

**The social networks of unaccompanied asylum
seeking young people in the transition to
adulthood**

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Abstract

The number of children seeking asylum alone in the UK and across Europe is increasing. Previous research has focused on the support unaccompanied children receive within children's services, and highlighted their vulnerability and isolation. Limited research exists that considers their transition to adulthood, at which time the process of leaving local authority care may coincide with a need to re-engage with the immigration system in an attempt to achieve the right to remain in the UK permanently. This thesis therefore focuses on unaccompanied young people as they transition to adulthood. Focusing holistically on the social networks of the young people, this study is concerned with understanding the process of transition and its impact on the social worlds of the young people. Taking the life-course approach as its conceptual framework, issues of time, space, structure and agency are emphasised.

Based on interviews with both unaccompanied young people and professionals (accessed through statutory and voluntary services in one large urban local authority in the north of England) the findings suggest that unaccompanied young people's social networks are active, complex and diverse, yet may be negatively impacted by uncertain and temporary immigration statuses. The findings illuminate previously unexplored aspects of unaccompanied young people's social networks, including their continued embeddedness in multi-sited family networks. The findings also challenge current constructions of unaccompanied young people as vulnerable recipients of support, and repositions them as young people who provide care and support to others as they begin to develop adult identities.

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This thesis is the sole work of the author and has not been submitted for examination at this or another institution for another award. All sources are acknowledged as references.

PART ONE

Introduction, Literature Review and Methodology

Chapter One

Introduction

1.0 The imperative to research transition to adulthood for unaccompanied young people

The numbers of children seeking asylum alone without a parent or guardian (known as unaccompanied children) have recently increased across a number of European countries, including the UK, as the much-debated 'refugee crisis' in Europe continues (Vervliet et al. 2015; Söderqvist et al. 2014; Refugee Council 2016; Holmes & Castaneda 2016). In tandem with this rise, academic interest in this group of children has steadily grown across the continent (Engebrigtsen 2003; Derulyn & Broekaert 2005; Diop 2009; Chase & Allsopp 2013; Söderqvist et al 2014). Whilst contrasts are apparent between the reception arrangements and policy frameworks governing unaccompanied children within different European countries, concerns have emerged that many of the policy frameworks currently in place fail to meet the needs of unaccompanied young people as they transition to adulthood (Chase & Allsopp 2013). Compounding this concern is a European-wide lack of research knowledge that explicitly addresses the transition to adulthood for unaccompanied young people (Wade 2011; Söderqvist 2014).

In the UK context, once they become known to the authorities, unaccompanied children will have their asylum claims assessed and be referred to the local authority Children's Social Care department, which is obligated to assess and meet their financial, accommodation, health, educational and broader needs (Wade et al. 2005; Wade et al. 2012). Whilst some children's claims for asylum will be accepted or refused outright, the majority will receive a grant of temporary leave to remain in the UK until they are seventeen, at which point they must apply for an extension of their leave to remain in the UK or make a fresh asylum claim in the hope of achieving a more permanent immigration status (Refugee Council 2016). Similar systems of offering time-limited, temporary protection until the transition to adulthood are evident throughout Europe (Chase & Allsopp 2013).

A corpus of research has emerged over the past fifteen years which has offered considerable insight into the experiences of these children including their migration journeys (Hopkins & Hill 2008; Crawley 2010a), psychosocial well-being (Broad & Robbins 2005; Chase et al. 2008; Chase 2013), resettlement needs (Wade et al. 2005; Wade et al. 2012; Kohli 2007; 2011) and health (Hodes et al. 2008; Vervliet et al. 2015), as well as the impact of immigration policies and social care systems (Engerbrigtsen 2003; Diop 2009; Wernesjo 2012; Cemlyn & Nye 2012; Dennis 2012; Söderqvist et al. 2014). Despite this robust knowledge, little is known about the period in which these young people cease to be categorised as children and transition to adulthood. The limited research that does address the transition to adulthood suggests that it represents a period of increased anxiety and uncertainty, as unaccompanied young people prepare to simultaneously negotiate the process of leaving local authority care and attempt to achieve security and stability through the attainment of a permanent legal status (Broad & Robbins 2005; Wade 2011; Kohli 2011). However, research has rarely been undertaken with young people as they experience this process.

Concern is mounting about the precarious and uncertain futures faced by unaccompanied young people in the context of an increasingly restrictive asylum and immigration policy climate, both in the UK and across Europe (Wade 2011; Chase & Allsopp 2013). Calls for increased knowledge and understanding have emanated from the academic community (Wade 2011; Sirriyeh 2013; Kohli 2014; Gregg & Williams 2015), refugee organisations (Gladwell & Elwyn 2012; Brighter Futures 2013) and government bodies (Joint Committee on Human Rights 2013). Additionally, the challenges that social work professionals encounter in planning the leaving-care process with unaccompanied young people who face uncertain futures is a persistent problem compounded by a paucity of research (Wade 2011; Wright 2014). The escalating numbers of unaccompanied children and young people arriving in the UK (Refugee Council 2016) has initiated a concurrent upsurge in academic, public and media interest in this topic, which brings an even greater imperative to enhance current knowledge of the transitions of unaccompanied young people.

1.1 The importance of social networks

The research to date has predominantly considered unaccompanied children and young people as individuals, focusing particularly on individual experiences, needs and traits at the expense of social relationships and networks (O'Higgins 2012; Clark-Kazak 2012; Sirriyeh 2013). The only study identified in a literature review that was explicitly concerned with the social networks of unaccompanied young people in the UK is Wells's (2011) study based in London. Wells (2011) concluded that unaccompanied young people were too often assumed to be 'radically severed' from social networks, and that greater attention should be paid to the multiple ways in which unaccompanied young people were connected into their social worlds. Research within the general population of care leavers has established the importance of social networks and social support for this group of young people (McMahon & Curtin 2012; Hiles et al. 2013) and studies of migrant populations have established the value of social networks across a broad range of migratory experiences (Zetter & Pearl 2000; Bloch et al. 2009; Crawley 2010a). Taken together, these literatures suggest that the study of social networks is likely to be an important area of enquiry with unaccompanied young people.

This research therefore addresses the question of how unaccompanied young people experience their social networks during the transition to adulthood, as well as seeking to understand how immigration status (particularly the temporary nature of many statuses offered to unaccompanied young people) affects this process. The research takes a life-course approach to analysing and understanding the social networks of unaccompanied young people and is therefore concerned to understand the spatial and temporal aspects of fluid social networks in a period of transition.

1.2 Methodological approach

Taking a constructivist philosophical position, a qualitative methodology has been applied to understand the subjective and intersubjective meanings attached to the young people's social networks. For the purposes of this study social networks have been defined as the social relationships which individuals enact, produce and reproduce across time and space.

The research involved three phases of interviews as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Interview phases

Phase	Type of participant	Method	Purpose
One	Unaccompanied young people (N=18)	Interviews including three different visual methods: Time tree; Mental mapping; Social network mapping	To capture the spatial and temporal aspects of young people's social networks
Two	Unaccompanied young people (N=11)	Semi-structured follow-up interviews (between 6–9 months after first interview)	To capture further temporal aspects and potential changes
Three	Social care and voluntary service professionals (N=12)	Semi-structured interviews	To provide contextual and local service information

Professionals were included as participants to provide contextual information which would enable connections to be made between the individual experiences of the young people and the socio-historical context on both a local and national level. Participants were recruited from one large urban local authority in the north of England. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure diversity in terms of gender, length of time in the UK and immigration status. Professionals who participated represented a range of roles including personal advisors, social workers, local managers and voluntary sector support workers. Fieldwork was undertaken between September 2014 and September 2015 with ethical approval from the University of York ethics committee.

1.3 Outline of the thesis

The thesis is presented in three parts. Part One continues with a critical review of the legal, policy and research context for the study (Chapters Two and Three). These chapters establish the context in which the study takes place and identify relevant themes, discourses and knowledge gaps within the domains of policy and research. Research on unaccompanied young people is necessarily situated at the intersection of a number of policy and research fields; leaving care, migration, youth and young people as well as the narrower field of unaccompanied children and young people. Chapters Two and Three therefore seek to address these interconnected domains of research and policy in order to draw out gaps in current knowledge and divergent theoretical perspectives on unaccompanied young people.

Chapters Four and Five set out the methodology and design of the research. Chapter Four is primarily concerned to clarify the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings, providing a rationale for the use of the life-course approach in this context and expounding on the principle theoretical facets of this approach. This chapter concludes with a statement of the research questions, aims and objectives. Chapter Five details the research design and methods including the sampling and recruitment strategy, interview methods and ethical considerations. Part One concludes by providing a brief introduction to the findings of the research (Chapter Six), including background information on the young people who participated in the research and an explanation of the structure of the findings chapter.

Part Two of the thesis contains findings relating to the different domains of the young people's social networks including family relationships, peer and community social networks and formal social networks. Each chapter in this part of the thesis explores a domain in detail, providing a rich focus on separate aspects of the social network. Chapter Seven explores the complex family networks of unaccompanied young people, both in the UK and abroad. Drawing on both the theory of 'family practices' and research on transnational family care practices (Morgan 1996; Baldassar & Merla 2014) the dynamic, fluid and reciprocal relationships of care that unaccompanied young people engage in are explored. Chapter Eight discusses the peer and community networks which young people develop over time, analysing in particular the way in which time and space mediates these social networks as well

as considering the ways in which unaccompanied young people negotiate aspects of 'sameness' and 'difference' (Mas Giralt 2011) within informal social relationships. Chapter Nine concludes Part Two with a presentation of the findings relating to the formal aspects of unaccompanied young people's social networks, in particular foster carers and social care professionals. Following a discussion of the types of relationships unaccompanied young people develop with professionals and foster carers, the chapter considers the position of social care professionals at the intersection of immigration agendas and child welfare concerns, concluding with an examination of the complex relations of power and agency which characterises these formal social networks.

Part Three is concerned with providing analysis holistically across the social networks through the prism of the life-course approach, using core facets of the life-course theory as an organising framework for the findings. Chapter Ten therefore considers biographical time and the role of biographical narratives in the social networks of unaccompanied young people. In particular the impact of immigration status on the young people's ability to create coherent narratives of past, present and future is addressed. Chapter Eleven analyses the impact of social and institutionally regulated time on the social networks of unaccompanied young people, focusing particularly on educational transitions and the process of leaving care to live independently. Chapter Twelve considers the socio-cultural transitions that unaccompanied young people experience, exploring the complex 'social fields' (Levitt & Glick-Schiller 2004) in which identity and belonging are negotiated, particularly in relation to the development of sexual and intimate partner relationships. The final findings chapter (Chapter Thirteen) situates the young people's social networks within the current socio-historical context, analysing the impact of national immigration policies and fluctuating global migration patterns on the social networks of the young people in this study. Chapter Fourteen concludes the thesis, drawing together findings to suggest that young people are not 'radically severed' (Wells 2011) from social networks and are actively engaged in the creation and maintenance of complex social networks across time and space. These social networks are profoundly impacted by immigration status and the findings presented provide a critique of the policy of routinely granting temporary statuses to unaccompanied children.

Chapter Two

The legal and policy context: unaccompanied young people, immigration and leaving care

2.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the current legal and policy context for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people. The chapter clarifies the terms and definitions used throughout the thesis, details trends in the numbers of unaccompanied children and outlines the asylum and immigration process they are subject to. Additionally, this chapter outlines the obligations of local authorities to unaccompanied children who are 'looked after' within the children's social care system, including their entitlements to Leaving Care services as they transition to adulthood. The chapter explores how current immigration policy in the UK impacts on unaccompanied young people, highlighting in particular the temporary immigration status granted to many unaccompanied children which expires as they transition to adulthood. Attention is also drawn to some of the salient policy themes that recur throughout the thesis. The tension between child welfare concerns and current immigration agendas is addressed with a particular focus on how this tension manifests in social work policy and practice with unaccompanied children and young people. The chapter concludes by establishing that the transition to adulthood is a period of particular research interest as it is a crucial milestone for unaccompanied young people in terms of establishing their immigration status and transitioning out of Leaving Care services.

2.1 Terms and definitions

An unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC) is defined by the Home Office (2002) as a child (a person below the age of eighteen) who arrives in the UK and claims asylum in their own right as there is no relative or guardian in the UK able to look after them. The terms 'separated children' or 'unaccompanied minors' are also used to describe these children. As this study is concerned with the transitions that UASC make into legal adulthood I have chosen to use the term 'unaccompanied

young people’ (henceforth ‘UYP’) to refer to young people between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five who either still fall into the UASC category (aged under eighteen) or were formerly considered UASC under the Home Office definition given above. This term reflects that the young people in this study may no longer be legally considered children and indeed may no longer be seeking asylum if they have received refugee status. The age range used within this definition is explained fully in Chapter Four. It broadly reflects the ages at which UYP will be transitioning from state care and may be renegotiating their immigration status with the Home Office.

2.2 Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children: numbers, trends and the asylum process

Following a number of years in which asylum applications by UASC decreased, there have been notable increases in applications in the years 2014 and 2015 as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: UK asylum applications by unaccompanied children 2011–2014

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Total applications	1,248	1,125	1,265	1,945	3,043
% change from previous year	-18%	-10%	+12%	+54%	+56%

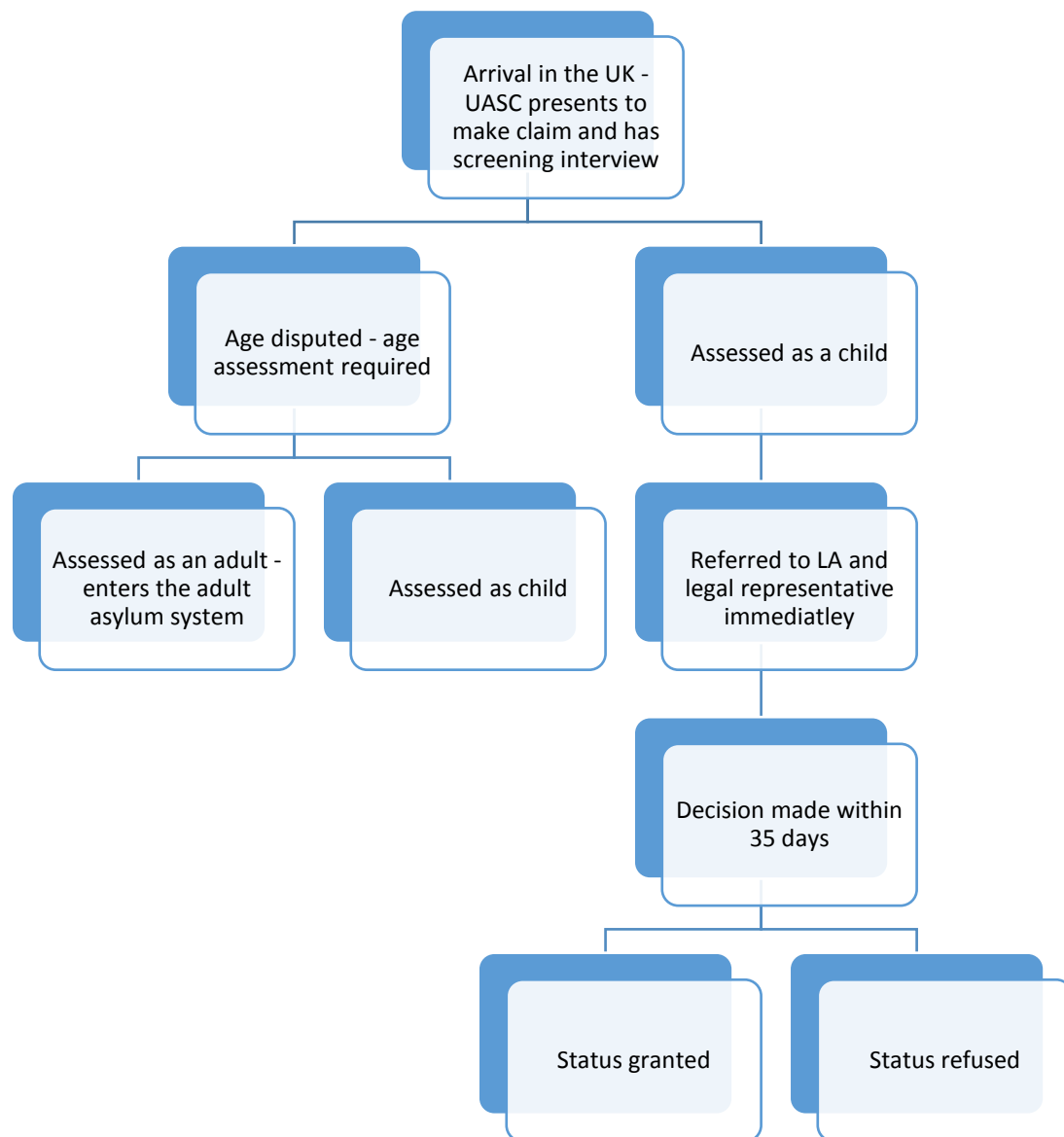
Source: Refugee Council (2016).

The rise in UASC applications is partially driven by growing numbers of UASC arriving from Eritrea and Afghanistan, although numbers of UASC increased from all the top eight UASC countries of origin, excluding Albania. Inevitably, trends in numbers of UASC and fluctuations in their countries of origin reflect wider global events and upheaval. However, a dramatic gender bias in UASC has remained

constant. In 2015, 90% of UASC were male, a comparable figure to previous years. Leggett (2008) has suggested possible reasons for the predominance of males, including the greater danger posed to males in sites of conflict and the perception that there are fewer risks to boys when travelling. Similarly, it has always been the case that the majority of UASC are aged sixteen or over when they arrive in the UK. The figures for 2015 demonstrate that 62% of UASC were aged sixteen or over, with 88% of UASC aged over fourteen (Refugee Council 2016).

On arrival in the UK, UASC will go through an asylum process which is briefly detailed below in Figure One. Children seeking asylum may present at ports of entry on arrival in the UK or present 'in country' at other locations, sometimes presenting to the local authority rather than the Home Office (Wade et al. 2012).

Figure 1: Basic asylum process for unaccompanied children



Source: Coram Children's Legal Centre (2012).

As demonstrated in Figure 1, UASC may have their age disputed when they arrive in the UK as they may not have appropriate documentation to confirm their age. Their age will then be assessed by the local authority (LA) in which they initially presented. The Refugee Council (2016), using Home Office figures, report a 141% increase from 2014 to 2015 in the number of age-disputed UASCs. This is a controversial practice, criticised for the poor quality of assessments and the inexact methods used (Dennis 2012). Concerns have been raised that social work practitioners may be required to carry out the assessments. The tension between this practice, which

potentially feeds into a pervasive 'culture of disbelief' and the purported paramountcy of child welfare, has been highlighted (Humphries 2006; Cemlyn & Nye 2012). Crawley (2009) locates the practice of age assessment within broader social processes, linking it with both a shift towards increasingly restrictive asylum and immigration policies as well as wider social questions about what it means to be 'a child' in society. Indeed, the controversy of age assessment reflects two important policy issues. First, the inequality between the provision of services for children and adults which stems from the relatively safeguarded status granted to children by their internationally and nationally recognised protected status in law (Dennis 2012). Secondly, and relatedly, age assessment signifies the ways in which normative western constructs of childhood, demarcated primarily by legal and chronological age and associated with vulnerability and passivity (Crawley 2011), can be utilised to exclude children and young people from crucial provisions and protections.

Once the applicant has been accepted as a child an initial decision will be made on their claim. Simplistically, there are two possible outcomes; the claim may be accepted and refugee status granted or the claim will be unsuccessful and refugee status refused. However, in the case of refusal, the legal position of UASC can become more complicated. As Table 3 (below) demonstrates, a large number of UASC will be offered temporary periods of leave to remain in the UK following the refusal of their asylum claim, often using the 'UASC Leave' category that applies when the only reason for granting a period of temporary leave is that the applicant is a child who cannot be safely returned to their country of origin. Table 3 explains all the different possible outcomes of a UASC's asylum claim, and details the numbers who received each outcome in the years 2014 and 2015, demonstrating how prevalent the use of temporary forms of leave for UASC are.

Table 3: Decisions on claims made by UASC 2014–2015 (aged seventeen and under at the time of decision)

Outcome	Explanation	Number who received this decision in 2014 (out of a total 988 decisions made)	Number who received this decision in 2015 (out of a total 1,559 decisions made)
Refugee Status	Leave to remain granted for five years. After five years entitled to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) which equates to full citizenship. ILR will be granted if still considered to meet the criteria to be a refugee.	418 (42%)	356 (29%)
Humanitarian Protection	Granted when applicant does not meet the strict criteria for refugee status but it is decided that return to their country of origin would breach their human rights.	9 (1%)	18 (1%)
Discretionary Leave to Remain (DLR)	Granted for a period of three years or until UASC is aged seventeen and a half. May then apply for an extension of leave or make a fresh claim for asylum if new evidence is presented.	23 (2%)	37 (2%)
UASC Leave	New type of leave that is similar to DLR but is specifically for UASC. Replacing DLR as the most	380 (38.5%)	805 (52%)

	common form of leave for UASC. Used when the only reason for allowing a period of temporary leave is because applicant is a child who cannot be safely returned.		
Right to Private and Family Life	Used when full refugee status has not been granted but the applicant is granted leave to remain in the country on the basis of their human right to private and family life.	4 (<1%)	0 (<1%)
Refusal	Asylum claim is refused and no other form of leave is granted. All decisions other than refugee status represent a refusal of refugee status of some kind, but the previous decisions involve a refusal along with an offer of another type of leave. This decision is an outright refusal which can be appealed.	154 (16%)	343 (22%)

Source: Refugee Council (2016)

The figures in Table 3 apply only to UASC who receive a decision on their asylum claim before they turn eighteen. Those aged eighteen at the time of the decision will not be granted UASC Leave and are unlikely to receive Discretionary Leave to Remain (only three such applicants received discretionary leave in 2014 and 2015 combined). For these young people the mostly likely outcome is that their claim will be refused outright, as occurred in 82% of these cases in 2015. However, as demonstrated in Table 3, the majority of UASC claims resolved before the applicant turns eighteen will result in the grant of some form of temporary leave to remain, which expires when the young person approaches adulthood. Over half of UASC

claims were resolved in this way in 2015. The same is true for all years since 2010, with the exception of 2014 (Table 3).

Temporary grants of leave to UASC are made on the basis that the UASC does not meet the criteria for Refugee Status or Humanitarian Protection, but cannot be safely returned to their country of origin. Whilst the Home Office (2015: 4) considers that these forms of temporary leave are granted in 'compassionate circumstances', the pervasive reliance on UASC Leave has come under growing scrutiny and criticism (Children's Society 2015). The frequency of granting temporary statuses highlighted above has been disparaged as a blanket policy that does not consider the individual needs of children (Manchester Immigration Aid Unit 2013). In particular, questions have emerged about the degree to which such decisions take account of the 'best interests of the child'. The 'best interests of the child' principle is enshrined in international law as a primary consideration¹ when making decisions that affect children and in national legislation in the UK Border Authority's (UKBA) duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children² (Pobjoy 2015). A raft of studies have concluded that the UKBA does not gather sufficient information on the child's best interests to reach informed decisions on asylum claims, lacks concern for establishing the child's best interests and fails to complete formal 'best interests of the child assessments' when making decisions on whether to grant UASC leave (Vine 2013; JCHR 2013; Warren & York 2014; Wilding & Dembour 2015; Children's Society 2015).

Guidance suggests that the Home Office (2015) begins from the normative assumption that it is likely to be in the child's best interests to be with their family. Presumptions of this kind within immigration systems and discourses have been critiqued (Chase & Allsopp 2013). Research suggests that dominant understandings of child migration validate an ethnocentric view of the 'nuclear family as the locus of a healthy childhood', disregarding the potential for child migration to be positive or for the individual child to thrive whilst separated from family (Whitehead et al. 2007: 7). Despite these presumptions, there is evidence to suggest that the Home Office does not routinely carry out the family tracing process required to establish whether

¹ Article 3 of the UNCRC requires that 'in all actions concerning children and young people, whether taken by public or private social welfare institutions... the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration'.

² This duty is contained within Sec. 55 of the Borders, Immigration and Citizenship Act 2009

returning UASC to their families is possible.(Warren & York 2014). A report by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (Vine 2013: 4) identified that in 60% of cases ‘family tracing was neither considered nor attempted’, suggesting that policy rhetoric which promotes safe return and reunification with family in the country of origin does not translate into practice, leading ultimately to high numbers of UASC with grants of temporary leave to remain in the UK.

There are mounting concerns that temporary leave is not a ‘durable solution³’ for UASC and may have negative impacts, particularly during the transition to adulthood (Children’s Society 2015; Gregg & Williams 2015). Indeed, the impact of immigration status on the transition to adulthood will be a major theme of this thesis and is a key component of the research questions and objectives. Whilst this issue will be explored in detail throughout the thesis, for the purposes of this section it is sufficient to note that research is beginning to emerge which questions the current UASC Leave policy on the grounds that it has multiple negative consequences on UASC’s mental health, education and long-term outcomes (Gladwell & Elwyn 2012; Manchester Immigration Aid Unit 2013; Gregg & Williams 2015). Furthermore, research has shown that young people are unlikely to fully understand the implications of temporary grants of leave and often do not appeal their initial decisions. Failure to appeal the initial decision affects UASC’s ability to apply for extensions of leave or make further claims as it is taken by the Home Office as an implicit acceptance of the initial decision (Warren & York 2014). Whilst the scale and depth of this problem is emerging, possible solutions are also surfacing. Wilding & Dembour (2015) suggest that many UASC may meet the criteria to be granted Humanitarian Protection, a more permanent form of leave, and recommend that this should be more broadly considered. Likewise, Gregg & Williams’ (2015) Children’s Society report urges the government to set out plans for a durable solution for UASC which may include consideration of more permanent forms of leave as well as strengthening family-tracing practices.

Changes to the permanency of ‘Refugee Status’ in 2006 mean that even those UYP who are granted Refugee Status may still be considered to have a form of temporary leave, albeit a significantly more secure one. Following the ‘Five Year Strategy on

³ The term ‘durable solution’ is used by the UN Refugee Agency and other international bodies to denote long term solutions for refugees and displaced peoples.

Immigration' (HM Government 2005), Refugee Status is now granted for a limited period of five years, rather than the indefinite period for which it was granted previously. The intention is that information relating to the situation in the refugee's country of origin will be kept under review to establish if the country has become safe to return to at the end of the five-year period. These changes in the permanency of Refugee Status have been linked to the wider curtailment of refugee rights which was outlined in the previous chapter (Morris 2002; Tyler 2010; Mulvey & Stewart 2014). There is limited research on the impact of changes to Refugee Status. However, Mulvey & Stewart (2014) have reported the potential negative impacts on refugees, including limiting their ability to integrate and resettle as well as denying them the psychological and emotional benefits of a permanent status. Research by the Refugee Council (2010) found the refugees in their study had difficulty accessing employment and education due to the limited nature of their leave, and were likely to delay getting married or buying a house due to the uncertainty of their status. Conversely, Brownlees & Finch (2010) emphasise the relative security that comes with Refugee Status as compared with UASC Leave and comment on the feelings of relief and improved mental health that UASC experience when refugee status is granted.

2.3 Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and children's social care services

Once formerly accepted as UASC, unaccompanied children's entitlements are the same as citizen children and they will be provided for as a 'looked-after child' under the Children Act 1989. In the past, some local authorities provided services to UASC as 'children in need' (under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 which places a duty on the LA to safeguard and promote the welfare of children). Providing services under this section of the Children Act, rather than the more comprehensive provision for looked after children in Section 20 (which places a duty on the LA to accommodate the child), had the effect of disallowing UASC from entitlements to Leaving Care services under the Children Leaving Care Act (2000), which is only available to children who have been officially 'looked after' (under Section 20, Children Act 1989). Stein (2006) noted that under these practices some UYP were

excluded from full access to services and were likely to receive poorer services than their citizen peers. However, recent guidance and case law⁴ has changed this position and the presumption is now that UYP will be provided for under Section 20 and subsequently entitled to full support under the CLCA 2000, regardless of which section of the Children Act they have received services under (DoH 2001; 2003, cited Dennis 2007). This represents a significant advancement in the treatment and reception of UASC and has ensured that their entitlement to the full range of children's services is assured in law.

Under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, UASC are owed certain duties from the LA. The LA has a duty to support and accommodate UASC as well as a more general duty to safeguard and promote their welfare. An assessment of their needs will be conducted using the 'Framework for the assessment of children in need and their families' (DoH 2000), although some consider that this framework is not fully adaptable for the assessment of UASC (Gregg & Williams 2015). Following the assessment, a care plan will be created which takes account of accommodation, financial and wider support needs. The majority of UASC are now accommodated in foster care. Figures for 2014 show that 61%⁵ of UASC were placed in foster care, whilst 25% were placed in independent living and 11% were placed in residential care (Gregg & Williams 2015). However, there is evidence that fostering is used primarily for UASC who arrive under the age of sixteen, and that the majority who are above this age will not be placed in foster care (Wade et al. 2012). Foster care is generally considered to be a positive placement choice which benefits integration, mental health and educational achievement (Brownlees & Finch 2010; Wade et al. 2012). Wade et al.'s (2012) detailed study of foster care for UASC highlighted its transformative potential, yet also raised concerns about the impact of recent funding cuts on UASC's access to high quality placements.

Whilst there have been some notable gains in the protection of UASC over recent years, and the government has reiterated its position that immigration status should not affect the quality of support provided to children (JCHR 2013), some troubling

⁴ The Hillingdon Judgement, R (Berhe) v Hillingdon London Borough, [2004] 1 FLR 439 established the presumption in law that UASC were entitled to Leaving Care services regardless of which section of the Children Act 1989 they had received support under.

⁵The number of young people placed in foster care has more generally risen over recent years. 74% of Looked After Children are now placed in foster care, an 8% increase since 2011 (DoE 2015)

factors remain. Hek (2005) raised concerns over a decade ago about the emergence of a two-tier system in which UASC were separated from citizen young people. Despite the recent legal advances outlined, there is still persistent anxiety that the immigration system continues to override child welfare concerns (JCHR 2013). The rights of children (in particular displaced and refugee children) are established within UK and international law and underpinned by global children's rights discourses and the professional values of the practitioners who implement policies to protect the welfare of children. However, UK immigration policy increasingly pursues a restrictive securitisation agenda (Sigona & Hughes 2010). UASC, situated at the intersection of these two very different policy fields, become an inevitable site of conflict in which the right of children to be protected clashes with the goal of stemming migration collectively and controlling migrants individually. The result of such conflict may be a system of differentiated access to entitlements for UK citizen children and refugee / asylum-seeking children. This has manifested in UK policy affecting UASC in a variety of ways. Sigona & Hughes (2010) point out that children without confirmed legal status have not been included in Child Poverty targets set by successive governments. A study of 59 unaccompanied children and 67 professionals and policy makers by Brownlees & Finch (2010) found that some UASC still had problems accessing health services and education, often due to the lack of a supportive adult to assist them with accessing services, or because of confusion on the part of services and institutions about their entitlements and rights as asylum seekers. The Joint Committee on Human Rights (2013) additionally uncovered concerns about a lack of appropriate mental health services to meet UASC's needs, and that general levels of support and care from children's social care services remained inconsistent across LA areas. This suggests that there are some areas in which UASC may find it difficult to fully exercise their legal rights entitlements despite full access being assured in legal terms.

The concerns raised above about differential access and treatment for UASC reflect general tensions within social work discourses about practice with asylum seekers and refugees, regardless of age. Humphries (2002; 2004) in particular has highlighted an 'unacceptable role for social work', suggesting that social workers have been drawn into complicity with oppressive government systems to exclude immigrant populations from services. There is support for this view, with some

researchers questioning the individual practice of social workers as well as national immigration policies (Sales & Hek 2004; Hayes 2004; Masocha 2015). As a number of researchers have suggested, this body of research feeds into negative portrayals of social work practice with asylum-seeking and refuge populations, reflecting the uncomfortable fit between repressive government rhetoric and immigration policy on one side and the anti-oppressive value base of social work practice on the other (Kohli 2007; Fell & Fell 2014). Many recurrent themes in modern social work have found a salient flashpoint in these issues (Barberis & Boccagni 2014). The strain between the care and control function of social work, fear of an uncritical acceptance of state policy, anxiety that the social work value base is being compromised; these are all dominant themes within social work discourse which are relevant to an understanding of the tension between child welfare concerns for UASC and the realities of UK asylum policy

2.4 Transition to adulthood and leaving care

The transition to adulthood represents the climactic point at which child welfare concerns and a restrictive immigration agenda intersect. As Sigona & Hughes (2010: 11) suggest, 'coming of age is a crucial threshold which can produce relocation within the legal system'. Indeed, many UASC find themselves repositioned as they approach legal adulthood, and may need to re-engage with the immigration system to extend their leave or make fresh claims for asylum if new evidence has become available. At the same time, all UYP, regardless of status, will be undergoing the process of leaving LA care. The following sections first consider relevant Leaving Care policy developments in general before considering Leaving Care policy in relation to UYP in particular.

2.4.1 Leaving Care policy

The development of policies to establish robust services and entitlements for care leavers followed a sustained period of research interest in this area, which established there were frequently poor long-term outcomes for care leavers (Stein 1990; Biehal et al. 1995; Biehal & Wade 1999; Dixon et al. 2006). A substantial

accumulation of evidence over the past twenty years has identified care leavers as a group associated with a high risk of social exclusion and poor outcomes across a range of indicators such as educational attainment, housing security and employment (Dixon & Stein 2003; Stein 2006). Attempts to understand poor outcomes for care leavers have centred on the pre-care, in-care and post-care experiences of young people (Stein 2008). Stein (2004; 2008) has identified the 'compressed and accelerated' transition to adulthood which care leavers experience as a particular challenge, stressing that the expectation of 'instant adulthood' has a negative effect on outcomes, particularly at a time when most young people in the UK are delaying and extending transitions to adulthood. Leaving Care policy is therefore founded on the triple concerns of delaying transition, planning for transition and supporting transition (Hiles et al. 2013).

The bedrock of policy in this area is the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 which builds on and amends the Children Act 1989 by placing a duty on LAs to assess the needs of care leavers, provide assistance and keep in touch until they reach the age of 21 (or 25 if they are still in training or education) in order to delay accelerated transitions to independence and provide specialist support during the process of leaving care (Hiles et al 2013). These aims were reinforced by subsequent policy, notably the Children and Young Persons Act (2008), which strengthens provision by assigning a 'personal advisor' to care leavers for the duration of the Leaving Care process, and providing for further assistance with education and training. The policy drive to delay transitions was further extended through initiatives which sought to promote care leavers remaining in foster placements beyond the age of eighteen, by ensuring LAs have a 'Staying Put' policy which supports care leavers in extending their foster placements (Children and Families Act 2014). Recent figures from the Department for Education (DfE 2015) show that 48% of eligible care leavers were still living with foster carers three months after turning 18, suggesting that the opportunity to extend placements is being taken up by young people, although data was not available to evidence how many young people remain after three months.

As well as delaying transition, the need for support with planning for independence when leaving care is internationally recognised (Munro et al. 2011). In the UK, the LA has a duty to ensure that care leavers are adequately prepared for the transition to adulthood and independence. The key means through which this is achieved is the

duty placed on LAs to ensure every care leaver has a 'pathway plan'. The pathway plan should build on the young person's care plan and take account of needs relating to accommodation, education and training, employment, health and the development of practical skills as well as financial and specialist support needs. Evidence from research suggests that effective pathway planning should start early, take a holistic approach including both practical and emotional needs and actively involve the young person and their wider networks of support in the planning process (DoH 2001; Wade 2003; Stein 2005; Dixon & Wade 2007).

Whilst the intention of pathway planning is largely accepted as positive and its association with good outcomes has been demonstrated (Stein 2012), there are some criticisms surrounding this practice. Evidence has emerged of inconsistencies in the effectiveness of pathway planning, with some young people reporting that they have little input into pathway plans or do not know the content of the plan (Stein 2004; Lindsay 2006; Towler 2011). More fundamentally, White & Wyn (1997) have criticised the metaphor of 'pathways' and 'pathway planning' which permeates Leaving Care policy. The genteel 'pathway' metaphor, they suggest, implies a linear, accessible, equitable and predictable journey into adulthood at odds with the complex, convoluted and potentially traumatic transition that some young people might experience. Following a similar perspective, critiques of Leaving Care policy centre on the policy impetus to create economically active and 'productive moral citizens' able to adjust to the 'normative demands of mainstream society' (Grover et al. 2004: 13). Indeed, many of the outcomes on which successful transition to adulthood are assessed include normative markers of outward achievement, including getting a job, staying in education and finding secure accommodation and crucially, becoming independent of the state.

2.4.2 Unaccompanied young people leaving care

As UYP leave care their 'pathways' to adulthood will be significantly impacted by their immigration status. There are three categories of UYP at this stage: those with refugee status confirmed, those who have on-going claims and appeals (and are therefore still uncertain of their future status) and those who have exhausted their appeal rights (commonly referred to as Appeal Rights Exhausted or 'ARE'). For UYP

with uncertain status, leaving care may be a period of acute insecurity, vulnerability and risk (Wade et al. 2005; Broad & Robbins 2005; Gladwell & Elwyn 2012). There is growing concern about this group of young people and the challenges they face as they become adults, particularly with respect to the curtailments of rights and entitlements that they may experience at this time (JCHR 2013; Chase & Allsopp 2013; Chase et al 2015)

Under current policy and legislation UYP who either have refugee status or still have an ongoing claim or appeal have access to the same Leaving Care entitlements as citizen care leavers. Where UYP have had temporary forms of leave such as UASC Leave, their entitlements to Leaving Care services will be unaffected, provided they have applied for an extension to their leave or made a fresh claim for asylum prior to the expiry date of their temporary leave. However, UYP without Refugee Status may experience problems accessing other crucial services at this time, particularly education. Brownlees & Finch's (2010) report for UNICEF highlights the barriers to accessing education for UYP leaving care. They particularly emphasise the way in which access to post-16 education is hampered by a lack of places and a lack of understanding on the part of education institutions about the rights of UYP to access education. The issues become further complicated if UYP wish to go on to university. Those with Refugee Status and those with temporary leave who have been in the UK for three years may access financial support through the centrally funded 'Student Support' scheme. However, Brownlees & Finch (2010) report that in practice access for those without Refugee Status is often only granted at the discretion of the university and when funded by the LA. Proposals contained within the new Immigration Bill (2015–2016), which at time of writing is being scrutinised in parliament, represent a further erosion of UYP's ability to access education. If the new proposals pass through parliament unchanged, LAs will be prevented from assisting UYP with university tuition fees if they are ineligible for student support. The proposed changes represent an attempt to introduce additional layers of conditionality which exclude asylum seekers and contribute to the creation of a tiered system of welfare access. Graduated and fragmented access to citizenship and citizenship rights is increasingly a feature of immigration and welfare systems across the world (Ong 1999) and in the UK (Morris 2002; Dwyer 2010; Morris 2012).

For young people who are Appeal Rights Exhausted (ARE), entitlement to services becomes much more complicated. At this stage the young person could be classified as either a 'failed asylum seeker' or 'unlawfully present in the UK' (under the Nationality, Immigration & Asylum Act 2002). If classified as a 'failed asylum seeker', Leaving Care support may continue to be provided until the young person fails to comply with removal directions from the Home Office. However, the majority of UYP will be categorised as 'unlawfully present in the UK' when their leave expires or their appeal rights are exhausted (CCLC 2012). In this instance, Leaving Care support can be withdrawn on the condition that removing support does not breach the human rights of the young person. Funding for Leaving Care services may continue for a period of three months whilst a human rights assessment is conducted by the LA (CCLC 2012). This is an area of substantial legal complexity. However, it is clear that access to Leaving Care services is jeopardised for ARE young people and may be withdrawn completely. In practice, LAs will usually remove Leaving Care support unless a young person actively pursues their immigration claim (by making a fresh claim for asylum with new evidence) or there are exceptional circumstances (CCLC 2015). Proposals in the recent Immigration Bill (2015–2016) seek to further restrict ARE young people's access to Leaving Care services. The proposed amendments to current legislation would either remove all support from UYP aged over eighteen who do not have Leave to Remain, or remove all support except basic financial and accommodation support, depending on the specific nature of their status and circumstances (Home Office 2016).

Young people who become ARE or fear that they will become ARE may abscond or 'disappear' out of the system (Gladwell & Elwyn 2012). It is difficult to establish how many young people abscond due to inconsistent methods for recording the reasons why young people stop engaging with services and incomplete national estimates which do not specifically address the numbers of children and young people who disappear. However, Humphris & Sigona (2016) have obtained data from LA demonstrating that 89 UYP were missing from LA care in 2013 and 87 were missing in 2014. In one of the few studies to address this issue specifically, Gladwell & Elwyn (2012) found that of the 23 unaccompanied young people they interviewed, seven young people identified themselves as 'absconders' and a further eleven had friends who had absconded. The same study asserts that practitioners in the voluntary

sector reported multiple cases of contact with young people who had absconded from formal services. Whilst it is not possible to reliably establish the frequency with which UASC abscond, the consequences of disappearing have been explored and include possible destitution, extreme poverty, exploitation, physical and mental health issues and high levels of abuse and violence that they are unable to report to the authorities (British Red Cross 2010; Crawley et al. 2011; Gladwell & Elwyn 2012).

The majority of UYP will eventually face return to their country of origin, although there may be a lengthy wait between being denied citizenship and return (Griffiths 2012; Matthews 2014). 2,748 former UASC have been forcibly returned to their country of origin since 2007 (Gladwell & Elwyn 2016). Evidence from practitioners in both the statutory and voluntary sectors suggests that the impetus to remove UYP is accelerating, although official data is not available to confirm this (Gladwell & Elwyn 2012; Wright 2014). UYP who have become ARE may be able to return voluntarily through one of the government-funded Assisted Voluntary Return programmes (AVR). However, evidence suggests that take up of AVR amongst UYP is low and that young people are the least likely to opt to return voluntarily (Thiel & Gillan 2010; Gladwell & Elwyn 2012). Consequently, some UYP will be forcibly removed from the UK at some point in their adult lives. Return of this kind may be preceded by a period of detention in one of the UK's detention centres.

2.4.3 Pathway planning with unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people

As noted above, the right of care leavers to have assistance with future planning is manifested in the obligation of LAs to provide young people with a 'pathway plan' which assesses their needs and explicitly addresses their plans for the future (DfE 2010). Meeting the planning needs of UYP is particularly challenging, especially where the outcome of their asylum claim is unknown (Wright 2014). The paucity of research in this area may be a contributory factor. 'Triple planning' has emerged as a possible means of managing uncertainty in the pathway planning process. This approach is concerned with ensuring that the pathway plan takes account of the multiple possible outcomes of asylum claims, including refusal, receiving status and

prolonged periods of waiting for a decision (Wade 2011). However, the complexity of achieving this has become evident (Wade et al. 2012). Planning for return is particularly problematic as UYP may have difficulty engaging with the idea of a negative decision and possible return (Wade et al. 2005; Wade et al. 2012; Wright 2014). Whilst recent research in this area has highlighted this difficulty, and current practice may have evolved in response, bracing the issue of return is likely to be difficult and challenging for all concerned (Dorling 2009; Wright 2014). It seems probable that the issue of planning for return will remain a prominent one as increasing numbers of young people are expected to return when they turn eighteen. Wade et al. (2012) and Wright (2014) have suggested that planning for return should form an early part of the planning process and that young people should be prepared for building an adult life in their countries of origin, not just in terms of preparing psychologically for return but also in terms of developing skills that will be useful on return, rather than focusing on completing the tasks relevant to westernised notions of successful development to adulthood. In contrast, Chase & Allsopp (2013) have questioned the process of 'triple planning', suggesting that it assumes young people will be able to think transnationally about their future and that there is little evidence of its effectiveness with this group of young people. Indeed, there are salient questions about how practitioners might plan for return when so little is known about the experiences of young people who have been returned to their country of origin. There is one recent report on the experiences of forcibly returned young Afghani asylum seekers. The findings suggest that returnees face multiple difficulties including problems connecting with social and family networks, lack of employment opportunities and a deterioration in mental health and emotional well-being (Gladwell et al. 2016). Indeed, the report suggests that their status as return immigrants from the UK may make former UASC unsafe, at risk of physical harm and social stigma. Crucially, the findings also suggest that the education young people received in the UK does not lead to greater employment security or opportunity in Afghanistan. The report ends with a very salient recommendation which reaches to the heart of the tension between leaving care and immigration policy which has been discussed throughout this chapter:

Policy-makers should address the contradiction between the Government's stated ambition to improve care leaver outcomes and the forced return of

former unaccompanied asylum seeking children to a context where they are unable to build safe and settled futures. (Gladwell et al. 2016: 54)

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has considered the policy and legal background of the thesis, including key definitions of UASC and UYP, and the upward trend in numbers of UASC arriving in the UK. The role of children's social care with UASC has also been explored. Once established as a UASC, unaccompanied children become 'looked after' under the Children Act 1989. Their needs should be assessed and a care plan detailing how to meet their needs will be created. UASC will be accommodated by the LA, increasingly in foster care. However, friction between child welfare concerns and the progressive 'securitisation' focus of immigration policy continue to arise despite some legal and policy advances for UASC. The controversial practice of age assessment is of particular concern. Age assessment and the presumption that UASC's best interests are best served by returning to their families point to the normative western constructions of childhood that underpin policy. Such constructions position UASC as defined both by chronological age (which should be accurately determined) and doubly vulnerable due to their status as children, and particularly as children who have become separated from the protective unit of the nuclear family and are therefore 'out of place' (Sigona & Hughes 2010).

The transition to adulthood represents a climactic point at which immigration agendas may begin to supersede child welfare concerns as the legal and policy protections of UASC status diminish. UYP with temporary grants of leave will begin to renegotiate their immigration status with Home Office and the risk of finding themselves without any legal status approaches. The transition to adulthood is also a period of time at which all UYP will be transitioning out of Leaving Care services and seeking to build lives lived independently of formal services. However, access to Leaving Care services is differentiated based on immigration status and this chapter has explored evidence of the potential difficulties that UYP may face in accessing a broad range of service if they become ARE. This transitional period for UYP emerges as a crucial area of research for myriad reasons, including the increased vulnerability of young people at this time, the multiple intersectional policies they

become subject to and the growing concern about the impact of these policies (JCHR 2013; Gladwell & Elwyn 2012; Gladwell et al. 2016)

Chapter Three

The research and theoretical context

3.0 Introduction

This chapter begins by reviewing the literature in relation to unaccompanied children and young people generally, highlighting in particular the paucity of research which is concerned with UYP transitioning to adulthood and considering the direction that the small amount of research that does consider this is taking. The chapter then continues to establish the reasons and justifications for specifically focusing on social networks in this thesis, drawing on evidence from research on transitions to adulthood as well as Leaving Care research. A review of the literature on social support and social networks follows, considering literature from the Leaving Care field, migration research and on unaccompanied children and young people specifically (although specific research is limited). Having reviewed the research context of this study, the broader theoretical contexts in which the study is situated are considered. This part of the chapter explores the social construction of youth and the transition to adulthood and the emergence of issues of structure and agency as a pivotal theme. The chapter concludes by explicitly addressing the theoretical positioning of the thesis in relation to the current gaps in literature and knowledge in this area. The approach to structure and agency is outlined and the conceptual framework of the life course is introduced.

3.1 Unaccompanied children and young people in the research literature

3.1.1 Psycho-social needs and well-being

There is limited research on unaccompanied young people specifically. However, there is a substantial body of research with a primary focus on unaccompanied children, some of which considers the transition to adulthood they may face. The majority of studies focus on psycho-social needs and collectively position UASC as a vulnerable group who are likely to have shared experiences of trauma and loss which heighten the risk of mental health problems (Kohli & Mather 2003; Leavey et

al. 2004; Kohli 2007; Hodes et al. 2008). Separation from birth families is considered to compound this trauma and stress, although, as Wernesjo (2012) points out, separation is rarely a central research focus. Further research has demonstrated the negative impact of the asylum process on UASC and the destabilising effects on children's sense of security and identity (Chase et al. 2008; Wade 2011; Chase & Allsopp 2013). However, Chase et al. (2008) urge researchers to be cautious about framing the experience of UASC using culturally specific labels and discourses around mental health. Similarly, Wernesjo (2012) has critiqued the individual orientation of much of this work and its emphasis on the psychology of the child from a largely Western psycho-pathological perspective, highlighting the need for research that now looks to the broader social context. Whilst the vulnerabilities of UASC are well established, research has also highlighted the remarkable resilience of UASC. This work has collectively identified that foster placements, appropriate and stable accommodation, access to education, personal strength and spiritual faith are factors related to the resilience of unaccompanied children (Hodes et al. 2008; Wade et al. 2005; Wade et al. 2012; Rigby 2011; Kohli 2007; Kohli & Mather 2003; Newbigging & Thomas 2011).

3.1.2 The role of services and social work

A large amount of the research in this area is concerned with the relationships between social work services and UASC. As discussed in the previous chapter, there is a corpus of work in this field which, following from work on immigration issues more generally, is concerned with the uneasy relationship between social work values (in particular a professional commitment to the 'best interests of the child') and the restrictive, potentially oppressive nature of immigration controls (Cemlyn & Nye 2012; Lovelock et al. 2004 cited Chase 2010; Humphries 2004). Kohli (2007), in a book dedicated to social work with unaccompanied children, reflects on the 'limited and limiting' nature of much of this research, stating that research studies in this field:

...largely fall into a portrayal of professional ineptitude and the established furrow of telling social workers what they have not done, what they have done too little of, and what they ought to do is firmly followed. (Kohli 2007: 15)

Kohli is concerned to provide a counter narrative of social work practice. His research identifies a typology of social work practices with unaccompanied children. He identifies three domains of practice: the 'domain of cohesion', in which practitioners are concerned to offer practical day to day support to create routine for UASC; the 'domain of connection', in which practice is focused on 'witnessing' past trauma and engaging in a more emotional realm with the service user; and finally, the 'domain of coherence', in which the practitioner engages in the co-construction of a new start based on a strong and enduring relationship between practitioner and service user (Kohli 2006b). With this typology and further similar work (2008; 2011) Kohli provides nuanced and detailed accounts of the realities of social work practice in this field, engaging with the ambiguities and complexities of practice in order to move beyond descriptions of deficient practice.

Beyond this, there is a related body of research which seeks to evaluate the needs of asylum-seeking young people and the ability of services to meet those needs (Wade et al. 2005; Newbigging & Thomas 2011). The positive contribution of statutory services has been documented and studies suggest that UYP tend to fare better in the care system than their UK peers in some important respects, including a higher commitment to education, decreased likelihood of behavioural problems and lower rates of contact with the criminal justice system (Dixon et al. 2006; Sinclair et al. 2007). Important work has been done to detail the nature of service provision and best practice in particular contexts. Work of this kind has contributed significantly to improved services for UASC. However, the portrayal of young people's relationships with services is often characterised by a uni-directional relationship of support in which the social worker has the primary responsibility for resettlement that the unaccompanied young person receives, even if the quality of that support is variable and patchy (Stanley 2001; Mitchell 2003; Wade et al. 2005; Chase 2010).

3.1.3 Vulnerability and agency

An evolving theme in work with UASC and UYP is the axis of vulnerability and agency (Sirriyeh 2013; Orgocka & Clark-Kazak 2012). The concept of agency is a complex and contested one and the explicit theoretical approach to agency taken in this thesis is discussed in detail in the next chapter. However, defined simply for the

purposes of the literature review, agency refers to 'the ability to exert one's will and act in the world' (Orgocka & Clark-Kazak 2012: 7). The new impetus to explore the agency of UASC has arisen in opposition to a perceived 'discourse of vulnerability' surrounding UASC (Clark 2007). However, as Orgocka & Clark-Kazak (2012) have pointed out, vulnerability and agency are not mutually exclusive and can be considered and explored as interactional. In this vein, important work has emerged that begins to investigate the agency of unaccompanied children and young people. Kohli (2006a) and Chase (2010) have both explored the possibility that UASC use silence as a form of agency and resistance. The tendency of UASC to tell 'thin' (Kohli 2006) or partial stories about themselves and hold back from professionals has been variously attributed to trauma, lack of trust and a need to tell official narratives for immigration purposes (Chase 2010.) However, Chase (2010) has shown that silence may be a means of resisting control and surveillance from professionals. Similarly Kohli (2006a) considers silence as a form of 'functional distrust', a rational protective mechanism for ensuring safety and protection. Continuing the focus on agency, Kohli (2011) has considered the social contexts in which agency might be established and practiced. He identifies the multiple 'webs of belonging' that UASC build around them as the social space in which agency can be developed, providing an alternate view to traditional concepts of resilience that locate coping and capacity within the individual. O'Higgins (2012) locates the lack of agency that UASC may experience within Westernised understandings of childhood as a stage of vulnerability and passivity. She perceives social work professionals as largely entrapped in these notions and suggests that social workers need to engage further with promoting the agency of unaccompanied children. On review, a trajectory becomes apparent within this research field which moves from gathering vital insights into the individual psycho-social and emotional needs of UASC and how services might meet these needs (and indeed the ways in which they are not), through to current research trends which seek to broaden understandings of UASC with reference to sociological concepts such as vulnerability and agency from a more critical perspective.

3.2 Unaccompanied young people and the transition to adulthood

Underlying much of the social work research is a commitment to assisting UASC with resettlement and integration which does not explicitly or directly address the potentially temporary and unstable nature of that settlement (Valtonen 2008). However, a number of studies have highlighted the increased uncertainty and vulnerability that UASC experience as they approach adulthood, suggesting that uncertainty and its effects (on mental health, well-being, security and safety) may be the defining feature of this transitional period (Wade et al. 2005; Wade et al. 2012; Chase & Allsopp 2013). Similarly, researchers have linked this period of uncertainty with liminality, the feeling of being in limbo and complex experiences of time in which young people may experience endless waiting and stasis punctuated by frenzied movements forward in time (for instance if they are refused status and detained) (Kohli & Connolly 2009; Griffiths et al. 2013; Kohli 2014). Recent research from Sweden provides a perspective from a different policy context, where achieving settled refugee status is much more common (Söderqvist 2014). In the absence of heightened uncertainty, this research considers how young care leavers develop their cultural and ethnic identities, finding that the young male refugees who participated experienced the transition to adulthood as a period in which they attempted to develop identities which would allow them to fit in and succeed in Swedish society whilst maintaining connections to their ethnic cultures.

Despite the understanding that we have gained, Kohli (2014: 18) has noted that 'little is yet known of the ways in which young people fare as they grow into adulthood'. Sirriyeh (2013) similarly points to a paucity of research on young people as refugees and asylum seekers as opposed to children, asserting that whilst studies such as those discussed above mention growing uncertainty and anxiety about the approach of adulthood, the journey into adulthood for UYP has not been tracked. For Sirriyeh (2013) the issue is with sharp distinctions between studies of child asylum seekers and studies of adult asylum seekers, which result in young people becoming lost and obscured in the literature. Clearly, a growing need has been expressed to address this gap in knowledge as concerns about UYP's welfare and the ability of services to adequately meet their needs accumulate (JCHR 2013; Chase & Allsopp 2013; Chase et al. 2015; Gladwell et al. 2016). What we can establish from the current

literature is that research to date has had a predominantly individual orientation (Sirriyeh 2013; O'Higgins 2012). As Clark-Kazak (2012) asserts:

... much of the literature, policy and programming tends to approach individual child migrants as individuals rather than as members of families, communities and networks. (Clark-Kazak 2012: 97)

This suggests a need to focus on the wider social networks of UASC and UYP as under-researched area of study. Much of the work we do have on social networks strongly indicates a need to recalibrate research away from a primary focus on the role of formal services. A number of studies have concluded that the role of formal services either diminishes during the transitional period to adulthood or is experienced as negative and controlling. UYP are likely to rely increasingly on peer, community and non-statutory support networks (Hopkins & Hill 2010; Chase & Allsopp 2013). Chase & Allsopp (2013) suggest that the current literature overestimates the role and significance of professionals. Relatedly, Wade et al. (2005) observed that social workers in their study of UASC tended to underappreciate the role of other significant adults in young people's lives, paying more attention to the role of services, than other elements of the social network. Wright (2014) reflects on these findings from a practitioner perspective and suggests that social work with UYP should accept the limitations and tensions of its role as a statutory organisation and seek to assist UYP with building networks that are independent of the state. However, we have limited knowledge of what these social networks look like for UYP in the transition to adulthood.

Current findings clearly suggest a need to expand research with UYP beyond the current focus on services and their role in resettlement to explore the wider social worlds of UYP. Karen Wells, in one of the few studies to focus on UYP in particular, identified that:

... there is still a tendency, marked in child saving institutions, of treating "the child" as an individual radically severed from social networks and effectively alone and in need of rescue. (Wells 2011: 328).

The findings from Well's (2011) study (one of very few studies to address the social networks of UYP specifically) suggest that UYP have complex and vibrant social networks which research has not yet explored. The social networks of UYP have

rarely been the focus of research, although there is often acknowledgment within large scale reports and studies that social networks are of importance to asylum-seeking young people (Bloch et al. 2009; Wade et al. 2005; Chase et al. 2008).

This review of the literature has ascertained that there are significant gaps in our knowledge of what happens to unaccompanied young people in transition to adulthood. Based on the little that is known, a focus on social networks arises as fertile for further research for a number of reasons. First, there have been no research studies that are explicitly focused on the social networks of UYP leaving care. Secondly, we know that social networks are important to care leavers and migrant populations alike (see review below) but know little about UYP's social networks specifically. Thirdly, current research indicates that UYP's social networks are likely to change during the transition to adulthood as formal services become less central, but we have not yet fully studied these changes. Finally, the only research study directed at the social networks of UYP suggests that their networks are complex and dynamic. Now that the focus on social networks has been justified, this chapter turns to reviewing the relevant literature on social networks.

3.3 The social networks of care leavers and migrant young people

Whilst this is an under-researched topic, there are some studies with unaccompanied children which provide insight into the social networks of UASC, although it remains unknown how these social networks change during leaving care and transition to adulthood. Studies with UASC have established that they tend to make bonding friendships with young people from similar backgrounds and also find sport, faith groups and stable quality placements helpful in the development of strong social networks. However, it may be harder for them to make friendships across cultural bridges, although arriving in the UK at an earlier age and having access to educational opportunities can aid this process (Wade et al. 2005). Both Wade et al. (2005) and Kohli (2007) have suggested that social work practice focuses too little on supporting social networks due to the demands of the urgent practical needs of children and that more could be done in this area of practice, for whilst some UASC develop strong social networks (particularly where they have family or siblings in the UK), many still face relative social isolation due to a number of significant barriers

such as language, culture and poverty. As there are few specific studies of the social networks of UYP in transition (Wells 2011), it is necessary to turn to the related research fields which consider the social networks of care leavers and the social networks of migrant young people more generally.

3.3.1 The social networks of care leavers

Research with care leavers regularly highlights the positive role of social networks in the care-leaving experience, including the importance which care leavers themselves place on social networks (Hiles et al. 2013; McMahon & Curtin 2012; Holland et al. 2007; Sala-Roca et al. 2012). The positive role of peers (Munro et al. 2011), foster carers (McMahon & Curtin 2012) and Leaving Care services (Scannapieco et al. 2007) has been variously documented. Social networks are considered vital for young people in general and care leavers in particular as they have been shown to promote social inclusion, positive mental and physical health, resilience and identity development (Antonucci et al. 2014; Gilchrist & Kyprianou 2011; Cotterell 2007). These are areas of particular concern for UYP in the transition to adulthood as they are dually exposed to a risk of social exclusion and attendant emotional, practical and developmental challenges due to their status as care leavers and asylum seekers (Spicer 2008; Sirriyeh 2013).

Studies to date have frequently found that professional support is essential for care leavers (Munro et al. 2011; Morgan 2012, see Hiles et al. 2013 for a full review). Indeed, the role of the professional emerges from the current literature as one that is relatively unproblematic, and whilst variations in the quality of Leaving Care services have been noted, fundamental assumptions about the positive role of statutory services could be further interrogated. Whilst it is relatively uncontested that practical support from services during transition is essential, the impact of services beyond financial and practical support is still uncertain (Hiles et al. 2013). An emerging theme in our understanding of the role of professional support during leaving care relates to the levels of agency that young people experience during the process. Care leavers have frequently reported that they experience a lack of agency (echoing findings on UASC in particular), with studies reporting that young people may feel that their voice is not heard and they are not included in decision-making

(Munro et al. 2011; Daly 2012; Morgan 2012). This occurs despite regulations and guidance reiterating the importance of listening to the views of young people (Munro et al. 2011) and research evidence that highlights that care leavers have a strong desire to have their opinions heard and valued (Stein 2012; Hedin 2016). These findings suggest that the role of formal services, whilst providing vital support, may be experienced ambivalently. Research also draws our attention to the time-bound and age-limited nature of the support young people can receive from services. Young people report feeling pressure to leave care and achieve 'independence' before they feel ready (Mulkerns & Owen 2008; Munro et al. 2011). The tension between 'independence' and 'interdependence' that is prevalent in the literature is relevant here. Many Leaving Care researchers now recognise that the process of leaving care is less about a transition to complete independence than a transition to interdependence, in which a range of different interconnecting social relationships are available to support the young person (Hedin 2016). This shift suggests the need to look beyond the role of formal services to more fully understand the wider social networks of care leavers. Indeed Singer et al. (2013) have suggested that the role of services may be to fill gaps in the support provided to young people in their wider network, rather than being the main source of support.

There is evidence that peer networks may play an important role and can provide opportunities to boost self-esteem, particularly groups organised around sport and extra-curricular activities (Hiles et al. 2013; Sala-Roca 2012) and that some practical support can be offered by peer groups, particularly in offering a place to stay in periods of homelessness (Hiles et al. 2013). However, the potential for conflict and challenges within peer networks is often highlighted (Hiles et al. 2013). Similarly, finding an intimate partner and starting a family is perceived ambiguously, and current research highlights the potential negative as well as positive effects of partners and children on the social network (Hiles et al. 2013; Hiles et al. 2014).

There are a number of studies that focus on the complexity of family support networks for care leavers (Barn et al. 2005; Wade 2008; Parker 2010). The lack of stable family connections is considered to be the most salient and challenging feature of care leavers' social networks. Rogers (2011) has noted the increasing difference between care leavers and other young people who are able to use family networks and support as an anchor for more fragmented and non-linear transitions to

adulthood as opposed to the 'compressed and accelerated' paths taken by care leavers (Stein 2008). Sibling relationships have also been explored and are considered to be amongst the more tenacious and stable family connections for care leavers, although evidence suggests they may also be complex and fluid (Parker 2010). Importantly, birth families are thought to provide vital cultural links for care-leaving young people and provide opportunities to observe cultural rituals and practices (Ibrahim & Howe 2011). Concerns have been raised that care leavers do not regularly and routinely receive formal support from services in establishing and maintaining contact with birth families, particularly extended kin networks (Wade 2008; Hiles et al. 2013)

Importantly, recent research considers the importance of personal agency within the informal networks of care leavers. Whilst a lack of agency has been noted in young people's relationships with formal services, a picture is emerging of the ways in which care leavers experience agency within informal networks. As Hedin (2016) suggests, issues of agency matter as much in the broader social context as they do in relationships with formal services. Evidence suggests that care leavers may play an active role in creating and maintaining their own social relationships (Andersson 2008, cited Hedin (2016); Schofield & Beek 2009) and that being able to overcome challenges within their social networks is important for the development of confidence and identity (Hedin 2016).

This review of the social networks of young care leavers points to an opportunity to further develop our understanding of the broader social networks of care leavers outside of formal services. In particular, the concept of agency has surfaced as an important theme for care-leaving young people. The potential lack of agency they may experience with formal services is evident. However, the potential for them to exercise personal agency in the wider social network is a developing area of study.

3.3.2 The 'rhetoric of social support'

Whilst the Leaving Care literature has provided some crucial work on the social networks of care leavers, gaps remain in our knowledge and conceptualisation of social networks. Within the literature, 'social networks' are rarely referred to in favour of what Hiles et al. (2013) describe as the 'rhetoric of social support'. Where the term

'social network' is used it is usually employed interchangeably with the concept of social support. The focus on 'social support' suggests a uni-directional relationship between the (vulnerable) young person and those giving support, positioning the young person as the passive recipient of both formal services and informal support. Closer attention could be paid to the agency of young people in creating, maintaining and acting within their social networks. Singer et al. (2013) have provided an example of how this might be done by focusing explicitly on how young people create and utilise support structures. Additionally a focus on social networks, rather than social support, allows us to explore the way in which young people may be both providers and receivers of support, particularly in light of evidence that care leavers may be more likely to care for others than allow themselves to be cared for (Samuels & Pryce 2008) and often take on higher levels of responsibility than other young people, including becoming parents earlier (Stein 2006). Furthermore, a social networks focus brings into view the ambiguity and complexity within social relationships that this review of the literature has highlighted. Across all social network domains (formal, informal, family, peers) the literature suggested both positive and negative impacts on care leavers were present, suggesting that a focus on 'support' alone cannot fully capture the dynamics of social relationships. Indeed, no relationship can be easily categorised as either supportive or not supportive. Research by Hiles et al. (2014) notes the complexity of support in the lived experience of care leavers, with some support being experienced as forced, pointless or controlling across all domains of the social network.

Similarly, different domains of care leavers' social networks are often treated as separate and unrelated entities. Antonnuci et al. (2010) have suggested the need to understand the multiplicity of different domains in social networks and the ways in which they interact. This need not relate to the physical interaction of different parts of the network, but the interrelated impacts that a complex set of connections can have on a network. A reframing is required which recognises the vital role that Leaving Care services and related agencies have in supporting care leavers, whilst enabling an exploration of the complex interplay between statutory services and other aspects of a young person's social system.

3.3.3 Migration, mobilities and social networks

In contrast to studies with care leavers, social networks in the migration literature are much less focused on formal sources of support and emphasise informal support networks, particularly the role of support from diaspora and ethnic communities. Whilst most studies are concerned with the impact of social networks pre-migration, on the migration journey and during immediate resettlement (Williams 2006; Gilbert & Koser 2006; Hopkins & Hill 2008; Reynolds 2010; Crawley 2010a) the general importance of social networks to asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants whilst they are in the UK has been highlighted (Bloch et al. 2009). Social networks are considered important sources of both practical and emotional support (Sales 2002; Zetter & Pearl 2000). Support from communities with similar migrant or ethnic backgrounds is considered vital but rarely unproblematic. Whilst these types of network can offer immediate support, the bounded nature of some migration networks can be potentially restrictive and prevent the creation of 'bridging ties' which provide links to the dominant society and potential opportunities for integration (Portes 1998; Gilchrist & Kyprianou 2011). Granovetter's (1973) 'strength of weak ties' theory is prevalent within this literature. This theory expounds that weak social ties, those which are not firmly imbedded in a person's immediate family, peer group or community can be the most useful in creating opportunities to interact outside of the immediate community and its limited social and economic resources. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged groups who may rely on weak ties to make bridging connections to opportunities outside of marginalised communities (Williams 2006; Wells 2011). The focus on cultural and ethnic communities in this field of research contrasts with Leaving Care work where this has seldom been a focus of research (a notable exception is Söderqvist's 2014 study of UASC Leaving Care in Sweden).

The role of transnational networks is another established theme in this area of work, with emphasis placed on networks that transcend bounded space. Although geographical space and constraints in the lives of migrant populations are still important, there is significant interest in how transnational social networks operate. In terms of young people, there is particular interest in how new media and communication technologies enhance their ability to maintain contact with transnational social networks and what this might mean for the development of their

ethnic and cultural identities (Wilding 2012). These transnational relationships remain under-researched in the lives of unaccompanied young people and have featured infrequently in previous research.

The key themes of social networks research in the migration literature reveal some stark differences between the framing of social networks in the social work imaginary and other disciplines. In particular, an understanding of networks from a migration perspective is almost entirely focused on informal networks which may span across geographical and physical boundaries. From the migration perspective, the young migrant may be more easily perceived as an active agent within complex multi-sited social networks. There is recent work in this field to suggest that the agency of young migrants (including those migrating independently) is crucial and it is the curtailment of agency that creates vulnerabilities, rather than the act of migration itself (Orgocka & Clark-Kazak 2012). This is, however, a relatively recent development, with past work in this area paying little attention to children and young people, too often treating them as the 'baggage' of migrating adults (Bloch et al. 2009, Crawley 2010b; 2011). Indeed research on the agency of young migrant populations, particularly UYP, has not developed to its full potential in either the social work or migration field. Crawley (2010b; 2011) in particular has published findings suggesting that recognition of young migrant's agency is under-explored and that research has regularly depoliticised and desexualised young people in order to maintain a social construct of migrant and asylum-seeking young people centred on victimicity.

Viewing social networks through the lens of these two sets of literatures (Leaving Care and migration) surfaces the inherent tension within this thesis between the Leaving Care perspective and a broader migration angle. The social work perspective, represented within the Leaving Care literature, understandably centres primarily on services and the practice of professionals. It is also concerned to understand 'social support' and the ways in which this can be mobilised as formal services begin to retreat. This social work lens positions unaccompanied young people as an especially vulnerable group of young people with particular needs during the transition to adulthood. The migration perspective provides an alternative view with important additional insights and is worth considering in more detail here.

The field of migration studies has advanced beyond the mapping of human migrations and the economic implications of migration to a more nuanced theoretical and philosophical position, underpinned by the new 'mobilities' paradigm which recognises the complexity and interconnectedness of a highly mobile world (Adey 2009). A focus on multi-layered mobilities has reframed mobility and migration as inherently social and therefore fundamentally bound up with complex power dynamics (Massey 1994; Urry 2000; Adey 2009). This focus reflects some of the key concerns and values within social work, suggesting the compatibility of this field with social work studies. Indeed, the mobility concept is multi-disciplinary and can be applied across a range of fields of inquiry. 'Mobility' has been described as 'movement imbued with meaning' and therefore has important implications for the study of migration, immigration and asylum seeking (Adey 2009: 34).

The mobilities paradigm has challenged assumptions of permanence and linearity in the study of migration, recognising that most migrations are transitory, impermanent, cyclical and complex, as is the case for unaccompanied young people. Indeed, recent work by Gladwell (2013) following unaccompanied young people who had been returned to Afghanistan when they became adults found that half of those followed had attempted further migrations. Taking this perspective allows us to move beyond the focus on resettlement and integration which has thus far dominated the UASC literature to consider the more complex longer term futures of UYP.

Viewing UYP through the prism of the mobilities paradigm may look very different from viewing them through a social work perspective. From the perspective of social work, focused as it is on the provision of services and meeting young people's needs, UYP may be considered uniquely vulnerable, living an extraordinary existence, hard to reach, 'other'. However, a mobilities and migration perspective recasts UYP as part of a universal global phenomenon, in which the 'whole world is on the move' and migration is the new norm. The circumstances of their migration might be very specific and unusually traumatic, but their experience of moving, movement and migration is far from unique. There is some distance here between positioning UYP as a group of care leavers with very particular experiences, needs and vulnerabilities and repositioning them as part of a universal movement of people. Whilst it is sobering to remember that there are 65.3 million forcibly displaced people worldwide (the majority of which are internally displaced) and 21.3 million refugees

worldwide (UNHCR 2015), and enlightening to view UYP's experiences from new global perspectives, it is also important to retain sight of their distinctive position in UK society as young people, care leavers and asylum seekers in an ever harsher immigration regime.

Ultimately, drawing on research in the migration field may aid the development of a social network concept that allows more scope for the agency of young people, recognises the importance of social networks across international borders and engages with the dynamic complexity of social networks in a period of uncertainty and transition. Similarly, the social work view of social networks can enhance a purely migration-focused view, with its focus on the potential impact of policy, its commitment to understanding the personal needs of oppressed groups and its understanding of issues of inequality. A recent paper by Smith (2013) is an example of the potential of this approach. He suggests that the complexity of social networks, particularly in a modern and mobile era may be routinely underrepresented. Drawing on Castells' (2007) theory of the networked society, he explores the role of power in social networks, explicitly linking this with social work with asylum seekers and immigrant populations. He calls particular attention to the way in which networks of power (including networks of formal services, and networks of knowledge makers such as researchers) may be used to include and exclude and the ways in which marginalised populations may use resistance and 'counter power' within their social networks, as was evident in Kohli's (2006a) and Chase's (2010) study of silence as a form of agency for UASC. What becomes clear from a reading of this literature is that there is an opportunity to enhance our understanding of the social networks of UYP by creatively drawing together knowledge and theory from across the disciplines of social work and migration.

3.4 The social construction of youth, the transition to adulthood and asylum-seeking young people

This chapter concludes by drawing out some of the key theoretical concerns uncovered during the review of the literature. This research is concerned with 'young people' as a particular category. For purposes of methodological clarity it will be necessary to be explicit about the ages of these young people, therefore acquiescing

to an age-graded system of delineating and categorising life stages. However, it is important to interrogate an understanding of 'youth' as a particular category and 'the transition to adulthood' as a concept that is inherently bound up with the study of young people and the process of leaving care. There are multiple ways to theorise and contextualise young people and the transition to adulthood. The key tension in this area of theorising is between developmental perspectives (which understand transition to adulthood as a linear staged process based on natural biological and psychological maturity) and social constructionist perspectives (in which childhood, adulthood and youth are viewed as social constructs which are culturally specific and variable across time and space). This thesis proceeds from the view that youth (like childhood and adulthood) is a socially constructed concept, a response to the particular social and economic conditions of a specific time and place (James & Prout 1997). An understanding of childhood and youth as social constructs has been thoroughly examined and theorised by academics working within the 'new sociology of childhood' (Jenks 1996; James & Prout 1997; James et al. 1998). This new paradigm for understanding childhood and youth aims to give voice to children and young people; to recognise the social relationships and culture of young people as valuable areas of study in their own right, and to acknowledge young people as social actors capable of constructing their own lives (James & Prout 1997). Importantly, this new understanding of childhood and youth is not restricted to an interpretation of youth as purely constructed, but insists on a more nuanced understanding in which youth is both a social construct and a social institution, motivating researchers to focus on the social context of young people's lives whilst preventing representations of young people as passive.

'Youth' is considered to be a liminal stage between childhood and adulthood. As White and Wyn (1997: 12) suggest 'youth exists and has meaning only in relation to the concept of adulthood'. It is a period of preparation, of 'becoming' an adult, a deficit state in which young people have not yet completed the process of becoming a grown up. A deficit understanding of young people has led to the period of youth being one that is understood as a time where increased guidance, surveillance, care and control are required. This is reflected in the development of Leaving Care policy and practices which position the acquisition of adulthood and independence as a process which requires professional assistance for those who do not have family

support. Relatedly, in both policy and research, youth and young people are regularly problematised (Mizen 2004). This problematisation may occur through general concerns about current youth transitions which are considered to be increasingly uncertain, complex and temporary, as exemplified by du Bois-Reymond's and López Blasco's (2003) term 'yo-yo' transitions which captures the tendency of young people to move backwards and forwards between states of relative dependence and independence (Hall et al. 1999). However, the problematisation of young people is most focused on specific groups of young people who are labelled 'vulnerable'. As Brown (2014) suggests, the vulnerability label may be a door to increased support and resources, but also has implications for the level of control and interference adults might exert over young people's lives.

Whilst generalised anxiety about youth and concern about particular types of young people have long been a social policy concern, it may be too simplistic to dismiss concerns as social constructions. There is evidence to suggest that the transition to adulthood in the UK is increasingly complex and costly, involves more uncertainty and risk and that successful transition is determined by access to family and community resources (Mizen 2004; Furlong & Cartmel 1997). This has significant implications for care leavers and UYP whose transitions may carry an even higher degree of uncertainty and complexity that is less likely to be buffered by access to family support.

There is general agreement that young people live their lives in a 'highly segregated aged-based context', structured through social institutions, laws and cultural expectations (Heath 2012: 8) and it follows that transitions during youth are similarly structured, with normative institutional and social markers often differentiating access to services and utilised as signifiers of successful transitions. This may be particularly the case for care leavers and UYP, whose transitions are more heavily influenced by the state and other social institutions. However, as White & Wyn (1997) suggest, these supposed markers of adulthood and independence are often transitory and short-lived, highlighting the complexity of establishing when transition to adulthood is complete and if it has been 'successful'. In the case of UYP, establishing the route to successful transition may be even more complex as notions of what constitutes 'adulthood', when this occurs and how it is achieved are culturally specific.

Recent research and theorising has begun to frame the transition to adulthood as a transition to full citizenship (Heath 2012; Hall et al. 1999). Full citizenship in adulthood is characterised by the attainment of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, including the political and social rights (the right to vote, drink, and drive) and legal and social responsibilities (subject to adult systems of justice and less legal protection under the law as outlined in the previous chapter). Hall et al. (1999) extend this reading to the expectation that young people will become socially productive and active citizens. Similarly Smith et al. (2005: 432) note a policy concern that young people become productive citizens through 'respectable economic independence', echoing critiques of policy and practice with care leavers which may be interpreted as primarily engaged with producing independent and productive citizens. Understanding the transition to adulthood as transition to citizenship raises pertinent questions in terms of the position of UYPs whose transition to adulthood is characterised, in a very literal sense, by a struggle to attain and enact such citizenship rights and responsibilities. The process of transitioning to adulthood and the process of seeking asylum may both be considered as processes of 'becoming'. For UYP the two occur concurrently in a complex embrace (Wilding 2012). Both young people and asylum seekers may come to embody society's own darkest fears and hopes of what it might, collectively, become. Sirriyeh (2010: 215) notes the ways in which the combination of a status of young person and asylum seeker (and indeed care leaver) may be considered 'unsettled, transitional, unintegrated and therefore potentially risky'. An understanding of UYP is therefore inherently entwined with a multiplicity of thorny social constructions.

A key aspect of taking a social constructionist perspective to the study of young people in general and asylum-seeking young people in particular is to pay attention to issues of agency, and this has emerged from the literature review as a key area to develop understanding. Indeed, agency is also a major concern in the study of youth and transitions more generally. Evans & Heinz (1995) delineate a typology of different transitions based on the level of agency young people are able to exercise, concluding that more successful transitions are characterised by higher degrees of agency. A later study by Cote (2002) again found the degree of agency a young person was able to utilise influenced the success of their transition to adulthood. Evans (2002) documents the way in which young people seek to maximise

opportunities and minimise risks within structural and social constraints, despite traditional concerns that young people engage in risky behaviours and use the transition to adulthood as a time of experimentation and boundary testing. Young people, he suggests perceive themselves as social actors. Similarly, Brown (2014) found that young people were resistant to labels that constructed them as vulnerable, and preferred understandings of themselves as active agents exercising a degree of control over their lives.

3.5 Conclusion

Research on UASC has established them as a particularly vulnerable group with specific challenges to their psycho-social wellbeing and mental health arising from the process of migration and resettlement, as well as the inherent uncertainty of the immigration and asylum system. The services provided to UASC and their relationships with professionals in formal services has been the subject of robust exploration, with findings which range from largely negative descriptions of poor policy and practice through to balanced and complex accounts of the practice of social workers in ethically and emotionally difficult terrain (Kohli 2006b; Kohli 2007). This type of research has begun to build an understanding of the important role of agency with unaccompanied children and young people (Chase 2011). Despite a varied and comprehensive body of knowledge on unaccompanied children, the transition to adulthood for UYP is less well explored. What we do know is that this is a very uncertain and problematic time for UYP in which they must negotiate the process of leaving care in the context of an increasingly restrictive immigration regime. The limited research that does exist suggests that there is likely to be a decreased role for formal services and support at this time, and that a fruitful line of enquiry would be to consider the wider social networks of UYP and their role during the transition to adulthood. This chapter has reviewed the literature on social networks in relation to care leavers, migration and UYP. There is a large amount of literature on care leavers and their social networks, although this work is usually framed in terms of social support. The limitations of this perspective have been explored here in order to justify the focus on broader social networks. The issue of personal agency during care leaving has been identified as a key theme that might

be explored more fully by a focus on social networks. The migration literature on social networks has also been reviewed. This field of work provides an alternative focus to the care-leaving literature, considering transnational and informal networks in more depth than the Leaving Care literature. This section has argued that there is scope to consider the social networks of UYP more broadly using insights from both literatures to complement each other. In particular, the issue of agency has emerged as crucial in both sets of research, and is therefore a theme identified for further exploration within the thesis.

Finally, this chapter has outline research that relates to young people and transition more broadly, highlighting in particular research and theorising which considers childhood and youth as socially constructed, variable across time and space. Focusing on this conceptualisation of youth transitions makes issues of agency explicit, and inherently problematises normative Westernised notions of childhood, adulthood and youth. This approach to youth and youth transitions will be crucial in a study that is concerned with the transitions of young people from a variety of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

3.6 Gaps identified in the research literature

3.6.1 Empirical gaps

Whilst the experiences of UASC have been variously documented, there is very little research on UYP as they move towards adulthood. Research which considers UYP as care leavers is particularly sparse. The knowledge we do have is limited to a consideration of UYP approaching adulthood within larger scale studies of UASC (Wade et al. 2005; Wade et al. 2012). This group of young people remain under-represented in the Leaving Care literature and are similarly under-represented in the migration literature. Given that there is growing concern about this group of young people and an increase in expectations on social workers to assist young people in planning for the future, a more thorough exploration of the issues that UYP face as they leave care is timely. There is significant scope for further empirical research with UYP leaving care. In particular, the role of UYP's social networks during the transition to adulthood has not yet been a focus for research. Whilst there is significant amounts of research on support for care leavers in general, there are

problems with applying this to the particular circumstances of UYP who are living through very different circumstances. The study of social networks with care leavers has proved fruitful terrain and it is likely this will be the case with UYP.

3.6.2 Theoretical gaps

Stein (2005) has suggested that Leaving Care research is under-theorised and there is consequently scope to provide a more theoretically focused approach to a study of care leavers. There is an opportunity to utilise some of the theoretical advances within the migration and mobility studies to invigorate our current understandings of unaccompanied children and young people. In particular, an explicit and detailed focus on the agency of UYP may address some of the current issues identified with Leaving Care policy and practice whilst simultaneously building on an emergent body of work with UASC and migrant populations which is concerned with agency. Relatedly a holistic approach to social networks, which does not focus on relationships of support but on all aspects of the social network, can redress an imbalance identified in the current literature which positions UYP and care leavers generally as passive recipients of support as opposed to active agents, relationally constructing their own social networks and ties. Finally, there is space to build on previous work, particularly with UASC, which can provide a detailed and in-depth understanding of young people's social relations in order to provide a counter-narrative to current constructions of asylum-seeking young people which have been identified as too often one-dimensional, containing complex lives within simple constructs (Kohli 2007).

Chapter Four

Methodology

4.0 Introduction

This chapter begins by outlining the constructivist philosophical approach that underpins the methodology, and introduces the life-course approach as a conceptual framework. Additionally, the theoretical position in relation to the concepts of structure and agency is made explicit. Section 4.2 discusses the qualitative approach to the research and its application to the study of social networks, considering also how key life-course concepts such as time and space are understood in the context of this study. Once the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the research are established, a definition of a 'social network' for the purposes of the research is reached and the research questions, aims and objectives are detailed.

4.1 Philosophical and theoretical underpinnings

4.1.1 A constructivist approach

The methodological approach to this research is underpinned by a constructivist philosophical position. This means that the research methodology proceeds on the basis that there is no one single absolute reality or truth, and that there are multiple socially constructed realities which are produced, transformed and reproduced through social interaction (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Bryman 2012). It follows epistemologically that 'knowing' and creating knowledge in the constructivist sense involves engagement with multiple constructions, interpretations and meanings. Knowledge is co-created through the interaction of the researcher and researched. A constructivist approach is therefore concerned to capture the subjective and intersubjective meanings attached to social phenomena by participants, rather than record an objective reality.

4.1.2 Conceptual framework: the life course

The study will be framed using the life course approach which is concerned with the movement of people through their own lives and the historical time in which they live, paying particular attention to the periods of change and transition which are the focus of this study (Harveen 1982). Stein (2006) has suggested that a life-course approach is appropriate for studies of care leavers as it can help in understanding cumulative effects over time and brings transition into focus. Similarly, from a migration perspective, Griffiths (2013) recommends further life-course research is needed in studies of migrant populations due to its focus on time and temporality, rather than spatiality and geography. Elder et al. (2003) have identified the key facets of the life-course approach; linked lives, time and place, structure and agency. Each of these facets and the way in which they are being conceptualised and understood is discussed in this section.

Linked lives

Linked lives refers to the life-course principle that lives are lived in connection with other people, and that social relationships play a key role in our life experiences across the life course. Lives are linked not just by personal and social relationships but by shared and similar experiences of people living their lives in the same time and place (Elder et al. 2003). The linked lives concept is very neatly related to the concept of social networks and their impact on transitions, providing a framework which recognises social networks as a vital focus.

Time and place

The life-course approach studies lives lived across time and space, drawing attention to the intersection of individual and socio-historical time (Hunt 2005). Emphasis is placed on the movement of people across the life course, both in time and in space, crucial to an understanding of both migration experiences and transition in time. Relatedly it focuses on the way in which lives are 'timed' through institutions and socio-cultural expectations. Lives may be considered 'off time', as has been suggested with the 'compressed and accelerated' transitions of care leavers when

compared to the lengthened and protracted transitions of their peers (Elder et al. 2003). UYP in particular may be considered to have experienced some 'off time' events in terms of the ages at which they have left their families and undertaken difficult journeys out of their home countries. The various ways in which time and space can be conceptualised within this framework are discussed in further detail in Section 4.2.4.

Structure and agency

As the life-course approach is concerned with the interaction of individual and historical time it inevitably addresses issues of structure and agency throughout the life course (Hunt 2005), making it an appropriate framework for this study as issues of agency were identified in the previous chapter as important emerging themes within the literatures reviewed. An understanding of agency is crucial to the thesis. There are various and contested ways of understanding what is meant by the concept of 'agency' and it is therefore necessary to outline here the approach to the concept of agency that is being taken within this thesis. This research adopts a structuration approach to structure and agency (Giddens 1984). Giddens' structuration theory posits the duality of structure and agency, conceptualising them as intrinsically embedded within each other. Structure is considered to have no external existence outside of the actions of agents. Structure is used, transformed and reproduced by agents during social interactions (including the knowledge that is produced during the research process) and therefore structure and agency are mutually dependent on each other for their existence. Giddens' structuration is a notable transgression from traditional understandings of structure (as the external institutions and systems of society), and represents an attempt to understand relationships of power and structure within a constructivist framework. This allows for a complex understanding of the dynamics of structure in that it rejects the notion that structural social forces simply act on and constrain agents. Agents are seen as active within the structure allowing for a more multifaceted and nuanced approach to analysing the relationships between individuals and structure which is appropriate to the life-course approach and its consideration of lives lived within the macro structures of a particular socio-historical time.

For Giddens, structure can be enabling as well as constraining. Indeed, the strength of structuration theory for this research and beyond is its ability to capture ‘the full force of the human ability to make a difference in the social world while recognising the limitations imposed by the social context’ (Layder 2006: 182). Agency here, in its simplest sense, is what an actor does. However, whilst this theory promotes agency to a status beyond something that is constrained, it also recognises the vital role of power and control. For Giddens, human action always implies power; the ability to produce an effect through action. Power is conceived here as relational, fluid and dynamic. Giddens terms this ‘the dialectic of control’, which describes the fluctuations in the balance of power and control on both the collective and individual level, a useful tool in understanding how individual lives are connected to socio-historical time throughout the life course.

Structuration theory therefore provides a way of explicitly theorising and detailing what is meant when we discuss the terms structure and agency. For the purposes of this research this theoretical approach is one which is actively engaged in promoting the analysis of agency on a par with structure as they are mutually embedded. As previously discussed, agency is one of the key concepts that has been identified as an area to engage with. However, research with a population such as UYP who are subject to atypical amounts of structural and institutional power must find a delicate balance between recognising young people’s agency and representing the significant structural challenges their situation involves. Viewing structure and agency as interrelated and co-dependent provides a means of negotiating this balance within a theoretically robust explanatory framework.

4.1.3 Relevance of the life course and structuration theory to this topic

The life-course approach is considered to be an appropriate conceptual framework as it is concerned with transition and time and has theorised many of the key aspects of this study; social networks, transition and agency. Whilst the life-course approach is explicit in its concern to analyse these issues, it is not prescriptive in terms of how concepts such as structure and agency are theorised. Similarly, the structuration theory is not methodologically prescriptive and is intended to be used selectively to illuminate social analyses rather than as a grand and complete overarching theory

(Giddens 1984). Therefore, structuration theory and the life-course approach are amenable to being used in tandem and indeed have similar concerns beyond structure-agency, including a concern for the social impacts of time and space and the impact of the actions of other people on social experience.

4.2 Methodology

A constructivist position necessitates a methodological approach that is able to capture the subjective and intersubjective meanings of the subjects of the study. A qualitative approach to research is suited to this position as it is focused on meanings and interpretations of social actors as well as the social context in which meaning is created (Ritchie & Lewis 2003). Qualitative research seeks to collect 'rich, nuanced and detailed data' which takes a broadly interpretivist approach concerned with capturing experience, complexity and context (Mason 2002a:3)

Discussing qualitative interviewing in particular, Mason (2002b) draws a distinction between research interviews as 'excavation', uncovering pre-existing relevant information and the research interview as 'construction' in which knowledge is created during the research process through the interaction of the interviewer and interviewee. This study takes a 'construction' approach and considers that knowledge is created through the interaction of the participant and researcher and the meanings and interpretations of those involved in the research interaction.

4.2.1 Applying a qualitative methodology to social networks

The social networks of UYP were identified in Chapter Three as a fruitful focus for research. Previous research indicates that social networks are important for young people, care leavers and unaccompanied young people for a variety of reasons. Research has also indicated that the dynamics of social networks may become increasingly complicated during the process of leaving care as informal networks begin to take a more prominent role. It has been suggested enabling strong and diverse networks of support should form part of effective planning with care leavers (Wade et al. 2005). However, we still know very little about how UYP's social networks operate, how young people use them and what UYP themselves think

about them. We have also yet to grapple with the complexity of social networks rather than focusing on the notion of social support.

Therefore, the main aim of this research is to further our understanding of UYP leaving care in the UK by focusing on an analysis of their social networks. As previously discussed, a focus on social networks, as opposed to support, allows for a more complex, multi-directional understanding of the social worlds of UYP. Adopting a qualitative approach to social networks can aid in capturing the multi-directional and multi-layered elements of a social network, which may or may not play a supportive role. Indeed, not all elements of a social network will have a positive influence. As Gilchrist & Kyprianou (2011) point out, social networks can be both enabling and restricting (mirroring the enabling and constraining features of structure in structuration theory). Focusing on social networks as opposed to support similarly draws attention to the interplay of agency and structure within the social network and promotes a focus on both formal and informal relationships.

A qualitative approach to social networks focuses on the subjective and intersubjective meaning of social networks as well as the structure of networks and patterns of relationships, which is appropriate for a study based within a constructivist paradigm. There is increasing recognition that qualitative analysis is capable of capturing the dynamic and fluctuating nature of social networks which is vital to the study of social networks during transition (Fushe & Mutzel 2011). This also allows for the exploration of social networks in their social context, making it an appropriate methodology for the study of groups subject to a very specific social and political milieu such as UYP, and will allow the research to make connections between social networks and issues of structure and agency.

4.2.2 Qualitative social network interviews

Qualitative approaches to studying social networks are centred on in-depth qualitative interviewing techniques designed to uncover both the structure and content of a social network and to explore with participants the meaning of the social network (Edwards 2010). In-depth interviewing is preferred over survey or questionnaire data as qualitative interviews can provide rich and detailed data on the participant's subjective understanding of the network. The approach taken in this

study is known as an 'ego-centred' approach, in which the starting point for considering the social network is an individual who identifies the key people within their social network (Edwards 2010). The boundaries of the network are set by the individual who is able to provide as much or as little detail on their social network as they wish. In other approaches the network boundaries are decided by the researchers who decide who they wish to identify within a given network. However, in this study the networks involved are highly personal and subjective. The data to be sought is equally subjective and therefore each network to be analysed is contained by one individual.

4.2.3 Conceptualising social networks

Taking this approach to social networks requires that what is meant by the term 'social network' is made explicit. Drawing on the gaps identified in the literature and the philosophical standpoint of the methodology, we can identify a number of different aspects of a 'social network' as defined for this research. On the most basic level, the social network is the network of social relations and relationships that a young person identifies as connected to them. Importantly, the young person defines the boundaries of the social network and decides whom they wish to identify as being part of the network and whom they do not. The social network that emerges from the interview is therefore constructed, produced through the social interaction between the researcher and participant. We could consider this to be a narration of the young person's network, or what might be referred to as the 'narrated network'. The narrated network is not considered an objective and complete account of the members of a participant's social network, but is a subjective narrative of the interpretations and meanings that have been attached to the participants' understanding of their social network during the research process.

4.2.4 Time, temporality and the social network

A qualitative approach has been chosen for its ability to capture fluid and dynamic aspects of social networks and relationships, which is particularly important for a study which is concerned with social networks during a transitional period such as

leaving care and becoming an adult. The life-course approach which frames this study is also concerned with lives lived over time. Therefore conceptualising and capturing time is of particular concern. COMPAS (Griffiths 2013) have recently highlighted the need for studies which focus on temporal elements of migration, which is often conceptualised as spatial rather than temporal. Further to this, the concept of 'transition' which is central to this research is intimately bound up with an understanding of time and temporality.

Time influences the social network on a variety of levels. Most basically, social networks inevitably change and shift over time, as does the young person's experience and interpretation of the network. Secondly, social networks in times of transition are likely to destabilise and go through a period of transformation and change. Thirdly, as the network is narrated in the interview and analysed by the researcher it is filtered through a variety of levels of interpretation, reinterpretation and representation. In all these senses, social networks are conceptualised here as fluid, slippery and ever-changing. The fluid nature of the social network and the focus on social networks in transition requires a more in-depth understanding of time and temporality as it relates to this study.

We most commonly understand time in terms of chronology; the order of events, the passing of time as defined by the ticking of the clock or the crossing-off of days on a calendar. We might also understand time as biological, in terms of the physical and psychological changes that occur as we age (Griffiths et al. 2013). Studies of transition and emergence into adulthood regularly draw on these understandings of time, focusing on biological age, staged psychological development and related social and legal expectations (Heath et al. 2012). These conceptualisations of time share an understanding of time as linear and uni-directional.

However, taking a life-course approach within a constructivist methodology requires additional conceptual layers of time. In life-course theory, three interacting aspects of time are highlighted; biographical time, social time and historical time (Elder et al. 2003).

Biographical time

A focus on biographical time, whilst allowing the participant to order an understanding of their lives and social relationships in meaningful ways, points us to explorations of how time is experienced, both across the life course, and in the moment. The experience of time can be crucial to the experience of migrant populations and their social networks, particularly those who have unsettled immigration status. Time may be experienced as accelerated and frenzied at particular points in young people's lives (when they first arrive in the UK, for example), or as decelerated and static, a temporal suspension of time, as they wait for asylum decisions (Game 1997; Griffiths 2013). Indeed, chronic waiting is a common experience for asylum seekers and has been studied both as an individual experience, as a government strategy for controlling and managing migration and as a positive liminal experience which provides space and freedom, particularly for young people (Griffiths 2013).

Perhaps the most crucial feature of a biographical understanding of time is the space that is created to focus on the future. The life-course approach which frames this study conceptualises human subjects as future-focused, concerned with 'future possible selves' (Hitlin & Elder 2007: 183), which may be of particular relevance with young people facing unpredictable futures. It has further been suggested that young people's migrations are intimately bound up with concepts of the future; migration is inherently future-orientated and for young people in particular, may represent an attempt to actualise an imagined future (Griffiths 2013; Adam 2004). Similarly, the process of leaving care is entwined with the process of imagining and creating an adult future. Social networks and relationships may play a key part in how young people imagine their futures and social networks are likely to be a key enabling or constraining factor in their ability to pursue future goals (Gilchrist & Kyprianou 2011). Conceptualising participants as future-orientated connects us to the significance of structure and agency in terms of understanding how young people might use and exercise agency within a social network to achieve future goals.

Finally, biographical time is narrated. It is ordered and structured for meaning to be produced and shared. Narrated time is (like structure) continually constructed, transformed and reproduced. In this sense it is recursive, the past is not enduring and is continually reinterpreted, re-remembered and reconstructed. The past and even the present are not dissimilar to imagined futures, as the past and the present

can be imagined and reimagined too in order to create a coherent sense of self and one's place and meaning in the life course. Biographical time therefore emerges as something that is not necessarily linear and progressive, it is highly subjective, recursive and complex.

Social time

Social time refers to the social roles and expectations that we are subject to, based on the interaction of our age, gender, class, ethnicity and culture. (This is also recognised by Giddens (1984) in his structuration theory. He describes this as institutional time.) Social time is structured through social institutions that differentiates access to rights, entitlements and resources (Hunt 2005; Dorling 2013; Chase & Allsopp 2013). A focus on social time can bring into focus the way in which societal understandings of age affect policy and practice with UYP, a consideration which emerged in Chapter Two as important for UYP. Social time is also structured through cultural norms and expectations, particularly in relation to how transitions throughout the life course are timed and patterned. This is a useful conceptual tool for understanding how UYP experience transition in relation to various cultural expectations and the experiences of the wider leaving-care population.

Historical time

Historical time places the individual life and social network within its historical context, focusing on the way in which the individual is enabled or constrained by the particular historical moment in which the life course takes place. This understanding of time places greater emphasis on understanding the specific social context in which lives are lived, once again drawing our attention to matters of structure and agency and requiring research which can produce analysis which interweaves macro and micro scale interpretations.

Socio-Cultural time

The term 'socio-cultural' time is a less frequently considered form of time. It is sometimes used to describe divergent understandings of time or approaches to time

within different cultural contexts (Surokin 1964). However, for the purposes of this research the concept of socio-cultural time has been expanded to include socio-cultural approaches to the development of identities and belonging over time. In contrast to the dimensions of time described above, consideration of socio-cultural time emerged from within the data rather than being a dimension of time which had been identified for analysis prior to interviews taking place.

4.2.5 Space, place and the social network

Recent research has noted a need to understand the importance of physical space in the study of social networks (Wells 2001). The spatial location of social networks and the impact of mobility or immobility within the network are crucial to our understanding of how networks function (Bloch et al. 2009). This may be particularly the case for transnational social networks which go beyond the confines of physical space. However, it is necessary to define what is meant by the terms 'space' and 'place' and the relevance these concepts have to the qualitative study of social networks.

Mendoza and Moren-Alégret (2012) suggest that space is a generic abstraction whereas 'place' is space given meaning, suggesting that the concept of 'place' refers to the meanings that are attached to a physical space. This concept of place has temporal, spatial and social elements. In terms of temporal and spatial elements, things are said to 'take place' at a particular time and in a particular space. It is the interaction of a specific time and a specific physical location that makes up a 'place'. Place is therefore inherently social and represents a space in which social processes are created, recreated and mediated (Agnew 2011).

There is a further element to a social understanding of place. 'Place' can be understood as a social position as well as a physical location, in terms of one's place in society and position in a global hierarchy (Olwig & Gulløv 2003). This understanding of place brings into focus the dynamics of power that are inherent in an understanding of place. As Moss & Petrie (2002) argue, places for children and young people are often defined and regulated by adults. An obvious example of this which has relevance to UYP and care leavers is the language of 'placements'. The places where young people in care go to live, be it with foster carers, residential

homes or independent living arrangements, are referred to as 'placements', the young person having been placed there by an adult in a position of relative power. Place, therefore, is location with meaning. It acquires this meaning through the individual's experience and understanding of it, but it is also imbued with wider social meanings through its continual construction and reconstruction through social interaction and interpretation.

Space refers to the spatial elements of a physical place (Agnew 2011). Space can be moved around in. We can have too much or too little of it. A focus on space draws our attention to issues of mobility and movement, whereas a focus on place is concerned with something specific in time and space. Mobility and movement are intrinsic to the experience of migration and an appreciation of space can add an extra dimension to our understanding that goes beyond focusing on belonging and attachment to a particular place and explores the ability to move between and within spaces. Indeed, an under-researched and under-theorised aspect of space is distance (Griffiths 2013). Studying young people who have transnational links draws our attention to this distance, the space between, in both the literal sense of geographical distance and the experience of being distant.

Space and place are therefore both crucial to understanding social networks. Place connects us to the physicality of social interactions and the meanings attached to geographical locations in which social relations occur. Focusing on space connects us with theories of movement and mobility that are intrinsic to experiences of migration, while simultaneously draws us to explore the spaces between participants and their social world.

4.2.6 Definition of a social network

Combining the philosophical, theoretical and methodological approaches detailed and explored in this chapter, we can outline a definition of a 'social network' for the purposes of this study. The social network refers to *the social relationships which individuals enact, produce and reproduce across time and space*. The social network that is able to be captured and analysed within this study is the 'narrated network', that is, the narrative of the social network that is produced through the qualitative interview process.

4.2.7 Social Network Domains

This research focuses on three particular ‘domains’ within the social networks of unaccompanied young people; Family, Peers/ Community and Professionals/Foster Carers. ‘Domains’ in this context denotes a discrete arena within the social network. The original intention was to differentiate between the formal and informal aspects of the young people’s social networks as much of the relevant literature distinguishes between formal and informal support and relationships. However, the three distinct domains noted above emerged from the data and it became evident that the distinction between informal and formal domains within the social network was an artificial one which did not capture the depth and complexity of relationships.

Whilst these three domains have been identified there is significant fluidity within the social network. Identifying particular domains for the purposes of drawing out some of the distinctive aspects of relationships of a particular type does not suggest that there is a sharp separation between each domain. Social relationships cannot be fully captured by such categorisations and the use of domains here is intended to draw attention to specific aspects of certain relationships rather than to fix and label relationships within static categorisations.

4.3 Research questions and aims and objectives of the research

Taking into account both the limited research knowledge of unaccompanied young people leaving care and the chosen methodological approach the following research questions emerged:

1. How do unaccompanied young people experience different domains of their social networks across time and space during the transition to adulthood and the process of leaving care?
2. How does immigration status impact their social networks when they leave care?

These questions are designed to increase knowledge and understanding of the social worlds of unaccompanied young people during transition to adulthood and the particular impacts of immigration status using a life course approach. The emphasis is therefore on fluidity and change within social relationships.

The aims and objectives of the research were identified as:

1. To explore the spatial and temporal aspects of unaccompanied young people's social networks, using the life-course approach as a conceptual framework.
2. To understand the impact that asylum seeking has on unaccompanied young people's transition to adulthood, in order to inform future policy and practice.

These objectives were grounded in the methodological approach and conceptual frameworks but also clarified the intention to produce material and data which is applicable to both policy and practice.

Chapter Five:

Research design

5.0 Introduction

Having outlined the philosophical, theoretical and methodological approach of this study, Chapter Five will outline the research design of the study. The study is based on interviews with both UYP (N=18) and professionals who work with UYP (N=12). The research proceeded in three phases. The first phase involved initial interviews with UYP. The second phase involved follow-up interviews with those UYP who agreed to take part in a second interview (N=11). The third phase comprised the interviews with professionals.

5.1 Sampling

Sample criteria for phases one and two: UYP

The criteria for participation in the study was as follows.

The young person should be:

- a current or former unaccompanied asylum-seeking child as defined by the Home Office (Home Office 2002)
- currently aged between 17 and 25

Using 17 as the minimum age required recognition that whilst legal adulthood was attained at the age of 18, and this theoretically represented a climactic point of interface between child welfare concerns and restrictive adult immigration processes, the reality on the front line is less circumscribed by legal definitions of adulthood. The decision to include 17-year-old young people prompted much reflection. UYP over 18 are the most under-researched group. However, the age of 17 was selected as this often represented the point at which the Leaving Care process began to be heavily impacted by asylum status, as temporary leave expired and young people

became ARE. The professionals involved with recruitment at the local authority felt strongly that 17 year olds should be included in the sample as for Leaving Care Services, the age of 18 has little significance. Young people in care are moving towards independence and phased into Leaving Care services from the age of 16.

Sampling strategy: Purposive sampling for phase one and two – interviews with young people

The aim of the purposive sampling strategy was to seek balanced representation of a variety of immigration statuses including those with Refugee Status, those still awaiting a decision or with temporary leave, and those who had become ARE. However, as the fieldwork began it became clear that there were very few young people who were still awaiting a decision or were still on temporary forms of leave. Whilst many of the young people in this study had experienced periods of waiting and temporary immigration statuses, most had either achieved Refugee Status or become ARE during the Leaving Care period. Out of a total of eighteen participants, only four were awaiting a decision or had temporary status.

Table 4: Breakdown of sample by immigration status at the time of first interview

Status	Refugee Status	ARE	Awaiting/ Temporary
Number in sample	9	5	4

Acknowledgment must be given to the difficulty of categorising young people in certain cases. It is particularly difficult in cases where young people are technically ARE but have been able to make a fresh claim due to new evidence about their case, or are able to make a claim to stay in the UK under Human Rights law which entitles them to a right to private and family life. For the purposes of this study, those categorised here as ARE were those who had received a final refusal of their first claim and appeal. Three of these young people had not yet made any fresh claims or applications to stay in the UK based on their right to a private or family life. Two of

the young people had made a fresh claim for asylum and were awaiting a decision, but have been categorised as ARE as this is how the local authority had categorised their status. In many ways, the experiences of these two ARE young people were similar to those awaiting initial decisions (as their Leaving Care entitlements continued once a fresh claim had been made). Whilst it proved impossible to recruit equal numbers of young people within each status category an equal balance was achieved between those who had the relative certainty of Refugee Status and those whose outcomes remained relatively uncertain (and were therefore in the ARE or Awaiting / Temporary category).

The content of the sample does not represent the wider population of UYP leaving care. Indeed, evidence suggests very few UYP will receive full citizenship and that the majority will follow a pathway of uncertainty and temporary periods of Leave to Remain before being refused citizenship (Gladwell & Elwyn 2012). Balance was sought between numbers of participants in each category on the basis that the study aims to evenly represent the experiences associated with each different ‘pathway’. It is also important to acknowledge that many UYP who have become ARE or who are uncertain of their status are extremely hard to reach and are much more likely than their peers to have disengaged from services.

The sample has been drawn from one geographical area, a large city in the north of England. This is because there are likely to be significant differences in policy, services and communities across localities (Wade et al. 2005). Concentrating on one geographical location allowed the research to include a deeper understanding of a particular local context and be specific about the how the local policy context impacts on the findings.

Sample characteristics of unaccompanied young people

Table 5: Sample characteristics of young people who participated in the study.

	N						
Age	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
	5	1	3	5	1	2	1
Country of origin	Afghanistan	Eritrea	Iraq	Somalia	Guinea	Sierra Leone	

	7	6	1	2	1	1	
Length of time in the UK	Less than one year	1-2 years	3-4 years	5-6 years	7-8 years	9-10 years	
	1	5	2	6	3	1	
Age at arrival	13	14	15	16	17		
	1	4	6	5	2		
Gender	Male	Female					
	15	3					
Status (at time of first interview)	Awaiting status	Refugee Status	ARE				
	4	9	5				
Accommodation (at the time of first interview)	Living independently	Living with foster carers	Living with family				
	12	5	1				
Work / education status	University	College / sixth form	Work	No education or school			
	2	12	1	3			
Receipt of Leaving Care services?	Yes	No					
	16	2					

The young people interviewed covered a large range of the ages that were in the original sample frame (17–25), although there were fewer young people aged 21 and

over (in large part due to the smaller number who were still in receipt of Leaving Care services or in regular contact with services at this age). Whilst the majority of the young people were in receipt of Leaving Care services, two of the young people who were aged 21 and above were no longer in receipt of the services when they were interviewed, but had remained in sporadic contact with services and were therefore able to be contacted to take part in the study.

The young people originated from a variety of countries but the majority of participants were from Afghanistan and Eritrea. Whilst national figures compiled by the Refugee Council (2015) show that the number of UASC arriving from Afghanistan has decreased significantly in recent years, most of the Afghani young people in this study had arrived in an earlier period when numbers of UASC from Afghanistan was still high. Numbers of UASC from Eritrea have recently increased and this is reflected in the number of Eritrean participants in this study who have been in the UK for a relatively short period of time.

In terms of gender, three of the participants were female and fifteen were male. The much smaller proportion of girls does reflect the national statistics on UASC. In 2014 88% of applicants were boys. This proportion has been similar throughout previous years. Girls seeking asylum alone also tend to come from African countries including Eritrea with very few unaccompanied girls arriving from Afghanistan and Iraq (Refugee Council 2015). This trend is reflected in the sample from this study, with the three female participants all originating from African countries (two from Eritrea and one from Guinea).

Table 5 also shows the sample characteristics for length of time in the UK; age at arrival, current accommodation and employment/education. These characteristics were not included in the sampling strategy but are worth noting here in order to provide a sense of how the situations of the young people within this sample might represent the wider population of UYP.

Most of the young people had been in the UK for between one and six years, although there were young people in the sample who had been in the UK for very short (less than a year) and very long (nine years) periods of time, representing experiences at very different points in the pathway from arrival to leaving care and beyond. The age at which most of the young people in this study arrived in the UK

was between 14 and 16. These arrival ages are relatively young in comparison to other similar studies and to the national average more generally. Home Office statistics show that 63% of UASC arriving in the UK in 2014 were aged between 16 and 17 on arrival. The statistics are similar for previous years (Refugee Council 2016). However, this sample does reflect the wider picture in that the majority of the young people arrived in the UK aged 14 and above, which is the case more generally. The characteristics of the sample in relation to accommodation and education are discussed further in Chapter Five.

Sampling strategy for phase three: interviews with professionals

Interviews were conducted with twelve professionals who had experience of working with UYP in the local area in which the study took place. Table 6 provides a breakdown of the roles and experience of those who took part in the study. Again, the sampling strategy was purposive in that it sought to represent professionals working at a variety of levels with unaccompanied young people.

Table 6: Breakdown of professional participants by job role

Role	Descriptor	Number of participants
Senior Social Worker	Social workers at a senior level with significant specialist experience of working with UASC/YP	2
Social Worker	Social workers within the Leaving Care team who had some experience of working with UYP on their caseload	4
Personal Advisor	Personal advisors who had experience of working with UYP leaving care	4
Team Manager	Manager of Leaving Care	1

		team – responsible for UYP Leaving Care on the team’s case-load	
Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)		Chair of case reviews. This IRO had significant experience of reviewing pathway plans for UYP	1

5.2 Recruitment

This section considers recruitment strategies for both the interviews with young people and the interviews with professionals.

The majority of participants (UYP = 16; Professionals = 12) were recruited through a large local authority in the north of England. A further two young people were recruited through a local voluntary organisation working with young refugees and asylums seekers. Recruiting in this way provides a clear route to access young people in a secure and supported environment with strict ethical guidelines. Block et al. (2012) discuss the importance of embedding research with young refugees in established supportive environments, and this was the primary reason for recruiting through an LA and a well-established voluntary organisation. However, there is a danger of presuming that young people necessarily feel comfortable accessing support from within the organisation, particularly where they are moving towards independence and may not see the workers regularly. In response to this a list of contacts for support and advice on various topics was compiled and made available to potentially vulnerable participants to encourage young people to seek alternative support if it was needed. Recruiting most participants through the LA does largely exclude those who were not engaged with services, although two of the young people recruited through the LA had aged out of Leaving Care services and were no longer receiving any Leaving Care support. However, it is important to note that accessing participants in this way did mean that some of the most vulnerable UYP, those who have been excluded from services due to immigration status and those who have absconded, could not be captured within this sample.

The local authority provided a Lead Contact (LC) person, experienced in work with UYP leaving care. It is important to note that the LC was responsible for drawing up the initial sample frame and the LA explicitly excluded young people that they felt should not take part due to mental health issues or severe language barriers. This had implications for the sample as the LA had influence over the young people who could be approached to interview. This does mean that the sample was more likely to include those who were more engaged with services and had better levels of mental health than might otherwise have been the case. The findings from the study should be understood in that context. However, despite this impact on the sample and findings, this was considered to be an appropriate method of recruitment for ethical reasons, which are discussed in further detail in Chapter Five (Section 5.5).

Two young people were recruited through a local voluntary agency that provided services to asylum-seeking and refugee young people. Secondary recruitment through the voluntary sector allowed the study to include some young people who were not fully engaged with statutory services and who were therefore excluded from the LA recruitment process. This provides a sample that is slightly less biased towards young people who have regular contact with statutory agencies and partially addresses some of the issues raised in the previous paragraph about the impact of recruiting through one lead contact. However, the voluntary sector similarly were committed to only recruiting young people who they felt were emotionally able to take part and those who had been engaged with the service for some time, and had built trusting relationships with the service.

Recruitment process: unaccompanied young people

The LC and voluntary service contacts were provided with information sheets to give to young people which had been specifically designed for the age group targeted with, input from the LC (see Appendix 1). The contacts were also briefed in detail on what the interviews would entail and the aims of the research, so they could personally answer any questions about the research as a first point of contact. Interview practicalities were arranged through the LC and voluntary contacts, although young people were encouraged to contact the researcher before the

interviewer to ask questions. Whilst this meant that the researcher did not always have direct contact with UYP before the interview, this method of recruitment was preferred due to the need to elicit participation in a culturally sensitive manner, which could be best provided by a trusted contact who was familiar with each UYP and had experience of working with this group (McAreavey & Das 2013). However, it is important to acknowledge the way in which recruiting in this manner can affect the perceptions of UYP about the researcher and their connection to the LA. To counter this, the researcher spent time at the beginning of the interview reiterating that the research was independent of the LA, and reassuring the young people that any information they chose to disclose within the interview would remain private and confidential.

Interviews arranged through the LC took place either in a private room at the LA offices or at the young person's home, depending on the wishes of participants. In all cases, the LC attended the start of the interview to introduce the young person and the researcher and to explain to the young person the support that was available to them after the interview if any support issues arose. Those recruited through the voluntary sector were interviewed in a private room at the offices of the organisation and the contact once again provided introductions and set out the support to be offered to young people whilst they were participating in the study.

Recruitment process: professionals

Professionals were recruited within the same LA using the same LC to distribute information sheets (Appendix 2) about the research. Contact information for the researcher was provided and the interviews could be arranged directly between the professional and the researcher. In practice, the majority of professional interviews were organised face-to-face, as professionals approached the researcher during the first phase of interviews with UYP to enquire about taking part.

5.3 Data collection

There were three phases of data collection: initial interviews with young people, follow up interviews with young people and interviews with professionals.

5.3.1 Phase one: initial interviews with young people

The interviews with UYP followed a 'hybrid' method approach to qualitative interviewing, using a number of qualitative methods within one study (Heath & Walker 2012). The use of hybrid methods has been described as multi-dimensional (May 2010:513, cited Heath & Walker 2012), in that each individual method aims to generate different types of data, allowing the researcher to ask 'distinctively different but intersecting questions' around one topic. Accordingly, each method was chosen specifically for its proven usefulness in generating a particular kind of data and interview discussion. There were three parts to the interview design.

1. Capturing Time

The first part of the interview was designed to capture the dynamic, temporal elements of transition and locate the young person's current social world within the life course of the participant. The interview was based around the co-creation of a 'time tree', a form of timeline, by the participant and researcher (Sheridan et al. 2011). Time-lining tasks generally require the participant to plot key events along a line drawn on a large sheet of paper. Events will usually be ordered chronologically along the timeline, although exact dates and timings may not be required (Sheridan et al. 2011).

I have developed the 'time tree' as an alternative timeline exercise. Participants were given a pictorial representation of a tree, with roots, a trunk and branches on a large sheet of paper, or asked to draw a tree of their own if they preferred. The roots represented the past, the trunk represented the present and the branches represented multiple possible futures. Participants were asked to populate the

picture with key events and changes in their life. The time tree activity formed the basis of the interview conversation.

Following from Kohli's (2006) research suggesting young asylum seekers prefer to deal with the present first, the future second and the past last, participants were asked to begin with the present and populate the trunk of the tree with recent important events and changes and describe their current situation. They were then asked to think about their 'imagined futures' (Adams, cited Griffiths et al. 2013). The different branches of the tree were used to represent the multiplicity of different futures that they might imagine for themselves. The future is a concept that has received little attention in social research, although a number of commentators have called for research to pay more attention to 'futuraity' – particularly as it is vital in addressing the agency of participants in shaping their own lives and goals (Chase 2013; Griffiths 2013). Understanding young people's imagined futures is vital in this context. Previous research suggests that many UYP have a foreshortened sense of future (Wade et al. 2005; Wade et al. 2012). The uncertainty of their predicament is so acute that they may become unable to imagine a future for themselves (Wade et al. 2005). Other recent research has suggested that UYP may have future plans that are at odds with the plans they make with support staff, and which they may feel unable to share with the agencies they are involved with (Chase 2013; Wells 2011). Either way, social workers and support workers are expected to assist young people in planning their future, taking account of the multiple pathways that future might take (Wade 2011), and it is therefore critical that research strives to understand how young people perceive their own possible futures.

Whilst there are some time-lining methods that incorporate the future by extending the traditional timeline into the future, this method tends to represent the future as uni-dimensional and linear, represented by a lone straight line. The time tree method explicitly addresses the inherent uncertainty of the future and the number of different pathways that a young person might take. The branches of the time tree are multiple and can be added to, in order to encourage the young people to imagine a number of possible futures. The time tree recognises that for many of the participants their future will be extremely uncertain, with a number of distinct pathways dictated by the outcomes of their asylum claims dominating the ways in which they think about their future (Wade 2011).

Lastly, participants were asked to populate the roots section of the tree with past events. Similarly to the 'future' branches on the tree, the diagram depicts a number of roots at the bottom of the tree which are designed to encourage the young person to think about different aspects of their past which have affected the course of their lives. The young people were not directed towards any particular time in the past and were able to decide for themselves how far into the past they wished to go. This method allows the participant to define the parameters of the discussion. In her research with unaccompanied young people Gallagher (2005) made an ethical decision not to discuss events pre-arrival in the UK as they may have been too traumatic for young people to recount. However, the time tree method allowed the participant to choose how far back they went, without pre-determining the boundaries of the discussion, allowing the participant more control over the interview process.

The time tree method was developed in preference to a more traditional time-lining approach due to the potential limitations and problems with using a linear timeline in this particular study. Whilst the traditional timeline is simple and easy to explain, it tends towards linear and chronological representations of time, which might imply a factual, official and static narrative of the type that young people are expected to recall for their asylum claims and official interactions with government institutions (Sirriyeh 2013). It was important that the interviews in this study were in no way reminiscent of the interviews that young people may have undergone with official government bodies and did not suggest to young people that they were required to repeat and recall facts and dates about their experience. The time tree method did not require the young people to order their experience in a linear or chronological orthodoxy of time. This is particularly appropriate for asylum-seeking young people who are likely to have experienced traumatic events and who have a high incidence of suffering post-traumatic stress disorder and mental distress (Howard & Hodes 2000; Kohli & Mather 2003; Hodes et al. 2008). Research suggests that asylum-seeking children and young people are often unable to remember or recall their experiences in an orderly and organised way, experiencing memories and events as fragmented, dynamic and disjointed (Kohli 2007). Additionally, the time tree allows multiple aspects of time to be explored without the constraints of chronology, giving

the interview scope to explore the various aspects of time that were identified in Section 4.2.4.

This method does have potential limitations. Whilst it is not dissimilar in its design from other activity-based and visual methods popular in social research, I have been unable to locate any literature which uses the specific time tree method. It is therefore an untested method. However, it is firmly within the tradition of other diagrammatical, visual methods in that it requires the participant to populate the paper in a way that is minimally directed.

Capturing space and place: mental mapping and photo elicitation

The second part of the interview was designed to explore the spatial elements of UYP's experience and social networks. The young person could choose either a 'mapping exercise', a photo elicitation activity or a combination of both. 'Mental mapping' required the young person to draw a map of important places, where they are located, how often they go there, and who they see there. The interview discussion was based around the map as it was created. This method is most commonly used in social geography (White & Green 2012). This method was chosen to help build a picture of the meanings young people attached to particular places and the social interactions that took place within them. It promoted an exploration of space, how it is used and experienced. Some of the young people did have difficulty with this task and expressed some initial confusion about how detailed the map should be. Whilst some young people drew detailed and specific maps of where they lived, others felt more comfortable with simply naming certain areas of the city. The difficulty some young people had points to some of the challenges of attempting to be as open as possible to the participant's interpretation of the task. Whilst this makes the task more participatory and hands control of the task to the participant, it can also increase anxiety and confusion if what is required of them is not clear. In order to address this, the researcher began this task by talking through what the purpose of the task was. By focusing on purpose and what the task hoped to achieve, young people were given some information which allowed them to feel less confused about completing the task, but ultimately remained in control of how to express themselves within the task.

For photo elicitation participants were asked to bring a photograph / photographs of the spaces and places that were important to them in order to stimulate discussion. This photo elicitation method was used effectively with UYP by Sirriyeh (2010) who suggests that the method allows the participant to choose the narrative point of entry for the interview and therefore construct a counter narrative to the official accounts they are regularly required to tell. This method allows the participant the potential to offer a more abstract entry point for discussion as opposed to the more concrete task of identifying spaces and places they frequent. Photo elicitation methods are seen as potentially participatory and empowering, allowing the participant to influence the research direction and decrease power differentials by providing their own point of view (Wang & Burris 1997). In practice, very few young people chose to bring and share photographs. Against expectations, the young people that did bring photographs chose to bring photographs of their home towns and old photographs of family and close friends. This shifted the expected conversation into spaces and places from the past and demonstrated the power of this method for repositioning the research into unexpected territory. This provided extremely rich data and allowed the participants to reflect on places and spaces of the past in a way that gave human depth and meaning (Russell & Diaz 2011) to places that were remote and distant to the researcher. It also provided a discussion of transnational spaces and places which were more difficult to capture in the mapping exercise.

These two methods did elicit very different types of data. The mental mapping task was useful for understanding the immediate and daily routines of people's lives; where they went and who they saw. However, capturing transnational relationships which were not conducted in geographical space was very difficult when using the analogy of a 'map'. Photo elicitation brought to the fore the places and spaces of the past, lost spaces and places and transnational places of importance in ways that the mental mapping exercise could not capture. Where both methods were used in tandem the richest data was collected as it allowed both types of data to be captured.

Capturing the social network: network mapping

The interview culminated with the creation of a diagrammatical representation of the young person's social network – a practice known as network mapping (Kindermann 2007; Bidart & Lavenu 2005). Participants were given an option of how they wanted to create their network map. A tablet computer was available on which there was a simple application which allowed them to create their map electronically. The rationale was that electronic mapping might be more engaging for young people who are increasingly familiar with using technology to communicate. Participants also had the option of drawing their social network on to a blank piece of paper using different coloured pens and sticky notes to create a similar affect. Interestingly, only one young person chose to map their social network electronically.

In both versions of the network-mapping exercise participants were asked to place themselves in the middle of the diagram and then draw their network of social relationships around them. Creating a diagrammatical representation of the social network provided the foundation for the continued interview conversation and provided a piece of documentary data for the researcher to analyse along with transcripts from the interview (Heath et al. 2009). Placing this exercise at the end of the interview allowed the young person and the interviewer to build on the previous tasks and feed that discussion into the creation of the network map. The previous exercises allowed the participant to begin thinking about the temporal and spatial elements of their relationships which then aided verbal discussions about their social networks. Indeed, by the time participants drew these maps they had already discussed many of the important people in their lives. Formally creating the network map allowed the interviewee to think in a more focused way about their individual relationships with people in the present.

The choice of interview methods

Careful consideration had been given to the order in which each part of the interview took place. Culmination in the network-mapping exercise was chosen for a number of reasons. First, the initial two parts of the interview helped the researcher and participant to begin thinking about temporal and spatial elements of the social

network before it was drawn. Understandings of the impact of the time and space taken from the first parts of the interview therefore informed the way that the social network map developed, as the young person reflected on their timeline and environment going into the mapping exercise and used these reflections to bring out temporal and spatial elements in discussion.

Similarly, the researcher had valuable information about the context for the map as it was drawn, allowing them to produce a more nuanced and personalised interviewing approach during the final exercise. In addition, a positive rapport had been given time to develop during the previous interview stages, resulting in a more comfortable experience for the participant going into the main exercise. The construction of the network map was therefore the culmination of a larger process of reflection and discussion, drawing together elements from the previous phases of the interview. Using a visual technique to gather data on social networks allowed respondents to work at their own pace and to create and define the terms and categories for interview discussion, avoiding the researcher imposing pre-conceived notions onto the discussion (Prosser 2005; Punch 2002)

These research methods were identified and developed with particular attention to the ethical dimensions of research design. The study was designed to create a balance between methods that generated the desired data whilst maintaining sensitivity to the needs of potentially vulnerable participants. Previous research with asylum-seeking children and young people have used similar methods due to a concern to distance the research interview from previous experiences of official interviews with the Home Office and government agencies, which may have been traumatic and conducted within a culture of doubt and distrust (Sluka 1995; Children Society's 2012).

There is a growing trend towards using so-called 'innovative' methods with young people in general, and UYP in particular. As an example, Wells (2011) used a photo elicitation method when researching UYP, in which young people took photographs of their local environments as the basis of a later interview. Graphic elicitation methods, such as the network drawing and time-lining activities are thought to be particularly useful where there are language barriers (Gauntlett 2007) and the nature of the interview may involve sensitive topics (Cornwall 1992), both of which are likely

for UYP participants. Similarly, the use of activities in the interview is thought to allow the participant more control over the pace and structure of the interview, as the questioning will largely be led by what they create (Sheridan et al. 2011) as well as promoting a more reciprocal relationship of co-construction between the researcher and researched (Kesby 2000). Similarly, an element of choice was built into the design, as Heath and Walker (2012) suggest that providing choice allows the participant more control over the research activities, partially redressing some of the power imbalance inherent in the research process.

Visual methods in general may be considered to empower marginalised groups to participate, as Finney & Risbeth (2006) found in their study of young asylum seekers; asking participants to express themselves visually circumvented some of the linguistic, social, cultural and educational barriers to active research participation.

5.3.2 Phase two: follow-up interviews with young people

The original research design consisted of only one interview with young people as described above. However, during the course of fieldwork an opportunity arose to follow up the young people at a later date. The fieldwork took place from September 2014 to September 2015. Over this period of time significant events were occurring in young people's lives, and some of the participants began expressing an interest in being re-interviewed about these changes, either by directly contacting the researcher to speak about the events or by contacting the lead contact to ask to meet the researcher again. Given that the research aims to better understand the transitions that UYP make as they leave care and the dynamic and fluid nature of their social networks over this period of time, this presented an invaluable opportunity to add an additional analytical layer to the research. Careful consideration was given to the relative merits of incorporating follow-ups into the research and some sacrifice was inevitably involved in choosing to undertake follow-up interviews. In order to complete the research in the required time frame the overall number of participants was reduced from an initial number of twenty-four to eighteen. This choice reflected the desire to capture rich, deep data and 'thick stories' in preference to the relative breadth of having more participants overall.

Another vital consideration was the function that the follow-up interviews would serve. It was important that they did not just provide an additional series of data,

such as basic information on events in young people's lives, but that they were designed to be congruent with the original research design. In order to achieve this, the follow-up interviews took as their starting point key elements from the original interview which were relevant to understanding the impact of the specific changes that had occurred for the young person. The availability of visual data from the first interviews was helpful in terms of providing a visual prompt for the researcher and participant to ground the connection between the follow-up interview and the initial interview. In this way, clear connections could be made between the data from the original interview and the impact of the change that occurred by the follow-up interview. Due to this method of structuring the follow up-interviews no generic topic guide was produced as the visual data from the first interview was used to structure the conversation. The timing of the follow-up interviews was designed to be responsive to the events in participant's lives over the course of the fieldwork. The researcher became aware of changes and events that had occurred by a number of different means. Most often, the young person contacted the lead contact about a significant change and was asked if they wanted to be re-interviewed about it. Young people were also able to contact the researcher directly. Occasionally, it became evident at the first interview that a significant event was due to occur (for example, the end of official support from children's services or a decision due from the Home Office on asylum status), so the participant and researcher agreed to meet again after the event. The researcher also pro-actively contacted participants to ask if they wished to take part in a follow-up interview approximately four to six months after the initial interview if they had not already been in touch. This approach was taken with an understanding that whilst significant events may not have occurred to prompt young people to contact the local authority of researcher, stasis and waiting can be an important part of experience of seeking asylum that a follow-up interview might be able to capture (Wade et al. 2005; Griffiths 2013). Eleven of the young people took part in the follow-up interviews. Of the seven young people that were not followed up, four young people could not be contacted before fieldwork closed, one young person declined to take part in a follow-up interview and one young person expressed an interest in taking part in the follow-up but was not available during the remaining fieldwork period.

Conducting follow-up interviews over a period of time allowed the researcher to build a more natural rapport with the young people. There were more opportunities for young people to develop trust in the researcher, and young people were able to talk more in depth about the experiences, building on what they had disclosed in the initial interview.

5.3.3 Links to Qualitative Longitudinal Research (QLR)

The addition of a second wave of interviews introduced a longitudinal element to the methodology which had not been present within the original design. The term Qualitative Longitudinal Research (QLR) can be used to describe research which seeks to track individuals over time and generates multiple waves of data (Neale 2012). Whilst this research did not track participants over a particular duration of time and collected only two waves of data its methods are nonetheless closely related to QLR methods. Indeed, at the core of QLR is the conduct of research both 'through and in relation to time' (Neale 2012:2).

The theoretical underpinnings of QLR have much in common with the life course conceptual framework which guides this study, particularly in terms of the emphasis on the intersection of personal biographies with social context and time. Relatedly, biographical research, which is concerned with life histories, is concerned to understand lived experience within the socio-historical context (Denzin & Lincoln 1998). There is therefore a connection between the 'biographical turn' (Chamberlayne et al 2000) within social sciences which is encapsulated in both the life course approach and biographical research, with the QL methodology.

Time and temporality are core elements of this research and a variety of non-longitudinal strategies have been described which address the importance of studying lives lived over time (Roberts 2002). The second phase of interviews is therefore one of a number of elements of the research design which capture change over time. This research design therefore marries together biographical approaches (in which time and temporality are captured through the narrating of stories of past, present and future) and QL approaches in which change over time is tracked through waves of data collection.

5.3.4 Interviews with professionals

The decision to interview professionals was a finely balanced one which prompted much reflection during the research design. Given that the research proceeded partially on the basis that too little attention had been paid to broader social networks in favour of formal networks, there was concern that gathering data from professionals would compromise the balance of the data and dilute the focus on the social network as a whole by giving voice to the formal elements of the network. This brought into question the positionality of the researcher and how far the research was concerned to 'give voice' to the young people who participated. However, as Shaw (2007) has argued in relation to social work research, it is necessary to problematise an uncritical acceptance that research should privilege the voice of marginalised and disadvantaged groups in research. Whilst this can and should be an important aim, Shaw (2007: 667) suggests that considering only the voices of disadvantaged groups does not always take account of 'power, space, place and time', which are crucial considerations in this research. Interviewing professionals would allow the research to connect with the socio-historical context more explicitly, and give vital information on the local service context, which we know can be variable and patchy across different local authorities (Wade et al. 2005; Wade et al. 2012). In this way, interviewing professionals provided an opportunity for more rigorous analysis of how the experience of the young people in this study might fit into the broader national context, and the way in which local policy and practice shapes those experiences on a collective level. This is crucial information for a study using a life-course approach in which individual experience is understood as intertwined with the socio-historical context on both the macro scale and the meso scale of local policy. However, the crucial deciding factor was whether the underlying philosophical position of the methodology could comfortably accommodate the views of young people and professionals if accounts and understandings differed. A constructivist approach allowed for multiple perspectives to be given equal validity, and allowed the researcher to approach accounts not as contradictory statements of fact but as constructed accounts embedded in complex relationships.

However, the researcher was concerned that the focus of the interviews remained on the broader social networks of the young people and did not focus solely on relationships with practitioners. It was vital that the professional interviews remained focused on their ultimate purpose, to provide contextual information on the wider social networks of the young people as well as understanding the role of formal services within those broader networks. In order to ensure the integrity of this focus was maintained the topic guide for the interviews was designed in two parts. The first part of the topic guide addressed the core contextual questions that emerged from the research questions. The second part of the topic guide was designed after the interviews with young people, and addressed the issues and themes that had arisen in those interviews, ensuring that this part of the research process was led by the data collected from young people (see Appendix 3 for Topic Guide).

5.3.5 Summary of Interview phases

Table 7: Summary of Interviews

Phase	Interview Type	Interview length	Data produced	Recording of Data
One	Initial interview with young people	45 minutes – 100 minutes	Visual Verbal	Visual (pen and paper) Audio-recording
Two	Follow up interview with young people	30 minutes – 90 minutes	Verbal	Audio-recording
Three	Professional interviews	25 minutes- 40 minutes	Verbal	Audio-recording

5.4 Analysis

The collected data was analysed using a 'narrative analysis' approach. This is most usually associated with life-history research and biographical methods of data collection. However, narrative analysis is not limited to particular methods of data collection and can be applied to data which was not collected in a purely narrative form (Riessman 2004). Indeed, it has been argued that all social life is storied and experience is always constituted through narratives, regardless of the form in which such experience is captured (Somers & Gibson 1994).

Whilst there is no strict definition of narrative analysis it has a number of defining features, which Bryman (2012) summarises as:

- A sensitivity to past, present and future events
- A sense of place
- An appreciation of the significance of the context in which events take place

These features of narrative analysis fit well with the research questions and aims as well as the methods for data collection which focus on time, place and context within the focus on social networks. Additionally, the definition of a 'social network' developed in previous sections views the network as a narration.

Riessman (2004) outlines a number of models for conducting narrative analysis. The model used within this research was a 'thematic analysis', in which emphasis is placed on the content of the data rather than its narrative construction. Put simply, using this model, the emphasis is on what is said rather than how it is said. The analysis in this research began by following the 'holistic approach' outlined by approach Lieblich et al. (1998). This required that a thematic analysis of the data is undertaken for each participant as if it were a case study.

As there was a variety of different types of data for each participant (visual data, transcribed interview data at two time points, relevant contextual data from professionals, observational data from research diary) this provided a means of incorporating all the different data for each participant to establish a coherent set of themes that represented the cumulative 'narrative' for that participant. Data directly from the participant represented their narrative, whilst supporting data from

professionals and observations provided the background and context for that narrative. For each participant data was collected at two time points. Creating a 'narrative' for each participant provided a means by which the data from two time points could be assimilated without losing sight of the impact of change throughout the young person's experience.

Once the holistic analysis of each case had been completed, the next stage of analysis was to analyse across cases, identifying common and contrasting themes. This part of the analysis was conducted using the NVIVO software tool to construct a framework of themes. The life-course framework was used to broadly categorise the themes utilising the key principles of the life-course approach as a guide (biographical time, social time, socio-cultural time, socio-historical time). However, during the analysis it also became clear that there were important differences and specific themes relating to different areas of the social network (family, informal social networks, formal social networks and services). It therefore became necessary to conduct the analysis through two different lenses and present the findings across two 'findings' sections accordingly. The first findings chapters therefore consider the analytical themes that emerged when focusing within the boundaries of each domain of the social network, allowing for an understanding of the specific themes that emerged particularly within that domain. The second findings chapter looks across the boundaries of each domain to apply life-course concepts to the networks as whole.

5.5 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the design of the research and have been considered at each stage. Previous sections of this chapter have considered the ethical rationale for the recruitment strategy and the choice of methods. However, there are some critical ethical considerations which require further examination in this section.

Ethics and vulnerability

This research was designed with a view to avoiding the temptation to label UYP as necessarily 'vulnerable', whilst recognising the specific vulnerabilities they might experience from a confluence of social identities (asylum seeker, young person, care leaver), current situation (poverty, transition, asylum process) and past traumatic events. Whilst many researchers in this area have identified asylum-seeking children and young people as a 'vulnerable' population, there is a growing belief that constructing particular populations as 'vulnerable' in social research can have the unintentional consequence of stigmatising and excluding certain populations from research (Aldrige & Charles 2008; Fisher 2012). There is a need to balance the desire to protect research participants from harm and to consider ways in which research can promote the agency and voice of excluded populations. The interview methods in this research have been chosen with ethical considerations in mind. As discussed previously, task-based methods such as the ones used in this study allow the young person a greater sense of control over the interview process and avoid potentially distressing direct questioning, allowing the young person to lead the interview and establish the boundaries of discussion. Visual and creative methods are also thought to be ethically appropriate for interviews that may touch on sensitive topics, as they require less verbal expression and allow for a 'softer' entry into difficult topics. They are also especially appropriate for young people who do not speak English as a first language as they allow for greater non-verbal expression.

Informed consent

All participants (professionals and young people) were provided with both written and verbal information about the study prior to interviews taking place (see Appendix 1 and 2 for the information sheets). Wherever possible, participants were given at least one week between being given the information and taking part in the interview. Occasionally, participants explicitly requested that the interview take place earlier. Both professionals and young people were asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix 4 and 5). Care was taken to ensure the consent forms were brief, worded simply and were not intimidating for young people taking part. Attempts have been made to strike a balance between documenting consent for the protection of

participants and avoiding any potential unease and anxiety that signing such forms might provoke in the young participants. Much has been written about the issue of informed consent when researching refugee communities, in particular where concerns have been raised that written consent may be inappropriate for those who may be reluctant to sign official documents (Block et al. 2012). There are further concerns that the idea of signed consent is bound up with Westernised notions of consent and approval that may be culturally unfamiliar or offensive to some participants (Ellis et al. 2007; Block et al. 2012). However, written consent was required for this study in order to gain ethical approval. Clear information was given to participants explaining what the consent form was for and reiterating that the consent form was for their protection, and to ensure they understood the content of the study and what participation meant for them.

Whilst written consent was required for this study, concerns have been raised that gaining written consent prior to participation might distil our conceptualisation of gaining informed consent to one act of signing the paperwork, and distract us from the need to continually reflect on and renegotiate consent throughout the whole fieldwork process (Miller & Bell 2002). Miller and Bell (2002) further problematise the idea of informed consent by questioning whether we are able, at the beginning of a research project, to give an accurate idea of what participants are consenting to, particularly in studies with a longitudinal element. They raise this issue particularly in relation to research that studies transition over time. As Neale & Hanna (2012) point out consent may be differently informed during different phase of the study. The issue of informed consent in this context was approached as an iterative and ongoing process (Mackenzie et al. 2007). Whilst written consent was obtained at the outset in line with the procedural aspects of ethics, consent was re-negotiated continually throughout the process. In practice, this required continually checking with participants during and after interviews that they wanted to continue, that the interview was unfolding as they expected and that they were happy for their input to form part of the data for the study.

Language barriers

One criterium for the study was that the young people involved were able to communicate in English. The use of interpreters was not possible or desired. The researcher recognised that the exclusion of those without a good level of English had ethical implications for the study, in that the findings presented cannot capture the voices of those who are not sufficiently fluent in English. This group of young people is likely to be some of the most vulnerable and recently arrived UYP. However, it was vital to the ethical integrity of the study that the young people who took part were able to give continual informed consent which can be considered as a process of negotiation that continued throughout the research (Block et al. 2012). This involved being able to understand fully the implications of participation in the study not just at the beginning, but as the study evolved. Similarly, it was important for ethical integrity that the young people involved were not subject to the 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu 1996) of having their words and meanings misunderstood or misinterpreted. For these reasons, young people who did not speak sufficient English were not able to take part in the study

Anonymity and confidentiality

Anonymity was guaranteed to all participants and data was protected in line with the University of York regulations and guidelines. All except one interviewee agreed to have their interview recorded. Recordings were taken on a password-encrypted voice recorder and transferred to the university's secure computer network as soon as possible after recording for transcription. One young person requested that notes were taken instead of a recording. The interviewer made the notes and gave the UYP the opportunity to check that they were an accurate representation of the interview when they had been written up.

The identities of participants are protected in written outputs by use of a pseudonym, which is preferred over the allocation of a number as this could be seen as potentially dehumanising. Aspects of a young person's identity or personal characteristics have been altered to reduce the risk of their anonymity being compromised. Characteristics such as gender, country of origin and asylum status may not be changed in some instances in order to maintain the integrity of the findings. However, every effort has been made to ensure that participants cannot be

identified. Similarly, individual professional participants will not be identifiable by their characteristics in written output. Their gender and the location of their work will not be included in written material. However, some characteristics, such as whether they work for the voluntary sector or statutory sector, are disclosed if it is intrinsic to an accurate understanding of the findings. Some general demographic information about the sample obtained for the study will be included in written outputs (for example how many participants were male and female, what ages were represented). However, no individual will be identifiable from this information.

Young people were assured that the information from their interviews would be confidential. It was also explained that the only time their confidentiality would be breached was if they disclosed that they or someone under the age of 18 was at risk of serious harm. The process for breaking confidentiality in these circumstances was explained. If concerns about serious harm arose, the researcher would stop the interview and inform the young person of the concern. The researcher would then inform either the lead contact or the voluntary agency contact of their concerns. Fortunately, this situation did not occur during the fieldwork.

Ethics and visual data

Due to the interview methods used some visual data was generated during the interviews with young people. These documents contained details which might compromise the anonymity of participants (e.g. by making the location of the study identifiable or by making an individual identifiable by the names in their social network). Therefore, these documents were used for analysis purposes only and are not reproduced visually within the thesis or any other outputs. The tension between 'giving voice' to participants by including their visual data and protecting their anonymity has been discussed by a number of researchers who suggest that there is a difficult balance to achieve, particularly when considering how far to redact and adapt a participant's output for inclusion in written material (Gallacher & Gallagher 2008; Lomax et al. 2011). The decision not to include visual material in outputs was taken after the fieldwork was completed and a full assessment of the type of visual data produced could take place. The visual data produced was both highly personal and included many identifying features and it was therefore considered expedient not

to include them. Whilst they could have been redacted and edited to ensure anonymity, the nature of some of the outputs was highly personal and changing and adapting them in this way may be considered an 'act of symbolic violence' on the contributions of young people (Bourdieu 1996).

Incentives

The young people in this research were paid £20 in vouchers for their participation. There were ethical dilemmas inherent in deciding whether to offer vouchers to the young people. However, the research process for this study was fairly intensive. Initial interviews lasted up to two hours and follow-up interviews up to an hour. Therefore, participants were expected to devote a fair amount of time to the study which it was felt should be adequately compensated in recognition of the value of that young person's time. The additional longitudinal element was also a factor in justifying financial compensation for a longer term commitment than a single interview (Neale & Hanna 2012). Conversely, financial compensation given for each interview had the potential to be a coercive factor for participants to return and the level at which payment set had to be carefully considered in order to fully respect the time commitment made by participants whilst avoiding any unintentional coercion.

Whilst the offering of incentives seemed relatively unproblematic in theory, the actual act of giving vouchers to young people after quite emotional interviews was often deeply uncomfortable, highlighting the need to be continually reflexive and pay attention to the 'ethical red flags' that present themselves in the course of research which cannot be covered by a procedural approach to ethics (Guillemin & Gillam 2004; Swartz 2011). A number of young people refused to take the vouchers, keen to establish that they had not taken part in the study for monetary gain. Knowing whether to insist on them taking the vouchers was particularly difficult as financial transactions of any kind are fraught with cultural and emotional significance. Most of the young people who tried to reject the payment had admitted to being in difficult financial circumstances and there was an ethical dilemma involved in deciding how far to push participants who were in financial need to take the vouchers. My initial strategy was to state that everyone involved in the study was given the vouchers and

that it was important to me that there was equity between all the participants. I experimented with giving the vouchers to the young people before the interview began to avoid the awkward shift from an emotional dialogue to a formal payment. However, this felt equally uncomfortable and potentially affected the tone of how the interview relationship became established. Finally, this issue was resolved by providing the vouchers to the LA or voluntary service contact who then passed on the voucher to the young person after the interview. This issue was one of many ethical dilemmas which presented during the course of the research. Whilst there is no scope within the thesis to reflect on each occasion, I have included this instance as an illustration of a reflexive approach to ethical problems in practice.

Gatekeeping and relationship with Lead Contact

Access to participants in this study was negotiated through and co-ordinated by the Lead Contact (LC) from the local authority (except in the case of those accessed through the voluntary sector). The LC role was akin to that of a 'gatekeeper'. The role and impact of gatekeepers is under-theorised. However, Crowhurst and Kennedy-Macfoy (2013) suggests understanding gatekeepers not just as the person who allows or disallows access, but as someone who may be deeply embedded in the research process in a dynamic way. This was indeed the case in this research as the LC was responsible for some crucial elements of the research, including drawing up a potential list of participants, initially contacting participants, providing them with information and ensuring that support was available to participants throughout the research process. It was crucial that a relationship of trust was built up between researcher and gatekeeper, not simply to ensure access, but to ensure that the research was ethically sound. In order to achieve this the LC and researcher met together on a number of occasions to clarify roles and responsibilities. This evolved into a developed working relationship of mutual trust and support which ensured that the fieldwork was smoothly co-ordinated, and arising issues were dealt with quickly.

However, it was also crucial to be reflexive as this relationship developed, and acknowledge that gatekeepers can shape the researcher's understanding of the field (Miller & Bell 2002). The concern that close working relations with the LC could influence the researcher's position echoed some of the concerns voiced earlier in

this chapter about the inclusion of professionals in the data collection. Essentially, the issue of power and positionality was central to reflection about the gatekeeper role. McAreavey & Das (2013) discuss the importance of recognising and identifying dynamic interactions of power in order to practice situation ethics (Flyvberg 2001). For them, the crucial component of ethical practice with complex gatekeeping relationships is the act of a continual critical reflection on power relations. In this study, that involved reflecting on the influence the LC was having on the research, not just in terms of controlling access, but also by providing background information and understanding on the local context. Whilst the close relationship that developed was beneficial to the practicalities of the research, it was vital to be mindful of the gatekeeper's input and influence. Again, the ontological and epistemological underpinning of the study was useful in this regard. The focus of the research is on the way in which UYP construct and understand their networks. Taking their meanings and understandings as the central anchoring point helped the researcher to resist the sway of alternative constructions that arose in the process of building a relationship with the services and professionals around them. Reflecting on power relations also allowed the researcher to be mindful of the ways in which those in a position of relative power can unintentionally provide narratives and ideas that run counter to the data collected to UYP, and the importance of maintaining a rigorous analysis of the data collected.

Ethics in practice

This research required a reflexive approach to ethics which moved beyond procedural considerations to 'ethics in practice' (Guillemin & Gillam 2004). Whilst it is not possible to present a full account of all the context-specific ethical red flags (Swartz 2011) that emerged throughout the course of the research, it is useful to consider an example from the research that highlights the context specific approach that was adopted. I have chosen to highlight an example that has been discussed previously in the literature on ethics in research with UASC. Vervliet et al. (2015) discuss the difficulty of maintaining boundaries in their fieldwork, and in particular highlight the challenges of dealing with direct requests for help. In the fieldwork for this study a participant explicitly asked for help with accessing higher education,

reasoning that as a researcher based at a university I would be able to assist him. As Vervliet et al. (2015) suggest it can be difficult not to take what they describe as a 'saviour' position, particularly where one's training and background is in helping and assisting with just such issues. This particular situation was further complicated because the particular young person was no longer in receipt of services and claimed that the LC had refused to help them. Vervliet et al (2015) describe taking an empowering position which recognised requests for help as expressions of agency, and suggest an approach which does not ignore requests for help by drawing strict boundaries around the researcher role. However, it is also vital to be realistic about the role of the research and the researcher (Leaning 2001). With this in mind, the researcher was able to provide some advice and signpost to non-statutory assistance, whilst encouraging the participant to do further research of their own and take steps to try to achieve their goal of accessing education.

Particular issues with ethics over time.

As Neale & Hanna (2012) have stated ethical issues can be magnified within studies with a qualitative longitudinal element. Multiple interviews with the same researcher can help to establish a rapport which is positive for the research experience for the participant and produces richer data. However, developing such relationships over time has particular challenges in terms of maintaining boundaries and managing expectations within the relationship. Morrow (2009) highlights the need to be open and realistic about the nature of the relationship and the level of support that a researcher can offer. In this project, this need was offset by ensuring a robust framework of support was available and signposted. However, such strategies can never entirely protect from the complex nuances of navigating the boundaries of relationships which develop over time but which ultimately have a cut-off date. Managing researcher/ participant relationships over time requires the delicate balancing of professional boundaries with ethical and moral responsibilities to advise, assist and relate on a human and emotional level during the research process (Hemmerman 2010).

5.6 Conclusion

The research design has been outlined in this chapter. Qualitative interviews took place over one year and across three phases; initial interviews with young people, follow-up interviews with young people and interviews with professionals. The visual methods used within the initial interviews with young people have been discussed in detail, highlighting their applicability for this research in terms of ethical research practice as well as their usefulness in capturing the elements of time and space that are necessary within the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of the study.

Crucial design considerations such as sampling and recruitment strategies have been detailed and reflected upon, particularly the impact of using one LC as the main access route to young people. The sample characteristics of the study have also been outlined and discussed in relation to the national picture and samples from previous studies. The sample was a purposive one, designed to cover a range of experiences across age, gender and immigration status.

Finally, the chapter considered the complex ethical considerations within the research, emphasising procedural issues and situational ethical dilemmas.

Chapter Six

Introduction to the findings

6.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces the participants' stories in order to provide the context and background in which the interviews took place, and draw out some general patterns in the journeys of young people, situating the descriptive characteristics of participants in their real-life experiences. The second section of this chapter explains how the findings chapters have been structured.

6.1 The young people: journeys

This brief section describes the young people's journeys from migration and arrival, through the care and immigration systems to arrive at the point of transition that the interviews sought to capture. This section provides the context and background for the findings presented in the proceeding chapters, and relates a sense of the individual stories that led to the moment in which the interviews took place.

6.1.1 Migration journeys

The young people originated from a variety of different countries, but mainly from Afghanistan and Eritrea, with young people also from Guinea, Somalia, Iraq and Sierra Leone. All the young people in the sample had fled war, conflict, oppression or persecution in some form. The exact form that such conflict and oppression took and the context in which they departed their homes varied depending on their country of origin.

In the case of young men from Afghanistan and Iraq, young people had most often fled under chaotic circumstances, escaping war and conflict in their cities and towns.

Many had lost family members. Most of the African young people were escaping the prospect of being forced to become a child soldier. Youth migration had become common in the towns and cities that they left, with both girls and boys migrating in large numbers to escape being drawn into military life in brutal dictatorships. More rarely, young people had fled gender-based violence and oppression with their families and communities.

For the majority of the young people their journeys to the UK had been long and treacherous, travelling through a number of different countries. Often they had travelled with family members or friends, sometimes becoming separated from travelling companions along the way, occasionally losing friends and family to starvation, exhaustion or other dangers inherent in such a journey. The details of each migration journey are unique to each individual and some of the young people did not discuss this part of their story at all. For a few of the young people the journey to the UK took many years, with long periods of time spent in other countries before arriving in the UK, reminding us that migration journeys are rarely a simple movement from point A to B but can be complex and protracted, with periods of settlement and movement, where the ultimate destination is in a constant state of negotiation and vulnerable to life events (Griffiths et al. 2013).

Case example: Faizal (aged 22), Afghani Male

Faizal originally left Afghanistan at the age of nine or ten and went to live with his uncle in Iran, where he worked as a joiner until he was eleven. He had settled into life in Iran when his uncle suddenly had to leave, and suggested that the safest option would be for Faizal to migrate to the UK. He left under his uncle's arrangements, arriving in the UK aged fifteen. Faizal remained uncertain as to what had necessitated his move to the UK, echoing the feeling of many of the young people when he said: 'I don't really know the whole story'.

Faizal's migration story highlights the complexity of some of the journeys that young people have made before they arrive in the UK. Another aspect of Faizal's journey that resonates across the young people's stories is the crucial role that families play in the migration process. Families played a key role in the ability of most of the young people to migrate. However, differences did emerge between young people from Afghanistan and Iraq and some of those from African countries. For the Afghani

and Iraqi young people, migration was often organised and set in motion by family members with little input from the young person. For the African boys at least, the decision to migrate was made jointly by the family and the child, with the young person having a larger role to play in planning when and how the migration would take place and where they would go.

6.1.2 Arrival

Despite differences in the length of the journey and the particulars of how and why the migration took place, ultimately, the young people arrived in the UK in poor physical health, confused and bewildered, speaking little or no English and largely unaware of the systems and culture of the UK.

After Home Office officials, the first people they came into contact with were the LA's children's services, whom they were referred to. Social workers organised emergency placements for them (most often an emergency foster placement), and provided them with basic amenities, clothes and food before arranging more permanent accommodation and beginning the process of settling them into school and the wider community.

6.1.3 Accommodation

The majority of the young people were placed with foster families or with family members in the UK that had been traced. Some of the young people had initially been placed in shared housing with other UASC from similar backgrounds. Most of the young people who had been housed in this way arrived prior to 2010, when the numbers of UASC were high, and the LA was able to secure properties throughout the city and be certain that they would be occupied by the high number of young people arriving. This policy was phased out as numbers of UASC decreased, and local and national policy guidance promoted the increased use of foster placements. Wade et al. (2005) note that despite the clear benefits of foster placements and practice and policy guidance promoting foster placements, access to fostering was often limited to younger UASC. In this particular study young people of all ages were

able access foster placements, suggesting a potential change in the placements that are available to UASC when they arrive in the UK.

However they were initially accommodated, by the time of the interviews most of the young people had moved into independence, often at around the age of seventeen. None of the young people in this study who were over the age of eighteen remained living with foster carers, even where the relationship was a strong one, highlighting that the transition to legal adulthood at the age of eighteen is often associated with a transition into independent living for care leavers, and this group of young people were no exception. At least two of the young people who were living with foster carers at the time of the initial interview had moved into independence or supported lodgings by the time of the second interview.

Case example: Makhda (aged 17), Eritrean Male

Makhda arrived in the UK aged fifteen and was placed with foster carers of African origin in a rural location on the very edge of the city. Makhda found it difficult to be outside of the city centre where the Eritrean community was based, and was anxious to move into independent living. By the time of the second interview he had moved into supported lodgings in the city centre with the help of his social worker, and was hoping to remain there for some time.

Case example: Zahra (aged 20), Eritrean Female

Hara arrived aged fourteen and was placed in foster care. The placement broke down quickly and she moved to a second foster placement, and formed a long-lasting stable relationship with her foster carers. Aged seventeen, she moved in with her male cousins from Eritrea who she had located in the city. This arrangement soon became problematic and Zhara then moved into her own independent accommodation, where she thrived.

These two case examples demonstrate the complexity of placement and accommodation in the young people's lives. A number of young people had experienced multiple placements or changes of accommodation before moving into independence.

6.1.4 Education

The majority of the young people were still in education at the time of the first interviews, although the situation for some young people was fluid and changed between interviews, particularly for those who were in college education. Whilst the numbers of young people attending college in this sample is high, the numbers alone do not reveal the complexity and diversity of experiences in college. Half of the young people who were attending college were aged over eighteen, highlighting the protracted length of time it took many of the participants to gain qualifications. Some of the young people had spent a number of years taking ESOL (English as a second language) courses to improve their language skills before being able to move on to more substantial qualifications that could lead to careers.

Case example: Sohail (aged 20), Afghani Male

Sohail had been studying ESOL courses of various levels for three years and had not managed to gain a place on a higher level of course. At the time of the interviews he was concerned that he was reaching the age of 21, and had not managed to reach a level at which he could move on to a more substantial course. There was no further funding available for ESOL courses and Sohail now had to begin looking for a job without the qualifications he had hoped to attain.

However, some of the young people were achieving academically, despite the difficulties of having to learn and be assessed in a language that was relatively new to them.

Case example: Zaki (aged 19), Afghani Male

Zaki was attending college to study Public Services with the aim of joining the police force. He had progressed through the expected levels quicker than had been expected and was beginning to consider applying for a university place, so that he could then fast-track up the ranks of the police force on graduation. This idea was supported by his personal advisor and college tutors.

The examples of Sohail and Zaki highlight the vast differences in educational experiences that young people reported. One of the young people was in full-time work at the time interviews; he was over 21 and not in receipt of Leaving Care services. Despite being in work, he had attended college and aimed to go to university in the future. Of those who were not in education or work, two had been prevented from working or taking up higher education because of their immigration status. It has been well documented in past research that unaccompanied young people are highly committed to education (Wade et al. 2005; Dryden-Peterson 2011; Wade et al. 2012), and desire to excel educationally to 'make something of themselves' (Kohli 2002). The young people in this study had the same aspirations. Some had taken significant steps to achieving those aspirations; others were struggling with learning written English and accessing higher levels of education.

6.1.5 Immigration status

At the time of the interviews the young people had a variety of different immigration statuses. The majority of young people had received Refugee Status. However, since 2011 changes to the status of 'Refugee' meant that this is now another form of temporary status rather than a permanent Leave to Remain. Refugee Status is now granted for five years, after which Indefinite Leave to Remain must be applied for in order to get permission to remain permanently in the UK. Whilst for some of the participants Refugee Status represented just another layer of temporariness, it was the most stable form of leave that they were able to achieve and opened up their access and entitlements making them equal to UK citizens in many respects for the duration of the leave.

Five of the young people were Appeal Rights Exhausted (ARE) at the time of the interviews. Unusually, four of those who were interviewed were still in receipt of Leaving Care services despite being ARE. The legalities surrounding access to Leaving Care services once a former UASC is over eighteen are extremely complicated, and there are many circumstances in which it would be possible for the LA to cease support for the young person. However, the LA in this particular city was able to continue supporting ARE young people as standard policy and practice, although their entitlements and access to services was precarious, complex and

often discretionary rather than obligatory (see Chapter Two for discussion of the legal context). One of the ARE young people interviewed was no longer in receipt of Leaving Services, because prior to becoming ARE he had turned 21 and was no longer in education.

Two of the young people were still awaiting an initial decision on their asylum claim. Despite the different statuses at the time of the interviews many of the young people had been through a number of different statuses and stages of the asylum process throughout their time in the UK. Following an initial period of waiting for a decision, the young people had either received Refugee Status or some form of temporary discretionary leave, which is a common form of leave given to UASC allowing them to remain in the UK whilst they are still children. When some of the young people applied to extend their leave or make it permanent after their temporary leave they had been refused. Many of the young people in this study who had Refugee Status at the time of the interview had been through a period of time when they were refused status and had to appeal or make fresh claims with new evidence. Whilst for some young people Refugee Status was granted very quickly, most of the young people had a protracted and difficult experience with the asylum system. One young man had been detained for deportation and then released for reasons he did not fully understand.

6.2 The structure of the findings

The findings of this thesis are split into two separate parts (Parts Two and Three of the thesis). Part Two contains the findings that relate to three different areas of the social network that emerged from the data; family (Chapter Seven), Peers and community networks (Chapter Eight) and formal social networks (Chapter Nine). Each area is addressed separately in order to explore how UYP experience different elements of the social network, what role different types of relationships play in the wider network, how those relationships are changing at a the time and what impact immigration status has on different aspects of the social network.

Part Three of the thesis presents the second area of findings and is structured using the theoretical approach of the life course. These findings explore the social network as a whole, using the key principles of the life-course framework to analyse the role

of time, space and place on the social network. Chapter Ten considers the role of biographical, narrative time and how young people make sense of the past, present and future in relation to their social networks. Chapter Eleven considers the impact of social time and the way in which social networks are shaped by institutional and societal expectations of transition over time. Chapter Twelve explores 'socio-cultural time' within the social networks and addresses how UYP negotiate complex social networks as young migrants with multi-sited social networks which transcend geographical and national boundaries. Chapter Thirteen situates the social networks of UYP in the socio-historical context and discusses the effects of global patterns of migrations, national immigration policy and local institutional practices on the social networks of UYP. Chapter Fourteen provides the conclusion to the thesis, drawing together the findings discussed in Part Two and Three to assess the implications for policy and practice, and address explicitly the research questions set out at the beginning of the thesis.

PART TWO

Social Network Domains

Chapter Seven

Family

7.0 Introduction

This first findings chapter will explore the role of family in the social networks of unaccompanied young people (UYP). One of the most significant findings to emerge from this study is the overwhelming prominence of family relationships in young people's stories. Levels of family contact ranged widely between participants. However, even when physically absent, family were a constant and meaningful presence in the young people's lives. The majority of young people in this study did have contact with family members, in the UK and abroad or a mixture of both. Only five of the young people had no family contact or did not wish to discuss their families during the interview. This chapter will highlight the important and complex role of family in the social networks of UYP and suggest that the role of the family has been substantially underestimated in many previous studies.

Unaccompanied children and young people are by definition categorised, understood and framed in terms of their separateness from families. Whilst some studies have touched upon the importance of family and highlighted the desire of young people to remain in touch with their family where possible (Wade et al. 2005; Wade et al. 2012), the issue of family has remained a marginal concern within a literature which has been primarily focused on the pressing issue of service provision and resettlement experiences. Beyond the need to deal with the immediate issue of service access and quality, there are a number of further reasons for the relative neglect of family relationships within current research. The sample in this study is a slightly older age range than many previous samples. Focusing on older UYP may capture family relationships that are re-established at a later stage of the migration process. There is also evidence to suggest that unaccompanied children are reluctant to talk about their families for a variety of reasons, including the emotional pain of recalling lost family connections and fears of disclosing or revealing too much

information about family members (Wade et al. 2005). Again, a slightly older sample of young people, who have had more time to establish trusting relationships with professionals and begin conversations about family members, may result in more willingness to engage on the topic of family.

However, the difference in sample age is unlikely to fully account for the lack of emphasis on family connections in previous research. Unaccompanied children and young people are framed primarily in terms of their status as 'separated' from family. The physical dislocation from family which forms the primary basis of the legal category of 'unaccompanied child' is an important point of emphasis in the literature, and is the starting point from which the current construct of the 'unaccompanied child' begins. Unaccompanied children are frequently described as being 'completely alone in the world' (Devici 2012), 'completely dislocated' from family (Simmonds 2007), children whose 'parents are dead, disappeared or hidden from view' (Kohli 2011: 317). These descriptions of unaccompanied children vividly capture some of the initial and immediate experiences of trauma and separation UASC experience on arrival. However, they stand in contrast to the levels of family connectedness found within this study and explored throughout this thesis. The tendency of current literature to accentuate the dislocation of UYP from their families may in part be a consequence of the 'victim discourse' which surrounds refugees in general and unaccompanied children in particular (Turton 2004; Simmonds 2007; White et al. 2011). Unaccompanied children are constructed as particularly vulnerable due to their status as children and their dislocation from family and place of origin. Brown (2014) has discussed the ways in which constructs of vulnerability and 'victimicity' are increasingly employed to mobilise moral and legal obligations and promote access to services. There is a potential necessity to stress the trauma and pain that unaccompanied children experience when separated from their family in order to promote legal rights and ethical practices. However, there has been little exploration within the literature of the multiple ways in which UYP remain connected to their family and continually negotiate renewed and reunified relationships with family members. This chapter seeks to redress this gap and begin to explore the varied and complicated web of family connections which form the most emotionally profound relationships which young people experience.

Relationships with family in the UK are explored first, drawing on the concept of family practices (Morgan 1996). The family-practices concept does not presume that family is a natural, biologically based, static unit but is instead concerned with the fluid dynamics of family, and the ways in which families are actively engaged in producing and reproducing the family over time (Morgan 2011; 2012). The fluctuating, reciprocal and negotiated nature of family relationships that has emerged from research with a family-practices focus is found to be feature of the family networks of the young people in this study (Mason & Finch 1993; Smart & Neale 1999; Neale 2000). In exploring such family practices, the findings suggest unaccompanied young people can be primarily providers of support to family members in the UK, particularly siblings, challenging the construct of unaccompanied young people as recipients of support discussed in Chapter Three.

Turning to transnational family practices, Baldassar & Merla's (2014: 7) 'circulation of care' concept, in which transnational family care is understood as 'given and returned at different times across the life course' is applied to understand how family connections are maintained across distance. The findings suggest that unaccompanied young people are particularly concerned with engaging in caring, supporting and protecting a variety of family members, but may have to defer these practices to an imagined future as their ability to provide care and support is restricted by their positioning within economic and immigration systems. Young men within the study were found to experience the curtailment of practices of care across distance as an impediment to the development of their emergent masculine identities. This chapter also considers the complexity of maintaining contact with family across distance and exchanging reciprocal care in this context.

Finally, the chapter considers the loss of family that is a common experience for unaccompanied young people. The experience of 'ambiguous loss' (Boss 2004; 2006) in which it is unclear what has happened to family members is considered. Again, the 'futuring' of family relationships emerged as a way in which young people were able to cope with family losses.

7.1 Relationships with family in the UK

The first section considers the relationships that young people experienced with family in the UK, focusing primarily on kinship placements and relationships with siblings which were found to be the most frequent and significant aspects of UK family networks.

7.1.1 Kinship placements

Three of the young people in this study had experience of 'kinship placements', which is defined as an approved placement with family and friends who have a prior connection with the child (DfE 2011b; Brown & Sen 2014; Selwyn & Nandy 2014). One of the young people, Sophia, was placed with her maternal aunt. Eran was placed with family friends and Mariam was placed with an 'aunt' whose biological relationship to her was unclear. Eran in particular pointed out that his understanding of family was not restricted to nuclear family or biological blood ties. In legislation, as noted above, kinship is defined broadly and provides for young people to be placed with extended family and friends and is therefore open to indigenous forms of being related (Carsten 2000).

Current national and local policy requires local authorities to give preference to placing children within kinship networks wherever it is feasible and safe to do so, underpinned by the Children Act 1989's stated commitment to keeping children with families wherever possible (DfE 2011b; Brown & Sen 2014). Research to date suggests that kinship care may provide positive outcomes for both the general population of looked after children (Farmer 2009; Brown & Sen 2014) and unaccompanied children in particular (Wade et al. 2005; Kearney 2007). However, there is evidence that kinship placement success may rest on the strength of attachment between the child and carer prior to the placement being made (Brown & Sen 2014). For unaccompanied children, the existence of strong prior attachments with kin may be difficult to establish, given the limited knowledge professionals may have about their past and the reluctance UASC often display in disclosing information about families (Kearney 2007).

Sophia had been placed with her aunt after a short period of time in emergency foster care. Her experience of reunification with family was overwhelmingly positive and hints at the unique sense of connectedness and belonging that being with family can inspire.

*I found one member of my family. You know you are not going to live alone. It is important to find at least one member of your family when you are on your own ... I was so happy to be found. Because I was lost. **Sophia***

Sophia's social network was dominated by family relationships connected to her aunt which provided her with huge amounts of support and stability, although her immediate family were still very much in her thoughts.

*The rest of my family, my mum and my siblings, they are still always in my mind. I remember them a lot. **Sophia***

Professionals were keen to point out that such unexpected family reunion is rare, particularly for newly arrived children and young people. Nevertheless, two other young people in this study had spent periods of time living with kin shortly after arriving in the UK. However, their experiences differed markedly from Sophia's; potentially because of the limited connection they had with their carers before migration. Eran explained why he did not remain in the placement long:

*They were really nice but I felt like I was a burden on them. They were both old and sick and they didn't have a lot of money so I didn't want to stay there for too long. **Eran***

Mariam, who was pregnant when she arrived in the UK, was initially placed with an aunt who resided in the UK. Mariam had difficulties within the placement, finding that she had little support and was made to feel like a burden on the family. She also left her kinship placement after a short period of time:

*I was in my Aunty's house when I gave birth to my son and I was in there living with her and there were too many people in that house, lots of people there and I really had to get out of that house ... everyday she was fighting with her husband and I did not like it there ... They were taking money from me and stuff so I didn't like. And the house was on second floor and I had to have everything on second floor where I was, bath baby, feed baby because if I went downstairs they were not happy with me. So when the baby is crying they are not happy with me. They keep telling me, we cannot sleep at night because your baby is crying and then that made me cry. I said to my social worker I prefer to stay on the streets than stay here anymore. **Mariam***

Mariam's experience underscores the potentially adverse effects of being placed with kin. Whilst social workers felt Mariam was particularly vulnerable as a young lone mother and would therefore be ideally placed with family, the opposite was true.

There is limited research on kinship care for unaccompanied children and young people. The varied experiences reported by the young people in this study reflect the spectrum of possible outcomes in kinship care for unaccompanied children, and chime with critiques of the assumption that kinship networks are inherently caring (Mason & Finch 1993; Neale 2000). Such critiques suggest that kinship and family networks, rather than being structures consisting of naturally occurring moral obligations, can be more usefully understood as dynamic and fluid sets of relationships, negotiated over time (Mason & Finch 1993; Smart & Neale 1999; Neale 2000). Long (2014), applying David Morgan's (1996) 'family practices' concept to transnational families, understands kinship as 'doing', and critiques the conflation of physical proximity with intimacy which can produce a tension between what kinship is and what it ought to be. Indeed, the findings in this study highlight the fluid complexity of relations with family and kin, which are not always experienced by young people as caring. Monsutti (2007), in a study of young Afghan boys migrating to Iran, questions the assumption that children who migrate are anomalous, out of place and in need of protection within a family unit, providing a potential critique of the assumption in policy that family and kinship care is preferential. Nevertheless Kearney (2007), writing from a practitioner perspective, highlights the continuity that kinship care can provide in the context of experiences of extreme disruption and the possibility that the shared experience of disconnection from a homeland can be beneficial to unaccompanied children and young people.

7.1.2 Siblings in the UK

In support of findings from Wade et al.'s (2005) study of UASC, sibling relationships were of primary importance. In an ethnographic study of migrant siblings from the Philippines, Aguilar Jr (2013: 360) suggests that sibling bonds are underpinned by 'symbolic ties to the house of one's youth' which become strengthened on migration. It is possible that the symbolic ties to home strengthen further when that home is threatened or destroyed. Indeed, some of the young people who brought

photographs to their interviews chose to bring pictures of their siblings pictured in the family home or home town.

Finding lost family members such as siblings brings with it new roles, responsibilities and the need for a degree of self-sacrifice, which may be felt more acutely by older siblings (Carsten 2000; Suarez-Orzoco et al. 2012). In their study of unaccompanied children, Wade et al. (2005) noted the tendency of UASC to put the needs of their siblings before their own. For the three young people in this study who had reunited with brothers and sisters in the UK, the relationships emerged as fluid over time and did entail a level of personal sacrifice. However, the central theme of these shifting relationships was the reciprocal and negotiated nature of care and support between siblings. Sohail's brother was living in the UK but in a different area of the country. Although they were unable to see each other often, Sohail described the vital importance of his relationship with his brother and his plans to strengthen the relationship in the future. However, he also expressed caution about how far he could rely on his brother for support.

I don't want to ask him for money. I don't want him to give me money. He has a family and he is working all the time. We keep in touch on the phone. He makes my heart big ... when I have some stuff or I'm scared or nervous, then he makes my heart big, but he is very busy. I don't want to put stress on him.

Sohail

Whilst Sohail values the emotional connection he has to his brother and the emotional support he might receive when he requires it, there is also reluctance to place too many concrete demands on the relationship at this point in time, leading Sohail to carefully negotiate the boundaries of support within the relationship. However, Sohail was keen to live with his brother and his brother's family at some point in the future, not only to remain connected to his brother, but to live within a family environment, highlighting the way in which siblings provide possible connections to wider family networks in the future.

If my brother can bring his family, I might move in with him and live family life. Kids make you feel very proud. Kids be nutty. I'd like to be there with nutty kids. Better than being lonely. Sohail

Zahra, who had recently reunited with her older sister in the UK, had grown used to living alone and had ambiguous feelings towards living with her sister.

*It's been nice because I never actually thought that I ... I've been independent for about erm, six years now. Like, I've got used to it but when my sister came it's like, it's nice to have someone. When there is something going on. Someone who you can turn to and talk to, y'know. But it was strange. Living on your own, it's like your own stuff, you don't need to come back home, you don't need to call anyone and ask if they're alright. But now you've got someone, you have to come back to the place, you don't do your own things now. You've got someone, you care about them. **Zahra***

Again, Zahra values the emotional support she receives from her sister, but also required time to adjust to the physical closeness of her sibling and the attendant responsibilities to maintain and protect the relationship. Strikingly, it is having someone to care for, as well as having someone to care for her, which Zahra ultimately equates with her family reunification. This reciprocity counters the dominant constructions of unaccompanied young people and care leavers as primarily passive recipients of support, rather than providers. Zahra's account also demonstrates the fluidity and change over time found in these relationships as she adapts to living with her sister again.

Kamal's relationship with his younger brother also displays the ways in which UYP provide care and support to siblings which is negotiated and fluctuates over time:

*He [his brother] is young and I look after him. I keep him with me for three years, but then when he was eighteen he wanted to go and I say ok no problem, get your own house. We still see each other a lot. I wanted him with me when he was young because he needed me. **Kamal***

Kamal continued to feel compelled to protect his brother. Kamal had just had his asylum claim refused and faced possible deportation. He had taken the decision not to tell his brother, at least until he had exhausted all possibilities of remaining in the UK.

Who wants his brother or his family to be in stress situation? No-one. That's why I am not gonna tell him. I will say nothing until after court and then I will

tell him. Either way, because I don't have choice. I don't want to tell him now because he is happy in life and I don't want him to be sad. Kamal

The accounts of these young people strongly rebuff notions of UYP as primarily receivers of support, and reposition them as potential supporters and carers of family members in the UK, particularly attuned to responsibilities to protect siblings. These relationships are fluid and negotiated over time, with different types of support being offered or required at different times. They are also reciprocal. Even where limited tangible support is offered or received, a mutual emotional bond of irreplaceable value is being exchanged, summed up expressively by Sohail when he talked about his brother.

He is like my right hand. My own blood. You can't find this love anywhere else. Sohail

7.2 Transnational family relationships

7.2.1 Futured reciprocity

Maintaining relationships with siblings in other countries also emerged as a significant aspect of young people's family relationships. Participants reported continuing contact with siblings who were residing in a variety of countries. Whilst younger siblings often remained in the country of origin, many young people had connections with older siblings who had migrated to a range of other countries. The concern to protect and take responsibility for siblings, which emerged as a vital factor for those with siblings in the UK, was echoed throughout the stories of young people with siblings residing elsewhere. However, the key difference was the way in which helping siblings abroad was not yet a tangible reality, but something delayed for the future, temporally reoriented by the consistent use of 'when' and 'if' in young people's narratives.

When I start working I can help them with school or with study because when you finish study you can do something for yourself. That's the only way I can help them from here there is nothing else I can do. Mariam discussing her brothers

My greatest fear is losing my family so I really want to have them by my side in the future. Especially my siblings. If I had status I would get my family here. I'm thinking a lot about my siblings. They are the future. I want a good future for them – not a future where they fear for their lives every day. That's all I want for them. Eran

The theme of responsibility to family members expanded beyond sibling relationships to encapsulate the whole family network, however that was composed. For Zaki, whose parents were killed in Afghanistan, the uncle who looked after him and arranged his migration to the UK was his closest family member and his primary familial concern.

I'm hoping that the government will let me get him out and bring him to UK. Along with my cousins. They looked after me, because they are my family. They are still a bit worried about their safety because they helped me come to the UK. I hope I can bring them here, at some point anyway. Zaki

More commonly, young people were preoccupied with concerns for their parents.

I'm just really worried about my mum, she's getting old now and there is nobody to look after her. I should look after her. Yousef

These findings highlight the aspiration of UYP to engage in the support and care of family members abroad. This is often framed in terms of bringing family members to safety in the UK if they require it, but also through the exchange of emotional, practical and financial support. The 'circulation of care' concept put forward by Baldassar & Merla (2014) is a useful framework for understanding the family practices of UYP. In their edited volume, Baldassar & Merla (2014) propose that care 'circulates' within transnational family networks. 'Care' is defined and applied broadly as including practical, emotional and symbolic elements. The 'circulation' of care refers to 'the reciprocal, multi-directional and asymmetrical exchange of care that fluctuates over the life course' (Baldassar & Merla 2014: 22). This emphasis on the fluctuation of care over the life course usefully points to the most striking aspect of the young people's accounts of relationships with family abroad; the 'futured' nature of the care they hope to practice. The need to engage in caring for and protecting family is keenly felt, yet has limited scope for realisation and is therefore futured,

deferred to some later point in time, when their immigration status is resolved or they are more economically stable.

Where young people wish to be a conduit for bringing family members safely to the UK, immigration status can act as a substantial barrier to their goals. UYP are particularly disadvantaged within the immigration system with regards to reunification. A recent parliamentary report (Home Affairs Committee 2016) highlighted the unfairness of the system in which unaccompanied children do not have the same rights as adults to apply for family reunion. Especially for those who do not have refugee status, the potential to reunite with family in the UK is highly uncertain and would likely take many years. Even more immediate aims of providing some financial assistance to family abroad may be thwarted by a combination of restrictions placed on education and work through the immigration system and the economic and labour market position of UYP as young people, care leavers and asylum seekers. As Baldassar et al. (2016) have recently noted, the specific position of migrants in relation to migration systems, welfare and employment regimes directly affects their ability to engage in transnational care practices, in this case as providers of care as well as receivers.

Understanding the 'futuring' of family care requires an extension of the notion of family practices and the way in which young people 'do' family, to account for the less tangible aspects of family connections. The specific positioning of UYP along the timelines of both their life course and migration trajectory affects their ability to engage in caring for family members directly. However, the futuring of such practices within young people's narratives can be understood as an active engagement with family care. As Smart (2007: 4) has suggested, we need to engage not only with families as 'doing', but with 'the family relationships that exist in our imaginings and memories'.

7.2.2 Transnational family relationships, gender and the transition to adulthood

For some of the young men in this study, the 'futuring' of care did not compensate for their frustration at being unable to actively care for family abroad in the present. Gendered expectations played a significant role in these young men's understanding

of family practices. Faizal described how he felt responsible for his younger siblings in Afghanistan, even though he had an older sister who lived in a neighbouring country who was able to have more contact with them, stating;

I am the man. I feel like I should be looking after them. **Faizal**

Roshaan similarly invoked his gender as a factor in his family responsibilities, as well as his status as the eldest son;

As the eldest son you must support the family and be like the father, especially if the father is sick or old or not there anymore. You must put the family first. That is what I need to be doing. **Roshaan**

Indeed, holding the status of the eldest son was considered to hold both specific obligations and particular dangers. A number of young men had experienced particular risks associated with this position within the family, and considered it a factor in their forced migration.

As the eldest son, you can become a target. That is how it works. It is the father and the eldest son, if anybody has a problem with your family. They won't go for the women or the children though or other family members. It is the eldest son that is in danger. That's why it is not safe to go back really. **Roshaan**

I was in danger because the people that killed my parents, they thought that because I was the son I might want revenge. They attacked me a couple of times. I wasn't thinking about revenge. I was only eleven. But I was getting older and they thought I might take revenge for my parents, so my uncle said I had to leave. **Zaki**

Professionals also noted the particular position of eldest sons, and stressed in particular how the death of a father could crystallise the need for young men to take traditional paternal roles, despite the geographical distance between the young people and their families.

It does depend on the culture, but when the father has died and they are the oldest male in the family, it is their duty to take care of the family and they feel

that they need to be independent and do that. Being the eldest son does have these particular responsibilities. **Social Worker**

As this social worker suggests, these roles can be culturally dependent. All the young men quoted above originated from Afghanistan, which has primarily patriarchal family practices. A recent study of manhood and masculinity in Afghanistan (Echavez et al. 2016) reported widespread agreement within the country that men bore the responsibility for family well-being in the broadest possible terms (including financial, spiritual, educational, physical and emotional well-being). These cultural expectations were found to weigh heavily on the men in the study, as they did on the young men quoted here.

Whilst for some of the Afghani young men family care practices were culturally defined, for Idris (from Eritrea) the expression of masculinity through family care was rooted in his own personal experience of 'doing family' rather than purely cultural expectations. Idris, who had been refused Refugee Status and was financially dependent on social services, was chiefly frustrated by his inability to realise an idealised version of paternal manhood represented by his own father.

When I get my £50 a week I feel like I'm begging. Just begging – you see people begging in the street and asking for some change and it's the same thing. I feel it's the same thing because back home my father he used to take care of our family, he used to encourage them to do something with their lives and I'm here – I listen to my father talk to other family parts to encourage them to do something but I'm here waiting for £50 every week. I heard talking about stuff like that when I was a child so it does hurt inside that but I've got no other option. **Idris**

Whilst a renewed focus on gender in migration studies has mostly addressed the experiences of women, recent research has begun to address masculinity and manhood in the context of migration, including the caring practices of men across distance (Sinatti 2013; Kilkey et al. 2013). The extraordinary role of the young male migrant and their obligations to provide for, protect (and potentially avenge) the family has also been explored (Lubkemann 2011; Schuster & Majidi 2013; Kilkey et al. 2013). The act of migrating itself may be deeply rooted in family expectations of the young male migrant to fulfil and achieve broader family goals and aims (for

safety as well as physical and economic security) as part of an established rite of passage to manhood (Olwig 2002; Sinatti 2013). Migration may also be understood as a 'family project' in which the young male migrant has significant responsibilities and represents the most mobile part of the family unit (Monsutti 2007; Kilkey et al. 2013).

The link between providing support for families and constructs of masculinity are evident across many different regions of the world, although there are nuanced differences and fluidity between and within cultures (Johnson & Stoll 2008; Priblisky 2012; Sinatti 2013). The transition to adulthood has also been established as a critical point at which the expression of masculinity through supporting family members is anticipated (Sinatti 2013). In this study, the interaction between the young men's age and their positioning with the immigration system prevented them from being able to fulfil the gendered roles they aspired to. This restricted ability to engage in family caring practices represented a suppression of adult masculine identities which were struggling to emerge.

7.2.3 Maintaining family connections

Whilst the care of transnational family members could become frustrated and futured, young people were often still engaged in 'doing family' (Morgan 1996) across geographical distance by maintaining regular contact with family. The professionals interviewed in this study often felt that the principal needs of young people related to maintaining family contact, although noted the potential difficulty of tracing and contacting families living in chaotic and uncertain circumstances. Where it was possible, continuing the connection to family members through the use of communication technologies could provide comfort to young people and assisted the maintenance of family bonds over distance. However, maintaining contact with families could equally be challenging and problematic. Mariam's experience of family contact was particularly arduous. On migrating, Mariam left behind an abusive father, with whom her mother still lived. She sought to maintain discrete contact with her mother whilst avoiding any contact with her father, who she entirely rejected, stating:

*He is not my father. He is dead to me. I have nothing to do with him. **Mariam***

Further complications emerged when Mariam explained that she had also left behind an abusive partner, and father of her son, whom was still deeply embedded in the family network in her country of origin. Maintaining her relationship with her mother and young brothers in such circumstances was fraught with clandestine contact, and fears that her mother might come to harm for keeping in touch with Mariam. Mariam's experience, whilst not common within this study, does draw attention to the potentially adverse and distressing family relationships young people may have experienced prior to migration (Bossin & Demirdache 2012). Another young person, Mohammed, was fearful of some of his family members:

*I have big problems with my family back home. My uncle and some of my family. They are dangerous for me. **Mohammed***

Whilst many unaccompanied young people are known to have left stable and caring family situations (Wade et al. 2012), for a minority of young people, the act of migration represents not just a refuge from national war and conflict, but from dangerous and violent family situations. The accounts of Mariam and Mohammed emphasise the need to be attuned to the different family situations that young people have experienced, as well as the dynamics of families, which cannot easily be conflated into a unit of family that young people are connected to. Individual relationships with family members can be differentiated, with young people seeking contact with some family members whilst actively cutting off others.

More commonly, young people felt a strong need to remain connected to family where they could. However, even where family connections were broadly positive, contact had multiple complexities. The wish to protect family members emerged again as young people reported that they tended to withhold information that might provoke anxiety for their family, and were therefore more likely to limit contact when they were struggling and might be most in need of their support. Baldassar (2008) reported similar findings in her study of transnational family relationships. Sometimes, the withholding of information related to a discomfort with questions about immigration status when the young person had bad news, or no news at all.

I don't keep in touch with my family anymore. It's hard when you say I'm in England and not doing anything and still waiting for a decision. It's been six years now. It's difficult. Yeh, but y'know every time I call them, the first thing

they say is “have you got your papers is that why you are calling?” That’s what they say. So, if I’m going to call them it will be five or six months, that’s all. Idris

It’s hard to explain to them what’s it’s like over here and how it works. They don’t really get it. Why everything takes so long. How come you don’t have papers yet? Medhane

Delays and problems with attaining Refugee Status could therefore act to distance young people from their transnational family networks. The ‘emotional labour’ (Hochschild 1983; Baldassar 2007) of continued contact with family members, particularly anxious mothers, was also a factor that led some young people to withdraw from family contact.

I used to talk to my mum on the phone a lot but now I try not to. She asks me too many questions. It’s really hard. She misses me and she cries a lot. That’s really hard. And she asks me if I’m too cold. She worries a lot that it’s too cold.

Mehdi

Keeping in touch with family abroad can be understood as a form of reciprocal care which allows family connections and practices to be maintained over distance (Baldassar & Merla 2014). However, the asymmetrical and fluid nature of care highlighted by Baldassar & Merla (2014) is relevant here as a number of young people began to withdraw from family contact over time. Whilst it was clear that some young people felt unable to offer their families both the emotional support they needed as well as the tangible progress with immigration concerns that family could expect, emotional distance was occasionally considered more positively as a coping mechanism and an indication that young people were learning to manage alone.

I used to speak to my family all the time, at first. But now, I don’t need them as much. I mean, I still miss them and I still need them. But I can cope better now. I’ve got used to it, being without them. Idris

Zahra’s account of contact with her father draws together a number of the themes that have been explored so far in this chapter. Zahra had become separated from her father and sister during the migration journey. Her father and sister had sought asylum in another European country. After a number of years apart and with no

knowledge of each other's whereabouts, Zahra found information about her missing family which led to renewed contact and reunification with her sister in the UK. Since her sister had moved to live with her in the UK, her father relied heavily on Zahra for support whilst concurrently seeking to exert renewed patriarchal control over her.

Now he calls me every day, and I'm like "dad, don't call me and I'm in an exam and he's like "oh, your sister – why is she not picking up. I am on my own". He phones and says "my heart is not well". He just couldn't, he still can't manage ... y'know when you've got a family they can control you so much and my dad like "I'm older than you, I know most things". Even on the phone if he tells me one thing I just don't take it because like I'm living my life just leave me. When he comes [to live in the UK] I'm thinking of going to another university probably. Zahra

Zahra is engaged in providing family care and support to her father across distance, and in this account is positioned as the primary provider of support to her father, rather than a receiver. Again, a gendered, patriarchal aspect to the family relationship is evident as Zahra alludes to her father's potential to exert control over her. Strikingly, after many years of physical separation, Zahra is wary of living in close proximity to her father and to some degree is seeking to reject the demands of care and support that he placed on her, highlighting again the negotiated nature of family care and the asymmetrical power relations inherent within such family practices (Baldassar & Merla 2014). Research by Barnett et al. (2015) has previously suggested that family reunification can be a perplexingly complex emotional experience in which immediate feelings of connectedness may not emerge as expected, particularly where a number of years have passed. Furthermore, Burton (2007) describes the ways in which young migrants who are reunited with parents may experience either infantilisation or premature adultification. Zahra reported experiencing and negotiating both simultaneously.

Visiting

The ability to maintain contact with family through visiting was extremely restricted due to the constraints of the immigration system, which disallow UYP from paying return visits to their home countries (even where they have Refugee Status). The

impact of this forced immobility is discussed more fully in Chapter Thirteen, but it is necessary to note here that the need for periods of physical co-presence is considered vital to the maintenance of family connections across distance (Urry 2003; Hugo 2013; Merla 2016), but may be inhibited by restrictive and securitised immigration regimes (Bailey 2013; Merla 2016)

Roshaan was one of very few young people who had been able to meet with his family. He met with them in a third country, as he was restricted from travelling to his home country. Like many such reunifications, the initial joy of being with family again is often tinged with sadness, as reunification can bring with it news of lost loved ones (Rousseau et al. 2004). One of Roshaan's siblings had recently passed away at the time of the meeting and he described how difficult meeting with family during this period of grief had been, suggesting that even when physical distance can be overcome, emotional distance may be less easily traversed.

*I don't feel like I really met them. Y'know. I say that I saw them, but I didn't really meet them. They were in too much of bad state at that time. **Roshaan***

Whilst the loss of family is often framed as a one-off event that occurs for UYP at the time of migration, Roshaan's experience reminds us that family loss is not limited to pre-migration or the act of migrating itself. Losses may continue to accumulate as family members age and continue to reside in dangerous situations. The process of reunification, whilst overwhelmingly desired by most UYP, is a process through which family members can be both found and lost.

Zahra also recalled her first reunification with her sister and father when she travelled to stay with them in the European country they had temporarily settled in.

*It was nice, it was like a family then, with my sister, we just like do everything together like sisters ... It was actually nice, because it's your family and I know there are people from Eritrea here and we go to eat like traditional food but it was like actually home-made food. Then it feels like you are at home. But I was supposed to stay for a few weeks but I didn't. I didn't really like it where he lived. There was nothing there and nothing to do. So I told them some lies so I could come back earlier. Everyone was surprised. **Zahra***

Zahra alludes to the importance of engaging in the familiar and everyday family practices that being co-present allows. However, the reunion was cut short as Zahra became uncomfortable in the unfamiliar surroundings. Zahra herself struggled to explain her difficulty with adjusting to the brief reunification. Her initial response to finding her family had been one of overwhelming joy and happiness. However, the reality of being with family had, over time, led to more difficult emotions as the process of reconstructing family relationships began.

Maintaining contact with family was found to be a crucial but complex activity for young people to participate in. They were often engaged in providing care and support to families across distance which could be a struggle to maintain, either because of the emotional burden of care, the practical restrictions of co-presence or the difficult negotiation of family expectations and power relationships which shifted over time. Contact with family carried with it ambiguous emotions and a continual conflict between the desire to connect with family and the need to reconstruct ruptured family dynamics in the context of significant obstacles and complexities.

7.3 Lost family relationships and ambiguous loss.

Whilst the majority of young people maintained some form of contact with family members in the UK or abroad, a significant number had suffered the loss of family members in some form. Most commonly, young people had lost family members in the most literal sense – they did not know where they were or what had happened to them. Boss (2004; 2006) describes this phenomenon as ‘ambiguous loss’, which describes the particular feelings associated with having a family member who is not physically present but is psychologically present, either because it is unclear whether they are alive or dead, or because of an overwhelming awareness of the perpetual risk and insecurity that a loved one continues to be subjected to.

I don't know what happened after I left. It was just my mum who was alive and I'm not sure if she is alive because at that time she was coughing and had sickness, maybe heart disease, I don't know. So, I'm not sure what happened to her. I've been to Red Cross and they couldn't find out anything so that is why I'm totally lost, really lost. Aziz

Here, Aziz echoes the experiences of Sophia at the beginning of this chapter, who described her initial lack of family contact as a feeling of being lost, suggesting that for UYP the loss of family contact is experienced as a loss of self, an overwhelming disorientation when the anchor of the family cannot be found.

Whilst this chapter has been concerned to refocus attention on the primacy of family relationships in the social networks of UYP, it is important not to undermine the scale of loss that young people have experienced and continue to experience. As Wernesjo (2012) has suggested, whilst UYP are principally defined by their separations, the actual separation from family is rarely discussed in research beyond assertions that separation and loss is evidently traumatic. Understandably, young people seldom wish to revisit such difficult experiences and grief. What emerges when they do is not only the on-going profundity of their multiple losses, but also the on-going centrality of the memory of lost family members in their lives. Chapter Ten will explore in further detail the influence of lost family members in young people's imagined pasts and futures. For now, in a chapter populated by complex family connections, it is necessary to recognise that the loss of family members casts a significant shadow over the social networks of unaccompanied children and young people.

You can't forget your parents and your family. Sophia

I used to cry when I thought about them, but even if you cry, you can't see them. Zaki

Where young people were unsure if family members were dead or alive, the 'futuring' of family care and relationships discussed previously was again a prevalent theme in young people's narratives, reiterating the importance of going beyond what families 'do' in the present to how the imagined family is projected into a future stage of the life course.

I think what I will do is go and find them. That is what I will do when I am settled. I will go and find my family. Zula

For others, less confident that their family members could be found or reunited with, future families were no less important, but were envisaged as new families that the young people would create for themselves.

At some point, you have to move on and make your own new family. Idris

They create new families. Many of the girls I've worked with have their own children now. They build new families for themselves, one way or another

Social Worker

The final thing to emphasise is that across all the differing and varied experiences of family that the young people revealed, the most salient and consistent finding was the central position of family in the young people's social networks, whether they were present, distant or existent only in the imagined past and future. For all these young people, the cycle of losing and finding family members was fundamental.

7.4 Conclusion

Unaccompanied young people are too often presented as 'radically severed' from social networks, particularly family social networks (Wells 2011). Whilst recognition of the importance of family connections has emerged within some studies (Wade et al. 2012), the family networks of unaccompanied children and young people remain a neglected area of enquiry. There are many reasons why it is vital to pay appropriate attention to the complex family relationships of UYP, not least because of the predominance of family connections reported by young people in this study. Additionally, evidence suggests that good family relationships are imperative to the well-being of UYP, and that poor or stressful transnational relationships can be detrimental to well-being (McGregor et al. 2015). The period of transition to adulthood is likely to be a period of time in which family relationships and responsibilities become progressively more crucial. For the general population of care leavers there is growing recognition that the Leaving Care period is a time when the renewal and re-negotiation of relationships with birth families becomes likely (Wade 2008). The value of relationships with birth families is embedded within the Children's Act 1989, and it is best practice to pay appropriate attention to maintaining contact with families, although this has not always been a priority in practice (Wade et al. 2005) and may not be suitable in the case of young people where the family is a source vulnerability (Orgocka & Clark-Kazak 2012). Whilst there are clearly huge challenges and obstacles for achieving this with UYP, whose families are at best geographically distant and at worst unable to be found, the imperative to recognise

the continued importance that family play in UYP's present and future should be fully recognised. Wholly acknowledging and exploring the role of the family in research is an essential step in assisting this complex area of practice and giving due appreciation to the connections which are most meaningful to young people themselves.

This chapter has demonstrated that family relationships remain the cornerstone of UYP's social networks, despite the radical and traumatic physical separation from family that unaccompanied children and young people experience. It is vital to understand that UYP do not originate from countries of origin, but from within families. No longer living with family may be the overriding experience of their migration. Re-establishing, renewing and reunifying these dislocated relationships dominates their concerns, particularly as they transition into adulthood. The migration process for unaccompanied young people emerges as a 'family project' (Muller-Bachman 2014) in which the ability of the family unit to survive and thrive may be at stake.

Drawing on the concept of 'family practices' (Morgan 1996; Finch & Mason 1993), this chapter has emphasised the fluid and negotiated nature of family relationships over time, with family in the UK and abroad. UYP emerge from this study as providers of support to family members, particularly siblings in the UK. This challenges constructions of young people as passive recipients of support and reframes our understanding of their social networks. Family networks are not just potential webs of support, but networks within which young people are actively engaged in giving, receiving and negotiating care, often across distance (Baldassar & Merla 2014). Crucially, much of this care is based on unique emotional connections to family and kin, however kinship is defined by the young person. Whilst there is a significant body of work within the migration literature which outlines the potential burdens placed on migrants by transnational families, particularly in the form of financial remittances, researchers have begun to uncover a more nuanced picture which recognises that fulfilling a broad range of family obligations can be a rewarding role which is unlikely to be resented by migrants (Lim et al. 2009; Lubkemann 2011). Similarly Kivisto (2011) has pointed out that family responsibilities are rooted in emotional attachments to family and have poignant significance beyond providing material assistance purely elicited through family pressure and cultural

stigmas. As Baldassar & Merla (2014) have argued, transnational families engage in all forms of care that proximate families do, including emotional and symbolic forms of caring.

Baldassar & Merla's (2014) concept of the 'circulation of care' is particularly useful here as its focus on care circulating over the life course draws attention to the 'futures' nature of family-care practices for many UYP who are unable to fully engage in family-care practices due to their age, immigration status or economic position. In such circumstances, care practices become deferred to the future. As Mische (2009) has suggested, the future is peopled with others, and for unaccompanied young people the future is populated with family members. Even where young people have no knowledge of where family members are or if they are alive, they continue to hope for reunification and populate their 'family imaginary' with loved ones who may no longer be a physical presence in their life (Taylor 2002). The findings also stress the role of gender in the family practices of UYP, indicating the specific masculine family roles that young men might wish to establish during the transition to adulthood, as well as the difficult gendered relations of power with family dynamics that young women were negotiating across distance.

Chapter Eight

Peers and community social networks

8.0 Introduction

This chapter considers the informal social networks of the young people in this study, focusing primarily on the friendship and community networks which were the main features of UYP's informal social networks. Previous research has raised concerns about the loneliness and isolation unaccompanied children and young people might experience (Wade et al. 2005; Wade et al. 2012), in particular the potential barriers to developing relationships with British citizen young people (Wade et al. 2005). More generally, care leavers are considered to be at heightened risk of social exclusion and isolation (Stein 2005). Previous research has established that informal networks of support are important for UYP (Wade et al. 2005; Wade et al. 2012) as well as care leavers more generally (Hiles et al. 2013).

The chapter explores the diverse and active social networks of the young people who took part in this study, and how those networks were changing during the transition to adulthood. Issues of time, space and place were seen to be particularly crucial as social connections shifted over time and in response to access to certain places and spaces. The findings also consider the role of different types of informal networks in terms of 'bonding' relationships within similar ethnic and religious communities and 'bridging' relationships outside of those communities, ultimately critiquing the potential essentialism of rigidly categorising relationships in this way. Young people's networks were seen to be built on understandings of 'sameness' and difference that were not limited to collective ethnic and religious identities.

Whilst seeking to emphasise the diversity and complexity of the informal networks that young people experienced, vulnerability to isolation was also found amongst some of the young people. The findings suggest that young people who have problems with immigration status may be more at risk of isolation for a variety of reasons, including issues of trust and difficulties coping with stress and uncertainty. This chapter nudges towards a deeper understanding of the gendered nature of informal social networks, tentatively suggesting that unaccompanied girls may be

more vulnerable to social isolation, whilst acknowledging the limited amount that can be extrapolated in this study which had few female participants.

8.1 Time and place in young people's informal social networks

8.1.1 First friendships and the cycle of informal mentoring

Most of the young people in this study had complex, active and dynamic informal social networks based around membership of various and diverse communities, individual friendships and loose groupings of friends. Perhaps the most crucial factor to consider within these informal networks is the way in which time interacts with the development and maintenance of such relationships. The majority of the UYP in this study described feeling extremely isolated when they first arrived in the UK, but most had gone on to develop strong and diverse informal networks over time.

For a small number of young people, the isolation associated with arrival in the UK was offset as they had arrived in the UK with a friend with whom they had shared all or part of their migration journey. Whilst most of the UYP had not settled in the same city as the friends they travelled with, or sometimes even in the same country, they remained in regular contact, suggesting that shared experience of the migration journey created lasting bonds.

*I speak on the phone everyday with my friend who I travelled with. He is in Belgium but we speak every day. I also have my friend who came here with me who lives in London. I go to see him too. I will be going next week. Yeh, they are very important to me. We saw a lot of things together, helped each other a lot coming here. **Medhane***

Little is known about the migration journeys that UYP experience, and even less about the relationships forged on that journey. Whilst it is often acknowledged that social networks are a necessary part of any migration, the focus is generally on the role of social networks in the decision to migrate (Portes 1998; Hopkins & Hill 2008), or on the role of clandestine networks of agents and traffickers (Derluyn & Broekaert 2005; Crawley 2006; Hopkins & Hill 2008). However Wells (2011), in her study of UYP in London, also reported that young people had made enduring relationships

with peers in transit, suggesting that informal friendship networks developed during migration are an under-researched area of study that might be explored in the future.

The first friendships that young people developed on arrival were often with young people who acted as informal 'mentors', helping to orientate the young person in their new surroundings and situations. Most often, these friendships were precipitated by social workers, who linked newly arrived young people with another UYP from the same country as soon as they were referred to the LA.

These informal mentoring relationships with other young refugees and asylum seekers could develop into enduring and close friendships which were highly valued by the UYP. Whilst formal mentoring and befriending projects for refugees and asylum seekers are reasonably common (Behnia 2007; Save the Children 2016), informal befriending relationships of this type between UYP have not yet been researched, and may be less common in other LAs where social workers do not engage in the practice of linking young people with each other. It is well established that refugees and asylum seekers generally rely on making loose acquaintances with other refugees in the local area when they first arrive in order to get advice and information (Williams 2006). However, the practice of social workers in this particular setting contributes significantly to the development of these connections. Whilst there is no formal policy in place regarding this practice, social workers felt it was part of good practice to foster such connections. One social worker described the process:

I would ring one of my other young people who have previously been on my caseload or are on my caseload so that they can explain to them what the role of the social worker is and that they don't need to be worried, that they've been through the same sort of processes. Nothing breaking confidentiality, no personal details, it's just so they can see a friendly face who's been through the same experience. And on most occasions they then make a connection with that young person so that they can socialise with them and make a network. I have two boys who are now 23 who turned up here last week wanting me to sign some passport photos for them and they are still friends and they're doing very different things but they've maintained those relationships. **Social Worker**

Other young people developed such friendships independently of social workers, often with young people from the UK whom they met at school or in their foster placements. Mentoring friendships with British young people allowed the young people to develop vital language skills and to learn about the culture of the UK and the local area quickly.

*I had a friend at school, Hamzar. He was Pakistani British. He taught me everything. I'll show you a picture of me with him at our school prom yeh? There he is. He was such a clever guy at school. So clever. He was a bit disabled but I looked after him and he looked after me and he taught me everything; language, school. Everything. **Zaki***

*Gavin was my friend. He was British and was in foster care here with me. He taught me language, taught me lots of things. He would spend a long time teaching me how to say things and trying to help me explain to foster carers what I wanted. He was very good to me and we had good friendship. **Makhda***

Whilst some of these informal mentoring friendships endured over time, others came to a natural end. Importantly, young people often became mentors themselves, creating a cycle of informal mentoring within the loosely connected community of UYP in the city which was strongly supported by social workers. The transition from mentored to mentor that some of the young people underwent highlights the ways in which these young people acted as both receivers and providers of informal support at different time points across their life course and the migration process. Many young people in this study were involved in this cycle of support, often catalysed by formal services, but actively converted into independent friendships by the young people themselves.

*I was the first person they saw when they came here. I sorted them out when they first came and told them everything about the country because I was already here. Social worker called when they came and I went and translated for her and that's how we made friends. **Faizal***

Faizal, eventually, found himself coming to the painful end of this cycle when the friends who he had mentored were no longer in need of his support.

I don't think now I am as important to their lives, at first they didn't know anything, not even how to go for a coffee and how to go to cinema but now they know that and they have found their own way and it's just different. They can go to the shop on their own now. I think I should be important to them but they don't think. They think they have done it all by themselves so I feel a bit hurt. **Faizal**

Importantly, none of the girls in this study had benefited from such mentoring relationships. The primary reason for this may be the relative inability of social workers to match unaccompanied girls together due to significantly lower numbers of unaccompanied girls arriving in the UK. This potentially placed girls at an immediate disadvantage in developing informal networks, and meant they were largely reliant on making these connections without an initial introduction from formal services.

'Natural' mentoring relationships have been explored within the general Leaving Care literature (Collins et al. 2010; Munson et al. 2010; Ahrens et al. 2011). However, these are largely concerned with the informal mentoring that care leavers might receive from adults outside of their family or professionals. Some of the young people had developed relationships akin to these natural mentoring relationships with teachers and voluntary support workers. However, it was the initial mentoring from other young people which was considered most crucial. These findings depart from the traditional focus of research on care leavers and young people's social support networks, which have not fully explored the potential of mutually supportive reciprocal relationships between young people. As Chapter Three highlighted, care leavers and vulnerable young people may be constructed as primarily in need of formal, or at least adult, forms of social support.

8.1.2 The interaction of time and place during the transition to adulthood

Many of the young people's informal social networks were characterised by a state of flux as they experienced various transitions mediated through the structures and institutions of education and work. The nature of these changes directs us to a critical factor in the informal networks of UYP; the significant role of place and space.

Most of the young people's informal social networks were highly mediated by the places in which they were able to meet people and form relationships. Recent theorising on social networks and communities has suggested that the significance of place is in decline as social networks become increasingly fragmented, virtual and transnational (Graham 1998; Wellman 2001). Indeed, the previous chapter on family relationships emphasised the continued importance of connections across space that were maintained without physical contact and co-presence. However, when considering informal networks of friends and communities, research with unaccompanied children and young people has previously established the vital importance of place and proximity to the development of relationships (Wade et al. 2005; Wells 2011). In this study, place and particular places were crucial.

School and college, (and later university) were key sites in which young people developed individual friendships and cultivated friendship groups. A number of previous studies have also suggested that schools and educational institutions may be the primary places in which unaccompanied children can form friendships and broaden their social networks (Wade et al. 2005; Askland 2007; Wade et al. 2012; Block 2014). Developing friendships at school and college was occasionally problematic, and some young people had initially experienced hostility and racism from other students, as noted in previous studies (Wade et al. 2005; Wade et al. 2012). However, the majority of the young people in this study had developed friendships through education over time, sometimes involving large networks of diverse friendships. However, the transition to adulthood is marked by various movements, either between educational settings or out of education into work. For the young people in this study, these periods of transition destabilised and disrupted their friendship networks, which became more difficult to maintain after the loss of as a shared place to interact and develop a sense of mutual belonging.

Zaki, whose friendship with school friend Hamzar had been his first and most formative connection in the UK, was struggling to maintain the same level of closeness in the friendship since leaving school.

I don't see him so much now since I left school and he went to a different college. I should see him more. But I'm really busy at college. Very busy. I

don't have a lot of time to be with friends when I'm focused on my studies.

Zaki

Faizal reported that his social networks had changed dramatically after he left college and started full time work, a change which he explicitly linked with idea of becoming adult.

I used to spend lots of time with friends. College friends and other friends. But I don't see people so much now that I work full time. Sometimes I feel like too much an adult. I'm mostly working all the time. I'm not a child anymore. Not out with my friends all the time. **Faizal**

These changes in friendship networks were a common theme amongst the young people, who had varying degrees of success in adapting to changes and developing new friendship networks. Woodman (2012: 1080) has argued that the educational transitions of young people lead to 'marked changes in the temporal structuring of daily life'. In educational settings young people are guaranteed time to spend with friends, and experience a shared temporal structure provided by the rigid routines of education. On transitioning out of education, 'temporal schedules' become more individually fragmented, creating challenges in maintaining friendships. Here the interaction of time and place is crucial to social networks, as the loss of a shared space and place to interact was compounded by a temporal desynchronisation in which the daily rhythms and routines of young people's time became individualised as they transitioned to adulthood. As the quotes above indicate, the loss of time spent with friends was a significant consequence of educational and work transitions.

Educational transitions were not the only changes that affected friendship networks. For some young people moving out of residential or foster care instigated a depletion of their peer social networks over time. The co-incidence of educational transitions with moving to independent living arrangements is known to cause considerable stress for young people leaving care generally, and UYP in particular (Driscoll 2015; Brighter Futures 2013; Refugee Support Network 2012; Gonzales 2011). The findings in this study highlight the impact on social networks in particular.

Aziz moved out of his residential placement where he had a strong network of friends from a variety of backgrounds. At the same time, he left college, through

which he had made a number of friendships. The cumulative effect of these changes depleted Aziz's network over time and increased his isolation.

*I don't really see those guys from the children's house any more. It's just. I don't go back and see them. I don't really know why. I just stopped going back. I feel a bit uncomfortable now I don't live there anymore. And college. I had lots of friends at college but it's harder to stay in touch now. I still see one of them because we play cricket together. **Aziz***

Aziz alludes to the maintenance of friendships through sport and the endurance of one of his friendships because they played cricket together. For the young men in this study, sports (particularly football and cricket) were vital in the construction and maintenance of friendships. The potential for sport to promote social connections for refugee and immigrant youth, particularly cross-cultural connections, has received recognition (Wade et al. 2005; Jeanes et al. 2015; Ni Laoire 2011; Huffman 2011; Wade et al. 2012). Informal sporting activity was again connected to particular physical places and spaces, which took on additional importance for young people who were no longer in education. Some of the young people had formed large and varied networks of friends from participating in regular, informally organised sporting activity. These networks were ethnically and culturally diverse but intimately linked to the local area and particular locations. Indeed, recent work by Risbeth (2016) has noted the potential of public green space for promoting cross-cultural contact for refugees in local areas.

*My friends are mostly through football. I love these friends. There are some of these friends like me, from different countries, but mostly they are from UK. We meet at (a particular park). It is three times each week on Saturday, Sunday and Wednesday evening. **Ibrahim***

Idris identified the park in which he played football as his most important place, and much of his informal social network was connected to meeting at the park for regular games of football.

*We play two or three times a week at the park. I meet many of my friends there. I just met them playing football together and then we all become friends after that. Because I'm not in college or uni now, this gives me something to do. And it makes me tired so I can sleep when I go home. **Idris***

As well as the significance of meeting in a particular place, time is also significant here. Regular meeting to engage in sport provides routine and gives purpose to unstructured days for many of the young people. In her study of UYP in London, Wells (2011) also recognised the importance of places in which young people meet to play sport. However, she noted the gendered nature of these spaces and indeed it was only the young men in this study who formed friendships and connections in this way. Both O'Connor (2009) and Ni Laoire (2011) have noted the gendered nature of access to sport as a means of social integration for migrant young men and ethnic minority boys from which girls are often excluded. More generally, gendered differences in the use of public space has been noted (Matthews 2003, Tomanović & Petrović 2010) and Sirriyeh (2013) has noted the gendered behaviour of some refugee women in public spaces due to community pressure to conform to culturally defined norms of feminine activities. Taken together, past research and the findings here suggest that unaccompanied girls may struggle to access spaces and places of informal interaction with peers, which may have detrimental effects on their ability to form social networks.

Young people's engagement with religious and cultural communities also provides a clear example of the ways in which time and space interact to mediate the informal social networks of young people. Some of the young people had become deeply embedded in these communities. This was particularly the case for the Eritrean young people, who benefited from a large and active Eritrean diaspora within the city. These young people actively sought out the Eritrean community which was centred on the church, both as a physical place and a social identity.

*I go church not every day, but a lot of time. I have lots of people that I know there. Lots of friends. It's very important to me. **Makhda***

Zahra in particular had exercised her personal agency effectively in order to access the church community, at a time when she felt at her most socially isolated.

When I first came, I couldn't get into school because there was only two months left to the summer – there was nothing for me, no social networks or anything. One day my foster mum was driving me in the car and I saw the Eritrean church. I remembered where it was and I walked to it on my own one day. It was closed but I saw a man outside and he looked Eritrean so I just

asked if he was Eritrean and if this was his church. He gave me a number for the church and I persuaded my foster mum to call them and check it out and she wasn't sure at first but eventually I persuaded her to take me there and from then she dropped me off every Sunday and I did all my socialising there for quite a while. Zahra

The quote above from Zahra demonstrates the interaction of both time and place in young people's access to religious and ethnic communities. First, time is crucial on a number of levels. Zahra sought out the community on arrival at a time when she felt particularly socially isolated. This reflects the importance that many of the young people placed on making connections with ethnic and religious communities when they first arrive in the UK. Notably, she alludes to the time of year of her arrival. Arriving in the summer had particular effects as she had to wait a longer period to access to education. A number of young people similarly referred to the period of time before they were enrolled into education as particularly lonely and isolating. Zahra also refers to the temporal rituals and routines of the church community which met every Sunday, providing her with a familiar temporal ordering.

Secondly, Zahra's account centres on her discovery of a physical place in which she envisaged being able to create a social space for interaction with people from her own community. Finally, she was very aware of her need to make connections, and actively engaged in seeking out such a community, even where that entailed walking alone through the city to find it and persuading her foster carer of its importance. The interaction of time, place and the agency of young people in seeking out sites of community interaction are all present in Zahra's story.

These salient factors are present across the other young people's experience of accessing religious and ethnic communities. A number of UYP shared similar incidences of seeking out churches and mosques by walking across the city and approaching strangers who either looked or sounded like they were from a similar country, and then asking for information about sites of worship, demonstrating the value young people placed on a physical place to worship. Some young people had moved out of or turned down foster placements as they were too distant from religious communities and the place of worship. Shar, from Afghanistan, described how his favourite place in the city was his local mosque, and how when he moved

into independent living his primary consideration in finding accommodation was proximity to the mosque. Places of worship therefore represent physical places and social spaces where young people can interact with members of the same religious and ethnic communities and establish familiar ritual and routines (Wade et al. 2005; Wade et al. 2012). Place therefore emerges as crucial to the social networks of UYP, as social networks are forged and preserved in specific locations (Wells 2011).

Even where young people did not identify as belonging to a particular church or community with a clear identity and focal place, being proximate to diverse city spaces and 'commonplace diversity' (Wessendorff 2010) in which they might be able to interact with people from the same or similar backgrounds was desired by most young people. When choosing universities to attend, some of the young people had purposely sought out educational settings that were culturally diverse, reflecting findings by Sirriyeh (2013) that UYP find comfort in ethnically diverse places. Access to ethnically appropriate amenities in the local area was also important, and recognised by the professionals involved with young people.

*Unaccompanied young people value a placement in a multicultural area where they can access cultural and religious services, not just for worship but things like hair salons and food shops. They can be in area where they can communicate in the same language. **Social Worker***

However, living within these looser spaces of ethnic and cultural identity could become problematic. Faizal, who had converted to Christianity when he arrived in the UK, was fearful of reprisal from the Muslim community in which he lived, even though he did not consider himself to be a part of that community.

I think they would kill me if they found out. I live in an area and they are mostly Pakistani there, a lot of Muslims. Because if they see me. You know they all call me brother and all that. I was scared they would see me at the church.

Faizal

Whilst young people's engagement with religious communities was more stable than the fluctuating friendships they established through school, residential care and foster placements, the passage of time still had important impacts. Research by Kearns & Whiteley (2015) suggests that asylum seekers and refugees gradually become more integrated and active within communities over time. However, for the

young people in this study the process was not quite so linear. The impetus to find a religious community to engage with appeared to be strongest on first arrival, and for some young people their interest had waned over time (although their religious faith remained strong), a finding also reported by Wade et al. (2005).

I don't really go to church anymore. I did when I first came but I just don't do that anymore really. I don't live near the church anymore, so it's a long way to go. But I don't question my faith. Idris

Again, Idris suggests a spatial element to his withdrawal from the church community. Whilst he continues to practice his faith individually, geographical distance from a place of worship has impacted his engagement. For some young people, relative disengagement from religious communities was a response to the fluid nature of the make-up of the religious community itself. Zahra described how many of her young church friends were moving away for university and work, undergoing their own transitions.

I'm not at church as much anymore now because I am every busy with my studies and living a bit further away. People are going as well. To London. To different places for university. I am always saying I will be going away too but I'm still there. People are like, why are you still here? You need to move out of this city and be somewhere else. Because that's what most of the young people do. Zahra

This reminds us that even though religious communities are based in and around relatively fixed physical places, the spaces of interaction within these places are fluid. Zahra's relationship to the church community is changing as her friends move away and the community itself encourages her too to move on and find new places and spaces of interaction. As Massey (1994) suggests, places are not static and fixed but better understood as processes or articulated moments in networks of social relations. However, the importance of physical places, changeable and fluid as they are, should not be under-estimated. As Turner & Turner (2006) argue, we experience the world in and through particular places. Similarly, this section has emphasised that the young people's networks of relationships were highly contingent on places and spaces to meet, either in formal institutional settings or using informal public spaces. Places are understood here as both produced through social relations

and embedded in particular spatial locations (Massey 1995). The interaction of time with place has also been discussed, as the 'temporal rhythms' (Sirriyeh 2013) of particular places bring young people together at particular times in the life course. The discontinuity in access to these places and time structures during the transition to adulthood can have destabilising effects on the social network, which may be mediated by more stable contact with places such as religious sites of worship and public spaces to engage in sport, although access may be gendered.

8.2 Bonding and bridging relationships

Studies of the social networks of immigrant, refugee and asylum seeker communities have regularly drawn on the concept of 'bonding' and 'bridging' relationships developed originally within theories of social capital (Putnam 2000; Ager & Strang 2004; Beirens et al. 2007; Wade et al. 2012). 'Bonding' relationships refer to relationships within ethnic and religious communities, and 'bridging' relationships refer to relationships between these communities (Ager & Strang 2004; Wade et al. 2012). The findings from this study suggest that UYP may identify with multiple overlapping communities which are not inevitably based upon religious, ethnic or national affiliations, suggesting the potential difficulty of confidently asserting what constitutes a 'bonding' relationship and what constitutes a 'bridging' relationship.

Some young people clearly identified themselves as belonging to religious, ethnic or national communities, which could be understood as bonding relationships, although it was rarely the case that these communities were their sole network of informal connections. The previous section highlighted some of the benefits of belonging to such a community, including the ability to have a place to meet culturally similar people and develop shared routines and rituals. In addition, the UYP further identified being able to communicate easily in the same language, exchange information about events in the country of origin and share familiar cultural practices as benefits of belonging to religious and national communities, which have also been reported in previous research concerned with the positive aspects of immigrant and refugee bridging capital (Aquilera & Massey 2003; Portes & Rumbaut 2006; Wade et al. 2012).

The potential negative and constraining aspects of bonding relationships within such communities has also been the subject of research that highlights the capacity of homogenous communities to be controlling and mistrustful (Levitt 2001; Cranford 2005; Krissman 2005; Newman & Dale 2005; McIlwaine 2008). Indeed, Zahra explained some of the ways in which her close connection to a religious community had been both problematic but beneficial. Zahra made connections with her male cousins through the Eritrean church but described them as 'extra, extra controlling'. She felt they were the most negative part of her social network and had experienced a number of conflicts with them since her arrival. However, meeting her cousins through the church had been the catalyst for her finding other family members and regaining contact with them.

My cousins, they are over-protective and bossy and try to get me in trouble with my dad. I see them at church but I don't speak to them anymore really. But they were the ones that found my dad and met with people to find out where he was. Zahra

The potentially constraining and restricting nature of religious and ethnic communities is explored further in Chapter Twelve, which considers the cultural transitions that UYP make over time. However, for the purposes of this chapter, it is necessary to note the complexity of bonding relationships in religious and ethnic communities, which past literature suggests can act to impose normative standards of behaviour on young people, particularly young women (Sirriyeh 2013). However, young people were rarely engaged in only one community or social network, more often having multiple, overlapping networks of relationships which comprised variously of ethnic and national communities, friendship groups and individual friendships. Most young people had groups of friends that were diverse in terms of nationality and ethnicity. The way in which young people identified with such groupings and communities challenges our understanding of 'bonding' and 'bridging' relationships, as young people often saw themselves as members of communities which were not defined by ethnic or religious identities.

Daana considered himself to belong to a community of musicians who formed his primary social network. As an aspiring professional musician he had surrounded

himself with young people with similar interests, with whom he had connected through music college and musically centred clubs and communities.

*I have made lots of friends here. I met a lot of my friends at Rock School which I did last summer, it's like a summer camp for musical people and I made lots of friends there. They are mostly white British people but we have a shared love of music in common. Same with music college friends, they are not from where I am from, but we all love music. **Daana***

Daana was one of few young people who explicitly rejected membership of national and ethnic communities as a way of moving from on the past:

*I like to be more friends with British people because it is good for my English. I don't really want to be with Afghan people. If you with Afghan family and friends then you always talk about the past. The past was rubbish and scary. I don't want to talk about that. **Daana***

This stood in contrast with many UYP who, at least initially, found comfort with people from similar backgrounds. However, he was a member of a local youth group for young refugees and asylum seekers, which he attended regularly. The friends he made at the youth club were a diverse mix of nationalities, religions and genders but bound together by their shared experience of seeking asylum in the UK, a shared experience which will be discussed later in the chapter as a crucial element of trusting relationships.

For other young people, the culturally mixed sporting communities they were part of defined their social networks, whether these communities were informal (as discussed above), or formal. For instance, Mohammed was a member of a semi-professional football team through which the majority of his social network was formed.

*I am always playing football with my team. I play for a team. Semi-pro. I love my friends from football. These friends are my family. **Mohammed***

These experiences highlight the difficulty of defining what constitutes a 'bonding' or 'bridging' relationship within these social networks, and challenge the notion that 'the ethno-cultural group is the prototype of community' (Anthias 2013: 330). Whilst many of the networks that young people engaged with were ethnically and culturally mixed

and could therefore be understood as bridging relationships to a mainstream host community (Wade et al. 2012), the networks bore the hallmarks of exclusive communities in their own right, if we understand 'community' broadly as based on a common identity, set of beliefs and practices which cultivates 'belonging' (Clark 2007). Membership of these communities was not established in terms of ethnicity or culture, but shared mutual interests or experiences. In addition, young people often established friendships with young people who did not share their national or ethnic identity but were from other ethnic minority groups. Mas Giralt (2011), in a study of migrant Latin American young people in the UK, found that participants formed social alliances with ethnic minority British young people as part of a strategy for negotiating 'sameness', difference and belonging. He usefully conceptualised 'sameness' and 'difference' as poles on a spectrum rather than binary opposites. The young people in Mas Giralt's (2011) study were seen to use 'strategies of sameness' with their ethnically diverse groups of friends, emphasising commonalities to create bonds, whilst downplaying difference. The young people in this study appeared to employ similar strategies:

My main friend at school was from Ethiopia. It's not my country, but it's similar. So we could relate to each other about that. Zahra

The experiences of the UYP in this study support Mas Giralt's (2011) suggestion that the discourse on migrant young people's relationships and networks is rooted in mainstream notions of 'sameness' and difference that unhelpfully dichotomise the fluid and overlapping spheres of commonality and belonging that young people experience. The relationships in this study are better understood as positioned on Mas Giralt's (2011) spectrum, in which young people emphasise their similitude with other young people in a variety of different ways which may or may not be based on religious, ethnic or cultural expressions of identity. These findings suggest potential limitations in applying the concept of 'bonding' and 'bridging' capital. As Daly and Silver (2008) have suggested, the concept of 'bonding' and 'bridging' may essentialise migrant populations, underplaying intra-group differences to presume homogeneity and commonality within groups, whilst neglecting forms of unity and connection that are not associated with ethnic, national or religious distinctiveness. The findings here echo this concern, as well as Jenks' (2008) caution against the reification of collectives which can lead to an assumption that 'sameness and

difference are properties possessed by the individual' (Anthias 2006: 20), rather than fluid processes of identification constructed and reconstructed across time and in particular places.

Nevertheless, the young people in this study also suggested that it was critical to have at least one friend who had a shared nationality:

... sometimes , at least one, you need at least one from the same country, who speaks the same language or something. Zahra

Finding the first person from your own country. Who you can talk to in your own language. Who can understand you. That is a very special moment.

Roshaan

Despite describing active and complex social networks that challenge the notion of what a bonding or a bridging relationship might be, the issue of trust between and within certain groups and communities was a crucial one. Much has been written about refugees, asylum seekers and issues of trust. A consensus has emerged that refugees are both mistrusted and mistrusting (Daniel & Knusden 1995; Hynes 2003; Ní Raghallaigh 2013). A number of causes for this mistrust have been proposed, including traumatic past experience of conflict (Kline & Mone 2003; Behnia 2004; Hynes 2009; Ní Raghallaigh 2013); prolonged uncertainty and negative conditions in the pre-migration and post-migration environment (Hynes 2009) and the culture of suspicion and disbelief inherent within the immigration system (Souter 2011). However, the functional and strategic elements of mistrust have also been explored in general (Gilson 2006), and in relation to UYP in particular (Kohli 2006). This work considers distrust as a rational protective response in a potentially adverse and uncertain environment.

Some of the young people in this study did experience problems with trust in social relationships. Occasionally, this distrust emerged from universal experiences of failed friendships and betrayal by boyfriends and girlfriends, and was not explicitly connected to the experience of seeking asylum and refuge. More often, young people's distrust was linked to their status as asylum seekers and difficulty in disclosing information about their immigration status. These issues were more prevalent amongst young people who had exhausted their appeal rights (ARE) or had uncertain immigration status:

I don't talk to them about immigration and stuff. I keep it private. It's not a lie. I've just been trying to be comfortable. I know it's a lie but it's not because I just want to be like them. I can't tell them because they will want to know more. I am a little bit frightened to tell them. Aziz

Aziz was ARE at the time of the interview, but suggested that even before he became ARE he had not been able to speak with his friends about his uncertain immigration status. Aziz's reluctance to speak with friends about his situation was linked not only with mistrust, but also with a desire to be like other young people, and to make his 'asylum seeker' identity invisible. Chase et al. (2008) have previously explored the effects of the negative labelling of 'asylum seekers' on UYP and the ways in which young people might seek to resist such 'stigmatised identities' (Goffman 1963) and negative labels (Zetter 2007) through selective disclosure and silence. Certainly, some of the young people in this study suggested that they would not discuss immigration problems with peers, due to fear of their reactions and a desire not to be seen as different by disclosing their status. Idris was one such young person, who explained how he kept his immigration concerns from all but his closest friends and became angry and upset when asked about immigration.

But I don't walk round and tell people about my life and so they think I'm settled here, they think I'm still studying or stuff like that. They don't know I'm still waiting on the Home Office. I hate people who you say 'hi, how are you' and they say 'have you got a decision yet?' I felt like I don't like that question. I get so emotional. I hate those people. They don't even know nothing about you, they just know, somehow they know you don't have papers. They just spit out that question and I don't like that. I don't mind people close to me asking about it – because they obviously care about me. Idris

Kohli (2006) and Chase (2010) have also written about silence and distrust for UYP, identifying that young people's silences and secrets may be both a normal part of adolescence and a form of purposive distrust. Indeed, the selective disclosure that young people engage in suggests a 'strategic capacity to determine when to speak and when not to' (Thomson 2013: 592), and indeed whom to speak with and whom not to. The findings from this study add a new dimension in that current immigration status played a key role. Young people who had attained Refugee Status were more

likely to be open with friends about their immigration experiences once they were certain of remaining in the UK.

Some young people also began to feel distrustful of their religious and ethnic communities when immigration issues arose. This was particularly the case for the Muslim young people, who expressed disappointment in the support they had received from their communities. Faizal dismissed the commonly held belief that Muslim communities are particularly supportive, describing it as a 'myth'.

People think Muslims are always helping each other out but it's not like that.

Faizal

Other young people shared instances in which they or close friends had been rejected by religious communities when they required help with immigration problems and had requested letters of support from religious communities:

*They won't help me. Even they wouldn't give me a reference. And I said what kind of Muslim are you. What's the point of Muslims. I needed it for the Home Office and they said I had to pay for it. I said OK I will pay for it. They kept saying they would do it and didn't. My friend was frustrated with them, he said what point of this community. You won't even write a letter and then my friend started swearing and they called the police. **Aziz***

Similarly, some of the Eritrean young people felt that the ethnic and religious communities they belonged to had limited resources to give any practical help, and might only be of assistance in extreme circumstances.

*Maybe if you were very, very desperate for help they would do something for you. They have collections for things and for people, but normally I would like to give to those collections and give support. I wouldn't ask for it. **Makhda***

This highlights the potential danger of assuming that young people who are embedded in religious and ethnic communities are necessarily well supported in that environment, as Wade et al. (2012) have previously noted. This may particularly be the case where young people have immigration problems, which may carry a stigma within ethnic and religious communities as it does within mainstream host societies. It also draws our attention to the ways in which young people seek to contribute to

those communities, and may not feel comfortable to ask for support as they negotiate their position and status within those social networks.

Despite these issues with trust and support, most of the young people had at least one person in their informal network that they felt they could discuss their immigration status with, or had discussed it with in the past. Uniformly, these young people identified other refugee and asylum-seeking young people as a trusted confidante in this regard, and trusted them above others with information about their immigration status, sometimes utilising their first friendships with informal mentors which had developed into closer friendships.

*I have a friends from my country who I met when I first came here and I can talk to them about it [immigration status]. It's different, because they have status now, but they understand. They had same problems as me. **Idris***

*I just have my friend from Afghanistan who helped me when I first got here. I talk to him about these problems [with immigration] sometimes. But that is it. **Yousef***

These findings suggest that the most vital informal relationships that young people form are with other young people who have similar experiences of seeking asylum. Usually, these young people will share a religious or ethnic identity, but this was not always the case. In this sense, the community of other refugee and asylum-seeking young people may be the most important resource that UYP have, particularly in terms of developing trusting relationships that become essential when immigration problems arise. Kamal, who had been in the UK for almost ten years, turned to the first friend he made in the UK when he unexpectedly became ARE and was faced with deportation. However, he chose to tell only this one friend, and not any of the other young men he made friends with when he arrived in UK:

*I have my one friend who I met when I came here. I tell only him. There were nine of us all made friends because we came at about the same time. There is no point in asking my other Afghani friends. They don't know either. **Kamal***

Kamal's experience shows just how important initial friendships with other young people in similar situations can be, not just at the point of arrival but throughout and

beyond the transition to adulthood. However, his experience draws attention to the limits of friendship, particularly when immigration issues arise and concrete practical assistance is required.

*You can't always trust your friends. I had a situation once when I needed somewhere to stay for a while and I turned to my Afghani friend who had his own house. And he wanted to charge me for staying with him even though I didn't have any money. No, I'm not sure I can trust anybody. **Kamal***

Despite these issues of trust the young people relied on peer networks and friendships as important 'domains of everydayness' (Blazek 2011: 81) in which they could distract themselves from problems, stresses and over-thinking the past. Previous research has noted the importance of leisure activities and staying busy as a coping mechanism for UYP (Wade et al. 2005; Ní Raghallaigh & Gilligan 2010; Chase 2010), and networks of friends emerged as vital for enjoyment and simply having fun. In this context, talking about the past and disclosing fears about the future did not figure prominently.

*Y'know we are just having fun. I love my friends because we can just play football and have fun. No stress. Just playing. **Ibrahim***

*When you are with your friends you just want to chill and have fun. You don't need to talk about the past and all that other stuff. **Zaki***

Many of the young people in this study spent a considerable amount of time with their friends and became frustrated when access to friends was restricted. Makhda explained how his foster carers limited his contact with peer networks because they had a strict curfew and did not allow him to sleep over at his friends' houses

*I feel like I am living a half life because I can't be with my friends as much as I want to. Without spending time with my friends, it is a half-life. **Makhda***

A final critical dimension of the UYP's informal social networks related to trust was their extreme sensitivity to cultivating networks of friends and peers that were experienced as positive. Most of the young people reported that they either had few or no negative friendships in their network, meticulously withdrawing themselves from friendships or networks of friends that they felt might impact negatively on them.

I only have good people who are my friends. I don't spend time with people who are bad for me. Idris

I'm a very friendly person so I make friends with people who are friendly to me. If they're not friendly good people, I don't make friends with them. Aziz

This was a feature of the social networks also noted by professionals:

We get some normal teenage stuff. But in the grand scheme of things there are very few issues with friends. After they've been through what they have I think they generally have a much more grown-up view of their relationships. I haven't come across many problems. Social Worker

These findings point to the way in which young people 'thoughtfully navigate the terrain of resettlement' (Denov & Bryan 2012: 9) and seek to positively construct their own social worlds.

8.3 Isolation

The findings from this study that many UYP have full and active informal social networks consolidate similar findings from previous studies (Wells 2011; Wade et al. 2012). They also highlight the complexity and diversity of the social networks young people are involved in. However, many previous studies have raised concerns about the potential for refugees in general and UYP in particular to face social isolation and loneliness (Mackenzie & Forde 2008; Wallin & Ahlström 2005). Experiences of social isolation were also found in this study. Such experiences were primarily associated with the period of time immediately after arrival, and most of the young people who went on to develop strong and diverse networks had experienced some form of isolation when they initially arrived. Indeed, the young people who had been in the UK for the shortest periods of time when they were interviewed were the most socially isolated, supporting previous evidence that immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers tend to become more socially connected the longer they have been in the UK (Kearns & Whitley 2015).

Samuel had been in the UK only a short period of time and said he did feel lonely and isolated, but was beginning to develop relationships at the refugee youth club:

I am quite lonely, being away from my family and my country. I haven't made a lot of friends yet. But, I will. I have met the people at youth club now. They are not from my country. But still, we are friends. **Samuel**

However, informal relationships did not develop uniformly in a linear fashion over time for all the young people, and some circumstances led them to become particularly vulnerable to isolation, above and beyond the difficult periods of transition identified previously in this chapter. Complications with immigration status affected some young people's informal social networks considerably. This may partly be a consequence of the issues of trust explored in the previous section, but also had other dimensions. Idris, who had been ARE for a number of years, described how he had withdrawn from his peers and community over time as the stress of uncertain immigration took its toll on him:

Y' know I'm not the kind of person. I don't know now because I am getting really down I felt like I try to I keep everything to myself. I just don't want to be around people, I want to be on my own and not think too much. And I don't like that. I'm not like a crazy person or anything but you just can't control it, it happens by itself. I can't control it. **Idris**

This impulse to withdraw from social activity was discussed by the other ARE young people in this study and supports findings by Kearns & Whitley (2015) that with each passing year that asylum seekers do not achieve stable status their social connectedness shrinks. The findings in Chapter Seven suggested that UYP may also withdraw from family contact when immigration issues occur, which may compound social isolation.

Gender also emerged as potential factor in isolation. Previous sections of this chapter have suggested that girls are both less likely to have access to crucial informal mentoring relationships and less able to make connections through sport. Only three girls took part in this study and it is therefore not possible to extrapolate widely from their experiences. However, two of the girls in this study appeared to be the most socially isolated of all the young people. Sophia had few friendships with peers and was not actively engaged in a church community, although she did attend church. For Sophia, this was partially because she was deeply embedded in the networks formed around her kinship placement, and the impetus to make

connections outside of her family may have been less profound. She also suggested that she had little desire for large groups of friends and was satisfied with the one close friendship she had cultivated through school.

*I don't need lots of friends. I don't want that really. I just need one friend. I have that with my English friend. So that's ok. **Sophia***

Sophia had also been in the country for only a year, and still had time to develop networks. Indeed, by the time of the follow-up interview she had begun volunteering at a local community centre and was beginning to broaden her social network. For Mariam, being a young mother was identified as the main barrier to the development of friendships and social connections:

*I am always looking after my son. So I don't do anything or go anywhere really. Just to the school with him and back. School and back. I can't really do anything else. **Mariam***

Mariam had a particular set of circumstances that affected her ability to develop friendships. As a young single mother with little family support, much of her time was taken up with caring for her son and she found the practicalities of socialising difficult. By the second interview, she had left college her social world had shrunk considerably, highlighting how transitions between educational institutions can have huge impacts on the social networks of young people:

*I used to see people at college. But I have problems now with that and I'm not going at the moment. So now I don't see anybody really. I don't do anything. It is getting very bad. Very lonely. **Mariam***

Like Sophia, Mariam had developed one close friendship with another young woman, although unlike Sophia, Mariam had sought out a friend who came from her country. Echoing Zahra's earlier story, Mariam had engaged with this friend when she heard her in the street talking the same language and wearing clothing traditional in their shared country of origin. Research suggests that girls prefer to engage in smaller networks of close didactic relationships with other girls (Maccobby 1998), which may go some way to explaining the smaller peer networks of Mariam and Sophia.

However Zahra's networks, which have been discussed throughout this chapter, were perhaps the most full and active of any of the young people, suggesting caution is needed in attributing increased isolation primarily to the gender of young people. Additionally, Sirriyeh (2013) found that the young refugee women in her study were able to develop strong social networks of peers. However, these findings do tentatively suggest that gender may be a factor in isolation for UYP, and certainly limits their access to some of the peer relationships that emerged as crucial in this study, such as initial informal mentoring relationships and friendships based around sport.

8.4 Conclusion

The findings from this chapter have shown UYP's social networks to be diverse, complex and fluid over time. Reciprocity was emphasised and can be linked with the mutuality that was a feature of the family relationships discussed in the previous chapter to position young people as providers of support. In this chapter, young people were seen to both receive and provide support from informal mentors in the form of other young refugees and asylum seekers. This process was often unofficially activated by social workers, suggesting the potential for this practice to be used more widely by social workers, especially given the longevity and significance of such relationships over time.

Indeed, the durability of peer and community networks were examined during this chapter as informal networks were in a state of considerable flux, as young people experienced multiple overlapping transitions in education and accommodation, highlighting the influence of both time and space on shaping social networks (Weller 2010). Communities and sports were seen to provide more stable networks. However, community relationships in particular were complex and could involve both positive and adverse elements, which could not easily be uncoupled from each other. Considering 'communities', the concept of 'bonding' and 'bridging' relationships was contested, as young people identified with a number of communities and networks that were not based on national, ethnic or religious identities. The potential essentialism of bonding and bridging categories has been critiqued before (Dwyer & Bressey 2008; Weller 2010; Wade et al. 2012) and the

findings here suggest caution in focusing understandings of UYP's informal networks around their ethnic, cultural and religious identities. Taking a broader, more subjective view of how young people identify themselves within and between communities at different times and in different places may bring into view commonalities, similarities and sites of connection overlooked by traditional understandings of community networks (Weller 2009). However, the significance of relationships with other refugee and asylum-seeking young people should not be overlooked, particularly in relation to issues of trust, as the findings suggest that the young people in this study were only able to trust other young people with asylum-seeking experience with the most sensitive issue of immigration control.

Whilst the chapter has centred on the dynamism of complexity of networks, experiences of isolation have also been considered. The very fluidity of informal networks could lead to isolation, as young people found they had to adapt to changing social networks in the transition to adulthood, primarily due to the loss of shared institutional spaces and time structures represented by schools, colleges and placements. Additionally, continued issues with achieving Refugee Status was a particular factor in isolation, compounded by a concurrent withdrawal from family connections reported in Chapter Seven. Gender was also a dimension to be considered in the potential for UYP to become socially isolated. Whilst the findings here were mixed in relation to girls' social networks and contrast to some degree with previous studies (Sirriyeh 2013), the limited access girls had to informal mentoring relationships and sporting activities suggested increased potential for isolation. Drawing robust conclusions on the basis of a small sample of girls with very divergent experiences is not possible, but at the least suggests that the gendered nature of the informal social networks of UYP requires further exploration.

Chapter Nine

Social care professionals and foster carers

9.0 Introduction

This chapter considers the role played by the more formal elements of the young people's social networks, particularly relationships with professionals working within children's services and foster carers. This chapter uses the term 'social care professionals' or 'professionals' to denote professionals who work within the social services department and have a formal role with the young person. Professionals in this context are primarily qualified social workers or 'personal advisors' who are not required to have qualified social worker status, but are often the main form of formal support for young people leaving care. They are responsible for maintaining contact with the young person and assessing and supporting their needs during the transition from care. The chapter begins by considering the different types of relationships that the young people in this study had developed with foster carers and professionals. Drawing primarily on Kohli's (2006) typology of different 'domains of practice' in social work with UYP (discussed also in Chapter Three), the findings explore different relationships from the point of view of young people and professionals, offering support for Kohli's (2006) findings and extending his typology to relationships with foster carers.

The chapter then moves on to consider the fundamental role of professionals and foster carers in the social networks of UYP. Using the concept of 'social navigation' (Vigh 2006; 2009) to contextualise the findings, as social work professionals and foster carers emerge as vital co-navigators for young people plotting a course through complex, shifting and often alien social environments. Issues of agency and control within these relationships are explicitly addressed, taking a relational approach to agency which emphasises the interdependency of agency and the complex power dynamics in the often emotionally laden relationships established between professionals and young people. In particular, the role of professionals in co-navigating the adverse terrain of the immigration system is explored. Finally, the chapter considers some of the 'unchartered territory' in young people's journeys to

adulthood in terms of the changing nature of professional and formal networks as young people approach care leaving. Also explored is the professionals' understanding and interaction with other parts of the young people's networks, with findings suggesting that professionals have very limited knowledge of young people's broader social networks as they transition to adulthood.

9.1 Relationships with social care professionals and foster carers

As discussed in Chapter Three, previous research has paid significant attention to the role of children's services and foster carers (Wade et al. 2005; Wade et al. 2012; Newbigging & Thomas 2011). Recent work has also emerged on relationships with foster carers that provides a deeper exploration of foster care experiences and how young people might develop 'family-like' relationships in foster care (Wade et al. 2012; Sirriyeh 2013). UYP form with professionals, with some notable exceptions (Wade et al. 2005; Kohli 2006b; Kohli 2007). Relationships and relationship-based practices are at the heart of social work (Trevithick 2005). The relationship between the young person and the professional is a central consideration of Leaving Care practice (Gilligan 2000). Kohli's (2006b) research is particularly useful for its attempt to understand the nuanced ways in which practitioners work with UYP, identifying a typology of practice across three domains (cohesion, connection, coherence).

The young people in this study frequently referred to relationships with social care professionals which could usefully be understood as operating within Kohli's (2006b) 'domain of cohesion', in which practitioners form strong bonds with young people, blurring the boundaries between friendship, familial bonds and professional practice. In this study, young people regularly referred to workers as friends, or used familial terms:

Y'know they are just like part of my friends, they're not social service or anything. Like Jenny, she's not my social service, she's just like friends. That's it, that's how I feel. Idris

When I said the house was cold she [personal advisor] would use her own money to buy electricity for me. She will use her own money for me. She is like a mother to me when I have no family. She is like a mother to me. Any

*problem, she will talk to her manager. She is for me and for my son. Everything I ask she will try for me so I feel like I have mum. **Mariam***

*I call her [social worker] my little mother. She is my little mother. She is family to me. **Sophia***

Young people frequently described relationships with social care professionals in this way. Many resisted the notion that they were receiving a 'service', understanding the support of professionals as beyond the bounds of statutory services. Detailed stories emerged of assistance which went above and beyond the required levels of support and the expectations of young people, including practitioners using their own money to buy young people items they could not afford, and giving up time at weekends to help with tasks such as decorating new homes or moving furniture.

The social care professionals described their relationships with some young people similarly, although they were clear that these relationships were limited to young people they had developed particularly strong relationships with, suggesting that Kohli's (2006b) domain of coherence is less a description of an individual worker's approach to practice than an uncovering of the possibilities of practice where such trusting relationships are mutually developed.

*It does depend on the young person but I think I am an advisor, a legal representative, a role model for some, not even like a friend. I'm more like a member of their family. **Personal Advisor***

*Some of the young people you form a really strong bond with. I think it's the ones that embrace you. Some of them really do that and then you can form that relationship. **Personal Advisor***

Where young people had cultivated these kinds of relationships with professionals they were likely to think of a particular professional as one of the most vital parts of their social network, and equate the strength of their professional relationship with an ability to cope in difficult times and feel safe and secure in the knowledge that support would be available to them. Crucially, these relationships had often evolved over time where consistency had been maintained and the young person had remained with the same worker for long periods, reflecting the findings of Kohli (2006b) and Bilton (2003) that such relationships require time to grow. The

development of such relationships also appeared more likely when the professional was the first person that had offered the young person support in the UK. Whilst this was not always the case, many young people described particular attachment to the professionals they met when they were first referred, describing their initial contact in reverent terms:

It was like an angel. She was like an angel sent for me. Zaki

Time therefore emerges as a significant factor in achieving relationships that operate within the domain of 'coherence', in terms of the evolution of relationships over time, the importance of continuity in professional support and the potential impact of the timing of the professional's entrance into the young person's life.

Some of the young people had also established strong familial bonds with foster carers akin to those that Wade et al. (2012) describe as 'family-like relationships', in which the young person was actively engaged in the family life and practices of the foster family and had developed a meaningful and enduring relationship within the placement. Whilst some young people established these bonds with the first family they were placed with, others experienced a number of placement transitions before finding a family-like connection. Zahra's first placement had broken down due to suspicion and mistrust on the part of her foster mother, a cause of placement breakdown noted in Wade et al.'s (2012) study. However, her second placement was more successful and she had maintained her relationship with the foster family after transitioning to independent living:

It's like a family really. I go and visit for tea once a week on a Sunday. Like every week. And sometimes they will come to me too. If I have problem in the house, like with the electricity or something I call my foster mum. Her husband is like really good with that stuff, so they come and help with stuff like that. Just like a family really. Zahra

Zahra's experience was not unusual, and a number of young people described at least one of their foster placements similarly:

I'm like their son. When I passed my driving test and I took my first car to see them they were so proud of me. I am like a son to them. Kamal

These close attachments with professionals and foster carers have clear links with Kohli's (2006b) 'domain of coherence' in which continued contact is desired by all parties and a collaborative approach to the young person's need is taken. Whilst these types of relationships may be more commonly reported in foster care, (Wade et al. 2012; Sirriyeh 2013), as Kohli (2006b) observes, social work practice with unaccompanied children is rarely described or understood in this way. The experiences of some of the young people in this study therefore reinforce Kohli's (2006b) research, adding the perspectives of UYP themselves to the narratives of professionals analysed by Kohli.

Some young people described relationships with professionals and foster carers that were therapeutic in nature but did not necessarily develop into strong, durable attachments and bonds. These relationships were more consistent with Kohli's (2006b) domain of connection, characterised by the ability of professionals (and sometimes foster carers) to witness the traumatic experiences that young people carried with them.

I told him [personal advisor] all about what happened to me. It is very upsetting for me. You will see if you look at my file that it is a very horrible story. But I did tell him about it. I don't want to talk about it again now here, because I have told my worker all about it. Aziz

Similarly some of the professionals described the difficult and traumatic stories of young people's migration journeys and pre-flight experiences, and suggested that they were deeply touched by the sadness of such stories and awed by the resilience of young people to cope and achieve in such circumstances.

This girl, she told me this story of what happened to her. You wouldn't believe what had happened to her. Terrible things. But when I look at what she has achieved since she got here. She is a nurse now and has a baby. I just think she's fantastic. Social Worker

Some of the young people preferred to maintain less emotionally connected relationships with professionals. However, many of these young people still valued professional relationships highly, based on the workers' effectiveness, professionalism and ability to take action for the young person.

The relationship is like, professional. It's like that. But he [social worker] is very important to me. I think he is brilliant for me. He helps me with lots of things. When I say I have a problem, I know that he can sort it out for me and help me with it. He has been very good person to me and I feel close to him because of that. Even though it is like professional relationship. **Makhda**

Past research with care leavers more generally has highlighted the importance they place on reliability, effectiveness and 'getting things done' (Morgan 2006; Golding et al. 2006; Morgan 2012). For the young people in this study, the ability to problem solve and access crucial resources and entitlements could be just as important as the development of a more therapeutically based dynamic. Some of the professionals described offering this type of practice, which might be considered as working within Kohli's (2006b) domain of cohesion, in which practitioners seek to bring order and routine to young people's lives through tangible forms of helping.

It's mostly practical stuff, knowing we are here to turn to. But we're always here. The emotional side of it. They just get on with it. They don't really want counselling – they'll get on with it and share with close friends. **Social Worker**

Similarly, some young people felt an emotional distance with their foster carers similar to that described by Wade et al. (2012), whilst still feeling secure and settled in their placement. Makhda was in a foster placement with another Eritrean boy with whom he formed a close relationship. The foster carers were uncomfortable with the close friendship and this created some emotional distance within the household:

I'm not sure they really understand sometimes. When I first came and I used to sleep in bed with my friend. They told me not to do that. And I didn't understand. They thought it was weird. But it was just helping. It helped me sleep. Things like that make it difficult but they do take good care of me though. **Makhda**

Locating the young people's experience of professional relationships within Kohli's (2006b) typology is useful in establishing the significant role that working within different 'domains of practice' has within young people's networks. The findings from this study therefore build on Kohli's previous work, adding the direct experiences of UYP in support of Kohli's research, which was based on interview with practitioners.

The findings also situate relationships with foster carers and personal advisors within this typology.

9.2 Reframing social work professionals as social navigators

The previous section established support for Kohli's (2006b) 'domains of practice' with UYP. This section moves away from Kohli's typology and the different forms of practice that were evident, but maintains the underpinning philosophy of Kohli's (2006b) and similar work (Wade et al. 2005; Wade et al. 2012) in attempting to engage with the nuances of practice and the complexity of the role of formal services in the UYP's networks. In particular, this section is mindful of Kohli's (2006b: 5) observation that previous research has a tendency to edge social workers 'out of roles associated with care towards roles associated with control'. This section seeks to reframe the role of social workers as 'co-navigators' on the difficult journeys young people take through the transition to adulthood. In Vigh's (2006) concept of 'social navigation', which is concerned with how people navigate their way through the terrain of shifting and changeable social environments, professionals are reframed as 'co-navigators' who are especially valuable for UYP in navigating the complex, unpredictable and adverse terrain of institutional bureaucracies and systems.

As suggested in the previous section, the day-to-day, practical role of professionals in the networks of UYP is crucial. Regardless of the strength of the relationship with professionals, young people's accounts of their relationships were dominated by stories of practical assistance. As one social worker pointed out, the primary need that professionals can meet for UYP is support with the complex bureaucratic processes to which they become increasingly subjected as they transition to adulthood.

Their problems are with bureaucracy. They can have practical skills and confidence that are brilliant. But it's the knowledge of the systems and the way society works because we operate very differently. **Social Worker**

The need for assistance with practical matters is observed in the general Leaving Care literature (Ward et al. 2003; Hojer & Sjoblom 2010; Morgan 2012) and research with UYP which specifically suggests that the practical skills acquired pre-migration

and during migration may be very different to those required to manage in the UK, resulting in the need for high levels of assistance with managing bills, bureaucracy and officialdom (Kidane 2001; Sirriyeh 2000; 2013).

*All these letters, every day, through the post box more and more letters, piles of letters. And so many appointments. You get so many letters in this country. In my country there are no post boxes. No addresses. Not these letters all the time. It is very simple life. I thought about gluing my letter box shut but I didn't know if this was illegal and I would get into lots of trouble so I didn't. Friends are not always very useful for that. I can get advice from them, from the people I know. But social services are the best place. They understand all those things. **Sohail***

*I really need help with bills and like the council and she is helpful with that. Like, it's okay I do manage living independently. But there are so many letters and bills and I don't sometimes know why I have this bill. I have her coming today actually because I have a few different things I need some help with. **Zula***

Indeed, young people routinely described their positive relationships with professionals in terms of their perceived levels of power to affect change and advocate for young people in complex systems. Sophia expressed this in the clearest terms when discussing her relationship with a social worker.

*She is powerful for me. She is very strong and very powerful. **Sophia***

Sophia continued to put this statement into context, providing examples of the occasions on which her social worker had successfully argued for important resources or helped her manifest important aspirations, such as accessing college. The role of professionals and foster carers in helping with educational difficulties was also a common theme:

*She [personal advisor] is trying very hard right now to sort things out with college. It is very bad. They are saying I cannot progress onto the next level. I don't know why. I did my exams and everything. They say I didn't fill in a form or something. But she has arranged to meet with them and I know she will sort it out for me. **Mariam***

A young girl who was at school was crying because the school was being racist. They didn't let her take her Italian exam and she needed the points for university. So, I rung and sorted that out for her. And they let her do it at another school. They sorted it right out. They thought she had nobody and so they didn't really treat her right. But when I got involved they sorted it out.

Personal Advisor

'Sorting' out problems as they arose was a crucial part of the relationships that young people had with professionals and foster carers. These problems were very often with bureaucratic institutions and systems rather than personal issues. However, they were pressing and urgent problems for the young people and caused them considerable anxiety.

Vigh's (2006) 'social navigation', which seeks to understand how people move through fluid, shifting and uncertain social environments in which structures and systems are potentially confining and volatile, is useful in this context. The emphasis is on how people plot a course through such changeable social terrain. Denov & Bryan (2012; 2014) have applied this concept to unaccompanied children in Canada, in order to explore how they navigate and negotiate the complex environment of migration and resettlement. Viewing young people's relationships with professionals through this lens, professionals can be understood as co-navigators, helping young people steer a course through the complex, treacherous and often alien terrain of societal institutions, including social care and immigration systems. Some of the professionals understood their practice in this way and hinted towards their navigational role:

We are like a stepping stone. A means to an end. To get them to a place they need to be. Hopefully with their refugee status and an education. **Social Worker**

The unaccompanied young people. Often, they know what they want. They know where they are going in life, they know what their future goals are and we just help with that. **Personal Advisor**

Having a sense of moving forward is really important and we need to pay attention to that. **Independent Reviewing Officer**

Importantly, the concept of social navigation concerns not only the ability to act, but to imagine future goals (Denov & Bryan 2012). The professionals quoted above appeared attuned to the need for UYP to imagine such futures and envisaged their role as one that acted in support of realising goals. However, their primary means of achieving this was through concrete assistance in the present. As Kohli (2007) has suggested, UYP prefer to deal with the present first, the future next and the past last. Bourdieu (2000: 211) similarly asserts that 'the real ambition to control the future varies with the real power to control the future, which means first of all having a grasp on the present itself'.

Understanding professionals, and indeed foster carers, as co-navigators across difficult terrain requires us to think critically about how the agency of young people is understood and conceptualised in such circumstances. A body of work is now emerging which explicitly considers the agency of unaccompanied children and young people (Crawley 2009; Chase 2010; Beazley 2015). A number of studies have sought to establish UYP as agentic, often positioning young people's agency in opposition to professional practice (Chase 2010; O'Higgins 2012). Chase & Allsopp (2013) point to young people's ability to avoid systems and structures of control, concluding that the role of formal services is overestimated and the agency of young people underestimated. Chase (2010: 2063) emphasises the way in which UYP seek to resist 'constant control and monitoring by social care and professionals'. O'Higgins (2012) suggests that UYP may be denied support from professionals when they express their agency, and argues that professionals should do more to promote young people's agency. Whilst importantly drawing attention to young people's agency and subverting constructions of UYP as inherently vulnerable, this work has largely considered agency as something that is either opposed, suppressed or ignored by professionals. These understandings of agency position it as property possessed by individuals (Burkitt 2016). Conversely, Burkitt (2016) proposes a relational approach to agency.

Locating individual approaches to agency in a Western reification of autonomy, individualism and personhood, he suggests that no person is ever completely agentic. Power, the ability to act, affect change and make choices is reliant on relations of interdependence (Burkitt 2016). Building from this and applying this view of agency to Vigh's (2006; 2009) concept of 'social navigation' allows the role of

formal social networks in 'co-navigation' to be explored in more nuanced ways, paying attention to the dynamics of power and control within these shared journeys. What becomes clear from the findings in this study is that expressions of agency are not limited to the resistance of controlling aspects of systems and structures represented by professionals, but involve an active engagement with professionals who are perceived to have the power and ability to affect change and successfully co-navigate young people through challenging obstacles.

Mariam's experiences provide an example. As described in Chapter Seven, Mariam was placed in a kinship placement with family members which she found difficult and challenging. Mariam approached her social worker and told her she wanted to live independently, but the social worker refused to help her.

*She said I couldn't live independently. She said I had to stay with family until my baby was older because I couldn't look after him on my own and I needed family. I told her I would rather live in the street than live here any longer and that I was going to leave anyway. In the end, I found another social worker and she helped me straight away. She said it was fine and she would help me to live on my own with the baby. **Mariam***

Mariam had experienced some of the more controlling aspects of professional practice, that chime with previous findings that young people can become increasingly vulnerable when they are not listened to, and their agency is constrained (Huijsmans 2011). Whilst Mariam described acting alone in deciding to resist the first social worker's decision, it was the recruitment of a more sympathetic professional that ultimately allowed Mariam to achieve her aim. Within Mariam's experience are complex interactions of multiple constraining mechanisms. Mariam is positioned as vulnerable and in need of care within a family, due to the intersectional effects of her age, asylum-seeker identity, gender and status as a young mother. However, it is ultimately her connection with another professional that guides her out of the situation, reflecting the dependence that many young people had on professionals to act as a conduit for manifesting their aims and goals.

For another young person, Zahra, her social worker navigated her through both a literal and emotional journey to visit her father and sister, whom she discovered were living in another European country. The social worker was involved in tracing the

family, establishing who they were and where they were. She was the person who gave Zahra the phone number to call her father, whom they had feared dead. The social worker also arranged for Zahra to visit her family and escorted her on the journey.

*It was so great that she [social worker] came with me. I was so scared. I'd never been on a plane on my own before. And then at the airport it was really stressful. They were not gonna let me travel because there was some problem with my documents and I was just crying. I had no idea what to do. But she talked to them and explained. It took so long. I don't know what I would have done if she wasn't with me. And I wanted her with me when I first saw my dad and my sister again. She had been there from the beginning for me. And she had been there and brought me the phone call from my dad. I needed her there with me. **Zahra***

Zahra's story highlights both the practical role of the professional in leading the way through systems and processes that may be unfamiliar and overwhelming for young people, but also draws attention to the emotional connections that are built over time as journeys, both literal and metaphorical, are taken together. As Burkitt (2016) suggests, interdependency has an emotional relation and cannot be fully understood simply as an interaction or transaction. In Zahra's relationship with her social worker we see the complexity of social navigation, in that it involves the confluence of practical tasks with emotional journeys. What could be seen as practical assistance is rarely purely practical, and successful navigation of seemingly practical obstacles will inevitably have emotional impacts on both the young person and the worker, as demonstrated by the social workers account of her journey with Zahra:

*It was very emotional for her and for me. I don't know who cried the most when we first found her dad. It was a very special thing for me to be a part of. We just cried and cried together. And then I had a lot of work to do to organise the trip for her to meet her father and get all the funding for that. Being able to see them reunite makes it all worth it. It's the best that it gets in this job. **Social Worker***

9.2.1 Navigating the hostile terrain of immigration controls

One of the most challenging areas to navigate for both young people and professionals was the complexity and uncertainty of the immigration system. A number of previous studies have represented children's services as complicit in oppressive state immigration practices, and therefore mistrusted by young people suspicious of the connections between social care and the Home Office (Humphries 2004; 2006; Chase 2010). Experiences that might be interpreted in this way were glimpsed fleetingly and rarely within this study. Professionals suggested that young people might not always be able to tell them the truth if it would jeopardise their asylum claim, but viewed this without suspicion and understood it as a form of functional distrust (Kohli 2006a) and a vital mechanism for self-protection that could be broken down as trust developed:

They can't always tell you everything. I understand that. But over time they realise that we are not the Home Office. **Social Worker**

I'm sure some of them have secrets. They have to. Our position has to be that they are children first. That's how we approach it. They are children with needs, not asylum seekers. **Senior Social Worker**

However, some young people had experienced a culture of suspicion within foster placements, noted also by Wade et al. (2012). Zahra's first placement had broken down because her foster mother did not believe her immigration story.

The foster mum, I didn't get on with her. She was saying stuff about my immigration and she didn't even know anything about me. She was trying to tell the social workers stuff. They moved me to a new placement. **Zahra**

Support with immigration was one of the most pressing concerns of young people and professionals, especially where young people had unresolved claims or had become ARE. At the sharp end of immigration control, social services were often the last refuge for young people and their sole means of support for ARE young people.

They are all I have. They are everything now when I am in this position.
Yousef

Findings from the previous two chapters suggest that young people can become increasingly isolated from both family networks and informal networks of peers and community when they have immigration concerns. Taking these findings into account, the role of formal services can be considered to have heightened importance.

In the previous chapter, Kamal's experience of receiving a refusal from the Home Office was described along with his decision to only tell one friend. That friend, a refugee himself, advised Kamal to approach social workers for help, even though Kamal had long since ceased receiving any local authority support. Tellingly, Kamal made two visits on that day, accompanied by his friend. He went to his former foster carers and his former social worker.

*I went to see my foster family to tell them what happened and they were so shocked and sad at what was happening. They have written me a letter. I'll show you it. It says that I am part of their family. I went to live with them and I am like a son to them. That's what the letter says. And then I came here to see [former social worker] and she is trying to help me. She is looking through the papers they sent me. And y'know. She's trying. But I don't know what she can do really. **Kamal***

Whilst most young people were aware of the limitations of the professional power of social services in such situations, their best hope of finding a guide through the adverse and confusing environment of immigration control was social services. The quote below comes from Aziz's second interview at which he was still ARE and still uncertain of his future.

*Without help from social services I would be totally lost right now. Totally lost. Because I have no idea what to do. No idea what happens next. But I am happy because they will continue to help me. **Aziz***

These findings suggest that the role of professionals as co-navigators is particularly crucial for guiding young people through the intricacies of the immigration regime. For some, this process is not limited to periods of crisis with immigration concerns. Many of the professionals considered guiding young people through the immigration system as one of their primary roles from the start. Importantly, building trusting and

positive relationships with young people was seen as an inherent part of this process:

If they don't trust us and we don't do good interviews and get the information about their past then we are limited in how much we can help when it comes to appeals. We need to work on that over the years. That is their main need, to get their claim accepted and we need to focus on that main need. **Social Worker**

The views reported here by both young people and professionals differ significantly from the 'culture of disbelief' and Home Office complicity portrayed in some studies. However, this is not to suggest that young people did not have any problems at the intersection of social care and immigration. Some of the young people had struggled to access assistance with the immigration system. Aziz described having to beg a social worker to attend court with him. Whilst she did agree to attend in the end, Aziz remained disappointed that she hadn't immediately agreed.

There were also notable inequities between the service young people received when they became ARE. Whilst it was local policy to continue to provide basic financial and accommodation assistance to ARE young people, at least for a period of time, some young people received substantially more support than others. One young person in this study had a university place funded by the LA, whilst another ARE young person had to persistently pester social services in order to get access to the most basic entitlements. This discrepancy appeared largely related to the different relationships with professionals that young people developed, as well as the effectiveness of the professional. The young person who was struggling to get support had been through numerous workers, and had no settled long-term personal advisor with whom he had built a relationship. Conversely, the young man whose university place was funded had built strong relationships with a social worker and personal advisor over many years. This highlights how the power young people have to express and enact their agency can rest largely on their interdependency with others (Burkitt 2016).

The professionals were aware of this inequity and explicitly linked it with the effectiveness of individual professionals:

*If you want extra support for an ARE young person you have to be able to make a very good case to the manager. **Personal Advisor***

*Packages are individually tailored, dependent on the potential of the young person, what they aspire to achieve. It definitely helps to have a worker who is able to make a strong case. **Independent Reviewing Officer***

Research has previously highlighted that levels of support for UYP can vary considerably dependent on the allocated worker (Wade et al. 2005; Chase 2010). However, the findings here suggest also that levels of support are also dependent on the 'potential' of the young person. Particularly where young people were ARE, and higher levels of support became largely discretionary, additional support (with education in particular) was linked to the presumed potential of young people.

O'Higgins (2012) has previously explored how UYP might be required to present in particularly 'victim-like' and vulnerable ways in order to receive support from professionals. Whilst this was not the case in this study, young people who presented as aspirational, dedicated to education and having 'potential' certainly seemed more likely to be able to access the highest levels of care and support. This suggests the potential for some young people to be labelled as more 'deserving' than others and for professionals to take 'extra risks for the right kind of young person' (Chase 2010: 2063). As one of the personal advisors explained:

*You have Saturday people and Monday people. That is, young people who if they ring you on a Saturday you will pick up and others who can wait until Monday. **Personal Advisor***

In another interview with a personal advisor the issue of agency, control and navigating through immigration systems overshadowed her story. An extract from the interview is worth reproducing here:

One young person has been in trouble with the police and I've warned him that he is at risk of just being picked up and taken into detention. Nothing I can do. I want to reinforce to him what might happen, with immigration. When he was at college and doing well, I would tell him to keep going, I told him I'd fight tooth and nail to keep him here. But now. It just depends on how he's doing when I see him and how my emotions are with him. I've been to court

with him. I always go to court with him. I really fought for him. And now he's just getting in trouble with the police. When I think of what I've been through with him. I know it's my job. But the emotions. When I see him not doing the right things. I just go cold. **Personal Advisor**

Here the professional is oscillating between two opposing positions in response to the behaviour of the young person. Whilst initially projecting herself as a protector and advocator, she then flips to presenting herself as powerless and complicit with the Home Office. The professional here can be viewed as using the uncertainty of the immigration system as a tool to try control the young person, and may also be perceived as withdrawing support when the right kind of young person suddenly becomes the wrong kind of young person. However, there is much greater depth to her experience than that interpretation allows. Crucially, the personal advisor alludes to the emotional journey that she has taken with the young person, referring to all 'that she has been through with him', leading us back to the concept of social navigation and the emotional interdependencies that may develop between young people and professionals. Relations of agency and control in this narrative are highly complex and located within emotional attachments, suggesting that close bonds and attachments between young people and professionals does not necessarily strengthen young people's agency and negate issues of control, and indeed can complicate power dynamics. As Denov and Bryan (2012) suggest, the notion of social navigation helps us to chart the ways in which child migrants move through systems of power which they can never entirely overcome. The findings here position professionals as potential allies in social navigation due to their heightened authority, power and understanding of the landscape. However, the findings also draw attention to the fluid and negotiated relationships developed throughout the journey in which power, agency, control and emotions collide in nuanced ways that may produce, reproduce and transform the social environment and differential power relations.

9.2.2 Unchartered territory: the transition to adulthood and 'shadow networks'

Continuing with the concept of social navigation, the final section of this chapter considers 'unchartered territory', a term used here to describe the limits of the co-navigational role that professionals can take up. The section considers the impact of leaving care and ageing out of services before closing with a discussion of the 'shadow networks' of the young people, the parts of social networks from which professionals are kept in the dark.

Professionals were only able to navigate young people for a limited period of time, acting in many ways like Antonucci et al.'s (2010) social convoys, formations of support which change throughout the life course. For some young people, navigating alone was problematic and represented a betrayal of the promises some professionals had made to finish journeys with young people:

They [social services] said they would stay helping me. They said they would carry on helping me until immigration stuff was sorted, because I was having big problem with it at that time. But they didn't. After eighteen, I didn't see them again. Faizal

For Faizal, services were cut off due to age-graded entitlements and left him without support to navigate the asylum system. Indeed, some of the professionals questioned when the role of social workers should end:

There is definitely a question about when the role should end. Young people really need support right through the immigration process. Right to the end. Even right up to the point of leaving the UK if that is the outcome. Policy needs to rethink that. Independent Reviewing Officer

However, some young people believed that professionals would continue to play an informal role in their social networks beyond the formal boundaries of their involvement:

They said they would still help me. After. Even after I turn twenty-one. I think they will. But maybe the workers will change and get new jobs. I don't know. Sohail

Despite Faizal's experience of losing support abruptly at the age of eighteen, there was evidence that young people continued to receive support beyond age cut-offs, as demonstrated by Kamal's return to seek support many years after leaving care.

How commonly such on-going support was received is difficult to gauge as only two of the young people (Faizal and Kamal) had aged out of Leaving Care services at the time of the interviews. However, professionals reported that they often had continued contact with UYP and considered that they were always available to help those who had left the service.

*They know even after support has ended my number never changes. I had a phone call from a young person I hadn't seen for three or four years to tell me she'd had a baby. What happened was I got a new phone and they tried to change my number and I don't want to change it in case clients from a few years ago can't get in touch with me. I want them to be able to get in touch with me if they need to because they are here without parents. So you just never know when they're gonna ring up for help. **Personal Advisor***

Indeed, it was sometimes professionals who struggled to end the relationship, highlighting the mutuality and interdependence of the relationships that are built over time and the emotional attachments that professionals formed with young people.

*You can keep it open-ended and you can still offer advice. I had one girl I was very close to her and after I stopped working with her I rang and asked her if she wanted to meet for a coffee. I arranged to meet up but she just didn't turn up. There was some disappointment because I thought we got on better than that. She was always glad to meet for a coffee when I was working with her. We'd have a chat and a laugh. To go from that to nothing was hard. **Personal Advisor***

Indeed, many of the professionals felt that young people often wanted to move on from social services and did not want to maintain contact unless they had very specific immigration issues, suggesting again that navigation through the complex systems of immigration can be the primary role of the professional.

*The older unaccompanied young people, they have their own lives now. They have established themselves. If their immigration status is sorted they are just part of society and very similar to any other young person. The support is there if they want it but mostly they don't unless they have something very specific like an immigration problem or they are applying for citizenship. **Social Worker***

A number of young people also had continued contact with foster carers and maintained family-like relationships with them after moving to independent accommodation. These relationships also transformed over time, with young people sometimes withdrawing from these relationships as they became increasingly independent.

*I was supposed to go see my foster family at Eid. I feel bad because I didn't make it round to see them. I was celebrating with my friends. We had a lot of food and went to see a few friends. I just didn't get time to go to them. I know they'll be disappointed. I should really go see them soon because I haven't been to them for a while. **Zaki***

These findings highlight the mutuality and emotional interdependence of relationships with professionals and foster carers. They also suggest that, where young people have settled immigration status, they are often capable and willing to continue their journey alone.

A final crucial finding relates to the way in which formal social networks interacted with other aspects of the social network. All the professionals interviewed in this study suggested that they knew very little about the young people's social worlds, particularly as they transitioned to adulthood. A picture emerged from professionals of a 'shadow network' that was just out of their view. The term 'shadow network' is used within studies of social networks to describe members of the network that could not be reached by the study, and is used here to reflect not only the views of social workers that young people had parallel social networks that were in the shadows, but also to acknowledge the limitations of this research in reaching into the networks which young people wanted to remain hidden (Heath et al. 2009).

*Sometimes you uncover a whole social world that was off the radar to us. It's not very open and it's difficult to get a transparent picture about what's positive in the network and what's not. It's really hard for us to get a grip on social networks. **Social Worker***

*There are definitely people we just don't know about. I was very close to one young person and after a number of years I found out about family she had in the UK all along that I hadn't heard about at all. **Personal Advisor***

For some professionals, their lack of knowledge about the wider social networks of young people caused them considerable concern. In particular, they became worried about the potential for young people to use shadow networks to abscond when they became worried about their immigration status. Professionals were clear that they felt young people had networks that were used for this purpose. The young people in this study provided a very different view, and reported that they would have no idea about who to turn to if they wanted to disengage from services or abscond from the Home Office. Whilst they knew this occurred, they felt they did not have the networks in place to do it themselves. Only one young person had experience of absconding from services, and had travelled to London where he had some community connections. However he soon contacted his social worker who persuaded him to return, emphasising again the vital role that professionals can have when immigration anxieties are at their most intense.

Other professionals had a more relaxed attitude to their lack of knowledge about young people's social worlds:

I know they don't tell me everything. Sometimes you need to keep things to yourself. What you want to share is what you want help with. **Personal Advisor**

Others felt there was an inevitable limitation to their role, that some young people were likely to use networks beyond the gaze of professionals with potentially tragic consequences.

Before one of my young people ran away he was getting lots of messages, whispered phone calls. There is a build up of making those connections. And they do have community networks. For some young people, that is their support and we're not and never can be. There is an exit route. They can't tell you about it. But there is. It's tragic. They are running away in fear. **Social Worker**

The limited understanding that the professional has regarding the social networks of young people highlights the limits of their navigational role, and the tendency for their part in the navigation to be confined to the areas in which they are considered to have particular knowledge, power and authority. Many of the young people preferred to navigate their personal relationships alone:

For personal stuff, I wouldn't really ask services for help with that. They have helped with so many things, education, housing all that kind of stuff. But personal problems are for me to solve with help from my friends or my family.

Roshaan

The limited knowledge that professionals had of broader social networks has also been reflected in the literature in which young people are often approached as 'individuals rather than members of families, communities and networks' (Clark-Kazak 2012: 97). Professionals noted some particular gaps in their knowledge that are also mirrored in the literature. Sexual and intimate partner relationships emerged rarely in the interviews with young people and were considered one of the main issues which young people preferred not to discuss with professionals. Sexual relationships are considered in Chapter Twelve. However, two other gaps in professional knowledge of social networks emerged which can be addressed here drawing on the findings of the previous chapters.

Some professionals considered that they knew little about young people's families in the UK and abroad. Research has previously suggested that young people may feel compelled to be selective in their disclosure of information about families due to fears that it will affect their asylum claims, and because they have been instructed to tell 'official stories' about their pre-migration experiences and relationships in their home countries:

Professionals are often guessing at the family picture. Until young people reunite with their families and workers have to deal with the fall out from that.

Independent Reviewing Officer

These findings suggest that the central role of families in the lives of UYP may not be fully addressed in current practice, leaving some professionals disconnected from some of the most critical aspects of a young person's life. Professionals also felt that they may have limited understanding of young people's relationships with communities, and suggested that there may be a certain level of discomfort with delving into communities.

We don't always know that much about different communities because it can be out of the worker's comfort zone. They might not understand the culture or the lifestyle in that community. **Independent Reviewing Officer**

Whilst there was some evidence in this research that professionals were committed to engaging young people in local communities on first arrival, this appeared largely limited to connecting young people with their ethnic / religious community or other asylum-seeking and refugee young people. Once these links had been established through religious sites or voluntary organisations, professionals had a limited knowledge of the young person's experience of informal networks. Lack of knowledge of such relationships is not necessarily problematic, and can reflect the burgeoning independence of young people as they create their own social networks autonomously. However, it could suggest that professionals might recognise the potential of informal social networks to provide positive and durable and connections and relationships, looking beyond solely ethnic and cultural to affiliations to promote a more individualised approach to linking young people with informal networks.

9.3 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the role of professional relationships and foster carers, and primarily sought to engage in balancing perceptions of professionals as controlling and limiting (Humphries 2002; 2004; Chase 2010; O'Higgins 2012) with the nuances and dilemmas of practice uncovered by others (Kohli 2006b; Wade et al. 2012; Wright 2014). In doing this, relationships were evident that support and expand Kohli's (2006b) typology of 'domains' of professional practice which range from the creation of strong emotional attachments to largely practical and concrete forms of assistance. Cutting across this typology, professionals were reframed as 'co-navigators' during complex journeys through difficult terrain, particularly administrative and institutional terrains that may be hostile and alien to UYP. This co-navigational role unearths the interdependency of young people and professionals, which stands in contrast to previous work that has not often engaged with the agency of young people in this way, preferring to understand young people's agency as individual and oppositional rather than interactional.

In positioning professionals in this way this chapter does not seek to undermine the agency of young people in navigating their own journeys, or to suggest that professionals are the sole companion of UYP through immigration and resettlement processes. Chase (2010) in particular has cautioned against perceptions that positive outcomes are mediated by bureaucrats and professionals rather than the action taken directly by young people. Wright (2014) has also drawn attention to limitations of the professional social work role and emphasises the importance of a broad range of voluntary services, which can offer less time-limited and policy-constrained support to UYP, particularly in the transition to adulthood.

The purpose of framing professionals, and to some extent foster carers, in this way is therefore not to privilege their role in the social networks above and beyond other aspects, but to look quite specifically at what professionals can do together with young people, rather than what they cannot. Navigating the terrain of social care, immigration and education institutions with young people emerged as vitally important, regardless of the strength of relationship between the young people and professionals. Viewing professionals as social navigators also brought into view the complex power dynamics of relationships. The findings presented here move beyond an understanding of professionals as either controlling or enabling, to consider the fluid and negotiated nature of power dynamics throughout the journeys of young people. Emotional attachments to professionals could be imbued with intricate power relations that shifted over time, and in response to the volatile terrain of social relations mediated by immigration controls and local policies, and as young people attempted to forge their own individual pathways that were sometimes at odds with the hopes and aspirations that professionals had for them.

The previous two chapters explored the 'negotiation and renegotiation' of family, peer and community networks over time (Hunt 2005). This chapter similarly drew attention to the changes in relationships with professionals as the balance between dependence and independence, which is a crucial dynamic of the transition to adulthood, was destabilised. The prospect of navigating alone caused considerable anxiety for some young people, and experiences of sharp cut-offs in support based on age and immigration status were reported. More commonly, the end of the journey for professionals and young people was much more fluid and negotiated, with young people found to regularly take the lead in withdrawing from such

relationships with both professionals and foster carers. Of greater concern, at least to professionals, were the places and spaces in the social environment of young people that they were not given access to whilst they were working with them. The social networks of the young people can be seen as highly compartmentalised, with professionals having very limited knowledge of young people's social worlds. The primary concern was the role of clandestine networks in absconding from services. Indeed, these findings draw attention to the limited scope of the findings in this study. The young people here were largely still connected into professional networks and it was not possible within the scope of this research to gauge the experiences of those who have absconded and disappeared. Particularly in terms of ARE young people, it is possible that those who do have the networks to abscond have done so, and are therefore not able to be captured by this study.

Nevertheless, the findings as a whole do shed some light into the networks of young people, which appear to remain shadowy for both the professionals in this study and within the broader literature. They suggest that the young people's social networks are complex and active, sometimes involving many different sets of relationships operating on intersecting global and local scales. This part of the thesis has also emphasised the fluid and dynamic nature of the social networks, which were seen to be in a state of flux, potentially mediated by gender, as life courses diverged and new identities were negotiated. Crucially, the relationships within these social networks are based on reciprocal care, support and emotional attachment, with young people rarely considering themselves as receivers of support within their social network rather than providers. For practitioners, who may be concerned about their limited knowledge of the sometimes opaque and shifting social worlds of UYP, there are a number of messages that can be drawn from this part of the thesis. Family is the most crucial domain of the network, and whilst it can be challenging to engage young people on this topic, a sensitive exploration of family connections in the context of a trusting professional relationship would give a much clearer picture of young people's social worlds and their imagined futures. Focusing on the potential family relationships of the future may be an effective way of engaging young people in the topic of family, without explicitly requiring them to address the past or the narratives of their immigration claims. Practitioners should also be aware of the ways in which social networks are transforming as young people leave care, and the

particular risks of social isolation related to both educational transitions and immigration problems. Whilst there are urgent practical issues attached to both changes in education and dealing with immigration obstacles, the impact on social networks should also be a consideration.

PART THREE

Social Networks Across Time and Space: Applying a Life-Course Perspective to Unaccompanied Young People's Social Networks

Chapter Ten

Biographical narratives of past, present and future

10.0 Introduction

Part Two explored different domains of the unaccompanied young people's social networks, analysing the different aspects of the networks they narrated, highlighting in particular the reciprocal and negotiated nature of relationships throughout the social network and the relational dynamics of power and agency within particular types of relationships. Part Three of the findings is concerned with exploring the social networks using the conceptual frame of the life course, to understand the influence of time, space and transition across the social network as a whole, utilising the various conceptualisations of time and space outlined in Chapters Three and Four. The first chapter of Part Three addresses biographical time, focusing on the role of social networks in the creation and maintenance of a biographical narrative that helps young people make sense of their past, present and future. Some of the young people in this study, most commonly those with Refugee Status, were able to create and maintain coherent biographical narratives of past, present and future which were constructed around social networks and relationships. These narratives drew inspiration from social connections of the past and present to project a positive imagined future. However, other young people, notably those with uncertain refugee status, found that such narratives were either difficult to establish or became destabilised when immigration problems arose. For these young people both the past and future became unclear or unimaginable. The findings presented in this chapter have implications for the practice of social work professionals, particularly in terms of pathway planning which are discussed in the conclusion of this chapter.

10.1 Biographical narratives of past, present and future.

On-going debates have emerged within the broader youth studies literature about the way in which young people create individual biographies (Brannen & Nilsen 2005). In particular, research has been concerned with how young people orient themselves to the future in the context of increasingly individualised and complex

life-course transitions (Giddens 1991; Beck 1992; Leccardi 2005). This interest extends to vulnerable groups of young people, including care leavers, whose poor future outcomes have been a concern for a number of years (Stein 2012). Research has emerged which highlights the importance of biographical narratives for both care leavers in general and UYP in particular. Ward (2011) has drawn on the field of psychology (Chandler et al. 2003; Lalonde 2006) to emphasise the need for a continuous sense of self through a biographical narrative for care leavers who are likely to experience multiple discontinuities. Similar findings are evident in research with UYP. Chase (2013), drawing on Giddens' (1991) concept of 'ontological security', shows how the creation and maintenance of coherent biographical narratives helps UYP sustain a sense of self that is stable across time, space and context. Around this theme, a body of work has emerged exploring the importance of a coherent narrative of past, present and future as a strategy for coping, creating and maintaining an identity and developing a sense of safety and security (Ní Raghallaigh & Gilligan 2010; Chase 2013; Chase et al. 2015). The findings in this chapter represent an addition to this vein of enquiry, focusing on the role that social networks play in the formation of a biographical life-course narrative.

10.2 Unaccompanied young people with status: imagined futures and imagined pasts

During the interviews with young people two distinct types of biographical narrative emerged. Some of the young people presented remarkably clear, coherent and positive narratives which were helping them achieve future goals. Others, mostly (but not exclusively) those who had uncertain immigration status, had less coherent narratives in which both the past and the future were uncertain, unstable and in some cases unimaginable. This initial section will present findings relating to the first group, who did have Refugee Status and were able to create coherent biographical narratives; focusing initially on their imagined futures. Research by Chase (2010: 869) has asserted that the well-being of UYP is 'fundamentally linked to the perception of a projected self within a future trajectory', and certainly the young people in this study who perceived themselves to be doing well displayed the strongest sense of a future. However, an additional element identified in this study

was the key role which social networks and relationships played in the formation of coherent narratives that spanned the life course. This study found that it is the 'webs of belonging' (Kohli 2011: 318), formed throughout the young person's life which provide the thread with which strong biographical narratives are weaved. Crucially, the interplay of social connections from both the past and imagined future was a focal point in the narratives.

Roshaan's imagined future was rooted firmly in this past, incorporating family tradition, family relationships and a return to his country of origin.

My uncle built bridges back home. He built one in my home city, so I really wanted to do something like that. When I arrived here I knew what I wanted to do ... one day I will go back and rebuild the bridges in my city. Roshaan

Kohli (2007) has previously noted that for UYP the past is, on many levels, another country. In Roshaan's narrative we see through his desire to build literal bridges a metaphor for his aspiration to construct a safe passage home, both in terms of a geographical return to his city, a return to his family and a temporal return to the past. The conduit for this passage is education. Whilst Roshaan's perfect circle of a narrative connecting past, present and future was the neatest and most distinct narrative of its kind, it illustrates characteristics present in other young people's stories. The biographical narratives of the young people regularly enmeshed the connected concerns of family and education.

Research with UYP has long recognised the vital role that education plays in future plans (Wade et al. 2005; Kohli 2007; Brownlees and Finch 2010) and the young people in this study conformed to those findings. However, whilst hopes of future success were dominated by educational goals, it was the social connections of the past and present that underpinned those goals, motivated young people to achieve them and produced the possibility of achievement. Chapter Seven emphasised how young people engaged in 'futured reciprocity', deferring family relationships and obligations. The focus here is in on how the futuring of family connections and care can form the central column on which biographical narratives are built. Whilst return and reunification with family did emerge in accounts such as Roshaan's, for the majority of young people return belonged to a distant and uncertain future. More immediately, young people's narratives were dominated by plans to reciprocate the

past sacrifices that family members had made to assure their safety. Mariam's mother had risked her own personal safety to assist her daughter in fleeing domestic abuse from both her father and partner. Since helping her daughter escape, Mariam's mother had been:

*...punished all the time. That's why I want to help her. She said she was ready for anything to help me. And now I have to help her. **Mariam***

Again, Mariam's hopes of helping her mother centred on education. She had developed a plan to achieve academically and become a professional. At the time of the first interview she was studying at college to achieve her goal. Whilst Mariam's plan to protect and provide for her mother had formed soon after she arrived in the UK, key connections made in the UK had crystallised her narrative and inspired more direct goals:

*I want to be a social worker. ...because of Davina [Personal Advisor]. She helped me so much and I want to help other people like she did for me. I can't think what to do to thank her other than to help someone else. **Mariam***

Mariam's story alerts us both to the transformative potential of positive relationships with social care professionals and the broader desires to reciprocate that UYP express. The young people in this study conveyed this through a determination to help not just their own families, but to develop careers that helped their communities. Imagined future careers in policing, nursing, medicine and social work were common.

*I think I've chosen the career I have to help people. All people. No matter who they are what, what race they are, where they are from, rich or poor. That's what I want to do. **Zahra***

*I have always wanted to be in the police. Since I came here. I want to look after the community. My community. And keep people safe. I have been safe here. And I want to help other people be safe. **Zaki***

Another young person concerned to give back was Faizal. His plans echoed some of Roshaan's bridge-building narrative and illustrate again the themes of reciprocity and return that could be achieved through education.

*I want to be more clever. I want to be educated and I want to be someone and then maybe I can go home to Afghanistan and change something ... like be a politician. I could make it better maybe. **Faizal***

Faizal and Roshaan's imagined futures are similar, centred on a desire to return to their home country to build either literal bridges or the metaphorical bridges of peace that Faizal refers to. Their plans to return to their home countries were unusual amongst the young people. Past research has highlighted the extreme reluctance of most UYP to talk about returning home and the majority of the young people in this study could not imagine a future in their country of origin (Coram Children's Legal Centre 2012; Gladwell & Elwyn 2012; Wright 2014). As Chase et al. (2008) have stated, even defining where home is and where they belong can be problematic. However, Roshaan and Faizal were amongst the participants who had been in the UK for a significant period of time (seven years each), and had both received Refugee Status shortly after their arrival, suggesting that being settled in the UK for a substantial period of time may have provided them with the stability and security to begin thinking about a long-term future that might involve a relatively safe return, on their own terms, in their own time, depending on the current situation in the country of origin.

Despite future plans to return home, Faizal remained conflicted about reunification with family. He had an older sister in Turkey, whom he did hope to see in the future, and two younger siblings in Afghanistan, born after his departure. The two younger siblings, whom he had never met, presented him with a problem and he expressed contradictory feelings about their future. At times he was clear that a future goal was to be reunited with them and support them, but then later in the interview he expressed doubts.

*The thing is y'know when you ask me can I imagine see my brother and sister again and I say no, y'know why, it's because I want to see them grow up and learn. I want to see them now. They are there now. They weren't even born when I left. The process is a really long time and it's still not finished ... I don't even want to see them to be honest. Somehow, sometimes when I think about. It's too sad. **Faizal***

Faizal's confusion about his siblings illustrates the complexity of family relationships that are, in some respects, suspended in time. For most, imagining these relationships in the future is possible due to the connections and memories of the past. For Faizal, his relationship with his younger siblings exists only in a distant future that he cannot fully envision, leaving him with a sense that they are somehow lost in time. What he is missing with them now, and has missed in the past, is something he does not know how to regain. He is struggling to place them in his narrative, with no past experience of meeting them, no present connection to them and an uncertain possibility of building relationships with them in the future. Urry (2003) has noted the need for proximity in relationships, which he describes as 'meetingness'. Whilst current discourse emphasises 'translocalism' (Conradson & McKay 2007) and the increased ability for transnational relationships to be maintained over distance through the use of communication technologies (Ang 2001; Schulz & Hammer 2003; Georgiou 2006), less attention has been paid to unequal access to such modes of communication. For Faizal, constructing a relationship with his young siblings across distance is made impractical by both the chaotic circumstances in which his siblings live and their young age. They therefore remain estranged from his biographical narrative and represent a point of discontinuity in Faizal's otherwise coherent narrative.

Whilst Roshan and Faizal had similar future dreams to become educated and return to their countries of origin, they had achieved different levels of success. Roshan had just graduated with an engineering degree and secured funding for a Masters degree. His steps towards achieving future goals were falling neatly into place. In contrast, Faizal had not been able to pursue higher education. He was working in a manual job and was frustrated with his lack of education. The role of social care professionals and the process of pathway planning were key elements in his frustration.

*My pathway plan should have said something about college and that I wanted to go to university they [the social worker and personal advisor] weren't interested. I fell out with my foster carers and they just wrote about that. I've just had nobody to talk about these things with. **Faizal***

Faizal suggests that the lack of support from professionals and foster carers, combined with his lack of access to people who understand the education system, had prevented him from fulfilling his goals. He is clear that social networks, or a lack of them, contributed to his difficulty in carrying out his plans for the future. Indeed, whilst narratives of past, present and future can be enhanced and developed in the way Mariam's was by her interactions with others, they can also be disrupted and frustrated. Zahra also recalled the difficulties she experienced in achieving her goal of going to university:

*It was really hard to go to college, the teacher was saying I couldn't do it. She said because of my language it would be too difficult for me to do the course I wanted to in Pharmacy. But Jen [social worker] kicked up a fuss about it and they let me try. **Zahra***

This quote from Zahra, contrasted with Faizal's experience, highlights the pivotal role that professional social networks, where they are supportive, can have in assisting young people achieve their future goals. Chapter Nine explored the role of professionals in assisting UYP in navigating institutional obstacles. This chapter demonstrates how crucial such a role can be for UYP. Educational goals represent not only short-term plans for achievement but can also be an integral part of manifesting a biographical narrative that stretches out into future time, and encompass a wide range of aspirations linked to family, return and reciprocity.

As well as requiring tangible support and encouragement in the present, many young people relied on the social relationships of the past to inspire future plans.

*My dad was always telling me, yesterday is yesterday and today is today. You should think about tomorrow. I don't forget these words, whenever I wake up these words are in my head. **Zaki***

Whilst Zaki's parents were no longer alive, they were very much present in his current life and provided motivation for the future. The young people who were able to talk about the past in a coherent way had similar things to say about the way in which morals, values and advice given to them in the past shaped their present situation and imagined future selves. Whether parents were lost, living or deceased, their voices echoed backwards and forwards in time, providing a means by which

young people could connect the past and the future in a way that positively influenced the present.

Previous research has understandably highlighted the trauma and distress that UYP carry with them from the past (Hodes et al. 2008). Less explored are the positive experiences, social connections and individual acts of sacrifice that they bring with them from the past and hold into the future. Research on the resilience of UYP has thus far emphasised external service factors such as foster placements and stable accommodation, or intrinsic factors such as personal faith and strength (Rigby 2011). These findings suggest that social relationships in the past, particularly with family, contribute positively to the young person's sense of self and future. The past can be reclaimed by young people, from a narrative of pure loss to one in which the ghosts of the past are not set to haunt them, but are constant companions galvanising them to attain the future life they hope for. The temporal ruptures precipitated by forced migration can be stitched back together, suggesting that time, whilst not reversible, can be cyclical (Adam 2004). At the core of this cycle for UYP is return and reciprocity achieved through education.

These findings suggest the need for a renewed focus on the inextricable interconnection between the past, present and the future, and the role of social networks in fostering and maintaining those connections. Significant attention has been paid to the future. Adam (2004) has suggested that people are in general future-orientated, and research has noted that migration itself is an act of 'futuring', inherently bound up with the idea of a better future (Piore 1979; Griffiths 2013). Similarly Chase (2010) has focused on the importance of a sense of future for UYP. Relatedly, Kohli's notable (2007) insight that UYP prefer to deal with the present first, the future next and the past last is relevant here. Undoubtedly UYP face immediate and urgent issues that take priority and are considerably orientated towards creating positive futures (Wade et al. 2005; Kohli & Mitchell 2007). However, these findings seek to build on Kohli's (2007) work to suggest a cumulative stage in which past, present and future become reconnected. It is these connections that form the basis of positive coherent biographical narratives. Equally important is the recognition that such narratives are populated with people. Biographies are constructed around social connections and relationships from the past, present and imagined future.

10.3 Unimaginable futures, unimaginable pasts: disrupted biographical narratives

Whilst the majority of young people with settled status expressed the clear and determined future goals which created a coherent thread between their past and future, those who had uncertain immigration status or were Appeal Rights Exhausted (ARE) struggled to imagine both the future and the past. Current planning practices with UYP are centred on 'triple planning', planning for a variety of possible immigration outcomes (Wade et al. 2012). However, the findings in this study confirm the difficulty of achieving this. Far from being able to imagine multiple possible futures, those with uncertain immigration status struggled to imagine any future at all. Furthermore, the precariousness of a positive imagined future is exposed. Even where young people had developed coherent future plans, a change in their immigration status could lead to the disintegration of any future vision as the young people became overwhelmed by unbearably present problems.

In this situation you are not in your right mind. You can't think of making decisions. All you are thinking of is getting killed and how they are going to kill you. They will kill you not with a gun, they will chop your hand one day, the other the next day, then one leg, then the other. There is nothing else you can think about. Kamal [just been refused asylum after ten years in the UK]

For Kamal, who had established a career and personal relationships, a rich and clear future had imploded into one in which the only thing he could envisage was fear and death. For the ARE young people, future thoughts were often consumed by fears of death and dying. Two of the participants revealed that they might kill themselves rather than be returned forcibly to their home countries. Return was inconceivable, beyond imagination. Becoming ARE was like a black hole which sucked in all their future dreams, and left a blank space they were unable to fill with anything but the immediacy of the fear.

If I had to go back. I don't know what I'd do. I've no idea. I'm totally lost.... We don't talk about that. There is no plan for that. I can't plan for that. It's impossible. It is like hell to me. If they send me back it will be killing me. If they try. I will kill myself. Aziz

For Aziz, the future had reduced down to *'keeping safe, just being safe is my future dream'*. Where ARE young people allowed themselves to imagine a future in the UK with status, they were able to express some hopes, but they lacked the clarity and coherence of those with a more certain future in the UK. The desire to look after family remained, but how to achieve that aim was hard to picture clearly.

It's too hard for me. I can't really imagine anything. If I had my documents, maybe I could be a hairdresser, maybe I could work in a pizza shop. I know I would look after my family but really I just don't know. Yousef

Here Yousef echoes the majority of the participants in his ultimate desire to look after his family, who were still in the Middle East, but has been unable to visualise any coherent future in which he might be able to achieve this. Samuel, an eighteen year old from Somalia who was still awaiting a decision on his asylum status, was having similar difficulties concretising a future vision for himself:

I just know I want to be here. UK. Not go home. That's all I can think of. That is what I think of. I don't know about anything else. Samuel

It is evident that uncertainty about immigration status significantly impedes young people's ability to imagine any kind of future for themselves, in the UK or elsewhere. Moreover, uncertainty about the future destabilises the whole biographical narrative leading to an inability to connect the future and the past. The past, mirroring the future, becomes blurry as the threads that have thus far sustained the narrative begin to unravel. Aziz, who said he had been able to talk in some detail about his pre-migration past with workers when he arrived was no longer able to speak about this time with coherence. When asked about his past, his reply was stark:

I can just say fear. The key word I want to say is fear. Someone was trying to destroy my family but we don't really know who. I don't know anything. I was just a child playing cricket, with a stick, in the street, playing making houses of mud. Just childish things. I didn't really know what was wrong, they said I didn't need to know. She, my mum might have been protecting me. I don't know. Aziz

This quote illustrates the difficulty some participants expressed in making sense of the past, and highlights the challenge of making sense of a time and place that

remains a profound puzzle. One of the issues is the age at which young people migrated and their limited understanding of events, compounded by the desire of families to protect children from frightening and complex knowledge. Other participants felt similarly that they were too young to comprehend what happened to them, or even to remember much about their home country. But for those who had a settled status, a coherent narrative of pre-migration life and departure was still possible, albeit with gaps in the concrete knowledge of events.

The ARE young people were struggling to keep together the fragile narratives of their past in the face of future uncertainty. Cutting at the threads that connected young people to their future seemed to have the effect of unravelling the whole web of the biographical narrative. Unlike the young people who identified positive inspiration from past relationships, ARE young people were more likely to be confused and distrustful of any personal relationships. Kamal, whose story began this section, appeared to have a strong social network involving work colleagues, friends, his girlfriend, her family and his former foster family. Whilst he had relied on his former foster carers to provide a statement and a reference for his fresh asylum claim, he stated that he did not know if there was anyone he could turn to if the worst happened and he lost his house or was facing imminent deportation. Aziz was similarly perplexed.

*... you don't know. In the world, anywhere, if anyone know you are in a bad situation they won't help you. **Kamal***

*I really don't know where I would go now if I needed help. Maybe Lesley [an adult friend] but I don't think she could help me she has her own plans. I don't think I would go there ... too many questions in my mind. Are the social workers gonna help me? Where can I get help? **Aziz***

These findings suggest the possibility that the 'webs of belonging' that are so intrinsic to the formulation of a strong sense of future break down when that future becomes extremely uncertain. In contrast to young people with more predictable futures, who use social connections from both the past and present to construct tangible life course goals and plans, those with uncertain futures may lose their sense of connectedness and their trust in the social network. The findings in Part Two suggested that UYP with uncertain status have significant difficulties in trusting

peers and community networks, and often avoid discussing such problems with their families. Social isolation was considered to be a particular concern for young people facing acute immigration uncertainties. The findings in this chapter suggests an additional element to the feelings of isolation; the estrangement of young people from their own biographical narratives and the people that have populated their story thus far.

Having difficulty with connecting the past, present and future was not exclusively limited to ARE young people, although it was much rarer amongst those with a settled status. Sohail, a twenty year old from Afghanistan with Refugee Status, was similarly struggling when he was interviewed. He had been taking ESOL (English as a second language) courses for a number of years without progressing onto more substantive qualifications. He was concerned about the future:

I worry about having money. About education. I had no education when I came here. I'm worried about getting a life partner. About being alone. Sohail

Whilst Sohail, unlike the ARE young people, does not directly say that he cannot imagine any future, he is obviously struggling to see what his future will look like. The uncertainty in his narrative does not arise from his immigration status, but in concerns about education and social relationships. When talking about the past, Sohail recalled the fear and confusion of his arrival in the UK when he was initially categorised as an adult asylum seeker.

When I arrived I was in detention. It just made me cry. Then they put me in some flats with adults. This crazy crazy guy lived there. I was just scared. It was so difficult. I didn't know how to cook. I didn't eat. I daren't leave the house. Sohail

Sohail's descriptions of past and future feature echoes of the stories of the ARE young people, where confusion, fear and worry are prevalent. This alerts us to an understanding that immigration status is not the only obstacle to developing a biographical narrative. The attainment of Refugee Status is no guarantee of developing a coherent future plan and coming to terms with the past.

10.4 Conclusion

Chapter Ten has addressed the question of biographical time within the construction of young people's social networks. In this study social relationships past and present, particularly with family and professionals, were pivotal in creating coherent narratives that led to positive possible futures, providing inspiration, motivation and practical assistance in the formation and realisation of a narrative. The study found positive stories of ambitious projects for the future, some of which were coming to fruition. Where young people are granted some permanency in their immigration status they are able to create biographical narratives built on themes of return and reciprocity through education. The prevalence of these themes draws our attention to the relatively neglected role of the past. Whilst studies have focused on imagined futures (Chase 2010) and the immediate issues in the present (Wade et al. 2005; Newbigging & Thomas 2011), the role of the past is less explored. The past, present and future are intimately connected and an understanding of the interlocked and cyclical nature of these three stages of a biographical narrative may be useful to further our appreciation of how young people can create and maintain biographical narratives that sustain a sense of continuity and self moving into the future. The threads that stitch these narratives together are the social relationships of the past, present and future.

However, the impact of immigration status on the construction of biographical narratives was evident. For young people who were ARE, imagining a future and past became almost impossible, erasing any narrative coherence that may have been achieved. In this process, social relationships and the 'webs of belonging' that were identified as crucial to achieving a positive future and reconciling the past become destabilised and uncertain, with young people expressing doubt and ambiguity about relationships past, present and future. Incoherence in the biographical narrative, whilst not exclusive to ARE young people, is at its most heightened and debilitating where immigration status is uncertain, highlighting the extreme difficulties professionals may face when planning for the future with UYP.

These findings have implications for the process of pathway planning that professionals undertake with young people leaving care (outlined in Chapter Two). The findings highlight the need to be mindful of the past, an often difficult task given

the traumatic nature of some young people's experiences and the limited ability to gather information from sources other than the young person themselves. Attention should also be paid to the way in which UYP rely on educational success to achieve their aspirations to support families and eventually reunite with them. The proposed Immigration Bill (2015–2016), discussed in detail in Chapter Two, poses a serious threat to the ability of professionals to help UYP access education. This is already a challenging area of practice (Gladwell & Elwyn 2012), and removing the right to funded higher education will have devastating consequences for young people and the practitioners working with them. In the meantime, these findings, in alignment with current guidance and regulations (Department for Education 2010) suggest that educational goals should be a primary consideration in pathway planning.

Where a young person has uncertain immigration status, or has become ARE, pathway planning becomes even more challenging and the findings presented here demonstrate that not only are young people reluctant to discuss return, they are unable to imagine it all. Faced with a negative decision, their biographical narrative destabilises and all that remains is the overwhelming concern to stay safe in the immediate present. This can leave young people extremely underprepared for negative asylum decisions and their consequences. Despite official guidance reiterating the need for return to be explicitly addressed in planning (Department for Education 2010) this issue remains under researched, with a paucity of knowledge for practitioners to draw on. Wright (2014) has explored the problem from a practitioner perspective and revealed concerns that discussing return can damage relationships with UYP, and may be interpreted as coercion or surveillance. Issues such as these, combined with the inability of young people to imagine returned futures, partially help to explain the 'planning drift' with these UYP (Wade et al. 2012).

Ultimately, practice may benefit from understanding that the past, like the future, is constructed and reconstructed over time (Fransson & Soro 2011). Pathway may be viewed as a process through which UYP can construct and maintain positive biographical narratives built around the social networks that evolve and transform across the life course.

Chapter Eleven

Social time and transition

11.0 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the importance of individual biographical narratives of time, and the different types of narratives that the young people in this research presented, looking across the whole life course. This chapter is concerned with the way in which 'social time' affects the social networks of UYP during the transition to adulthood. The life-course concept of social time refers to age-graded transitions which are mediated through social institutions and norms (Horrocks 2002; Hunt 2005); indeed Giddens (1991) refers to this concept as 'institutional time' in recognition of the permeating influence that social institutions exercise over the time-structuring of lives. Young people in particular are thought to live their lives in particularly age-structured ways that differentiate their access to institutions (such as education), their rights and entitlements (for instance to Leaving Care services) and their responsibilities (Hunt 2005; Heath 2012; Dorling 2013). These age-related structures are clearly bound up with the cultural roles and expectations which collectively constitute 'social time', influencing in particular the timing of lives and transitions.

The timing of transitions has been a core concern within the Leaving Care literature. Stein (2006; 2008), echoed by many others (Dixon & Stein 2006; Dixon & Wade 2007; Hiles et al. 2013), has emphasised the 'compressed and accelerated transitions' of care leavers who experience some of the key markers of transition to adulthood much earlier and in greater synchronicity than the general population of young people. This 'instant adulthood' is in marked contrast to trends and patterns in Western society of increasingly extended, fragmented and individualised transitions to adulthood, characterised by terms such as 'emerging adulthood' (Arnett 2000) and 'yo-yo transitions' (DuBois-Reymond & Lopez Blasco 2003) which are frequently used to describe contemporary transitions to adulthood in Western societies. To many commentators, this amounts to a de-structuring of social time for young people generally, whilst for care leavers (and potentially other disadvantaged groups), the

institutionally structured nature of transition remains (Leccardi 2005; Stein 2008). Despite changes over the last decade aimed at extending support for care leavers' transitions (see Chapter Two), age-graded systems remain, with cut-off dates for support dependent on age and whether the young person is in full time education, rather than their individual preparedness to leave care.

Two particularly salient aspects of social time and transition that emerged as significant for UYP are explored in this chapter. First, young people's educational pathways are explored. The findings highlight the negative impact of some common disruptions to education that UYP experience, such as immigration issues and difficulty progressing through levels of study. Also discussed is the positive role that continued access to education during the transition to adulthood plays in the social networks of the young people in this study. The second part of the chapter explores the complex process of transition from care to 'independence', with a particular focus on different constructions of 'independence' during the transition to adulthood. The findings suggest that UYP do not necessarily equate the leaving care process with a transition to adulthood, but with pre-migration and in-migration experiences. The young people drew heavily on narratives of resilience linked to their migration journeys to assert their ability to be independent. In contrast to the general population of care leavers, many (though not all) of these young people desired freedom and independence in the form of living alone, and were largely considered competent to do so by professionals. Many young people particularly desired freedom to socialise more freely with their peers without restrictions. Overall, the findings from this study suggest that transitions for unaccompanied young people are not only 'multi-layered and complex' (Wade et al. 2012), but also mediated and influenced by experiences of social time in ways which impact their social networks.

11.1 Social time and educational pathways

A substantial body of literature emphasises the pivotal importance of education for UYP (Wade et al. 2005; Kohli 2007; Brownlees and Finch 2010; Hopkins & Hill 2010; Wade et al. 2012; Refugee Support Network 2012). The previous chapter highlighted the crucial role of education in the construction of biographical narratives and the realisation of future goals. Beyond this, it has been recognised in this thesis

and elsewhere that the social institutions of education are principal sites through which UYP build their social networks (Beirens et al. 2007; Kohli 2007; Wade et al. 2012). Education transitions can be particularly stressful and uncertain for UYP, who may have difficulties in accessing further education and higher education institutions (Gonzales 2011; Refugee Support Network 2012; Brighter Futures 2013; see also Chapter Two). Furthermore, Chapter Eight demonstrated how educational transitions can have a disruptive effect on peer social networks, as young people's lives diverge without the spatial and temporal structuring of educational spaces and schedules. The findings in that chapter were concerned with how standard and expected educational transitions can disrupt social networks. The focus here is on the potential desynchronisation of educational pathways across this period of the life course, which leave some UYP 'off time' from their friends and peers.

Whilst the educational experiences of UYP prior to migration vary greatly they have all experienced significant disruption to their education when they arrive in the UK (Wade et al. 2005; Wade et al. 2012). The majority of UYP arrive between the ages of fourteen and seventeen, with a small window of time in which to progress through the UK education system. This compresses their education into a remarkably small time frame in which they must also learn the English language. Conforming to the expected social timings and educational transitions prescribed within the system is therefore a daunting task. Indeed, young people in this study, the vast majority of whom had left the school system and attended college, identified some particular challenges and educational disruptions associated particularly within the period of leaving care. The main source of disruption to education came, perhaps unsurprisingly, from the immigration system. Young people who became ARE were especially vulnerable to educational disruptions and periods of time during which they were unable to access education.

The story of Idris, a 21-year-old Eritrean male who had become ARE, most plainly illustrates the impact that immigration issues can have on educational transitions and the consequent effect on social networks. Idris arrived in the UK aged sixteen and was granted Discretionary Leave to Remain in the UK until he was seventeen and a half. Idris developed his language skills quickly and was very successful at school. When his temporary leave expired, he was studying for his A-levels and had received an offer for a university place. Unfortunately, he was unable to extend his

temporary leave and was unsuccessful in a fresh asylum claim. As he had no Leave to Remain in the UK he was unable to take up his place at university. Access to university can be extremely complicated for UYP, as those who are still awaiting decisions may have to pay international student fees and universities are increasingly reluctant to admit students who cannot guarantee they will remain in the UK for the duration of the course. Following the new system of reviewing refugee status after five years (discussed in Chapter Two), universities are now also reluctant to admit refugees with less than three or four years remaining until their review (Refugee Support Network 2012).

At the time of Idris' first interview it had been four years since he received his first refusal from the Home Office and was denied his place at university. He had been unable to access education or work during that period of time, but had continued to receive support from the LA. For Idris, one of the most difficult things about his situation was the way in which it alienated him from his peers whom he perceived as progressing in their lives, whilst he was motionless:

I've got friends, they've got papers and they are going on with their lives. But I am still sat here waiting for a passport ... so now I don't like it when they talk about what they are doing, things for the future, because I can't join in with any of that. Idris

Idris described how he had become increasingly isolated from his social networks since the negative decision from the Home Office, attributing this change to the mental stress of his uncertain status and the increasing geographical and social distance between himself and his friends who had gone to university.

For Idris, social isolation from friends and peers was compounded by a concurrent decision to isolate himself from contact with his family in Eritrea. This too stemmed partly from disruption to his educational pathways (as well as his family's concerns about his current immigration status discussed in previous chapters). His family, particularly his father who is a teacher, had high expectations of his educational achievements and Idris found it difficult to face their increasing disappointment when he contacted them.

It's hard when you say I'm in England and not doing anything and still waiting for a decision. It's been six years now. It's difficult. Idris

Idris also kept his educational difficulties from many of his friends, making it problematic to create trusting friendships. He would often pretend that he too was in some form of education in order to appear as though he was on the same pathway as them (See Chapter Eight for a discussion of similar responses to disclosing immigration status).

Idris' situation draws attention to the way in which asylum and immigration regimes that create temporariness and uncertainty climaxing in the transition to adulthood can disrupt key educational transitions for UYP. Social expectations and norms around educational transitions can leave those without access to continued education isolated from both their peers and their transnational social networks. Many studies of migration and immigration have highlighted the sense of limbo, waiting and stasis that is created by uncertainty in the immigration system (Griffiths 2013; Brighter Futures 2013). However this period of temporal paralysis takes on an additional dimension when considered in terms of the transition to adulthood, and the massive expansion of further and higher education which has elevated post-eighteen education into adulthood to a new social norm (Altbach et al. 2009). Consequently, UYP who struggle to maintain linear and standardised pathways through education can become 'off time' and alienated from their peers.

Aziz, another ARE young person from Afghanistan, had suffered a similar disruption to his education when he was refused an extension of his temporary leave at the age of seventeen and taken to a deportation centre for a period of three months. Aziz describes being taken to the deportation centre in his school uniform, a visceral image of both the sudden rupture in his education and the dramatic fissure that opens up during this age period when immigration agendas collide with social institutions traditionally charged with protecting children.

They sent me straight to the deport centre. I went to sign. I was with my school bag and uniform. And I said "at least let me get changed". It was horrendous. I felt so ashamed. I don't know what kind of thing this is. At least have respect for the school. Aziz

Following this period of detention, which Aziz described as extremely traumatic, concentrating on education became difficult for him.

I worked really hard at school trying to get good level but the problem is stress which makes it hard to study. It's just immigration stuff. No other stress, makes it hard to study. All the time thinking what is going to happen to me; all that going on in my mind. Even now, I'm still thinking of it. Aziz

The young people who had experienced periods of difficulty with immigration status were all emphatic on this issue. Once their immigration status had become problematic, the stress and uncertainty it caused had a significant impact on their ability to study. This often led to delays in progress through school or college. Consequently, some young people expressed feelings of being left behind as friends progressed in a more linear and normative fashion through the stages of the education system.

It was not only education but also wider career pathways that were disrupted. Mohammed, also ARE, was attempting to pursue both higher education and a potential career in professional football. Both were thwarted by his lack of legal status.

It stops me from getting opportunities. I have friends that are getting all these opportunities and going to different places to do football. But immigration is stopping me. Mohammed

As we saw in Chapter Eight, Mohammed had built his informal social network around his passion for playing football, but was gradually losing his friends and peers who took up opportunities to play football in different parts of the country and internationally. Mohammed however, remained patient. He reflected on how, like many aspects of migration, this was really all just a matter of time.

My friends, they have some things I don't have, doing things I don't. But it will come to me in time. It is just that we are on different times. Mohammed

Indeed, Mohammed's statement captures eloquently the experience of being desynchronised and 'off time', moving through social stages and transitions out of step with friends, peers and the rest of the society in which you live. An interesting flipside to being out of step with UK peers emerged when a small number of young people discussed continued relationships with friends in their home countries. For

these young people, it was their ability to access education that distanced them from the friends they had left behind.

I did stay in touch with one friend back home. But, it's so different. She thinks it's amazing that I can go to university and that I'm studying and doing all this stuff. It's very different for her. She is in the military now. I don't know where she is right now actually. Her life has turned out very differently to mine.

Zahra

Uncertain immigration status was not the sole cause of disrupted educational transitions, although it was the most difficult. A small number of young people in this study who did have Refugee Status had suffered interferences to their education that were caused by difficulties in progressing through the various stages of college in a time frame similar to their peers. Reinforcing previous research findings (Brownlee & Finch 2010; Wade et al. 2012), all these young people felt they were ready to progress to higher levels of study within college but were prevented from doing so because of the perception that their language skills were not sufficient.

I want to go to uni, but, like, college are holding me back. I say that I need to do higher level, not just ESOL, more ESOL but they say I need more time, always more time, but I am impatient, I don't want to wait more time. I'm ready now. **Medhane**

This statement from Medhane demonstrates the feeling of being held back in time that educational delays precipitate and, in contrast to Mohammed's philosophical approach, echoes Chase & Allsopp's (2013) finding that periods of waiting and limbo can create a heightened, compulsive need to move forward.

Mariam, who described in her first interview her dream of becoming a social worker, had suffered an obstacle in her plans by the time of the follow-up interview. Administrative problems in college and a lack of support to progress through different levels meant that she had been forced to leave college, at least temporarily. This delay had affected her profoundly and led to increased social isolation.

I don't see anyone. Not at all. It's just me and my son all day. It's driving me crazy to be honest. Now I'm not going college I can go a long time and not even talk to anybody ... I didn't have that many friends at college really, they

*don't have children, but when I was there I would talk to people. Now I don't talk to anybody ... except my social worker. **Mariam***

Being a single mother is a compounding factor in Mariam's isolation. College had provided her with some everyday social connections which, whilst she would not consider them friendships, had an overall positive effect on her. Conversely, the ability to continue with education and even go on to higher education had a positive impact on the social networks of those who managed to achieve it. Continuing education did not just have the benefit of keeping up with peers, but could both broaden and diversify social networks.

At university, there are so many different people, from different places. They don't judge me for not knowing the language so well. We're all from somewhere else. I've got a lot of new friends now from all over the world.

Zahra

*One of the best things about staying in education is new people ... I want to meet new people. Different types of people. **Zaki***

The starkest example of the impact that continued education can have on social networks came from the follow-up interview with Idris. By the time of the second interview Idris had, after four years of waiting, been able to take up his place at university with the support of local authority funding. A former social worker, in collaboration with his current personal advisor, had successfully argued for special dispensation to fund his higher education through the local authority. He had been at university for three months when he was interviewed again. The contrast was apparent:

*Everything is so good, I've got big social life now. A big social life in my flat, everyone comes to chill. And a social life in the area. The best thing, the thing that changed so much since coming to uni is the social life. It's good, but maybe it won't be so good when it comes to exams. **Idris***

Idris had gone from being someone who was increasingly isolated, living alone, and struggling to cope with the uncertainty of the immigration system to someone who was enjoying an extremely active social life, new social relationships and was, as a consequence, able to cope much better with the concerns that remained over his

future in the UK. Idris, like the other young people at university, was concerned with emphasising the diversity of his new friendships. The university experience had allowed him to meet and make friends with people from different social backgrounds and ethnic communities, an aspect of social networks that many of the young people considered important.

However, he still had not fully reconnected with his family, choosing not to tell them he was at university, but simply 'studying'. Ultimately, the spectre of the immigration decision still exacted some constraints over his social relationships.

Going to university is a big deal where I come from. I don't want to get their hopes up. If I get a negative decision on my claim, I'll have to leave. Their hope is so high. It could go down. Idris

Despite the outstanding issues with immigration and his family, the opportunity for higher education had been transformative for Idris.

Everything before was stressful. But this all keeps me busy. I can see a future now maybe. It's like being a completely different person. Idris

An Independent Reviewing Officer, who was responsible for reviewing Idris' Leaving Care package, noted this change and spoke about it in an interview, with Idris' permission. He too described Idris as a 'different person' since going to university, but was keen to emphasise that stories like this one are rare.

I'd say it's not necessarily usual for this to happen. A very strong case has to be made. And I'd say it might be almost unique to this particular local authority. They are highly committed to these young people and their education. That's not going to be the case everywhere. Independent Reviewing Officer

Chapter Nine alluded to the significant role of professionals in helping UYP navigate institutional structures, including education. Both young people and professionals regularly referred to the significant amount of input professionals had in negotiating access to education and helping overcome educational obstacles. In particular, professionals were keen to point out their particular commitment to assisting ARE young people with education, and were proud of local policies which supported promisingly academic young people with uncertain status through education.

However, proposals within the new Immigration Bill (2015–2016), currently being scrutinised in Parliament, propose changes to the entitlements of UYP who want to go on to further education. These proposals, if passed into law, could mean that ARE young people will have no access to UK higher education, and those who do have status in the UK will be treated as international students, required to pay the attendant fees without access to loans and maintenance grants. The current policy and practice evidenced in this study, which is heavily focused on supporting UYP with education at the time of transition to adulthood, will be severely impinged, creating additional barriers for these young people and placing them further out of step with their social networks.

11.2 Leaving care, social time and the construction of ‘independence’

Whilst the education system represents one way in which social time is mediated through institutions, the Leaving Care process represents a parallel interceding influence on the transitions of young people in which the primary goal is often constructed as the achievement of independence (Hiles et al. 2013). Indeed, Western constructs of the transition to adulthood regularly equate it with attaining independence (Sarri & Finn 1992; Holdsworth 2005; Bruckner & Mayer 2006; Goodkind et al. 2011). Similarly, Sennett (2003: 1202) has argued that dependency is perceived as ‘an incomplete state in life, normal in the child; abnormal in adult life’. In the field of Leaving Care, there has been an increased focus on ‘interdependence’ rather than independence in recognition that supportive relationships, social networks and dynamic interdependencies are a crucial part of smoother transitions to adulthood (Fraser & Gordon 1997; Propp et al. 2003; Goodkind et al. 2011; Mendes & Moslehuddin 2006). Indeed, whilst scholars have argued that Western adulthood is now primarily about presuming responsibility for oneself, rather than responsibility for others (Bruckner & Mayer 2005), the findings outlined in previous chapters of this thesis have emphasised how UYP equate becoming adult with increased responsibilities to families both in the UK and transnationally. However, an initial step in achieving such aims does require achieving some level of economic and social independence. Whilst the various ways in which independence might be constructed and the contested nature of the term ‘independence’ is recognised, the

findings in this section do centre largely on the 'independence' that young people achieve when moving to independent accommodation and leave foster or residential forms of care. This focus is led by the perceptions of the young people and professionals themselves. Both young people and professionals regularly conflated the achievement of 'independence' with living independently and related competencies and skills. Therefore, the term 'independence' is employed throughout the rest of this chapter to denote either living in independent accommodation (often still funded by Leaving Care services) or becoming entirely independent from services.

Despite policy aims to extend support for care leavers to the age of twenty one (or twenty five if in full time education), the Leaving Care process is still heavily predicated on age structures and cut-offs at which young people are expected to complete certain transitional steps based on their age rather than on their individual preparedness (Hiles et al. 2013), with access to services bounded within age ranges. Even where specific age boundaries have been softened or extended, evidence suggests that in practice, many age-specific transitions persist in the process and the early age of Leaving Care has been highlighted frequently (Biehal et al. 1995; Dixon & Stein 2005; Wade 2006; Wade et al. 2012).

Some of the young people in this study stressed the perceived rigidity of these cut-off dates.

*When you're eighteen it's just done. You're eighteen, just go. Never mind that I have moved my whole country and language and everything and that everything for me is new. **Faizal***

*It's like you're seventeen, so you move out to be on your own or whatever. That's how it is. **Zula***

However, many of the other young people did not express this view, although the majority of the participants were living in independent accommodation funded by the LA. The professionals who were interviewed perceived their practice as being significantly more flexible and reflexive to personal circumstances than might be suggested by the literature:

There are certain ages at which things generally happen but we also know we need to be responsible to individual needs. For instance, during the transition to Leaving Care services, if someone needs quite a lot of support, they'll keep with their current social worker until they are ready to move on to having a personal advisor and less contact. Wherever we are able to, we do what we can to meet individual needs. **Social Worker**

Indeed, the findings from this study suggest an extremely complex picture in terms of transitioning to independence, most particularly in terms of moving towards living in independent accommodation. These processes are significant for social networks as they represent a process in which formal social networks, which include social workers, personal advisors and foster carers, begin a period of planned withdrawal. This was also highlighted in Chapter Nine, which discussed the changing nature of relationships with professionals as young people approached the end of their entitlements to services. The relatively early age that young people generally leave care has been discussed previously, along with the tendency for care leavers to experience 'compressed and accelerated transitions' (Stein 2008). Additionally, a recent review of the Leaving Care literature emphasised that many care leavers feel under-prepared to move into independence (Hiles et al. 2013). Cumulatively, Leaving Care research and policy has moved towards a consensus that delaying and extending transitions is positive (see Chapter Two for more detail). However, there is some dissimilarity between the research evidence from the general Leaving Care population and the young people in this study, who were often keen to live independently as soon as possible,

A crucial factor for young people concerned the culturally constructed meanings of dependence and independence and indeed the meanings of childhood and adulthood. Some of the young people experienced a dissonance between the social timing of transition to independence and adulthood in their home cultures and expectations in the UK. This was particularly true of the young Eritrean men.

In Africa, it's different to in England. At thirteen you take responsibility for yourself. **Idris**

Back home I had smaller siblings. I did everything for them, everything. **Medhane**

For these young men, cultural expectations in terms of responsibility for themselves and other family members differed significantly in their country of origin from Western constructs, in which sharp distinctions between the life stages of childhood and adulthood often exclude children from adult spheres of life (Jackson & Scott 2006). The young people referred regularly to previous experiences of looking after themselves and family members before migration. However, as discussed in Chapters Seven and Ten, care obligations continue to be a significant concern that increases in intensity during the transition to adulthood. The care they have undertaken for others and themselves in the past combines with the care they hope to reciprocate in the future, to create strong claims that they are prepared for independence, and indeed interdependence.

A related significant factor involves the meaning of the act of migration itself and its relationship to attaining adulthood. For some of the young people (primarily young men), whilst their migration was forced by the circumstances in which they lived, leaving had become a rite of passage:

When I was leaving, I was young but there was lot of people my age leaving also. It wasn't such a big deal to be honest. Idris

In Eritrea, you get to a certain age and everybody goes. It is a strange place where there are only old people and children. Medhane

You learn that you will have to leave if you don't want to be a soldier. Most people leave at sixteen but I got out a little earlier. Makhda

The idea of migration as a rite of passage has begun to emerge in literature on forced migration, disrupting our notions of UYP as exceptional and recasting their experiences as a critical life stage, rather than a catastrophic life-course rupture (Monsutti 2007; Chase & Allsopp 2013; Mackenzie & Guntarik 2015). In countries where there is a culture of migration, leaving may become a new social norm and a means of attaining adult status, although this is mediated by gender with boys and men much more commonly associating migration with achieving adult status (Kandel & Massey 2002; Jonsson 2008). Migration therefore may represent a transition to adulthood which is 'on time' in the social temporality of a particular culture, though considered strikingly 'off time' according to Western ideas of childhood. Whilst recent literature has suggested that increased mobility is a defining feature of Western

transitions to adulthood (King 2016), the act of independent migration is still broadly considered outside the normal realms of childhood and youth (Sigona & Hughes 2010; Sirriyeh 2013).

In addition to the differing cultural constructions of childhood and the potential for migration to be a rite of passage to adulthood, many of the young people from different cultural backgrounds cited the migration journey itself as an experience which prepared them for independence, drawing on such narratives of resilience to establish their claims to independence. Roshaan, from Afghanistan, spoke at length of his year-long journey to the UK. His experiences were distressing and traumatic but were also formative in terms of developing his capacity to manage on his own.

*I saw lots of things, lots of death, y'know. It was very very hard. Like here, now, even when things are hard, it is never as hard as that. **Roshaan***

Faizal, also from Afghanistan, left aged ten and initially moved to Iran with his uncle.

*I was there five years without ID and I was being forced to work until I was eleven. I was doing joinery which is why I picked it when I got here. And I worked in the shop for a year. I was little but I was just working. **Faizal***

Medhane, who is seventeen and from Eritrea, summed up the issues whilst discussing his recent decision to move from foster care to supported lodgings, an arrangement in which the young person lives semi-independently.

*I used to manage myself whilst I was in Africa. And then in Sudan. And then in Libya. And France. And Italy. All the way I was alone. In England though, that's not enough. You have to show them you can be independent. **Medhane***

For Zhara, also from Eritrea, the very nature of being a child seeking asylum alone had given her the skills for independence. She contrasted her experience with the experience of her sister, who had migrated to Scandinavia with their father:

*I think it's completely different for her. She wasn't on her own. She had family with her the whole time. I've been doing this myself the whole time ... now my sister is coming to live with me ... my dad is struggling to be independent without her! I told him I am the young one and you are old. I've managed on my own and so should you. **Zhara***

Zhara had lived with two foster families since living in the UK. Although she had continued a very close relationship with the last family after she moved to independence, her statement here implies that becoming independent is an intrinsic part of being without your family, supporting research by Monsutti (2007) which links the spatial and social separation from family as a key moment in which the period of childhood may be halted. She also raises the issue of age, contrasting her ability to be independent at a young age with her dad's inability to live alone despite being an adult, reminding us again of the way in which the experiences of UYP can reveal the flaws in age-structured ideas about the capability for independence.

The findings in this section so far strongly suggest that whilst some young people feel they were moved to independence at an arbitrary age-based cut-off, many young people considered themselves to be prepared to move to independence very quickly. These young people challenged Western constructs of childhood and adulthood, drawing on past experiences to demonstrate their competence, autonomy and resilience. The transition to adulthood is therefore not something that they associate with the process of leaving care, but something which has been on-going for a long time and may have already been completed.

The concern about the expectation of 'instant adulthood' (Stein 2006) that permeates Leaving Care literature may not fit comfortably with a group of young people who perceive that they began their journey to adulthood not at the point of leaving care, but with the act of migration or even prior to migration. The role of the practitioner within the social network as the key person to assist a young person towards independence may therefore be complicated by different cultural and social understandings of when and how independence is achieved. However, there is some evidence that care leavers more generally feel that they are already 'adult' because of the difficult experience they have faced in their childhood and youth (Goodkind et al. 2011), suggesting that such narratives of resilience and pushes for independence may not be limited to UYP. However, the professionals in this study did perceive differences between UYP and other care leavers. Many of the professionals suggested UYP were much better prepared for independence than other young people in their care, and were less likely to experience problems transitioning to independent living. The professionals drew on similar narratives of resilience to explain why UYP were better prepared.

They [UYP] are generally better prepared. Definitely. They know what they're doing. They've had a lot of different experiences and they transition into living alone really well. A couple of problems might happen, like they would for anybody, but on the whole, they don't need as much support, y'know with practical things... They still need support, but they are stable. **Personal Advisor**

However, a minority of professionals were more ambiguous. Whilst showing an awareness that UYP did well in the transition to independence, they were concerned not to make the mistake of conflating life experience and a mature attitude with not needing help at all.

All young people want independence, that's totally normal. And yeh, they've had very specific experiences that mean they have been independent in the past. But in my experience, many unaccompanied young people think they are ready before they really are. They don't necessarily realise that it might be very lonely, they might spend a lot of time on their own, thinking about their immigration status or family back home. It would be a mistake to think that because they have practical skills and present as very mature for their age, that they aren't still very vulnerable in some areas of their lives. **Social Worker**

Indeed, research has identified a tendency amongst some care leavers to construct identities based on a strong sense of self-reliance (Samuels & Pryce 2008; Goodkind et al. 2011). Surviving and coping alone become sources of pride and self-affirmation, the flip side of which might be feelings of shame and failure when support is required (Blakeslee 2015). In this way, Samuels and Pryce (2008) suggest that strong self-reliance and a desire for independence can be both a strength and a potential weakness, if the desire for independence leads to a 'disavowal of dependence' and leads young people to disengage from all forms of support, formal and informal.

Given the general agreement that UYP generally have excellent practical competencies but may struggle with some very specific issues (bills, immigration concerns, isolation), it was surprising that professionals relied heavily on practice tools which emphasised specific life skills. Young people were required to complete

the inappropriately titled 'Passport to Independent Living' before moving into their own accommodation. This is heavily focused on domestic skills such as cooking, cleaning and changing light bulbs. This approach was not considered helpful by some of the UYP, given the high level of competency many of them had in self-care and basic life skills. Indeed, this did suggest that local policy was lacking in some flexibility and responsiveness of the individual needs of young people recommended by research (Biehal et al. 1995; Stein 2004).

Whilst generally the young people were keen to live independently, others were less confident. Although they may have picked up considerable coping and survival skills as unaccompanied children, the bureaucratic complexity of the UK was something their journeys had not prepared them for and presented an area in which professionals were a vital part of the social network, as discussed in Chapter Nine. For most of the young people in this study, administrative issues were a persistent stress in their lives, and one of the biggest downsides to being 'independent'. Sohail, who was about to turn 21 and had just finished college, was one of the young people struggling with managing bills and running a household since moving into his own accommodation. He was very concerned about the imminent loss of all support from social services.

*Well, this is the system, you can't change the law. Like nobody wants to die, but they have to. It is sad, but is inevitable. But I feel like I need more support. Sometimes I get letter – or bill and I can't sleep for worry about it. I can't sleep until they sort it for me. Why can't I manage on my own self? This is a bad sign for me? When I was younger I needed and got more support. I don't need as much support now. But I'm not ready to be on my own. I'm really worried for turning 21. **Sohail***

Sohail recognises that he needed more support when he was younger, but as he approaches 21 he still feels that he is not ready to manage without the crucial formal support within his social network, highlighting the way in which the system grades ability to be independent by age, rather than by individual readiness (Dixon & Stein 2003; Stein & Munro 2008). Sohail had struggled with transition before when he first moved into his independent accommodation, and recognised that he was struggling with a similar fear of change as he approached 21:

*Now is quite a peaceful time I'd be happy with it staying like this. At first, moving was hard, moving into my flat it was really hard. It was just me and four walls. In supported housing they did everything for us. Life was very simple – we could just go outside – play... but I've become more confident since living alone. I don't want things to change really now. It was a year of being hard at first and it felt really sudden to be on my own in the house but y'know, now it's okay. **Sohail***

This quote from Sohail evokes the imagery of moving from childhood into adulthood. Here he refers to the ability to just 'play' when he was more supported, but also recognises that living alone has built his confidence. He also refers to the feeling of being alone. He had previously lived in shared supported housing with other UYP and for him, the transition to living independently created a reduced social world, which took time to adjust to. As has been noted elsewhere, the move to independent living combined with education transitions can cause considerable stress for young people and impact significantly on their social networks (Gonzales 2011; Refugee Support Network 2012; Brighter Futures 2013; Driscoll 2015; see also Chapter Eight).

Many of the young people in this study had strived for independence shortly after arrival, or were currently considering moving into independent living. Zaki, 19, who had been living independently for three years, was able to reflect on his own push to move into independence which began aged fourteen.

*I loved my foster family, I still love them, they are great people, but I really wanted to move out y'know. I wanted that. I thought I could do it, like my friends. I wanted freedom, to be with my friends. **Zaki***

Zaki, on reflection, did not regret being persuaded by his social worker to remain in foster care until he was seventeen. His quote, however, illustrates many of the key elements in the narratives of young people who were currently pushing for independence. First, there is the idea that they are competent, as illustrated by their pre-migration experiences and survival of migration discussed earlier. Secondly, the social impetus to be with friends. Finally, perhaps most significantly, the desire for freedom.

These elements were reflected throughout two interviews with Medhane who was seventeen and from Eritrea. Between the two interviews he moved out of foster care and into supported lodgings with the assistance of his social worker. There were two major elements to his determination to leave the foster family, and, like Zaki, they were not necessarily related to his personal relationship with his foster carers.

I wanted more freedom, I wanted to be treated like I was seventeen and I could have more responsibility. Since I came here [supported lodgings] I have massive freedom. **Medhane 2nd Interview**

Medhane wanted to be free, but also wanted to experience the freedoms that he felt were associated with his age. Part of the problem, he suggested, was that his foster family had different notions of what freedoms and responsibilities seventeen year olds should have, particularly around socialising, staying out late, and sleeping over with friends. Initially, his social worker had been reluctant to support a move to independence and had explained to Medhane that he may have less money if he moved out of foster care. However, for Medhane, the economic impact was of little importance;

I don't like money. I like freedom. Freedom is very important to me because there is no freedom in the country I come from. **Medhane**

Freedom was an important concept in a number of other narratives of independence that young people drew on, and reflects findings in the broader Leaving Care literature that young people may leave care in order to achieve greater levels of freedom and autonomy (Goodkind et al. 2011). However, a number of young people linked their desire for freedom particularly with a lack of freedom in the country of origin. Medhane also expressed a desire for 'freedom over my own time'. In this he was referring to his social time in the most literal sense, wanting to spend more time with his friends without the curfews and restrictions within his foster family. Increased social freedom was suggested by a number of young people as being either a reason for moving, or a benefit they had noted after moving into independence. Social networks are crucial here, in that unrestricted access to informal and peer networks can provide an impetus for young people to move into independence.

Another significant factor in Medhane's move to supported lodgings was the location of his foster placement in a rural area quite a distance from the city. Medhane felt

isolated from his own ethnic community which had a thriving network within the centre of the city. For Medhane, access to this social network was another major aspect of his decision to move. Professionals reported that this was a common occurrence. A number of foster placements were available in rural locations but young people regularly turned them down and preferred independent living arrangements in order to be able to access social networks and minority ethnic communities more easily, suggesting that convenient access to social networks, both in terms of geography and freedom to socialise without constraints from foster families, played some role in choices to move into independence.

Whatever the specific individual reasons for desiring freedom, the concept of freedom had become strongly linked to living independently for many of the young people. As Zula, twenty, stated, 'having your own place is freedom'. Bound up with this was the desire for freedom within one's own social time and social networks.

The suggestion from these findings is that young people may perceive the move to independence as a process which gave them greater access to their informal social networks and the freedom to operate within these networks with less constraints. Research from the broader Leaving Care literature differs slightly in that social networks are generally seen to contract as young people leave care (Hiles et al. 2013). However this same literature, drawing on the notion of 'interdependence', also stresses the importance of social support across multiple domains of the social network and striking a balance between formal and informal social networks that change gradually over time in preparation for leaving care (Collins et al. 2010; Johnson et al. 2005; Blakeslee 2012; Hiles et al. 2013; Blakeslee 2015). The determination of some UYP to move to independent living may be an expression of this need to balance out networks and support structures as the time limit on formal support nears expiry.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the pathway to independence was not linear. Whatever gains young people made towards their own ideal of independence could be reversed by life events, which could force young people to reluctantly accept a more dependent position in relation to others, particularly professionals. Idris, whose story formed a key part of the discussion on educational pathways,

described a circular route in which whatever independence he had gained was reversed when he became ARE.

I used to be an independent person. I am an independent person. But now, it is like I am going backwards with that. I'm dependent on my workers for everything. I hate that. I hate being dependent on them like that. Idris

During the follow up interview it became clear that going to university had allowed him to claw back some of the independence he valued so much:

Yeh, like I don't need to see my worker so much. She knows I like to be independent and everything is now fine, so, she like knows to give me some space. Idris

Indeed, there is some convergence between the issue of educational pathways and the transition to independence, as many young people felt access to higher education was a conduit for gaining increased independence. The example of Idris highlights the way in which independence is not something which is gained in a one-off event when a particular age or stage of a process is reached, as Zhara's overly dependent father demonstrated earlier in the chapter; it is certainly not something that is permanently gifted to young people on completion of some 'transition to adulthood'.

Perhaps the most striking example of this is Kamal, who as we saw in previous chapters became ARE at the age of 23, a number of years after leaving care. He had completed an almost perfect example of a successful transition from care. He had lived independently and successfully, built a career and maintained a strong social network including intimate personal relationships. However, on becoming ARE, Kamal instinctively returned to Leaving Care services for help, his ability to manage independently suddenly failing. In the end it is Kamal's statements, which comes from a place and a life after leaving care that exposes the potentially harsh realities at the other side of the 'transition to adulthood' for UYP.

The thing is I am an adult now. When, in the past I was young, everyone helped me. Social workers they helped me a lot. Now I am an adult they can do nothing. And with this [immigration status], nobody can help me now. Kamal

This statement from Kamal drives home the divide that young people cross from childhood to adulthood and the multiple impacts that transitioning to adulthood can have for UYP. The age structuring inherent within both the immigration/asylum and Leaving Care systems combine to leave a young person with limited support at a time when the rights and protections of childhood have fallen away. The fact that Kamal reached out, backwards in time to his most trusted worker, demonstrates the power of the formal social network across time. The fact that they could do so little to assist him is a stark reminder of the blunt boundaries created between childhood and adulthood, which do little to reflect the complex and convoluted pathways young people take to an often elusive independence. However, Kamal's statement also suggests that whilst many UYP strive for recognition of their independence and move towards an increased role for informal social networks, there are circumstances in which young people still require the assistance of formal services long after they have left care, particularly where they leave care with their immigration unresolved.

11.3 Conclusion

The question of the impact of 'social time' on the social networks of UYP has been addressed throughout this chapter. The mediation and structuring of time through social institutions such as education and children's services has been explored. The findings suggest a number of ways in which UYP may experience time as desynchronised from their peers. In particular, disruption to educational transitions is seen to have particularly detrimental effects that are often the consequence of uncertain immigration status. Educational disruptions and delayed transitions through social time can have significant impacts on social networks, as Rosa (2003) has discussed in the context of the increased speed and desynchronisation of Western society generally.

'... clock-time and the linear perspective norm act as filters through which reality is sieved and as a lens through which all social relations and structure are refracted' (Adam, 2003: 64). As a consistent result, the 'dictatorship of speed' is rarely questioned in our society, because in a highly competitive world 'standing still is equivalent to falling behind. (Rosa 2003: 11).

For UYP, 'falling behind' has the effect of distancing them from their social networks and the biographical narratives that sustain their movement forward into the future. We know that the quality of social networks and social relationships are of vital importance in transition from care (Howe 1997; Wade 2008; Blakeslee 2015) and that education offers opportunities to create, maintain, broaden and diversify social networks. Changes in access to education, whether structured, pre-determined forks in the road of the UK education system or unexpected discontinuities provoked by the immigration system, are likely to destabilise and transform young people's social networks.

Social time is also a crucial mediating factor in the transition to independence from leaving care. Whilst there are multiple ways of understanding 'independence', this chapter focused on the largely age-structured process of moving into independent accommodation and the eventual withdrawal of support from formal services. The social time and timings which underpin Leaving Care services and processes were found to be dissonant with the young people's own perceptions of their ability to become independent, which they link not with the ages and stages that structure leaving care, but with their own personal experiences before, during and after migration. Social networks were an important factor in the impetus towards independence, with a desire for freedom over social time (in the literal sense) with friends a dominant theme in young people's narratives.

An interceding factor in the process of constructing and achieving independence was the impact of immigration status. Young people who had on-going concerns about their immigration status experienced an increased and prolonged dependency on formal services, echoing the findings in Chapter Nine which explored the vital role of professionals in navigating immigration systems. However, concerns about coping independently were not limited to young people with uncertain immigration status, as some refugee young people also expressed anxieties about coping without formal support.

Overall, this chapter has explored how UYP navigate the structures of social time during the transition to adulthood. The routes young people negotiated through the institutional structures of education and Leaving Care were seen to be complex and highly individual. These unique pathways were sometimes positive expressions of

young people's agency, as demonstrated by their determination to create narratives of independence and resilience which countered the presumption of their dependence on professional adult care, as well as challenging broader constructs of young people as dependent and lacking the competencies for independence. However, becoming out of synch with the rhythms of social time when education was disrupted could have damaging effects on social networks, which could reverberate throughout the life course.

Chapter Twelve

Socio-cultural time and space

12.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, cultural understandings of age and adulthood were seen to impact the way in which transition to independence was perceived and managed by young people. This chapter explores further the influence of culture on the transitions of young people in order to understand how young people negotiate the cultural aspects of their social networks. The chapter suggests that UYP are negotiating socio-cultural time and space within their social networks in a process of socio-cultural transition. As Tziouvas (2009) has suggested, cultural continuities and discontinuities across time are a key aspect of migration experiences.

Culture is a wide-ranging term that includes the 'distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or social group', including 'lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs'. (UNESCO 2001: 12). The transition to adulthood is widely recognised as a crucial period of identity development within the life course, including the development of a cultural identity (Kehily 2007; Sirriyeh 2015). However, the concept of cultural identity cannot be accepted uncritically. Anthias (2013) has critiqued the 'culturalisation' of social relations, which too often homogenises binary ethno-cultural groups. Indeed, the findings in this chapter reflect the multiplicity of fluid socio-cultural identities that UYP negotiate during the transition to adulthood.

Whilst the need for young people to have opportunities to engage with and practise their home cultures is recognised and encouraged within the literature (Wade et al. 2012), the full complexity of young people's socio-cultural life and its impact on transitions is rarely addressed in detail. Wade et al. (2012) and Ní Raghallaigh & Sirriyeh (2015) have outlined how concepts of identity and culture are complex and fluid over time, and this chapter begins by discussing the socio-cultural transitions that the young people were experiencing, and addresses the complexity and diversity of the cultural identities young people negotiated. In particular, the active role of young people in forming their own cultural identities is highlighted, as is the

inadequacy of binary and bi-cultural approaches that situate cultures within 'fixed places of origin or destination' (Sirriyeh 2015: 88). The second part of the chapter explores how UYP, in particular young women, negotiate the conflicts and tensions that arise within their social networks as they develop new cultural identities, specifically new approaches to gender and sexual relationships.

12.1 Socio-cultural transitions

Kohli (2011: 314) has suggested that UYP often undergo an 'extensive period of absorbing and being absorbed by the new culture' in a process of resettlement, which is often successful where appropriate support is received. The findings from this study focus on a more active role for UYP, who appeared dynamically engaged in the development of complex cultural identities, which involved 'learning' UK culture and renegotiating cultural identities related to their cultures of origin. Waldinger (2015) has previously suggested that a foreign culture must be learned, and there is some evidence that asylum seekers and refugees may know very little about the UK before they arrive (Crawley 2010a). Indeed, some of the young people suggested that the little they did know about the UK before arrival was not accurate, based on myths and rumours circulating in their home countries. Others, notably those with some prior links to the UK, had a better understanding of UK culture. Despite varied cultural awareness of the UK before migration, the majority of the young people felt learning about the UK culture was important to them.

*I have a very close relationship with this culture and country... I am getting to learn more about the culture of the UK. **Aziz***

*Because this is your country there are probably things here that you don't know about but I do. Because I try to learn everything. **Kamal***

Support within social relationships has been shown to be vital for UYP adapting to a new culture, with foster carers emerging as a pivotal resource (Wade et al. 2012; Qin et al. 2015). Many of the young people in this study described the importance of foster carers in assisting them during this period of cultural transition.

*My foster carers, they helped me with understanding everything about the UK. **Kamal***

My foster mum. She explained everything about the UK culture and I learned it. Zahra

The role of foster carers in facilitating UYP in their negotiation of a cultural identity has received some attention in previous research. Foster care has been shown to assist young people in cultural adjustment (Hek 2007), but more recent debates have focused on the relative merits of culturally matched placements and cross-cultural placements. Whilst placements that are matched for ethnicity or religious orientation may be presumed to support cultural identity development (Small 2000), further research has shown that cross-cultural placements may be equally beneficial (Chase et al. 2008). Indeed, the young people in this study who had been culturally matched with foster carers sometimes experienced problems and tensions around cultural transitions. Medhane in particular found his relationship with his culturally matched foster carer problematic, and identified ethnicity as an issue.

She treats me like we are living in Africa, but we are not living in Africa. She can't change even though she has been here twenty years, but I can because I am young. Medhane

Mariam also echoed this sentiment when discussing her poor relationship with a former social worker who was from a similar background:

I think it's because the social worker was from Africa and I am from Africa. And she doesn't want me to be happy or something. She did not help me at all. She thought she knew what was best for me. Mariam

Mariam reported that after this experience she was concerned about working with professionals from an African background, feeling that they made assumptions about what was best for her that they would not make with other young people, although this perception was dispelled when she worked with an African personal advisor with whom she formed a very strong relationship.

As explored in Chapter Eight, nationality and religion are not the only salient aspects of the evolving cultural identities of UYP during the transition to adulthood. As Wade et al. (2012) have suggested, care must be taken not to over-generalise or make assumptions about a young person's connection to their cultural identity when making placement decisions. Some of the professionals in this study were very

aware of these issues, reporting that young people were likely to reject a culturally matched placement if they did not feel that it met their wider cultural needs in terms of being geographically located near to their church, mosque or community. They also reported that young people sometimes requested to be placed cross-culturally in order to maximise their opportunities to learn English and integrate into the UK culture.

We do try to place young people appropriately in terms of culture. But it's difficult because they sometimes don't want that. It's more important for them to be close to the city centre or the rest of the community. They will not take up a placement with a culturally matched family just on that basis. They consider other things, including if they are going to be able to develop language skills as well in that placement. **Social Worker**

Wider social networks also play a crucial role in the cultural transitions and identity development of young people (Qin et al. 2015). Sohail, originally from Afghanistan, described how he enjoyed both learning about his UK friends' cultural practices and enlightening them about his. He had visited a church with a Christian friend and in return taken his friend to see a mosque, in order that they could exchange an understanding of their cultures. Other young people maintained their private religious practices whilst rejecting some of the cultural labels and ideas they perceived to be associated with their ethnic identity in the UK.

I don't really like my people. It is because of my people that I am here, isn't it?

Faizal

People in my culture, they lie. They say one thing and then do another thing. I have seen that. I don't want to be part of that. **Zaki**

As Wernesjo (2015) suggests, cultural belongings and identities can be both claimed and disclaimed. Phinney et al. (2001) have suggested that the rejection of a cultural identity may be precipitated by the negative stigma associated with a particular religious or national identity, a form of resistance to adverse cultural labels (Gee 1996; see also Chapter Eight). However, the rejection of such cultural attachments can also represent part of a 'bracketing' of the past as a strategy for coping and moving on (Chase 2010). More commonly, young people did not actively reject their

culture, but experienced a process of forgetting which left them more connected to the UK culture, particularly where they had been in the UK for a number of years.

I forget most things about my culture actually. I am more about this culture. It's nice when people ask about my culture because they are interested, but really I am just like them. Aziz

Indeed, the negotiation of different cultural ideas and practices was evident, leading young people to adopt certain cultural customs from the UK whilst maintaining and preserving some of their previous cultural practices. For instance Sohail, who earlier in the chapter described the religious and cultural exchange he engaged in with friends, was concerned that he would not be able to marry someone from the UK.

In this community you could get a wife, but then you would probably get separated. Getting married in a different culture is no good. I need an Afghan wife. A Pashto. Sohail

These findings suggest that the young people in this study were actively engaged in what Qin et al. (2015: 220) have described as a 'conscious and specific process of active cultural selection and production', which permeates all parts of their social network.

Importantly, ethnic and national culture were not the only significant parts of young people's cultural identity, with some young people valuing ethnic and religious cultural attachments much less than others. Daana, an aspiring professional musician originally from Afghanistan, sought out connections which nurtured his identity as a musician.

Most of my friends are white British people but we share a love of music. I don't have Afghani friends. I made a decision for a new life and I want everything to be new. Daana

This quote from Daana reinforces the need for us to look beyond an understanding of cultural identity as solely ethnic, as Anthias (2006) has previously suggested. It also reminds us that attachments to home cultures vary considerably (Olwig 2003). Similarly religion, and particularly religious practices, had played only a small role in some young people's pre-migration identities and they expressed some confusion at

the assumptions made about their religious ideals and orientations when they arrived in the UK.

I only really learned about the Muslim religion when I came here. It wasn't such a big thing for me back home. Aziz

I didn't really practise my religion before I came here. I would say we were more relaxed about it. But you're not really expected to be like that here. The Asian community here wants you to pray a lot. Faizal

Whilst faith and a personal belief in God were expressed by most of the participants, and a majority of young people practised their religion at a church or mosque, for many the emphasis was on maintaining their own personal relationship with their faith rather than cultivating a cultural identity linked to a religious identity and religious practices.

Building on observations in Chapter Eight that young people's informal social networks could not easily be understood by a narrow focus on bonding and bridging relationships within and between nationalities and ethnicities, the findings in this chapter challenge us to widen the focus beyond nationality and religion when considering the importance of culture in the social networks of UYP, including when considering the most appropriate foster placements (Ní Raghallaigh & Sirriyeh 2015.) As Wade et al. (2012) have previously warned, over-generalised assumptions about a young person's cultural affiliations and identities are unhelpful. Young people are likely to make their own decisions about how they negotiate their cultural identity (Phinney et al. 2006), decisions which will be unique to the individual.

Relatedly, previous research on immigration and culture has suggested that migrants develop a bi-cultural or dual identity, which blends together the culture of the home country and the receiving country (Benet-Martinez et al. 2002; Huynh et al. 2011). However, the young people in this study contested such dualisms and binaries, explicitly addressing the complexity of their own cultural identities and the intricacies of cultural identities more generally.

There are all kinds of different communities within the Eritrean community. Different religions, different ways of doing things. Back in Eritrea it is like that, and here in the UK the Eritrean communities are all different too. It's not like

*there is one Eritrean culture or one African culture. It's much more complicated than that. **Makhda***

Two of the young people, who had lived in the UK longer than most of the other participants, questioned the sense in which they could be considered as being from another culture.

I've lived in this country longer than any other country. It's this country I know.

Faizal

*I've made a life here and everything from back home for me is gone. I don't even want to live in another part of the country, because now I am comfortable with here. This is home. **Kamal***

These quotes demonstrate the difficulty of attributing a home culture or a presumed hierarchy of cultural identity (Bhabha 2004) to young people who have been in the UK for a significant period of time, and who are rooted not just in the UK as a nation, but in very specific communities. There is a sizable body of research that addresses the nature of home and belonging for migrant communities in general (Mallet 2004) and UYP in particular (Sirriyeh 2010; 2015). It is not within the scope of this chapter to consider this literature in detail. However, it is notable that current research and theorising emphasises that the concept of home, like the connected concepts of culture and identity, is not fixed or singular but rather fluid and in a constant state of negotiation and renegotiation (Sirriyeh 2010; 2015). Indeed, the concept of home may not be located in a geographical space but defined relationally, for instance as a place where a person can be with their family. Kamal, who described above his rootedness is in his local area, ultimately reflected that he would go anywhere and be anywhere, just to be with his family again.

*The thing is, if there was some family in another part of the world I would go and say goodbye. I just want to be with my family. In any country. **Kamal***

What emerges most strongly from these accounts is a critique of approaches to migrant cultural transitions which centre on the assumption of the development of a bi-cultural identity, rather than recognising that the process of transitioning into a new culture involves the negotiation of multifaceted, intersectional relationships and positions which fluctuate over time (Chase et al. 2013). Indeed, many of the young

people in this study were concerned with broadening their cultural horizons beyond both the UK and 'home' cultures, reaching far beyond the dualities and illusory boundaries of a definable 'home' culture and 'UK' culture.

I don't want just friends from my home country. Or just from the UK. I want to meet people from all different countries. I want to totally mix and meet all different people. **Sophia**

I think it's very important to know about England and to see it. But I also want to know more about the whole world. **Sohail**

I want to travel and meet all different kinds of people from all different cultures. I want to help people no matter what race or religion or culture they are from. **Zahra**

The young people in this study were concerned to project a global, cosmopolitan identity that emphasised mobility, travel and diversity. Yuval-Davis (2010) has suggested that identities are stories that people tell about themselves. For many of the young people in this study, those stories were not contained within binary, essentialist, discourses of 'culture' (Anthias 2013). Conversely, the emphasis was on the flexible boundaries of belonging.

This first part of the chapter has established that UYP are undergoing a cultural transition in tandem with their transition to adulthood, in which they continue to negotiate and develop complex cultural identities. Importantly, UYP emerge as active agents in the construction of a cultural identity that is fluid and dynamic, rather than fixed. The formation of these identities does not conform to essentialist notions of national, ethnic or religious cultural identities, and demonstrates the inadequacy of setting a 'home' culture in opposition to a 'UK' culture. As Olwig and Gullov (2003: 802) state, nation states 'do not coincide with specific well-defined socio-cultural entities', and have a lot of internal complexities. The young people in this study did not experience a linear bi-directional process of moving from a definable 'home' culture to a UK culture, or indeed develop what many commentators describe as a 'bi-cultural' identity (Benet-Martinez et al. 2002; Huynh et al. 2011). Rather, complex cultural identities were negotiated, practised and expressed within 'multiple, fractured and interrelated social spaces' (Anthias 2009: 15). The second part of this chapter

goes on to explore some of the tensions that arose within these social spaces, particularly in relation to gender roles and sexual relationships.

12.2 Socio-cultural fields and transition: the development of intimate partner relationships

In the previous section, the complex cultural transitions that UYP experience were explored with a conclusion that suggested cultural identities are fluid and operate across multiple social spaces. This second part of the chapter considers some of the conflicts and tensions that arose for the young people within these spaces, with a focus on the development of intimate partner relationships.

As Olwig (2003) has identified, international migration is too often presumed to represent a split from home practices and cultures. This can be particularly the case for UYP who migrated at an age before their cultural identity may have fully developed, and are often assumed to be isolated from families and communities (as discussed in Chapter Seven). In recent research Söderqvist (2014) has recognised that UYP are not simply uprooted from their past relationships and cultural practices. She asserts that migrant identities are not tethered to geographical space. Indeed, the findings from this study suggest that young people's social networks cannot be understood by a focus on transnational relationships in isolation from other parts of the social network, and that a more fruitful emphasis might be on the complex 'socio-cultural' fields in which young people negotiate their cultural identities. Socio-cultural fields refer to the 'set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices and resources are unequally exchanged, organised and transformed' (Levitt & Glick-Schiller 2004: 1009). The existence of these social fields emerged within young people's narratives, particularly in discussions about the creation of intimate partner relationships and marriage. Zahra's story in particular is illustrative of this.

Zahra was separated from her father and sister during migration from Eritrea. She located two male family members living in the same city as her. Through them she made contact with her father and sister who had settled in another European country. The male family members in her life were a dominant theme in Zahra's narrative and were the source of tension and conflict. The conflict primarily arose

from Zahra's intentions to create a new cultural identity which was distanced from the cultural practices of her family, notably in the arena of intimate partner relationships. Her father was keen for Zahra to marry within the Eritrean community. However Zahra, who had no intention of getting married for a long time, was adamant that she would not marry an Eritrean.

They [Eritrean men] want to be in charge all the time and I can't take that. My dad shouts at me and says "but that's the culture" but I don't care about the culture. We're not in Eritrea anymore. But my dad thinks I'm mad. He thinks I need a smack in the head. Zahra

Zahra described continual disagreements with her father during her telephone communications with him and was worried about his plans to come to live with her in the UK. She also described how she felt that her behaviour, particularly with young men, was monitored and surveyed by her male relatives who she was living with at the time.

As soon as he sees me talking to someone he calls my dad and says that I am going out with them. He gets the wrong idea. But he doesn't know anything. I was on the stress to the maximum until the social workers helped me move out. My dad said I would not be his daughter anymore if I moved out but I said that's fine by me. He knows he can control me, through my dad, because I do what my dad tells me to do."

Dwyer (2000) has noted that migrant women's behaviour may be policed by young men and this resonates with Zahra's experience. The quote above also draws our attention to the way in which gender interacts with family positioning to create differential power relations. It is Zahra's position not just as a woman, but as a daughter which defines her position within this social field. Indeed, Anthias (2013) has identified that 'culture' acts as a medium for intergenerational struggles and the control of older generations over the young. The issue had become more pertinent since her sister had moved to live with her in the UK and had subsequently met and become engaged to an Eritrean man. For Zahra, her sister's contrasting levels of conformity were a product of her father's influence.

It's different for her, she's been with family, with my dad all along, but I've not had that. I've been on my own. Zahra

Zahra's story highlights the impossibility of fully understanding complex social relationships within a purely transnational perspective that is associated with 'the container theory of society' in which rootedness in nation states is taken for granted (Urry 2000; Levitt & Glick-Schiller 2004). The actors in Zahra's social network are sited in multiple locations (none of which are the country of origin), and are actively mobile across national borders. For Zahra, it is the interaction of family members who are located geographically close to her with those who are not that creates the most difficult struggles.

It is important to note that Zahra was extremely committed to both her family and her community. She was very active within her local church and dedicated to bringing her family together in the UK despite her anxiety about living with her father again. As Olwig (2001) has suggested individuals can be embedded within a socio-cultural field and simultaneously reject some of the cultural practices and labels that are dominant within that field. Significantly, social fields are conceptualised as fluid with boundaries defined by the participants, in which there is potential for transformational exchange. Zahra, persisted through her conflicts with her father and had some success in changing and transforming his views.

*On Skype yesterday with my dad, it's been a year since I've seen him face-to-face and when I said that (I wanted to get married to a Western person) I got told off. I was like let's just leave this. I've got three years. But I want to convince him little by little. I think it's working. **Zahra***

For Zahra, the site of conflict was centred on the gendered expectations she was subject to within this particular social field, which she experienced as dissonant with her wider social network in the UK. Weinstein-Shr & Henkin (1991) suggest that the maintenance of set gender and generational roles can provide order and continuity for families who have experienced extreme disruption and fragmentation. Similarly, Dwyer (1999; 2000) has discussed the role that migrant women play in the preservation of cultural practices and values and the way in which young migrant women's experiences are impacted by 'familial expectations of appropriate femininities'. This extends beyond the scrutiny of personal relationships and into everyday expectations.

My dad and my cousins, they are the type that they think women should be cleaning all the time. Zahra

For Mariam, another young woman in the study who wished to marry outside of her community, the issue of gendered expectations and practices was graver. Having escaped violence and brutality from men within her family and community, her rejection of gendered cultural practices in her homeland was complete and thought-provoking.

I want a nice person. I don't want a man that treat me badly or beats me. I don't want a violent man. I want a man love me and help me out. Mariam

Mariam, unlike Zahra, had no contact with any male members of family, and no current necessity to negotiate her decisions within her family. However, both young women were linked by their desire to create partnerships built on equality and a rebalancing of power within gendered relationships from those they had thus far experienced

I want to be able to do everything for myself. I don't want to depend on someone, on a man. I want to work and do it all for myself. Mariam

I see Eritrean women getting married, they used to be our friends but now they don't come out as much, they are more, don't have the life they used to have. But if you get married to someone from here your life is the same. You just have to plan it. In Eritrea they don't know about planning. They leave their wives at home they go pub with their friends. In Eritrean community they drink, so they go play and drink. They leave wives with the kids. When I saw that I thought that's not for me. Zahra

This suggests that their choices were not simply about choosing a partner, but additionally about renegotiating a new, more powerful gender identity, made possible by the fracturing of old social fields upon migration, creating a space for new social fields to be created or positions within existing social fields to be renegotiated. As Curran and Saguy (2001) have recognised, migration creates an opportunity for gender roles to shift, both on an individual and collective cultural level.

Whilst Zahra and Mariam's stories have drawn our attention to pertinent issues about gendered power relations within UYP's social fields, it was not just young women

who experienced conflict and tension about their choices of partners. Zula, a Somalian male, reported similar experiences. He had developed intimate relationships outside of his culture and religion. He was currently in a committed relationship with a European girl. This had created friction within his social network. However, Zula had no contact with any of his family, with whom he had lost contact during migration. For Zula, the opposition emerged from within his local ethnic and religious community who were vocal in their disapproval of his choice of girlfriend. However, he felt able and free to choose his own partner because he was not in contact with his family.

I don't care because I don't have family. If my family were here it might be different but now it's my choice. Zula

Whilst Zula did plan to find his family in the future, and take his girlfriend and their imagined future children with him, their absence in the present had freed him to pursue the partner relationships of his choice, despite protestations from his local community. Zaki felt similarly that he was free to choose a partner from outside of his community, although he did not link this with his lack of contact with family. He felt that everyone was free to choose whom they married and did not envisage any problems within his community, demonstrating again the wide differences in how young people experienced their cultural communities, even where they had similar levels of embeddedness within them.

Families can play an important role in the development of a cultural identity and the freedom to develop new divergent identities may arise from socio-cultural fields with little family input, as in the case of Zula and Zaki. Parents in particular are considered to be a key medium through which cultural ideas and values are transmitted (Phinney et al. 2001b) and little consideration has been given to the way in which migrant identities might develop for unaccompanied young people who remain detached from their families. As explained in Chapter Seven, for those young people who remain in contact with family or reunite with them, they are embedded in a complex social field in which their individual migration might be seen as part of a family life project and the ability of the family to survive and continue (Chase et al. 2013; Kohli 2011). It is within this context that 'family traditions, ideas and norms are negotiated over time' (Coe 2011: 1997)

The issue of choosing a life partner and challenging gender roles emerged from these findings as one of the ideas and norms that were being negotiated. The issue of intimate and sexual relationships is rarely addressed in the literature on UYP, and is a limited feature of migration studies more broadly, with notable exceptions (Cantu 2009; Vasquez del Aguila 2014). There are a number of possible reasons why sexual and intimate relationships are not a focus of research on UYP. First, the majority of research in this area focuses on unaccompanied children and younger teenagers, potentially missing areas of interest that become more relevant during the transition to adulthood. Secondly, as Crawley (2006) asserts, unaccompanied children and young people are desexualised within the literature in order to emphasise their victimhood and vulnerability. Where sex and sexuality does arise in research on this group it is framed in terms of exploitation and risk, particularly for girls (Crawley 2006). Thirdly, young people may be reluctant to discuss these personal issues with researchers and professionals. Indeed, Chapter Nine reported findings that the professionals interviewed in this study knew very little about the intimate and sexual relationships that young people were involved in. Indeed, one professional was shocked to discover that two of the UYP on her caseload had married each other without her knowing they were in a relationship with each other. Some of the professionals felt that there may be a cultural aspect to the silence surrounding sexual relationships.

*I think sometimes it's a cultural thing. It's something that culturally you don't speak openly about, particularly with the boys. You don't necessarily want to talk about that with someone who is mother figure to you. **Personal Advisor***

Again, the interrelated issues of culture and gender interact to create a space in which talking about sexual relationships becomes difficult. One professional who recognised this issue described how they had dealt with this in the past:

*Sometimes they don't want to talk about it with workers that they perceive as being from a similar cultural background to them. There is a worry that it's not appropriate, particularly with female workers. We have dealt with that by getting young people, the young boys to speak with other members of the team, from outside of their culture and maybe a male worker and then they are more comfortable. **Social Worker***

Whilst there are many reasons why this issue is a difficult one to address in practice and in research, the findings presented in this chapter suggest that intimate partner relationships may be a key area of divergence within UYP's social fields, and a sphere in which young women in particular might be struggling to negotiate their cultural identities.

12.3 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the previously under-researched area of the socio-cultural transitions of UYP as they develop and negotiate complex cultural identities in the transition to adulthood. The findings highlight the active role that young people take in learning and engaging with UK cultural practices as well as maintaining past cultural practices. Further to this, the findings illustrate the complexity of negotiating such cultural transitions and the need to look beyond the construction of bi-cultural identities dominated by the national, ethnic and religious aspects of the 'home' culture to understand the variety and breadth of cultural identities that young people look to develop. Using the lens of 'social fields' to explore this further, the findings suggest that UYP are embedded within complex social fields which were not bound by geographical space and which, like culture and identity themselves, are fluid and negotiated over time. In particular, some young people experienced a renegotiation of their gendered identities and sexual relationships. This is a topic that has received limited attention in past research. Overall, this chapter has brought to the fore the negotiated and fluid nature of cultural identities and practices during the transition to adulthood, as well as highlighting the importance of moving beyond some of the dualisms within migration research towards an understanding that the social networks of UYP operate not just transnationally, but in complex multi-sited social fields in which geographical place and distance is not always the most salient factor.

Chapter Thirteen

Socio-historical time and space

13.0 Introduction

This final findings chapter is concerned with placing the experiences of UYP in the macro socio-historical context. A life-course perspective aims to understand the relationship between human lives and the changing social milieu in which they are lived (Hunt 2005). Therefore the aim of this chapter is to connect the individual experiences of UYP with the wider global, social and political context through which their life course is structured. The findings from this study suggest that a crucial overarching aspect of the current socio-historical landscape is the relative mobility and immobility of migrant populations. The first part of this chapter explores the salient impacts of the UK's approach to immigration and asylum in the context of an increasingly mobile global world. In particular, the impermanence and forced temporariness now inherent in the immigration and asylum system is found to create both spatial and temporal immobilities which extensively impact the young people's social networks. The second part of the chapter emphasises the ways in which fluctuations in the mobility of different groups of migrants affects the young people's social networks. The findings demonstrate that variations in the numbers of UASC arriving in the UK and their countries of origin impact on national and local infrastructures of support. More broadly, the relative mobilities and immobilities of different groups of migrants have profound effects on the communities in which UYP live, as well as the transnational communities with which they are connected.

13.1 Spatial and temporal immobility: The impact of the asylum system

UK immigration and asylum policy is becoming more restrictive (Dwyer et al. 2011; Schuster 2011; Lewis et al. 2012). Despite an increasingly mobile, globalised world in which the relevance of national and territorial citizenship is now contested, governments across Europe have become progressively more concerned with controlling access to citizenship (Mulvey 2010; Waite 2012). In this context, issues of

asylum and immigration have become conflated, and the relatively protected humanitarian space occupied by refugees and asylum seekers is now highly politicised and dominated by punitive control and monitoring measures designed to deter further migration to the UK (Cresswell 2010). One particular aspect of this policy landscape is the creation of hierarchies of citizenship, described by Ong (1999) as the creation of differentiated 'zones of citizenship' which mediate levels of access to social rights, including mobility rights. Dwyer (2009), echoing Morris's (2003) concept of 'civic stratification', describes this phenomenon within the UK as the 'tiering' of citizenship, referencing asylum seekers and refugees as examples of the way in which access to citizenship is now graduated and fragmented. For refugees and asylum seekers the consequence of this policy context has been a move towards institutionalised temporariness (Rajkumar et al. 2012), a situation in which full access to citizenship is withheld, either permanently or for protracted periods of time, whilst some temporary protection is offered.

Whilst uncertainty and periods of waiting are inherent within the broader immigration system, they manifest in two particular ways for UYP. The first and most pertinent is the policy of granting UASC who fail in their asylum claims periods of temporary discretionary leave as outlined in Chapter Two. The second, which is not particular to unaccompanied children and young people, is the change made in 2006 to Refugee Status, which is now granted for a period of five years, after which the individual's claim to Refugee Status is reviewed (See Chapter Two for further details of this change).

One of the key impacts of temporary status is the differentiated access to mobility that each status confers (Hannam et al. 2006). Issues of mobility and particularly enforced immobility have become deeply intertwined with notions of citizenship and social divisions, with some scholars suggesting that mobility rights are the most critical element of citizenship (Urry 1998). Mobility and immobility are also connected to issues of power and control, particularly within the immigration system which researchers have amply demonstrated uses control of movement and immobility in order to manage and govern immigrant populations (Bourdieu 1999; Griffiths 2014). Thus far, migration researchers have focused largely on spatial mobility and immobility. However, this section seeks to connect spatial mobility with temporal mobility, which I am defining as the ability to feel able to move forward in time.

The impacts of temporary and uncertain statuses have been evident throughout this thesis, but are worth restating here in order to make explicit their connection to experiences of immobility. Chapter Ten revealed the difficulty that ARE young people faced in projecting themselves temporally into the future. Chapter Eleven demonstrated that some UYP experience feelings of being 'off time' from their peers, unable to move forwards with their transitions to adulthood whilst others progressed around them. Throughout the thesis we have seen how young people's plans hinge on the ability to reunite with and provide for their families; plans which are only possible when various legal limbos have been resolved. All these experiences can be understood as forms of temporal immobility, the experience of feeling unable to move forward in time (either through the inability to imagine and actualise future time, or the sensation that time is progressing without you).

The waiting and uncertainty that is associated with this type of temporal immobility has permeated the literature on UYP, which emphasises that the overwhelming concern during the transition to adulthood is the resolution of asylum claims and the achievement of a permanent status (Wade et al. 2012; Refugee Support Network 2012; Chase & Allsopp 2013). The negative impacts of chronic waiting and uncertainty have been documented with this group (Chase et al. 2015) and in the migration literature more generally (Griffiths 2013), with findings likening the waiting and uncertainty to a state of limbo or stasis (WLacroix 2004; Wade et al. 2012). Whilst other scholars have recently questioned this conceptualisation of waiting as passive and empty time (Rotter 2016), it is clear that to a large degree waiting for the resolution of an asylum claim is experienced as being stuck in time, what Griffiths (2014) refers to as 'sticky time'. Some of the young people in this study, particularly those who had been awaiting decisions, echoed this established literature. For Mohammed in particular there was a clear sense of frustration building over time. Whilst during this first interview he adopted a philosophical and patient approach to waiting, by the second interview three months later, he was finding it considerably more difficult to manage.

Waiting is my life now. I feel like killing myself because it's all the time the same thing. Nothing changes. Mohammed

You always wait, you say I'll do something when I get my papers, but it never comes. You wait for a decision to move on with your life... I need to move on or go back. Just something. Idris

The need for movement, for some kind of change or shift to occur, was felt acutely by these young people. Chase & Allsopp (2013) have previously suggested that being young may heighten the impulse to move forward, and this likely interacts with the enormity of the awaited decision to create an intense need to alleviate the waiting. Indeed, the desire to be released from their temporal immobility may begin to override even their fear of return:

My mum. She speak to me about visa, saying if you don't have document then just come back but I can't do that without document. I can't even leave without the documents. Yousef

The experience of waiting, although much derided by many of the young people, was not experienced as acutely where young people were awaiting initial decisions or had a number of years of temporary leave still to go. Where ultimate decisions seemed a long way off in the future, young people were cautiously optimistic that they would ultimately achieve Refugee Status, and perceived temporary leave as a necessary step on the pathway to permanency. However, Kamal's experience suggests that such assuredness may be naïve. After ten years and a number of extensions to his temporary leave, Kamal had been refused Refugee Status or any further extensions, and was facing the prospect of deportation. He provided a striking critique of the policy of offering temporary leave to unaccompanied children.

I would request the government, if someone comes here first all, then send them back straight away or give them permanent stay. Don't mess about. Don't waste all that time and money. People might find somewhere else to go. They let me stay because everyone feels bad for young. Now you are older they don't care. I have done all these things here and made my life here – but they should have sent me away the first time. Kamal

For Kamal, the wait for a decision had come to an end, but the negative result precipitated a temporal reversal, the real-life equivalent of landing on a snake in a

game of 'snakes and ladders', sliding back through all the progression that had been made to where he had begun.

This temporal backslide is indicative of the potential pitfalls of making binary distinctions between experiences of mobility and immobility, with the assumption that one is either moving forward or stuck. Kamal's experience reminds us of the need to attend to the interplay of motion and stasis both spatially and temporally (Cresswell & Merriman 2011). A focus on temporal mobilities brings into view the potential for mobility to be experienced as moving on, but also as a moving backwards in time, erasing along the way all that has been achieved so far. Whilst the 'temporalities of slowness, stillness, waiting and pause' (Sheller 2011: 4) are commonly discussed as part of the theorising of mobility and movement, temporal backsliding is rarely acknowledged.

Importantly, it was not just those who were currently experiencing the sharp end of impermanent citizenship statuses that discussed this issue. Many of the young people who now had Refugee Status, but had experienced temporary statuses, referred to the lasting impact that 'institutionalised temporariness' and uncertainty had on their lives.

*I was scared about getting my status. I was scared to be in my house in case they send me back to Africa. Even now, when I see a police officer in town I'm scared of them. **Mariam***

Other young people noted the impact of legal difficulties in extending periods of temporary leave or periods of time waiting for claim decisions. Perhaps the most important impact was on their access to education. They noted in particular the longer-term effects of disrupted access to education (discussed also in Chapter Ten) had on their academic progression, suggesting that even when 'permanency' of some kind is achieved, the effects of being 'temporarily temporary' continued to echo throughout their lives.

Indeed, changes to the legal category of 'refugee' have added further layers of temporariness to the experience of asylum seekers. As Chase et al. (2015) have asserted previously, Refugee Status does not mark the end of waiting and the beginning of permanence. In this study, Mariam expressed this feeling clearly.

*Five years is not permanent. If I could stay forever it would be like I have a place that is my country. I would like to be a citizen. I want them to say “you are part of us”. For now I’m not really part of your country, but I’m trying. I worry that they won’t let me stay. **Mariam***

Like Mariam, many of the young people in this study who had been granted Refugee Status found that it did not necessarily solve all the problems that they had anticipated it would.

*You think that when you get status everything is going to be wonderful but it’s not. **Sohail***

*Everyone makes it sound as if – if you get Refugee Status it will be brilliant but it is not really like that, it is still like a prison, like a jail. **Faizal***

Indeed, the restricted mobility attached to Refugee Status was a crucial issue for many refugee young people. In particular, the restrictions on travel to their country of origin became problematic. Faizal, quoted above likening his status to ‘a jail’, was concerned for the welfare of his orphaned siblings in Afghanistan. His status disallowed him from travelling to Afghanistan to see them or from applying to bring them to the UK. He showed me a photograph of his siblings, saying:

*This is all I have left of them... y’know you ask me if I can imagine seeing my brother and sister again, and I say no? It’s because I want to see them grow up and learn. I want to see them now. They are there now. The process is a really long time and it’s still not finished. **Faizal***

This quote demonstrates how the spatial and temporal immobilities created by the current immigration regime interact with each other. For Faizal, the temporal aspect of his estrangement from family is paramount. He is not only geographically prevented from being with them, he is simultaneously prevented from being with them at a particular time and experiencing the passage of time with them. That Faizal chose to show a photograph of these siblings is especially poignant. As Rosa (2013: 11) has said family photographs represent a ‘trace of someone’s presence and an awareness of the pervasiveness of distance and absence’.

Roshaan, also from Afghanistan, had similar experiences. He recalled meeting with his family in a third country to see them for the first time since he migrated. He was shocked and disappointed that his brother no longer recognised him. Another of Roshaan's siblings had passed away since he migrated and he was unable to attend the funeral, missing not only the passage of time, but the rites of passage that mark both time and family status. As the eldest son in his family he felt strongly that it had been his responsibility to support the family in times of grief, but he was prevented from doing this by the mobility restrictions of his legal status. In happier times too, his inability to mark rites of passage with his family was difficult to bear. The following conversation emerged in the interview when I asked Roshaan if his parents in Afghanistan were pleased when they found out he had graduated from university:

Roshaan: *I haven't talked to them since then. I said I would ring them and I never did. I will tell them. They will be pleased. I will tell them.*

Interviewer: *I'm surprised that you didn't ring them straight away.*

Roshaan: *I put it off. I said tomorrow, I will tomorrow and then I got busy with stuff, small things.*

Interviewer: *Do you think there was a reason you were reluctant to ring them?*

Roshaan: *I find it hard because they are over there. It would be so good if they were here. I wonder if they will be able to come for graduation... They probably can't. I will ring them tomorrow.*

Whilst many of the young people were unable to contemplate return to their countries of origin and indeed feared for their lives if they returned, others were willing to take calculated risks in order to see their families again. This did not mean they wished to return permanently to the country in the near future, but that after such long periods of separation, and with a strong sense of responsibility to family members, the gravitational pull of a brief visit home exerted an ever-stronger force. As Roshaan asked me during his interview:

What would you do if you hadn't seen your family in six years? **Roshaan**

To summarise, the current socio-historical context in which UYP migrate is one of increased global mobility and a concurrent attempt by governments to manage and restrict the mobility of different groups. Whilst the literature on mobility and immobility has largely focused on the restricted mobility of migrants who cannot migrate or are in transit to western countries (Carling 2002; Toyota et al. 2007; Suter 2013; Stock 2013), this study has explored the im/mobilities of UYP within the UK asylum system, linking issues of immobility with the temporary statuses that are likely to experience. Crucially, immobility is experienced as both spatial and temporal. Temporal immobilities take many forms, including the inability to 'move on' with one's life or imagine a future, difficulty with progressing through life-course transitions to education and work 'on time' with peers, and powerlessness to experience the passage of time and rites of passage with family members. The findings have also demonstrated the need to look beyond binary notions of being either mobile, which is regularly constructed as positive and active, or immobile, which is oppositionally constructed as negative and passive. For these young people it is the inability to move to very specific places at very specific points in time which is problematic. Whilst they can travel to almost anywhere in the world when they achieve 'permanency', it is the one place in the world they most need to be that they cannot reach. Temporal mobility, movement through time, has also been shown to have non-linear qualities. At the extreme end of temporary statuses, temporality can be experienced as operating backwards, as Kamal's story demonstrated.

This reveals the falsehood of another 'dichotomy of migration'; the sharp distinction between temporary and permanent statuses, with the assumption of a linear movement from temporary to permanent (King 2002). The findings from this study demonstrate the ways in which multiple periods of temporariness can protract into something which feels like permanence, as Kamal reveals when he talks about the life he has built in the UK over many years. The findings also show how temporariness does not end with Refugee Status; the feelings and fears of insecurity can continue, as do the tangible effects of disrupted pathways to education and work.

Direct impacts on social networks have been evident. 'Chronic' waiting may make young people begin to contemplate a return home, particularly for those who have family to return to. What emerges most powerfully, however, is the way in which

temporal and spatial immobility disconnects young people from their families for extensive periods of time, which become gradually harder to tolerate. There is a clear logic to the policy of restricting young people from visiting their home countries, as their safety may be compromised. The question of why someone would choose to visit a place that they have sought refuge from is a complex one, and as Cresswell (2010) has suggested, the issue of to what degree movement is a choice is not straightforward, and there are innumerable degrees of necessity within any act of movement.

13.2 Migration, mobility and services

The previous section explored the impact of increasingly restrictive asylum policy in the current socio-historical period on the social networks of UYP, noting specifically the ways in which institutionalised temporariness and immobility (both spatial and temporal) impacts on young people as they transition to adulthood. Mobility and immobility emerged as key themes. In this section the differentiated im/mobility of particular groups within young people's communities is shown to be a powerful mediating influence on young people's social networks. This section presents an exploration of the impact that fluctuations in numbers of UASC arriving in the UK at different time periods has on the infrastructure of services and support that unaccompanied children and young people receive.

The experiences of the young people in this study were shaped by the specific context in which they migrated to the UK, including the numbers of other young asylum seekers who were arriving at the same time. Some of the older UYP in this study arrived as part of the cohort of UASC who came to the UK at a time when UASC numbers were relatively high. Due to the large numbers of children seeking asylum at the time a robust infrastructure had emerged within the local area to support their needs. Whilst evidence suggests that services for UASC nationally were patchy and inconsistent at the time, some LAs (including the one in which this study took place) had invested heavily in services for UASC (Wade et al. 2005). The LA in which this study took place had developed a specialist support team for refugee and asylum-seeking children and young people. A large number of voluntary services had appeared in response to the increases of UASC, many of which had

strong collaborative partnerships with statutory services. However, as the numbers of unaccompanied children in the UK diminished, services, both statutory and voluntary, had undergone a period of transformation. The specialist team was disbanded in 2011 and many voluntary services had closed or reduced their activity due to decreased demand.

Both professionals and young people referred positively to the community of young asylum seekers that developed when numbers of UASC were high and extensive services were available.

When we were getting eight [UASC arrivals] a week there was a real community. They all went to the youth groups. Everybody knew everybody. You could always link new arrivals in with the group. Now they go to foster placements out of the city. There are fewer services and no community.

Senior Social Worker

Due to the large numbers of UASC, the specialist team were able to place UASC aged sixteen and over into shared accommodation, finding it relatively easy to place new arrivals with others who spoke the same language and had similar ethnic affiliations and identities. However, as numbers dropped the arrangement became untenable, and foster placements became more common, with ambiguous consequences.

Standard practice five years ago, if they were sixteen or over, was to place them in supported accommodation with other young people. That created immediate support networks and community. We had fifteen or twenty houses. Now we don't have that because we don't have the numbers. On the other hand you could argue that now in foster placement they get a lot more adult support. **Social Worker**

Just as social workers became unable to make social connections for young people through shared accommodation, their ability to create informal mentoring relationships between individual young people also diminished when the specialist team was disbanded. These informal mentoring friendships were discussed in Chapter Eight, and emerged as crucial and enduring social connections for many

UYP. However, the professional's role in establishing such friendships declined with the loss of the specialist team.

Now the team is across six teams rather than one team you don't always know who's around in terms of new arrivals. You're relying on social workers who haven't had years of knowing who is in the city. They can't do it [connect young people to each other] that easily. **Senior Social Worker**

This informal mentoring system was also highly valued by professionals, who noted that it was a first step in building trust with newly arrived young people. The ability of another unaccompanied young person to vouch for the social worker, and explain that they were there to help, was not only a comfort to new arrivals but also created a foundation of trust for social workers to begin to build on. In even more practical terms it allowed social workers to begin communicating with newly arrived children and young people very quickly, without having to wait for (and indeed pay for) translation services. Social workers noted how accessing translators for some dialects was extremely difficult, and without other young people to assist they might have to rely on translators who only spoke similar dialects.

The professionals generally regretted the loss of the old system that had operated when large number of UASC were arriving, and were frustrated at the loss of many services that had occurred when numbers of arrivals began to drop. However, it was clear there had been some problems with previous ways of working and the huge pressures on the service from large numbers of newly arrived children. Some of the young people recalled negative experiences of being housed in groups with other young asylum-seeking boys.

I fell out with the boys in the accommodation. I didn't like it. I was trying to study and they were noisy and disrespectful. I really wanted to live with a family but that didn't really happen then. **Faizal**

Whilst conflict between young people did occur, and social workers were concerned that conflicts based on religious or political beliefs could happen if young people were not sensitively placed, the professionals felt that the overall system at that time worked well for most young people, and only a minority of young people experienced problems in shared housing. Indeed, even Faizal occasionally felt nostalgic for that

time, reflecting that he had lots more friends during that period and 'lots of people to talk to', compared to the more isolating experience of both foster care and living independently as an adult.

Whatever the relative merits of the new versus the old systems, it was clear that UYP encountered vastly different experiences dependent on the numbers of UASC who arrived at similar times. The ready-made quality of social networks that was a consequence of large numbers of UASC from similar countries arriving simultaneously had disappeared in recent years, reducing the role of social workers in linking young people to existing social networks and causing young people to have to take their own initiative to access networks. However, those who had arrived more recently had proved very able to develop their own networks over time, and had largely benefited from foster placements, where they accessed not only adult support from foster carers but also the opportunity to develop friendships with other looked-after young people in the same placement (as discussed in Chapters Eight and Nine). Despite these new avenues to make social connections, they did face a more difficult social terrain to navigate, with fewer voluntary organisations and community organisations available to them. Social work professionals pointed out that this was particularly the case for post-eighteen services.

*A lot of post-eighteen services closed fairly recently. One really good one which we referred to and relied on a lot closed. So there is now limited support out there. All the funding in the voluntary sector is gone. **Personal Advisor***

Young people who had experienced this transition in the framework of local services commented on these changes:

*I used to go to the youth clubs all the time but they all shut down now. We don't have that anymore. I used to go to a charity place. Young people would all meet together and play games and have food, but that's not there anymore. They don't have that anymore because there is not as many people coming. **Sohail***

I did a lot of things before. I used to go to another project after school for three years and there were students from uni coming to do stuff so they were coming from city learning centre and we all used to go there **Faizal**

One youth club for refugee young people remained in operation, and some of the newer arrivals attended weekly. They benefited from it enormously, but did note that they mostly spoke different languages as they tended to come from a broad range of different countries. Whilst they still found ways to communicate and enjoy each other's company, they lacked opportunities to connect with other young people from their own countries.

As the fieldwork for this research drew to a close, the numbers of UASC arriving in the UK began to increase due to escalating global upheaval and conflict in recent years (Refugee Council 2016). As final interviews took place, the potential consequences of this change were beginning to hit the consciousness of professionals and services providers. The workers on the front line, and those with more experience of UASC, were the first to grasp the gravity of this change and try to formulate responses to it. Whilst there was anxiety about the increased workload and the lack of infrastructure (particularly in the context of squeezed local authority budgets in this period of 'austerity'), there was also optimism that the accumulated experience and knowledge gained in the past could be put into practice again. Front-line professionals picked up quickly on the changes, but managers higher up the scale were slower to respond. One team manager, interviewed a few weeks before newspapers and academics began reporting on a European 'refugee crisis' (Papataxiarchis 2016; Bozorgmehr et al. 2016), appeared unprepared for any change and could not envisage any need for services to adapt in the near future.

Looking at it, the numbers appear pretty steady at the moment. Nothing at all like what we were experiencing a few years ago. Specialist teams had a place at that time but the situation is very different now and I can't see that changing, from the numbers as they stand now. **Team Manager**

Only a few weeks later, young people were arriving in the UK in much larger numbers and the service was finalising arrangements to take young people from councils in coastal counties, who felt they were unable to cope with the sudden

increases. One experienced professional agreed to be interviewed about the changes:

We're now taking groups of young people who can't be adequately accommodated in the councils they arrived in. We had a group of eight young people arrive this week and we have been able to put them in shared accommodation together, much like we used to when we had large numbers. We are coping okay with it at the minute, although a lot of the staff are not really trained for this and we don't have the processes we used to. But we do need to think about what we are going to do in the medium term, if this continues. In my opinion, only specialist teams can deal with this properly, if it continues like this. It's the most sensible way to respond to it. **Senior Social Worker**

As the fieldwork closed professionals were in discussions with management about the possibility of reinstating a specialist team, at least temporarily, but concerns remained that the infrastructure that had grown up around UYP in the area had been recently dismantled, and would take time to emerge and develop again. Changes in migrant populations require flexible and adaptable services to react to the fluctuating demands for services (McCabe & Phillimore 2012). Some of the social workers remarked on the seemingly strange idea that arriving at a time when services were most under pressure might be beneficial. But they believed that it could be the case as specialist services were much more likely to be available and ready to respond. However, it is for future research to discover if services ultimately rose to the challenge during the current increase in UASC.

These findings make clear that individual mobility and immobility must be understood within the broader context of collective movements of people. What is most striking is the undeniable impact of the time period in which young people migrate. National and local infrastructures of support can change rapidly as they respond to the oscillations in global patterns of mobility. Research by the Institute for Public Policy Research (Griffith & Halej 2015) suggests that migrant (although not specifically refugee) communities are becoming increasingly transient, noting in particular the problematic impacts on social networks. They suggest that the trajectory of migration in particular local areas influences how far migrant groups can benefit from the

presence of co-national groups and better quality services, supporting the findings presented here.

13.3 Im/mobility and community networks.

Shifting global mobilities and immobilities affected young people's networks beyond the infrastructure of statutory and voluntary services in multiple ways. As Hannam et al. (2006) suggest, places are dynamic; their nature and scale liable to be altered by mobilities. Contrasts appeared between young people from different countries of origin in terms of the strength of the communities they could access. Some of the Afghani young people noted a decline in their community, which they attributed to a perception amongst migrants that the UK was now a difficult place to seek citizenship.

But people not coming here now, because not staying, they not gonna get to stay so not coming from Afghanistan no. No, going other places, other countries where they can stay. So, not so many people here now to talk to.

Sohail

Sohail was one of the young Afghani men who had been here for a significant period of time. As well as noting the impact of decreased migration from Afghanistan to the UK, he lamented the departure of many of his Afghani friends who had voluntarily left or been forcibly removed from the community over time.

*People are more spread out now. Many of them get deported or go to London, people like to go to London, get jobs, more businesses in London, make business there. Many of my friends have spread out and gone. **Sohail***

The interplay of the mobility and immobility of people within the Afghani community had further consequences for Sohail's social network. He was particularly concerned that he would not be able to marry an Afghani woman and bring her into the UK.

I'm worried about getting a life partner, about being alone. I want to have life partner and many children, but worried. My brother got married and it is working but he can't bring them here, y'know his wife and baby can't bring them yet. So, if you go back home and get wife you might not be able to get

*her back... It will only get worse, harder, and more strict. There are many changes now, so many changes. So that worries me. **Sohail***

Other young people noted the broader influence that restrictive immigration regimes were having on their local communities.

*Y'know sometimes when you go to town and you see people and they are like in the Betfred and they look miserable, they just spend 24/7 in there you know betting and stuff like that. I see people from my country y'know, older than me, they haven't got papers and they spend 24/7 in there. And sometimes when you see them, that scare you. **Idris***

In contrast, the young people from African countries described a vibrant and developing community which they were able to access, although Zahra did point out that it was common for the young people in the community to move out of the area for work and study, just as it is for many young people in the UK as they transition to adulthood. Despite the relative normality of young people moving on, social workers did feel that access to social networks was very different dependent on country of origin

*There are really big and active African communities in the city at the moment, so if you're from one of those communities it's relatively easy to access that or for social workers and foster carers to link you in. If you're from a country where there is not so many people coming then it's going to be a lot more difficult. **Senior Social Worker***

However, there was a flipside to this burgeoning community which concerned young people who had left family behind. With vast numbers of people, particularly young people, migrating out of some African countries, participants were concerned about the communities they had left behind.

*There are no young people left where I come from anymore. Everyone is getting out, girls and boys. There is only very old and very young left. It does make me worry about who is going to look after my mum. I think she must get quite lonely. **Makhda***

*It's so quiet there. It's like its dead now. My country. **Medhane***

These findings highlight both the dynamism and fragility of local communities, in the UK and transnationally, which are impacted by global patterns of migration, mobility and immobility. Change over time was evident, both in the changes that young people observed within their realms of their own life course (the loss of friends to deportation or a change of location) and in terms of the changing face of the places they lived as patterns of migration fluctuated. The potential pitfalls of conceptualising migration and mobility as a movement from one fixed place to another also emerge (Steel 2014). Places are not fixed, and even where young people find some level of 'permanency', the places they settle and the places they leave behind continue to change and transform, for better or for worse, demonstrating again the limits of conceptualising the migration process as a linear movement from unrootedness to settlement. Access to social networks of many different kinds alters and wavers in tandem with the movements of people in and out of the city; new communities thrive and others diminish, circles of friends and fellow refugees expand and contract as legal processes resolve and their contemporaries become mobile again, voluntarily or forcibly. The changing 'geography of resettlement' (Hynes 2011) for refugees and asylum seekers has been the subject of research, although usually in respect to the policy of dispersing asylum seekers across different local authorities, which unaccompanied young people are not subject to (Hynes & Sales 2009; Hynes 2011). However, Fried (2000) has drawn attention to the 'social discontinuities' that exist within migrant and ethnic communities regardless of specific policies such as dispersal which have direct impacts on local populations. What is clear from the findings presented in this section, is that 'resettlement', even where it involves some form of permanency in terms of legal status, is still subject to the shifting social landscapes of the places and spaces where UYP find themselves. In this way socio-historical time continually impacts the social networks available to young people, as demographics shift in response to global events, national policies and local changes.

13.4 Conclusion

Taking the different sections of this chapter together, the impact of the current socio-historical context, whilst difficult to fully appreciate contemporaneously, can be recognised as a mediating factor that affects the social networks of UYP in complex

ways. A number of social commentators have advanced strong arguments that the impact of increased global mobility is one of the most salient attributes of the current age (Urry 2007; Cresswell 2010), and its applications to young people who migrate are obvious. Taking mobility as a starting point, the chapter considered government responses to certain types of mobility, and in particular the immigration regimes designed to control and manage mobility (Cresswell 2010). As Hannam et al. (2006) suggest, a globally increased mobility can heighten the immobility of particular peoples, with refugee movement now constructed as particularly problematic.

The temporariness that is a relatively new feature of these systems has been commented on widely. The findings in this chapter linked temporary statuses with both spatial and temporal immobilities, and explored the restrictions UYP experience in moving on in time and in space. Beyond the restrictions conferred on individuals due to their legal categories, collective mobilities and immobilities impacted the young people's social networks via the effects on policies, services and local communities, ultimately demonstrating that whilst a permanent status may be achieved, the permanency of social networks rooted in particular places is much more elusive.

Chapter Fourteen

Conclusion

14.0 Introduction

This thesis contributes to a field of research emerging across Europe in response to concerns that the transition to adulthood for unaccompanied young people is both an under-researched topic and a major contemporary concern for policy makers and social care practitioners (Wade 2011; JCHR 2013; Chase & Allsopp 2013; Söderqvist 2014). The research was undertaken in the context of amplified interest in immigration issues broadly, and child immigration particularly, as Europe experiences a much debated 'refugee crisis' (Holmes & Castaneda 2016), in the midst of increasingly exclusionary and restrictive asylum policies developing throughout the continent (Guild & Groenendijk 2016). Whilst the UK response to refugees and asylum seekers changes over time (Schuster & Bloch 2002), the current policy context is characterised by an 'expanding and repressive apparatus' of immigration control compounded by the politics of 'austerity' and decreased public spending (Vickers 2012: 46; Mayblin 2014). For children, the exclusionary practices of immigration regimes exist in tension with contemporary Western discourses, which construct them as vulnerable and in need of protection due to both their chronological age and displacement from families. The manifestation of this tension in policy is the proliferation of grants of temporary immigration status offering time-

limited protection and support which expire on reaching adulthood, when unaccompanied young people are also engaged in negotiating their exit from leaving care services (Wade 2011; Wade et al. 2012).

Whilst knowledge of unaccompanied children is robust, and the study of adult asylum seekers has thrived, knowledge of unaccompanied young people has largely fallen between the cracks in the child/adult divide, despite some understanding that the transition to adulthood is a troubling and precarious time for this group of young people (Sirriyeh 2013). This situation is changing, and research studies have begun to address this group of young people. However, the focus has largely remained on unaccompanied young people as isolated entities, dislocated from social relationships, replicating the individual orientation evident in studies of unaccompanied children (Wernesjo 2012; Clark-Kazak 2012). This research therefore endeavoured to understand unaccompanied young people within their social context by exploring their social networks as they transition to adulthood.

Social networks were conceptualised as fluid and dynamic constructs, narrated by the participants in the study. Using the life-course approach as a conceptual framework, particular attention has been paid to the spatial and temporal aspects of the social networks. Drawing on a range of interview methods with both unaccompanied young people and relevant professionals, the thesis has addressed the interrelated questions of how young people experience their social networks across time and space in the transition to adulthood, and how immigration status impacts that experience. In addressing these questions the thesis has made contributions to empirical, theoretical and methodological knowledge, which have implications for policy and practice with unaccompanied young people.

14.1 Empirical contributions

The findings from this study demonstrate that unaccompanied young people are not 'radically severed' (Wells 2011) from social networks, but deeply enmeshed in complex and fluid webs of relations across three interacting 'domains': family; peers and community and formal social networks (including foster carers and social care professionals). Previous studies have emphasised disconnection and detachment from social networks, sometimes as an evocation of vulnerability. This is particularly

the case when considering family relationships. Many current understandings of unaccompanied children and young people centralise the act of migration as a singular rupture in time, space and the family network; a 'ground zero' from which new lives and relationships are rebuilt. The findings from this thesis present a more complicated picture in which multiple continuities as well as discontinuities are evident within the young people's social worlds.

Relatedly, evidence emerged that unaccompanied young people are actively engaged in complex and diverse informal social networks of friends, peers and communities. These networks are often multi-faceted and operate beyond the boundaries of ethno-cultural affiliations. Within these social networks 'sameness' and 'difference' are negotiated and renegotiated over time. Generally, young people moved from a desire to connect with others who had similar backgrounds and experiences to the construction of a more cosmopolitan approach to their networks in which diversity was highly valued and desired. However, building strong relationships with other young people who were seeking asylum was crucial, as these friendships provided unique spaces of trust and understanding that endured over time.

Despite the endurance of early relationships formed with other young lone asylum seekers, the process of re/negotiating relationships was a common theme as the social networks were characterised by a state of transformation and flux across all domains, generating both challenges and opportunities. As young people emerged into adulthood their position within family social networks shifted as new, often gendered, roles and responsibilities became more urgent, and focused the young people on their aspirations for the future and hopes of reunification.

Simultaneously, relationships with peers and friends were changing as the young people experienced various educational transitions. Succeeding in education was crucial to the fulfilment of future aspirations and the stability of life-course narratives. As previous studies have suggested (Brownlees & Finch 2010; Wade et al. 2005; Gladwell & Elwyn 2012), education was the primary means of constructing informal networks. Such networks were significantly destabilised by the educational transitions and disruptions commonly experienced by the young people in this study. Where young people were able to remain in education, despite the multiple

obstacles to their success, their social networks were boosted and diversified considerably. The importance of education to unaccompanied young people is well established in terms of promoting well-being (Wade et al. 2005; Gladwell & Elwyn 2012). This study adds an additional dimension, asserting the value of continued access to education during the transition to adulthood particularly in order for young people to maintain and strengthen social networks as well as achieve core aspirations to provide for their families in the future.

The community networks that young people accessed were also shifting as young people negotiated their cultural identities within communities, which provided spaces of belonging and connection but could also prove limiting and constraining to the development of the multi-faceted identities young people experienced, particularly in terms of gendered identities and sexual relationships. As Crawley (2011) has previously suggested, asylum-seeking young people are frequently de-sexualised within the current literature. The findings from this study tentatively suggest that the development of sexual relationships which is a crucial part of the transition to adulthood can be fraught with complexity, as young people cultivate sexual identities within 'social fields' which are both transnational and embedded in local community spaces. At the same time, the changing demography of local communities impacts on the social networks of young people. Where large ethno-cultural communities are available community connections are much easier to access. But these communities are also in a state of flux in response to vacillating conflicts in countries of origin, and the effects of government immigration policies that restrict access to the UK or see many community members returned. These findings demonstrate the transience of the communities in which young people live, and underscore the limitations of linear understandings of pathways to 'resettlement'. Even where young people have security of immigration status, there is no one static 'place' or community in which they might proceed to attain resettlement, rather there are fluid spaces of social interaction within which experiences of belonging are negotiated.

The roles of professionals and foster carers have been explored in previous literature (Kohli 2007; Wade et al. 2005; Wade et al. 2012). As Kohli (2007) has suggested, social care professionals in particular have been portrayed negatively as complicit with oppressive government practices. An over-riding consideration has been the tension for professionals, located at the conflicting intersection of child welfare and

immigration systems which are considered to have irreconcilably divergent values and objectives. However, the findings from this study reframe social care professionals as 'social navigators' (Vigh 2006), ideally positioned to help young people traverse the complex cartography of the bureaucratic institutions of social care and immigration. Many of the young people in this study developed strong, emotional connections with professionals similar to those described by Kohli's (2006b) research, which explored the way social care professionals perceive their relationships with unaccompanied children. However, relationships based on more practical forms of assistance were no less valued. Indeed, strong emotional connections forged between professionals and young people could have ambiguous consequences. Whilst such strong attachments could increase access to resources and support, they also required a careful negotiation of expectations of assistance once formal eligibility ended and a difficult balancing of complex questions of power, agency and equity.

A key research question addressed within this thesis is the impact of immigration status during the transition to adulthood. Immigration status was seen to impact all areas of young people's social networks profoundly. Approaching adulthood with uncertain immigration status had an isolating effect on young people. Many of the young people withdrew from contact with families, avoiding difficult conversations that would cause anxiety and disappointment within family networks. At the same time, young people with uncertain status were more likely to be distrustful of relationships within the peer and community networks, distancing themselves from friendships with young people who did not share their experiences and receiving limited support within religious and ethnic communities. The disrupted access to education and work, which was a common consequence of immigration problems, also had a negative impact as young people's pathways to adulthood diverged considerably based on immigration status. Lacking access to the social spaces of interaction provided by education and work opportunities and struggling to cope with the fear of return to countries of origin, young people without status saw their social worlds diminish at a time when their peers with Refugee Status were expanding and diversifying their social networks. Given the increased likelihood of social isolation, the role of professionals takes on an extra significance for young people with uncertain status. Trusted professionals may be the only person within the social

network who is fully aware of the young person's situation, as they seek to hide their immigration issues from others. Whilst young people had ambiguous feelings towards dependence on services if their immigration status was not resolved, professionals were often the only viable means of accessing support. Losing access to such support emerged as a primary anxiety for young people, and raises pertinent questions about the time-limited nature of services when young people are facing such a high degree of uncertainty and still require substantial assistance with bureaucratic institutions, not least the Home Office immigration system. In the context of diminishing voluntary services to meet such needs there is a strong feeling amongst young people and professionals that social care professionals have a role to play in supporting young people until immigration issues are resolved.

14.2 Theoretical contributions

14.2.1 Vulnerability and the 'rhetoric of social support'

Whilst previous research has focused on unaccompanied young people (and care leavers more generally) as a group who are in need of support, the findings presented here have highlighted that unaccompanied young people perceive themselves primarily as providers of support within social networks characterised by relations of fluctuating and inequitable reciprocity.

Reciprocity was a crucial feature of family networks in particular. Many of the young people were engaged in intricate exchanges of care with family members in the UK and abroad, perceiving themselves as primarily responsible for providing support within the family network, rather than receiving such support. Similarly, the young people often acted as informal mentors to new arrivals, participating in a cycle of support and friendship-making which generated some of the most durable and trusting relationships they experienced. These findings contrast with constructs apparent within the current literature, which position unaccompanied young people as principally recipients of support (both formal and informal), perhaps in order to advocate for resources (Brown 2014). Additionally, these findings suggest a need to move beyond the 'rhetoric of social support' identified within the Leaving Care literature, which is largely concerned with identifying supportive relationships (Hiles et al. 2013), in favour of deepening understanding of the complex and shifting

relations within social networks which cannot be fully understood by a focus on uni-directional experiences of receiving support.

The construction of unaccompanied young people as primarily recipients of support is linked to broader discourses in which young people generally and certain groups of young people in particular are understood as inherently vulnerable (Brown 2014). Within such discourses, younger people are positioned as inhabitants of the walled garden of childhood (Postman 1983), patrolled by (adult) family members or professionals who mediate and guide access to the adult world (Vitus & Lidén 2010). As Bhabha (2009) has noted, unaccompanied young people destabilise Western constructions of the idealised 'normal' childhood through their displacement from family and the 'adult' nature of their experiences. In this study, the young people explicitly addressed the disparity between their experience and UK perceptions of child and adult roles. Drawing on pre-migration and migration journey experiences, the young people constructed narratives of resilience and independence which questioned the notion of an age-associated transition to adulthood. For these young people, 'adult' identities had been assumed in their countries of origin or thrust upon them in arduous migration journeys. For some, the act of migrating itself represented an established rite of passage to adulthood. And yet, attempts to establish themselves as adult in the context of their lives in the UK were complicated by a number of factors. Unresolved immigration status could deny the young people access to the relative independence which was necessary for them to express adult identities (Griffin 1993). An inability to play a contributing role to family networks through continued education and work similarly restricted their ability to fulfil adult roles and responsibilities, which were becoming increasingly important to the young people. Conversely, the perception of increased independence and competent 'adult' identities could lead to less support and access to fewer resources, creating multiple conflicts and tensions for unaccompanied young people as they sought to negotiate the relationships between support, independence and 'adult' roles within their social networks

These findings therefore suggest a rebalancing of focus within the literature, away from assumptions of individual vulnerability wrapped up in Western notions of childhood and towards understanding the multiple ways young people are actively engaged in their own social worlds as both providers and receivers of support, as

they seek to forge adult identities across complex multi-sited social networks. The findings similarly relate to a body of research within the migration field which has sought to contest constructions of child migrants as the 'baggage' of their parents and families, rather than active agents in their own right (Orellana et al. 2001; Graham et al. 2012)

14.2.2 Agency

Agency was identified at the beginning of this thesis as a key emerging concept in the study of unaccompanied young people, with a number of studies recommending that research, policy and practice acknowledge the agency of young people more explicitly (Beazley 2015; Chase 2010; Crawley 2009). However, previous studies have principally portrayed the agency of unaccompanied young people as oppositional to relationships with social care professionals, who tend to be perceived as a controlling or coercive force (Chase 2010; O'Higgins 2012; Chase & Allsopp 2013). However, the findings in this study suggest a relational approach (Burkitt 2016) to agency may be more useful in understanding the relationships young people experienced within the formal aspects of their social networks. This recognises the interdependence inherent within social networks, and allowed for an exploration of the interlinked dynamics of power and emotion in professional relationships. Taking an approach to agency that recognises the duality of structure and agency (Giddens 1984) is helpful in understanding the ways in which young people act and express agency through their relationships with professionals. Whilst they inevitably experienced the system of immigration controls as almost overwhelmingly oppressive and omnipotent, they also recognised the potential power of individuals acting on their behalf. As Burkitt (2016: 327) suggests, 'individuals derive their capacity to produce certain actions or effects from social activity itself'. For many of the young people in this study the most valuable social activity in terms of increasing their capacity for agentic action was their relationship with professionals. However, that is not to deny the complex negotiations of vastly unequal power differentials evident within relationships between young people and professionals. It must also be recognised that it was not within the scope of this

study to reach young people who have absconded from services and who may have had different experiences with professionals. However, in considering the agency of unaccompanied young people a difficult balance must be achieved in acknowledging and challenging the limited power young people experience in relations with the state, whilst simultaneously recognising the scope for personal agency within relationships with professionals who work on behalf of the state.

In focusing on the ways in which agency may be repressed by professionals and practitioners, the literature thus far has largely neglected the role of agency within wider networks and relations, including family and informal networks. In this study, young people were negotiating issues of agency across the whole of their social networks and, especially where they had achieved Refugee Status and were not subject to immigration controls, the primary sites in which they sought to express agency were within family and community networks. Patriarchal systems were experienced as particularly controlling by the girls in this study, as they sought to establish themselves as women within complex social fields of interaction that crossed cultural and geographical boundaries. The transition to manhood that the males in the study experienced was similarly imbued with cultural understandings of masculinity and gender, which were difficult to navigate. Whilst gender was not the sole issue related to agency in this study, it is recognised here as an example of the limitations of understanding agency purely in relation to state systems and practices. This thesis has therefore contributed to a broader understanding of the interplay of structure and agency in the lives of unaccompanied young people by illuminating the negotiation of agency and control in many different types of relationships, rather than considering only the control exerted by the state. Similarly, the thesis has sought to begin to uncover some of the nuanced dynamics of power and agency within relationships with professionals.

14.2.3 Time and space

Researchers are beginning to explore the temporal aspects of migration in addition to the spatial aspects that have historically been prioritised (Griffiths et al. 2013). This thesis considered the interplay of time and space using the life course perspective as a framework. Young people's social networks were seen to operate

across multi-sited social fields that consisted of fluid relationships across time and space. Within these social fields, their identities and positions were negotiated and renegotiated during the transition to adulthood. Conceptualising the social networks as comprising multiple interacting social fields draws attention to the way in which young people constructed identities within their social networks. Rather than bi-cultural identities based on the assumption of a definable 'home' and 'away' (with home frequently defined geographically as the country of origin and temporally as a place occupied before migration), young people pursued fluid, diverse and reflexive identities and belongings within different networks of relations. The dichotomy of home and host countries traditionally found within studies of migration has been challenged by previous researchers who seek to contest the notion of a fixed and singular place called home (Blunt & Dowling 2006: 198; Sirriyeh 2010). Drawing on that work the findings here have considered how 'home' can be located within social networks which transcend time and space.

The act of migration has often been portrayed as a largely linear pathway from uprootedness to resettlement; a line in time and space which begins in the country of origin with the act of migration and ends with integration in a host country. Whilst recent work has begun to challenge this perception, the literature on unaccompanied young people has rarely considered alternative life courses in which the ultimate goals are beyond achieving refugee status and establishing safety in host countries. Chase & Allsopp (2013) have highlighted that unaccompanied young people may have alternative imagined futures to those presumed by the state and professionals. Findings within this study provide some suggestions that young people who achieved Refugee Status are able to imagine broad and diverse futures that cannot simply be understood as resettlement. Overriding aspirations are to reunite with family members either in the UK or abroad. For many, travel was a key part of their imagined future possibilities, with some even daring to dream of a safe passage to their home countries. Time and space in these narratives is not only non-linear but recursive, as young people seek ways back to the relationships of the past whilst maintaining the social networks of the present and projecting them into the future. As Conroy (1995: 104) has eloquently explained, 'no story is a straight line in the imperfect geometry of human life and the bewildering intricacies of fate'.

14.2.4 Chronopolitics: politics and the control of time

As explored above, the young people's social networks were heavily impacted by their immigration status at the time of leaving care. Moreover, young people were impacted by their temporary immigration statuses, regardless of the eventual outcome, particularly as Refugee Status is now another form of temporary status (albeit one with much less uncertainty attached). To understand this experience of temporariness this section draws on the concept of 'chronopolitics' (Fabian 1983) to draw explicit links between UK policy and the experiences represented in this thesis in order to contribute to the growing number of voices critiquing the practice of granting temporary statuses to unaccompanied children (Children's Society 2015; Pobjoy 2015). The term 'chronopolitics' refers to the use of time as a political device for controlling the time of the 'other', in this case, the non-citizen young people. Originally developed as a critique of anthropological ideas and practices, the concept of chronopolitics has also been fruitfully applied to the treatment of refugee and asylum-seeking populations. Van Houtum (2010) has explored chronopolitics in relation to European Union border regimes, and suggests that waiting time and temporary protections can be used to control, manage and immobilise populations. Whilst Van Houtum (2010) is referring specifically to the camp-like spaces emerging within Europe to contain refugees and asylum seekers in transit, the control of time he refers to has also emerged within the context of this study. The young people who had experienced the 'toxic uncertainty' (Auyero & Swistun 2008: 1) of temporary statuses found that their time was controlled in multiple ways which impacted on their social networks. Mobility and immobility, as Van Houtum (2010) suggests, are crucial aspects of the way immigration status exerts control over time. In Chapter Thirteen, the term 'temporal immobility' was used to denote the way in which immigration status prevented young people from moving both backwards and forwards in time, and will be employed again here to explicitly address the impact of the current policy of granting unaccompanied young people temporary status.

The theme of disrupted progress within the transition to adulthood has emerged throughout the findings, notably in obstacles to education and achieving 'adult' roles and responsibilities. As Barbara Adam (2008) has noted, there is a rarely acknowledged plurality of timescapes within which people reside, of which synchronicity with others is a key element. For unaccompanied young people who

are unable to continue with education or access the workplace a process of desynchronisation from peers is likely to take place. On an everyday level this is experienced as being unable to share the same spaces (schools, universities, workplaces) as their peers and dislocation from the timings that structure everyday life (such as school times, study time and work schedules). In order to negate these effects young people create their own structured times and spaces via sport and musical interests, or rely on the timescapes structured by the rhythms of religious worship. Despite these strategies for regaining control of time and reconnecting with peers, young people still experienced a feeling of being 'off time' from other around them. As Fabian (1983) has detailed, a consequence of chronopolitical devices (such as temporary immigration statuses) is the 'othering' of those subject to such mechanisms of control, distancing them in both time and space from peers and the general population. On a macro level Fabian (1983) notes the way in which Western discourses of perpetual progress and the reification of lives lived at an accelerated pace, creates the possibility of exclusion through the containment of people not only in space but in time. As Sharma (2014: 137) asserts: 'theoretical critiques of the culture of speed have not paid sufficient attention to the institutional, cultural, and economic arrangements that produce specific tempos for different populations'. For unaccompanied young people without status, the tempo of their life course is irregular and decelerated and therefore out of synch not only with peers, but with the wider societal ideals dominant in the 'host' country.

On another level, the desynchronisation that young people with temporary or uncertain statuses experienced relates to the ability to fully engage in 'adult' roles and responsibilities which, often constructed around gender, become increasingly important to young people as they transition to adulthood. These roles often relate to family responsibilities, which have a particularly urgent quality given the precarious and uncertain existence that many family members are experiencing either in transnational settings or in the UK. Similarly, young people without status have increased dependence on formal services, which they associate with a loss of independence and freedom. This form of temporal immobility impedes the transition to adult identities, with concrete consequences within social networks which may be relying on the care and support (in terms of both tangible and intangible resources) from the unaccompanied young people in order to maintain the family's existence.

Whilst the policy of granting temporary periods of leave disrupts young people's movement through time, it also mediates their movement through space. Even when Refugee Status is achieved young people are unable to return to their home countries for a period of five years (at which point they may receive indefinite leave to remain and travel restrictions will be lifted). The result of this policy is that many young people will be unable to spend time in the physical presence of their families for long durations. This spatial immobility has distinctly temporal consequences. Distance here is not measured in miles but in years lost to the passage of time. As Roshan's story of missing the funeral of his brother (in Chapter Thirteen) demonstrated, the passage of time is not an empty corridor, but replete with multiple inaccessible timescapes. Unaccompanied young people miss not just the passage of time with family, but the rites of passage that cement family relationships and orient young people within family narratives. In this way, temporary statuses create interacting spatial and temporal immobilities.

Finally, temporary and uncertain status can disorient young people within their own biographical narratives. Klinke (2013) has suggested that time has no meaning outside of narrative. Indeed, the young people in this study without settled status found it difficult or impossible to create a biographical narrative of past, present and future through which they could give meaning to their lives and assert some control over the most individual and personal form of time. This aspect, perhaps more than any other, highlights the insidious nature of chronopolitical mechanisms which not only isolate young people within their social networks and wider society but can dislocate them from the meaning attached to their own personal stories.

14.3 Implications for policy

This thesis has begun to examine the impact of granting temporary forms of status to unaccompanied young people which expire as they transition to adulthood. Multiple harmful effects have been evidenced including disruptions to education, potential social isolation and the detrimental effect on well-being. The findings clearly suggest that temporary statuses of this kind have durable negative effects on unaccompanied young people. The longer-term impact of those effects remains unclear and may be uncovered in future research. For now, the findings contained here add support to

the growing number of academics and voluntary sector organisations that are challenging the pervasive use of such temporary statuses without regard to the potential impact on unaccompanied children and young people. An alternative policy would involve granting a more permanent form of status (Refugee Status or Humanitarian Protection) automatically to children who cannot be returned to their country of origins if their initial claim is refused. This would provide unaccompanied children with the stability and permanency they require to make sense of their often traumatic pasts and begin to construct positive future trajectories for themselves, which may involve integration into a community in the UK or an eventual voluntary return to their countries of origin to contribute to the reconstruction of their family ties and the nations they come from. On a more practical level, this policy would provide unaccompanied children and young people with less disrupted access to education, which the evidence in this thesis suggests is the conduit through which young people hope to contribute to both their families and wider society in positive and beneficial ways. These findings therefore demonstrate a strong humanitarian case against the use of temporary statuses (in favour of more permanent statuses) in terms of negating the overwhelmingly negative effects of impermanence, yet also highlight a further argument that permanent status may have long-term beneficial effects that go beyond the individual young person's experience and permeate their social networks, both locally and transnationally. This research is therefore a preliminary step in evidencing the impact of temporary statuses and contesting the continued routine use of temporary statuses for unaccompanied children.

More immediately, proposed changes within the Immigration Bill (2015–2016), which curtail access to higher education funding for unaccompanied young people, are of concern. One of the most challenging impacts of temporary status was its ability to disrupt access to continued education. However, young people who did have Refugee Status also experienced difficulties with continuing education as they transitioned to adulthood. The findings here have demonstrated the value of education to young people in terms of expanding and diversifying social networks, avoiding social isolation and contributing positively to their families, communities and host country. Ensuring continuity of access to education to all unaccompanied young people, regardless of their status, should therefore be a priority for policy makers.

This thesis has also highlighted the significance of the role of social care professionals, particularly in navigating complex systems of immigration and other bureaucracies. These findings therefore suggest that the role of professionals is not necessarily compromised by their position as state employees, but strengthened by their experience, expertise and power within state systems. Practice, therefore, may be usefully based around assisting unaccompanied young people with their primary goal of achieving immigration status. In order to effectively achieve this social care professionals need the ability to continue their role with unaccompanied young people until immigration issues are resolved. This may include providing support to young people who are facing return and who enter detention. Whilst the policy of granting temporary statuses persists, the urgent need for support with immigration during the transition to adulthood will remain. This thesis has demonstrated that professional assistance with such issues is a primary need for young people, and an area of support in which professionals are uniquely positioned. Consideration should be given by policy makers to the possibility of extending the professional role in this area until immigration status is resolved. A similar recommendation has been made by the Office of the Children's Commissioner (2014), who suggests that Leaving Care support should not be withdrawn when young people receive a negative decision on their asylum claim. However, the report does not consider those who have aged out of the asylum system by the time they receive a final decision and face return. There is a trend within current Leaving Care policy towards extending support for care leavers (the 'Staying Put' scheme to keep young people in foster care longer is a recent example). The trend towards extending support recognises that care leavers may require different levels of support for different periods of time depending on the circumstances as they transition to adulthood. This is the same basis on which an extension of support for unaccompanied young people with uncertain immigration status is proposed. Such a proposal is therefore harmonious with current policy emerging in this area. Relatedly, the formation of specialist teams where practicable could support these extended functions, and recognise the vital role of social care professionals in navigating young people through complex immigration systems and the far-reaching practical and emotional effects of changes or delays in immigration status.

14.4 Implications for practice

A number of implications for practice have emerged from these findings. In particular, this research has demonstrated the frequency with which unaccompanied young people can build strong emotional attachments with professionals. Whilst these relationships were seen to be complex and laden with negotiations of power and agency, they also emerged as crucial to young people who were reluctant to disclose their full stories and circumstances within other parts of the social network. As the findings have asserted the importance to unaccompanied young people of constructing biographical narratives, it seems likely that professionals are well placed to engage in this process with young people. This requires practitioners to pay sensitive attention not only to the futures of the young people, but also to the role of the past. There are substantial challenges in achieving this, as young people may be reluctant to discuss traumatic events. However, in the context of a trusting relationship built up consistently over time, the findings here show that such work is possible and valuable. Within this process, professionals could also consider the ways in which young people understand their own journeys and the identities forged within those journeys. Recognising the roles and responsibilities that young people have within family social networks, both pre-migration and after migration, is a crucial step on understanding how the social networks of unaccompanied young people are experienced and how future goals and aspirations are constructed. Another benefit of approaching practice in this way is that it recognises that young people are not simply in need of support but are involved in complex exchanges of support across their social networks. The process of 'pathway planning' may provide opportunities to incorporate these aspects of practice into work with unaccompanied young people. Furthermore, pathway planning could also provide the basis on which the need for extended support to assist with uncertain immigration status could be assessed and planned for.

A number of previous studies have highlighted the uncertainty inherent within pathway planning with young people who have not resolved their immigration status, often suggesting a 'triple' planning approach, which considers multiple possible outcomes of asylum claims. A 2014 report by the Office of the Children's Commissioner suggested that the triple planning approach was not fully effective given the current context of policy and practice. This may be a consequence of the

limited role for social care professionals at that most difficult part of the immigration process for unaccompanied young people. Whilst triple planning remains a sensible process to pursue, the findings in this study suggest it should not be at the expense of a holistic planning approach which incorporates an understanding that the future is intimately connected with the past. Additionally, for triple planning to be effective, the professional must be able to assist the young person with a plan for the future if they ultimately face return to their home countries. However, the statutory role of the professional can end abruptly when asylum claims are denied, or may have ended some years before an ultimate decision when the young person aged out of the system. In this context, professionals are expected to plan for something they will be unable to assist with and have little knowledge of. Engaging with young people about their experiences in the country of origin and their transnational family networks might provide more insight for professionals into the realities of the multiple possible futures faced by young people.

A key area of good practice identified in this research was the role professionals played in connecting unaccompanied young people to others with similar experiences. Whilst it may be difficult to achieve this in areas with few unaccompanied young people, services with higher numbers of young people would be able to replicate such a system of informal mentoring. Even where other young asylum seekers are not available in larger numbers, access to community resources can be supported by professionals. However, the findings also warn against the risk of taking an essentialist view of this task and considering community in narrow ethno-cultural terms. Engaging young people in discussion around the types of communities they wish to be a part of is a good starting point for identifying broad community networks that are not necessarily religious or national in nature. Professionals should also be more aware of how young people's needs for community relationships might change and shift over time. Connecting young people with a community network is not a one-off discrete task, as young people's fluid identities develop in different directions. Being aware of the potential for such shifts will be helpful for practice in terms of recognising the rapid and frequent changes that may occur in social relationships, particularly during educational transitions. The potential for isolation is not limited to the early days after arrival, but has other potential trigger points. Additional support may be required at these times and can,

where those trigger points are known (for instance transitioning from school to college), be planned for.

14.5 Methodological contributions and limitations of the study

Along with the contributions to knowledge detailed above, this study has contributed to knowledge of methodological practices with refugee and asylum-seeking young people. In particular, the 'Time Tree' visual interview method was previously untested, but proved particularly valuable in capturing non-linear understandings of time, which ultimately led to a richer analysis of the dynamic and fluid social networks of unaccompanied young people. The method was also useful for creating an interview environment that was distinctly dissimilar to immigration interviews, and allowed young people scope to explore their own narratives without recourse to a chronological account. Similarly, it gave the young people control over the time-scope of their narrative, allowing them to define at will where the past began and the future ended. Creative and visual methods are now used regularly in the study of unaccompanied children and young people (Sirriyeh 2013), and the Time Tree may prove a useful addition to the more frequently used methods in this research area. Additionally, it may have applications beyond this group of young people and could prove a valuable method for any study that seeks to understand imagined futures and non-linear experiences of time.

This thesis has also contributed to methodologies for exploring social networks qualitatively. Traditionally social networks have been researched using quantitative methods, although the qualitative exploration of social networks is a growing area. Whilst social network mapping is frequently used as a method, the methodology used in this research provides an example of how to capture the spatial and temporal aspects of social networks that can be difficult to achieve using social network mapping alone. Combining a number of 'hybrid' visual methods to capture different aspects of time, space and social network allowed for a rich exploration of both the spatial, temporal and relational facets of social networks.

There are some limitations to the design of the study and the findings must be understood in that context. In particular, the research took place within the one local authority area and the majority of participants were accessed through one Children's

Services within that area. Previous researchers have noted that services for unaccompanied children and young people are patchy and inconsistent across the country, and therefore the experiences of the young people in this study are not necessarily generalisable to others in different local authority areas who may have dissimilar local policies and practices. Additionally, the access route chosen to recruit participants is likely to reach those who are the most engaged with services (statutory or voluntary). It is therefore not within this scope of this study to address the experiences of young people who have disengaged or absconded from services. Whilst the number of young people who take this route is unclear, it has been suggested that the numbers are high enough to be causing considerable concern (British Red Cross 2010; Crawley et al. 2011; Gladwell & Elwyn 2012; Humphris & Sigona 2016). This group of young people are likely to be particularly vulnerable and are an under-researched group.

The lower number of women interviewed in this study is also a limitation to consider. Whilst the numbers of female unaccompanied young people is considerably lower than male, making females more difficult to recruit, the sample did originally aim to reflect more diversity of experience in terms of gender. Gendered experiences of transition to adulthood and social networks emerged as a critical theme within the thesis and it would therefore be useful to explore the identified themes with a large number of unaccompanied young women.

14.6 Potential directions for future research

Whilst the design limitations of this study excluded the possibility of researching the experiences of unaccompanied young people who had disengaged from services, future research with an explicit focus on this most vulnerable group of young people is needed. The findings have also highlighted some other potential areas for future study. The negotiation of gender and gendered identities was a theme that emerged throughout the findings and has received little attention in this research field so far. Studies which compare the experiences of male and female young asylum seekers would benefit in exploring how gender intersects with the experience of lone asylum seeking as a child or young person. Family relationships were found within this thesis to be of vital importance to unaccompanied young people, yet have rarely

been a consideration in previous studies. Further research will be required to fully understand these complex transnational connections.

This thesis has provided further understanding of how unaccompanied young people imagine their futures as they transition to adulthood, and the key role that social networks play in constructing future goals and aspirations. However, it has not been within the scope of this thesis to establish how and if young people realise their longer-term goals. Whilst some research is beginning to tackle the subject of young people returned to their home countries (Gladwell 2016), research is needed which addresses the longer-term outcomes for unaccompanied young people who remain in the UK or move on to other countries.

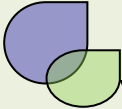
Finally, the potentially damaging impact of temporary statutes which expire during the transition to adulthood has been explored throughout the thesis and represents a key research finding. In this study, the focus was specifically on the impact of immigration status on social networks, although related impacts on education and well-being were also considered. However, further work is urgently needed which explicitly assesses the impact of temporary statuses in order to establish the longer-term consequences of this policy.

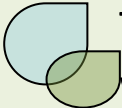
Appendices and References



Appendix 1: Information sheet for young people


THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

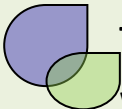
INFORMATION SHEET FOR YOUNG PEOPLE THINKING OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY

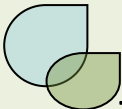
 My name is Kelly. I am a researcher at the University of York and I would like you to take part in my study.


 The study is about the experiences of asylum seeking young people leaving care and becoming adults.

  Council is taking part in this project and thought you might like to help me.

 I would like to hear from you because you are a young person leaving care who has experience of the asylum process.

 The study involves taking part in two interviews with me where we will do some tasks together

 All the young people who take part in the project will receive a £20 voucher.

 Taking part is *your* decision. It's OK to say no. The information you give is confidential. No-one will know

I'm interested in talking to you about

- Who you can go to when you need help
- How you relax and have fun
- What it's like where you live
- How you feel about the future



This is me.

I am also going to be talking to some of the services in your local area to find out what services they offer young people like you and how these services might be improved.

I'd like to interview you, but to do something a little bit different:

- *Draw a map of the people you know using an IPAD or pens and paper
- *Make a timeline of your story so far
- *Take photographs of where you live
- *Draw a map of where you like to go

All the young people who take part in the project will receive a £20 voucher

Things you need to know about taking part in the study....



- Taking part is up to you. You don't have to take part. It doesn't matter if you don't want to.
- You decide when is best for you to take part and the interview can take place somewhere you feel comfortable. It's OK to have someone with you when you're being interviewed if you want to.
- You choose what we talk about, and what we don't talk about. It's fine to say you don't want to answer any more questions.
- We like to record our interviews. We will check first if you are happy to be recorded. Please tell us if you don't want to be recorded.
- It's OK to change your mind about taking part. You can leave the project at any time. You do not have to say why you want to stop being part of the project.

Appendix 2: Information sheet for professionals

Research Study: The social networks of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young People leaving care: Information for Professionals

You are invited to participate in a new study about the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young People Leaving Care

Social work research and policy has recognized the difficult journey to adulthood that care leavers experience. Research has been conducted on the experiences of a diverse range of care leavers from those with physical and learning disabilities to those who are leaving care as parents.

However, little is known about one of the most vulnerable group of care leavers, Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young People.

This study aims to better understand the experiences of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young People when they become adults and leave care.

What the study will involve for you?

You have been invited to take part as someone who has expertise in this area. You will be asked to take part in a short telephone interview. I am interested in your opinions on current policy and practice with unaccompanied asylum seeking young people and in your practice experience of what happens when these young people leave care. I'm particularly interested in the social networks of asylum seeking young people when they leave care, and how they use professional and informal social networks.

With your written consent, the interview will be audio-recorded. Staff at all levels can take part as well as local partners from the voluntary sector. Telephone interviews will be scheduled to minimise any disruption to your work.

Who else is involved in the study?

Interviews with 24 unaccompanied asylum seeking young people will employ innovative interview techniques which will involve young people in tasks such as creating time lines and social network diagrams as well as using visual material like photographs to base the interview around.

For further information or questions contact:

*Kelly McDonald
(Postgraduate Researcher)*

E-mail: kmm525@york.ac.uk

*Address: Social Policy
Research Unit*

*Department of Social Policy
and Social Work*

University of York

Heslington

YO10 5DD

Telephone: 07813208227

Further background to the study

The transition to adulthood represents a period of increased vulnerability, anxiety and uncertainty for unaccompanied young people. Their leaving care experience will likely be influenced by the asylum status of the young person as they turn eighteen as their status will affect their access to services as well as their ability to plan for the future and make positive steps towards building that future. Unaccompanied young people may leave care with full refugee status, with their status undecided or with their appeal rights exhausted and no right to remain in the UK.

Practice recommendations have so far centred on the need for a 'triple planning' approach to pathway planning which takes account of the different asylum claim outcomes. However, practitioners have little research knowledge to draw on in their attempts to do this. It is the intention of this study to explore both the experiences of unaccompanied young people across the different pathways as well as current practice concerns with those who have left local authority care.

Messages for practice from the study will hopefully be used to improve services and impact future policy in this area. It is hoped that the findings can, for the first time, enlighten us about the experience of unaccompanied asylum seeking young people as they leave care and highlight the challenging work that is done in this area.

*If you would like to contact a senior member of staff about this study, please contact **Jim Wade** at the following address*

Social Policy Research Unit

Department of Social Policy and Social Work

University of York

Heslington

YO10 5DD

Or you can contact him by e-mail at jim.wade@york.ac.uk

The research team

The study is being conducted by a postgraduate researcher from the University of York undertaking a research doctorate with the Department of Social Policy and Social Work. She is a qualified social worker and has been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council to undertake this study. The study is supervised by Senior Research Fellow, Jim Wade who is an experienced practitioner and researcher in the field of leaving care and asylum.

The information you give is anonymous and confidential

All the information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Only the researcher and her supervisors will have access to it. All data collection, storage and processing will comply with the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. The findings from the study will form part of a written thesis that will be submitted as a PhD thesis at the University of York. The findings may also be disseminated through published papers or presentations at conferences. A summary report of the findings will be made available to all organisations and individuals who participate. Quotations from your interview may be used in the findings, but they will be anonymised.

You can change your mind at any time

If you agree to take part in the study you will be asked to sign a consent form to state that you understand what the study involves. However, you can still withdraw from the study at any point up to and during the interview itself.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information. If you think you might like to take part please retain this information sheet in case you need any of the details later on in the process. Please contact me if you have any further questions.

Appendix 3: Topic Guide for interviews with professionals

Core Research Questions:

What changes in the local context do you think have impacted on unaccompanied young people's social networks?

What national policies do you think impact on the social networks of unaccompanied young people?

Do you have any particular local policies and practices that support the development of social networks?

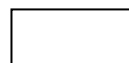
Questions developed from young people's interviews

How do you think the role of children's services fits in with the wider social networks of unaccompanied young people?

Do professionals engage with others areas of the social network for instance family and local communities?

What do you think the role of the professional is within the social network?

Appendix 4: Consent form for young people



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Research Unit

Social networks of unaccompanied asylum seeking young people study: Consent form

Please tick the boxes next to each statement to say that you agree with the statement

I have read the information sheet and decided I want to take part in the study. I understand what the study involves

I know that I don't have to take part and I know that I can stop taking part in the study at any time.

I agree to have my interview recorded. I know that what I say in the interview is confidential and the information will be kept safe. Nobody will know that I have taken part in the study or what I have said.

I understand that when the researcher writes about my interview she may use my words but she will not use my name and nobody will know that they were my words.



Signature:

Date:

Please print your name here

If you have any questions about taking part in the study please contact:
Kelly McDonald, SPRU, University of York, York YO10 5DD. Tel: 07813208227 Email:
kmm525@york.ac.uk

Appendix 5: Consent form for professionals

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

Social networks of unaccompanied asylum seeking young people
study: Consent form for professionals

Please tick the boxes to confirm that you agree with each statement

I have read the information sheet and understand what taking part in the study involves

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I can withdraw from the study at any time

I agree that my interview can be audio- recorded. I know that all data collected will be anonymised and treated confidentially in line with the Data Protection Act

I understand that the research reports will include my views along with the views of other people, but I will not be identified



Signature:

Date:

Please print name here

If you have any questions about taking part in the study please contact:
Kelly McDonald, SPRU, University of York, York YO10 5DD. Tel: 07813208227 Email:
kmm525@york.ac.uk

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