



Seeking
& Access

Seeking Access

by

Aine McAllister

with

Waleed Ali Zuoriki

Havva Nur Bektas

Kona Katembwe

Moutasem Alibraheem

“

Voice-the capacity to make oneself understood in one's own terms, to produce meanings under conditions of empowerment. And in the present world, such conditions are wanting for more and more people.

”

(Blommaert, 2006)

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Declaration

These ‘participant voiced poems’ (Prendergast 2009) are an act of resistance. They resist the normative expectations (within institutions such as universities) of how stories should be organised and how language should be used in order for a meaningful ‘listening’ to occur. These expectations have ‘the tendency to freeze conditions for voice: unless you speak or write in this particular way, you won’t be heard’ (Blommaert, 2008:5).

The principal vehicle for this resistance is applied ethnopoetic analysis. This technique, developed by Jan Blommaert in the field of linguistic ethnography is especially productive in dialogic situations where systems of meaning making meet (Van Der Aa, 2021). Professor Blommaert drew on the ethnopoetic approach to textual analysis of Dell Hymes whose work was aimed at the reconstruction of silenced voices – in an act that liberates them. (Hymes, 2003:11 in Blommaert, 2009: 271).

Maynard and Cahnmann discuss a continuum on which they place poetic ethnography, ethnopoetics and ethnographic poetry and they define their work as being concerned with the first and third category; “where ethnography meets poetry on the page, infusing anthropological scholarship with the spirit of creative connection” (2010:5). These poems are also situated on that continuum-between ethnopoetics and ethnographic poetry. They are the result of a process by which, through critical poetic inquiry, applied ethnopoetic analysis of dialogic exchanges has been drawn upon to lead to the researcher’s poetic representation of the participants’ voices.

These poems are intended to amplify the voices of the participants, Waleed, Havva, Kona and Moutasem. The poems reflect *their* insights, experiences and truths. The arrangement of their narratives is informed by ethnopoetic conventions which uncover a sophisticated and often lyrical and emotive deployment of language; nothing has been added, their narratives have not been re-ordered. Space on the page has been used and very few words have been removed to sharpen the focus of the poetic lens used to create the poetic representations of the participants’ testimonies of seeking access to Higher Education as refugees and asylum seekers.

While the arrangement of these narratives is determined by an applied ethnopoetic analysis and poetic rendering it is important to note however, that the participants themselves critically constructed the narratives to be analysed. In order to facilitate this process participants created photographic images which reflect their experiences of seeking access to Higher Education and those images determined the content of the conversations. The subsequent analysis and arrangement have served to reveal the poetics already inherent in the structure and content of the participants' constructed narratives.

It follows then that these participant-voiced poems are jointly owned. By virtue of their participation Waleed, Havva, Kona and Moutasem have a right not only to be acknowledged but to claim joint ownership of this outcome. The participants' claim to ownership and the collaborative nature of the process through which these poems have been created is exemplified by Moutasem's statement that representations pertaining to his narrative are an 'explanation of the picture' that he created and that he drew on in conversation, albeit rendered on the page in poetic form. The poems are given space here to speak without additional commentary.

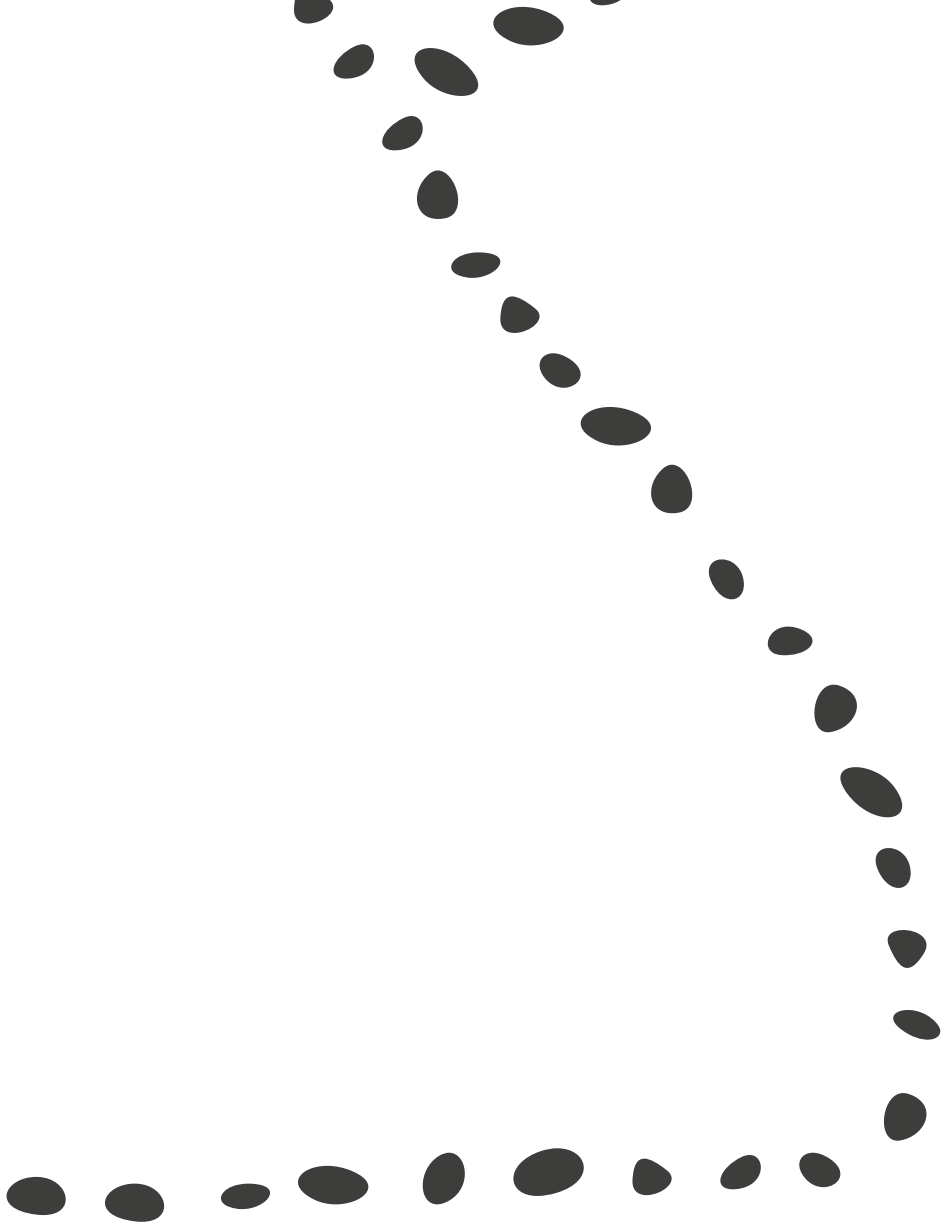
Foreword

In this short pamphlet, Aine McAllister has brought together a fantastic collection of so-called participant-voiced poems. In its entirety, the collection brings about another layer to what Jan Blommaert has called ‘applied ethnopoetics’: voices from places where different systems of meaning-making meet (Blommaert 2006). As the poems follow certain ethnopoetic re-renderings and guidelines, we see at work a restorative philology (Hymes 1996) that brings forth an originality to the words as they were spoken by participants.

From its early Hymesian inception in the late 1970s of putting Boasian prose into meaningful voiced poetry to its recent applications in asylum procedures and social work; ethnopoetic scholarship has flourished and brought to the table indexically pregnant voices rendered obscure by capitalist society obsessed with statistics and quick results.

It is therefore with great pleasure that I introduce magnificent addition to ethnopoetic practice, in its dialogicity, in its splendour, in all its meaning-making properties. The floor is open.

Dr. J. van der Aa (Jenny) - Senior Researcher (Post-doc BAP)
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KU Leuven







Waleed Ali Zuoriki

I **The Rearview Mirror**

The reflection on view
 on the highway
this is exactly my first stage
 in the UK
 the most critical period
 in my life.

Suddenly I found myself
 with an unknown future
 unknown long way
 unknown end.

I don't know
 where I'm going
I don't know
 what the future could be
I don't know
 what to I have to to do.

II Refugees Deserve Better

During the demonstration
and protests here in London
calling for
the rights for refugees
after some policies, new policies
to deport asylum seekers
outside the UK.

I feel myself "Oh my God"
I'm facing another critical situation
that might deport me

so it was another challenge
another struggling
and obstacles in my way
to higher education
and to the to the stability.

To seeking
for peaceful, peaceful heaven.

Refugees deserve better.

III I'm Standing Amongst the People

Last year, when I started volunteering
it's the time of integration
it's the time when I feel
I have to integrate positively
to the community and the society.
I have to be a good man here
I have to contribute positively
to the people living in the UK.
Either British or non British
since I'm here

this was one of the big challenges.
To the same way to the Higher Education
To the same way to the stability.

The integration was very very important to me:

I'm standing amongst the people
waiting for the train.

I have to be a very integrated guy
to be there.

IV Interpreting Hope

There are five candles.

The first candle is my wife
the second candle is my elder son
then the third one is my daughter
then my other son and my other daughter.

Those are my family
and I just inspiring hopes
and strength from them.

"So proud of you"
this is one of my close friends here
who I worked with her
in volunteer work in London.

All this together is interpreting the hope
interpreting the that, I, the give me
the strength

to face all the challenges I have here

to continue my work until the end
to not give up.

V Continuing Self Learning

I started searching for opportunities
to access Higher Education.

I was searching and searching
and continuing self learning.

I will not stop learning.

Because I was learning before

then I stopped for a while
then I think if I continued
to stop learning
then it would not be good for my future
for myself.

I decided to continue self-learning
through some websites
downloading some courses online
before applying to some institutes here in the UK
and at the same time
exploring all the opportunities
surrounding me.

But, of course in a very small, tiny room
shared with another roommate
it's a refugee's room.

As you see
there is no table
there's nothing
only bed and chair

and just I'm putting my laptop
which I brought over

with me, the old one

on my pillow.

VI Yellow Sticky Papers

Finally I get the right access
to the Higher Education journey.

Also, this was one of the challenges.
I thought this was the end of challenges
but it was also another big challenge.

How to integrate into academic life?

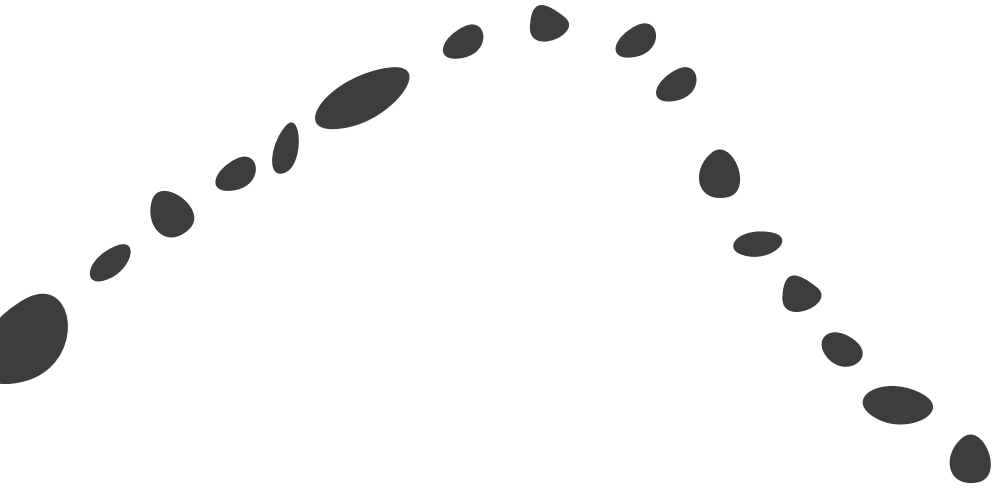
To the new UK education system
all over all
it was new for me
the way of the lectures
the online lectures and study methods

it was a big challenge
explaining now how I will suffer

in this period
to just
to not give up
to continue
to the end, my studies.

The yellow sticky papers here and there, the notebook, the espresso coffee:
that is not giving up.

Just go ahead
continue the way to the end.





Havva Nur Bektas

II My Offer

And then apart from this
for now I have three kids
and one of them is just one years old.

Even though I try to do I get offer from my university
it will be like my baby
is taking the first place
so I cannot attend my offer
my university.

the baby is there and two kids
who are older than them, my son and my daughter.

They bring other responsibilities
as a mom, you have
have to take care of them also.

As a woman, housework
the cleaning
and then washing the line of the clothes
especially the drying of the clothes
is the biggest part
(laughs) that you cannot dry them.

III Time Time Time

When I draw the heart
which is broken
which is crying [laughs]
it is coming from my home country
that I miss
that I haven't been there
for now six years now, six years
and all my relatives are there.

Psychological wellbeing is also affected
how they say, your motivation
to do new things
to be in a new beginning
if your mind is, tell me, busy
if your psychology is not okay
if my psychology is not okay
I cannot concentrate, I don't feel motivated.

We can have talk, say
FaceTime talk is anytime
whenever we want with my parents
but still I cannot neglect that I miss them
and it is affecting.

When I see the people that
grandpa and the grandson
is walking together in the street
I'm saying "*why not my children also?*"
This opportunity. [sighs]

Let's see, we don't know

But, for now, this part I'm trying to just neglect
to be able to concentrate to a new life here.

I'm just saying with my family
we are all here
we are together
this is a good sign.
And my husband is also here
he supported me
when I wanted to do something
in terms of my education.
So let's see *[sighs]*

time, time, time *[laughs]*
is the biggest need
the most needed for me.
Tell me. To be able to do all of these things.

IV The English Thing

I have written my English thing.

I can speak English.

I have worked
in an English-speaking country before coming here.

But still, the need of proving
that you have this level
of English as a teacher
even though I was able to do it
before coming here
this is also another stressful part for me.

I don't mean
they should not ask
but the experience
should be taken into consideration:
what I have done.

I'm not coming from a place
that I didn't work in any area
so the regulations with
the English part
is also challenging for now for me.



V Get into Teaching

Knowledge is the part I have mentioned
yes, there are opportunities
very great opportunities
in here
in the UK
in this country.

It's a great country
but how to find these informations
how to reach
how to make use of
these opportunities
it's a bit how do you say, challenging.

I contacted with tell me to get into teaching
tell giving advertisements
on the websites
on the Instagram, Facebook
for those who want to teach here.

You can apply there
they help you.

Even when I apply there,
I said I am an asylum seeker
I want to be a teacher.

They too, they don't have too much of the information.

I have to go over with the government's website
that if you want to be a teacher in UK
what are the requirements that you should have.

That knowledge part was a question mark
until we get in our "ReConnect to Higher Education"
when we met the people
those who have achieved that
attending Higher Education
while they are asylum seeker.

That is also bringing me the hope
that I can also
do also something.

Even though mm timing.
The time for
because the application is about to end.

Still I want to see my chances by applying.
Do I have a chance
to get to
to be offered any university in teaching education
teacher's education?

We will see *[sigh]*

I don't know.

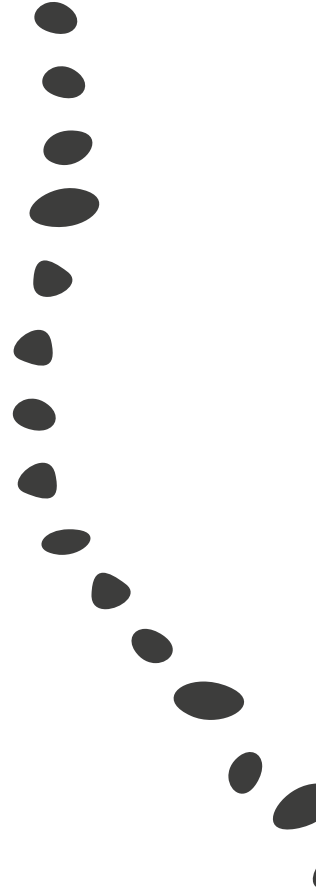
Mm, but I don't feel hopeless
like how I feel before

because like I said, the common sense:
before holding a refugee status
you can't do anything
in terms of Higher Education
in terms of being an official teacher.

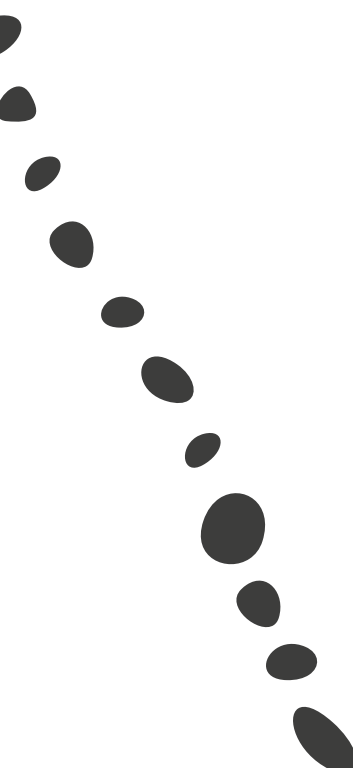
But now mm I want to get the place
from a university for PGCE
it will bring my self-confidence
on this issue again.

If not this year,
why not next year?

these are the things I can try *[sighs]*
I can tell for now.



Kona Katembwe



II The Potential in Me

I was doing English for Speakers of other Languages
the advisor I met there
saw the potential in me.

He advised me
advanced English
English for academic purposes.

He helped me
to apply for different courses.

I had to study
English at that level.

He helped me
to go on to a BTEC course
at a higher level
instead of doing it for two years
starting in the first year.

The BTEC was a Higher National Certificate -
it's usually for people who are working
I wasn't working at that time
but I had permission to work.

III Some People

Second year of a HNC

I found it quite ok.

The theory was alright.

The practical side was a bit difficult for me

because of the practical lessons in the lab.

All the equipment

that we had to use

I'd never seen them before in my life.

It was a quite a new experience

but my colleagues in the class -

they work

they study in the UK.

It was easier for them.

Some people

were helpful

others

were horrible

as usual.

IV Then I was Stuck

then I finished that

then I had to move on
to a degree course

but I couldn't do it straight away
because of some of the requirements
and to get funding and so on

then I waited another year

then I joined the degree course
in the second year as well
that was chemistry
and I managed to complete that

but after finishing completing the course
I couldn't find a job
I was stuck again
after spending three, four years- *[laughs]*
four years studying English

then HNC

then the degree course
I couldn't move on
I was stuck.

V The Odyssey

I thought I wasn't confident enough
to go for jobs.
I couldn't find jobs
lot of things even came up
when I was looking for work.

First I didn't know how to look for work
proper job or work
in the UK
so until I found out
I found out later on
because then
I had to do other courses
to help other people
advice work and so on, community work, interpreting work
then I learn about the mistakes
that I was doing.

But on the other hand I believe
the system wasn't helping me much
because I had a few job interviews
in high profile places
but *[sighs]* I find sometimes
that people didn't really care
they didn't really empathise
wherever you come from
whatever your circumstances
for them it was about the job.

Being asked personal questions
about marital status:
if I was married to a British woman
or a white woman.

So all this feeling
it was a bit hurting

I decided

I want to do teaching,
because I couldn't use my degree
as in the subject chemistry.

I couldn't do the PGCE for secondary school,

I did not have the GCSEs the English and maths
so I thought I would do the further education one.

I was on the ReConnect Programme

for some reason I couldn't finish the programme
first because I had other duties
I had a job
I had family commitments
financial commitments.

The desire still

to use my chemistry knowledge
is still there.

I decided

I wanted to do the PGCE secondary
so I engaged onto doing evening courses in GCSEs.

I've started with maths
which I passed with an A
and then at the next year
following year

I did GCSE English
English language.

so I thought I'm ready

and I join the programme
the ReConnect Programme again
thinking that this time I'm ready
I'm going to apply for it.

V The Odyssey

and then we we had the pandemic, COVID-19
everything was suspended.

I was relying very much
on the the PGCE Further Education
the course was suspended:

I started looking at some places
and all became difficult and complicated.

It's all been about studying,
going through different hurdles
and overcoming them
and every time I have to do something
I have to go and study

in my area
really of expertise
which is science and chemistry.

I studied it even in this country
but still
still haven't used it

I would say
I've never used chemistry.

All these years,
all this passion
that I had for chemistry, for science [3.0]

it never materialised

never put it in practice.

but at least I'd like to do something
to make sure I pass on the knowledge
that I have of of of
science, maths, physics, and chemistry.

Pass it to the younger generation
if even I can help
I could help one, two young people
to understand science
that would be great achievement for me
that would make me happy
but I wouldn't give up.

I know that even
that I don't have much
how would I put it
I'm not in in life
I'm not at that stage where
I should be looking
for for for
newly qualified teachers posts and so on
I should be at senior posts
or middle management
I still want to do it.

Even if I have uh two years or three years left to work *[laughs]*

I will still do it.

To be able to encourage someone.
To help someone do homework.
To help someone pass exams, to understand science.

V **The Odyssey**

I have have membership
 a CDI membership for careers advice.

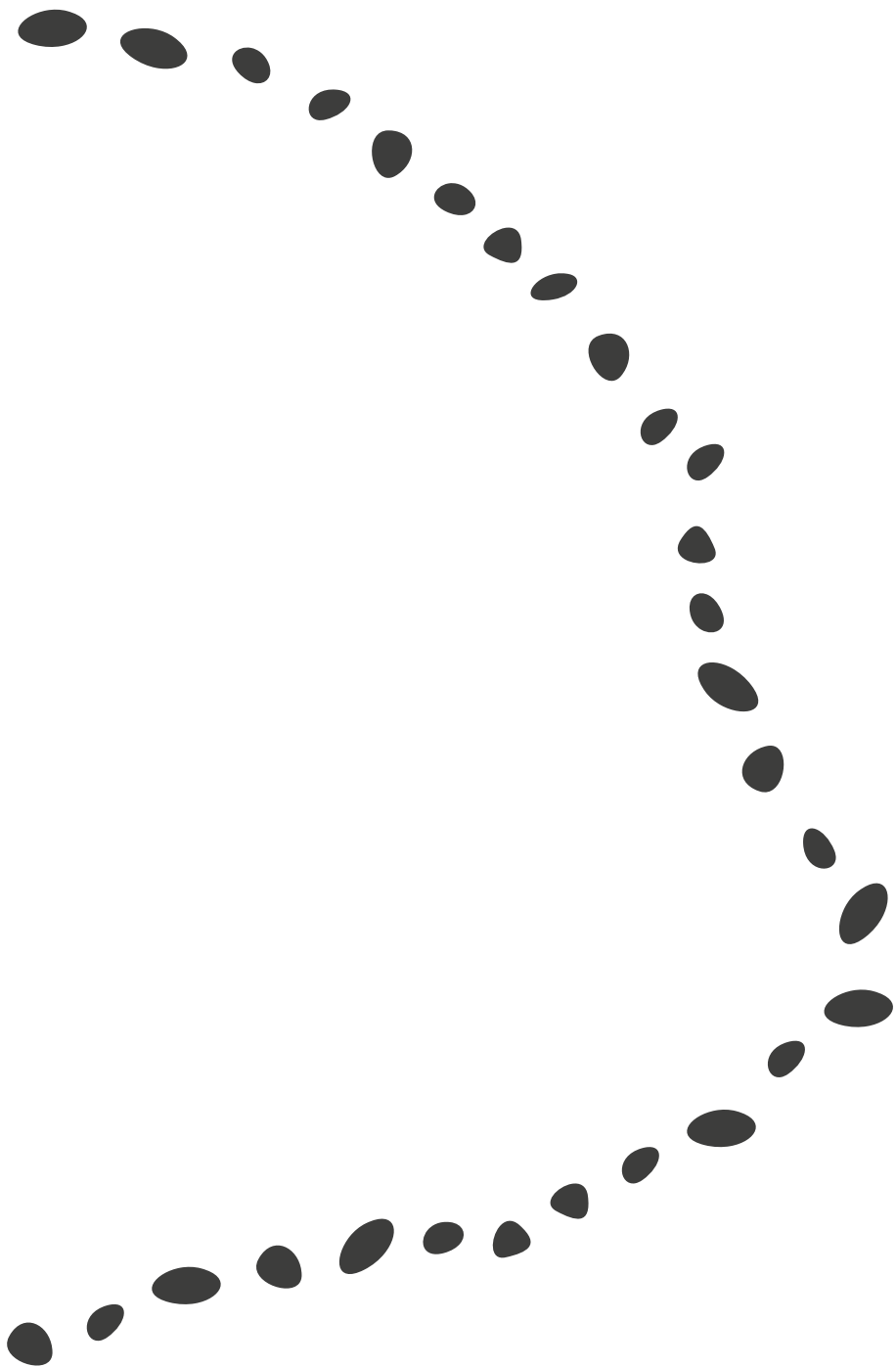
I have a BTEC that's in chemistry.

I have a degree
 plus other qualifications
 GCSEs you name them
 NVQs and so on.

So my life in the UK's been about qualification, qualification.

 but maybe jobwise I still
 I'm still not satisfied

 until I go and use my chemistry.





Moutasem Alibraheem



II **This Notebook**

And, sometimes, the language is the reason.

I have been here
 for about one year and ten months.

I searched a lot
 but without any result.
 This notebook
 represents the result
 that I achieved
 on a paper
 that is still white

there are only my dreams on it.

III All my Certificates

When I was needed to go
to the university here
all the universities asked me
I need all the certificates
all the documents

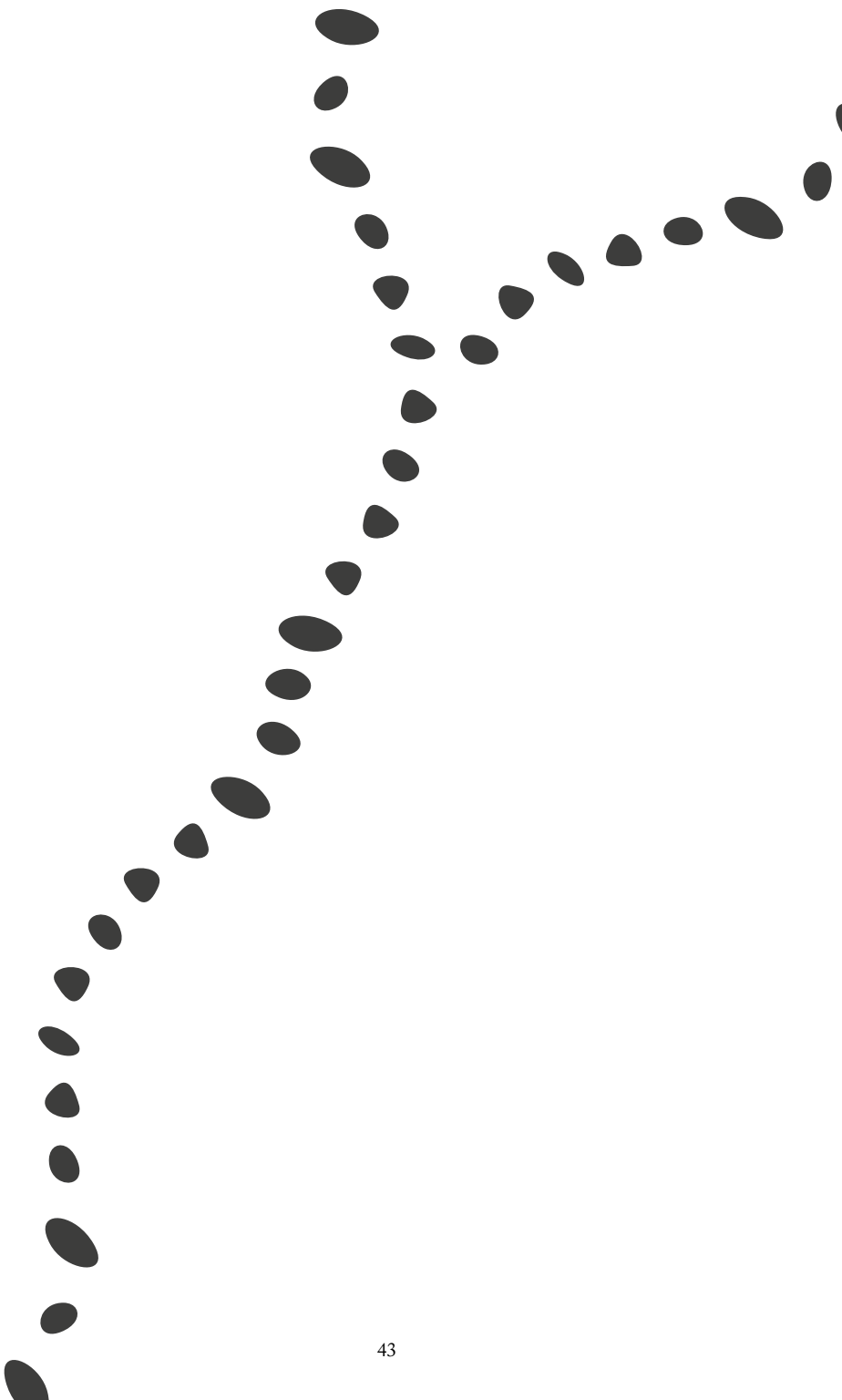
but when I give him my certificate
documents
they told me
they hold me
you need to start over
one year, two year, three year

But when I was living in my country
my university
I was studying for three years and one half.

I need only one half
to finish all my study.

But here in the UK
when I contact with the university
they told me no
you need to start
one year, two year, three year
that's very, very difficult.

And maybe take for me many years.



Acknowledgments

My profound gratitude is for Waleed, Havva, Kona and Moutasem for lending their accomplished voices to my work. As I wrote in the declaration at the beginning of this pamphlet, the poems reflect their insights, experiences and truths. Whatever is to be learned from this work about the experience of refugees and asylum seekers, seeking access to Higher Education and the challenges they face - is to be learned from them. Whatever is to be learned, is possible because of their generosity of spirit and their wisdom.

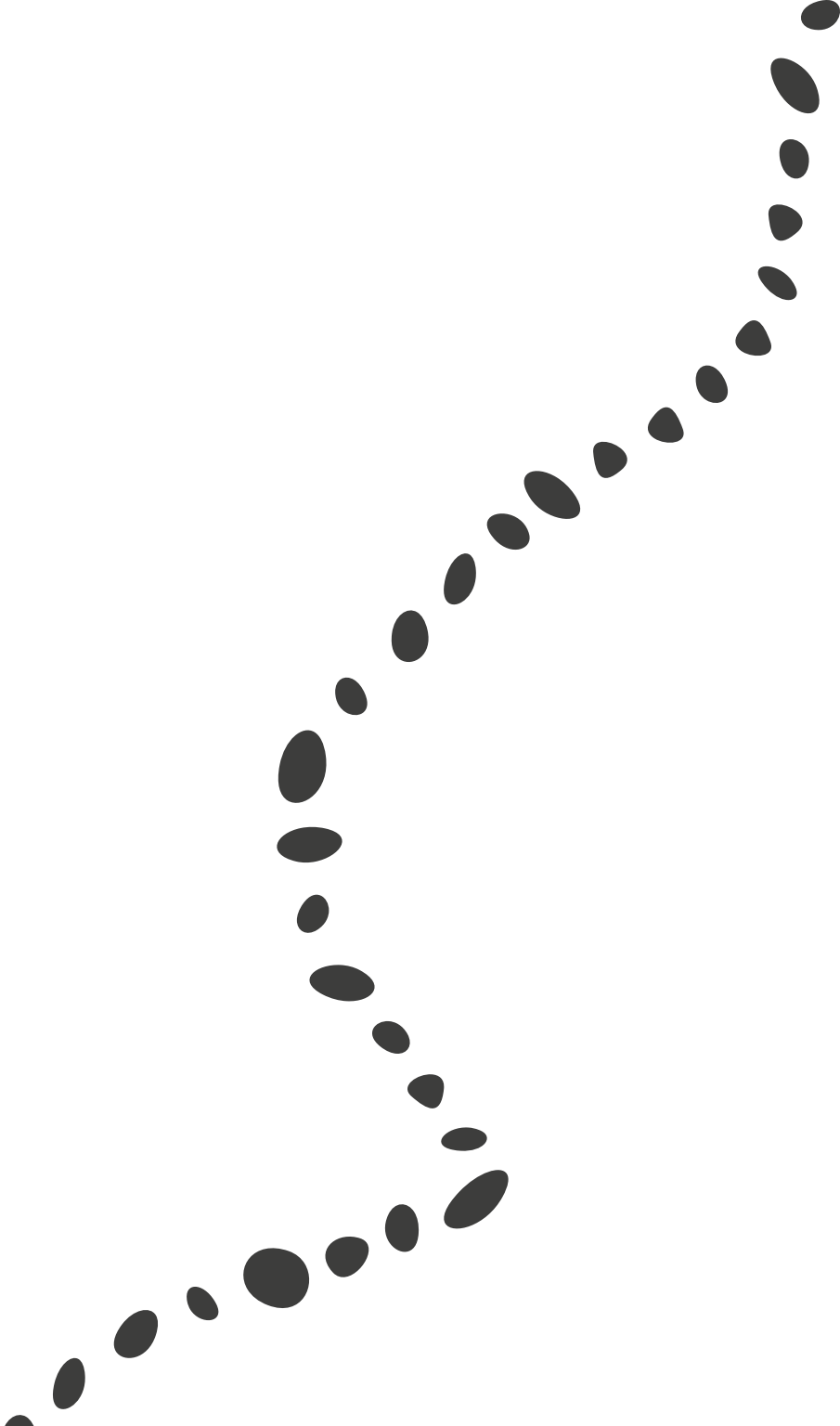
My warmest thanks to Professor Jeff Bezemer, Head of Department for 'Culture, Communication and Media' at UCL Institute of Education, who awarded the seed funding which allowed me to carry out this poetic inquiry research and create these participant voiced poems. My thanks also Dr Mina Vasalou and Dr Andrea Revesz, who along with Professor Bezemer reviewed my application favourably. Enormous thanks also to Professor Lesley Gourlay for her mentorship and generous guidance in writing the application for funding.

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My heartfelt thanks also to Dr Jenny Van Der Aa, Senior Researcher at the University of Leuven, a long-term collaborator of Professor Jan Blommaert for entering kindly and openly into dialogue with me to share her invaluable knowledge of 'practical ethnopoetics'.

I would also like to thank Dr John Yandell for his feedback and guidance as I develop my wider research around dialogic pedagogy and poetry as means to amplify the voice of refugees and asylum seekers, seeking home in the context of the hostile environment.

I would also like to thank Dr Nicole Brown for her friendship, mentorship and advice as I navigate this privileged and rewarding journey in which I attempt to merge pedagogy, dialogue and poetic inquiry to achieve the social justice aims of my research.





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