rather than some other country of asylum. Some said that their agent had offered limited choices of country of destination and the UK had been the most desirable, due to ease and expense of travel route; the English language being spoken; and the perception that Britain was a 'democratic country'. Others said that they had had very little say in the matter, as

the arrangements were made with the agent by another family member. An Iranian man had no intention of applying for asylum in Britain, but ended up doing so after being caught by UK Immigration with false travel documents while en route to North America, where members of his immediate family were living. An Algerian woman said that she had not known where in Europe her agent was taking her; when she reached the UK, she thought that the local population was speaking German. A few individuals had travelled to the UK on visas to take up educational opportunities or visit family members, and did not apply for asylum until some time later, when the situation in their country of origin destabilised, necessitating the request for protection.

These accounts are consistent with existing studies into the decision-making of asylum seekers. For example, a study funded by the Home Office into the decision-making of a non-representative sample of asylum seekers, found that for most, the primary aim was to reach a place of safety, and many were not greatly concerned about where that place was, or what kind of place it might be (Robinson and Segrott 2002: 7). Very few respondents in the study had knowledge of the asylum process, the welfare system or the opportunities for employment in the UK prior to their departure (*ibid.*: 49). Other studies have shown that complex factors influence the choice of destination country, where a choice exists at all, including the presence of family or friends, colonial ties, cultural/ethnic proximity, existing networks of individuals from the country of origin, the cost and facility of the travel route, the rate of acceptance of applicants from particular countries, the political and economic climate, the perception of the country's human rights record, the possibility of social mobility or of gaining assistance and support, and the knowledge or advice of their agent (Barsky 2000: 25-28; Neumayer 2005: 48).

This raises the pertinent question of the extent to which the “indiscriminate deterrent and preventative measures” (Gibney 2004: 11) outlined in the previous chapter can succeed in their stated aims. Their success appears dependent on potential asylum applicants possessing knowledge of the British asylum system before their flight; such knowledge being sufficient to prevent them from leaving or at least choosing the UK; and the existence of choice as to destination country. The accounts of asylum seekers indicate that the notion of ‘pull factors’ that has been

employed in political rhetoric is highly simplistic and fails to account for the variety of factors affecting the designation of destination country. Despite the increasing restrictions in the immigration regime already outlined, application numbers continued to rise in the UK (Zetter & Pearl 2000: 679) in parallel with global crises; as astutely put by Knudsen, a “deterrence policy cannot eliminate the fear and the desire for a more secure future” (1992: 140).

Applying for asylum

Initial expectations

The asylum seekers whom I met in Glasgow had undergone first or second-hand experiences of threat, intimidation and sometimes arbitrary corporeal punishment, and had consequently developed fears for their safety which they remained acutely conscious of. They arrived in the UK with certain expectations of what the future held, including the ease with which they would gain the legal right to remain in the UK. Such expectations were developed around impressions of the UK as a ‘democratic’ country in which human rights were an ideological imperative, gleaned from popular ideas about Britain in the country of origin. For example, Karim believed that the world had become aware of the dictatorship in Sudan and the crisis in his home region of Darfur. As he said to me, “I went to the UK because they have democracy. I could have gone to Saudi, another Islamic country where I could have spoken Arabic, but I knew they wouldn’t protect me from my government”.

Communications from others, such as friends, acquaintances, agents and co-nationals already resident in the UK were also informative. For instance, Mudiwa knew many co-nationals who had left Zimbabwe for the UK and been granted permission to stay, including her elder sibling. It did not seem unlikely to her that she would be granted permission to remain, just as others had. Similarly, when staying in emergency accommodation in London, Noor witnessed a number of co-nationals being granted Refugee Status. She expected also to be granted Status as, she told me, “we’re here for the same reasons”. Impressions of the British political structure or civil society were grafted onto individuals’ firsthand experiences of persecution or threat, which seemed most clearly to warrant protection. Lennartsson (2007) notes similar ideas

among her asylum-seeking informants in Sweden. She notes that service providers used the term ‘honeymoon phase’ to refer to newly arrived asylum seekers’ sense of relief at having escaped from unbearable conditions in the country of origin (or transit) and the accompanying sense of the future being regained.

When Asad reached England, he applied for asylum at the Home Office in Croydon. Before long, he was interviewed by a young Home Office interviewing officer who asked him a series of questions, but conveyed a lack of knowledge about asylum issues. Asad said that he told her that he was taking medication for an infection arising from injuries sustained in the prison camp. This medication was administered by a doctor upon his arrival in the UK, but several days before the interview he had moved to a new address and had not yet registered with a local GP. Several weeks after the interview, Asad received a RFRL²⁸. He says that in the letter, the Home Office interviewing officer wrote “I don’t believe in any credibility...I don’t believe in this guy, I don’t believe in anything he said to me...I asked him if he takes medicine and he said yes but he don’t even have a GP”. In other words, according to Asad, the reason he was refused was that the interviewing officer misunderstood aspects of his account and interpreted them as inconsistencies, and thus found his whole account incredible.

Other participants told me about a variety of problems they had experienced during the interview, which had a repercussive effect on later stages of the asylum process. These are consistent with the problems documented in existing research and consultations (Asylum Aid 1999; Crawley 2001; ILPA 1999; Refugee Women’s Strategy Group 2007; Rycroft 2009). A number of women told me that they felt unable to give a full account because of poor mental and/or physical health at the time; being distracted by the needs of their children who were present; and reluctance to speak openly about sensitive matters in the presence of their children or an interpreter from the country of origin, or to the male interviewing officer. Some said that difficulties communicating with the interpreter, or what they later discovered were inaccurate interpretations, led to incorrect information being recorded. Finally, many noted incompetence, bias, or misconduct on the part of the interviewing

²⁸ For some of some of my participants, the initial decision was delivered just a few weeks after the submission of the claim for asylum, but for others it took many months or even years. This depended to some extent upon the timing of the procedures outlined in section 2.4.1.

officer; such as telling the applicant not to go into detail; failing to query inconsistencies which were later used as the basis of refusal; and not repeating the account back to the applicant to assure its accuracy.

Initial refusal

Asad described the outcome of his claim for asylum, and his reaction to it, in the following way:

They refused me. No hope. Just pain. No dream. No nice dream...Sometimes I just take this paper for the refusal and say 'where are these people? I'm going to take them to [my country] and they can see how is the people'. It's pain...How you feel about it? You feel pain...I see someone who doesn't know anything, even the name of my country, and he says to me 'this is not true'.

Given their intense expectation that asylum will be granted based on experiences of persecution and ideas about the approach of the UK government towards people in their predicaments just discussed, most of my participants reacted to initial refusals with shock, disappointment and despair. As noted by Pirouet, asylum applicants are commonly unable to understand why they have been refused as “their need for asylum seemed to them so self-evident that perhaps they failed to present their case as fully as they could have done” (2001: 54). Nevertheless, most people do formulate reasons to account for refusal, as will be shown later.

Appealing

Asad did not speak extensively about the process of appealing. The one thing that he did recount to me of his experience in the (then) IAT was the suspicion with which he was met by both the Adjudicator and the HOPO. He described how he had attended his hearing looking “a little bit elegant, fresh” in a suit and formal shoes borrowed from a friend. In response, “the Home Office [Presenting Officer] was saying ‘you’re an asylum seeker; where did you get the money to buy those clothes?’”. Presenting this particular memory is a means of evoking the ‘bad faith’ and suspicions expressed by Home Office staff. The interaction described reveals that the HOPO in question possesses specific expectations of how an asylum seeker

will dress and behave, and Asad's divergence from the prototype is a cause for suspicion.

Interactions and self-presentation in the appeal hearing

During my fieldwork I had the opportunity to hear many of my participants' accounts of appeal hearings, and to observe several of them firsthand. Women in particular spoke of the hearing as an intimidating affair in which they felt themselves to be 'on trial'. Mudiwa's initial reaction to the setting of an appeal hearing date was to say:

I can't go to court and they scrutinise every statement I make again. Like they said I was lying because I told them I had two siblings when they asked how many siblings I have in Zimbabwe. Because two of us are in the UK, and two are in Zimbabwe, right? And then later I said 'there are four of us', meaning myself included, there are four children in the family. They think you're lying...the Judges and Home Office really look down on you, they try to intimidate you.

As with the aforementioned interpretations of refusal, emphasis was placed on suspicion conveyed by both the HOPO and the Adjudicator, who were often regarded as in league with one another, against the appellant. People commonly spoke, as did Mudiwa, of the minutiae of one's account, or seemingly peripheral details, being dissected and analysed, in order to cast doubt on their story, while the crucial events of persecution and issues at stake seemed to be overlooked. Much time was spent beforehand preparing for the hearing: thinking about and investigating through pointed questions posed to solicitors and others, what kind of information or account is required for status to be granted; what kind of people the decision-makers are willing to admit; and the ways by which it might be possible to make them believe one's account.

The trepidation experienced both before and during the hearing manifested in nervousness, which could induce minor forms of loss of control over one's body. Such manifestations themselves then became an immediate concern for women asylum seekers in particular. For example, several of my female participants told me that they were afraid that during the hearing they would become tongue-tied; give rambling or garbled responses to questions; not know how to answer questions or simply reply 'I don't know'; shake visibly; or need to use the toilet. This attention to one's own behaviour reflects a concern that both men and women possessed over

self-presentation in the hearing. A process of ‘impression management’ (Goffman 1973) could be observed, which involved estimating what the decision-making authorities regard as a ‘desirable’ asylum seeker or ‘credible’ appellant, and attempting to perform in congruence with those qualities.

Mudiwa followed her solicitor’s advice to wear makeup and smart clothing as, he claimed, this was more likely to win the adjudicator’s favour. Karim’s wife Khadija chose to wear a long tailored skirt, button-up shirt, fitted suit jacket and *hijab*, rather than her usually favoured colourful, full-body length Sudanese *tobe*. For the few who were not reliant upon an interpreter, self management extended to choice of language used, which became most evident in moments of breakdown. For example, during the course of a hearing, it was necessary for Mudiwa to say that a person had been absent from an event because they had gone to the toilet. She asked me after the hearing “was the word ‘toilet’ inappropriate? Should I have said ‘bathroom’ or ‘lavatory’ instead?” Having attended a private English school in Zimbabwe, Mudiwa was familiar with the ways in which British English usage (here, involving ‘polite’ or ‘crude’ words) could convey notions of social status, and thus feared that her choice of words would lead the Adjudicator to develop an impression of her as poor and unrefined. ‘Impression management’ during the hearing also included attempts to present one’s social reality in an appealing light. For example, Noor said to me several times during the week before her hearing that it would be good to have lots of friends attending the hearing so that “the Judge can see that I’ve made friends in Scotland and give me stay”. Noor’s comments refer to a notion which by this time had gained currency among people at the RCIP projects, that applicants’ chances of being regarded favourably and ultimately granted the right to remain by the deciding authorities would be improved if they showed signs of having ‘integrated’ in the UK. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 6. The asylum seekers that I observed at the AIT aimed to present an image of what they believed the decision-making authorities regarded as an unthreatening, trustworthy and genuine applicant. The efforts on their part are somewhat similar to the work of reformulating the asylum narrative in order to present a ‘valid’ claim, as discussed in the previous chapter (Coutin 2000).

Legal representation

As entering the appeals process was the point at which most of my participants were introduced to legal representatives, and as any chance of success was dependent upon having legal representation, relationships with solicitors became crucial in maintaining a case. The legal arena is one to which I had limited access and therefore I will give it only brief consideration, based on the data I collected. Most of my participants communicated mixed feelings regarding their solicitors. On the one hand, the solicitor was the most influential and committed advocate that the individual had in terms of their claim (community organisations and individual friends/acquaintances could lend social, material or practical support but could rarely assist an individual in winning his/her case). On the other hand, some individuals said that they did not trust their solicitor and appeared to resent their dependency on him/her. Some individuals had solicitors who behaved unethically, for example, charging clients while in receipt of legal aid (at least one solicitor was being investigated by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner for malpractice). Other solicitors, such as Mudiwa's and Noor's (the same man) were regarded with slight ambivalence. As Mudiwa explained,

I need my lawyer to have faith in me, to present my case well and be on my side. I won't have a chance to speak in the court, to respond to the Home Office when they attack me, unless the lawyer gives me the chance. Last time he didn't defend me. When the judge asked if he wanted to respond to the attack on me by the Home Office, he said 'I have nothing to add'. I felt so let down when he said that. There was nothing I could do, I couldn't say anything.

Noor lacked faith in her solicitor as he exhibited behaviours which she considered to reflect incompetence, or a lack of knowledge of, and concern for, her case. Three such behaviours are illustrative here. First, the Practice had the wrong address for her on file and so she never received notification of appeal²⁹; second, the practice never called her to give her updates, which Noor deemed poor practice in contrast to a previous solicitor in London who had called her every week and thus demonstrated a

²⁹ By chance, when attending the Tribunal one day, I saw Noor's name on the notice board listing the day's hearings. This indicated that her CMR hearing was taking place. I was able to notify her of this, and she in turn contacted her solicitor.

concern for her; third, her solicitor once ruffled through her paperwork while asking her for information about her case. She thought that in order to be able to represent her adequately, he should already possess this knowledge. Indeed, an even more fundamental reason for her lack of faith in her legal representation was the fact that she met with and was represented by not one but at least three different solicitors from the same practice over a period of a few months. This made it very difficult to develop any kind of rapport with any one of them. Others, such as Karim and many involved with RCIP (on advice from RCIP/RAF staff), had engaged solicitors whose distinguished performance, respect for their clients, and commitment to ethics had earned them corresponding reputations. The clients of these individuals had great confidence in them. Such attitudes towards, and relationships of trust with solicitors, were essential for information to be divulged to help prepare cases. They also appeared to influence individuals' confidence vis-à-vis their cases, and the nature of their hope for the desired outcome.

For his part, Asad was ambivalent about his solicitor in London, who could not obtain legal aid and insisted that Asad pay for his services. Asad had to request money from friends and contacts in his country of origin community in London. He told me that after the final refusal by the Tribunal, "I asked my solicitor 'okay so what you gonna do now?' He said 'there's nothing we can do. Best thing is go to sign. If you don't go, they're going to put you in detention.'" Many of my participants had reached this point in the process and were left hoping and waiting for new evidence in order to lodge a 'fresh claim', or wishing for the government to institute some kind of amnesty programme. Some individuals began to consider more thoroughly their options. For Asad and a few other families I knew, the best of a limited range of options appeared to be onward migration, to which I will return in a moment.

Powerlessness in the appeal hearing

When they lodged their claim for asylum, applicants entered a process about which they possessed limited knowledge. Manal once made this point to me explicitly, saying "you don't have full information. You are engaged in something and you don't know what it is." The basic contents, interpretation and deliberation of refugee

law were to a large extent impenetrable and incomprehensible to my participants. Good accurately captures their predicament when he writes that applicants “often lack even folk knowledge of the principles of British law, and may hold very different ideas regarding justice, legal procedures, and personal rights” (2007: 18). The questions regularly posed by the asylum seekers to myself and to others regarded as conversant in refugee law was indicative of substantial gaps in knowledge. For example, I was regularly asked questions such as ‘what is the name of the court?’ (the AIT); ‘why wasn’t I asked to go to the court when my solicitor is going for my case?’ (a CMR hearing); ‘what do credibility and genuine mean?’; ‘why do I have to give a witness statement?’; and so on. This can be attributed in part to the specific language employed by the legal profession and bureaucrats, in refusal letters, legal counsel and hearings, which is almost certainly unintelligible to the asylum applicant (Good 2007: 112). While legal professionals and bureaucrats refer to documents describing asylum categories, legal manuals, case law, public journalistic commentaries, human rights discussions, cultural discussions of the historical events in a particular place, and the details of the applicant’s claim, asylum claimants may be aware only of their own experiences, or they may engage in discourses about other experiences like theirs, and are unlikely to be familiar with either bureaucratic categories or any of the legal conversations (Shuman & Bohmer 2004: 398). This is particularly the case when the applicant has not been previously exposed to legal concepts or proceedings.

Appellants are also disempowered in legal proceedings by dependence on lawyers and interpreters to represent their claims for asylum on their behalf (Good 2007). When people can speak English, they can usually exercise greater control on the hearing in terms of observing and comprehending what is happening, responding appropriately, and also presenting a narrative in such a way as to have a persuasive impact (*ibid.*: 185-6). Most appellants are denied this kind of influence upon, let alone understanding of, the proceedings by virtue of their dependence on an interpreter. Like Good (2006: 160), I observed that interpreters failed to provide simultaneous whispered interpretation while a discussion was taking place in the hearing, with most interpreters limiting their interpreting to speech that was directed at/from the appellant. Rycroft (2005) notes that submissions are crammed with legal

terminology which marginalises the appellant, as the interpreter can either unpack the meaning of concepts and get left behind with the interpretation, or give a verbatim interpretation that will not mean anything to the appellant. For example, ‘Article 3’ takes only a second for other parties in the hearing to utter, but for the interpreter to explain Article 3 rights and their relevance to the claim takes one to two minutes (*ibid.*: 18). While legal expertise is essential for “steering applicants through the maze of technical law surrounding their goal of refugee status” and an interpreter is vital for communication to take place in the first place, applicants are disempowered because they must “relinquish much of their individual autonomy in their reliance upon these other persons, and are therefore, for good or ill, unable to present their claims in ways they themselves might have chosen” (Good 2007: 21). Good suggests that one consequence of this for unsuccessful applicants may be that they retrospectively attribute the failure of their cases to this ‘silencing’ of their own stories. My research sheds light on a number of other ways by which the asylum applicants account for the denial of protection, which I now outline.

Asylum seekers’ explanations for refusal

In narrating his account, Asad states not only the fact of his refusal, but also his own reasoning for it: firstly the disbelief of the interviewing officer (grounded in misinterpretation of his account) and secondly, her lack of knowledge. His last sentence implies a perception of the injustice of a situation in which a person without knowledge of his country of origin has the responsibility of judging the validity of his claim. It took some effort on my part to elicit from Asad the reasons for refusal stated by the Home Office. He said

[they said] the country is safe and you can go back, [the country] is very big, you can go [elsewhere], something like that. This is the main reason for the refusal. And after that when I went to the Tribunal, for the third time it has straight away been refused.

This manner of approaching the refusal was not unusual among my participants. When asked why they were refused, they would sometimes refer to what was outlined in the RFRL or subsequent findings of the Tribunal (in favour of or against the appellant). For example, it was common to hear the response “They said that I

could go to another part of my country and I would be safe there” (referring to a finding that there was an Internal Protection Alternative) or “they said that I would not be recognised as [belonging to a specific group] and so the government wouldn’t do anything to me” (referring to a finding that the applicant could not demonstrate a well-founded fear of persecution on the basis of ‘race’). Whatever reasons for refusal they recalled, their accounts consistently reflected a belief that the determination was neither valid nor appropriate. People displayed an unyielding conviction in their need for protection. In refuting formal determinations, it was very common for the asylum seekers to offer alternative explanations for the refusal. Such explanations provide insight into the ways in which the decision-making process was perceived to be conducted, and by extension, constructions of ‘immigration’. Explanations tend to refer to particular qualities attributed to the decision-making parties, including their prejudices, posture of disbelief, limited knowledge, and unrealistic expectations of applicants. In designating accountability in this way, the asylum seekers affirmed the legitimacy of their own accounts and experiences.

i. “They don’t like asylum seekers”

Linked to the notion that Home Office and AIT decision-makers were routinely suspicious and disbelieving of individuals’ accounts was the idea that these same parties carried prejudices towards applicants. This was a view that also tended to be aired by the staff and volunteers of organisations working with asylum seekers in Glasgow. Karim accounted for the negative determination of his first appeal by referring to the ‘racist judge’ (adjudicator). He said “everyone knows her because she’s tough and a racist. If you go to court and you see the name of that Judge on your case, you will be very upset”. When I asked him what he thought would be the outcome of his most recent appeal, he said “I don’t know. I have all the evidence to show that I’m a Refugee. If the Tribunal gives me the Refugee Status or if it doesn’t depends on the judge on the day”. I recall Noor scrutinising the pictures of the AIT staff which hung on the waiting area wall, believing them all to be ‘judges’. After consideration, she pointed and said “I would like to choose that one, because she looks the nicest. Maybe she would give me my status”, thus linking the woman’s perceived personal qualities with her determination.

A new, young case owner working on NAM cases told me that the attitudes of ‘older generations’ in the UKBA contrasted sharply with those of new recruits. His description brought back a memory of one AIT hearing I attended during fieldwork, at which, upon discovering that I was a PhD student, the middle-aged male HOPO spent much of the hearing scoffing at and making occasional snide remarks about the appellant in my direction. At the conclusion of the hearing he approached me and we began chatting about asylum cases. He spoke of his scepticism regarding the validity of asylum cases, advising me to sit in on Zimbabwean and Somali appeals which he claimed were summarily made by people from neighbouring countries who were masquerading as refugees. He said ‘People lie all the time in their asylum claims; why wouldn’t you if you could get into the UK for work?’

To say that perceived prejudices affected decision-making is also to comment on the arbitrariness of the system. This strikes a chord with Coutin’s study of Salvadoran refugees’ attempts to legalise in the United States. Coutin found that refugees’ legal advocates presented the Immigration service as an overloaded bureaucracy (2000: 101). Like the solicitors I witnessed, they gave the message to their clients that ‘there are good judges and bad judges’. Coutin concludes that “such depictions of justice as at least in part a matter of luck suggest that law is arbitrary, that there is some room for play within the system, but that the conditions that determine this play...are beyond immigrants’ control” (*ibid.*). Similarly, in a large-scale statistical analysis of asylum decisions in the United States, Ramji-Nogales *et al.* (2007) found remarkable variation in decision-making between officials, offices and regions. They suggest that the result of an asylum claim “may be determined as much or more by who that official is, or where the court is located, as it is by the facts and law of the case”, and use the metaphor of a ‘refugee roulette’ to describe such arbitrary adjudication (*ibid.*: 302).

ii. “They don’t believe anything you say”

My participants saw the Home Office as possessing a deep suspicion of asylum seekers which, coupled with a refined ability to detect inconsistencies in accounts, resulted in a refusal to believe their stories of persecution. Such a view undoubtedly

reflects the prevalence of negative credibility findings. In the quote above, Asad refers to the disbelief of the interviewing officer. Noor referred to the disbelief of Home Office decision makers when she asked me in frustration one day “What can you do to make them believe you? They find a way to refuse everything you say”. Manal said “Immigration are very good at jumping on mistakes. They just look [at] any gap you have left [and]...they jump on it”. Delaram, a gentle and sophisticated Iranian woman, told me that during her appeal hearing, “the judge and the Home Office talked to each other and didn’t say anything to me or my solicitor. They said to each other ‘Do you believe her?’, ‘No, she’s lying’, and they found ways to refuse me”. People would often refer to the decision-makers’ focus on inconsistencies, and to minor details cited in negative credibility findings, to substantiate their explanations. Delaram described how the Home Office had refused her on the basis of an inconsistency between her assertion, in her first asylum interview, that she was from a country near Iran with a large Iranian population, and her later claim to be from Iran. Delaram was adamant that she had been clear and consistent about her identity. Through her solicitor, she repeatedly requested a copy of the tape recording of the interview as evidence, but the Home Office was not forthcoming.

iii. “They don’t know...”

The explanation of being refused on the grounds of the lack of knowledge of the decision makers was conveyed through statements such as “they don’t know about my country” or “they don’t know what the situation is in my country”. Asad spoke at length of the limited extent to which the British had ventured to his country, and the strange visions of life in Africa displayed by Adjudicators. It is noteworthy in this instance that no Operational Guidance Notes or Country of Origin Information Reports exist for Asad’s country of origin, and claims made by applicants from this country have tended to be low in number; hence it is likely that the decision makers had little exposure to, or expertise in, claims from this part of the world. The explanation of limited or false knowledge reflects a struggle between the authority of the individual’s experiential or ‘subjective’ knowledge and that of documented, second-hand or ‘objective’ information gathered by others.

iv. “They expect you to be superhuman”

Some asylum seekers thought that their quite natural inability to meet excessive expectations to recall details and present consistent accounts was the reason for the denial of asylum. This can again be traced to negative credibility findings on the basis of inconsistency in details, such as dates, locations and the timing of events, provided by the applicant or recorded by the Home Office. Mudiwa’s comment about her experience of appealing reflects the pertinence of memory in such matters:

In the court [in 2007], they questioned something that I said in 2005 [in the substantive interview] –how was I supposed to remember one thing I said in 2005? They expect you as an asylum seeker to be superhuman –to remember everything.

Despite the requirement of a lower standard of proof in the asylum courts than that applicable in civil cases (Good 2007: 242), an Asylum Aid report (1999: 30) which reviewed Home Office and IAT refusal letters, echoes my participants’ complaints, in stating that asylum applicants have been asked to

exhibit feats of memory that would normally demand a scrupulously maintained diary. Whatever they say in their initial interview will dog them throughout the whole process and they will be cross-questioned at the appeal stage often many years after the events they are asked to recall.

This is no doubt based on the common sense supposition among decision-makers that asylum seekers will remember and recount traumatic events with exceptional clarity and vividness (Good 2007: 191). Some of my participants pointed to the fact that they were currently living in exceptional circumstances, which made it only sensible to assume that they could not possess ‘superhuman’ faculties. Asad’s account of his deportation shows how recall of even personal information may be extremely difficult. He said:

I am a human being. Anything that comes to mind, I’m telling you but I’m not going to say to you that I’m not going to forget...You forget, I forget, everyone forgets...

When they deported me, the Home Office was asking me ‘When were you born?’ I told them. They said ‘How old are you?’ I said ‘I told you’...They said ‘How many years old?’ From one, two, t- t- t-, I was counting. They said ‘why are you counting your age? How old are you?!’ I said ‘I have been deported, I don’t know what’s going to happen to me, I’m scared, what do you want me to say?’

It has also been established that trauma can affect the quality of material remembered. Herlihy *et al.*'s study of repeated descriptions of events among Kosovan and Bosnian Refugees found that people with depression and/or PTSD had difficulty retrieving specific autobiographical memories, and that discrepancies in their accounts were more likely to occur with longer times between interviews (2002: 325-6).

Delay

Most of my participants waited for significant periods of time between various actions on their cases. For example, at Karim's appeal hearing the HOPO assured all present that she did not wish to pursue the appeal after seeing the new evidence that was presented by Karim's solicitor. She pledged to seek approval for the granting of Refugee Status from her supervisor the following day. It took a further four months for the letter confirming that Karim would be granted Status to be sent to his solicitor. I witnessed a number of participants' appeal hearings adjourned because new evidence was introduced that required examination. There was a period of between six and nine months before these cases returned to the AIT. Mudiwa submitted an application for Judicial Review when I concluded fieldwork in January 2007. Eighteen months later she had still not received a date for the hearing. Finally, in August 2009, the Home Office responded to repeated petitions from her solicitor to resolve the case on compassionate grounds, and granted her ILR.

When asked about the status of their cases, most of my participants answered 'I'm just waiting', and specified what they were waiting for: the establishment of a date for an appeal hearing, the outcome of an appeal, or news on an application for Judicial Review. As such, they tended to locate the source of their waiting with the Home Office or the appeals system. In contrast, it has become commonplace for asylum decision-makers to place accountability for delays in the determinations process with asylum applicants themselves. Indeed, the development of legislation appears to respond to this assumption. For example, the Home Office (2006a) has asserted that the reduction of the appeals system to a single tier under the *2004 Act* was intended to "significantly reduce the scope for claimants to string out the appeals

system solely to delay removal”. A prominent Glasgow-based immigration solicitor has noted that the UKBA has made accusations that solicitors, too, are out to prolong the affair and make decision-making as slow as possible (Pers comm.). The notion that applicants or their legal representatives are intentionally delaying is an interesting contention which I would like to briefly consider.

Practically, applicants themselves arguably have limited opportunities for delaying. They must adhere to strict timeframes regarding the submission of applications to appeal (for example, ten business days to appeal to the AIT after an initial refusal from the Home Office); and cannot simply postpone an interview or appeal hearing without good reason. If they do so, there may be serious consequences for their application for asylum. Delays may be welcomed in the sense that every day spent waiting is another day of continued life in the UK, which is perceived as preferable to return; however, this does not mean that delay is sought and generated by asylum applicants. The Home Office, on the other hand, as initially the principal decision-making body and the institution responsible for processing the final determination of a case, is arguably able to exercise more freedom in this regard. Asylum Aid (1999: 10) has noted that

The Home Office has often drawn attention to the exploitation of the many opportunities for delay that present themselves in the asylum system...What is less well-known is the regularity with which the Home Office itself delays the resolution of cases by requesting deferral of appeal hearings.

The same report goes on to suggest that the strongest cases appear to be the ones where the delays caused by the Home Office are most frequent, but whether this is deliberate or caused by incompetence is unclear (*ibid.*) In comparison with the applicant, the Home Office appears temporally constrained less by legal procedure than by accountability and questions of legitimacy (as noted in the previous chapter).

But the main point I wish to make is that the notion that asylum seekers ‘intentionally delay’, or more specifically ‘intentionally delay *solely to prolong the process*’ evokes a kind of scepticism. Specifically, it implies that the applicant knows that he or she will inevitably be required to leave the country anyway, so the act of pursuing the right to remain is somehow self-interested. In contrast, delay clearly enacted by the Home Office is presented only as a product of bureaucratic

inefficiency and the inability to manage excessive workloads. In other words, in this construction, asylum seekers are imbued with (negatively geared) agency and intentionality, whereas Home Office staff are posited as simply (though, perhaps, ineffectively) carrying out apolitical, bureaucratic ‘work’.

In light of the nature of applicants’ claims in general, it would seem logical for individual applicants to use whatever legal means available to stay in, and pursue their right to remain in, the UK for as long as possible. Rather than necessitating scepticism, this seems entirely in keeping with claims for asylum. My intention here is to shed light on the connotations of duplicity and spuriousness in some of the assumptions made about asylum applicants and delays, and to question the extent to which these reflect the realities of the process.

Onward migration

Three years on, Asad’s circumstances were quite different from when he first arrived in the UK. His wife Lila had made the journey to London from the country of origin and lodged her own claim for asylum on the basis of political persecution. During their time in London, the couple conceived two children and made many friends, and Lila attended a therapy group at the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture. When Lila’s claim was refused, she and Asad made the decision to travel to Dublin. Asad explained:

We just go there just to go, to just to leave this country...When I was worrying here, the solicitor saying to me if you stay in [your accommodation] you’re going to be deported. So I don’t know, I don’t have any friends— I tell you if I had a friend where I could stay with [my wife and children], I would stay.

Irish immigration regulations state that if an applicant has had a claim for asylum examined in another Dublin II Regulation/Dublin Convention State, Ireland may request that state to take back the individual’s application. The individual may then be transferred back to that state. Asad did not tell me whether he was aware of this rule when he left the UK. He said that he received much better treatment from immigration officials in Ireland than he had from those in Britain: “they are nice, they are not pushing you in Dublin”. Consequently, he felt much happier:

...Believe me, they give us nineteen euro a week, per person. Nineteen euro is ten pounds. And I'm happy. Not [because of the] money. I'm happy that I'm not stressing. I'm happy not waiting for any letter coming. I'm happy not to see the postman, not to worry, not to deport me. So I feel free...the immigration in Ireland...even if they know that you're coming from England, they're not saying 'you are coming from England, you go back' like what it is here.

So when I went to Ireland, I got a place to stay and whatever problem can come, I can face this problem. But for the time being I am free. Like a new start. You understand like I said to you - no letters, no Home Office, no deportation, nothing coming. I know there's something gonna come but for the time being I'm resting. So this is the point. Because all the years I'm fighting, fighting with the Home Office. They don't even give me four months, six months [of rest]. If it's not me, it's my wife. If it's not my wife, it's me...I don't want to anymore to take all this stress. But I'm taking all this stress for the family. I keep it inside me. It made me weak inside. And I don't want to show to my wife that things are like that.

In Dublin, Asad found temporary respite. He had opted out of the British asylum system and shed the uncertainty of waiting which accompanied it. As he says, taking leave of the asylum system meant that there was 'nothing coming'; his orientation was not as acutely directed at the future and the next obstacle it seemed to promise to deliver. This section of his account highlights the emotional burden of waiting and hints at the effects on personal relationships, subjects that are analysed in Chapter 5.

Detention

Eventually, Asad says, he was sent back to England, where he was detained. In speaking about his detention, his focus is on events which occurred in the detention centre itself and the shameful conditions endured by other detainees. One of the few resources Asad had at the time was his material possessions, which he attempted to use to improve the circumstances of other detainees:

...you see, like I said to you, always I want to help, Rebecca...when I was in this Cambridge detention [Oakington], I see people who will get deportation tomorrow or day after tomorrow and the Home office caught them with only one [set of] clothes. When they told me this it was so painful. I take all my clothes. Everything that I have. I come, take it from here to Ireland and from Ireland to here. Rebecca I give it. I don't care about myself. Just, my eyes, I don't want to see anything. When I give to these people, the Home Office and the security say 'where are your clothes and why did you give them these clothes?' I get punishment for this. But they don't know what's inside me...I cannot see someone come and say 'I'm gonna go to deportation tomorrow and they caught me where I was working and I have only these clothes'. How ashamed I am.

So they took me...The detention where they put me Rebecca is just me alone, small room. And just not even ten minutes a day I can see the light.

When I asked why the authorities would do this, Asad replied:

They said this guy want to kill himself...They call it 'short-term detention'. It's punishment. Alone. And there was a camera, they see everything that I do...

I asked whether it was true that he felt suicidal and he stated emphatically:

In this detention I feel! When they put me in this place, I was thinking 'what the...what did I do to them, these people?!' I wonder what crime I did. [They said] 'Leave our country'. I leave it already! Why they caught me and they brought me here?

Asad's primary interest here is the injustices he perceives to be perpetrated by the immigration system – solitary confinement, surveillance and misinterpretation of his motives – and by extension, the denial of dignity.

Sevda, a youthful and vivacious mother of two who journeyed to the UK in 2002 with her husband Maksim after he was violently attacked in Azerbaijan, was also taken into immigration detention with her children. Her account of this experience contains a rather different focus to Asad's. Its concentration on fears for, and inability to properly protect, her children, reflects Sevda's primary role as a mother. She described to me how the detention took place:

It was coming up to [my son's] birthday and I had arranged a party for him and bought lots of food for the party...At 6am, Immigration came and banged on the door of our flat then knocked it down. Some of them went into my children's room [which is beside the front door and separated from the parent's bedroom by a flight of stairs] and woke up my children. They were screaming and crying, extremely frightened. Other officers came upstairs into our room. I was just in my underwear. I put on just my [dressing gown]. They were filming us with a video camera. They got close around me like this and stopped me from moving around. Maybe they thought I or [Maksim] would try to jump off the balcony. We had no idea that they would be coming. Just a few days before we got a letter saying that our appeal was accepted, so we still had a case. I told them 'go and look at the papers in the kitchen', because I kept it all on the shelf there. But they didn't look at it...and because they were so close and stopping me from moving, I couldn't get it. They told me get dressed and they took us to Brand Street...

At Brand Street, I saw Home Office people working there, women, laughing at me behind the glass. How can anyone be so cold and have no heart, to laugh at me and my children in that situation? We were taken in separate cars...my children and me in one car and [Maksim] in the other. They said that we would all be taken to same place, but I didn't see [Maksim] again for long time, I didn't know where he was...

Sevda then described how, upon arriving at Dungavel, she had requested food for her children from the security staff. The staff told her that they had missed the scheduled breakfast, and gave the children crisps and juice. Sevda said “this was not a proper meal! I would never give my children crisps and juice for breakfast. My children don't eat crisps”. The three were transferred later that day by minibus to another detention centre in England. When Sevda learned that the transfer was about to take place, she told the staff that her daughter suffered badly from travel sickness. Consequently,

they said they would give her some tablets for the travelling. I thought is gonna be for travel sickness. When they gave her the tablet, she fell asleep after one minute and she was sleeping for hours. It was eight hours to London and she slept for six hours. When she woke up she fell asleep again straight away and I knew something was wrong. This isn't my daughter. Then I knew they gave her sleeping pills. I couldn't believe they gave my daughter sleeping pills. She's just a child. Even I don't take sleeping pills because I know they can be bad for the heart; it's even worse for a child who only has a small heart...I was so angry.

After two weeks in detention in London, Sevda and the children were issued with train tickets to Glasgow and released, by literally being allowed to walk out of the front gates of the detention centre. Sevda was frustrated that she was expected to figure out for herself how to return to Glasgow with her two small children. Maksim was later released when one of the RCIP volunteers paid his bail.

Sevda's suggestion that immigration thought that Maksim might jump off the balcony reflects an awareness of the resolute unwillingness of most families to return and the fact that some individuals had threatened to jump when dawn-raided³⁰. Sevda's flat was on the 20th floor; jumping would mean death. In her account she communicates her fear of the invasion of 'immigration' into the private domain of

³⁰ Such threats have assumed a tragic reality: in 2010, three members of a family from Russia who had been refused asylum died after jumping from a high rise in Glasgow, and an Iraqi Kurd who anticipated deportation plunged to his death from the balcony of a high rise in Nottingham.

her home and the body of her child, the latter constituting a betrayal of her investment of trust in authority. The fulcrum of Sevda's fear is similar to that articulated by another mother, Delaram.

Delaram was detained by British immigration when transferring in Heathrow en route to the Netherlands, where she intended to claim asylum and reunite with her husband, who was already there. She was escorted to a room where she was questioned for around five hours. Her two young daughters were taken elsewhere by immigration officers. She became extremely distressed about their whereabouts and well-being, and repeatedly asked for them. The authorities continually responded with the message 'don't worry, we don't want to hurt them'. "But of course", Delaram said to me, "it's very hard to trust people you don't know, especially when you are a mother and they have taken your daughters".

For Sevda, the whole experience of detention served to undermine a sense of security:

After this experience, I was very scared they would come again and take us. When someone was knocking on the door or the buzzer I didn't answer...

Maksim said he wouldn't take me and the children to sign at the Home Office. Why should we go with him? I saw once a woman with a baby in her arms, one next to her and one inside her, and they made her go to sign. Why? Is she going to run? Of course not!...

Maksim refused to take us. He said a woman with her children won't run away. He said to them 'Why do you want my wife to come and sign? Do you want to see my wife? Do you want to see my children?' He took this part of his watch [the metal strap] and went like he was cutting his wrist, like he was going to kill himself. Since that time, the Home Office didn't ask us to sign in. Just Maksim went alone every week.

The circulation around the flats of stories of detention like Sevda's appeared to intensify other applicants' fears of detention and deportation. However, it also helped them to plan what to do in the event that immigration came for them.

Deportation and voluntary return

It was not long before the Home Office attempted to effectively conclude Asad's case:

So after that, they put me in long-term detention that's near to Heathrow. Colnbrook? I stay one week...one day the guy from Home Office come and they say 'ok, you're gonna go to your country'. I ask him 'OK, what about my family?' He say 'oh you don't have family here so you need to go'. He said 'are you going to sign this paper?' I said 'I'm not going to sign it'...So I shout at him really, and we make some argument, and he left. So I have been deported anyway.

I was feeling ashamed myself Rebecca. I don't want to even talk about it but because of you I'm talking. All these things happened to me, I see, my eyes see people who are already being crazy...People already stressed. People already get their mind is hurt, is blowing. What they're saying you can't understand...I see people like that. And these are things I don't want to see. Whatever, whoever [the] human being, I don't want to see them suffering. But I see.

Anyway, I have been deported...[There was] one guy (doctor), and two security and their boss and me - five. [They were] big...They took me at night when I was sleeping. They took me like a criminal...When they took me, from my bed I go out, I see all the doors, they are locked and people are sleeping in their rooms. I feel what, what I did? Even not to say goodbye to my family!? And why they take me at night this time? Being quiet, like killing someone...They came and said to me 'let's go'. Why took me at night? What I did? Who knows if this time they took me and kill me? Who knows? This is the criminal act. Because we are asylum seeker.

Asad's account here echoes his recollection of the desert prison camp, where people were taken away and executed at night in secret and without legal process.

They took me to another prison. Just you alone. You're not allowed your shoes. No bed, because you're going tomorrow. And...no cover, because maybe you kill yourself. Nothing...You can't sleep because they're gonna come and take you...

I was just saying to my God, asking my God...and I've never been separated from my children since they were born, not for one day. Now I'm separated for one month. And that time the painful thing was [my daughter] started walking...Her mum she phoned me in prison. She said [our daughter] is walking. And I want to see her...

I said [to myself] 'what did I do?' I said this is the— I'm going now, whatever is going to happen to me is going to happen...I asked my God 'if you think that with all this love for my children...so help me, I need your help please...I want you to help me, not to be separated'. Rebecca, when I asked my God like this, I was seeing

everything – not sleeping because I didn't sleep – I was seeing everything, like someone telling me 'hey you! Go with them. What they tell you, just do it'.

When they came in the morning, the boss for the security said 'listen, we're going to take you and if you start fighting with us, this tall big guy is going to rub you and you're going to...' I said 'take it easy. I'm not gonna fight with you. We're gonna be friendly. Let's go'...Believe me, Rebecca. Because I asked my God and I have a feeling inside me, and the stress go.

This section of Asad's account highlights the psychological process of preparing for deportation; his resistance and then acceptance, by way of an appeal to God, of what he expected to lie ahead. Asad boarded the flight to his country of origin and arrived with the Home Office accompanying officer at the airport in its capital city. He regarded himself as extremely lucky in what happened next. As previously mentioned, his country has no diplomatic relations with Britain and for this reason, an agreement could not be reached with the government before his deportation. The information compiled by the Home Office about him was given to the police (who, according to Asad, knew nothing about him) rather than the bureau that deals with people wanted by the government. Asad says that the police looked at the papers and refused to allow him entry because his nationality could not be proven. They suspected him of being a national from a neighbouring country with which his country was engaged in conflict. He was placed on a flight back to London. By the time he re-entered the UK, he was ill from a prolonged infection and lack of food. He fainted at the airport and awoke sometime later in hospital.

Contemplating voluntary return was also an excruciating process of assessing risk and attempting to predict future outcomes, in the light of knowledge of the situation in the country of origin and information gathered from various sources. This is highlighted by the story of Grace, the only asylum seeker I knew who did return. I met Grace just three months after she applied for asylum. She knew virtually no one in Glasgow, and spent long periods of time sitting in her high-rise flat, worrying, with only her two infants to keep her company. The wind rattled the doors and windows of the flat so forcefully that I initially thought that there was someone banging on the front door. Grace said that she had at first felt scared and unsafe on her own with so many noises, especially at night. She had become accustomed to the sounds but more depressed and dejected, as she waited for a chance to explain her

claim to the Home Office. She told me that her whole body ached and she could not sleep. She begged me repeatedly, 'please help me, please talk to immigration...I can't go back there or they'll abuse me or kill me...they're wicked!'

Grace reported feeling much better at our second meeting, after attending a local women's group and meeting me. She had her asylum interview, which brought a new confidence and energy to her demeanour. This, however, was short-lived; her claim was refused on the grounds of an Internal Protection Alternative. The refusal was not a complete surprise as, she told me, asylum seekers at the women's group had told her that the Home Office refuses many people; 'they find ways to refuse people, they don't believe people'. She followed the advice of her solicitor and lodged an appeal.

A fortnight later, Grace was visibly unsettled and tearful when I arrived at her flat. She had received an AIT hearing date, but proposed that voluntary return might be the best way forward as, she said, 'I can't do this anymore, I'm tired of it'. She professed 'something bad happened last week': the Police had come to her flat to serve her a Court Order. Criminal charges had been laid against her as she had been in possession of false documents when entering the UK. Worrying about the charges, she had visited the office of Unity, an anti-deportation organisation that I had told her about. She said that the Unity volunteer had told her 'I could be jailed at Dungavel for one year. He said it has happened to people. I don't want my babies to be taken!' Grace asked me numerous questions in an effort to develop an idea of whether she would be jailed and/or whether her asylum appeal might be successful. She reiterated: 'I can't live like this, wasting my life and unable to think straight', and decided to seek advice from the IOM about the VARRP.

The following week, Grace and I met with the solicitor assigned to her criminal case. Grace asked for his professional opinion of her chances in both the asylum appeal and the criminal hearing. He asserted that he could not advise her on the former, but in the case of the latter it was not yet clear; it would depend upon the evidence possessed by the Police, and whether or not she was found guilty. He added that chances could be good because the courts are relatively gentle on women, especially those in her situation. She later confessed to have not understood what the solicitor had said, and asked me: 'will it be OK or not? Will I be found guilty or

not?’ I tried to re-iterate the solicitor’s indeterminate message and encouraged her to gather more information from her immigration solicitor. She asked me to help her organise the documentation required to apply for the VARRP. When I asked her whether it would be safe to return, she proposed that she could live in hiding in a part of the country far from her husband, and that in her estimation, it would be better to return with the money from the IOM and start a business, than to go to jail and lose her children in the UK.

That was the last time I saw Grace. I had every intention of attending her AIT hearing and expected that even if the return was approved, it would take some time to arrange her departure. The following week I went on holiday. When I came back, I discovered that Grace’s phone number had been disconnected. I contacted the IOM, who informed me that she had returned to Nigeria. We communicated by telephone several months later and she told me in a sad voice that she was, thus far, ‘OK’.

Dispersal

Asad says that the Home Office sent a fax for him in hospital which advised him to report to them in two weeks’ time. Meanwhile, Lila and the children were dispersed to Glasgow. Asad was released from hospital without any money, means of transport, or place to stay. He was forced to rely on the kindness of others:

When I was released, I didn’t have any money. I was asking for money to get a bus... Really, I was asking for money in the street...Because I used to do this, now when I see people [begging] and I have [money], I give...Anyway, I stayed with my friend in London. When I get out of the detention it’s nice to see people. People want to know what’s happened to you, why you leave us...I get help from them, from my friends, and I come to Glasgow, and just go to Brand Street, to sign.

Most of the asylum seekers in receipt of full NASS support found that meeting basic subsistence needs (such as food, toiletries and clothing) required careful planning. Few people could afford to pay for leisure activities or put aside savings, instead surviving on payments from week to week and in some cases, borrowing from friends. Most arrived in the UK with little or no money and were unable to raise capital for immediate necessities such as prams and warm clothes for the Scottish climate. Donations of such necessities from community organisations or contacts

were often relied upon in the early stages. However, Asad now faced an even worse predicament, which has been recognised to affect a significant number of asylum seekers in the UK: destitution (Refugee Survival Trust 2005; The Poverty Alliance 2006; Refugee Action 2006; JCHR 2007). Destitution is understood here as a lack of the means of subsistence, such as when homeless and without the right to social housing, and lacking the ability to make money or claim benefits. The Refugee Survival Trust (2005) identifies the three main causes of destitution among asylum seekers as administrative errors and procedural delays; policy; and circumstantial factors; while the Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR) reports being persuaded that the government has been “practising a deliberate policy of destitution of this highly vulnerable group” (2007: 41). Asad’s temporary destitution may be understood as policy-induced in that he was unable to return to his country of origin and yet ineligible for support or accommodation. He was fortunate to have friends in London with whom he could stay until his move to Glasgow, and a wife who was still entitled to support.

It was at this point in Asad’s story that I met him, and it is here that I leave his account. Lila was awaiting the outcome of an appeal, the couple were living in NASS accommodation, and Asad was regularly signing in. Most of my participants were at a similar point in the asylum process when I began fieldwork. With the basic means for survival met, individuals were able to exercise some degree of freedom of choice. Though the future was nevertheless uncertain, life had, to some extent, normalised, with a regular cash flow, secure housing, access to various services, children attending school, and opportunities for social contact. At this stage, people were more likely to invest their efforts in information gathering, building social networks, and political lobbying.

Work and welfare

The inability to work constituted a profound, often vocalised, source of frustration for all whom I knew. It can be readily observed that the compulsion of asylum seekers to live on welfare is doubly damning: it forces them into poverty by preventing them from securing any other income, and this fuels accusations that they journey to the UK only to seek free handouts and exploit the generosity of the state.

Some reflected on how this wary attitude towards asylum seekers was prevalent in the host society. Mudiwa, for example, often spoke about how Glaswegians responded to her when they discovered that she was living on government funds. When she went to the Post Office to collect her NASS payment, she felt that people looked down on her and that the staff were unfriendly because as with the general public, “they think asylum seekers are just lazy people who want to sit there and eat their money that they’ve worked hard for...the whole experience makes you feel ashamed”. Mudiwa believed that asylum seekers would receive more social acceptance if they were allowed to work, reasoning:

people won't be making a big fuss about asylum seekers...coz you are working, you are not getting any money off someone, right?...maybe people will just accept “ok, fine, they're people like us...just fighting for the right to stay in this country but at least they are providing for their own way”. Maybe there won't be any fuss about “oh, they're taking our houses” coz maybe you'll be paying.

Her assertion reflects a powerful idea, which was taken up in public discourse about asylum seekers in Glasgow, that widespread acceptance of asylum seekers would be more likely were their efforts towards reciprocity, or ‘making contributions’, apparent. I will return to this idea in Chapter 6.

The curtailment of freedoms

In discussing life as an asylum seeker, there was, among people at this stage in the process, an almost universal focus on prohibition. In other words, being an asylum seeker was defined in terms of what one could not do. The source of prohibition was generally identified as the Home Office, such as when a Nigerian woman said to me “the Home Office don’t let you do anything. You have no control over your life”. The inability to work, limited educational opportunities, and dispersal on a ‘no-choice’ basis were commonly stated examples of such a lack of control. This is typified by the comments of Delaram.

While we chatted over coffee and sweets in her high-rise flat in Ralston one day, Delaram began to describe what life as an asylum seeker was like. She said “You can’t travel, you can’t work, you can’t get a licence to drive a car”. When her parents came from Iran to visit her in Glasgow, her father joked that Delaram lived in

a prison. He walked down the communal hallway, pointing to the flat numbers painted on the neighbours' doors, and say 'this is cell number 30, this is cell number 32, ahh now we have reached your cell – number 34!'. Although she had become accustomed to living in Ralston, Delaram said, she never thought that she would live in such a place and would never choose to live there either. After many caveats, she carefully said that 'in her opinion' the people living in the area lacked 'culture', were uneducated, and used drugs. This was not the kind of neighbourhood she felt she belonged to. I later complimented her on the personal touches she had added to her flat, such as paintings, wallpaper in the living room, new curtains, and her own coffee tables which were decorated with photos of family members and other ornaments. She shrugged, 'yes, I've found cheap decorations and they are okay'. 'But', she said, 'if it was my own home, it would be different. It would be much better'. This discussion highlighted that with regard to where and how one was to live, choice could not be exercised due to the dispersal policy.

Similarly, when I asked Sevda what life had been like during the five years she had been an asylum applicant in the UK, her answer emphasised the rules and regulations by which her life had been governed:

We couldn't do anything! We couldn't even decorate our flat. They gave us horrible duvet covers, all the same, they were green, it was horrible...The walls were also plain and looked awful. [The GCC project officers responsible for overseeing NASS accommodation] told us we couldn't change it. I was so depressed everyday being in this flat, seeing these walls. So we bought some wallpaper very cheap and changed the walls. We could have made this place better, so why did they want to stop us? It's not just better for us, we're making the place a lot nicer for them [NASS]. After we changed my children's room they always wanted to play in here. I was a lot happier as well...Also, I told [the GCC project officers] that I needed a vacuum and they said 'oh you know how to use a vacuum?' I said 'of course!' I don't know where they thought I was from, but they didn't think I could use a vacuum. Can you imagine? I was dressing nicely and they said things to me like where did I get nice clothes. Maybe I dressed like this in my country but they didn't ask me...

The views of these women and others were often derived from drawing comparisons between life as asylum seeker and life in the country of origin before 'the problems', which, particularly for affluent individuals, had been characterised by exercise of choice; or between the reality of being an asylum seeker and the 'freedom' they had hoped or expected to find in the UK. As Manal said to me,

I never expected I would find so poor people in Scotland or in UK. UK is the most richest country in the whole world. I never expected there are such bad houses. Very bad! Believe me, I thought it was only in our country, but even in our country you would not find rubbish like these houses.

Temporality has an important bearing on the perception of freedom and restriction, which I would like to illustrate by way of a further example from my fieldwork. In Ralston, I met a teenage girl named Marie, who came to the UK as the dependent of her mother, who had fled civil war in an African country. By the time I began fieldwork in early 2007, Marie had lived in the UK for six years and had undertaken all of her secondary schooling in Scotland, and performed exceptionally well in terms of academic and extra-curricula pursuits. An excursion to France was planned for Marie's language class, and all students were expected to participate. With the help of her solicitor, Marie's mother sent a letter to the Home Office requesting permission for Marie to go, but, unsurprisingly, received a negative response. Marie was the only student in her class to miss out on the trip. Now approaching the end of her final year at school, and with no indication that the family would be granted Refugee Status, Marie began to worry about her future. Her parents were both professionals from an elite class in their country of origin, and Marie had been hoping to pursue a career in medicine. However, University study was, at the time, virtually inaccessible for asylum seekers. It appeared that Marie's only option was to volunteer.

It is unlikely that such questions of exclusion from educational opportunities, from the activities of one's peer group, and from the ability to plan one's future, would be as pertinent were the duration of waiting only a matter of months, as is intended by Home Office targets. Marie, however, faced a potentially boundless wait. The extent to which life can be lived according to normative expectations – or, more specifically, the extent to which a young woman can undergo rites of passage – in the context of structural constraints imposed by policy, thus remains questionable. The same problem was faced by young adults of marriageable age who were not permitted to marry; young people who could not earn money to repay the debt to relatives who funded their travel; and others who could not fulfil responsibilities or enter the next stage of their lives because of the culmination of state policy and

bureaucratic delay. Many of the individuals in this situation chose to try to fill their time with productive activities (such as looking to meet potential spouses, volunteering, undertaking part-time college education, and so on), so that they would be prepared to act accordingly if, and when, they were granted Leave.

The Home Office's treatment of asylum seekers: hospitality and honour

In recounting his experiences of various aspects of the asylum process, Asad often referred to the Home Office, and specifically, its perception and treatment of asylum seekers. It must be remembered that his opinions are informed by the series of negative firsthand encounters already described, as well the stories he heard of other applicants' experiences. I asked Asad about his expectations when he first applied for asylum. He replied:

When I come here I don't know this system, really, like it would be hard here. Like here I'm going [to be] waiting 8 years. If I knew it I [wouldn't have come] here to this country...To be struggling 8 years, to be not treating you like a human being...You are asylum seeker. It's slave, but now the word is changed. They [modernised] it. They don't call you slave but they call you asylum seeker. Do you understand? They called our grand, grand family, long time ago, slaves, and now they're ashamed. So what are they gonna do? Call them asylum seeker. It's the same system.

When I asked Asad to explain why he described asylum seekers as slaves, he said:

The way that they treat us when you go to see them, these immigration people. This is the time you found out that you are nothing....you come for protection [and say] to someone 'I have this problem', to someone who doesn't know your country, doesn't know even how many people are in your country.

Asad talked about how it felt to be refused and sought by the authorities:

Here I'm not free in my mind. My mind is in prison. Someone is playing with my mind in the computer. Refuse this guy. Catch this guy. Send him back to [country of origin]...

Rebecca it's so deep what this Home Office done to us, really...all of them the same, every human being, every one, every one who's working with the Home Office that I've met in my life, is a bad person. I never seen someone that treat me as a human

being. Believe me...And all of my friends, same situation: crying about the Home Office! Women crying about the Home Office! Friends crying about the Home Office! What's the reason? It's the same reason as me.

*Maybe their boss is telling them [Home Office staff] to do that. They forced them to do. I think so...They have to do their job like this...
They pay like an exterminator. They pay you to go...*

An underlying theme in the accounts presented throughout the chapter is the perception that the Home Office is disbelieving of asylum applicants' motives and claims. Manal once frankly expressed this perception when she said "the Home Office thinks that we have vultures in our blood. They think that we are here just to take, for benefits". As I have shown, the points of contact between asylum seekers and Home Office representatives – the asylum interview, the appeal hearing, signing in, and detention – were often adversarial in nature and overwhelmingly intimidating for applicants. Most people communicated their shock at having their claims initially refused, and accounted for subsequent refusals in terms of the duality of the *personal*, emotive qualities and biases of decision-makers, and the *organisational* or institutional culture of suspicion and prejudice directed at applicants. Consequently, it was perceived that the asylum system was steadfastly geared against applicants and manifest with mistrust.

In this section, Asad's account sketches a picture of an asylum seeker arriving at the border without prior knowledge and making a claim to the authorities for protection. However, this person's vulnerability is met with derision, their claim is dealt with inadequately, and they are therefore treated as if they are 'nothing', a 'slave', 'not a human being'. Among Asad and others, there was a tendency to construct their present condition in terms of, on the one hand, being hunted by the state or other persecutory parties who were perceived as 'lying in wait' for their return, and on the other, being refused by the state whose protection they had requested. In other words, their accounts articulate a sense of being wanted and unwanted, sought and rejected, in a configuration that was antithetical to their well-being.

Dikeç (2002) has noted that talking about borders entails talking about openings, reception and therefore *hospitality*. Hospitality is a concept that seems to effectively capture these accounts of poor reception and ongoing treatment by

immigration authorities. Hospitality has classically been theorised by Kant (1970[1795]) and Derrida (2000). Derrida (2000: 77) identifies a conflict between,

On the one hand, *The* law of unlimited hospitality (to give the new arrival all of one's home and oneself, to give him or her one's own, our own, without asking a name, or compensation, or the fulfilment of even the smallest condition), and on the other hand, the laws (in the plural), those rights and duties that are always conditioned and conditional.

The former position refers to the Derridian notion of hospitality as making the way for passage without abolishing boundaries. It is about giving spaces to the absolute stranger of whom nothing is known, and is therefore an experience beyond objective knowledge. This is an ethical law of unlimited hospitality. The latter laws refer to the Kantian notion of the right to universal hospitality (to not be treated with hostility upon the arrival of another's territory) which is regulated at the juridical level through agreements between states (Kant 1970[1795] in Dikeç 2002: 232). In other words, this is the exclusionary right of the hosting nation-state. This kind of hospitality is conditioned by the recipient meeting certain conditions, such as gaining physical access to the boundaries of the state and possessing the appropriate documentation and evidence to prove their claim etc (*ibid.*). Therefore, we might translate Derrida's tension as a tension between the ethical law of unlimited hospitality, and the conditional laws of immigration which require that certain provisions be met by the immigrant before hospitality is granted.

One of the recurring themes to emerge from my fieldwork was the importance and value of hospitality in many of the societies from which my participants came. Karim, for example, regularly spoke about hospitality and the meanings it carried in Sudan, and more particularly among members of his tribe. He described hospitality as an orientation where: "you should do everything for your guest, you should provide them with everything they need, treat them with respect, put their needs before your needs", and abstain from ever turning them away or asking them to leave. I observed this mode of hospitality among a number of asylum seekers, who retained a posture of expectation of guests when at home, and upon the arrival of guests, sent the children away so as not to disturb the guests, provided elaborate and extensive meals and regularly sent guests home with small gifts. In this

formulation, the guest also has a responsibility to respect the host. As Hage (2002: 5) notes, in the traditional Arab perspective, a guest is a person whose presence is desired because they have been invited, and in a moral sense, s/he is someone whose worth is recognised and presence valued. This implies that the guest also values and recognises the host through the act of visiting (hence the customary ‘thank you for coming’). Consequently, hospitality entails a degree of moral reciprocity and the mutual recognition of worth (*ibid.*). Dikeç (2002), who draws primarily on Derrida, proposes a view of hospitality in a very similar sense, as a sensibility in social relationships and interactions, as well as in institutional practices, which is about mutual recognition, providing space for the stranger without abolishing boundaries, and the cultivation of an ethics and politics of engagement and reverence for the stranger.

The accounts presented throughout this chapter indicate that it was this kind of unconditional, ethical hospitality which the asylum seekers both valued and expected when arriving at the borders as strangers in the vulnerable position of seeking to be received. It is this kind of hospitality that they appear to regard as lacking in encounters with immigration. They do not meet the strict criteria necessary for a reception characterised by conditional hospitality, and are instead treated with hostility. Their vulnerability is not concealed by the host, nor are they protected. Rather, as Asad points out, immigration enhances asylum seekers’ vulnerability and acts as an “exterminator” who will actually “pay you to go”. This strips the applicant of their dignity and honour, the minimum without which the human is considered to become an animal in the moral sense (Hage 2002: 3), which explicates the assertions of Asad and others³¹ that asylum seekers are thought of, or treated, as human beings.

Conceptualisations of the Home Office or ‘immigration’

I observed the consistent use of two interchangeable terms in references to the notion of staying in the UK or leaving: ‘the Home Office’ and ‘immigration’. The accounts presented throughout this chapter indicate that the Home Office was viewed as an

³¹ For example, one night a RAF meeting, an asylum-seeking woman burst out ‘the Home Office think we’re aliens or something, not human beings!’ On another occasion, a man said ‘we aren’t treated like human beings’ in relation to signing in at the Home Office.

organisation that delivers the government's policy and decisions. This organisation was conceived both in terms of possessing a will of its own ('the Home Office don't let you do anything', 'they don't believe you', 'they don't want us'); and constituted by individual members of staff who carry out its work. At the RCIP/RAF projects, SRC representations in particular actively fostered a view of such staff as detached decision-makers following protocol, rather than ill-intending or prejudiced individuals. While some asylum seekers did describe Home Office staff according to this view, as "only doing their jobs" or "doing what they are told to do by superiors", it was not always adopted. Much more commonly articulated was the notion that 'immigration' possessed a unified will to shun and remove asylum seekers.

The Home Office, or 'immigration', was also conceptualised as exerting absolute power over subjects, in terms of controlling decision-making, spanning a vast geographical range, being linked to other authorities, entering the home without warning, handcuffing and taking whole families into detention, controlling the bodies of those detained, and having access to all manner of information about individuals. For example, a number of women suffering from depression and anxiety told me that although they wanted to seek help, they were not prepared to admit the extent of their ill health to a GP or counsellor for fear that their children would be removed by social services. Similarly, a number of women were reluctant to report incidents of harassment or assault to the police, as they feared such reports would be known to the Home Office and would adversely affect their asylum claim. The perceived ubiquity of immigration's powers was also made explicit by one woman's comment that while an asylum seeker, one is forced to "be hiding, always looking over your shoulder and scared of the government and what they can do", or another's vision of having Refugee Status as "[feeling] like no one is looking over my shoulder and seeing what I'm doing and what I'm up to. Like someone owns me. Someone controls me". It is in one sense ironic (given the search for protection) and in another quite understandable (due to previous experiences of persecution), that these statements also readily describe the mental orientation of many individuals *prior to* their flight.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has presented the account of one asylum applicant, Asad, as well as the comments and stories of other applicants, in order to explore the lived experiences of various phases of the asylum process. It has sought breadth in its description of experiences, but also the identification of common threads which run through them. It has not been my aim to examine the legal complexities which determine whether Asad or others should be recognised as refugees or otherwise. I did not think it necessary to comment on the validity of their claims, nor did I want to present a critique of immigration policy and practice based on a set of theoretical principles. Rather, I have been concerned to consider people's, but in particular Asad's, perceptions of the course that life has taken, reasons for coming to the UK, and the process entered into when asylum was claimed. It is my hope that this chapter constitutes a multidimensional ethnographic picture even as focuses on the narrative form, to provide the reader with a broader understanding of the experiences, attitudes and perceptions of some of my participants than might be the case in a more thematically bounded chapter. Nevertheless, I have also attempted to raise a number of points regarding the asylum seekers' conceptualisations of the asylum process and of immigration, as characterised by a series of dishonourable experiences and hostile encounters. This is one of the constitutive parts of their waiting, and, as will be shown in the forthcoming chapters, plays an important role in shaping their hopes, expectations and efforts towards creating their desired futures. The following chapter starts where Asad's story in this chapter finished: at the stage where he and his family were dispersed to Glasgow.

4. Co-creating a space of sanctuary in Glasgow

Feeling unwanted in this new land where asylum seeker became my second name. My right to work has been taken away, my right to travel has been taken away, my freedom has been taken away. Life for me became useless until I realised that all things work out eventually for the good. I decided to use the only opportunity that I was left with, going to college. I passed my Higher National Qualification last year and this year I gained the Higher National Certificate. This was very enjoyable and I am grateful to the authorities for this opportunity.

Even though I was doing well at college I still felt unwanted until I joined the Asylum Forum Project. The first meeting I attended brought a revival in my life. A very warm welcome. I met wonderful people and also one of my dreams came true...[at one of the projects] I learned how to play guitar with the help of a famous musician.

It feels like having a second family. I have people to turn to for advice, support and encouragement, to the point that I no longer feel unwanted but special...

- Asylum-seeking woman from Africa, cited in Asylum Forum Newsletter.

Many asylum seekers and refugees come to Scotland fleeing from terrible oppression and persecution. In Scotland they seek sanctuary and a place to rebuild their lives, a place where they can meaningfully contribute to the community they live in...

We can learn much from the broad range of people who come from different countries. We can learn from each other and from all those who live within our borders. With the opportunity to live, without fear or persecution, asylum seekers and refugees have the potential to contribute greatly to the diversity and prosperity of Scotland.

- Margaret Curran MSP, Scottish Minister for Social Justice, cited in Scottish Refugee Integration Forum 2003.

Introduction

The focus of the present chapter is narrowed to the context of Scotland, and more specifically, Glasgow, as the primary social setting within which waiting took place. Zetter (2007: 182) states that the process of becoming a dispersed asylum seeker:

excludes not incorporates...marginalizes the refugee from his/her social and cultural milieu, alienates him/her from local hosts who understandably resent impoverished migrants forcibly dispersed into their already deprived communities, and compels the claimants to live in controlled poverty.

While experiences of exclusion, marginalisation and alienation may be common among dispersed asylum seekers, this is not the full story. As indicated by C's anecdote above, asylum seekers' exclusion is produced not only by dispersal but by the conditions of asylum migration and the social and political status of asylum seekers in the UK. Furthermore, the process of becoming a dispersed asylum seeker differs greatly among individuals, according to the resources upon which they are able to draw and the dispersal setting itself. In Glasgow, formal support structures offered the means by which exclusion, marginalisation and alienation could be addressed and to some extent, transformed. I show that through their interactions with one such structure, my participants were able to develop forms of consociation; identify and articulate concerns; secure concrete forms of protection; and communally plan strategies to further their aims and interests. This resulted in the co-creation of what I call a place of 'sanctuary'. The structure in question is the Ralston Community Integration Project (RCIP) and its ancillary group, the Ralston Asylum Forum (RAF), which were formed under the Scottish government's distinctive policy response to asylum seekers, reflected in Margaret Curran MSP's comments above.

The point that I wish to emphasise in this chapter is that the setting of Glasgow was highly influential in the asylum seekers' experiences of waiting. It was with and through others, that individuals' understandings of waiting – their expectations, hopes and imaginations of the future – were constructed and mediated. At one level, then, this chapter explores the negotiation and conflation of Scottish policies and interests with the asylum seekers' political, social, economic and cultural interests. At another level, it describes the setting within which struggles to realise that which they desired and waited for, were played out.

Two provisos must be made here. Firstly, the experiences of my participants are not representative of all asylum seekers, or even most asylum seekers living in Glasgow. Clearly, not all asylum seekers are so heavily linked to support structures as my participants were; and even among my participants, levels of exclusion and isolation varied. Secondly, all of the asylum seekers involved in this study were connected to other significant national, religious and ethnic-based networks, as well as kin, friendship and interest groups, which, for practical reasons, I was not able to sufficiently research. The chapter is narrowed in focus to RCIP/RAF as a social

setting in which waiting took place; however, it should not be regarded as the only such setting, or necessarily the most significant, for the asylum seekers.

Dispersal: the Scottish context and response

A contract was agreed between GCC and NASS to provide 2,500 units of accommodation to asylum applicants from April 2000. Glasgow became the main dispersal city in the UK, accommodating around 5,000 applicants and their dependants each year (Home Office 2000a, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005a, 2006b, 2007). For GCC, this provided a favourable opportunity to make use of void housing stock, some of which had been earmarked for demolition in the near future. The YMCA was also contracted by NASS to provide a small amount of emergency accommodation, as was a private housing company five years later.

Following a referendum in 1997, the Scottish parliament was established by the *Scotland Act 1998*. While immigration affairs remained the responsibility of Westminster, devolution brought a number of services under the remit of the Scottish government, including integration and social inclusion/cohesion; education and training; policing and prisons; legal services and legal aid; social work; law and home affairs; local government; economic development; housing and planning; health; and interpreting and translation services. Whilst subject to UK-immigration laws, asylum seekers resident in Glasgow come under the scope of these devolved services.

GCC had some previous experience of providing accommodation and services for asylum seekers through the Kosovar temporary protection programme in 1999. However, the new dispersal scheme was greater in speed and scope, and neither Glasgow's services sector nor its inhabitants were sufficiently prepared for its commencement (Kelly 2002). Fragmentary, ad hoc and erratic infrastructures were in place: the Scottish Refugee Council legal service had been shut down, the interpreting service was unequipped to deal with new language needs, and few immigration lawyers were prepared to take on asylum cases (*ibid.*: 9). Barclay *et al.* (2003) suggest that the development of services was constrained by lack of funding and co-ordination, difficulties regarding communication with the Home Office, and lack of experience. Kelly (2002) notes that the centralised nature of NASS decision-

making reduced the capacity of local authorities and refugee agencies to plan and prepare for the needs of the newcomers. Voluntary sector organisations perceived NASS as a 'distant' and 'unresponsive' agency, and felt that they carried the burden of rectifying problems resulting from NASS's failures to deliver (Wren 2004: 3).

Scotland was also allegedly unprepared for dispersal in terms of community relations and equalities structures. It has been established in sociological studies that Scotland has a relatively low concentration of minorities, a political agenda distracted by other forms of ethno-national conflict, and a discourse of tolerance towards others claimed through the experience of national oppression, which has produced a legacy of neglect of race issues (Williams & De Lima 2006: 499). Kelly notes that in 2000, the Scottish parliament was all-white, and no framework existed for monitoring and responding to racist incidents or creating a national interpreting resource (Kelly 2002: 2). The Home Office set out in its dispersal process manual the priority to house asylum seekers in areas with existing ethnic minority communities, and to place specific language groups in corresponding cluster areas (Boswell 2001). This would enable efficient provision of appropriate service and help to overcome the isolation resulting from fracturing contacts with existing community support networks (Boswell 2001; Zetter & Pearl 2000). However, there were few refugee or ethnic minority communities in the areas of resettlement in Glasgow prior to the arrival of the asylum seekers. NASS's housing allocation within the city was 'random' (Kelly 2002: 9). It has subsequently been argued that dispersal has been driven less by suitability of existing populations and service networks than by the availability of low-cost housing (Boswell 2001; Wren 2004).

Most NASS accommodation in Glasgow consists of medium to high-rise council flats constructed in the 1970s, in areas that had predominantly homogeneous and socially deprived populations prior to dispersal (Boswell 2001; Schuster & Solomos 2004). Existing residents were not informed that asylum seekers would be arriving and taking up residence within their neighbourhoods (Kelly 2002; Barclay *et al.* 2003). When they learned that flats were being refurbished (by NASS) for the new arrivals, some perceived asylum seekers to be receiving unjustly preferential treatment. This is reportedly a fulcrum for the development of initial resentment among local populations towards the newcomers (Barclay *et al.* 2003).

An Oxfam review of media content at the outset of dispersal revealed an overwhelmingly negative attitude towards asylum seekers (Kelly 2002). Emotive language was used in print media to describe asylum; blatant untruths were told about the costs of supporting applicants; a hierarchy of deservingness was created; and open hostility was perceptible in letters from readers. The report concluded that such hostility would increase the threat under which asylum seekers live (Kelly 2002: 6). Such circumstances generate doubts about the effectiveness of the objectives of the dispersal policy. As Boswell (2001) notes, it is questionable as to whether dispersal meets the aim of reducing social tensions, as while tensions may be reduced in areas from which people are moved, there are often far more acute problems in the new receiving areas.

A network of players soon emerged to respond to the acute needs of new arrivals and to foster 'community cohesion'. Resident volunteers formed asylum support groups and campaigns³²; Strathclyde Police undertook community liaison and visible action against anti-social behaviour and racial attacks; and churches began to establish drop-in centres. There was a growing recognition of the intersection of deprivation and racism (Kelly 2002: 11-12). Shifts towards greater involvement by the Scottish government were instigated after the murder of Firsat Dag, a Kurdish asylum seeker living in the Sighthill area, and the rising controversy surrounding children in the Dungavel detention centre in 2003 (Cairney 2006: 441), which is discussed below.

Ralston Community Integration Project and Ralston Asylum Forum

In 2002, the then Scottish Executive established the Scottish Refugee Integration Forum (SRIF), a consultative group consisting of experts from academia; the housing, voluntary, legal and education sectors; faith groups; and refugee organisations. In consultation with the wider public and the voluntary sectors, the SRIF was set the task of developing action plans "to enable the successful integration

³² Two resident-based support groups that started at this time were Glasgow Asylum Rights Campaign and Glasgow Campaign to Welcome Refugees.

of refugees³³ in Scotland and the provision of more accessible, co-ordinated and good quality services” (SRIF 2003). The resultant Action Plan (*ibid.*: 8-20) identified a number of key areas and associated actions to be taken, including:

- translation and interpretation (ensure access to services; develop a national certification body for interpreters and translators);
- information and advice (ensure dissemination of information and advice on legal matters, rights and support issues to organisations; develop networks between organisations);
- community preparation (provide information to communities prior to dispersal; work to stimulate and support activities that promote integration);
- positive images, community development and the media (politicians to take a role in promoting integration; develop refugee consultation and representation processes; initiate media monitoring);
- housing (provide advice and support to ensure access to appropriate housing);
- justice, community safety and access to justice (develop training regarding legal rights for refugees; initiate monitoring and regulation of legal advice and assistance services);
- children’s services (develop specialist plans to take account of children’s needs);
- health and social care (raise awareness among health professionals regarding asylum issues; review resource allocation; identify best practice), and;
- enterprise, lifelong learning, employment and training (allocate adequate resources for ESOL; work on access to higher education and training programmes; identify barriers to employment).

The approach adopted was one of ‘partnerships’ between various statutory and voluntary stakeholders, who would support ‘frontline staff and volunteers’ in preparing for integration (*ibid.*: 10). There was therefore an aim to expand the role of the voluntary sector in cluster areas and to encourage voluntary sector agencies to

³³ The SRIF Action Plan also referred, although slightly ambiguously, to asylum seekers. For example, the draft supporting document states that many devolved services “make no practical distinction between asylum seekers and refugees in terms of delivery” (SRIF 2002: 8).

facilitate good relations within local communities (Zetter & Pearl 2000). By virtue of their ‘localism’, voluntary sector organisations were perceived to be better placed than the state to develop customised solutions to local problems of social exclusion, providing environments in which individuals can demonstrate their responsibilities as ‘citizens’ (Amin *et al.* 2002 in Findlay *et al.* 2007: 56). Throughout the period 2000-2002, a number of ‘multi-agency partnerships’ were established in dispersal areas across Glasgow, and the Scottish Refugee Council (SRC) assumed a ‘partnership-brokering’ role in some areas (Wren 2004). Ralston Community Integration Project (RCIP) was one such partnership.

In accordance with the SRIF Action Plan, RCIP’s mandate was to facilitate the integration of asylum seekers who had been dispersed to the area of Ralston, by organising the provision of English tuition and opportunities for the “building of bridges, bonds and links” between “the host communities” and “the refugee asylum-seeking communities” (Ralston Community Integration Project 2008). RCIP ran several projects including drop-ins with one-on-one ESOL tuition, a women’s group, a computer class, exercise classes, and vocational training workshops. Asylum seekers and refugees would visit the RCIP office to chat with the staff; seek referral to other services; request assistance in completing forms; apply for material assistance; or report a success or crisis in their asylum cases, housing situation, family affairs or welfare support. Zetter and Pearl define refugee community organisations (RCOs) as those “rooted within, and supported by, the ethnic or national refugee/asylum seeker communities they serve...[and] established by the refugees and asylum seekers themselves – or by their pre-established communities” (2000: 676). RCIP was not established by refugees and asylum seekers; a fact that is not surprising given the demographic profile of Glasgow at the time of its inception. It did, however, exist primarily for the benefit of asylum seekers and refugees and possess expertise in asylum issues. As such, it may be helpful to describe it as a ‘refugee advocacy organisation’ (RAO), to distinguish it from both RCOs and other voluntary organisations with more general target populations.

If RCIP was intended to cover the social and material needs of asylum seekers and to foster ‘integration’, Ralston Asylum Forum (RAF) was intended to encompass political and lobbying interests. Along with a number of other Asylum

Forums in various parts of Glasgow, RAF was formed in 2004 under the SRIF Action Plan. It operated as an auxiliary group to RCIP. The SRC was responsible for developing and delivering RAF, in line with its community development strategy: a “long term grassroots strategy for empowering marginalised people to bring about change for themselves” (SRC 2005: 4) and to “build bridges between communities” (SRC 2007: 5). RAF’s main work consisted of a fortnightly meeting to disseminate information, discuss issues of pertinence to asylum seekers, report concerns to representatives of local services, and plan outreach initiatives such as giving talks to school pupils about asylum issues. Two members of RAF reported to the Scottish Refugee Policy Forum, which was made up of representatives from Scottish RCOs and RAOs, and communicated to higher levels of administration (including the Home Office).

Tensions in asylum policies: the Scotland-UK distinction

Since dispersal began, asylum has increasingly become a site of tension between the devolved government of Scotland, based in Holyrood, and the national government of the UK, based in Westminster. Although, as was shown in Chapter 2, there is a palpable reluctance to receive asylum seekers underlying recent immigration legislation, the situation has been somewhat different at the governmental level in Scotland. Public discussions on matters of ethnicity, emigration and immigration in Scotland have recently taken place in the context of growing concerns about demographic trends (Williams & De Lima 2006: 508). Scotland’s population is declining and ageing, and the government has recognised a need to address the ‘skills gaps’ or ‘shortages’ in the labour force. In this context, “the notion of a ‘welcoming’ diverse Scotland is being strongly promoted as an important aspect of projecting Scotland as a ‘good’ place to live and work” (*ibid.*). To this end, the government has launched several high profile campaigns and initiatives. One of these, termed the ‘Fresh Talent Scheme’, aims to promote Scotland amongst people applying for work permits for the UK and encourage students at Scottish universities to stay and work in the country for two years after graduating. The scheme “signals a clear departure from discourses on immigration at a UK-wide level and demonstrates a Parliament wishing to adopt a different stance within the limited context of devolved powers”

(*ibid.*: 512). The agenda of retaining immigrant populations and utilising their skills base extends to asylum seekers. This is explicitly set out in the report of a study undertaken for CoSLA. The report makes a strong case for the estimated economic contribution of asylum seekers to Glasgow, through their potential for employment if granted Refugee Status; their greater tendency for self-employment and entrepreneurship than the indigenous population; and the increased employment and income generated in Glasgow from central government spending to, and on behalf of, asylum seekers (CoSLA 2005). Scottish government research has concluded that asylum seekers in Scotland are generally well qualified and in possession of a broad range of skills in trades and professions that they are keen to utilise (Charlaff *et al.* 2004); and have already brought financial gains and increased employment, addressed skills shortages, increased ethnic diversity, kept schools open by boosting the number of pupils, and motivated other school pupils with their high level of educational motivation (Barclay *et al.* 2003). Nevertheless, as Williams and De Lima note, the Scottish government has been impotent to facilitate the employment of asylum seekers and refugees, and its ability to achieve any major shift in policy areas strategically controlled by Westminster appears questionable (2006: 513).

‘Integration’ is one facet of the Scottish government’s enthusiastic stance towards asylum seekers of relevance to this thesis and examined in Chapter 6. A slippery term, ‘integration’ refers here to assistance provided under national structures to help facilitate individuals’ access to, and participation in economic, social and political dimensions of public life (such as housing, employment, welfare support, education and training, voting, and so on). In Scotland, the integration of asylum seekers is promoted from the time of their arrival in the country (see SRIF 2003). Westminster, however, has only supported – and funded – the integration of Refugees (Home Office 2000b, 2005b; UKBA 2009c). Hence, service providers in Scotland are working under “an integration policy framework conceptualised and funded by the Scottish Executive and a legal policy framework emanating from Westminster” (Wren 2004: 15). In other words, there is an ongoing tension between Westminster carrying out its legal policy framework, and Scottish services delivering its integration policy framework. Often, immigration decisions and actions undermine the investment made by the Scottish government in asylum seekers. This

tension is epitomised by the issue of the Dungavel Immigration Removal Centre and dawn raids.

Dungavel is located in the countryside approximately fifty kilometres from Glasgow. Formerly a prison, it is operated under detention centre rules by the Home Office (UKBA) and therefore does not come under Scottish jurisdiction. In recent years, the Home Office has been undertaking 'dawn raids' on failed asylum applicants. As was described in Sevda's story in Chapter 3, a dawn raid involves the arrival of immigration officers at the applicant's residence, usually in the very early hours of the morning to maximise the likelihood of their being present. Immigration officers have the power to break into the accommodation if it is known that the applicants are present but refusing to facilitate entry. The primary applicant and their dependents (including children) are required to hastily prepare their belongings and are escorted to vans which deliver them to the detention centre.

Asylum seekers, their neighbours, voluntary sector agencies, education authorities and MSPs all became deeply worried about the use of excessive force during dawn raids and the traumatic effects on the families targeted, other asylum seekers and the wider community. As responsibility for children is devolved, concerns were particularly centred on the well-being of detained children and also other school children who would find that their classmates had suddenly disappeared. Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People campaigned against dawn raids, asserting that they were traumatising children and families (BBC 2005). More broadly speaking, dawn raids were seen as damaging to Scotland's effort towards the integration of asylum seekers and community development work (Wren 2004: 4).

In 2008, the First Minister of Scotland entered into talks with Westminster to have Dungavel closed. An aide to the First Minister is reported to have said that the government has

consistently and on many occasions outlined our fundamental opposition to dawn raids and the detention of children in Dungavel...The Scottish Government believes we should have responsibility for asylum seekers and immigration, then we could preclude the possibility of this appalling situation continuing (Ross 2008).

The MSP for the constituency which includes Dungavel lodged a motion in Parliament calling on the Scottish government to ensure that families under detention or investigation by the UKBA be kept out of Dungavel while their cases are resolved (*ibid.*). In 2009, the Scottish government entered into a partnership with GCC and UKBA to fund a pilot project in Scotland aiming “to reduce the need for the detention and enforced return of those families who the UK Border Agency and the courts agree do not require international protection” (UKBA 2009d). Rather than being detained, failed asylum applicants were placed in designated flats and given support by social services to ‘prepare an action plan’ for return (*ibid.*).

In these features of policy and action, Scotland appears to be a qualitatively different context to England, for asylum seekers and those supporting them. Findlay *et al.* (2007) report that the activities of refugee organisations are increasingly shaped by Westminster’s policy agenda, as responsibility for the provision of collective services and welfare provision has shifted to the voluntary sector. London-based organisations report strongly resisting the government’s attempts to mobilise them for particular tasks, and see themselves as working for the interests of their client populations rather than those of the state bureaucracy (*ibid.*: 69). I would argue that the situation of such organisations in Scotland is slightly different. Most were created and are funded under the Scottish government’s devolved asylum-related policies, which are largely oppositional to those of Westminster. This lends them a degree of autonomy from the national asylum policy agenda, which, at a practical level, helps to facilitate a sense of solidarity and subsequently trust, with their target populations.

The locality of Ralston

The vast majority of asylum seekers involved in the research lived in one of three housing estates in Ralston. Historically an industrial, working class and culturally homogeneous suburb, Ralston is today characterised by a mixture of high quality privately-owned residential housing dating from pre-World War 1, and social housing owned by GCC or Local Housing Associations. The Scottish government publishes statistical data on ‘indexes of multiple deprivation’, which are compiled according to indicators in the seven domains of current income, employment, health, education, housing, access to services, and crime. Glasgow has a concentration of

multiple deprivation (Scottish Executive 2006) and in 2006, the Scottish Parliamentary Constituency to which Ralston belongs was listed in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation Decile 1, with approximately 29% of the population income deprived; 23% of working age population employment deprived; and 52% living in social rented housing (Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics 2005). The suburb is linked to the city centre by arterial roads, and has good public transport links to other parts of Glasgow. The main street is lined with charity stores selling second-hand goods; tanning salons; coffee shops; 'chippies'; betting shops; and two pubs. During working hours, elderly people, mothers with prams and young men can be seen waiting for buses near the entrance to the small shopping mall housing Asda and Iceland supermarkets, or smoking outside the pubs.

The three housing estates similarly consisted of several high rise concrete buildings in the midst of a flat, communal expanse. Some of these buildings had adjacent football fields or children's play areas. CCTV cameras covered the entranceways to the buildings and the lifts. Each building was manned by a concierge, who was the first point of contact for matters of security. Many of the asylum seekers had persistent concerns about their security around the estates, as there were occasional thefts and stabbings in the vicinity, as well as several incidences of arson in the communal hallways of the buildings. According to witnesses and representatives from Strathclyde Police who reported to RAF, Scottish youths were responsible for most of these incidents. Anti-social behaviour, such as racial harassment or intimidation, particularly by groups of young people, was not uncommon, and illicit drug use could also be observed. Nevertheless, Ralston was commonly regarded as safer than many other sites in Glasgow where asylum seekers were housed, and most residents tended to be friendly enough in the communal areas, greeting each other when passing in the hallway or taking the lift, for example.

The housing estates were surrounded by low-rise private and local authority housing; council-run community halls which served as venues for various events; and churches. At the time of fieldwork, the RCIP office and RAF meeting room were located on the ground floor of the main building in one of these estates, which was twenty minutes' walk or five minutes by bus from the other housing estates. The choice of location for RCIP was informed by the principle of accessibility (ideally by

foot) of dispersed populations to the projects. However, travel expenses (the cost of an all-day bus pass; £3 at the time of research) were provided to all asylum seekers at all RCIP/RAF projects to ensure that the cost of travel was not a barrier to attendance. Attendance at the projects was also free.

‘The flats’, as the asylum seekers referred to the housing estates, were important sites of social interaction and information sharing. Asylum seekers living in the same housing estate tended to befriend and subsequently regularly visit one another. Some were members of residents’ associations whose meetings provided an opportunity for contact with other residents. Residents also came together during the period of regular dawn raids in 2006, in active protests. I was often told stories of the state of perpetual fear all were living in during this time, and of how many participated in candlelit vigils in the early hours of the morning to await, and show their opposition to, the arrival of the immigration vans. Scottish neighbours sometimes hid those at risk of being detained in their flats to ensure that they would not be taken. On one occasion, access of the immigration vans to the flats was blocked by protestors, including elderly men, full-time mothers and pregnant women, many of whom regarded themselves as previously ‘non-political’. The involvement of their Scottish neighbours was understood by many of the asylum seekers as a demonstration of their acceptance and support, which was highly valued. The shared locality was thus not only a place for interaction but also the locus of shared experiences of, and resistance to, threats from the immigration authorities.

RCIP/RAF staff, facilitators and participants

As stated in Chapter 1, approximately fifty asylum seekers were involved with RCIP and RAF on a regular (weekly to monthly) basis during 2007. They had learned about RCIP and/or RAF through formal referral (from their social worker, the SRC or another organisation); a RCIP leaflet found in various locations across the city; attendance at a local venue hosting the RCIP drop-ins; or from an acquaintance. Most were part of a family unit; the husband of the family had usually claimed asylum and the wife and children were registered as dependents. The next largest group was single women with children, followed by single men. There was a stronger representation of men at RAF than at RCIP projects, but women still

outnumbered men at every project. RAF's business was focused on information, planning and lobbying – what Moser refers to as 'community politics' (1993: 34). That community politics is usually more the domain of men than of women in the societies from which the asylum seekers came (Moser 1993) may account for the greater acceptability of this group for men, in comparison to RCIP projects, which were primarily focused on social and leisure activities rather than 'work'. A number of individuals who attended RCIP projects did not attend RAF, and vice versa, but there was a rough overlap in membership. In a number of cases, the wife of a family would attend the RCIP women's group and the husband would attend RAF. There were a few individuals who would attend only the RCIP drop-ins for English tuition and thus have no contact with the wider group of attendees. The asylum seekers came from the regions of the Maghreb, the Caucasus, West and East Africa, South-Eastern Europe, the Caribbean, the Middle East and South Asia, and the primary languages spoken were various dialects of Arabic, French, Farsi, Turkish and Urdu, and English.

RCIP's most active members of staff were Fatima, whose responsibility it was to design and deliver the projects, represent RCIP at various meetings, engage in publicity work, and act as the first point of contact for clients; Lucy, who handled the administration, project delivery and various other kinds of support; and Jocelyn, the volunteer Manager who dedicated almost full time hours to guiding the workflow, planning projects and events, preparing the newsletter, representing RCIP at meetings, and so on. A body of around twenty-five regular volunteers also worked for RCIP. They were, on the whole, white, British and retired or semi-retired teachers, councillors, university lecturers and clergy, who tended to live in more affluent areas of the city than Ralston. Thus, even though the projects aimed to encourage mutual understanding between the asylum seekers and deprived locals among whom they were living and from whom antagonism was expected to come, it was generally people from a rather different socio-economic class with whom face-to-face contact was facilitated. Most of the volunteers had learned about RCIP through one of the local churches, acquaintances, or when attending a community event at which RCIP was publicised. Those who spoke to me said that they were motivated to participate by religious or altruistic values, such as helping others in

need, and by the opportunity to socialise with, and learn about, people from different countries. Many of the volunteers chose to perform specific roles, such as English tuition. Others were enlisted for the less clearly defined role of ‘facilitating integration’. In contrast, RAF did not have any volunteers. This is probably because it was intended as a space for asylum seekers to voice their concerns, where the ‘assistance’ of volunteers was not required.

Despite the often-similar benefits gained by volunteers from involvement to those gained by asylum seekers, the former were not regarded as service users. The distinction in the roles of asylum seekers as ‘recipients’, and non-asylum seekers as ‘volunteers’ and thus ‘deliverers’ of the projects, informed the kinds of interactions that took place. Until the appointment of a Volunteer Coordinator, few asylum seekers and refugees acted as volunteers for RCIP. The relatively passive behaviour appropriated by the asylum seekers at the projects was not played out in domestic spaces, where they assumed a lively role providing for guests. My observations of RCIP accord with Wren’s findings in her study of ten community organisations called ‘Integration Networks’, that were set up in Glasgow during 2000-2002 to meet the needs of asylum seekers and refugees. Wren found that despite agreement that asylum seekers and refugees should be involved in service provision (see Ager & Strang 2004b; Audit Commission 2000), this was not achieved in practice by the Networks to any significant extent. She suggests that there were barriers to asylum seeker and refugee involvement, such as lack of childcare availability, language barriers, personal problems related to the strains of waiting and being transitory populations (Wren 2004: 46). She also notes that the set-up of the Networks was not conducive to participation of asylum seekers as interpreters would be required and there was a widespread misconception among asylum seekers that volunteering, like paid work, was illegal (*ibid.*). Despite the fact that barriers such as English language aptitude, crèche availability and incorrect information about the legality of volunteering had been overcome at the RCIP projects, responsibility for securing, planning and delivering provisions tended to remain with the staff/service providers.

In contrast to RCIP, RAF was intended to be ‘refugee-led’ (SRC 2005: 4) and continually encouraged active participation of asylum seekers. The group was administered (i.e. agendas set, minutes produced, rooms booked, paperwork

distributed and budget managed) by staff from the SRC and GCC, and chaired by a few of the most confident asylum seekers. The SRC and GCC staff regularly encouraged all of the asylum seekers to learn how to chair the meetings and organised training in committee skills so that the group could become more self-sufficient.

The boundaries of membership or participation were formally set by the funding regulations, which stipulated that the projects were for residents of Ralston only. There was some debate among RCIP staff and volunteers about who should be admitted to the projects, as individuals living in other parts of the city sometimes showed up after being invited by friends who lived in Ralston and attended. In practice, such individuals were usually welcomed, but on a number of occasions they were told that there was no space for them, and referred to services in their own local areas. This localisation of the organisation meant that the asylum seekers shared the spaces of both the flats and the projects, which could help to reinforce their social ties.

The social context of migration and dispersal

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, I intend to show that involvement with RCIP/RAF offered an opportunity for the asylum seekers to address experiences of alienation, isolation and marginalisation in dispersal. Their motivations for seizing this opportunity are inextricably linked to the social context of primary migration, issues arising from interactions with existing residents, and financial exclusion.

Many recent spontaneous asylum seekers represent national groups with a relatively short history of migration to the UK. Consequently, the presence of support and advice networks based around previous ‘vintages’ – departure and transit cohorts uniting people with shared experiences before and during displacement (Kunz 1973: 140) – is limited. Most of the asylum seekers I worked with had travelled to the UK either alone or with members of their immediate family, and had few relatives and friends already living in the UK (usually in London or regional England). This reflects the emergence of ‘new geographies of migration’ (Koser & Pinkerton 2002), whereby some asylum seekers are becoming pioneers in countries with no pre-existing social networks.

Most of my participants arrived and applied for asylum in London. Those with resident kin or friends were able to connect with them at this time. Some were also able to make acquaintances or friends of co-nationals upon arrival, such as whilst in emergency accommodation. However, as Zetter *et al.* (2005: 172) found, dispersal tended to fracture the connection between asylum seekers and their frameworks of community support available in London and the South East of England. Asad and Lila are a case in point. When they arrived in London, they easily slipped into the extensive network of fellow nationals, and they nostalgically described this time to me as one of intense social activity. Upon being dispersed to Glasgow, they discovered that there were less than a handful of fellow nationals resident in the city. Lila felt extremely isolated and became depressed. Eventually, she and Asad met a few other French and Arabic speakers in the flats, who became friends and in turn, introduced them to other co-linguals. These individuals became important sources of regular social contact and occasional short-term assistance in the form of child-minding, legal referral and money lending. Others formed similar connections by bumping into each other at the flats, the mosque, or in other public spaces and identifying each other through phenotypical or behavioural markers as potentially sharing national, ethnic or religious affiliations. While important, the networks that people like Lila and Asad created were limited compared to what they had been accustomed to. This provided the impetus for seeking out the social activities provided by RCIP.

For other asylum seekers, pre-existing ethnic, linguistic or national networks in Glasgow were easily accessible upon arrival. A number of national communities had formed in Glasgow, most notably Sudanese, Eritrean and Iranian (organised Congolese, Somali, Kurdish, Algerian and pan-African networks were also apparent). Such communities had large populations in Glasgow and were well mobilised, organising formal activities for their compatriots, such as parties celebrating religious or national days, barbeques in the summer and language or religious schools for children. Such groups were not necessarily, however, politically-neutral, self-evincing sources of belonging. As Kunz has noted, individuals may feel affinity to people who chose to escape the same situation as their own, but would be apprehensive to meet someone who might have been one of

the political 'ins' at the time when they were among the 'outs' (1973: 138). A high level of mutual suspicion based on factors like ideology, religion, ethnicity, region of origin, class, past occupation, political affiliation and immigration status, may be observed among recently arrived populations (Gold 1992: 19). Such suspicion often has a greater ability to deter interaction than shared national origins have to unify individuals. Mudiwa, for example, experienced a constant tension in relation to co-nationals. On the one hand, she felt a desire to share her mother tongue, jokes, memories, food and discussion about the situation in Zimbabwe with fellow Zimbabweans. On the other hand, she felt an aversion to the pejorative effects of gossip, demands on time and money, and a sense of competitiveness present in interactions with Zimbabweans, which arose from her status as an asylum seeker unable to work in contrast to other Zimbabweans who had arrived under the visa regime and were permitted to work; and as a single mother belonging to a culture where childbirth outside of wedlock was widely condemned. Consequently, though she held a patent curiosity for other Zimbabweans (especially those who also appeared to be young single mothers in the asylum system) she largely avoided them, seeking instead the fellowship of white British women, for whom her status was understood quite differently, as something for which Mudiwa should be simultaneously pitied and admired, for the perceived difficulties she endured with stoicism. In sum, the social networks with which asylum seekers were already, or became, connected to in the UK were not equivalent to their previous social networks in the country of origin. Nor were they necessarily self-evident or easily accessed. Rather, they required conscious enactment and management by individuals, a process which was made challenging by the context of dispersal.

Social isolation from the indigenous population or what might be called 'the wider society' was also common among newly dispersed applicants. Most of the asylum seekers I knew wished to befriend Scottish, British, or at least native English-speaking people in order to improve their language skills and 'better understand the British people'. However, for most, it was difficult to make contact with local residents. A crucial initial contributor to this situation was their English language

aptitude. Very few people spoke any English at all when they arrived in the UK³⁴. Most were enrolled in ESOL classes at college, but, as a number of women told me, ‘All the other students at college are asylum seekers or from other countries and they're also learning English. We don't speak English together’. The problem was not merely one of English aptitude, particularly as time passed. Rather, it related to an absence of opportunities to meet people. The policy against paid employment excluded asylum seekers from making social ties through the workplace. As previously noted, the flats were a site of interaction and therefore a potential access point. However, the way in which Asad characterised his relationships with his neighbours finds agreement with the experiences of many of my participants. As he said,

I met a few people here as neighbours. Some of them I know, [from when] they take the lift or when they go out of the building...So they say ‘hi, hi’. But I don’t have a Scottish friend that would come to my house or I go to his house or we go to the pub or the cinema. No. Just ‘hi, hi’.

The existing residents of the flats were often unlikely companions due to their differing socio-economic backgrounds and/or divergent moral frameworks, and the intimidating behaviour that some exhibited. Noor, for example, regularly witnessed vandalism to the flats where she lived and was sometimes subjected to racial and sexual harassment from adolescent residents. Alone with a small child, she often felt unsafe and, by the time I met her, had lost hope of befriending other residents in the flats. She had developed a pragmatic relationship with a female Glaswegian neighbour, a single mother who was gregarious and kind but habitually drunk. Their relationship pivoted upon an agreement to check on one another’s safety, share information about incidents in the flats, and share child-minding responsibilities. This offered Noor some comfort, but she was uneasy about the neighbour’s intoxication. On my visits the neighbour was always friendly with me, and it became clear from separate conversations with her and Noor that there was a gulf between them. The neighbour could not understand why Noor was ‘always miserable’ and

³⁴ A few individuals were doubly isolated when dispersed to Glasgow, as they possessed limited English and found that only two or three co-linguals (including interpreters) were resident in Glasgow.

appeared not to want to 'help herself', such as by making a small (illicit) income through odd jobs; Noor, on the other hand, could not understand why the neighbour abused alcohol and was estranged from her family, who Noor thought should be at the centre of one's life. Noor was eventually moved to better accommodation after literally pleading with the GCC accommodation worker to be re-located. Separated from her family and friends by her flight and dispersal, as I write this thesis she continues to tell me that she is desperate for close companionship.

The asylum seekers would sometimes say of some of the Scots resident in the flats, 'they are bad people living here'. When quizzed about the specific meanings of 'bad people', they would refer to the drug use, aggressive behaviour, casual sexual relations, prostitution, theft, and lack of parental control of children that could be observed in the vicinity of the flats, which stood in stark contrast to the principles upheld by most of the asylum seekers; of the immorality of extra-marital sexual relations and substance use, and the absolute authority of parents over children and children's deference to elders. For example, Karim, like other Sudanese Muslims regarded nudity in the presence of others as a strict taboo. He was therefore in a state of shock when he arrived home one day to see an unclothed man and woman having sex in the communal clothes drying area of his building. The threat perceived to be posed by such behaviours was not only to physical safety but to the moral integrity of the asylum seekers' children. The apparent choice of a significant proportion of the local resident population of the flats to live on welfare was also perceived as an indicator of moral poverty.

The final barrier that the asylum seekers faced to accessing domains of interaction was their forced dependency on welfare, which was raised in Chapter 3. The sum of income support provided by NASS meant that it was extremely difficult to access forms of public social activity. People often lamented that after food, clothing, transport and other essentials had been paid for, there were little funds remaining for leisure activities. Although some individuals would entertain friends in their homes or attend community events which incurred a small fee, few could afford to take their children or themselves attend the cinema, sports centres, swimming pools or extra-curricula classes and clubs. It was also difficult to travel to places of

interest outside Glasgow, as car ownership was non-existent and public transport links were often lacking.

RCIP/RAF as a conduit for social connections and a foundation for the construction of 'community'

In the following section I aim to pinpoint the kinds of processes taking place at the projects and their significance in the broader scheme of waiting in the asylum process. A brief review of the literature on social collectivities and formations will allow me to later draw out these points.

'Community' was once the anthropologist's subject matter in a convergence of geographic locale, ethnic identity and social boundary. This has been progressively reformulated, with a shift to multi-sited fieldwork and transnational subjects, resulting in ethnographic depictions of not clearly ethno-spatially bounded groups but networks of actors, objects and ideas (cf. Appadurai 1988, 1991; Gupta & Ferguson 1997; Hannerz 1996; Hastrup & Olwig 1997). In social scientific disciplines, 'community' is often used to refer to shared values and goals of members of a group, and a sense of warmth and connectedness that unites them (Morris & Orton 1998). Such concepts see communities as characterised by people's shared culture and geographic locale, and engagement in activities that demand interrelationship of efforts (Kelly 2003). Attachments to the social group are seen to develop from these conditions, and these keep it cohesive on a relatively permanent basis (Minar & Green 1969). This view is reflected in dominant discourses on community (Baumann 1996) and can be seen in social policies towards minorities, who are assumed to possess the aforementioned qualities (Kelly 2003).

Cohen's (1985) pioneering work *The Symbolic Construction of Community* breaks from both the definition of community as an observable structure and the very quest to establish an adequate definition. His focus shifts from definition to use, and, as such, from form to meaning. He argues that 'community' implies that the members of a group of people have something in common with each other, which distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other putative groups. The identity of the community is encapsulated and distinguished from other entities by the boundary, which is marked through a variety of means, including statutory,

physical, racial, religious and linguistic, and so on. The boundary exists in the minds of its beholders (symbolically) and may thus be perceived quite differently by people across either side of it, and those encompassed within it (*ibid.*: 14). In a not dissimilar vein, Anderson developed the term ‘imagined community’ vis-à-vis the nation, to account for the way in which members will never know, meet, or even hear of most of their fellow members, and yet in each of their minds is the image of their communion (1991: 6). Such perspectives have been widely utilised to examine evocations to consociation based on categorical identities such as nationality among people who may never know one other and are separated by geographical distance. However, this has also led to concern about empirical laziness in community studies; the lack of evidence that communities purported as ‘imagined’ actually form a community at all (Hage 2005: 468).

Baumann addresses the question of community as a methodological problem in his intriguing study of Southall (1996). He urges researchers to break away from the convention in community studies of projecting ‘community’ upon others on the sole basis of their ascribed ethnic identity, and to instead question whether the word ‘community’ is chosen to describe a collectivity one willingly participates in (1996: 15). I would suggest that the distinction is not always an easy one to make, particularly given the advantages that may come from co-optation in an asserted community. Amit, on the other hand, suggests that invocations of community pivot on the tension between impulses towards sociality, and platitudes of classificatory fellowship. Therefore, she argues, entreaties to community offer analysts ‘signal fields of complex processes’ through which sociality is sought, rejected, contested, realised and interpreted, rather than clear-cut groupings (Amit 2002: 14).

Two ways of conceptualising community effectively capture the processes I observed during fieldwork. The first involves the formation of personal relationships, connections and bonds of fellowship, involving the warmth specified in the conventional models, which are, as Amit (2002) argues, reliant on face-to-face interactions. That is, personal relationships cannot rely on categorical identifications; they require contact, reciprocity, effort and opportunity, and are vulnerable to geographic distance (*ibid.*: 22). I refer to these as ‘social connections’ or ‘intimate ties’. The second way of conceptualising community refers to the assertion of

distinction and the production of symbolic boundaries (Cohen 1985; Anderson 1991). This is not necessarily based on shared experiences but requires appeals to classifications. While there is a shared use of symbols, particularly in terms of language, meanings may differ greatly between members. I will suggest that invocations of community in this sense were often employed towards political ends.

Reconstructing social connections

Participation at the RCIP/RAF projects broadened the social, leisure and vocational opportunities of the asylum seekers, which was highly valued in the context of migration and dispersal already discussed. More importantly, it provided a foundation for the nurturing of relationships, both with other asylum seekers and with native speakers of English, which in turn produced a sense of social connectedness with the wider society. The relationships that formed often pivoted upon commonalities – shared experiences in the asylum process, having children of the same age, a similar disposition, religion, nationality and language. Familiar clusters of individuals could be observed in the seating patterns at the projects. Attempts to make connections on the basis of shared language sometimes produced interesting chains of communication. For example, an Albanian who knew Turkish would speak in Turkish to an Azerbaijani, who would speak in Russian with an Armenian, who would speak in Armenian with an Armenian-Iranian, who in turn would speak in Farsi with his compatriots.

Behaviour at the projects overwhelmingly conveyed generosity, acquiescence and co-operation, although there were no doubt tensions and antagonisms between individuals that I was unable to detect. The women would greet each other with kisses and hugs according to the cultural norms corresponding to their level of intimacy, and a few of the regularly-attending French-speaking men would call out to attendees as they entered the room ‘*bonsoir, ça va?*’ Everybody would stand around before the start and at the end of events, sharing news with and about one another. The Arab and Pakistani women would bring containers of dates, sweet *kalbalouz* and *zalabiya* that they had made to share around at RAF meetings. The RCIP staff and RAF facilitators were extremely courteous and generous with their time. At quarterly events such as summer trips and Eid and Christmas parties, individuals from the

various projects congregated in a congenial atmosphere. The groups would always celebrate the successes of members in their asylum cases, with cakes, music, singing and dancing.

Many asylum seekers remarked that RCIP/RAF constituted a ‘community’ or ‘family’ of which they were a part. This became most apparent to me when a longstanding member of RAF died suddenly. The RAF meeting following his death was sullen. Shocked members who had just heard the news and those who had attended his burial shed tears together. The set agenda was abandoned for a discussion of how the group might respond to his family, and the planning of a group visit to his grave. Individuals took turns to share with the group their memories of him. An appeal was made by Manal for contributions towards the costs of the funeral and the generosity of the response was striking. Asad later described how he had also been touched by this event, the first RAF meeting that he had attended:

This is the real family. This is the thing. This is more than anything. More than the Home Office, more than the papers, more than the stress. This is your family. Imagine my first day I come here and I see they miss their friend, all of them crying and taking the money. I know some of them they can't afford it but they're taking the money, whatever they can. So to me this is my family...it's like a child who learns to walk. You need to hold his hand, he needs to hold something, before he can be strong.

Asad's comments show his revelation that through their generosity, co-operation and contribution in a time of crisis, the members of the group were akin to family. In using the words ‘more than’, he implies that this sense of cooperation and belonging overshadows negative experiences of the asylum process. The individual asylum seeker is likened to a child learning to walk, which invokes the sense in which asylum seekers are still learning about the asylum system, and are in a disadvantaged position in relation to it. The group gives strength when the individual asylum seeker is weakened. Ruth, a bright and earnest young mother from Nigeria, also made the explicit association of RCIP with ‘family’. She said, “When I came here I had no one. I gave birth alone. There was no one there to say ‘congratulations, you have a beautiful baby!’ That was the saddest – and happiest – day of my life”. A semi-regular attendee at the RCIP projects, she highly valued the availability of support

from the staff and other asylum seekers. She said “the people I have met [at RCIP] are like family to me when I have no family here”.

Amit (2002: 64) remarks that some of the most crucial forms of fellowship and belonging are marked less by symbolic icons than they are established through shared activities, a sense of ‘family’, habits and sight. By sharing living and social spaces in which daily routines and activities were synchronised; familiar faces recognised; an empathetic ear and advice extended, the asylum seekers developed just such a kind of fellowship. In the context of the erosion of social ties by displacement and dispersal, RCIP and RAF thus helped to re-create personal connections, which extended across different categories and situations and were not confined to the projects (Amit 2002). It is these to which the asylum seekers were referring when they used the term ‘community’ or ‘family’ in relation to RCIP/RAF. Such terms articulate the sense of interconnectedness, camaraderie and intimacy experienced by the asylum seekers, and effectively nurtured through the projects.

Fostering symbolic ties: the construction of ‘community’

A recurring notion could be observed in the language used by RCIP/RAF staff; in printed materials produced by RCIP/RAF; in speeches, poetry readings or other performances by asylum seekers and volunteers at public events; and in the policy documents and research reports of the Scottish government, statutory agencies and RAOs³⁵. This was the notion of the existence of an ‘asylum seeker community’ or ‘refugee community’, and a ‘host community’ or ‘non-refugee community’. This community terminology was regularly and unselfconsciously employed, along with claims that ‘integration’ is only possible through the two communities ‘sharing their cultures’ with one another. For example, RCIP’s mandate was formally described in documentation as ‘bringing communities together’, and Fatima regularly referred to her work as “building bridges” and “developing good relations between the communities”, while Manal often said that RAF was “bringing the communities together to build a better Scotland”. In utilising such terminology, there was no explicit interrogation of the ways in which ‘community’ might be constituted,

³⁵ See, for example, CoSLA 2005; Barclay *et al.* 2003; Scottish Refugee Council 2005; The Poverty Alliance 2006; Wren 2004.

constructed, or imagined by the people to whom it referred. Rather, the terms tended to be attributed, according to the assumption that communities exist (Baumann 1996).

Many of the activities and discussions at the RCIP/RAF projects fostered a sense of equivalence between asylum seekers, through both focusing on shared experiences in the asylum process and the identification of the defining features of 'asylum seekers'. For example, public performances at RCIP events often presented standardised, generalised experiences of asylum seekers, such as of persecution or war, powerlessness in the asylum system and the achievement of 'integration'. While these kinds of experiences may be relevant to the asylum seekers involved, they nevertheless brushed over the variety of different experiences that did not fit the mould. Focus was confined to one aspect of identity – asylum seeker – at the exclusion of various others. Like other processes of categorising regarded as necessary by policy makers and immigration officials, these were reductive; 'fragmenting' and producing clear-cut labels and categories of the often complex mix of reasons for migrating and experiences of migration (Zetter 2007: 178). Asylum seekers were construed as linked to other, unknown fellow asylum seekers, who together made up a broad community. Comparatively little attention was dedicated to defining the 'host community'. It was presented as constituted by native English speakers who were long-term residents of the UK or specifically Glasgow, but was more a conceptual distinction from, or the concomitant entity of, the 'asylum seeker community'. These appeals to community based on the policy-imposed categorical label of 'asylum seeker' reflect attempts to create and realise certain forms of collectivity or identification, rather than the prior existence of clear-cut groupings. They speak to the policy agenda of bringing contained groups together; an agenda which only makes sense once separate entities – and the boundary between them – have been established. In other words, I observed processes of creating symbolic community according to policy-imposed classifications.

Such processes were inextricably linked to the policy environment, and to political aims. Kelly's (2003) study of Bosnian refugees in the UK provides some insight into the ways in which the assertion of such linkages on the basis of categories may be used for political purposes. According to Kelly, multicultural

models, which have informed the British response to immigration since the 1960s, propose that individuals can maintain their unique cultural identity and membership to a specific cultural group whilst at the same time becoming part of the mainstream society. Such models emphasise the role and existence of ‘communities’, which individuals are assumed to belong to. Multicultural policies, Kelly contends, have focused on ‘self-help’ and the role of formal community-based organisations to provide services and advice tailored to the specific needs of these communities. The basis for group and organisational formation may lie in the way British institutions create spaces for the recognition of *groups*. As such, individuals who share categories – such as nationality, immigration status, or ethnic identity – must form themselves into an association in order to enter into dialogue with state institutions. For Kelly, this creates a situation in which there may not in fact be any ‘refugee community’ in existence, yet there are formally constituted refugee associations (*ibid.*: 41). She calls the resultant ‘anomaly’ “contingent community”: “a group of people who will, to some extent, conform to the expectations of the host society in order to gain the advantages of a formal community association, but the private face of the group remains unconstituted as a community”, with neither real nor imaginary links between individuals and little sense of group-wide obligation (*ibid.*: 41). Kelly’s work suggests that the assertion of ‘community’ relates to political strategies formed in response to a particular model of governance.

While it was already shown that many members of RCIP/RAF had actually forged intimate ties with one another and thus created a qualitatively different situation to the one that Kelly studied, her identification of the political grounds for asserting the existence of a formally constituted ‘community’ points to other processes occurring through the projects. Specifically, as Zetter notes, enhanced solidarity derived from collective consciousness through co-optation of a label may advantageously be used as a lever on governments and agencies (1991: 55), and as a catalyst for changing public opinion. This can be seen in RAF’s work towards improving statutory service provision by reporting problems to local authorities who were invited to attend meetings. For example, at one such meeting, the group compiled a list of concerns for an NHS professional. The points on the list included: asylum seekers do not have access to some health services; the quality of treatment

received by asylum seekers is poorer than that received by residents; asylum seekers are treated as if they are inhuman; asylum seekers are not prioritised as they could be deported at any time; and all GPs prescribe paracetamol to asylum seekers, whatever the problem.

At RAF projects, the facilitators and the asylum seekers themselves encouraged one another to engage in political processes. The asylum seekers were instructed in social, political and economic 'rights' and 'entitlements, and trained in establishing lobbying groups or committees and representing such groups at meetings. Manal conveyed the importance of such endeavours when she said in an interview that attending RAF enabled her to

meet other people in the same situation...the supporters, the campaigners, and we can expose our concerns, talk about ourselves, plan what to do. And many times we have an opportunity to be heard by the high circles like Scottish government, Westminster and human rights [JCHR]. So if we didn't go there we would never have our voices heard. So it was very helpful for the campaigners to know our concerns and to expose them, because it's good to hear from them but even better to hear from asylum seekers, to speak for themselves.

As Manal notes, through identification with the purported asylum seeker 'community', it was possible for individuals to collectively present their concerns to the Scottish government, the Home Office, and the JCHR and other consultative processes.

Much of RAF's work aimed to transform the meanings attached to the very label around which people were mobilised, because of the constraints and burdens it produced in the wider public setting (Zetter 2007: 183). Such work was in accordance with the aim of promoting 'positive images' set out in the SRIF Action Plan. In her widely cited study of Hutu refugees, Malkki (1995a) has examined the practices of adopting, modifying, rejecting and transforming labels, towards particular political, social, or material ends. She shows how the refugees residing in the Mishamo camp in Tanzania engaged in a mythico-history narrative which saw the Hutu as the 'rightful natives' of Burundi. The 'refugee' identity was employed by this group to assert their status as a nation in exile, waiting to reclaim the homeland. The refugees residing in the Kigoma township, however, had not constructed a categorically distinct, collective identity. They sought to inhabit multiple, shifting

identities adopted from the social context of the township, and resisted the designation of 'refugee'. For the town refugees "far from being heroized, refugeeness was instead often negated and supplanted by a series of alternative identities and labels" which "operated as strategies of invisibility" (Malkki 1995a: 156). Utilising multiple identities offered benefits in routine life, including the ability to avoid harassment from officials, secure jobs, travel, obtain licenses for petty trade, converse with strangers and spend leisure time in bars etc (*ibid.*:157). Thus they were able to overcome some of the obstacles that could be imposed by the refugee label, but also to pursue broader goals not related to Refugee Status.

Hackett (1992) has also shown the variety of transformations of identity among refugees from Pomerania and East Prussia who were resettled in the north of Germany after World War Two. The refugees were designated the label 'Polack' by their hosts. This carried connotations of being 'dirty, dumb and lazy', referring to the refugees' status as social burdens who were forced to live in places associated with dirt (due to housing shortages), and was contrasted with the notion of 'German' as 'hardworking, clean and orderly'. The refugees rejected this designation, asserting that they belonged to a larger German identity. In doing so, they acknowledged a shared perception of Germany-Polish ethnic boundary markers, but placed themselves firmly on the German side (*ibid.*: 45).

These two examples confirm that labels are ascribed by self and others, and inscribed with a variety of meanings produced in particular social, cultural, political and historical contexts. Labels may thus be adapted, transformed and evoked towards particular ends. In most public settings, my participants did not subscribe to the label 'asylum seeker', but rather actively attempted to hide the fact of their being labelled so, to avoid the associated stigma and negative treatment from others that they expected would follow. For example, some people told me that they did not want their Scottish neighbours to discover that they were asylum seekers. Others resented being asked in public places such as the GP practice or college whether they were asylum seekers. When socialising with co-nationals outside of the projects, they tended not to refer to themselves or any of their (asylum-seeking) friends as asylum seekers, except when speaking about their legal cases or reflecting on their difficult predicament in the UK. It was somewhat expected that co-nationals had arrived in

search of asylum. In such settings, people tended to be far more pre-occupied with 'tribe', wealth, social status, family backgrounds, religion, and other forms of affiliation than with identifying around the 'asylum seeker' label .

Again, much of RAF's work set about informing and influencing the attitudes of members of 'the host community', such as through the school outreach initiative, poetry readings performed at public events, and published stories. In these contexts, asylum seekers were purported to be skilled, contributors, and victims seeking protection, in direct contrast to conceptualisations found to underlie immigration policies and bureaucratic practices, that asylum seekers are illicit, 'bogus' economic migrants, or a burden. As such, a distinction between deserving and undeserving was drawn upon, with asylum seekers placed on the former side. For example, the RAF school outreach initiative involved asylum seekers giving talks about asylum issues to local primary school children. Members of the group explained why the initiative was important: "We need to show the Scottish community what we are like. They don't understand, they confuse us with economic migrants"; "we need to show the community what asylum seekers experience, day after day", and "we need to explain why asylum seekers come here, remove bad ideas they have from the media, build good relations with the host community". The focus here is on reducing negative stereotyping and mythology surrounding asylum to facilitate greater acceptance of and sympathy for asylum seekers.

In summary, the RCIP/RAF projects were geared towards fostering a symbolic community among asylum seekers on the basis of a policy-imposed label. This was inextricably tied to a policy rhetoric and agenda. The resultant collectivity provided a springboard for efforts to engage with political structures and to improve public images of asylum seekers by endowing the asylum seeker label with a more positive meaning. Through these actions, the asylum seekers attempted to contribute their own stories to the immigration debate, which sharply contrasted official, bureaucratic representations of asylum seekers. They subsequently were able to re-articulate 'the problem' of asylum as not one of the invasion of Britain by undeserving, bogus claimants, but rather, as one of injustice, originating in a punitive asylum system.

A space of sanctuary

In this final section, I suggest that RCIP/RAF constituted a space of sanctuary for asylum seekers involved in the projects. The basis of this conceptualisation lies in the social processes already identified and in the generation of trust, acceptance, protection and support, which was seen by many of my participants to be a particular feature of Glasgow.

RCIP/RAF staff actively worked to create an environment in which asylum seekers were able to both invest trust and have this investment honoured, which was particularly poignant given the multiple ways in which relations of mistrust had developed through persecution, displacement and the asylum process (see also Daniel & Knudsen 1995; Hynes 2003). Staff demonstrated that they were worthy beholders of sensitive and personal information, by ensuring that disclosure to other parties – which could be detrimental to the individual and his/her case – never occurred. Crucial to engendering trust was the demonstration of advocacy. All involved in the projects helped to create an environment in which asylum seekers were not subjected to scrutiny or attacks on integrity, in contradistinction to the asylum process. This was achieved by avoiding discussion about the content of individuals' claims. Correspondingly, the legitimacy of individuals' presence in the UK was regarded in universal terms. That is, their right to live and to stay in the UK was not seen as dependent upon their ability to comply with (interpretations of) the Refugee Convention. Staff and volunteers tended to adopt the self-stated or self-evident goals of the asylum seekers, and to assert with them that all asylum seekers should be given Leave to Remain. Such public agreement was accompanied by a focus on shared experiences of the present in the asylum process, rather than shared experiences of the past which played a part in the decision to seek asylum. This is another component of processes of enhancing a collective consciousness by minimising differences between asylum seekers. Finally, almost all involved in the projects tended to participate in a cynical dialogue about the Home Office, which asserted the Home Office's shortcomings, inefficiency, or culture of racism and xenophobia, and constructed the existence of two opposing sides engaged in a battle over the asylum seekers' ability to remain in the UK. Staff and volunteers situated themselves abreast the asylum seekers.

Involvement with RCIP/RAF could bring concrete protection to those facing threats from immigration authorities. RCIP staff and RAF facilitators encouraged asylum seekers to register their details with anti-deportation organisations. One of these was a volunteer-run group called Unity, which operated out of a small office located near the Home Office's Brand Street branch. Unity ran a scheme whereby asylum seekers would sign into a log book in the Unity office and leave their belongings with volunteers there before signing in at the Home Office. The volunteers would keep track of how long the applicant was in the Home Office and if they did not return within a reasonable timeframe, it would be assumed that they had been detained. Unity would then take immediate action, contacting the applicant's solicitor, informing family members, and in some cases, launching a media campaign to publicise the case. One of RCIP/RAF's regular volunteers, Kay, was also the representative of another anti-deportation organisation. Kay was well-informed and assiduous, and often assumed a personal advocacy role for individuals facing crises in their cases. When an elderly woman named Madeline, who, in the words of her solicitor, had a 'very strong' asylum case, received a deportation order from the Home Office, she immediately contacted Fatima at the RCIP office. Fatima in turn phoned Kay, who spoke with Madeline's solicitor to glean the full details of the case, scheduled a meeting with this solicitor, arranged a meeting with an MP to garner political support, and enlisted me to keep abreast of updates in the case and Madeline's well-being. Kay vehemently believed that it was essential for individuals to be endowed with sound advice and a knowledgeable advocate in order to avoid unjust or erroneous action on the case. Madeline's anxiety was markedly reduced by the presence of individuals with whom she could discuss details of the case, advice from the solicitor, and possible actions. Crucially, such individuals could be relied upon and were only a phone call away. RCIP also distributed free household goods and clothes, and could dispense financial assistance to people in emergencies from its 'destitution fund'. Involvement with RCIP/RAF thus had practical implications for asylum seekers' safety and security. An extract from an interview with Manal sheds further light on this:

Rebecca: But was there a barrier in your mind to integration, because you didn't have Leave to Remain. It wasn't permanent here. Was that a barrier?

Manal: Err, no...At least for me, no. It was...a good reason to be well integrated. People can help you, you know. Being at home like couch potatoes and more than that you don't have Leave to Remain- How can you get help or get campaign for you if people don't know you and they don't know your skills, you're not giving back? It was good reason for me because I don't have [Leave to Remain]...Maybe if I had Leave to Remain in the beginning, maybe I'm not well known like this, quickly I get the job and that's it. Maybe.

Manal not only indicates that organisations and individuals were able to affect developments in asylum seekers' cases, but also suggests that temporary status and the risk of deportation formed a good reason to become involved with voluntary sector projects due to the public visibility such involvement could lend individuals. The efficacy of interventions such as campaigns launched by Unity, in terms of evading detention, returning families from detention, and keeping cases active, was widely witnessed. Manal also connects the concept of support to reciprocity, indicating that interventions are performed on asylum seekers' behalf when they demonstrate their skills and 'give back'.

In referring to the support gained from RCIP/RAF and other organisations in Glasgow, the asylum seekers often drew contrasts between Scotland/Glasgow and England/London. England tended to be conceptualised as a place with a diverse population, where people would not be noticed or harassed on the basis of their skin colour. For example, one African woman told me that in London, "nobody cares if you're black" and an African man said "if you get on a bus in London, nobody will stare at you because they'll be thinking 'he's black'". People living in Scotland, however, were presented as less accepting of difference. A few individuals told me that friends had warned them prior to their being dispersed that "Scotland is no place for a black person". However, Scotland was also regarded as a place with localised networks of support specifically intended for asylum seekers, which was not perceived to be so pronounced in London. Asad made some of these contrasts explicit when speaking about his impressions of Glasgow when he arrived:

Asad: When I come here I see- before you go to sign in immigration, you have to go to Unity, leave your name, your address. You can have some little bit of hope. But in London who knows? Who cares? Who is gonna...

Rebecca: So did you feel that in Glasgow, people care?

Asad: Care more, care, care, like you guys, working in [Ralston]... Women's group, community, all these activities. You give hope to our women...if something happens,

a hundred percent, the community do their best to find out [how to solve the problem]. You understand? Little bit of hope. But in London, who cares about this? Only the Home Office, they are one hundred percent high to destroy everyone. But here...

You see, London is the capital city...many people...and everyone is going up and down...Because [there are] many people, no one can see if you're gone [if you've been detained]. Even your neighbour cannot find out...[the country of origin] community can help but not one hundred percent of the time...many of them don't speak proper English. What can they do? What are they gonna start? This is the problem. They only buy telephone cards, advise you about your solicitor...If you say 'I need a hundred pounds or two hundred', they can produce the money, they give, but they don't know about the rights, to stop this thing. So like here, [RCIP/RAF], they know this thing, you understand, they know. And they can find a good solicitor and even help you where you are, it's easy for them – phone here, phone there – because they are already a charity organisation so they have contact with other connections so they can find help as quick as possible.

This [RCIP]...it's taking the stress as well. Our women need to go to a place where they can mix with people. They can learn from...if they don't know things, the community can tell them and they can get help. Not only help about money I'm talking, but general help. You don't have a family. You used to have a big family back home. But here you have this [RCIP/RAF], it's like a family. Anything can happen, bup!- you see them in front of you. You need people - if you're gonna fall, they can catch you.

Asad draws a contrast between London as a large city in which interpersonal relations among unfamiliar people are rare. He characterises the organisations in London which represent people from his country of origin as lacking the operational capacity and resources possessed by more mainstream, established charities like RCIP/RAF. In contrast, Glasgow is described as a place where, through the presence of organisations such as RCIP/RAF, a greater degree of personal interaction and pastoral care occurs. Asad claims that the projects reduce 'stress' by offering individuals opportunities to learn, to socialise and to gain assistance. RCIP/RAF is presented as providing a safety net when people face problems with 'immigration'. Implicit within this account is the dichotomy of an antagonistic 'immigration' attempting to remove asylum seekers (hence, their 'falling'), and an accepting 'family' or 'community' in Glasgow trying to help them (to 'catch' them). Such a view reflects an awareness of the way in which the tensions between Westminster and Scotland, already noted, have played out in Glasgow.

The accounts presented in Chapter 3 indicated that although the asylum seekers sought a place of safety in which hope, possibility and ontological security might be re-established, the asylum process was generally experienced as a series of hostile and undignified encounters with officials. Individuals felt that in having their claims substantiated, the information they disclosed was scrutinised and interpreted in a negative light. Many stages of the asylum process produced a sense of powerlessness to act upon the world or to influence the path of one's case, and this was connected to an absence of knowledge of the process. I have suggested in this chapter that social isolation and exclusion were integrally linked to both primary migration and dispersal. My concluding contention is that in light of these factors, the RCIP/RAF projects were seen as a space of 'proxy' sanctuary. Against the backdrop of protracted waiting, they provided a setting within which social ties could be reconstituted, concerns identified and communicated, trust re-established, and concrete protection secured.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has demonstrated the profound role of one organisation and ancillary group, which was formed under Scottish policy, in the lives of the majority of my participants. I argued that the impetus for their involvement with RCIP and/or RAF was the isolation, exclusion and marginalisation wrought by primary migration and the dispersal policy. The products of their involvement were various. Individuals were able to develop new and enduring social ties, and to form a symbolic community through which knowledge could be sought, problems identified, and political engagement undertaken. The projects were a space of trust, unquestioning acceptance, protection and security, and as such, could be regarded as a space of sanctuary from the asylum process and 'immigration'. In subsequent chapters, I show the importance of this space for the social mediation of waiting: people's attempts to anticipate their futures, to make sense of their experiences and to hope for the desired future.

5. The metaphysics of waiting

Introduction

This chapter explores cognitive and emotional aspects of waiting in order to understand the specific meanings and contours of waiting for the asylum seekers. I begin by discerning what the asylum seekers were waiting for, in its positive and negative modalities. I then analyse the ways in which my participants narrated their experiences of waiting as a way into understanding firstly, certain characteristics of waiting as a condition and their inseparability from aspects of life dictated by the asylum system; and secondly, the various meanings ascribed to it by the asylum seekers. I also identify the personal and socially-mediated methods of coping and of subverting some of the negative aspects of waiting that my participants undertook. These had the effect of improving present circumstances and increasing the potential for desired future outcomes to be realised. I conclude the chapter by returning to the question of what waiting is directed at, and demonstrate that far from being merely ‘decisions’ or immigration ‘papers’, the objects of waiting represent visions of a particular kind of life which sits in stark contrast to the one presently lived.

Waiting among asylum seekers as a particular kind of waiting

The etymology of the verb to wait may be a first step to understanding waiting as a kind of existential condition. In old French, ‘guatier’ means ‘to watch for’, and its modern equivalent, ‘attendre’, means ‘to expect, to pay attention, or to stretch toward’; while the German ‘guetter’ means ‘to guard’. These meanings imply a sense of anticipatory preparedness, which points to the concept of time and specifically, the future. As Pascal once wrote, in waiting or impatience, we encounter a situation in which ‘we anticipate the future as too slow in coming, as if in order to hasten its course’ (cited in Bourdieu 1999: 209). However, I would suggest that in the purposive waiting of asylum seekers, it is not merely an orientation to the future that is produced by waiting, but a focus on the specific object, which is waited for precisely because it is not accessible now but may be at some point in the future. In other words, the promise of the event-to-come is what produces the experience of

waiting (Bissell 2007: 282), and the intentionality of this act derives from the presence of some degree of caring (one cannot be both indifferent to something and wait for it). Hence, the experience of waiting is the experience of the world as in some sense *mattering*, and offers people a heightened awareness of their needs (Vanstone 1982: 103-107).

Crapanzano (1986: 47) makes a distinction between two kinds of waiting according to the object. I prefer the more encompassing conceptualisation of a continuum to his dichotomous formulation; thus, at one end is an active kind of waiting for something particular, known and tangible. We might call this instrumental waiting. Here we find waiting for very specific and straightforward things, such as the arrival of a train, or an appointment with the doctor. Such waiting carries a very clear and precisely defined notion of what will come. At the other end is waiting for something, anything, in which case the object is not known, is hidden, or is unknowable but is regularly given a symbolic object, often expressed in abstract terms, such as war, the end of the world, death, eternal peace, and so on (Crapanzano 1986: 47). Here we might place the waiting of the characters Vladimir and Estragon in Beckett's (1969) *Waiting for Godot*. While their stated object is the arrival of Godot, it is clear that they do not really know why they are waiting for him. When Estragon asks what Godot will do for them when he arrives, Vladimir responds vaguely, "Oh...nothing very definite" (*ibid.*: 18). Godot represents for the men something that will make life better. In this sense, their waiting is not waiting for something that would validate, cancel or fulfil waiting; it is the kind of waiting we fear that waiting might amount to – just waiting (Schweizer 2008). Crapanzano asserts that it is this kind of waiting that his informants undertook in relation to the end of apartheid, anticipating a rather vague sense of impending change but altogether unclear as to what it might entail. This could be placed closer to the end of the continuum where Beckett's characters are located, in the sense that the South Africans had at least partially-formed ideas of what might happen with the end of apartheid.

Crapanzano (1986) is also helpful in his observation that specific, purposive waiting has two *modalities*; the positive, which is infused with desire because it is directed at something that is longed for; and the negative, which is directed towards

something that is dreaded. This, therefore, is about the possibilities or outcomes associated with the object for which one waits, which to a large extent determine even the kinds of modalities available. As I will show, the existence of a negative modality, and its character, gave the waiting of the asylum seekers a very particular shape.

From the asylum seekers' accounts of their arrival and application for asylum in the UK, it is clear that at the outset, their waiting was directed primarily at one *object*: the initial decision. As already noted in Chapter 3, the common expectation of being granted the right to remain was disappointed when the RFRL arrived. Almost all appealed the refusal, and by the time I began my fieldwork many passed through several appeals and subsequent dismissals from the AIT. Consequently, they were dispersed across different stages of the asylum process (some moving to other stages during the course of the fieldwork). Each stage was associated with slightly different immediate objects, according to the possibilities available at this stage.

Generally speaking, the long-term waiting of individuals with active appeals was punctuated by instances of short-term waiting for immediate objects, such as a meeting with their solicitor which might provide an indication of their chances of succeeding at appeal; evidence from another party which could be instrumental in a subsequent hearing; a letter confirming the date of an appeal hearing; or the delivery of the AIT's decision on an appeal. Their waiting could be fulfilled by due process.

The waiting of individuals who had exhausted all appeal rights and were at risk of deportation was attuned to receiving a deportation order (while hoping that the Home Office had forgotten about them), or to the prospect of being able to build a fresh claim. I witnessed a few such individuals 'opting out' of waiting altogether by subverting deportation and going underground.

In contrast, a larger category of individuals whose appeal rights had been exhausted, but who could not be returned to their country of origin for various reasons, experienced long-term waiting for a change in policy, such as a government amnesty. For people at all three stages, waiting was ultimately directed at attaining Refugee Status or some other form of Leave to Remain, which was perceived as the final conclusion to, and a fulfilment of, their waiting. For a couple of individuals long-term waiting also encompassed reunion with estranged family members and a

transformation of the political situation in the country of origin which would enable safe return.

My participants' waiting would be positioned closer to the 'tangible' end of the 'objects of waiting' continuum, as they were waiting for particular and perceptible things which carried important consequences. For all, the negative modality represented what they voiced as their ultimate fears: a final refusal which would lead to deportation to the country of origin where they expected to face threats to safety and well-being or possibly death. This was to be avoided at all costs. Their waiting also had a particular content, by which I mean that it involved fluctuating forms of hope and despair, according to a variety of conditions. Hope oriented people to the positive modality of their waiting.

To say that people were waiting purposefully for the essential object of waiting – attaining the right to remain – is not particularly informative. It is necessary to understand what this object symbolised for them. Several studies involving asylum applicants who have been waiting for extended periods of time in countries of asylum have noted a perception that the granting of the right to remain will deliver a 'normal', 'free' and inclusive existence in the host society, and that life will be able to 'move forward'. This 'normal life' is regarded as impossible to achieve while occupying the asylum seeker status (Brekke 2004; Lacroix 2004; Stewart 2005). None of these studies considers what is implied by notions such as 'normality' and 'freedom', and the means by which they are fixed to Refugee Status. My participants voiced identical sentiments in relation to the positive modality of waiting, and in the final section of the chapter, I explore the meanings attached to it. However, such an exploration requires taking the reader first on a slightly different path, through the asylum seekers' descriptions of waiting. This gives a depth and shape to their waiting and reveals present experiences of waiting in relation to which the aforementioned imaginings of 'normality' are constructed.

A crucial feature of the asylum seekers' experience of waiting was information. I established in the previous chapter that the RCIP/RAF projects provided the opportunity for interaction among asylum applicants, and between them and service providers, volunteers and locals. I also mentioned that the asylum seekers were in contact with legal professionals and had, to varying degrees, developed

informal networks with co-nationals, co-linguals and neighbours. Such contacts enabled the acquisition and sharing of information concerning the asylum process and others' experiences of it in terms of regulations, procedures, timeframes, legal process, rights, and conditions of eligibility for the granting of Leave to Remain. Part of the work of legal practitioners and agencies/organisations such as RCIP/RAF, GCC and SRC was to convey accurate information. Both accurate and inaccurate information from all of these parties played a fundamental role in the experience of waiting.

Certain kinds and sources of information were preferred by the asylum seekers over others. In their study of the dissemination of information among asylum seekers, Koser and Pinkerton (2002) found that for information to be deemed trustworthy by asylum seekers, its source must also be deemed trustworthy. Formal institutions, and hence the information disseminated by them, are unlikely to be trusted. Social networks were found to be regarded by applicants as the most trustworthy sources of information, however, the information they circulate may not necessarily be accurate (*ibid.*). Most of my participants perceived information received from both RCOs and social networks made up of other asylum seekers to be at least as reliable as, if not more reliable than, that offered by solicitors. One reason for this may be the establishment of trust that I argued in the previous chapter was an essential part of the space of sanctuary at the projects. Negative or hostile experiences with authorities both in the country of origin and in the UK created deep mistrust of authorities among many of my participants, and some individuals were wary of solicitors, having witnessed specific instances of incompetence, the investment of little effort in the individual's case, and in one or two cases, malpractice³⁶.

Specifically with regard to information aimed at predicting the future, it may be that it was easier for people to invest confidence in what they observed firsthand,

³⁶ One example of malpractice was conveyed to me by a male participant. He said that his solicitor had charged applicants large sums of money for representation whilst receiving legal aid, and lost important documents for his case. When he refused to pay and informed the solicitor that he would legal representation elsewhere, the solicitor spitefully warned him that he would soon receive a deportation notice, which he did. This man believed that the deportation notice was issued because the solicitor had alerted the Home Office to the failure of his case. He claimed that every applicant he knew who had relinquished the solicitor of his services had received a deportation notice a week later.

as an indicator of what would happen again, than in the – however well-informed – speculations of others. Crucial to the perceived relevance of transmitted information was the sense of equivalence between applicants, which was reinforced by the symbolic construction of community at the RCIP/RAF projects. Many asylum seekers communicated the following logic: ‘if something is relevant to others like me, it may also be relevant to me; if something happened to them it may also happen to me; and if something happening to them is not happening to me, this might reveal a cause for concern with my case’. However, the information shared among participants of the RCIP/RAF projects (and, from what I could gather, within people’s other networks) was neither always accurate, nor transferable in light of the particularities of each case. Comparisons with other asylum seekers could lead people to regard their situation as anomalous and produce a sense of injustice, anxiety or confusion, such as when Noor told me that all of the co-nationals she had met when she first applied for asylum had been granted Refugee Status. She said, “I got refused and two years have passed now and I’m still getting refused. Why? We’re here for the same reasons”. Comparisons could also lead people with active, ongoing cases to become highly fearful of being dawn-raided, such as when rumours of the threat of deportations were rampant in the flats. Representatives from the SRC in particular were aware of these issues. They would often try to discourage people from comparing themselves with one another, declaring that ‘every case is considered on its own merits’ and best served by proper legal advice, so that ‘false hopes’ or unwarranted fears would not arise. In this way, the social setting and the information circulating within it played an important role in shaping experiences of waiting.

The lived experience(s) of waiting

In the following sections, I attempt to examine the lived experience of waiting, primarily through attention to its narrative articulation. As will be seen, narratives of waiting tended to communicate a sense of suffering and disruption, through the themes of time, activity and power. It would be erroneous to view these as merely ‘accounts’ of events or emotional states. They are important sites for negotiating and interpreting past and ongoing experiences, and seeking forms of purposive and

meaningful action towards different outcomes (Eastmond 2007: 251). Furthermore, cultural representations of suffering – including narrative – can be, and frequently are, appropriated for political and moral purposes. For this reason, suffering has social use (Kleinman, Das & Lock 1997: xi). The public naming of suffering through narratives could act as a form of testimony, identifying root causes and allocating responsibility, and transforming individual suffering into a collective form.

In his study of waiting, Crapanzano (1985) found that his subjects sought release from the suspense, anxiety and contingency of waiting by telling stories, becoming pre-occupied with everyday activities, feigning indifference to the object of waiting, rehearsing its arrival, and praying. I too identify methods in addition to narration by which my participants sought to cope with the uncertainty and powerlessness of their predicament, to improve the circumstances of everyday life, and to enhance possibilities for the future. This highlights an advantage of anthropological methodology over that employed by existing short-term sociological studies of waiting: despite the tendency of the narratives to articulate an overwhelming sense of passivity, paying attention to other activities in which individuals were engaged illuminates their agency.

The most recurrent theme to emerge in narratives of waiting was the disruption in the ‘normal’ flow of time (see also Brekke 2004; Lennartson 2007; Stewart 2005), conveyed through temporal metaphors. An examination of these narratives therefore necessitates some deliberation on the concept of time. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to conduct any comprehensive overview of anthropological and philosophical theories of time, I intend to selectively and critically explore notions of time as they apply to the phenomena observed in my research.

Anthropology and time

At the most basic level, time may be understood as a measure of change. As Aristotle noted, it is only through observing change that time may be quantified, because it is change that we experience rather than some abstract notion of time (Aristotle in MacBeath 1993). This change refers to temporal variation in the ordinary properties of things, rather than purely spatial variation (such as, for example, the distribution

of colours in a patterned rug), which is not genuine change (Le Poidevin & MacBeath 1993: 1). But this raises the problem of what constitutes change, and whether it is objectively or subjectively constituted. One must be aware of a change in one's own cognitive state in order to realise the passage of time, and this implies a degree of self-consciousness in the reckoning of time. Lynch (1972) posits that there are two kinds of evidence of the passage of time available to us, both identified by Leach (1961). The first is rhythmic repetition, including the heartbeat, breathing, circadian rhythms, celestial changes, days, seasons and menstrual cycles. The second is progressive, non-repetitive, irreversible change, which involves growth and decay; alteration rather than recurrence. This is the time of ageing and death.

Durkheim (1961) distinguishes between personal time of subjective consciousness (which I will return to later); and social time, which is a collectively constructed notion and more primary than personal time. Social time consists of "collective representations" that derive from and reflect the groupings and rhythms of social life, such as days, seasons, festivals, rites of passage etc. These form a meaningful varied temporality – not something abstract and homogenous (Munn 1993), and are both derived from and dictate to society (Gell 1993: 4). An example of social time is Evans-Pritchard's (1940) 'oecological time' of the Nuer, which is rooted in activity-based 'social rhythm' (Munn 1993: 96). Time here is a succession of tasks, as evidenced most famously by the Nuer Cattle Clock.

A quality of time that has been discussed in the literature is direction. The standard topology of time defines it as boundless, continuous, linear, non-branching or unique, open and infinite (Swinburne in MacBeath 1993: 184). However, the anthropology of time points to culturally-specific notions of time in terms of direction. Both Eliade (1959) and Leach (1961) have suggested that the belief in the repetition of time found in so-called 'primitive' societies develops as a result of the fear of death and the irreversibility of life changes; the second aspect of time is denied by equating it with the first (Leach 1961: 125). The sacred time of ritual plays itself in reverse order to restore people to an initial beginning (*ibid.*). Bloch divides Balinese time into "socio-ritually derived, ideological 'mystifications' involving 'static,' 'cyclic,' 'nondurational' time forms; and universal, unmystified knowledge of 'durational,' 'linear' time" (Munn 1993: 100). However, the circular-linear

contrast has been questioned on the basis that repetitive/circular time does not logically exclude linear sequencing because even repetition of an event occurs later than previous ones (*ibid.*). Cyclical time may thus be viewed not a spinning disk but a wheel rolling forwards (Good 2000: 281).

In his highly accomplished work *The Anthropology of Time* (1993), Gell argues that anthropological theories of time are not a metaphysics but rather a sociology of time, that is, a delineation of the way in which time is conceived, constructed and collectively represented, within specific contexts. He presents a rationalist philosophical argument about the necessarily common experiential foundations of the category of 'time', preferring the 'culture-free' metaphysical categories of Kant. Kant proposed that time is a 'pure concept of understanding'. It exists not as an aspect of external reality but only as a categorising device which we impose on our experience in order to understand it (Le Poidevin & MacBeath 1993: 16). Gell agrees that time is a category which we all face in the same way in our practical lives, qualifying: "there is no fairyland where people experience time in a way that is markedly unlike the way in which we do ourselves, where there is no past, present and future, where time stands still, or chases its own tail, or swings back and forth like a pendulum" (1993: 315). He further suggests that the Western metaphysics of time captures two aspects of time. These are A-series and B-series time, presented by McTaggart (1927) and later elaborated by Mellor (1981).

Events in A-series time are categorised according to past/present/future. They move from future to present to past, and but can also be all of these at once. This kind of time is dynamic and essential to the idea of transition – things being arrayed in one way and then another way. A-series time is thus subjective time. In contrast, in B-series, events are categorised according to whether they occur before or after one another. If an event occurs a week before another, it will always remain one week apart from the other. Events are given concrete values by date-specificity, the "*indices* provided for events in terms of whatever culturally transmitted schema is in operation" (Gell 1992: 159). B-series time is objective, static, or in Mellor's words, 'real time', as it reflects the temporal relationships between events as they 'really are' (Gell 1992: 165). Experiences and decisions are grounded in A-series time.

Phenomenological accounts of time offer a delineation of the characteristics of A-series time. Husserl's (1966 [1887]) theory of internal time consciousness builds on Bergson's conceptualisation of the experience of time as not a scientific set of separable, quantifiable units, but rather a 'flow' involving past, present and future, and an experience existing within that flow. Husserl proposes that we experience an ever-unfolding, continuous present by hearing and seeing the now-present thing but enriching this perception with associations derived from what we have just experienced. This is achieved through retentions and protentions which are both part of 'intentions', relations linking processes of cognition and that which is cognised. Retentions are past experiences stored in memory, the perceptual beliefs from the proximate past which continue to be updated via perception. Protentions are retentions fed forwards. They are

not anticipations of other present moments-in-being, but projections of the subsequent evolution of this one. As such, protentions may be disappointed or decisively fulfilled as the present evolves (Gell 1992: 228).

Husserl is concerned with micro-level time rather than longer-term forms of time-reckoning, of relevance to this research.

Another element of A-series time is its perception in terms of duration, also referred to as 'time-reckoning', "the use of selected cultural categories, or contingent events...to 'tell time'-to ask 'when' something happened, will or should happen-and to 'measure' duration-to ask 'how long' something takes, or to 'time' it" (Munn 1993: 102). Gell (1993) differentiates between 'perceived' duration and 'clock' duration. 'Perceived' duration is how long an interval 'seemed' to last. In Bourdieu's (1977: 105) terms, it is the 'practical time' that flies by or drags, depending on what one is *doing*, that is, on the *functions* conferred on it by the activity in progress. 'Clock' duration is how long an interval *did* last, produced by temporal cognitions based on inferential schemes, the data of which comes from significant events in the outside world, including calendars and clocks, which have temporal meanings.

It has also been noted that there is now a common tendency to view time in quantitative terms, as object and/or possession (Bourdieu 1999). Thompson (1967) traces the emergence of such a perspective to the industrial capitalist era, when

reformers and the church promoted a ‘time-discipline’, which was congruent with both the objectives of efficiency in the labour force, and the Christian Puritan aversion to idleness. Time was recognised as relatively abstract, quantifiable and objective, its measurement tracked by the increasingly popular marker of status, the clock. Labour time was measured according to a straightforward principle: Workers experience a distinction between their employer’s time and their ‘own’ time. The employer must *use* the time of the worker’s labour efficiently. Time thus became currency. The time of the worker was time ‘spent’, both in the monetary sense and the active sense, rather than time ‘passed’ (Thompson 1967: 61). Since the introduction of the mechanical clock in the late 18th century, there has been an increasing precision of chronometrical time (Schweizer 2008: 3) and separation of time from space (Giddens 1990: 17). The mechanical clock “expressed a uniform dimension of ‘empty’ time, quantified in such a way as to permit the precise designation of ‘zones’ of the day” (*ibid.*).

Bergson’s philosophy is unique in its explicit exploration of waiting as a way of understanding time and employs the notions of duration and quantified time (Bergson 2005). Bergson explained that the objective measurement of time by a clock is merely an abstract representation of time required for practical purposes. Real time is *durée*, or continuous duration, which is lived. But, as Schweizer (2008) asks, how is duration lived? How is the person conscious of it? Schweizer uses Bergson’s experiment of waiting for a lump of sugar to dissolve in a glass of water to answer these questions. He says that in waiting, one has a thwarted desire to protract or contract duration. Through the thwarting of desire, the waiter becomes conscious of duration – it is something *other* than what can be measured or thought. The time that is felt and consciously endured appears slow, opaque, thick, unlike the transparent, inconspicuous time in which tasks are accomplished (*ibid.*: 16). Waiting is thus more than a certain amount of time, more than what can be shortened or lengthened (that is, more than quantified time). When Bergson notes that his experience of waiting is of time that “I cannot protract or contract as I like”, he is pointing out that time no longer appears to serve as a transparent medium or instrument (*ibid.*). In waiting, the hour cannot be turned into something. The waiter “must live the hour, feel it, embody it, perform it willy-nilly, in his characteristic

vacillation which manifests itself...in his agitation, his pacing, his glances at his watch, his fixation on objects” (*ibid.*: 17). Rather than seizing time, time has seized the waiter (*ibid.*: 19). The various conceptions of time raised here will be drawn upon in the ensuing discussion in order to analyse the appropriation of the category of time and common temporal metaphors in narrating experiences of waiting.

Quantified time and (the) quality (of) time

i. ‘Stolen time’

In the early stages of fieldwork, I attended a public seminar in Glasgow with the theme ‘asylum as a human right’. There, I heard a speech delivered by Francine, the middle-aged West African representative of an African women’s group whose membership base is primarily asylum seekers and refugees. Her speech broached the reasons why people seek asylum, aspects of gender-based persecution and the absence of rights granted to asylum seekers in the UK. She concluded by raising her fist in the air and declaring with dignified force and emotion:

One day our grand children will stand and ask: give us back minute by minute all the days, months, years that have been stolen from us. Every minute spent in detention. Every minute we lived in fear of deportation or destitution. Every anxious, dehumanising day spent waiting for status. Every minute our ancestors spent in slavery.

ii. ‘Lost time’

At the RAF women’s group one afternoon I sat discussing with a woman from the Maghreb, Taliba, what she and her husband would like to do if granted the right to remain in the UK. Taliba told me that she was presently preparing a fresh claim, but as the legacy case review was underway, it was likely that she would be granted Leave to Remain in due course. She said that as her husband was a trained engineer, he would like to find work as an engineer in Scotland. However, an Arab engineer friend of theirs who had been in the asylum process for many years and just received ILR had recently registered at the job centre where he was told that it would be impossible to find work as an engineer, due to the amount of time he had spent unemployed. Taliba exclaimed, perhaps with as much reference to her husband as to

herself “I was twenty-two when I arrived here. Now I’m almost thirty. I’m turning thirty next month. I’ve lost nearly ten years of my life being an asylum seeker. All of my twenties, gone”.

iii. ‘Time cut’

One day I sat opposite Karim in his flat, and we took turns dipping our spoons into the bowl of cereal he had prepared for us. Karim was awaiting the setting of an appeal hearing date. As we chatted about world politics, his studies and religion, I pondered on why he always spoke spontaneously and fervently about all manner of things except his asylum case, unless prompted by me. I asked him why this was so. He replied, with what I had come to recognise as an expression of pain, frustration and shame, head shaking and eyes squinting into a wry smile:

It’s very difficult Rebecca...I don’t talk about [my case] as there is nothing to do for my case...Now it’s a matter of time, I’m just waiting now. What am I to do? You want me to go to the Home Office and demand Status? I came for protection and now I’m waiting two years and four months. Til now my case is hanging. That is shameful for me and for the British government. If you want to accept people, it’s better to let things go easy. Why put people here for two years – some people five years – and they don’t know what is happening? Rebecca, imagine you are waiting two years! The feeling is very bad for me. But two years and a half cut from my life – I am not allowed to work or to study, I am just waiting for a weekly bursary [NASS payment] or going to college to learn part-time. This is not my ambition. My ambition is more than that. Returning would be very bad – I am facing death! I don’t worry for myself but our people there will lose. When I am here, if I get Refugee Status, I will do many things for the people there – speak out for the people there, go to discussions with the government. Now there are discussions in Libya and I can’t go there. People are calling to talk two hours on the phone to discuss and to plan with me. When I am sitting here, I’m doing nothing.

iv. ‘Life on pause’

I interviewed Manal after she had received ILR under the legacy case review. I asked her what it had been like to be waiting for so many years. Even though, having exited the asylum process, she now occupied a different position to the individuals whose comments are cited above, her response was strikingly similar:

Ohhh my goodness. Our life was put on pause for 6 years and a half. Living with the stress to be deported at any time, living in stress to be detained at any time, fear of dawn raids any time, any time someone could knock on your door very hard and then maybe it would be broken down. Not able to sleep properly over the night,

keeping watching from the window, hearing other people are deported in an unhuman way, living on the very small of the benefits five pounds a day...living and not allowed to do, to work or you know, many things, deprived of things, for six years and– Maybe it would be OK if you are living in this way a few months but not for six years and a half. It was a very stressful situation.

In the first three narrative extracts presented here, time has been quantified into days, months and years ‘possessed’ by the individual and thus susceptible to being stolen, lost, or cut from one’s life, reflecting the tendency to view time as an external thing or commodity (Bourdieu 1999). These are strikingly similar to the metaphors used by inmates to describe prison time, identified in ethnographies of prisons in the United States and Brazil. In prison, ‘empty time’ or ‘dead time’ is conceived as time emptied of events and human interaction, generally passed in a cell (Medlicott 1999), and is understood as ‘punitive time’ (Goifman 2002). Like the prisoners’ punitive time, Francine refers to slavery, which is the complete appropriation of a person’s (here, the African ancestors’) time by another (here, the British Empire). The asylum process is likened to slavery in the sense that the British state now appropriates asylum seekers’ time, which results in a loss of autonomy. However, what Francine is referring to is not merely denial of the ability to fill time with activities or to choose how to fill time with activities, but also the *quality* such activities are perceived to possess. In other words, Francine indicates that the activities which fill quantified time – being held in detention, fearing deportation and destitution, waiting in anxiety – deprive the individual of his/her capacity for joy and well-being, and diminish his/her agency.

Taliba’s ‘lost time’ seems to convey both a sense of grief at the passage of her years of youth in a far from desirable situation and her frustration that her husband’s inability to work during this time may prevent them from later attaining characteristics of their hoped-for future. Karim associates the time ‘cut’ from his life with exclusion from productive and meaningful activities such as full-time/university education, employment and political action. Karim never failed during our conversations to press upon me a principle which he held of utmost importance: that one should have ever-higher ambitions in terms of educational attainment, language acquisition, business enterprise, succeeding up the ranks in employment, and the accumulation of wealth. These values may be traced to his affluent background and

the entrepreneurship encouraged within his family (and commonly believed among Sudanese to be a characteristic of his tribe). Karim's comments in particular imply a conception of linear time. Munn notes that many ethnographic accounts give evidence of a view of long-term time as a cumulative process involving "continuous and progressive" growth (1992: 101). While she refers primarily to descent groups growing away from their ancestral origins, which repetitive rituals aim to reverse, we might add to this rubric the notion of growth in terms of an accumulation of various forms of capital (wealth, status, knowledge, kinship) over an individual's lifetime.

The sense of time as stolen, lost or stopped in these accounts is not about an absence of signifiers of time's passage. Under Aristotle, one could argue that we cannot make sense of such time because nothing could count as an experience of it, since for a person to notice time is precisely for him/her to undergo change (Le Poidevin & Macbeath 1993: 5). The asylum seekers are acutely aware of how much time has elapsed while they have been waiting. They perceive changes occurring in blocks of quantified time, including the manifold Durkheimian collective representations and 'biological' markers of childbirth, physical ageing, the changing seasons, holidays and school terms. However, they are denied the change that they seek and desire *for themselves*. It might be said that their awareness of time as change is amplified due to their constant focus on how things *could* or *should* be, and that they must endure a modified rhythm of social life. The sense of lost time, then, is produced by the incongruity between the desired or imagined trajectory and the one that has been lived and therefore actualised. People only spoke of the absence of time in relation to the past. In other words, as this is about how time has been spent, it only arises through retrospective reflection.

v. Activity and passivity

I sat with Sevda and her husband Maksim in the living room of their high rise flat one summer day, eating salted apples and sipping hot black tea. Sevda had previously agreed to discuss her life with me and feeling ready to get started, prompted me "So, tell us again about your research". As soon as I finished explaining my interests, she and Maksim said, in sync, "we can tell you what it's like to wait!" Sevda specified: "It is like your life has stopped. When you're waiting

you're just sitting at home like couch potatoes. There is nothing to do". Maksim added "it's very difficult...I want to work but I'm not allowed to". Sevda pointed to the other activities that they were prevented from undertaking, such as choosing where to live and decorating the flat, and spoke of her fears of what would happen to her and her family in the future.

Sevda's perception that life has stopped and that 'nothing happens' refers to restrictions on the individual's capacity while in the asylum process. Similarly to Karim's assertion that while waiting "there is nothing to do for my case", it raises an important point: that the condition of waiting entails passivity, subordination and dependency (Bourdieu 1999; Crapanzano 1986; Schwartz 1974). As Crapanzano (1986) notes, the object of waiting may be sought³⁷ but essentially, its arrival or non-arrival is beyond the individual's control³⁸. In this way, waiting renders the subject passive. Vanstone (1982) suggests that in the modern world, a state of dependency and passivity is commonplace because modernity is characterised by a complex system of inter-dependent relations in which the individual plays only a small part, which forces him/her to wait upon others to perform their roles in the system. In this context, frustrations easily arise, "because one has no alternative to waiting, no personal action or initiative to which one can resort in lieu of that which the system, in its own time, delivers" (Vanstone 1982 :19). According to Vanstone, such frustration reveals a widespread belief that dependency is a diminution of our true function and status, and an insult to our dignity (*ibid.*: 50). This belief in turn has produced a language and practice of 'enablement', advocating independence but also, inadvertently, devaluing those who cannot be so. Vanstone sees the modern Western avoidance of dependency and inactivity as rooted in the value placed by the capitalist system on productive labour, itself derived from the Calvinist movement (Weber 1930). This relates to the transformation, already noted, of time into currency, the result being that waiting is seen as undesirable, unproductive and wasteful (Bissell 2007; Schwartz 1974; Schweizer 2008). While it is difficult to make generalisations given their variety of backgrounds, I could make a few

³⁷ Indeed, this thesis attempts to highlight the various and concerted efforts made towards realising the object of waiting.

³⁸ The option to bring an end to the waiting did exist, in the form of withdrawing from the asylum system. This, however, was not equivalent to the fulfilment of waiting; the granting of Leave to Remain.

tentative suggestions as to why my participants were averse to the passivity of waiting. All of the men and many of the women had been the principal providers for their families prior to their exile. Almost all had come from societies in which state welfare was non-existent and working for one's livelihood was a necessity. In such settings, work certainly carried a primary social value. I could also point to the disempowering and pacifying experiences of persecution that many of my participants had endured in the lead-up to their flight. In this context, one way of reconstructing their lives in the UK was to reclaim their ability to exercise choice and to act purposively.

It is evident here that the waiting of asylum seekers involves an intertwining of aspects of the condition of waiting *as such* and policy-induced circumstances in which the individual must relinquish his/her "dignity for handouts and leftovers, entering a relationship of individual submission to authority" (Fuglerud 1999: 124). Sevda's and Maksim's comments both make explicit the perceptual contiguity between the passivity of waiting and the inactivity caused by exclusion from employment and enforced welfare dependency.

Without the option of working, many individuals filled their time with educational, social and voluntary activities. In their study of elderly Americans on dialysis, Russ *et al.* (2005) note that although dialysis time is perceived as circular, repetitive and restrictive, it need not be 'lost time'. As put by one of their participants, the challenge is to make *all* time present and full, and to be conscious of investing meaning in one's time (*ibid.*:7). This thesis reveals that despite the articulations cited above, the asylum seekers found many means of making waiting time meaningful, productive time in the present, towards both current and future-oriented aims.

vi. Waiting, gendered activity and gender relations

The denial of involvement in systems of (re)production and exchange during the waiting period had important consequences for individuals' prescribed roles, social status and relations with others. Moser (1993) distinguishes between three kinds of work, in the context of the developing world. 'Reproductive work' tends to be the work of women, and involves biological reproduction, and care, socialisation and

maintenance of individuals throughout their lives. 'Productive work' is performed by both men and women for payment in cash or kind. 'Community work' includes both community managing and community politics, the former involving activities to ensure the provision and maintenance of communal resources for consumption, undertaken primarily by women as an extension of their reproductive role, and the latter involving formal political activities undertaken by men at the community level, usually meriting fiscal payment or increases in status and power (*ibid.*: 34). This could in some ways be likened to the community/political lobbying work of RAF.

It was very clear during my fieldwork that the asylum-seeking women tended to be far more occupied in these various kinds of 'work' than their male counterparts. The women were engaged in the reproductive work of child rearing, domestic duties and familial care, and some undertook voluntary placements for community organisations which might be regarded as community politics work. Furthermore, most were enrolled part-time at college and regularly attended RCIP/RAF projects. A typical weekday for one of my female participants would involve feeding the family; preparing the children for the day and escorting them to school, nursery or crèche en route to college; attending several hours of classes at college; collecting the children; preparing dinner; attending a RCIP project or RAF meeting; and finally preparing the children for bed and cleaning up the flat. It was arguably easier for women than for men to participate in activities in social and institutional settings due to women's contact with the 'entry points' of social services, such as healthcare and education, through their reproductive work as primary caregivers. Men were rather more passive in terms of their use of time. Some attended college and were involved in the RAF group but very few volunteered. Many took on a range of domestic tasks and most did the grocery shopping, but it seemed that their days were primarily spent in the home or socialising with male friends in their flats or the city centre.

Some anthropologists have noted that in refugee camps, where aid is delivered without the demand for reciprocation, the change in traditional gender roles and power relations between men and women can be problematic and rupturing. It has been noted that work gives purpose and routine to daily life, and that in the absence of employment, activities other than productive work can in a sense 'become' work (Wallman 1979: 11). Regular activities can also structure time, boost

morale and provide opportunities to meet people through regular encounters (Tsuji 2005). The opposite may also be true. Thus, as others have found, the compulsory provision of welfare by aid agencies or governments can lead to a reduction in social status and a sense of humiliation, particularly among asylum-seeking men (Lacroix 2004). A passive condition may put self-definitions at risk and challenge traditional familial roles (Colson 2003).

Huseby-Darvas (1994) has observed that in the Hungarian camps set up for refugees from the Former Yugoslavia, gender and familial conflicts developed as the women's roles changed. Similarly, Turner (1999) describes how Burundians in a refugee camp in Tanzania were faced with a situation in which few jobs were available and UNHCR provided for the requirements of daily sustenance. Against the backdrop of a traditional system in which the male headed the household as the breadwinner and gift-giver, men in the camp lamented that the women no longer respected them. The role of providing for the family had been taken over by UNHCR, which was perceived by the women as "a better husband" (Turner 1999: 2). Particularly in camps, changing gender roles may be influenced not only by patterns of productive work but also the establishment of women's empowerment groups under UNHCR policies to counteract the perceived gender bias in local society (Atkinson 2007).

Whilst I never heard anyone use terms similar to those documented by Turner (1999) to refer to the Home Office, I observed a sense that men's status was undermined by enforced welfare. Women's greater participation in community work, coupled with men's increased involvement in reproductive work and prohibition from productive work, produced a sense of role-reversal against the backdrop of normal social relations in the country of origin. Most women took a more active role in public affairs than their husbands, acting as intermediaries between wider society and the family unit. A number of men subsequently expressed a concern to manage the activities of their wives, particularly those involving other men, where the women's safety and discretion could be jeopardised.

Unsurprisingly, few men were comfortable speaking to me about the stigmatising topic of unemployment. Karim did say that as he was unable to work, he spent a good deal of time helping his wife take care of their children, which was

radically divergent from custom in Islamic Sudan. This did not bother Karim, but he admitted that it would be shameful for him were his relatives in Sudan to learn of his activities. Manal stated that when forced to live on benefits,

The man feels he's worth nothing...As though he cannot care for and meet the expectations of his family. It's like they are putting the men down, emotionally...It happened with my husband. He always worked hard for his family, he provided for us. When he came here, he feels he's nothing, he's useless. It's very hard. Maybe the woman doesn't have that feeling because she's not responsible to feed his children, but...the man feels this.

When I asked Manal if this might be the reason why a lot of asylum-seeking men did not participate in community projects, she replied

Yes...They feel they are very small...And sometimes the woman gets angry because in the meantime he wants to stop her from being involved [in the community]...He feels a complex towards his wife: she's doing very well, and he can see [that] his wife knows people and she's building up good relationships and he's not. All what he could do was only working. There have been arguments. I know many friends they had arguments.

Manal highlights the strains on relationships produced by the inability to meet, or the rupturing of, gender-based roles and expectations. She identifies the diminished social status that the man suffers, and his inability to come to terms with his wife's higher public profile, as a source of tension. It is clear that experiences of persecution, of leaving the country of origin and of enduring waiting, placed a considerable degree of pressure on relationships. Spouses demonstrated immense loyalty to one another, marriage and family cohesion throughout these events.

vii. Linear time: perceiving deadlines and measuring progress

If the first two themes emerging in people's narratives of waiting referred to the past and the present, the next two sections of the chapter are more oriented towards the future. Temporal specificity – the presence or absence of a deadline as a promise of action – is an important aspect of waiting. The presence of such a deadline may act as a point in the imagined future to which an individual may orient himself/herself, which engenders a certain degree of expectation of an outcome in temporal terms. In forms of waiting where a deadline is specified, the time between the present and that

perceptible point in the future can be transformed into graduating stages which enable the individual to locate themselves in relation to the end point. Such stages may be identified through ‘time-reckoning’ or a calculation of ‘clock’ duration with reference to inferential schemes (Gell 1993). In the kind of waiting experienced by my participants, deadlines were not provided by the Home Office or AIT for decisions or outcomes of Appeals³⁹. The essential object for which the asylum seekers were waiting presented itself at an *unidentifiable point* in the unfolding future, giving waiting an “open-endedness” (Brekke 2004: 23). Schwartz claims that waiting may constitute punitive sanctioning of the most extreme kind when a person is kept ignorant of how long s/he must wait (1974: 862). Deprived of a specific end-point and hence a system of graduating stages, the applicant is unable to determine at what rate – or indeed if at any rate at all – he or she is moving towards the object of waiting.

In this context, my participants sought other means of judging how long they could expect to wait for various things. Information was usually sought in the form of the timescales that fellow asylum applicants’ cases followed. This was particularly so during the legacy case review, because all cases were being treated on the same grounds. Some of my participants told me how long they expected to wait for Leave to Remain to be granted after completing and returning the legacy case review questionnaire, based on how long their friends had waited. When their waiting exceeded the expected time, their anxiety became perceptible in the form of guessing why this might be the case (had their questionnaire been lost in the post? Had it been put at the bottom of the pile?), and considering what they might do in the event that a refusal was issued.

In waiting for status determination, not only was the end-point imperceptible, but the changes that did occur in one’s case, such as a refusal at an appeal hearing, did not indicate whether success or failure was imminent. When one waits for the birth of a baby, one usually not only knows approximately how long until the birth but also witnesses or feels viscerally this movement in the form of the baby’s growth

³⁹It should be noted, however, that the AIT did issue specific dates for CMR and Appeal Hearings. Also, the Home Office and the applicant had certain periods within which either party could appeal a decision – if no appeal action was taken during this time, the decision made by the Tribunal would stand.

and associated changes in the mother's body. We might call this a kind of linear movement. As Brekke (2004) has noted for his asylum-seeking respondents in Sweden, my participants valued a sense of progression in various aspects of life, such as was provided by courses at college which pointed towards completion, end of the term, next semester and so on. The importance of these forms of cumulative transition might be partly accounted for by the fact that nothing in their cases seemed to move in a linear fashion, creating an overall sense of paralysis. A fitting metaphor to explore this sense of time is found in the board game *Snakes and Ladders*. Players follow a course laid out in zigzagging squares across the board which begins at the bottom left-hand corner, with the aim of reaching the finishing point at the top left-hand corner. Players make their way along the prescribed path by rolling the die and taking the designated number of steps. Along the way, they encounter snakes and ladders. If they land on the head of a snake, they must slide down its body to a previous point on the board. If they land on the bottom of a ladder, they must climb up it to a position further along the path. The essential feature of the game is that whether one lands on a snake or a ladder is random to the extent that it is dependent upon the number on the die.

This same sense of randomness of the asylum determinations process was often articulated by my participants, and this relates to their ignorance of the legal process and possibly the actual randomness of decisions, as outlined in Chapter 3. Waiting becomes a series of attempts; of trying, failing and starting again. It is very difficult to determine the point at which one currently stands because even if one appears to be close to the end-point – for example, when preparing for another hearing about which the solicitor feels very confident – another snake may be ahead, ready to deliver them back to the starting point. As Manal told me,

Every time gets harder, every year. Every year you lose the being patient...because you get tired of waiting, waiting. Every time you say maybe next month it will be fine, maybe. And every time you find yourself in an even worse situation, facing deportation. Every time. It's too much, too much.

Russ *et al.* (2005) found that elderly Americans on dialysis were similarly denied a sense of progressive time. They felt that life was being stalled due to the endless, repetitive process of dialysis. In dialysis, there is no anticipated end, and treatment

becomes meaningless ‘time spent’, devoid of hope (*ibid.*: 11). The authors compare this to the hospice setting, where dying is given shape by the postulation of an end towards which one is striving or anticipating, arguing that the end structures the time of waiting, creating possibility for agency and community in relation to the shared anticipation of death. Their findings are markedly similar to my own in terms of the importance of the postulation of an end, without which, the asylum seekers still appealing are similarly positioned to the dialysis patients, caught in a repetitive loop in the asylum process. Those who have exhausted appeal rights may be said to have reached a dead end, with cases not moving at all. However, my findings differ from those of Russ *et al.* in that despite the absence of a postulated end, my participants could be clearly observed to be making this time meaningful and hopeful.

viii. Uncertainty and powerlessness

At the human rights seminar already mentioned I met an articulate and forthright young woman named Danisa. Danisa had been a teacher in Zimbabwe before seeking asylum in the UK and at the time of our encounter, she had been waiting for four years for her final status to be determined. When I told her that I was interested in understanding how people experience waiting, she replied without hesitation “waiting is torture”. In my hand was a pamphlet about Falun Gong practitioners which had been distributed at the event and which possessed the title ‘Tortured for their belief’. Danisa pointed to the pamphlet and said

*They say torture. **This** is torture, waiting, not knowing. I don’t know anything. I don’t know what will happen to me tomorrow. I don’t have a future. I just wake up everyday. I could go to the Home Office tomorrow and be sent back. I pray to God please, please, everyday. I go make friends. I talk to people like you so I don’t have to think about it. The more you think, the more stressed you feel.*

Danisa’s construction ‘I don’t know what will happen to me tomorrow’ implies a state of powerlessness in that she, the agent, does not *do* things; things happen *to* her. I am reminded also of a comment another woman, Delaram, once made to me: “especially in the beginning, I felt like a small stick in the sea, being knocked around this way and that by the waves”. This powerlessness relates to the fact that the fate of the applicant essentially lies with the decision-making bodies, of whose actions and

reasoning the individual applicant knows very little. It also reflects circumstances of limited capacity dictated by the asylum process. Nevertheless, it is not simply the fact of an absence or presence of agency that is at stake here, but its relation to time. Bourdieu states that “absolute power is the power to make oneself unpredictable and deny other people any reasonable anticipation, to place them in total uncertainty by offering no scope to their capacity to predict” (1999: 228). He qualifies that this is an extreme power that can never be reached except in the theological imagination (*ibid.*), but this nonetheless points towards the kind of power exercised through the asylum determination process⁴⁰. It is not merely that the bureaucratic-legal process ‘holds’ people in waiting. Waiting as a condition implies submission, “the interested aiming at something greatly desired durably” (Bourdieu 1999: 228). Bissell captures this investment in his description of waiting as “a form of contractuality and a temporally displaced form of trusting relationality forged between a subject and the event-to-come” (2007: 282). A person can be durably ‘held’ only insofar as s/he possesses *illusio*, is invested in the game (Bourdieu 1999). Thus waiting involves a kind of powerlessness by its very intentionality – in the desire for, and investment in, the attainment of the objects of waiting.

Read through Bourdieu, Danisa’s comments about the denial of reasonable prediction show the concepts of prediction, expectation and anticipation to be crucial. All three terms relate to a future orientation which has been somewhat overlooked in the literature on time, as observed by Nunn (1996 in Hage 2003: 10), who notes that

the construction of the perceived future has not been elevated to a faculty of brain function in the same way as the construction of the perceived past, namely, memory. Despite this, anticipation, planning, foresight and the executive functions are pivotal to human adaptation.

For example, Husserl’s (1966 [1887]) phenomenology, while precise in terms of the flow of time in perception, does not provide a category for the opposite of memory. Useful concepts in this area may be found in the work of some anthropologists, and Casey’s (1976) phenomenological treatise on imagination. Anthropologists have

⁴⁰ And I would add that this is not only the case in terms of people now knowing what the outcome of their cases will be, but also in the case of detention, which was demonstrated to be somewhat random and unpredictable, with people whose cases were active nonetheless being dawn-raided.

suggested that prediction or expectation might be understood as an estimation of what might happen, also known as forecasting or foretelling the future. It is from accumulated past experiences that one develops predictions of what will happen in the future (Lingis in Zournazi 2002). More specifically, in waiting, past experience – I would argue the past experience of others *and* oneself – offers the tangible data required to determine the likelihood that the object of waiting will be delivered or not (Crapanzano 1986). What all of my participants lacked when they became refugees was a previous experience of flight and the asylum system. In navigating this system, they were moving through ‘uncharted territory’. Thus, knowledge of what was happening was limited and the ability to predict was denied to them to a large extent.

Anticipation may be seen as a series of possibilities that people trial or imagine, which plays a key role in what they choose to do. Casey (1976) writes that anticipation takes place in relation to things as if they were real. It refers to ‘hypothetical possibilities’. In anticipating, we regard a possible future entity or event *as if* it were about to appear or occur in the present. We usually anticipate what form the future might take so as to be in a better position to deal with the projected object or situation if and when it does arise. This is why Casey refers to it as an instance of what Dewey (1930) labelled ‘dramatic rehearsal in imagination’. The primary aim is therefore to induce more skilful or suitable action. In anticipation, the hypothetical possibility is regarded as of instrumental value, in coming to terms with the real, rather than of intrinsic interest (*ibid.*). We could further separate anticipation into two forms: expressive, which entails visualising how things will be in terms of one’s emotional state, and practical, which is more geared towards planning what to do. The asylum seekers spoke to me of their practical anticipations in terms of preparing themselves for the possibility that the negative modality would be fulfilled, contemplating questions such as: what will I do if immigration comes to get me? Who will I contact? What will happen if I am deported? What will happen when I arrive at the airport? How will I survive? Both expressive and practical anticipation were evident with regard to the positive modality of waiting, and, I suggest, played an important role in apprehensions of a ‘normal life’, which I will explore later. Waiting therefore does not exclude anticipation as a mental act; on the contrary, the future-orientation and uncertainty immanent in waiting calls anticipation into being.

Casey contends that anticipation is distinct from imagination, which has the attitude of ‘pure possibility’, and involves no concrete relationships, uses, or consequences – not even as projected in an *as if* form. He writes “we see or do nothing *through* or *with* an imaginative presentation, but ‘see’ or ‘do’ things *in* it and *on its terms* alone” (*ibid.*: 116). The ‘pure possibility’ of the imagination is possibility that is posited for its own sake, its inherent interest, not for the sake of anything external to itself or because of its actual or potential value in the realisation of projects that transcend the act of imagining itself.

In waiting not only does one not know with any certainty what *will* happen; there is a common sense of not knowing what *is* happening in the present. As I have already asserted, the asylum system was largely encountered as unknown, confounding, self-contradicting, impenetrable and distant. In Chapter 3 I considered people’s accounts of not knowing the requirements and purposes of procedures; limited or sporadic correspondence from solicitors or the administration; and lack of prior knowledge and/or subsequent explanation of legal language and proceedings at hearings. This evokes a sense of the state of affairs depicted in Kafka’s *The Trial* (1937). Arbitrariness and unpredictability are the defining features of K.’s world. Like the asylum seekers, K.’s initial disbelief (and, not so similarly to the asylum seekers, outrage) at what is happening gives way to attempts to gain some grasp of the ensuing affairs, but he is acutely aware that he is playing the game without knowing the rules. Like the asylum seekers, throughout his progressive inculcation in the process there remains a constant tension between the extent to which action may be taken and the futility of such action in the face of an impenetrable system which is unlikely to deliver a positive outcome.

I want to raise one final point, vital to reaching a reasonable understanding of Danisa’s articulation of the powerlessness of ‘not knowing’, which is that it is not merely *not knowing* that is crucial here. We might ask: if all of the anticipated outcomes of waiting were regarded as entirely positive, would people be concerned about their inability to predict which one of many possibilities would be likely to occur? I would suggest no; what is crucial to the anxiety and uncertainty observed here is the existence of the negative modality and the likelihood of it being realised. Prediction and anticipation occurs here within a fairly specific set of possibilities,

one of which is dreaded. It is the profoundly negative nature of one or more of the likely possibilities that makes the inability to predict which outcome will be realised, a problem.

Strategies for knowing and doing

In the context of this powerlessness, ignorance and the dreaded possibility of deportation, the asylum seekers undertook strategies to acquire and disseminate information that could potentially be used to improve the likelihood that the positive modality of their waiting would be realised and the negative modality averted. Those who had been in the process for many years had clearly attained a wealth of knowledge of the asylum process, from their own experiences, and from other applicants, legal advisors and service providers. RAF meetings were a primary site of rich 'explanatory information' concerning bureaucratic procedures, practices, timescales, documentation, and requirements. Information could serve to reassure by providing an otherwise unavailable insight. For example, in November 2007 Manal was invited, as the representative of RAF, to tour the Home Office's Glasgow office. She reported back to the RAF meeting the following week:

I went to the Home Office and saw how many files they have, in big piles. It was strange knowing that my questionnaire was in there somewhere. The department is very busy reviewing all the cases. So don't worry if you still haven't got your questionnaire or received a decision. Everyone will have their turn.

By presenting an image of something that she has observed firsthand, Manal transforms an abstract, hidden process into something empirical. Applicants' cases are actually piles of papers sitting on desks, waiting to be processed.

Information could empower individuals to realise the possibilities for action available to them, and thus to affect some influence over their futures. This process is made explicit in an excerpt from a discussion at a RAF meeting which was held at the outset of the legacy case review, a time when mixed information concerning how the review would ensue was persistently circulated. The facilitators – Michelle from the Scottish Refugee Council and Kay from an anti-deportation organisation – performed the role of advocates who administered information:

Farah (Algeria, 6 years in asylum process): Are the legacy cases only families?

Taliba (Maghreb, 7 years): How do you know if you are a legacy case?

Michelle (SRC): Everyone here is a legacy case. If you've been here five years, you're definitely a legacy case.

Saeid (Iran, 5 years): What do I do if I get a questionnaire?

Michelle (SRC): Get in touch with your lawyer.

Farah (Algeria, 6 years): Go to the CAB for advice too.

Michelle (SRC): It is your responsibility to be on top of this. It could happen at any time. You must ensure that the questionnaire is returned on time. I think the deadline is two weeks. If it's not returned in time, it won't be used in the decision-making process. It'll be a lost opportunity to add important information. They will make a decision on stuff you've already submitted. If you're unable to get legal advice, add a covering letter to say that you're seeking legal advice and you'll submit further information later. It's NOT AN AMNESTY. Some people will still get a negative decision.

Rasa (Iran, 2 years – through Farsi interpreter): Are people with ongoing cases still legacy?

Michelle (SRC): They may still be dealt with before the review.

Kay (Anti-deportation organisation): There are a large number of cases which the Home Office says are finished. Cases with hearings scheduled will come later. The review will start with cases where nothing has happened for a while. Check with your lawyer to see what your case looks like. Think about taking a different lawyer. You could be arrested and removed without a review. Not everyone will be reviewed. Don't just sit and wait and hope for the best.

[Hums of agreement].

Rasa (Iran, 2 years – through Farsi interpreter): If someone has been here seven years and their case is reviewed and they are still refused, what will happen?

Kay (Anti-deportation organisation): If you've been here seven years, go to your lawyer. Especially if you have children. There's a specific policy.

Farsi interpreter: But if you've been here a long time, then what?

Kay (Anti-deportation organisation): The Home Office intends this will be final. We don't know if things will happen during the review that can be taken to court.

Sara (Pakistan, 7 years): If you've been here seven years, does your child have to be born here?

Kay (Anti-deportation organisation): No. Go to a lawyer.

Saeid (Iran, 5 years): I know people who have been here six years and they went to a lawyer and he told them not to do anything.

Kay (Anti-deportation organisation): Lawyers have different advice depending on the case. Sometimes they will advise people to leave the case for some time. For example, if they've been here just over six years, the timing is important. Lawyers know the whole case; the Home Office doesn't. The Home Office is lifting, attempting to remove, people who have been here more than six years but under seven years.

Manal (Algeria, 6 years): Emma – she's Welsh, Assistant at the BIA [now UKBA] – said that people here six years and ten months will be accepted because by the time the Home Office is studying their cases, it will be seven years. It's hard to remove such people as an argument can be made by their lawyer.

We see that the asylum applicants seek to discover whether or not they are legacy cases, that is, whether the following discussion applies to them, and if so, in what way. Second, they look to see what action they should take according to the status of

their case. Third, they seek to understand what practice will transpire according to this status and/or action; in other words, to predict. Saeid demonstrates the habitual behaviour of drawing on (in this case testing) the experiences of others and the advice given to them as an indication of what one might do oneself. Finally, Manal provides the account of an 'expert' from the Home Office of what will happen. Such enquiries were generally made in the context of the expectation that one would receive a negative outcome at the next juncture in their case.

A multitude of practical information and advice was shared among asylum seekers in an effort to help one another gain a stronger grasp of their situations and options, and to anticipate the likelihood that certain paths would lead to their being granted Leave. Commonly shared pieces of advice included: be careful not to become involved or associated with any illegal activity; avoid drawing unnecessary attention to yourself, such as by making formal complaints or protesting; try to get strong evidence for your case, such as by having your photograph taken with political opposition from the country of origin; the Home Office is less likely to detain or deport visibly pregnant women; get involved in integration activities and get Scottish people to advocate for you; try a new solicitor who has a track record of success. The consequence of such activity was to at least minimally subvert the sense of passivity experienced.

Nevertheless, knowledge in itself was not sufficient to empower people to act. Action could be hindered by fear, mistrust of authorities, and the emotional burden of refusal. For example, when Mudiwa received a letter of dismissal after her appeal at the AIT she could not bring herself to read the letter in full as she said it made her feel 'too depressed'. Two weeks after receiving the letter, and with only one day to appeal the decision, she met with her solicitor to prepare an appeal. He prompted her to think about counter-arguments to the points laid out in the refusal and to gather evidence to support these. However, with only a day until the submission was due, with limited access to resources, and with other commitments (such as child care), she was hardly able to prepare any evidence. As an educated and capable woman, it is quite possible that had she been advised, in sufficient time, of the ways in which she could gather evidence, she would have readily done so. In other words, access to the kind of knowledge, skills or opportunities that would

enable people to help themselves lacked instrumental power without the corresponding emotional agency required to act on them.

The role of hope

Some of the preceding discussion has pointed to the content of waiting, in terms of particular forms of hope and hopelessness, and their relationship to knowledge. Hope has been conceptualised in the literature as conviction without any evidence, the “trusting expectation that tomorrow has something to offer” (Lindquist 2006: 6). In this formulation, hope exists even in the face of expectation that what one desires will not arrive, and may thus be understood as “hope against reality” (Wikan 1996). It contrasts trust, which is an expectation based on inconclusive evidence, and confidence, which is a strong conviction based on substantial evidence (Hart 1988). Hope is also commonly conceived as either based on accurate prediction, as in ‘founded hope’ which is likely to be fulfilled, or inaccurate prediction, as in ‘false hope’, which is not (Lingis in Zournazi 2002). Hope may also be concrete, directed at specific things that are desired; transcendent, when unspecific in orientation; or completely lacking, as in the case of despair which deprives life of meaning and purpose (Marcel 1951; Smith & Sparkes 2005).

It has been noted that hopefulness emerges when people face desperate situations (Hage 2003) and is a matter of coming out of a darkness – of illness, of separation, exile or slavery – in which the individual is presently located (Marcel 1951: 30). Long-running European philosophical traditions have formulated hope as a negative human faculty which keeps people going and protracts their agony; or as a negation or deferral of life, as is reflected in the ethos ‘suffer in the present in the hope that enjoyment will come later’ (Hage in Zournazi 2002; Hage 2003). ‘Hope as deferral’ is the kind of hope commonly associated with waiting and inaction in the English vernacular, such as in the appeals made by the RAF facilitators to the asylum seekers: ‘Don’t just sit and wait and hope for the best!’.

Hage (2003: 12) suggests that Potamianou’s (1997) differentiation between ‘hope for life’ and ‘hope against life’ captures the difference between hope which induces an active engagement with reality and hope which breeds passivity and disengagement. Lindquist (2006) has argued that hope – or, we could say, ‘hope for

life' – can allow people to retain what Bourdieu terms the *illusio*; their interest in and commitment to the game. The metaphor of the game incorporates the fact that every investment is associated with uncertainty. For the game to exist, chances must be situated between subjective expectations and objective possibilities. That is, nothing must be absolutely sure but not everything must be possible (*ibid.*: 9-10). Hope enables people to identify and orient themselves to the imagined *positive* and thus *desired* future, in contrast to present unwanted circumstances they wish to change or a negative potential future they wish to avoid (Elliott & Olver 2007: 144). Thus, hope for life arises in situations of uncertainty and difficulty, where there is the possibility to effect some influence on one's future.

The articulation of hope varied among my participants and across time. There were constant oscillations between hope and despair, as people acquired new information or perspectives, faced new obstacles or reached apparent dead-ends in their cases. This is illustrated by two phone conversations I had with Mudiwa. The first conversation arose when Mudiwa called to tell me about a positive experience she had had while dropping her child at nursery that morning. She had met an older woman from Somalia, whose son attended the nursery. The woman had started a friendly conversation with Mudiwa, which led to a number of pointed questions about the length of time Mudiwa had been in the UK and in Glasgow, and whether she had 'papers'. Mudiwa had not wanted to answer, feeling suspicious of this stranger's intentions and feeling that the answers held private information. She had pretended to text someone on her mobile phone while the woman spoke, so as to appear distracted and reply with simple answers. However, after a time she realised that the woman was not being nosy or judgemental but rather sought to be open and helpful. The woman told Mudiwa that she herself had been an asylum seeker and waited for four years. She had attended court three times before finally being granted status. For Mudiwa, this was extremely encouraging. It offered her a new sense of hope. She told me

I always hear people saying that they just went to court once and then got papers. When people get Refugee Status, they don't talk about it. Or if you do find out that they're a Refugee, they make it out like it was easier than it was and easier than what you went through.

Mudiwa had finally heard what she believed to be an honest account of how difficult and yet ultimately successful one woman's experience had been. The woman also said repeatedly that the law had changed and was currently more favourable to those in the asylum system. She suggested that Mudiwa might be able to study at university and encouraged her to contact one about admissions. She also said that she knew that students could receive a £30 per week allowance from the government. Mudiwa was elated at what seemed like a host of possibilities opening up to her.

The second phone conversation occurred a week later, after a visit by Mudiwa to her solicitor to go over the points laid out in the third dismissal of appeal from the AIT. On the phone, she was audibly upset, her voice quiet and hoarse with tears. The solicitor had told her that she had exhausted her rights of appeal. He did not think that she should go to the Court of Session, as she did not have a good chance; it is very hard to win at that stage. He advised that it would be better to just wait and maybe next year or the year after she would get something. Because she is Zimbabwean, they would not try to send her back in the meantime. She concluded this recollection of their conversation by saying: "I feel drained. I don't want to think about it anymore. I'll leave it for now and think about it next week". Before she hung up, she lamented "nothing I have ever wanted or dreamed of has ever happened". I pointed to aspects of her life that she valued and the gains she had made, but she was unreceptive. She informed me that she would go shopping to try to take her mind off things.

The role of others – the Somali woman, the solicitor, and myself – is clearly important in the shape Mudiwa's hope takes. Stories detailing other people's achievements in the asylum process helped to instil hope, and were often told for this very purpose. This could also be observed at RCIP/RAF projects, where it was common practice for members of the group, especially staff as the central point of contact, to distribute news of success. One of the RCIP staff would call me to let me know whenever a family was granted Leave, and would report the news to familiar faces who visited them in the office. I found myself asking the standard question at the projects: 'have you heard that so-and-so got Leave?' The language employed by solicitors when working through the strengths of a case and noting that 'things are on our side,' or pointing to the fact that the Adjudicator assigned to the case was

sympathetic, also helped to nurture hope. Such talk incited hope by indicating the possibility of positive change, and helping them to foster a belief that it would come, even in the face of evidence to the contrary. This was ‘hope for life’, which kept people committed to pursuing their claims in the asylum process, thus sustaining their waiting but orienting them to the desired outcome.

The asylum seekers and the staff of RAOs spoke of the need to guard against ‘false hopes’, which were regarded to have the potential to cause pain and eventual despair, when their lack of grounds was realised. Solicitors and the staff and facilitators of the RCIP/RAF projects aimed to steer people away from generating false hopes, by trying to circulate accurate information and prevent the development of unfounded expectations.

The final point that I wish to make about hope is its transformation into confidence, understood as a strong conviction based on substantial evidence (Luhmann 1988). Many of the stories circulated among the asylum seekers sought to establish the proof that success in their cases was imminent, because it had happened to others. The legacy case review in particular gave people strong evidence that they would be granted ILR. However, I want to re-iterate the fact that hope – or indeed confidence – was never complete. It was always a fragile state, susceptible to being undermined. As an extremely stable, level-headed woman from Eritrea told me some months into the legacy case review, “even though all are hopeful, after years and years of rejection it is hard to believe that things will come good”. She added: “it makes you feel good when others get it but you still worry that you won’t be one of the lucky ones, especially when it’s taking a long time”. She knew other Eritreans who had been in the UK for the same length of time as her family. As they had recently been granted ILR, she reasoned that she should also. “But”, she qualified, “it’s hard to believe that, and it’s easy to be always worrying and thinking about it”.

Communicating, measuring and making sense of suffering

Young (1997) has pointed out that the idea of psychogenic trauma is widely understood among all classes and social groups. The underlying idea is an extension of much older concepts regarding the power of experiences to cause intense emotions that in turn cause pain and disease (*ibid.*: 246), rather than an isolated variable

entering and temporarily inhabiting the body (Coker 2004). The communicability of such pain may, however, be limited. In his argument about the incommunicability of the pain of torture, Daniel (1996) has highlighted that more socialised pains, such as headache, toothache and earache, are given names of recognition in folklore and diagnostic labels in medical lore. Their representations are public, available to more than one person to map his/her private experience onto, even though no one pain is like another. From there, sympathy and empathy take over, making the pain more or less shareable (*ibid.*: 142).

Various bodily pains and illnesses were commonly discussed by the women, in the context of both enquiries into one another's well-being, and discussions about the asylum process. In the first instance, the women often reported that they or their children were suffering from short-term illnesses – chiefly seasonal colds and flu – which they believed to be caused by the cold or windy weather; lack of fresh air circulating in contained public spaces due to others' insistence on keeping windows shut; or contact with other children at crèche or nursery. Through such attribution, several women communicated the difficulty of adapting to a foreign and harsh environment and their frustration at harmful consequences of others' ignorance about the spread of disease. Almost all of the women reported suffering from chronic conditions, which they tended to explicitly link to disrupted life experiences intrinsic to waiting. Sometimes when I would ask 'what is it like to wait?', they would reply by way of confessing to suffer from one, or many, ailments, such as insomnia, heart damage, rheumatism, headaches, depression, anxiety and stress. Stress and depression were reported to manifest in the physical symptoms of weight-loss, weight gain and poor skin condition, which the women would indicate by gesturing towards their bodies and remarking "look what it does to us!", or by displaying photographs documenting drastic changes in physical appearance. One woman told me of an unusual spot that appeared on her face directly after a traumatic AIT hearing during which she had had to contain her anger at the Adjudicator and the HOPO. The spot grew quite large and remained for some time. Whenever she was anxious, angry or flustered, it became very red, swelled to twice its size, and throbbed. She asked a GP to examine it but all he could report was: 'it's very

strange!’ For this woman, the spot was a visceral indicator of her fluctuating levels of ‘stress’, produced by the asylum process.

Complaints of insomnia were particularly common and tended to be directly associated with fears of dawn-raids. Mudiwa told me that she regularly had dreams in which she could hear Immigration knocking on her door and stamping outside. She would wake up in a sweat to silence yet be unable to sleep again for several hours. Perhaps the most striking instance of the attribution of ill-health to the asylum process was Manal’s meditation on the sudden death of a member of RAF which apparently resulted from complications with medication he was taking for insomnia and an underlying health condition. Of his death, Manal said to me

Many of my friends are in hospital because of depression from the asylum process. Most asylum seekers take anti-depressants and sleeping pills. All come with good health but it’s the asylum process that makes them sick. [The deceased] was nervous and depressed and that’s why he was taking pills. You must use his death for your research, to show how the asylum process makes people die, it makes people mad, it makes people sick!

In her research on bodily narratives among Sudanese refugees in Cairo, Coker found that culturally-embedded illness metaphors such as ‘death’ and ‘bloodlessness’ were used to communicate the ways in which being a refugee rendered the self ‘sick’ on various levels (2004: 26). These narratives referred to the disintegration of social and cultural integrity, located in both the physical and social body. While the universal, objectifying biomedical accounts offered by the health care professionals in Egypt were only able to label the refugees’ problems as ‘somatisation’, the refugees themselves identified the causes of their present illnesses as inextricably linked to processes involved in displacement, such as restrictions on movement and on the practice of traditional customs in Egypt (*ibid.*). My participants also utilised common Western metaphors of pain and illness and pointed to observable physical signs of illness to convey their suffering. Malkki (1996: 384) has pointed out that corporeal wounds carry, in Tambiah’s words, ‘communicative efficacy’ in a context where refugees’ bodies are treated by refugee administrators as speaking to doctors, and perceived to give a more reliable and relevant account than

the refugees themselves⁴¹. That the asylum seekers' pains could be communicated through commonly recognised labels or physical markers may have been particularly important to them in light of the emphasis on physical evidence, often regarded as lacking and a cause for disbelief, by the deciding authorities. The asylum seekers were able not only to map their pains onto the public representations available to them, but to locate the source of these pains in the disruptive experience of waiting. As such, psychogenic trauma was given a tangible reality, which opened channels to empathy and transformed the suffering of waiting into a shared experience.

A related idea communicated by my participants was that the magnitude of suffering endured in waiting could be quantitatively represented in terms of its duration. Of course, this is not absolutely true; if challenged or pressed on this issue, they would indicate that a myriad of factors contribute to suffering and that a person's suffering perhaps should not be measured or compared. However, in public settings it was certainly implied that more years of waiting amounted to more hardship. This was reflected in the gasps that followed revelations of an individual's long period of waiting or the "aagh, two years, that's nothing!" dismissal when another would state their more recent date of arrival. The social and moral dimension of this kind of spiritual/existential/psychological suffering (Young 1997: 245) appears in the implication that a 'just' system would determine outcomes according to a temporal 'queue', with those who applied first and therefore endured longer stationed at the front. When the legacy case review was well underway, I asked a Kurdish mother of four whether she had received a questionnaire. She replied in the negative, adding

It's not fair because we've been here for seven years. There are some people who have been here for just two years and they have Leave to Remain already. I think we should all get it, but there should be an order. People who have been waiting longer should get the questionnaire first.

Another woman, Taliba, interjected "I've been here for *eight years* and I haven't heard anything yet!" On another occasion I was preparing tea with some Algerian

⁴¹ Fassin and d'Halluin (2005) also observe increasing emphasis in France on the use of medical certificates which document scars left on the body, as evidence that torture has taken place, in the context of disbelief of asylum seekers' narratives by the state.

women. One said to the rest of us ‘You know, I met a guy the other day who just got his status. Guess how long he waited’. We all offered guesses – eight years? Ten years? – assuming that this was one of the commonly-circulated anecdotes of injustice and hardship. She replied ‘no, two and a half months! Can you believe it? He got it after two and a half months and here we are waiting for eight years!’ It is interesting to note the assumption held by the woman that her claims are well-founded and that temporal differences between applicants in the determination of their cases are unjust or baseless. There is no mention of the possibility that the man was granted Refugee Status quickly because he was able to successfully demonstrate that he had a well-founded fear of persecution, whereas the Algerian woman, a failed asylum applicant on Section 4 support whose husband had safely returned to Algeria, was not.

I already mentioned that the ordeals of the asylum process and waiting itself were seen to cause suffering. Explanations for suffering were sought at a more fundamental level; in terms of why one was enduring these ordeals in the first place. That is, people sought to answer the question: why is this happening, and why is it happening *to me*? In public settings, it was common to place accountability with the Home Office, by alluding to poor administrative practice or reduced productivity. When I probed people personally, some attributed the wait to the will of God, part of a master plan. Two Christian women suggested that they were being given a test of endurance from God. Mudiwa questioned why she had recurring ‘bad luck’ while ‘bad people like rapists and murderers are prospering’. She speculated that she was receiving punishment from God, but that if she prayed, possessed patience and endured, she would be rewarded with Leave to Remain. Several Muslims interpreted their suffering through a theological frame, suggesting that it may be that Allah was testing their *iman* (belief/faith). Manal, for example, indicated that by presenting her with the ordeals she faced, Allah was teaching “how to do like God, how to live for him and do the tasks for him”. She went on to explain her understanding of the role of God and of her faith in relation to her current circumstances:

He would save you maybe from being deported. He would save you by ensuring you are deported. Maybe something negative would be happening to you here and he would like you to be away. It depends. We don't know the future. But it's good to stand the problems and to be happy with what you have in your hands, you

know?...If I was detained, of course it would harm me. But in the meantime I would realise that maybe it would be good for me. We don't know...God doesn't give you anything if you don't work hard for it, you know? Just like cut arms and you wait for what God will give you. Doesn't work like this. Until God sees that you are working hard for the thing and if you worked hard for the thing you may get it and you may not. At this stage, it would be the will of the God. At this stage, because you've worked hard for it...As Mohammed sallahu wasallam peace onto him said, make the cause. Make the cause. That means try to do the thing and you will get it...Prayer is 3% of what God asks you to do. 97% has to be done in your life, in conjunction. That's why Islam helps me in the asylum process.

Not a day with my Muslim participants passed when I did not hear the word *insh'allah* (God willing) uttered in relation to desired future outcomes, particularly the objects of waiting. Wikan (1996) refers to similar evocations among the poor in the slums of Cairo. She claims that the phrase *bukra, insh'allah* (tomorrow, God willing) can drive foreigners in Egypt to despair due to its seeming emptiness of meaning other than false expectations. I too sometimes felt as though such utterances signified desire for the thing it concerned, but that there was a vacuity therein, a disavowal of responsibility for making it happen given the constraints of poverty, limited resources and status. Wikan writes that Cairo's poor know that *bukra, insh'allah* may be a cover for attempts to evade responsibility, but they also believe that God helps those who help themselves. Reassurance is derived from the belief that God does not act randomly but has a purpose. Therefore, *bukra, insh'allah* can instil hope or at least evade total despair. In other words, *insh'allah*, rather than implying that one is hopeless and may remain idle, reminds the individual that the future is in God's hands and that one must persevere, because "good effort will bring good results. Giving up is like showing lack of faith in God and his superior scheme" (Wikan 1996: 86). My participants' utterances and behaviour convey such a belief in the necessity of taking action towards the desired end. Christians' interpretations seem to also indicate a belief in the necessity of 'making the cause' – through prayer, devotion and ethical behaviour, and the work of managing cases, gathering information, and trying to enact change in policy – for one's waiting to be fulfilled. The congruent message that action should be taken towards improving one's chances was also conveyed in the RCIP/RAF setting. As Kay urged RAF members, "Don't just sit and wait and hope for the best". Religious belief gave meaning and stipulated a code of behaviour and intention, and thus opened the possibility of expiation.

I observed many forms of relief from the suffering of waiting. The women in particular told me that they found release from the cognitive pull and emotional strain of waiting by carrying out tasks and activities. Activity could produce complete immersion in immediate sensation, freeing them temporarily from anxiety about the future (Lynch 1972). One woman told me that although having three children was difficult while an asylum seeker, children were the best distraction. She said, ‘when I had a baby, I didn’t think about my case at all’. At my departure from visits with a number of women, I was told that they had enjoyed speaking with me because it had made them forget their situation for a time. The RCIP/RAF projects were clearly crucial in this respect, as women told me that going stopped them from ‘worrying and thinking about their situations’, and relieved them of ‘being stressed’.

Conversely, at least three of my participants told me that they opted out of community involvement as a means of coping. Whether through announcements and conversations about asylum issues, or mere contact with others in a similar situation, such involvement brought the asylum process into primary focus for the women. This served for some as a constant reminder of their predicament and enhanced their ‘stress’. As Mudiwa noted,

As you keep going week after week, you see that more and more people are being granted but you still have a refusal. The people you were in the same situation with are no longer in that situation and they’re thinking about their new life so they don’t worry about you or how you’re feeling at all, which is understandable. And you end up asking yourself ‘Why me?’ and ‘Is it going to work out? Is it not going to work out?’ Yeah, so it’s kind of depressing... But I do find it easier to just lock myself in the house and not think about it.

Mudiwa’s comments reaffirm the point made earlier, that the act of comparing and identifying differences could not only confound the individual but also produce a sense of injustice and despair.

Finally, a few individuals spoke of the imagination as a release from the constant pull of waiting. The now-reclusive Mudiwa was an advocate of the imagination. She said “sometimes I daydream to escape...I just imagine I had my status, a job, a house – I think about all the details. I’ve lost hope. I don’t think I will ever be happy but it makes me feel better to imagine it”. Some of my participants

discredited the imagination as a form of release, saying that it, like other efforts to feel better, was only temporary and could not resolve the underlying problems.

Positive perspectives of waiting

Until now, the narratives presented have centred on the disruptive, preventative and agonising aspects of waiting. It should be noted that by focusing on a point at which most people have been waiting for many years and at which they are structurally predisposed to express their anxiety and apprehension, I may have methodologically over-prioritised the downsides of the waiting experience. There were also other, though less commonly articulated, positive perspectives through which my participants perceived their waiting.

First, waiting could be viewed as a preferable option to the feasible alternatives on offer. There was almost unanimous agreement (Grace, who returned to Nigeria, being the exception) that although waiting produced frustration and suffering, returning would have much worse consequences. This life was known; the past provided testimony that it could be withstood. To continue this life – which could lead to an even better situation – was thus regarded as preferable to hastening a final refusal and return. Put simply, continuing to wait was better than the fulfilment of its negative modality.

Second, when applicants' duration in the asylum process became a criterion for consideration in the legacy case review, waiting came to be seen as a potential asset, increasing one's chances of being allowed to remain. This is illustrated by the situation Mudiwa found herself in after several dismissals at the AIT and an appeal to the Court of Session. Several months after submitting her appeal she had still not received a response from the Court and consulted her solicitor. He advised her that it would be better not to try to hasten the setting of a date for the hearing because in another six months she might be eligible for consideration under the legacy case review, and her being here longer and her child being older, would be an advantage. Solicitors were aware by this time that a high proportion of legacy cases had been granted ILR under the review, so Mudiwa's solicitor had good reason to advise his client in this way. Through the legacy case review, having waited was advantageous for many of my participants. People who it appears would not have been granted

Refugee Status were eventually granted ILR. After this consultation with her solicitor, Mudiwa still bemoaned the pains of waiting but did also concede to, and even evoke as a kind of panacea, the usefulness of waiting and its superiority to hastening a negative outcome. In this example, Mudiwa's solicitor's advice is not so much about enacting delay as *accepting* it. In other words, we are talking about the adoption of a particular perspective, and withdrawal rather than pointed action to delay. Paradoxically then, waiting could be simultaneously disabling in the multitude of ways outlined in this chapter, and enabling in the sense of granting more time in continuing a life, and potentially playing an instrumental role in attaining the end goal.

There is also indication that waiting as duration was seen in positive terms by those acting in supporting roles. Service providers in Glasgow have reported concern that faster Refugee recognition rates mean that new Refugees could go off 'into the wilderness', and not know what to do if they have problems (Rosenberg 2008: 80). Such a view implies that asylum applicants have more access than Refugees to a support system providing pastoral care and supporting slow, cumulative learning and adaptation, in preparation for more permanent residence. Asylum solicitors have stressed that their role is to befriend, advise, research and advocate. This crucially depends on the establishment of trust between applicant and legal representative, which requires time. The more time the legal representative has with the client, the better they can represent them (Pers comm.).

Duration qualifies people for consideration under the legacy case review; enables support from linkage with service providers; and facilitates the trust necessary for good legal representation. In congruence with common notions of time, duration thus appears as a kind of currency (Thompson 1967). In the first example just stated, the time of waiting has been transformed by advice from the solicitor. The nature of activities may not change, but once it is asserted that the accrual of quantified time will be advantageous, these activities can be endowed with a new sense of purpose. Waiting may become working towards the desired outcome. In contrast to Schwartz's assertion that waiting incurs a cost on the waiter because usable time becomes a non-usable resource (1974: 844), positive waiting may be seen as imbuing the time of waiting with a currency that can be spent towards

qualification for permanent residence. For those in supporting roles also, time is represented as currency, in that it enables the accumulation of capital, in the form of the asylum seekers' knowledge and aptitude in everyday affairs and the establishment of trust to facilitate information sharing. From the perspective of these supporters, such capital might enable them to effectively perform their roles, but will also be of benefit to applicants in terms of their daily affairs, asylum cases, and futures as Refugees.

Waiting for... 'A normal life'

In this final section, I return to the question of what the essential object of waiting symbolised. It is evident from the preceding discussion that the condition of waiting and the circumstances of life stipulated by asylum policy are regarded as disrupting the normal flow of time and blocking certain life trajectories and projects. In contrast, when describing visions of life 'with the papers', the words "normal", "free" and "happy" were often used. Consider the following extract from an interview with Mudiwa:

Rebecca: What do you imagine it will be like if you do get your papers?

Mudiwa: I think, for me, that would be the greatest thing ever. Coz after four years I would finally have something that I'm really, really happy about, like something positive in my life, coz I've just had so many, like, you know, negative things happening in my life. That would be a huge step, not only for me but for my [child] as well coz I know I will start making a life for my [child], something I really wanted my [child] to have. And I will have a life as well. I'll go to school. You know, all those things I've dreamt of doing I think I'll do them...And I'll just feel like I'm independent. You know? No one is looking over my shoulder and seeing what I'm doing and what I'm up to. Like someone owns me. Someone controls me...That would be a good thing...a major boost in my life.

Mudiwa's comments indicate a belief that the granting of Leave will enable her to 'start making a life'; seizing opportunities or realising dreams, such as furthering her education. The comments of my other participants were strikingly similar, specifying that once they had been granted Leave, they would be able to work and contribute to society; choose where to live; marry; drive a car; travel abroad on holidays, and so on; and thus overcome the stagnation and exclusion which characterised the waiting period. Mudiwa also speaks of an expected change in her own demeanour, from

feeling subordinate and constrained to happy and independent, which is specifically linked to her relationship to the state bureaucracy. It was also commonly imagined that attaining a secure immigration status would deliver the ability to predict and determine the future, and a release from constant fears and worries about deportation. People, such as Delaram, who had been separated from family members, viewed the ‘the papers’ as allowing family reunion and thus a proper family life, necessary for the well-being of children. Finally, many people expressed a belief that their suffering would be drastically diminished and that the illnesses afflicting them would disappear. Such visions both implicitly and explicitly compared the ‘abnormal’ current condition of waiting with the imagined ‘normal life’ that could be realised with the granting of Leave.

Notions of the ‘normal life’ that people believed would be realised were also developed in a more positive sense, in relation to experiences observed among other asylum seekers who had been granted Leave to Remain in the UK. At least publicly, ‘success stories’, focusing, for example, on how the individual in question was now living in a nice home of their own choosing, running a thriving business, furthering their education, or planning for a visit from family members, were often shared. These were sometimes specifically cited to demonstrate that life after waiting could not only be ‘normal’, but also potentially, idyllic.

The past could also be a positive source of constructions of ‘normality’. In his research on home and hope in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina, Jansen (2006) finds that for Bosnians, a ‘normal life’ involves a feeling of socially-embedded worth and recognition, and a degree of control over one’s individual and collective future. He asserts that Bosnians’ yearning for a ‘normal life’ was produced through the remembered ‘normality’ of pre-war life, which was characterised by a context of nationally heterogeneous patterns of residence framed in the political, social and economic configuration of socialist Yugoslavia. This recalled ‘normal life’ was associated with embedded security and dignity, localised in a pre-war place of residence, and included health care, education, social welfare and stable employment (*ibid.*). Aspects of past life in the country of origin – particularly prior to ‘the problems’ – also served as important references for my participants in conceptualising a normal life. People often spoke of the presence of extended family,

regular employment or a reliable source of subsistence, and the general predictability of life. For example, Delaram described her life in Iran as ‘normal’ and associated this with her parents’ continual presence, her lack of worries, a wider religious community network, the family’s affluence, and her ability to enjoy extensive travel with her husband. ‘The papers’ – or the idea of being granted Leave to Remain – could thus be understood as a vessel into which people’s hopes and dreams for the future could be placed. To what extent these were realised when Leave to Remain was granted will be briefly touched upon in the Epilogue.

Concluding remarks

Asylum seekers’ narratives have been examined in this chapter in order to identify the meanings of the condition of waiting attributed by those who experienced it. I began by proposing that all forms of waiting contain a certain structure. That is, waiting is always waiting *for* something or many things; which may be more or less specifically defined and/or fluctuating. Furthermore, different objects are associated with different modalities, ranging from negative to positive. In this sense, waiting is an intentional and emotional process.

In the asylum seekers’ narratives, waiting was presented as disrupted personal time, particularly in terms of the diminished quality or absence of activities which enhance well-being or are aimed at the realisation of aspirations. This was connected to the control and usurpation of one’s time by others. Also communicated was the sense of disrupted social time, in that people were out of step with the social rhythms of life. Furthermore, progress in relation to both life goals and the asylum claim itself was presented as stunted, and in the case of the latter, immeasurable. This produces a sense of randomness of events and non-linear time. The inability to anticipate the direction of their asylum case and their lives leads to not so much a fixation on the present as an intense anxiety about the future. Crucially however, this anxiety relates not only to an absence of certainty about what will happen, but an awareness of what could *very well* happen.

Through this analysis emerges the insight that waiting is inherently connected to the asylum process and the restrictions imparted on people through the policy framework. That is, the narratives about waiting are intricately referential to

activities people are doing, which are shaped and constrained by policy at the national and Scottish level. Thus, waiting is not some isolated experience that can be disentangled from the rest of life. It is aimed at both a specific thing (the asylum decision) and a general thing (the quality of life itself), and is shaped by previous experiences, information from others, the status of one's case, the character of one's legal counsel, where one is living, how one is able to pass time, one's resources for coping and making sense of events, and so on.

The chapter also argued that strategies for 'knowing and doing' were of crucial importance given the diminished ability to comprehend what was happening and to predict what lay ahead. Practical strategies were undertaken by asylum seekers to strengthen their knowledge of the asylum process, improve their chances of success in the asylum process, and enhance their material security. Furthermore, it was shown that 'illness talk' helped to communicate and transform individual suffering into communal sympathy; religious frameworks were drawn upon to make sense of predicaments; activities were undertaken to shift attention away from the strain of waiting; and hope, which oriented them to the positive modality of waiting, was carefully fostered through social interaction. Such strategies constitute agency in terms of making meaning from otherwise confounding affairs and aiming to bring about concrete and beneficial changes in individuals' lives.

Finally, it was suggested that while narratives communicated waiting as an overwhelmingly negative condition, for some, it was possible to transform this into a positive experience. Such a possibility was dependent upon the ability to imbue the time of waiting with value. In other words, waiting could, in certain instances, be seen as a productive condition. Through this exploration, it was possible to reconsider what the object of waiting – gaining Leave in the UK – symbolised, in a clearer light. I proposed that this was a sense of a 'normal life', which was imagined not only in contradistinction to the abnormal present, but also in relation to past life and the lives of others witnessed in the UK.

In the final substantive chapter I continue the threads of this argument, returning to the social context of Glasgow, to consider how both struggles to remain which occurred in the public sphere and people's own work at developing a sense of homeliness and security, were aimed at securing this hoped-for 'normal life'.

6. Adapting, belonging and struggling for the right to remain

*You cannot pull out the roots and plant in a strange ground, a bad ground. Our children don't consider the country of origin as home. It is just the country of **origin**. They think of themselves as Glaswegian!*

- Manal

My first attendance at Ralston Asylum Forum (RAF) in the very early stages of fieldwork was also my first introduction to discussion among some asylum seekers, service providers and asylum advocates in Glasgow, of the rather ambiguous yet potent notion of 'integration'. At the conclusion of the formal meeting segment of the night, attendees gathered around the room in small groups to chat over tea and coffee. I found myself standing at the side of the room, not far from a rather shy-looking, middle-aged man who was also standing alone. I walked over to greet him and introduce myself. His name was Mohammed. Earlier on I had heard him speaking Arabic with another attendee, and therefore was not surprised when he confirmed that he was from a country in the Middle East. We chatted briefly about the Arabic language and the RAF group. He had been attending for some time and knew almost all of the members. Being new to the group and thus not well-versed in its norms, and being in the early stages of fieldwork and thus eager to gather as much information as possible, I endeavoured to ask about his immigration status. At the time, I was delighted with the extent of self-disclosure in his reply. It was not until many months later that I realised that his 'story' followed a similar narrative style to those told by many of the asylum seekers involved in the community sector in Glasgow.

Mohammed told me that he had been living in Glasgow with his wife Nazahah and their four children since 2001. They had initially been placed in high-rise flats in the Gorehill estate, an area of acute deprivation where a large number of asylum seekers had been housed, to the – at least initial – chagrin of the pre-existing population. Mohammed and Nazahah felt unsafe in Gorehill, and were concerned

that the lack of play areas was detrimentally affecting their children's health and development. Mohammed told me that his request to be relocated had resulted in their successful move to a low-rise flat with a garden in a council housing estate in Ralston. He and Nazahah felt that Ralston was a vastly better place to live than Gorehill; it was quieter and safer, the neighbours were friendly and there were grassy play areas for the children. He told me that his case was complicated and drawn out, and was now being sent for Judicial Review. He then shifted into a kind of appeal,

my family and I have integrated here. I've taken classes, my son has done all of his schooling here. He is fourteen now, that's seven years of schooling here. He's very good at school. My youngest son was born here and has never been to [the country of origin]. I've told the Home Office this but they didn't want to hear it, they say it's not relevant to the case. I accept this but it's not fair to make people wait. If you decide quickly, no one will integrate, they can still go back. But after six years, you have a life here.

I asked Mohammed whether he and his wife would consider returning to the country of origin. He replied:

Never. We will never go back. If I get a negative outcome, I'll take it to the newspapers, I'll make a campaign. Scotland is where me and my family want to be. We have made it our home.

Mohammed referred to Scotland as 'a good society' with 'some very good people', and we agreed that the country had changed for the better through immigration. He said that he is a trained and experienced doctor, and the UK needs doctors; he's taken classes in the UK and can speak English. He asked me, "Why can't we stay?"

Introduction

A number of scholars of refugee studies have cited Turner's (1969) framework of rites of passage in elaborating the process of displacement (see Beiser 1987; Camino & Krulfeld 1994; Malkki 1995a; Turner 1999; Harrell-Bond & Voutira 1992).

Harrell-Bond and Voutira refer to displacement as "a violent 'rite' of separation" that leaves refugees in a state of limbo until they are incorporated once more into society (1992: 7). Turner (1969) develops van Gennep's formulation that rites of passage are life transitions marked by society, accompanying 'every change of place, state, social

position and age' (van Gennep 1909). They involve the three distinct phases of separation, where symbolic detachment of the individual from what s/he has been in the past takes place; transition (*limen*), in which the characteristics of the 'passenger' are ambiguous; and aggregation or incorporation, where the individual is elevated to a new status (Turner 1969). During the liminal phase subjects do not fit within the networks of classifications that locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminality implies being 'betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial' (Turner 1969: 95). It leads to the reassessment of the familiar and initiates a resynthesis of the passenger's world view (Turner 1969 in Beiser 1987: 457). Usually initiates are regarded as dangerous and polluting, and thus kept separate from the rest of society (for example, in a hut away from the village).

Beiser (1987) suggests that when they first arrived in Canada in the 1970s and 1980s, the group of South East Asian refugees he studied were in a state of psychological liminality. Cultural expectations in the new country were ambiguous and conflicting for the refugees. Unlike the ritual initiate who is supported through the transition by the weight of cultural tradition and symbolic or personal guides, they had little assistance in the new country to move to the more stable condition of aggregation. In this context, they attempted to cling to or to recapture the past, with its meaningful social positions (Beiser 1987: 458). Similarly, in their study of Vietnamese refugees in a Hong Kong camp, Chan and Loveridge (1987) found that the liminal state of waiting induced 'emotional hibernation' in which the individual refugee lost track of 'who s/he is, where s/he is, and why s/he is there'. As a consequence, individuals often turned to the past and isolation from the surrounding community and environment, creating a 'cocoon' where it could be denied that anything had changed (*ibid.*: 750).

The asylum seekers with whom I worked faced the kind of transition to new roles, statuses, and modes of behaviour and interaction that many migrants face. Their situation was distinct from that of refugees commonly studied by anthropologists, of protracted waiting in camps (cf. Atkinson 2007; Malkki 1995a; Knudsen 1992; Turner 1999), where the dominant practice of containment hinders most forms of contact with the wider (host) society. My participants were, to all

intents and purposes, living in the host society, as the neighbours, classmates, congregation members, customers, and sometimes friends of its citizens. However, they were persistently reminded that they lacked a permanent status, and that their futures were subject to the decisions and actions of immigration authorities. Moreover, their experiences tended to be more individualised than those documented from the refugee camp setting, where whole villages or ethnic communities are relocated together and may engage in social reconstruction communally. This social context, and the formal support delivered in Glasgow to asylum seekers, meant that my participants had many opportunities for social interaction with people from a range of ethnic and national backgrounds. Formally delivered support was designed to acculturate them into the language, behavioural norms, rights and entitlements, roles and associated aspirations, held to be common to the dominant population of Scotland.

This chapter, then, explores the extent to which the asylum seekers regarded it as possible and desirable to foster a future-centred a sense of belonging in the host society, in the context of the uncertainty and liminality of the waiting period. Citing the contrasting findings of studies which explore the liminality of forced migrants living in situations of prolonged insecurity (Beiser 1987; Chan & Loveridge 1987), I suggest that for my participants, there was no communal effort to withdraw into the past, nor a singular focus on either this society or another, as a potential home. Rather, the past and other places played an important role in the anticipation and creation of a new life. In collaboration with others, the asylum seekers sought to bring about an end to their waiting, all the while engaging in the selective management of change and continuity during the waiting period, effecting regeneration in the new setting.

The analytical framework

A wealth of terms has been employed to refer to the processes that I will explore in this chapter. Anthropological studies often focus on the concepts of ethnicity and identity in relation to the formation and maintenance of group boundariess after migration. However, these are not the main focus of this chapter. Acculturation is another term which refers to the process by which immigrant groups

adjust to different cultures (Castles *et al.* 2002: 113), but this lost currency with most social scientists from the 1970s onwards due to the underlying assumption of one-way adaptation, whereby migrants become absorbed into and indistinguishable from the dominant society (Gold 1992). Assimilation was replaced with the more encompassing term of integration. Each term carries normative meanings which vary between countries and across time, and depend on the values, interests and perspectives of those employing them. Since the discussion surrounding asylum seekers in Scotland has become dominated by the concept of integration, and since a large proportion of the activities that asylum seekers were involved in were funded under the SRIF Action Plan, I focus my attention first on this concept.

The concept of integration has been utilised in public policy (by governments), in the community sector (by those assigned the task of delivering 'integration programmes'), and also to some degree in academia (usually in disciplines such as sociology and social policy). Broadly speaking, processes referred to as integration tend to be those involving the acquisition of knowledge on the part of migrants, and accompanying behavioural change whereby individuals and groups become increasingly involved in the institutions of society, and more oriented towards the dominant culture of the society. More developed usage identifies specific processes of change which are placed into categories. A basic formulation would make the distinction between objective or functional integration, which would include easily observable participation in housing, education and the labour market; and subjective or social integration, which would include less obvious 'mental orientation of the individual', usually towards the new society (for example, see Brekke 2005: 31; Atfield *et al.* 2007). More complex frameworks of integration have also been developed by scholars. Heckmann *et al.* (2001), for example, identify four dimensions of integration. Their model includes not only a consideration of the actions of the migrant, but also the structures of the society which facilitate and/or restrict such actions. The four dimensions comprise structural (the rights of newcomers, access to labour markets and core institutions); cultural (behavioural and attitudinal change); social (the development of relationships and engagement in voluntary associations), and identificational (notions of migrant belonging and identity). In a similar vein, Ager and Strang (2004b) suggest that integration occurs

within ten domains and is in fact *measurable* through four types of markers, thus implying that processes of integration are in some way quantitative. Their research was commissioned by the Home Office in order to establish a basis for a common understanding of integration for those working in the field of refugee integration, and to provide a tool for planning and evaluation that would be relevant to projects and policy-makers (2004a, 2004b). Although the assertion is commonly made in the literature that integration is a process rather than an end state (Penninx 2004 in Spencer & Cooper 2006: 13), Ager and Strang actually define integration in terms of a state of being, suggesting that:

An individual or group is integrated within a society when they: achieve public outcomes within employment, housing, education, health etc. which are equivalent to those achieved within the wider host communities; are socially connected with members of a (national, ethnic, cultural, religious or other) community with which they identify, with members of other communities and with relevant services and functions of the state; and have sufficient linguistic competence and cultural knowledge, and a sufficient sense of security and stability, to confidently engage in that society in a manner consistent with shared notions of nationhood and citizenship (Ager & Strang 2004b: 5).

The widespread use of this integration model makes it tempting to adopt; however, a review of its normative and varied meanings leads one to question whether it is conceptually useful to the present study. What strikes me when reading the studies reviewed is a point recognised by both Jentsch (2007) and Brekke (2005): confusion arises from the fact that integration is often used as a catch-all concept, referring both to social, political and economic processes, and to the objectives and outcomes of strategies for inclusion. As a process which migrants undergo, integration does not offer an elucidating analytical framework developed from either sound theorising or empirical data. Rather, it is presented as a somewhat reductive set of pre-determined and confined categories into which instances of data may be inserted. This is not particularly revealing, and in fact may be misleading; as Castles *et al.* (2002) note, what looks like lack of integration may be a reflection of another issue, such as poverty. A striking example of the potential ineffectuality of such usage is a recent study of refugee integration (Atfield *et al.* 2008), which first defines integration using the models listed above, then asks refugees what it means to them, and finds

(rather conveniently) the two to be congruous. Rather than shedding light on the processes of adaptation and participation of refugees, by employing such a framework the study actually merely tests how well refugees have understood and/or adopted the notions of integration in public circulation.

As an objective, integration presents a kind of ideological position. It carries an implicit moral judgement; that the processes defined as integrative are desirable and should be supported by governments. As Castles *et al.* (2002: 130) ask, who defines success and against what societal objectives? Likewise, as an outcome, integration implies an ideal state that immigrants should embody. People can be deemed to be 'integrated' or 'not integrated', depending upon whether the process has been successful or continues to prove unsuccessful. Indicators of integration may point to objective/structural markers useful for judging such factors as labour market participation but do not help us to understand the intricacies of processes of adaptation. Furthermore, national/governmental notions of 'successful' or 'unsuccessful' integration (as determined by these indicators) may be wholly irrelevant to the concerns of migrants, including asylum seekers. In political rhetoric and policy documents, there is no indication of what informs such a moral framework, other than the assumption that 'if migrants do not integrate, social tension and conflict is likely to develop'. Finally, defining integration in terms of a state or set of behaviours comparable to the 'wider host communities' (Ager & Strang 2004b: 5) raises the question of to whom 'host communities' refers. It is well known that there are vast and multitudinous differences in people's participation in the 'domains of integration' proposed by the proponents of integration models, according to a range of interlinking socio-economic, political, gender, ethnic, and geographic factors. In other words, those behaviours or conditions posited under the integration model as desirable for migrants may not have been achieved by most residents of the UK. In this sense, 'integration' appears an ethnically-loaded foil for what are essentially processes of participation applicable to all residents.

Policy research, as distinct from pure research, will never escape from reliance on ideologically-loaded concepts such as integration, because these reflect political concerns (Banton 2001). A distinction should nevertheless be drawn between descriptions and analyses of processes (what happens, as known through

empirical evidence), and policy objectives (the ‘should’ of political rhetoric)⁴².

Consequently, as an analytical model for processes of adaptation and belonging, the concept of integration as it stands is not useful to this research. Considering integration in terms of a social ideal and/or governmental objective *is* useful insofar as the discourse surrounding integration is something with which my participants were extremely familiar and drew upon to further their own aims during the waiting period.

A more useful analytical concept for understanding what is at stake in adapting and creating a meaningful life for my participants in relation to British society may be incorporation, the third stage in Turner’s (1969) rites of passage. In most rites of passage, incorporation occurs when the participant acquires the knowledge, experiences and behaviours necessary to successfully complete the proper rituals (Chavez 1991: 258). In incorporation, the subject is restored to a relatively stable state. S/he is conferred ‘structural’ rights and obligations in relation to others, and expectations are placed on her/him to behave in adherence to the customary norms and ethical standards bestowed on persons of his/her position (Turner 1969: 95). The concept of incorporation encapsulates not only individual agency but also the role of the broader society and those in positions of authority. Chavez (1991) argues in relation to undocumented migrants in the United States, that incorporation occurs in stages. Undocumented migrants who stay in the host society increasingly acquire experiences, knowledge and modes of behaviour that link them to the society. Full incorporation depends not just on their own personal changes but also on the larger society’s willingness to ‘imagine’ them as members of the community, and their tendency to ‘imagine’ themselves as part of the larger community. This ‘imagination’ refers to Anderson’s (1991) idea of communion between citizens and the nation as a ‘deep, horizontal comradeship’ (Chavez 1991: 259). A society that is unwilling to ‘imagine’ undocumented settlers as part of the existing society places limits on their incorporation. This theorisation readily applies to asylum seekers in the UK, given their similar relationship to the nation-state, and their temporary status. However, I would add that for incorporation to occur, not

⁴² See Spencer & Cooper (2006) for a comprehensive literature review of integration policy concepts across Europe.

only do these ‘outsiders within’ require linkages with society and to be imagined as part of it; it is also necessary for the rights, entitlements and obligations bestowed on permanent residents, to also be conferred on them.

As shown in Chapter 3, UK-wide policies were understood to communicate that asylum seekers are unwelcome and to restrict their movement and participation, discouraging their presence in the country. Applicants were reminded of the precariousness of their continuing existence in the UK through appeal dismissals, the removal of other failed applicants, and having to sign in at the Home Office. The messages received from the Scottish government were quite different, centred on ‘welcoming’ and supporting asylum seekers and seeking to keep them in Scotland. Chapter 5 highlighted the way in which the primary object of waiting – and the perceived key to its cessation – was regarded by my participants as the granting of the right to remain. This was equated with such notions as normality, freedom and acceptance by others. In terms of their imagination at least, the granting of Leave could therefore be regarded as equivalent to incorporation. Thus, as I will try to illustrate in this chapter, my participants were for the most part striving for incorporation.

In order to reach an understanding of how the asylum seekers perceived their experiences of displacement and constructed a discourse relating to the nature of their migration, its duration and future prospects, one must regard both what they said and what they actually did in their daily routine (Al-Rasheed 1994). Furthermore, it is revealing to consider the distinctions between what is said and done in private, and what is said and done in public settings. Eastmond (2007), drawing on Good (1994), has noted that there is a difference between conventional stories and those of refugees. Conventional stories follow a central syntax of predicament, human striving, and an unfolding in time (Good 1994). Often in refugee situations, the outcome is not given, and “refugees are in the midst of the story they are telling, and uncertainty and liminality, rather than progression and conclusion, are the order of the day” (Eastmond 2007: 251). This distinction between conventional stories and ‘refugee stories’ neatly captures the difference between the private and public discourses employed by many of my participants, which I now discuss in turn.

Private narratives and actions

The impossibility of belonging

A number of qualitative studies of forced migrants have explored the question of belonging and participation in the new social context of migration, poignant and perhaps universal as it is for ‘people on the move’ (Jansen & Löfving 2007). Some such studies suggest that for many asylum seekers, uncertainty about the future is married with a sense of the impossibility of being oriented to the present society, of making it one’s own place. Fuglerud (1997) acknowledges that the state of permanent insecurity and tension resulting from an uncertain immigration status provided a cause for many Sri Lankan Tamils in Norway to withdraw from participation in the wider society. De Genova observes an “enforced orientation to the present” among undocumented migrants, brought about by uncertainties arising from the possibility of deportation, which inhibits the development of long-term plans (2002: 427). The Refugees who possessed five-year LLR in the UK interviewed by Atfield *et al.* (2008) reported that not knowing what would happen next or when they would have to leave had a profound effect on their sense of belonging. Some felt that there was little point in making friends or investing in their future. Lacroix (2004) states that the African asylum applicants in her study perceived the waiting period as too long, impeding their ability to settle and begin a new life in Canada. Additionally, Mountz *et al.* (2002) show that for a group of Salvadoran asylum seekers in the United States, temporary status restricted investment in ‘structural and social forms of integration’. In the face of an unstable legal status, many pursued creative arrangements in major financial investments such as sharing car or home ownership, to reduce losses if they were deported (*ibid.*: 347).

Each of these studies points to the importance of security, which is intricately linked to temporality, in asylum seekers’ sense of belonging in the new society. At the outset of fieldwork, in possession of knowledge of these findings, I expected to myself find asylum seekers asserting the impossibility of developing a sense of belonging while occupying categorised an asylum seeker. What I discovered were rather minimal *verbal articulations*, in specific contexts, of the impossibility of being fully a part of society in terms of participation and the development of a sense of

belonging. Such articulations tended to be part of a broader dialogue centred on weariness of the difficulties faced in the asylum process. Barriers to participation directly arising from immigration policy were often mentioned. Fatima, for example, whose continuing employment at RCIP was dependent on demonstrating that asylum seekers were becoming 'successfully integrated', confessed that RCIP was 'just playing at integration', because she regarded integration as structurally impossible while people occupied the asylum seeker category and were unable to work. Some of my participants spoke more generally about experiences that had stunted the development of a sense of belonging in this society, highlighting the way in which this subjective state is not merely a matter of personal choice or orientation, but is also produced through interaction with people seen to represent the society, and with immigration. Sevda told me:

Being through this experience has affected me. I feel negative towards this country because of this. If they had given me Leave to Remain after one year, I would love this country. But really they damaged me, they damaged my view of this country. Scotland made this legacy case review. They are the ones who started it. That's good. But really they don't like us here. I haven't experienced any racism myself but I have seen it, I have seen how people talk...once when I was waiting for a bus with [my son] in the pram, I was first in the line and a Scottish woman with a pram came and stood in front of me. I said 'excuse me, I was first in the line' and she said 'fuck you bitch'. Yes, can you believe it? When the bus came, she got on first. I got on too and I told the driver what happened and some other people who saw it also told him...

I've heard people on the bus talking about asylum seekers. You know Rebecca, one day on the bus one elderly woman stood up from the seat, she gave the seat for a Somali woman with a pram. This Somali woman didn't say thank you and the old woman started talking to a woman next to her, saying 'she didn't even say thank you. She comes here to our country and we give her everything'. Maybe if the Somali woman said thank you, she wouldn't have talked like that. But still it would have been in her heart, you know?...

No, I don't belong to Glasgow. My children do. This is their home now. That's why I stay. But really I belong in my country. I miss my country so much.

Sevda highlights the importance of both reception and acceptance from locals on the one hand and the duration of waiting on the other, in the development of a sense of belonging and inclusion. Mudiwa also often linked barriers to participation with the temporary and insecure status of asylum applicants. She once said to me:

Now I have good friends who have boosted my confidence but I haven't gotten anywhere. I'm still at point zero. I've made myself a family here with you and

[another friend] and [my boyfriend], but that's about all. College is a good thing but everyday I'm reminded that "you're an asylum seeker so don't get comfortable".

Despite these assertions of the barriers to participation and belonging, I found many more clear indications, particularly in the behaviours which I observed, that most people were nurturing and investing in a sense of future-oriented homeliness here.

'Making a life'

The process of loss and regeneration characterises the experience of forced migration (Camino & Krulfeld 1994). To varying degrees and in different ways, refugees experience loss of community, family, status, capital, property, entitlement, place and personal identity. The known and orderly past is replaced by a new and unpredictable future as they enter the liminal phase. Old boundaries are destroyed, which puts into question the taken-for-granted assumptions on which daily and political life depend (Krulfeld & Baxter 1997 in Colson 2003: 6). As Downing (1996) puts it, routine culture answers 'primary questions', including: Who are we? Where are we? Why do people live and die? What are our responsibilities to others and ourselves? Answers are provided in everyday life, allowing the individual to focus on tactical problems. Forced migrants experience an unexpected disturbance of routines and are forced to re-examine primary cultural questions, including: Where are we? And for most also, who are we? (*ibid.*). However, liminality carries positive elements, such as growth, transformation and the reformulation of old elements in new patterns (Turner 1969). This process of adaptation is creative and re-creative; hence, the counterpart to loss in displacement is regeneration. In the context of loss, new forms of culture are negotiated and accepted by refugees and the dominant society (Camino & Krulfeld 1994).

It is important to remember that acquiring aspects of a new culture and maintaining the old are neither mutually exclusive nor dichotomous processes; rather, they may be mutually reinforcing (Hopkins 1992). For example, in her study of Cambodian refugees in the United States, Hopkins found that those individuals who learned the English language and urban job skills were then able to acquire jobs which provided the capital necessary to escape from poverty and relocate to better neighbourhoods and schools. They were then permitted to invest available funds in

the establishment of temples, to freely practice Khmer customs such as weddings, and to communicate with relatives elsewhere. Thus, the selectively practised process of Americanisation helped to facilitate maintenance of traditions (*ibid.*). To some extent, this seemed to be the case for my participants also. Those able to engage with the host society could better sustain links with people in other places and access resources to maintain continuity. For example, English language aptitude enabled greater participation in the public sphere, such that individuals could connect with others from a similar background and utilise information technology to ease communication with family members or acquire information from the country of origin. I now describe the processes of regeneration that I observed, or in other words, the ways in which my participants were reconstructing their lives and creating a sense of homeliness in the UK.

‘Taking the things which fit and leaving the ones which don’t’

In private settings such as the home, or when sitting in intimate groupings of a few individuals at RCIP projects, my participants would talk about the changes they had undergone since arriving in Britain, and the ways in which they were negotiating the old and the new here. All clearly sustained links with family members, friends and other contacts in their countries of origin, via communicative technologies and social networks. They commonly distinguished between their ‘country’, which was often remembered with great warmth and nostalgia, and ‘the system’ or ‘the government’, which was usually associated with feelings of injustice, anger, or despair. The latter was commonly identified as the cause of displacement and the source of ongoing problems for the country’s population. As Karim once explained,

Most computers have Windows operating system. If you have something wrong with Windows, you can throw the computer away and look for a new one. But the new one will still have Windows – the problem will still be there...Some British people – the House of Lords I think – said three or four months ago that Darfur is not safe but Khartoum is safe. All reports say that the government is bad, al-Bashir is the worst dictator ever. We need to change the system. If al-Bashir changes, dies, the system is still going. If you say there are some organisations there in the camps and places, this is not what’s needed. We need a solution. Some organisations are trading in the Darfurian problem to make money. We believe you should do something for the Darfurian people and all the Sudanese people, especially in the marginalised areas. If you don’t change the system in Africa, you will receive more refugees. If Europe

closes the border, it won't solve the problem. We need to fix the causes of the displacement.

In speaking of the country of origin in terms of 'the country' rather than 'the system', most of my participants would reflect on the landscape, climate, customs and foods, and describe aspects of their upbringing and the responsibilities they continued to hold in relation to relatives there. At times, this talk evoked a sense of melancholy for what was missed and lost. It articulated a sense of the world they inhabited other than that which we shared in Glasgow; and selves other than those public 'asylum seeker' selves so often evoked in RCIP/RAF settings. Such talk also encapsulated a critical reflection on aspects of their new lives in the UK or aspects of British society, and could help to make sense of features of life here that eluded them.

The process of adaptation that I observed was selective, and undertaken always in relation to other places and past lives. As Manal told me, "you take the things which is suitable for you and leave which is not suitable for you, which doesn't fit with your culture". She used the example of her retaining her religion, Islam, but adopting simple, everyday behaviours which are common in Scotland but 'don't exist' in Algeria, such as "being on time for appointments, not pushing others when getting on a bus, and saying hello and good morning to people you don't know". She would now greet familiar faces on the street in Ralston or in her building; had she behaved this way in Algiers, she told me, people would have thought her strange or presumed that she had shady intentions.

Religion was a fundamental aspect of life and self, which was regularly discussed in the context of the absence of religious practice in Britain, and specifically among Muslims, negative or inaccurate representations of Islam observed in the media. Almost all of my participants who described themselves as having been religiously active prior to their migration continued to observe religious practices in Glasgow. Many Christians in particular were extremely satisfied to have found a church in Scotland where they were accepted and supported, and this no doubt helped to foster a sense of belonging. Some people asserted that their beliefs remained constant, but some practices required modification. For example, some Pentecostal Eritreans attended an Evangelical church that ran services for the Ethiopian community. This was not ideal as services were delivered in Amharic,

which the Eritreans could not understand, but they nonetheless regarded it as the closest thing available to an Eritrean Pentecostal service. Likewise, most Muslim men continued to attend mosque on Fridays, though some felt that the interpretation of Islam in the Pakistani-run mosque in Glasgow differed slightly from their own. Prayer routines tended to be less strictly adhered to than they had been in the past, as there was sometimes no suitable place in public to prepare for and perform prayer, or college timetables were not complementary to those of prayer. At home, prayer times could be more easily adhered to, and in synchronicity with the country of origin, as the call to prayer was broadcast from Arabic television channels.

Muslim men and women often spoke to me about the extent to which they could or should, retain gender roles, forms of bodily comportment, and styles of dress. Most of the women continued to wear clothing that they considered more 'modest' than that worn by most women in Scotland. Few wore the kinds of clothing they had previously worn in the country of origin, which could usually only be found in local stores in London. Instead, they carefully selected clothing from the mainstream fashion outlets in Glasgow and wore this in such a way as to adhere to current local fashions while maintaining the desired degree of modesty. I observed that Sudanese women were particularly flexible in their dress; they would continue to wear the customary *tobe* in the home and at Sudanese events, but wear 'Western-style' skirts and tops when attending college, RCIP events, AIT hearings and so on. Karim often voiced his disapproval of the 'casual' clothing worn by men in Scotland. He was adamant that the only suitable daily wear for himself was a suit, complete with tie, or for social events and ceremonies, the loose, white, multi-layered *jalabiya* worn by men in Sudan. I only once saw him wear jeans and a jumper, because his suit had been dirtied in the rain the previous day. He said "I feel childish, not very professional, dressed like this".

Many of my participants expressed a sense of the dangers posed to women and teenage girls by living in a society in which sexual activity with a range of partners, from a relatively young age, appeared to be widely accepted and normalised. Muslim men and women told me that they had consciously adjusted some of their own behaviours, such as women attending college with male classmates, or men befriending and occasionally being alone with women who were

not their wives. These new behaviours were regarded as different but not inappropriate⁴³. They were recounted as having been initially strange and uncomfortable, producing concerns about boundaries and unclear intentions; however, repeated practice had allayed such concerns. This did not mean that co-nationals had undergone the same process or shared the same views. Consequently, some individuals experienced continual unease about the assumptions others would make about the meaning of their new behaviours. Karim and I, for example, sometimes faced the suspicions of other Sudanese when we met in public contexts. On more than one occasion when we were sitting together with books and coffee in front of us, in the park or the library, Karim was greeted by passing Sudanese men who enquired as to whether I was his girlfriend. There were also practices, such as talking openly and theoretically about matters pertaining to sexuality and the body (and the approach to these matters observed in Britain), which a number of Muslims told me they would have great difficulty in ever doing themselves, even if they wanted to.

Exposure to the behaviour of Scots living in the high-rise flats often occasioned reflection on morality, and specifically the importance of respectful behaviour of children towards adults; modesty; sexual integrity; hospitality; and general politeness. Such reflection reinstated the importance of moral frameworks, by identifying the immediate evidence of their decline or absence in the anti-social behaviour of some Scots. As was noted in Chapter 3, providing hospitality for guests was of utmost importance to my participants, and involved offering guests vast quantities of food and drink which had taken many hours to prepare, the full attention and lively conversation of the man of the house (in cases where there was one), and the presentation of small gifts at the end of the visit. To receive guests, I was told and observed, was a matter of privilege. This principle was not to be abandoned, even in light of the financial restrictions imposed by asylum policy; although some complained about their inability to *properly* cater for guests due to such restrictions.

⁴³ A few of my African participants noted that some of their fellow nationals engaged in 'bad' behaviours since their arrival in Britain, such as sexual activity out of wedlock or the consumption of alcohol. Such behaviour was frowned upon and accounted for by pointing to the influence of Western ideas, or loss of religious values, brought about by living in Europe.

A number of practices pertaining to the cleanliness, care and presentation of the body were maintained. In a few families, contrary to the rules stipulated by NASS, parents shared their sleeping quarters with their young children, as had been practice in their homes in the country of origin. Many continued to observe the bodily cleansing practices they had always performed, such as washing after visiting the toilet, rather than adopt Western practices, and this sometimes called for the employment of creative techniques when in public, such as carrying a water bottle to the bathroom. Some continued to use oils and perfumes for hair and skin which had been used in the country of origin. These would be acquired at a cost, from a relative or friend in the country of origin, or from a particular shop stocking appropriate goods. For example, every Sudanese woman would use a hand-mixed perfume made from a collection of spices called *dilka*, and periodically sit over burning sandalwood to fragrance their skin and clothing, as had been done in Sudan. These scents always hung heavily in the air at Sudanese community events.

While many women had introduced new foods and recipes into their cooking (such as those they had picked up from friends or seen in the supermarket), most prepared the food they had eaten in their upbringing, using recipes learned from their mothers. The appropriate ingredients were bought from the Pakistani, Turkish, Algerian and African food stores in Glasgow. One of the most enjoyable fieldwork activities was learning to cook such recipes from my female participants. These occasions generated discussion on a range of topics. A number of women linked notions of 'the good wife' or 'the accomplished woman' (which they modestly saw themselves as or strived to be) with the preparation of food for others. By extension, we reflected on what we both regarded as poor nutrition and basic culinary skills possessed by many Scottish women we knew. Some families had taken brief trips to London and purchased, or been given, goods such as earthenware, cooking pans and coffee pots, which were identical to those used in the country of origin. For example, Noor was overjoyed when she was given a coffee table from her country of origin. She took pleasure in inviting me to her house and performing the customary coffee-making ritual. As she moved through each of the procedures – roasting then grinding coffee beans and spices, adding them to water in the coffee pot, lighting the gas cooker, and laying out the cups – she became absorbed in memories of life in her

village. She described how the older women would perform this ritual, while the younger women sat quietly in deference, thus registering the proper roles of women of different statuses. She commented on how sometimes all that the women would do in a day was prepare the coffee, drink and talk, over and over again. By recounting and performing the ritual, she evoked the different sense of time and sociality she had experienced in her country of origin, re-visiting it through the newly-found perspective of life in Britain.

The value of reproduction and of family, particularly among people of African origin of both Muslim and Christian faith, was spoken of regularly. Most parents spent much of their time tending to their children or securing educational and social opportunities for them. Many parents told me of their wish to have a large family because of its intrinsic value, or because the value placed on reproduction in Islam or Catholicism. However, many cited the limited presence of family members who, in the country of origin, would have acted as carers; their financial position while asylum seekers; and the uncertainty of the future, as reasons for restricting desired reproduction. Many of the women had been taught about family planning by their local GP and been administered forms of contraception over which they had sole control⁴⁴. Thus, they also had the means and broader social context to limit reproduction in ways that might not have been possible in their countries of origin.

It has been observed that the children of migrants tend to be quicker in acquiring the language and adopting the attitudes and behaviours of their peers, than adult migrants (Brekke 2005). While this tends to be seen as a positive force from the perspective of 'integration' policies, it was regarded by many parents as a challenge, in that their efforts to instil appropriate values and behaviour could be undermined by the influence of the wider society and other children at school. As Sevda from Azerbaijan said of the Scottish children she observed,

⁴⁴ Contraception was also discussed at the RCIP women's group, among the women and as part of the set agenda for the benefit of several women who had borne three children and were thought to have less control over reproduction than should be the case. I wondered whether the distribution of such information was part of the broader implicit 'cultural education' process taking place at RCIP projects, whereby, among other norms, women were taught that three children was sufficient. On many occasions women also compared and advised one another on their contraceptive strategies at the women's group.

I was shocked when I saw the way children were to their parents. Some children would stick their tongue out at their parents, they would say something back when their parents told them off. My children learned this from nursery, not from the teachers but from the other kids. In the lifts I hear Scottish children saying no when their parents told them to do something, they are arguing with their parents. In my country it's not like this. Also the young people here are very open. Boys and girls who are fifteen years old go out on the street and kiss. In my country you can't do it. If you are doing it, it's behind closed doors. But you shouldn't be behaving like that at such young age.

Many of the adults shared Sevda's concerns. One Eritrean woman spoke of the failure of disciplinary methods used in Eritrea when applied to her children in Scotland. In Eritrea, she said, parents only needed to give 'the eye' for their children to obey them. Here, however, children misbehaved and ignored their parents' reprimands. In Eritrea, if children did something naughty in public, other people would observe and report back to the parents and if the parents were not home, the neighbours would temporarily take responsibility for the children. She said that this communal care borne of neighbourhood relationships was absent in Glasgow, and so parents were required to put more energy into ensuring that their children had both freedom and guidance. Parents in whose countries of origin smacking was normal as a stronger form of discipline for bad behaviour reported that it was necessary to either cease this method or hide it from public observation, due to British laws and fears of intervention by social services. This was one kind of normative belief held by people in the UK which some individual asylum seekers explicitly critiqued. They saw forms of physical discipline which were not at risk of causing damage to the child as perfectly acceptable and effective, and argued in opposition to the dominant view in Britain, that their parents' controlled disciplining of them as children was entirely effective and without any lasting negative psychological or physical impact.

Some national groups had established weekend schools to teach their children about the dominant language, customs and/or religion of the country of origin. Although the mother tongue was spoken between parents and children in every home I visited, children's attendance at weekend schools was considered a more formal, structured and dependable way of maintaining the mother tongue and developing

literacy⁴⁵. This, they said, would enable children to communicate with their grandparents, and to feel at home if they were ever to visit or return to the country of origin. Many of my participants had bought a cheap satellite dish from the Sunday market, which enabled them to receive television channels in their mother tongue. Consumption of other media in the native tongue, such as books, films and websites was extremely common. This sometimes produced a sense of nostalgia, but also enabled people to keep up-to-date on changing events in the country of origin, to nurture bonds with relatives and friends, and to garner a sense of simultaneity with life there. From what I was told and observed, many children but very few adults watched English-language channels. Varying levels of effort to learn English were evident among adults, with the vast majority extremely committed to developing fluency. Most were enrolled in formal classes at college and yearned for opportunities to practise speaking. Learning English required a great deal of effort and dedication, particularly among the older adults, however, it was felt by many to be crucial to their desired future in the UK, to participate in the wider society, to interact with neighbours and friends from all over the world, and to understand their school-aged children (and their children's teachers). The only exceptions in this respect were a couple of mothers who could not find English classes with crèche facilities, and a few men and women whose mental or physical health prevented them from attending formal classes. These people nevertheless participated in RCIP activities, using an interpreter or what little English they had, or communicating with co-linguals. It is also important to note that the UK in general was regarded as a place where children could enjoy educational opportunities, often greater than both what had been available to the parents themselves and what the children would have if returned to the country of origin. In this sense, life in the UK potentially involved not only processes of regeneration but also advancement, particularly for the younger generations.

Finally, involvement in political activities in the country of origin was not common, but did occur among those whose flight was related to political persecution. Karim, for example, was an active and authoritative figure in a Sudanese

⁴⁵ This was particularly the case after children began attending school and wanting to speak the language of their peers in the home.

political opposition group. He sustained contact with members of his own political party, other opposition groups, and organisations with an interest in the Darfur conflict, travelling across the UK to participate in demonstrations and meetings about the future of Sudanese governance. In a not dissimilar fashion, Asad supported a rebel group that aimed to overthrow the current government in his country of origin, and helped to maintain a website containing political commentary and news on the political situation. For both Karim and Asad, political activism, although frustratingly not as effective as they would wish, was perceived as a potential catalyst for change, which could signal the possibility of return to their countries of origin. As mentioned in Chapter 3, many of my participants who had not previously been engaged in politics took up political lobbying in Scotland in relation to the immigration system. This is an example of the way in which the liminality of the waiting period could actually serve as an impetus for people to learn and to engage with political structures in a way that they might not have done were they to quickly receive Refugee Status, as Manal's earlier comment indicates.

Investing in the future, creating a sense of homeliness

Some anthropological studies have revealed the ways in which marginal people, including refugees, attempt to, or feel condemned to, live in the present with little contemplation of the future and little interest in the past (see Day *et al.* 1999; Sigona & Torres 2005). Similarly, some of my participants spoke of the necessity of living 'each day as it comes'⁴⁶. However, I found that the forms of regeneration I have discussed – efforts to acquire language, develop lasting social ties, negotiate, adapt and retain customs in their new setting – indicate a kind of investment in a stable life, and in a life *here*, in and for the future.

Turton (2005) refers to the material work of producing and maintaining a sense of place, such as constructing settlements, naming, decorating, modifying and ritualising places, which constitutes a constant struggle to avert "an endemic sense of anxiety and instability in social life" (Appadurai 1996 in Turton 2005: 268). I observed a multitude of examples of work at creating a sense of place through the

⁴⁶ For example, Manal once told me that her family would buy food on a daily rather than weekly basis, so that no money (or food) would have been wasted in the event of their removal.

adaptation of places. All of the flats I visited had been decorated with such objects as old landscape paintings found at markets, postcards from friends, portraits of the Mother Mary, tapestries of mosques or script from the Qur'an, and so on. In living rooms, trinkets and framed photographs of family and friends had been carefully placed on tables, chosen for their aesthetic qualities or because they carried sentimental value. All NASS accommodation is furnished with uniform lounge suites, carpet and curtains, which are usually green or maroon in colour. Some families attempted to individualise their flats by introducing their own rugs, curtains, cushions and coffee tables. Electrical goods such as televisions, DVD players, digiboxes and computers were almost universally present, having been purchased for a cheap price at the Sunday market.

It was not uncommon to open a bank account so that money could be saved. A couple of families sought to open long-term savings bank accounts for their children which could be accessed when they reached the age of eighteen. Mudiwa indicated to me that she saw the acquisition of goods, enrolment in college, opening a bank account and the development of friendships as markers of 'progress', of her successfully setting up those things which she believed were possessed by people whose lives were characterised by permanency and normality. While such practices are undoubtedly highly open to interpretation, indicating at least the desire to improve the material quality of life and perhaps to acquire markers of wealth and social status, I would argue that they also point, as Mudiwa indicated, to a commitment to creating what the asylum seekers perceived to be a 'stable' and 'normal' life here. Such a life had the power to subvert the uncertainty of their present situation. In other words, there could be a sense in which building material securities could enhance the overall sense of security.

A recent anthropological volume on conceptions of home among 'people on the move' reminds us that home may be regarded as somewhere left behind in another *place* and in another *time*; but it may be more than simply the place from which people have come (Jansen & Löfving 2007: 15). Drawing on Hage (1997), they argue that home is made and remade on an everyday basis through strategies of cultural continuity, overcoming alienation and social disintegration. Home is thus "a struggle to create possibility, to engage in... 'a search for cool ground' – a concern to

find or establish secure places that may serve as bases for developing a future” (Jansen & Löfving 2007: 17). Such a sense of ‘possibility’ challenges the passive notion of home as social and physical shelter, and attaches to it opportunities for ‘a better life’: change, improvement, dreaming and imagining (*ibid.*: 16). A contributor to the same volume, Thiranagama (2007) has shown through the story of a Sri Lankan woman that a sense of homeliness may have a temporal component, in that it may depend on the possibility of finding a home *for the future*. She suggests that making home may not only be an attempt by people to ‘re-inhabit’ the world but to make it change for them (*ibid.*: 33-37). Similarly, among my participants, Scotland was perceived as a place with opportunities for children, where the principles of freedom from oppression and freedom of speech were upheld. As Manal once said, in Scotland, it was even possible for ‘normal people’ to communicate to those in higher levels of power, such as the First Minister. Previous chapters indicated that life while waiting was difficult, but Chapter 4 in particular highlighted that many opportunities to foster social connectedness and hope were available in Glasgow. Continued existence in the UK seemed to offer the possibility of a place of relative security, of social ties, of welfare and upward mobility; what might otherwise be called societal hope or a ‘fully human’ life (Hage 2003). In this sense, it was a place in which people could find a home for the future.

In the private settings referred to here, my participants’ accounts were formed around desires for ‘the papers’; for security, freedom and the ability to participate in society and pursue life plans. Their talk in such settings was rarely framed in terms of the political rhetoric of ‘integration’, the subject to which I now turn.

A public narrative of integration

A large proportion of my time during fieldwork was spent attending the RCIP projects; seminars and meetings held by RAOs for the purposes of information dissemination and planning; and social events and public demonstrations organised by RCOs and anti-deportation groups. I was also exposed to the printed media produced by these organisations, which, along with the various kinds of gatherings mentioned, were a means by which those involved in lobbying on asylum policy could communicate political messages to the wider public, politicians and the Home

Office. Over time, I became aware of a sense of déjà vu when observing such events and media, resulting from the recurring prevalent theme in the dialogue used at them: integration. In one sense, this was not surprising, given that a number of the organisations had the mandate of ‘facilitating the integration of asylum seekers’. What was surprising, however, was the shape such dialogue took, its uniformity across time and place, and the fact that it was not repeated by the asylum seekers in more private settings such as the home. Indeed, those asylum seekers who pursued a greater degree of involvement with RAOs were more likely to employ the language of integration than those less involved, who rarely, if ever, used it. I came to identify this dialogue as a public narrative which was utilised by both individual asylum seekers and their advocates. Most commonly, an organisation responsible for managing a particular mode of communication (whether it be a speech made at an event or a story published in printed media) would choose individual asylum seekers as ‘spokespersons’ to convey the narrative to an audience. For instance, the SRC might select an individual asylum seeker who was well-versed in public speaking and competent in spoken English, to present their ‘story’ at an event. Having already been exposed to such events, the asylum applicant would be aware of the narrative that was suitable and appropriate for the occasion.

In the vignette at the beginning of the chapter, Mohammed presents a rather condensed and simple version of this narrative. A further example is the story of an asylum-seeking woman, written in the third person (implying that the story is being told by someone else or is constructed in collaboration with someone else), and published in the newsletter of an RAO in Glasgow:

C left the Ivory Coast in Africa to study in Britain 5 years ago. A few months after her arrival, war broke out in her homeland. Her family – including a young son – vanished. She has now all but given up hope and believes they are all dead. C was 3 months pregnant when she arrived in the UK and 6 months later when she was in a British maternity unit giving birth, she had never felt more alone. Most of her experiences have been good, but it is the tragedy of her life that has cut her off from happiness, not the British people. ‘British people in general try and respect others. Of course there are some bad examples, too. I had a neighbour who was really rude. If he had been an educated person then I would have found it very upsetting. But he wasn’t. So it didn’t really worry me that much...Some folk who live near me thought that all asylum seekers were after their jobs and their money. But when we got involved with each other, they see that we have good things to offer the UK. If we

are given the opportunity to get to know them, we can show that we've been forced to come here and that we can help build a better UK...

C still misses the Ivory Coast terribly. 'I have no choice but to stay here, I have no family left in Ivory Coast. So I must make my home in Britain. My little boy is always asking me to see his father. 'Where is my daddy? I want my daddy'. But she has no idea whether he is alive or dead.

What does isolate her, though, is the government insistence that she cannot work while going through the asylum application process. 'My little boy cries a lot. If I could work, I could do so much more for him, but I am stuck in the house. I get depressed and cross and end up shouting at him. Nevertheless, I have made many friends among Scottish and African women and have come to really love Scotland, and it is special to me when I hear my little son speak with a Scottish accent'.

The caption of this story reads 'I love hearing my son speak with a Scottish accent'.

Three common elements of the narrative can be identified, often, but not necessarily, presented in chronological order. The first is reference to what I will call *origins*. This usually begins with identification of the country of origin of the speaker and mention of the difficult and/or life-threatening circumstances under which the individual had to, or asylum seekers as a category of persons must, leave the country of origin. Usually, the forcible nature of this kind of migration, the fact that coming to the UK was not a matter of choice nor motivated by any interest other than safety and protection, are made explicit.

The second element is a reference to *adversity and change* in the UK. This includes a reflection on initial and subsequent impressions of Scotland, experiences of negotiating the asylum process, and the challenges of adjusting to a new life in an alien environment. Sometimes it includes commentary on the perceived obstacles to gaining asylum, experiences of social exclusion, hostility from locals, the denial of political and civil rights, and the strains and pains of separation from family members.

From adversity, the narrative generally progresses to what I will call *integration*. This includes an assertion of the development, over time, of a sense of belonging to Scotland. Sometimes the actual period of time is stated, for example, 'My family and I have lived in Glasgow for [x number of] years'. Attestations of participation and involvement, either in what is called 'the local community' or 'Scottish society', of learning to speak English and making friendships with Glaswegians or Scots, are also made. Commonly included are references to the new identities of the children of asylum seekers as Scottish, as reflected by their birth in

the UK or Scotland and represented by their Scottish or Glaswegian accents. Crucially, at this stage, references are also made to the contributions and commitment to Scottish society which asylum seekers make and will continue to make, if granted the right to remain. Contributions made are cited in social terms, probably due to the inability of asylum applicants to participate in the labour market, and include terms such as ‘participating in the local community’, ‘helping to make better, safer communities’ or ‘helping to build a better UK’. These often seemed to speak to the Scottish government’s agenda of regenerating local areas of deprivation, but also accord with the British government’s most recent approach to citizenship, which was mentioned in Chapter 2. Sometimes specific activities, such as volunteering in local initiatives, are mentioned. Purported contributions to be made once Leave to Remain is granted usually relate specifically to economic contributions. This is reinforced by the qualities of asylum seekers and Scots presented. While Scots are usually referred to as ‘friendly’ and ‘welcoming’, asylum seekers are commonly described as ‘good people’, ‘trustworthy’, ‘hard-working’, and possessing many ‘skills and qualifications’, which was highlighted in Chapter 4 as being one of the positive meanings attached to the asylum seeker label in the work of RAF and RCIP. Quite often, the speaker attests to their wish – or determination – to stay in Glasgow if granted the right to remain in the UK.

The aspect of ‘belonging’ in the narrative was also used in isolation in many contexts, such as at demonstrations where placards carrying the message ‘We belong to Glasgow’ were held; the website of the anti-deportation organisation Unity, which announced the release from detention of asylum seekers with messages such as: ‘Welcome home [name of asylum-seeking family]! *Back in Glasgow where they belong!*’; and at community parties, such as RAF’s Christmas party, where the Scottish organisers included a segment in the programme for singing Scottish songs, including ‘I belong to Glasgow’.

As already mentioned, the narrative follows a logical flow of predicament to human striving as time unfolds (Good 1994). It develops from past place occupied (which seemingly assumes a minor role, disappearing from the narrative as it progresses), to current place occupied (which has been actively seized), to an imagined future place (which the speaker and asylum seekers in general seek to

inhabit). It moves from suffering in the country of origin to overcoming initial obstacles here which are primarily located in the mechanisms of the state, and finally lands on a relatively agreeable picture of a settled life in Glasgow. By moving through tenses in such a way, the narrative evokes a sense of duration in Scotland. What emerges is also a generic character of asylum seekers. They are not individuals possessing specific languages, distinct histories or complex and varied views of the world. Instead, they are a rather homogeneous lot whose qualities directly relate to matters of state and economy.

Chavez (1991) argues that the common sense view of undocumented migrants in the United States is focused on their transience, thus reinforcing their lack of commitment to the community's well-being. I would argue that this is equally the case for asylum seekers, but that the common sense view goes even further, perceiving them as an active threat to the nation-state, through attempts to exploit state resources under the guise of asylum, as suggested in Chapter 2. Asylum seekers are not legitimate members of the community – they are outside the 'legal' system that constitutes society and governs the behaviour of lawful citizens. Their image consists of a collection of negative values and missing qualities (*ibid.*). As already outlined, integration, on the other hand, represents a social ideal for migrants in popular discourse: shared notions of nationhood and citizenship (which implies adherence to the law and loyalty to the nation); the inter-mingling of migrants with members of their own and other communities; and participation in and contribution to the wider society and economy. In this context, the narrative presents a positive image of asylum seekers by demonstrating that not only have they adjusted to the laws and ways of life in Scotland; they are committed to the future of the nation, and have desirable attributes that could be usefully employed for the benefit of the nation. In this sense, the narrative is reactive, or responsive to, messages about asylum seekers circulating in the public sphere.

However, more than that, the narrative makes specific claims to asylum seekers *already* being part of the nation, by using notions of 'belonging in Scotland' or 'being Scottish'. In this sense, it is an example of the way in which a national discourse of belonging can be drawn upon as a way of negotiating a state of liminality imposed by being located outside the nation (Malkki 1995a). Kiely *et al.*

(2005) have explored the different types of identity claims being made in post-devolution Scotland based on the three identity markers of blood, birth and belonging. A blood claim refers retrospectively to ancestry; to a person's forebears rather than their upbringing. A birth claim is based on being born in Scotland, to Scottish or non-Scottish parents. It is prospective, linking birth to early socialisation, which introduces various forms of attachment to Scotland. A belonging claim is founded on qualified, emotive conceptions of commitment felt to Scotland. Key markers of belonging are demonstrable forms of commitment and contribution to the country. Belonging claims normally depend upon residence, which provides the context for the development of feelings of attachment and commitment, and cultural practices identified with Scotland, through late socialisation (*ibid.*). Hence, belonging claims are associated with duration.

The narrative of integration clearly draws on the notions of both birth and belonging. Adults claim to feel a sense of belonging and attest to this by the duration of their residence, the contributions already made to Scotland and the intention of an ongoing commitment to Scotland. Through the narrative, they also make strong birth claims in relation to their children, using accent as an indicator of early socialisation in Scotland. Kiely *et al.* (2005) further suggest that nationalism is often conceived in terms of two forms: civic/territorial, involving ideas of citizenship and the rule of law; and ethnic/cultural, involving cultural and biological essentialisms. They argue that on the surface, Scottish nationalism seems to provide a civic, residential basis for belonging. The campaign for a Scottish parliament and its establishment constituted a celebration and endorsement of territorial belonging. A shared view across the political divide was the downplaying of birth as a marker of Scottish identity, while highlighting issues of 'belonging' based on residence and commitment to Scotland (*ibid.*). This account of Scottish nationalism provides an explanation for the prominence of the use of claims to belonging in Scotland in the integration narrative. If an individual is seen as belonging to a territory or polity, it becomes morally repugnant for them to be expelled from it.

Chavez (1991) argues that in the case of undocumented migrants in the United States, those who have developed a range of linkages to the society may still have full incorporation blocked by their immigration status, and society's dominant

view of them. Likewise, Kiely *et al.* note that certain English migrants expressed a sense that they “already feel and live out one form of Scottishness but are looking for external acceptance or legitimation of identity based upon belonging” (2005: 165). As previously posited, for incorporation to occur, individuals must acquire the appropriate knowledge, experiences and behaviours; be imagined as part of society; and be endowed with a new set of rights and responsibilities. In rites of passage, the initiates are guided through the ritual by authoritative instructors, who re-integrate them into society (Turner 1969). For the asylum seekers, the authority, at least in their minds, could be conceived as ‘immigration’ or the Home Office, and yet for the majority involved in my fieldwork, the Home Office had refused their claims and appeared to be set on pursuing their removal. Malkki (1995a) has shown that national discourses of belonging can be drawn upon as a way of negotiating a state of liminality imposed by being outside of the nation. Similarly, in co-authoring and communicating this public narrative, the asylum seekers were making formalised claims to incorporation, which in objective terms is represented by the right to remain. The narrative asserts that they have acquired the cultural and linguistic knowledge and competence necessary to be fully-fledged members of society, and that they are capable of working and thus contributing to the economy. It also implies that their experience of residence has enabled them to develop a sense of belonging and commitment to Scotland. Therefore, through presentation of their correspondence, desirability, and belonging to Scottish society, the narrative appeals for their full incorporation.

Some immediately observable consequences of the dominance of the narrative are worth noting. The concept of integration into Scottish society seemed to override or minimise the space (in public settings) for dialogue on a range of topics, including ongoing relations with the country of origin, social networks with co-nationals/co-linguals, efforts to maintain cultural continuity, and questions of return. It neatly adhered to a sedentarist logic in which “the rooting of peoples is not only normal but also perceived as a moral and spiritual need” (Malkki 1997: 61). Rather than leaving the asylum seekers in the liminal space of the uprooted, they were presented as having undergone the ‘orderliness of transplantation’ (*ibid.*). Importantly, the narrative also obscured the fundamental and legal right of

individuals to seek asylum in the UK on the basis of *persecution*, asserting instead that individuals should be granted the right to remain on the basis of their degree of integration into, and potential or realised contribution to, Scottish society.

Consequently, contrary to the principles enshrined in international refugee law, it became perfectly reasonable for Mohammed to ask me on that first day we met, why, given his skills and qualifications, his children's schooling and the family's extended residence, they could not stay. This highlights the fact that "people build their own stories on the narrative scaffolding that their local worlds make available, and these scaffoldings constrain the kind of story that can be told, even as they enable storytelling" (Frank 2004: 178).

Integration and the legacy case review

In an unbelievably timely development, several months into my fieldwork and to the surprise and utter relief of all those I was working with, the Home Office launched a review of 'legacy cases' across the UK, with a view to clearing the estimated backlog of 400-450,000 unresolved cases. The review may be seen as an exercise in political legitimacy and public accountability in response to public pressure and scandal, as discussed in Chapter 2. 'Legacy teams' dedicated to the resolution exercise were established in Home Office branches in Glasgow, Liverpool and Croydon. In the initial stages, recognition rates in Scotland were reportedly higher than in England (Pers comm., Scottish Refugee Council), possibly as a result of pressure from Holyrood and lobbying by RCOs in Glasgow.

The process began with the Home Office issuing questionnaires to 'legacy case' families, in which they were required to delineate their claim for asylum and any other compelling reasons why they should be allowed to remain in the UK. Immediately after the announcement of the review, a prominent RAO distributed a leaflet advising legacy case families:

If you can demonstrate that you are 'integrated' into Scottish society, your lawyer could have a greater chance of proving it would breach your human rights to uproot your family and forcibly remove you from the UK (PAIH 2007).

The leaflet also suggested that asylum seekers could help themselves by collecting “anything to demonstrate [their] enduring connection to Scottish society” (*ibid.*). Shortly afterwards, the Home Office itself distributed information about the review which made no mention of what would be asked of applicants in the questionnaire, and no mention of integration. The SRC was careful not to mention integration in its briefings, but rather emphasised the importance of obtaining legal advice in completing the questionnaire. However, at RAF meetings, mixed information was circulated. In May, for example, Kay, a representative of an anti-deportation organisation who spoke with much authority and was treated accordingly, told the group: “the criteria that will be used to determine legacy cases are still unclear. The Scottish Executive have asked the Home Office to treat cases sensitively and consider how well integrated people are but the Home Office have not said that they will do this”. By July, the Home Office had still not distributed any information indicating that integration would be considered in the review. Michelle, the SRC representative who facilitated the meeting, nonetheless announced at the time that:

Part of the review will look at how well you are integrated. They ask for reasons why you're wanting to stay in the UK, so it helps if you're in groups, part of things. But it's also not essential because remember the primary reason for being here is persecution so it wouldn't be fair if two people, one with a son in a youth club, and the other not, and the one with the son got granted. People have the right not to be involved but the reality is that it does help.

Almost every asylum seeker I knew was now in a mad rush to obtain letters of support from community organisations, churches, friends, neighbours, college tutors, and children’s teachers. RCIP staff members – including myself – were enlisted in the task of drafting letters for individuals and families involved with the organisation which utilised currently-favoured language. We referred to families as ‘valued members’ of the various projects, ‘attending regularly’, ‘well integrated into the Ralston community’, and as demonstrating ‘active participation’, ‘commitment’ and ‘contributions’. The Home Office did later concede that ‘human rights factors’ (presumably the right to respect for private and family life under Article 8 of the ECHR) would be considered in assessing cases. However, as was mentioned in Chapter 5, the status of information shared among asylum seekers and the mode of its circulation, meant that it was at least as important, and perhaps more compelling,

than ‘formal’ information the Home Office distributed. The notion that evidence of integration equals the right to remain was sustained by the exchange of information within the RCIP community and subsequently reinforced by people who were granted Leave to Remain. Manal was one such person. On the day that she received notification of ILR, she came to the women’s group and delivered what can only be described as a speech to the other Arab women who were still waiting for their questionnaires. She told them that they must be hopeful that Leave to Remain will come for them, and when it does come, they must continue to attend the group and be active in the community. She said,

The main reason I got Leave to Remain was because of my integration into the local community. The Home Office looked at my activities – they know well the activities that asylum seekers are involved in – and granted me status because I know the local community. For this reason as well, all of you should keep going with integration.

I was also struck by how this notion entered into the consciousness of even non-legacy cases, people with still active applications. For example, as I mentioned in Chapter 3, Noor repeatedly told me throughout the week preceding her appeal hearing that it would be good to have many friends attending the hearing so that the Judge could see that she had made friends in Scotland and give her ‘stay’. If there is any place where integration should not be a matter for consideration, but rather the facts pertaining to the asylum claim, it is surely the courts.

The legacy case review thus presented a paradox: in order to secure the right to remain, asylum seekers sought to provide evidence of efforts to integrate, which the Scottish government had actively supported but which the British government had pursued a policy of preventing until after the right to remain was granted. This is akin to the legalising moves of Salvadoran undocumented migrants in the United States observed by Coutin, in which they were required to demonstrate that they were participating in legitimising activities at a time when they were illegitimate (2000: 130). The whole exercise of the legacy case review served to reinforce the notion that demonstrable attachments, commitments, or contributions to Scotland naturally correlated with the right to remain. In other words, entitlement was seen as deriving from a political contract (between the nation-state and asylum seekers),

rather than demonstrating the need for protection based on experiences of persecution.

Return

The desire to return is often assumed to be universal among forced migrants, emanating from the depth of national belonging, with home designated as the territory previously inhabited (Jansen & Löfving 2007: 9; Al-Rasheed 1994). The assumption that return is the most preferable course of action to 'solve' the problem of forced migration has also persisted in the objectives and interventions of institutions which deal with forced migrants (Koser & Black 1997: 7). Much research has shown, however, that return is neither always desired by such people nor understood in the same way, and is certainly not always the most desirable way forward. Al-Rasheed (1994) points to the instrumentality of refugees' histories, statuses in the country of origin, and relations with compatriots prior to flight; the ongoing political situation in the country of origin; and relations with the population of the host society, in the presence or absence of a 'myth of return'. I would add to this characteristics such as the age, family structure and dynamics of individual asylum seekers; the economic situation in the country of origin; and their immigration status in the host society. Al-Rasheed found two very different attitudes towards return among two groups of refugees in London. Iraqi Arabs identified whole-heartedly with the country of origin and saw their displacement as a temporary phase which would eventually lead to their return to Iraq. They were waiting for the possibility of return, and were concurrently engaged in political activities to make return possible. Assyrians from Iraq, on the other hand, saw their migration as a permanent solution to their historically alienated existence in Iraqi society as a Christian minority and an ally of the British. Therefore, they possessed many reservations about return and were apparently very positive about settling permanently in Britain.

My participants did not fit into such clear-cut groupings but certainly, the majority were highly pessimistic about return. For the small group that had been refused and exhausted all appeal rights, formal return was actually determined by the UK government to be impossible, due to a medical condition, there being no safe

travel route, lack of travel documents, etc. For others, the ‘choice’ still existed in practical terms but was determined to be unrealistic and/or objectionable for other reasons. The first reason, apparent particularly among individuals with active asylum claims in the early stages of the process, was that return was unfeasible due to the risk presented to safety and/or life. Karim, for example, learned from human rights defenders in Sudan that the Sudanese government had a list of political activists it aimed to find and ‘eliminate’. His name was on this list. When Noor received information that the safety of family members still in the country of origin had been compromised as a result of her departure, she concluded that return posed a serious risk, as the authorities appeared to still be in search of her.

Second, and especially for those who had been in the asylum system for many years, return would have ramifications for the process of loss and regeneration which I described above. Displacement led to loss of livelihoods, social ties, capital and assets, including the very physical foundation of home, yet families had devoted themselves to creating and investing in a stable life here. Return represented a further loss (of this life), re-displacing social structures which had adapted and developed in the exile setting (Allen 1996), and the necessity of investing emotionally and physically in further regenerative activities in a place which might have changed drastically during their absence. In other words, return would not necessarily mean return *home*. Home in the country of origin was irrevocably lost in space and time (Jansen & Löfving 2007: 15), but more than that, it had been, to some extent and for some people, re-made during residence in the UK.

The process of returning was often perceived to be either too difficult to contemplate, or impossible, particularly for a number of individuals no longer of working age and in poor health, who would not necessarily be able to secure a source of sustenance. However, it was also the case for the very youngest of my participants, who was full of productive energy: Mudiwa. When it appeared that there was little chance of Mudiwa’s case receiving a favourable outcome in the appeals court, I asked her whether it would be safe for her to return to Zimbabwe. She replied “yeah, I mean, it would be okay, there aren’t [political] problems as such anymore, but I can’t go back coz I’ve made a life here... We’d have to start all over again in Zimbabwe and there is nothing for me there”. Mudiwa went on to highlight

the issue of living standards in the country of origin, an important consideration in assessing the dynamics of 'starting all over again'. With permanent residence in the UK, she could easily access tertiary education, find well-paid work, use her disposable income to create a suitable environment for herself and her child, and send remittances to her family in Zimbabwe. However, if she returned to Zimbabwe, she would be forced to live in a rural area currently beset by food shortages, with little possibility of furthering her education or securing a source of income, and with limited access to health care. She foresaw that rather than contributing to her family's sustenance, she and her child would constitute a strain on an already fragile home economy. Furthermore, as she saw it, her child's future would be bleak. This seems to agree with Jansen's (2007) point about returnees in Bosnia-Herzegovina, that one's positioning in the life course affects one's ability to successfully remake home; in this case, yet again in the country of origin.

As I mentioned in previous chapters, my participants were engaged in a kind of personal battle to maintain dignity, honour and integrity, particularly in relation to the mistrust that immigration authorities exhibited towards them. To drop this quest and return would, as Knudsen (1992) has suggested is the case for many asylum seekers, be akin to giving up and conceding that one was never a refugee in the first place. It would also render the efforts made futile and the time spent waiting wasted. As Manal once put it, "I have kept strong and I would never give up, I would never stop at this point. I keep fighting, I keep fighting, whatever the situation."

When I asked those who were determined to stay in the UK permanently what they would do if faced with a deportation order, varying degrees of planning were proffered. Some divulged no plans, blankly stating 'I cannot go back'. A few said that they would go underground. As Sevda told me in hindsight, after being granted ILR, "we would have gone on the run. We would have stayed with friends, gone into hiding. There was no way we could go back to our country. Plan B was to run. It's the same for everyone". Two women told me that they would commit suicide if faced with deportation. I cannot gauge the degree of seriousness with which these plans were considered, but I can say that at least one woman did actually go underground with her small child upon having her appeal refused and being notified that the Home Office was preparing her travel documents.

For others, estimating the consequences of return was not so straight-forward, and the process of assessing risks was complicated by the VARRP delivered by the IOM. As one woman from the Maghreb who had been in the asylum process for eight years told me, it had not been easy holding out, waiting and hoping for asylum for so many years. Money would be offered by the IOM to return and it was tempting to take it. She and her husband had considered it many times. But they had lost *everything* in the country of origin, and the money from the IOM was not going to be enough to rebuild their life there. Most people involved with RCIP and anti-deportation organisations held a sceptical view of the VARRP, believing it represented an attempt to coerce vulnerable people into a move which would not be in their best interests. Grace's decision to return under the VARRP was made in light of a range of factors, including the immensely isolated and short-term period she had lived in the UK, her perception of the risk of going to jail and losing her children were she to persist in her asylum appeal, and the offer of funds to rebuild her life in another part of Nigeria.

Only three of my participants spoke of a desire or dedication to eventually return to their country of origin. It was perhaps not surprising that two had fled for reasons related to their involvement in oppositional politics in the country of origin; the third was the wife of one of these men. Karim often spoke of his hope and efforts to bring about reform of the political system in Sudan, so that he and his family (and other Sudanese exiles) could return. Thus, for Karim and some of the other asylum seekers, waiting was not only directed at the asylum process but also at the state of affairs in the country of origin. Karim's wife Khadija also longed to return to Sudan, because in her words, "the culture is too different in this country". Asad was another whose claim for asylum rested on his demonstrated opposition to the government of his country of origin in Africa, and his subsequent experiences of detention, torture and forced labour in a prison camp. He kept abreast of political developments in the country of origin and expressed his hope for a regime change, so that he could return and participate in the new political configurations. While both he and his wife Lila weighed up the potential benefits and disadvantages of staying in the UK in the future, I had the impression that she was far less enthusiastic about return. She had established a strong social network of co-nationals and co-linguals in Glasgow and

London, and a few very close friends. She enjoyed attending college and imagined herself working in the future, something she was unlikely to do in the country of origin. She was also content that her children had access to a reasonable quality of education in Britain.

The question of return, in terms of a concrete plan rather than a desire or longing, was negotiated within the family according to the differential experiences of husband, wife, and children. Parents understood their children to be adaptable in their youth, but many also witnessed their children developing attachments to people, places and activities in Scotland. A concern of many was that identified by Brekke (2004) among asylum applicants in Sweden: that their children would become too adjusted and attached to Scottish society, in terms of relationships and language skills, to be prepared for the possibility of return. Seen from this perspective, attempts by individuals such as Karim to teach his children the religious values, customs and language of the country of origin, could be understood as preparation for return. Most of the children I encountered had no or very few memories of the country of origin, either having never lived there or being too young to remember living there. Thus, their perceptions of the country of origin and of living there were primarily developed through the sometimes negative attitudes and stories of their parents. Parents seemed able to hide their fears of removal from their children only to a certain extent. Manal told me,

I was so stressed when I was about to be deported. Why? For my children. I don't want them to live the same way I lived. You know what I mean? It's for my children. Many times [my son], before we were about to be deported, I didn't tell him about our concerns but he could feel or hear me when I was talking to his Dad. He said 'Mum I don't want to go to Algeria. I don't want to be beaten by the teacher [in Algeria]. I don't want to leave my friends'.

A number of children witnessed their classmates being taken into detention, which induced anxiety and elicited the attention of, among others⁴⁷, the Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People, who spoke out against the removal of children of failed asylum seekers. Given their limited first-hand experiences and received impressions of the country of origin, evidenced here by Manal's son's

⁴⁷ For example, the detention of a teenage girl along with other members of her family led to a heavily publicised campaign known as 'The Glasgow Girls', which was initiated by her friends.

reference to a story she had told him about children being beaten in Algerian schools, as well as the fears of their parents and the shock of observing other children going missing, return seemed to be perceived in rather negative terms by many children. Therefore, even among those individuals who appeared devoted to their potential return such a conviction was complicated by the desires and aspirations of their dependants, which themselves were subject to continual change over time. For people in this situation, deportation begins to look like secondary forced migration.

It is finally worth noting that the subject of return carried the status almost of taboo in public settings, as, I would argue, it implied a lack of commitment to the UK/Scotland. The public integration narrative and the legacy case review process implied a kind of contract between asylum seekers, their advocates and the nation-state. In this context, return would run contrary to the notion of commitment, undermining the whole basis of the contract. The desire to return may also have been under-articulated because people lacked permanent residency status and were overwhelmingly focused on gaining it, and thus on staying rather than returning. This is congruent with the fact that the granting of permanent status was accompanied by a change in focus in relation to return among a number of families.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have attempted to delineate the ways in which the asylum seekers responded to the changes that accompanied migration and the contingencies of the waiting period. There appears to be a significant contrast between public articulations and private reflections, yet both display a striving for acceptance, security and incorporation, and more broadly, an end to waiting. The public narrative presented a narrow and generic view of asylum seekers which relates specifically to their current or potential relationship to the nation-state, highlighting their attributes, contributions and commitments. I have argued that this constituted an appeal to incorporation, conceived by the asylum seekers as the conferment of the rights and entitlements of permanent residents. The public narrative opened up the possibility of conveying the desire for belonging in a publically acceptable manner, but in doing so, masked a whole host of complex and ambiguous experiences evident in private contexts. Here, a complicated picture of continuing languages, practices, roles and

values, and negotiating transition to, or selective appropriation of new ones, emerged. Evident also were commitments to other places, which were not so much strategic as cultural, emotional and ideological, concerned with maintaining self, past life, social ties and meaning. I have tried to demonstrate that despite the restrictions placed on them during the asylum period, the asylum seekers were engaged in efforts to re-create lives for their families here. The degree of permanence these lives were imagined to have differed greatly between individuals – from Mohammed’s adamant belief that he would never return to the country of origin to Karim’s assertion that he wished to return to Sudan when it was safe to do so – and were subject to change over time. Nevertheless, in all cases it appeared that the asylum seekers were countering the ever-present uncertainty of their lives by attempting to generate a sense of security and homeliness in the present. They were, as Brekke (2004) found, living ‘as if’ they had the right to remain in the UK.

The chapter also points to a number of issues concerning temporality. When articulating a sense of the impossibility of belonging, the asylum seekers indicated that the temporary nature of life in the UK is a negative force, resulting in the withdrawal from society and short-term orientation. In seeming contradiction, lived, extended duration in the UK appeared to necessarily create attachments and a sense of homeliness, impeding departure. Note again Mohammed’s statement in the opening vignette: ‘if you decide quickly, no one will integrate, they can still go back. But after six years, you have a life here’. Brekke (2004) found among his participants a belief that after a specific period of time it would be worse to be refused asylum, based on the notion that the longer they waited, the more reason they should have for receiving a positive decision. This was also linked to an underlying notion of attachment to Swedish society and growing separation from their country of origin (*ibid.*). While I detected no direct relationship between duration of residence in the UK and articulated intensity of a sense of belonging or commitment to remain, I did notice that many people recalled that a decisive attitudinal change had occurred after a couple of years in the UK. At this stage, whilst less expectant of being granted Leave due to refusal and multiple dismissals, they felt more ‘at home’ and more determined to stay.

In the public narrative, duration appeared as a rationale for the bestowing of permanent status in the UK, as it was associated with the concept of national belonging. Commitment of asylum seekers to the nation also implied duration in a future-oriented sense. Finally, duration was the determining criteria for consideration in the legacy case review, effectively fusing longer duration to deservingness. Leach (1961: 134) has observed that in the liminal stage of rites of passage, ordinary social time has stopped. Many rituals are transformative and temporal sequencing and duration are essential parts of their performance. They initiate change in the social conditions or spiritual status of those who bear their transformative power (Good 2000: 280). Consistent with this model of liminality, the waiting period appears as a creative and productive period in which, despite inestimable hardship, time can be utilised as capital, investment can be made in the life that is desired, and people can utilise the social, political and national resources available to them towards ending their waiting. In this process, the future was ever in sight.

7. Epilogue: After waiting...

Sevda: 'The Indefinite'

On a sunny morning at the beginning of August 2007, I made my usual walk through the winding streets of Ralston to the women's group. During the last two months, a number of families involved with RCIP/RAF had completed and returned the legacy case review questionnaire and were now waiting to hear from the Home Office. I arrived at the RCIP office to be greeted with the news from an excited Fatima that Sevda had 'got her status' that morning. Sevda had brought the letter from the Home Office to show the RCIP staff, and Fatima handed it to me to read. It reiterated the grounds of Maksim's claim for asylum and confirmed that the Home Secretary had decided to grant him, Sevda and their children ILR. It then detailed the general rights that this status would bestow upon them. Sevda was the first member of the RCIP/RAF group whose case was successfully concluded under the legacy case review.

I immediately made my way to the room where the women's group was held to see how the news had been received. I found the regulars standing or sitting at the tables chatting and joined Nazahah and Taliba, who had been waiting longer than most in the group. After the usual greetings, they both hastened to ask me 'Did you hear about Sevda? How did she get stay? Is she a legacy case? Did she go to court before? Did she get the indefinite?' We discussed the answers to these questions before moving on to the new *hijab* style that Nazahah had adopted upon recommendation from Taliba. Noor entered the room and we hugged each other and chatted about her upcoming trip to London to visit friends. She was very excited, saying 'I'm going to have fun! I'm sick of sitting at home, feeling lonely and bored'. She clearly had not yet heard Sevda's news but responded with surprise and joy when told.

As the women began helping themselves to the lunch, Sevda arrived with her two children. She was elated, and, as each individual rushed to her to offer their congratulations, hugs and kisses, she exclaimed 'I'm flying! I'm flying! I'll come down soon and then I'll organise a party and everyone will be invited!' All attention

was on Sevda and there was a sense of celebration in the air. The group of women clapped for her and a few, including a Russian-speaking woman who was a close friend of Sevda, began to cry. I heard one of the volunteers say to this woman “now I know it’s hard for everyone else but we need to be happy for her” and Fatima quickly clarified this misunderstanding, saying “she’s crying with happiness for Sevda”.

Jocelyn made a small speech, declaring the group’s deep happiness for Sevda and her family, their delight that the family could now “stay with us forever”, and the fact that her children “really are Scottish now”. A cake which Sevda had brought was cut, and juice and sparkling wine purchased by the RCIP staff was shared around. We shouted ‘cheers’ in unison.

When the merriment had subsided, the other asylum-seeking women appeared a little pensive and subdued. Some said “let’s all hope it’ll happen for us too”. Taliba and Nazahah drew Sevda aside and asked her a series of questions. I later asked them what they had talked about and they told me what they had learned: Sevda was a legacy case, she received the questionnaire a number of weeks ago, filled it in and sent it with letters of support. Four weeks later, she got this letter saying that she had ‘the indefinite’. Taliba said that Sevda had been waiting for court but that had been overruled. The other Arab women now discussed this all amongst themselves in Arabic.

I sat beside Sevda and asked her what would come next. She said that she would enrol in the RCIP computer class and care for the children while Maksim worked; he had already been to register at the job centre that morning.

Karim: ‘Refugee Status’

In November 2007, two years and three months after Karim arrived in the UK and applied for asylum, we sat together in his flat working through English pronunciation exercises. His last appeal hearing in August had been adjourned with the HOPO advising Karim and his solicitor that she would recommend granting Refugee Status and expected this to take a matter of days. Two months had now passed and Karim was confidently waiting for an outcome.

Karim's mobile phone ringing interrupted our conversation. I noticed that unlike his usual mobile phone conversations, this one was conducted in English. Karim was making affirmative statements 'yes, okay, yes'. From his tone of voice, it sounded like a practical matter that warranted little concern. Saying 'OK, I will come tomorrow', he ended the call. He then turned to me, smiling, and said 'Rebecca, you should say *mabruk*' (congratulations). I asked 'why? What was the phonecall about?' and he replied 'it was the solicitor calling to tell me that today they picked up my papers from the Home Office'. My surprise was culpable. All I could say was 'are you serious? Really?' I felt tears well in my eyes. I shook his hand firmly and said '*mabruk*'. He began laughing and repeating *ilhamdililah* (thanks be to God), and stated that my coming that day was the 'first step' to this happening. He thanked me many times and said 'I will never forget this day. My life has changed. After two years and four months of waiting, of my life being cut from me, now you have cut it back for me'. I protested, saying that I had had nothing to do with it, which to me seemed utterly obvious. We both continued laughing with joy. I asked if he wanted to call people and tell them. He said no; he would collect Khadija from college and tell her then as calling now while she was in class would cause a disturbance and prevent her from being able to concentrate for the remainder of the class. He decided not to tell anyone else until his Refugee Status papers had been prepared. He said 'now I will be very different. You will see me *really*. You don't understand what this means for me'. I disagreed with him and qualified: 'it means that you can live'. He laughed, 'OK, you understand. Now I am very relaxed. I was always thinking about it. Now I can think about other things. I can do anything!'

I explained in Chapter 2 that various statuses may be granted to those who apply for asylum. Those recognised as Refugees under the Refugee Convention are presently granted Limited Leave to Remain (LLR) for a period of five years, while those successful in the legacy case review are granted Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR). These two statuses carry the entitlement to apply for family reunion (of dependent children and spouses) and mainstream welfare benefits, to access public education, and to engage in paid employment. People with ILR have no restrictions on their travel, while Refugees can apply for a Convention Travel Document that, naturally,

does not entitle the bearer to travel to the country of origin. Refugees are eligible for certain kinds of assistance programmes and funds, such as an Integration Loan. Those granted ILR can apply for citizenship after five years of residence, whereas Refugees must wait until the end of the five year LLR period, apply for ILR, and possess ILR for a further five years in order to be eligible to apply for citizenship. Neither status confers voting rights or the right to stand for elections, as this is reserved for citizens of the UK, EU and Commonwealth. Research participants who commented on their receipt of ILR and were aware of the associated privileges tended to convey satisfaction with this status. One exception, Manal, told me that although she was glad to have ILR, she was disappointed that after all of her struggles, she was never recognised as a Refugee. This, I believe, represents her lasting distress at never having had the validity of her claim affirmed.

Brekke (2004) has raised the question of whether a positive decision delivers the 'normal life' that applicants have been waiting for. He claims that in the case of his asylum-seeking respondents, the lack of residence permit was "a peg onto which [they] could hang their other problems" (*ibid.*: 41). Once taken away, the expected relief did not come and the degree to which their problems disappeared was questionable. They "could no longer lean on the role of being victims of an unjust asylum system" and decisions that had been put off presented themselves with force (*ibid.*: 42). As is represented by the two ethnographic vignettes presented above, the granting of either kind of status among my participants was initially met on a universal basis with a mixture of elation and relief. People used metaphors such as 'a weight lifted' and 'release from prison', as well as terms such as 'freedom' and 'no longer being stressed' to describe the feeling. There was a sense in which the mere arrival of that which was waited for alleviated suffering (Schwartz 1974).

However, as the months passed, such elation was replaced with new struggles and concerns. A whole range of pragmatic matters had to be addressed as soon as possible in order to make the transition from asylum applicant to resident a smooth one. There was a range of matters for which the asylum seekers now had to take responsibility and become acquainted: electricity bills, the benefits system, taxes, accommodation, job-hunting, and so on. RAF agendas came to reflect people's change in focus. Instead of being centred on Home Office policies and procedures,

news from local agencies about initiatives asylum seekers could take part in, reports from similar refugee groups, and opportunities to communicate problems to the authorities, meetings now offered vocational training, advice on financial management and housing, and citizenship workshops.

Once granted Leave, people are no longer eligible for NASS and accommodation. As none of my participants was immediately able to engage in paid employment, all were required to apply for mainstream welfare benefits. In Glasgow, there were problems processing mainstream benefits due to the high volume of people being granted ILR in a short space of time. NASS payments are cut 28 days after Leave has been granted, hence it is vital for people to apply for mainstream benefits as soon as possible. Applicants who did not apply quickly enough were left without any money for a number of weeks. During this time, payments from the RCIP 'destitution fund' were regularly made to such families. Job Centre Plus was quick to introduce a centralised system through which those granted ILR under the legacy case review could apply for mainstream benefits. The SRC was quick to arrange information sessions for the newly granted and advice agencies, about the ensuing process and the importance of haste. Those who had received Leave were required to also find new accommodation. As most could not afford to pay for private housing, the demand for public housing in Glasgow was high, and exceeded its supply at the time of the legacy case review. Consequently, many people signed up to the waiting lists of local housing associations, and were given a concession to stay in their NASS accommodation until they secured other permanent accommodation. Some remained waiting for housing in Glasgow for at least another year.

A number of asylum seekers who decided to stay in Glasgow told me that their decision was motivated by their love for the city; the availability of leisure, vocational and educational opportunities; the presence of friends and a community from the country of origin; well-developed support for asylum seekers and refugees in the voluntary sector; and a desire for stability and continuity for their children.

Some individuals, such as Maksim and Sevda, enrolled in full-time college courses which they hoped would prepare them for entry into specific vocations; others, such as Mudiwa, Karim and Khadija, were accepted into undergraduate and

postgraduate university degrees. In the final months of fieldwork, I observed that a number of families with ILR stopped attending RCIP projects and RAF meetings, because they were moving elsewhere, had become involved in other activities such as education, or felt that the projects were no longer relevant to them. Nowadays, most of the regulars from the fieldwork period do not attend the projects. It is a host of new applicants, accommodated in Ralston whilst their claims are processed through the NAM, that constitute the client population.

The intention to work upon being granted the right to do so was almost unanimous among my participants. Some individuals, such as Mudiwa and Delaram who both possessed fluent English and determination, quickly found employment in the retail and services industries. Most, however, faced a series of obstacles to securing employment, which have also been identified in a Scottish Executive report (Charlaff *et al.* 2004) on employment among refugees. Qualifications from the country of origin were often not recognised, or individuals lacked sufficient documentation to attest to their skills and qualifications. Some people did not possess an adequate level of English for anything other than unskilled labour, while others could not find jobs appropriate to their skills and expertise. The long period of unemployment whilst an asylum applicant for some caused mental health problems and a diminished self-esteem, which impaired job seeking. This long-term unemployment could also be unattractive for potential employers, when thought to result in deskilling or outdated knowledge. Furthermore, low-paid employment could actually present a financial loss when compared with remaining on benefits and investing in education and training towards a desirable and well-paid position in the future. It was expected by all in the RCIP/RAF group that Manal would find a job immediately after gaining ILR. Despite her work experience in Algeria; fluency in three languages; tireless volunteering as a French teacher at local schools; membership and representation of various lobbying groups; authorship of published short stories in English; and extensive training in public administration, Manal was unsuccessful in several job applications in Glasgow. The primary reason for her lack of success, she told me, was an insufficient history of employment in the UK. She said that she felt trapped in poverty, and as though the many years of involvement in the community sector now amounted to nothing. The tendency which I observed, to

remain unemployed after being granted Leave, is consistent with the findings of the aforementioned Scottish Executive study, which reported that of a non-representative sample of 147 people with Refugee Status or Exceptional Leave to Remain in Scotland, only ten (6.8%) were in employment (Charlaff *et al.* 2004: 32)⁴⁸. As the authors note, the fulfilment of Scotland's aim to retain skilled migrants – including the highly motivated group that is refugees – requires strategies for encouraging refugees to remain in Scotland (*ibid.*: 39).

At least six of the families involved with RCIP/RAF left Glasgow for cities in England within a year of being granted ILR. Some left immediately, while others stayed on searching unsuccessfully for work in Glasgow before finally moving. Manal's was one such family. She told me that it had broken her heart to leave Glasgow because of the memories of her friends, but that perhaps the change would bring a new start to her life where nothing would remind her of 'the stress' of the asylum process. Many of the RCIP staff and volunteers who had known and supported these families over the years felt their departures as a shock and a great loss. Some volunteers were disappointed at not having been consulted in the decision-making process, and it struck me that they felt that an unspoken mutual commitment between themselves and the asylum seekers, had been broken. The families who moved to London told me their decision was founded on the relative ease with which employment and accommodation⁴⁹ could be found in London; the presence of family members and/or friends and acquaintances from the country of origin there; and the multi-ethnic makeup of the city, which meant that they were not visible minorities.

⁴⁸ Although the report does state that the majority of these Refugees had claimed asylum between 2000 and 2003, it does not indicate how long they were in the asylum process or for how long they had possessed the right to work when they started working (Charlaff *et al.* 2004: 14).

⁴⁹ Theoretically, it may not be easier for people to find public housing in London, as in England, the 'local connection' (under the *Housing Act 1996*) requires normal residence, employment or a family association resident in the local area, for access to social housing or assistance. Under Scottish housing legislation, no such local connection is required. The SRC has suggested that this may act as an incentive for Refugees to settle in Scotland. Those of my participants who reported ease in securing housing in London were entitled to social housing due to their residence there prior to being dispersed.

Some families with ILR planned to travel to the country of origin for a holiday, and a couple of Refugees hoped to be able to journey to countries neighbouring the country of origin, where they could rendezvous with family members. Two women were able to apply for children left in the country of origin to join them in the UK. Thus, the end of waiting facilitated plans, realised by some, to reunite with estranged family members.

To return to the question raised earlier, it would appear that the extent to which the conclusion of the asylum process brought a 'normal life' and indeed, an end to waiting, was dependent upon people's aspirations and whether or not they were achieved. Aspirations to gain status were in some cases quickly replaced by other, yet unreachable goals, or by an intensified focus on pre-existing goals. As such, it seemed that in many cases, waiting was continuous. That is, while its character and objects may have changed, life remained, in many senses, 'on hold'. This point is illustrated by the changes I observed in Asad. As shown in Chapter 2, Asad was determined to attain the right to remain, and suffered greatly in his unwillingness to give up. Yet after being granted ILR, his perspective changed. He told me that he had been 'doing nothing' for the seven years that he was an asylum applicant, and that what might be regarded by some as his achievements – "learning English, getting the indefinite, understanding the society and how is the people" – were not important to him, but merely "a part of where you live". At the time of these utterances, an attempted coup was taking place in his country of origin, and Asad was keenly following its development, communicating with political associates there and in the diaspora. He said that he was now waiting to realise his "real dream", of returning to his country to resolve the political situation and to help alleviate poverty.

Another dimension in the conclusion or continuation of the waiting period is the duration of protection. At the outset of the research, I anticipated that the contraction of protection with the introduction of LLR could lead to the protraction of uncertainty for Refugees. However, unlike Atfield *et al.* (2007), I found that the three couples I knew with LLR had taken a rather pragmatic approach; they would 'try not to think about it'. Most believed that they would be granted ILR at the expiry of their LLR, as illustrated by Karim, who told me that having LLR:

is fine, no problem. I know other people also who only have five years or three years [LLR or Humanitarian Protection]. I know that the Home Office says they will return people if the situation has changed but I don't believe the regime will change, unfortunately, and I don't believe that they will send me back. I believe that they won't return anyone who has been here for five years...my daughter now is five. By that time, she will be ten years old. They can't send her back when she has lived here for five years.

The final point I wish to reflect upon is the extent to which the perception of waiting in the asylum process was transformed once conceptualised as a thing of the past. Retrospective reflections were constructed in relation to current affairs. Manal and Asad, for example, both now saw waiting as a period in life that had not been worthwhile towards achieving (newly updated) current goals. Although I did not hear it expressed by anyone else, Mudiwa's perspective offers a noteworthy contrast. When she was finally granted ILR in September 2009, Mudiwa told me 'you know, now that I have my status, I'm glad that I didn't get it before, because I wouldn't have been ready for it'. She qualified: 'when I applied for asylum, I was alone, depressed, young, inexperienced, I didn't know anything and I had a baby. I wasn't ready to study or other anything like that'. Now, her child was approaching school age, she had close friends and a partner, and felt both knowledgeable about life in the UK and comfortable about living in Glasgow. She had been accepted into her chosen degree programme at University and was ready to begin studying. Consequently, she felt that this 'new start' to life had come at the appropriate time. Mudiwa's perception is that the possession of ILR confers upon the individual a state of 'independence', in which s/he assumes responsibility for accommodation, subsistence, and personal development. Such a perception is consistent with the application of the rites of passage framework to the asylum process, where waiting is liminality, and the granting of the Leave as aggregation.

Nevertheless, an essentially ambiguous picture emerges from this brief review. While during their waiting the asylum seekers were, for the most part, working towards incorporation, it is clear that this was not necessarily immediately delivered by the granting of LLR/ILR. In other words, incorporation was dependent on a range of processes, such as gaining employment or secure housing, which took more than a change in immigration status to acquire. What is most apparent is that while life may

resemble 'normalcy' to a far greater degree than was the case during the waiting period, rapid changes continue to occur. 'Making a life' is thus a continual, constantly evolving process; though perhaps now easier and with a new character. This indicates once more the fruitfulness of an embedded temporal approach in research with asylum seekers, and implies that further research with this particular group would enable more conclusions to be usefully drawn.

8. Conclusion

This thesis has aimed to provide an ethnographic analysis of particular subjects, settings and phenomena previously unattended in anthropological research: the lived experience of waiting among people who sought asylum in the UK during the first decade of this century and were dispersed to the city of Glasgow. It conceptualised the waiting of these people in two overlapping ways. Firstly, waiting was seen as a particular stage in the journey towards asylum and the reestablishment of ontological security and trust in others. Secondly, it was conceived as a condition emanating from immigration status and policies corresponding to that status, which produced a set of orientations in time and place. The research is intended to fill a lacuna in anthropological and refugee studies literature; while many scholars and commentators have pointed to the waiting period in the asylum process as particularly problematic, little more than a simple formulation of what it entails has been proffered. Those studies that have committed more thorough consideration to this subject have been salient yet limited in their chosen methodology and treatment of theory. In the present research, the insights gained during participant observation in a range of contexts and through the asylum seekers' narratives, have produced a fuller appreciation of the varied, and at times contradictory, experiences, reflections, and understandings of this particular kind of waiting.

In terms of its aim to explore the waiting period as a condition pertaining to a particular immigration status, this research might be regarded as offering an account of the lived experience of policy. Chapters 2 and 3 provided an examination of asylum policies and procedures, and applicants' experiences of them. Asylum policies were treated not merely as 'background information' but as 'structuring forces' that categorise, shape and order subjects (Shore & Wright 1997). The development of such policies was traced to processes of political legitimation informed by dominant discourses on asylum and immigration, rather than the will of a cohesive 'state'. Through this explication, the research contributes to literature on the effects of processes of categorising (Zetter 1991; 2007), showing the way in which similarities in experience between otherwise disparate people may be produced through legal and bureaucratic processes, and cultivated for political

purposes. By revealing the interpretations of asylum policies of the people who are subjected to them, and these people's various strategies to limit or alter the negative effects of such policies on their lives, the thesis offers an empirical substance to practical and ethical critiques of policy. Moreover, the narratives of individual asylum seekers create an alternative social reality as they challenge dominant ways of envisioning asylum seekers and the asylum process (see also Lamb 2001). It has been shown that while the cause of prolonged suffering for applicants, policies have been ultimately ineffective in their aim to deter applicants, as largely bureaucratically-induced delays led to thousands of people developing strong grounds to stay and eventually being granted ILR.

It was found that the longer the condition of waiting extended, the more consequential these structuring forces of policy were. In short durations, the halting or hindrance of certain aspects of life might be considered a minor, temporary irritation. However, as was shown in Chapter 5, as the waiting period became more protracted, the conditions imposed by asylum policies came to affect and disrupt a wider range of social and cultural processes, including transition to later phases in the life cycle (such as marriage or starting a career); and the ability to accumulate financial reserves (to repay or support relatives elsewhere, or to enable children to engage in leisure activities and pursuits). In this sense, long-term waiting of the existential kind discussed here is qualitatively very different from short-term instances of waiting, both in the asylum process and more generally. Most studies and considerations of waiting are limited to quotidian waiting events (Bissell 2007; Schwartz 1974; Schweizer 2008). As the focus here has been on neglected forms of waiting which concern the quality of life itself, this research fills a significant gap in knowledge.

It was observed that the effects of particular asylum policies converged with the condition of waiting. In Chapter 5, attention to the asylum seekers' narratives revealed that waiting was associated with a sense of passivity, constraint and lost time. It became evident that these problems were, in fact, intricately linked to particular policies, including the prohibition on work, enforced welfare, and dispersal to Glasgow. As such, the condition of waiting and conditions imposed by policy were mutually reinforcing. The thesis touched upon the way in which exclusion from

productive work in particular has consequences for spousal relations and men's self-esteem and status, due to the inability to perform gendered roles and meet familial and social expectations. It was suggested in Chapter 3 that people were waiting upon decisions made by bodies or individuals whom they believed mistrusted them, held prejudiced views towards them, and were intent on removing them. People reported feeling passive, dependent and powerless in relation to these authorities and the asylum system, particularly when unable to fully grasp or assume an assertive role in the legal process; prohibited from working; reliant on limited welfare and housed in accommodation not of their choosing; constrained in geographic mobility; and susceptible to forcible detention and deportation.

Waiting was also conceptualised as a particular kind of mental orientation. In Chapter 5 it was argued that waiting presupposes a focus on the future, but crucially, the perception of the future is characterised by an acute sense of not knowing. It was suggested that people may possess greater or lesser degrees of knowledge regarding the likelihood of certain events occurring. Herein lies the difference between hope as a positive orientation lacking evidence, trust as an expectation based on inconclusive evidence, and confidence as a conviction based on substantial evidence (Hart 1988; Lindquist 2006; Lingis in Zournazi 2002; Luhmann 1988). Waiting for asylum, unlike many of the more common forms of waiting, involved a lack of evidence, and hence it was particularly difficult to predict whether the granting of Leave, or ultimate refusal, would be realised. This absence of evidence was connected to a lack of previous experience in the asylum system, limited knowledge of the legal process once the case had entered the appeals system, and confounding or apparently arbitrary decision-making. As other studies have noted, the resultant sense of uncertainty was particularly difficult for the asylum seekers. However, unlike other researchers, I have argued that it was not uncertainty in and of itself that was problematic, but the nature of the negative modality of waiting: refusal and deportation. That is, people believed that were the negative modality realised, they would face threats to life and limb; the loss of a life that had been created; and failure in the quest into which so much had been invested. The research also found that there is a temporal dimension to not-knowing, which distinguishes this kind of waiting from many more common forms. That is, the waiting of the asylum seekers generally

lacked temporal specificity: a date or other temporally-defined unit provided for when one may expect the arrival of that which is waited for. As such, the asylum seekers faced potentially limitless waiting. Thus, in waiting, people were able to predict neither *what* would happen nor *when* it would happen.

In Chapters 4, 5 and 6 some of the ways in which the asylum seekers coped with, and made meaningful, the uncertainty which characterised their lives, were identified. Specifically, communally articulating and sharing pains, drawing on religious beliefs to interpret experiences, engaging in private prayer and social forms of worship, and pursuing activities which placed mental focus elsewhere, all helped to alleviate the suffering inherent in waiting. Various strategies were also pursued in order to enhance the sense of control over the events taking place in their lives and improve chances of success in the asylum system. Specifically, information was sought from peers, legal advisors and the staff of RCOs, and this helped to orient people to the desired object of their waiting and to plan a course of action. Threats of deportation were somewhat minimised by securing concrete protection from anti-deportation organisations and advocates involved with RCIP/RAF. Waiting could also be given instrumental value when the legacy case review arose, as waiting time could be transformed into ‘duration’, which qualified people for consideration under the legacy case review.

This thesis did not take the notion that waiting is problematic, disruptive and a source of suffering, at face value, as existing studies among asylum seekers and refugees have tended to do. Following a principle underlying refugee studies, attention was paid to people’s available agency. In other words, despite the sense of powerlessness and restriction that permeated all stages of the asylum process, it was acknowledged that people had recourse to strategies of empowerment, which they developed and honed as time passed. Waiting was thus constituted by both the absence or partiality of knowledge *and* its gradual acquisition. The asylum seekers could be regarded as agents who act in purposive ways according to the varying forms of ‘capital’ available to them, rather than as mere passive victims of persecution or policy. Paying attention to changes over time and to the social milieu within which waiting occurred was crucial to gaining such insights, and this was enabled by long-term participant observation.

This research focused on one point in people's lives and in their journeys for asylum; the point at which they were living under NASS arrangements in Glasgow, and also one period of time; the year 2007. The context of Scotland is crucial to the processes and patterns observed throughout the thesis. The demographically, economically and politically informed aim of the Scottish government was to some extent consistent with that of the asylum seekers: to secure their future existence in Scotland. This contrasted with the objectives of deterrence and 'border control' contained in national (British) asylum policies. Tensions thus arose between Holyrood and Westminster, and between the Scottish policy of facilitating integration from arrival and the national policy of supporting 'integration' of Refugees. The Scottish approach led to the creation of Ralston Community Integration Project (RCIP) and Ralston Asylum Forum (RAF), which came to be highly influential in the asylum seekers' possibilities for reconstructing social ties, accessing educational opportunities and formal support, enhancing safety, and presenting their plight in the public domain. Furthermore, their living situation, in the communal space of the flats rather than an isolated 'reception centre', enabled the asylum seekers to come into contact with a range of people. Although difficult in the early stages of dispersal, contacts with other residents tended to improve as time passed. Nevertheless, many of the asylum seekers still found it difficult and potentially threatening to live closely amongst people whose customs, behaviours and moral frameworks appeared very different to their own. This local context arising from dispersal, and the particular level of engagement of the majority of my participants with the voluntary sector, produced very different experiences than might be the case in other cities across the UK.

This thesis has been concerned with both the attainment of the legal-bureaucratic means of being able to belong, participate or remain in a particular country, and people's 'own investments of significance' in places (Jansen & Löfving 2007: 13). It has seen the two as both distinct and overlapping. In Chapter 6, the concept of 'integration', which has been employed extensively yet somewhat indiscriminately, was critiqued. It was proposed that 'incorporation' offered a more fruitful analytical approach to the processes observed. Other studies among migrants with an insecure immigration status have suggested that an extended waiting time

negatively affects the ability to 'integrate', develop a sense of belonging in the long-term, or desire to invest whole-heartedly in the place of resettlement (Chan & Loveridge 1987; Lacroix 2004). In contrast, I found that waiting did not necessarily challenge my participants' ability to resettle or to make investments in life here. The difference may be in the setting in which people wait, such as whether a refugee camp or in the host/resettlement society, as well as in the support received, resources available, and kind of hope possessed, while waiting. The research found diverging experiences among people and also across settings. Most people, particularly those waiting for many years, appeared to have made manifold material and emotional investments of significance in the UK. They were also engaged in a struggle towards formal emplacement, and utilised the public narrative of integration, which referred to normative, sedentarist notions of national belonging and rootedness, in this struggle. Others felt more ambivalent, even bitter, about their experiences in the UK, and did not necessarily intend to stay indefinitely but nevertheless held the immediate goal of obtaining ILR. A few intended to return to the country of origin as soon as it was safe to do so. All continued to exercise relationships and connections with people, politics and information from and in the country of origin.

The related concept of return or repatriation was considered in Chapter 6. In contrast to the persistent and dominant assumption that return is both preferable and desired by forced migrants, my participants expressed an overwhelming reluctance to return. Various reasons for this reluctance were observed, such as serious fears for their lives or freedom, or dire prospects in terms of livelihoods and daily sustenance for themselves and their families still living in the country of origin. For others, it was more a matter of the gradual investments that had been made in life in the UK. After having invested so much time and energy in their battles, people like Mohammed could not contend with 'giving up'. I would suggest that the duration of waiting had a cumulative effect in terms of people's commitment to that for which they waited. That is, the longer people were waiting, the more they became invested in their waiting; the object that was longed for became all the more potent, invested with more symbolic value. Thus, by the time I encountered them, despite the many setbacks in the asylum process, people were unwilling to give up their struggle for asylum. Hope was important in keeping people invested in 'the game'.

Consequently, people's desire or refusal to return cannot be understood without also examining the ongoing political and economic situation in country of origin, relations with compatriots prior to flight, relations with the population of the host society, incentives or coercions to leave or stay, family structure, position in the life course, hopes and aspirations, *and* the duration of waiting. Not only did ideas about return vary significantly between people but these were unstable and shifted over time.

Waiting as an orientation was seen to be concerned with desire, anticipation and imagination. The experience of waiting derives from a degree of wanting or caring about something, and hence it enables people to identify their needs (Vanstone 1982). This is obvious in the sense that many people were all too aware of their need for protection. In another sense, however, it may be seen that the temporary sojourn of waiting gives people pause to reflect on what the right to remain, or protection, represents; to dwell more deeply on what it is that they are waiting for. It was shown that the obvious ultimate object of people's waiting – the granting of status – carried a symbolic element. At the time of the fieldwork, many of my participants imagined that the granting of the right to remain would be congruous with the ability to begin a 'normal life' – of freedom, opportunity, safety and security. Waiting was thus about both imagining that normal life in the future, and working towards realising it by building as stable a life as possible in the present and attempting to secure a positive outcome in one's case. Consequently, the question of whether anticipations were realised becomes relevant. During the few months after people were granted ILR, it was hard to tell whether they believed that that 'normal life' had been grasped. That is, people were still in a state of transition – moving elsewhere, trying to attain jobs, waiting for or working towards the situation in the country of origin changing – still struggling in many ways as they were before.

It would be valuable to conduct a follow-up study of the same subjects' changing circumstances, aspirations and recollections of the period of waiting and its influence on the present. In other words it would be fruitful to consider: what is the lifeline of waiting? How long does it have a structuring effect, and according to what kinds of factors? Is it significant at all in the long-term? Of course, there would be limitations in such a study given the different paths taken by my participants. Today

RCIP/RAF has a very different client makeup, as many people have moved away from the area or chosen to no longer attend the projects. In November 2009, the Secretary of State for the Home Department stated in response to a parliamentary request that “good progress” had been made by the UKBA in the legacy case review, with over 220,000 cases concluded at the end of September 2009 (House of Commons 2009). As these cases are resolved, it appears that NAM will develop its own backlog. As such, the questions addressed in this research will remain pertinent. A useful comparison could be made in future research of various regions within the UK, various connections to formal support, and various degrees of participation in national-based communities, and so on.

Finally, this thesis has made possible an understanding of the duality of waiting. That is, although associated with a sense of stagnation as in the traditional formulation of waiting, people’s lives were nevertheless filled with highly productive activities, such as learning English, studying courses at college, reproducing and caring for families, contributing to political struggles in the country of origin, lobbying the British government, attempting to change service delivery and public opinion, and working on asylum cases. It is to emphasise the fact that long-term waiting is about *doing* that the chapter headings are primarily verb forms. For some people, it was the insecurity of immigration status that provided the impetus for involvement in a number of these activities. While displacement involved loss of people, places, capital and material possessions in both time and space, it also involved the active regeneration of learning the norms, customs and language of a new society, selectively adapting and maintaining continuity. While an extremely painful, challenging and traumatising stage in the asylum process and in life, in accordance with the liminal phase in the rites of passage, waiting among asylum seekers in Glasgow may thus also be regarded to some extent as a transformative and preparatory period.

Appendix 1.

A brief history of UK immigration legislation and policy: 1905-1990

The *Aliens Act 1905* was the first piece of modern immigration legislation instituted in the UK, and thus the first permanent control on the movement of people into the country (Shah 2000: 10). The Act provided that immigration officers could refuse leave to land to immigrants who appeared to be undesirable. Refugees were required to show that they were seeking admission solely to avoid persecution or punishment on religious or political grounds (*ibid.*: 35). The *1914 Act* was passed at the outbreak of World War I to restrict the stay and mobility of Aliens, require their registration with authorities, and increase the powers of authorities to arrest, search and detain. By the 1930s the idea of state sovereignty had become conflated with the right to exclude those seeking asylum in Britain (*ibid.*: 43-46). Nevertheless, during the Second World War, Poles, Eastern Europeans, Belgians and French, many of whom were Jews fleeing persecution, were accepted in Britain, and 80-90,000 displaced persons were recruited from camps in the British zones of Austria and Germany (Cohen 2004: 75).

The mass displacement and devastation produced by World War II provided the impetus to develop binding international standards for the rights of refugees and the obligations of states to them. At the end of 1950, The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was established by the United Nations General Assembly. The following year, the *1951 International Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* was drafted. The Convention was limited in scope to those individuals who had become refugees as a result of events occurring prior to 1 January 1951. The UK ratified the Convention in 1954 but it was not until 1993 that legislation was passed to anchor it in domestic law (Schuster 2003: 134).

Debilitated by debt and destruction, reliant on obsolete Victorian infrastructure and facing labour shortages, Britain turned to immigrants from Poland, Italy, Ireland and the Caribbean to supply labour for post-war reconstruction efforts (Robinson 2003: 102-3; Shuster 2003: 135). Concurrently, various British territories began claiming independence. The introduction of *The British Nationality Act 1948*

clarified British subject status as that acquired by possessing citizenship in independent Commonwealth countries or in the UK and colonies (Shah 2000: 72). The government supported the emigration of around 760,000 Britons to Commonwealth countries between 1946 and 1951 to 'keep the Empire British' (Joppke 1999: 106), and attempted to reconcile Commonwealth and colonial interests by using extra-legal controls, such as limiting the issue of passports, on immigration from the Indian Subcontinent (Shah 2000: 74-5).

As Joppke (1999) notes, when the subjects of empire began to act on their right to settle in Britain, they unexpectedly reversed the direction of four centuries of colonial settlement. Immigration was now designed to prevent "the outer reaches of empire from moving toward the centre" (Joppke 1999: 101). *The 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act* placed all Commonwealth citizens, except those born in the UK or Ireland, under immigration control (Shah 2000: 75). After increasing immigration of East African Asians, it was updated in 1968 to remove the right to travel freely to the UK of citizens of the Commonwealth and colonies who themselves were not – or whose parents or grandparents had not been – born, adopted, registered or naturalised in the UK. By narrowing membership through the institution of national citizenship, the UK deflected potentially massive post-imperial immigration from Malaysia, Singapore, South Yemen, the Caribbean and East Africa (Shah 2000: 81). The manipulation of membership became intricately tied up with immigration control (Joppke 1999: 11). Many Britons began to react negatively to high concentrations of West Indians and Asians living in the impoverished inner quarters of British cities, believing that this hindered 'assimilation', caused 'social problems' and threatened British national identity (Robinson 2003: 105). The issue of race, and specifically racial tension, would be a recurring theme in immigration debates during the next decades.

It was also during the 1960s that the need to strengthen the Refugee Convention in order to protect new exiles from Europe, Africa and Asia, became evident. In 1967 the U.N. General Assembly adopted the *Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, which removed the earlier 1951 deadline. The Convention specifies that those recognised as Refugees become subject to the laws of the country of refuge (Article 12) and should enjoy similar rights to those pertaining to other

aliens (Articles 7-30, 34). Signatories commit to the principle of non-refoulement; to not return anyone to a territory where his/her life or freedom would be threatened for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion (Article 33). In Britain, immigration rules carried specific provisions on asylum from the early 1970s. Little information regarding practices for assessing asylum applications at the time is available, but it is clear that the Home Office was responsible for processing claims, and those recognised as Refugees were granted admission of one year at a time, convertible into Indefinite Leave to Remain after four years of residence (Shah 2000: 106-109).

The Conservative Party was elected in 1970 with a policy manifesto containing strict controls on immigration as a necessary foundation for successful race relations. According to Spencer (1998) this stemmed from the widespread assumption that hostility among white Britons towards ethnic minorities would be exacerbated if they were to believe that immigration was not effectively controlled. Accordingly, the *1971 Immigration Act* extended “the exclusionary tendencies against non-white British nationals...through the new formula of ‘patriality’” (Shah 2000: 89), whereby a British passport holder born overseas could only settle in Britain if they held a work permit and could prove that a parent or grandparent had been born in the UK (Cohen 1994: 49; Shah 2000: 89).

Throughout the 1970s, the two major parties’ reactions to refugee issues were largely determined by the refugees’ geographic location and political circumstances (Kaye 1994: 147). Granting refuge to those fleeing from Communist countries was a means of de-legitimising those governments and the political ideologies upon which they were founded. Programmes to accept large groups of refugees, including around 10,000 Vietnamese in Hong Kong (then British Crown territory); 28,000 Asian Ugandans fleeing Idi Amin; and approximately 3,000 Chileans fleeing the Pinochet regime (Cohen 2004: 76; Pirouet 2001; Schuster 2003: 141), were organised by both Labour and Conservative governments.

The Conservative Party returned to office in 1979 and introduced immigration legislation, responding to fears about excessive immigration, in nine of the following eighteen years. This era marked the relocation of refugee issues from the public agenda, where an issue is of public interest and regarded as needing

specific attention, to the institutional agenda, where it is under active discussion within political institutions with a view to constructing policies (Kaye 1994: 149). As Kaye notes, refugee and asylum issues could not avoid “being ‘contaminated’ by the atmosphere in which immigration and race relations were being discussed” (*ibid.*: 148). In 1986, the *Immigration (Carriers’ Liability) Act 1987* was passed, which imposed fines on airlines carrying passengers without the correct documents, compelling airline staff to adopt the role of immigration officers. Humanitarian agencies were concerned that this challenged the UK’s commitment to the Refugee Convention by preventing people from seeking protection (Pirouet 2001).

Kaye notes that the Labour party’s criticism of Conservative policy centred on the accusation of developing racist policies and breaking the long tradition of giving sanctuary to refugees (Kaye 1994: 151-153). The Conservatives defended such criticisms by attributing racial attacks on refugees in other European countries to lack of control over influxes, and arguing that tight immigration controls were essential to prevent similar occurrences in the UK. Neither side was therefore able to escape an entrenched deliberation on ‘race relations’ (*ibid.*: 154).

An increase in the number of people applying for asylum from 1988 to 1989 was followed by actions designed to curtail refugee migration (Kaye 1994: 150). Despite Labour opposition, visas were introduced for Sri Lankan Tamils in 1985; the subjects of several Commonwealth countries in 1986; and Turkish nationals in 1989 (Kaye 1994: 151; Schuster 2003: 144; Shah 2000: 165-6). There was also a tendency to use detention, deportation and the courts to restrict asylum claims (Pirouet 2001: 22). The conflation of ‘the refugee’ and ‘the economic migrant’ became a keystone of immigration discourse. In a speech in 1989, the Home Secretary asserted that “obligations to those fleeing political persecution do not give automatic right of entry to those who understandably want to migrate from a poor or troubled country to a richer and more peaceful one” (*1989 Conservative Campaign Guide* in Kaye 1994: 150). Similarly, now that primary migration had been stopped, the ‘bogus presumption’ was applied to secondary migrants⁵⁰, who were presumed to be trying to pass as entitled family members of settled migrants (Joppke 1999: 115). Under

⁵⁰ ‘Secondary migrants’ refers to those applying for entry on the grounds of family reunion or marriage.

this presumption, the need to detect evasion outweighs the interests of genuine applicants (*ibid.*).

This review demonstrates that in the earlier part of the 20th century, British immigration policy was largely shaped by the devolution of empire. Although limited, such policy was fundamentally aimed at managing the entry and settlement of subjects of former colonies, and tied to questions of ‘race’ and ‘community cohesion’.

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