

NEGOTIATING EXISTENCE

Asylum Seekers in East Anglia, UK

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DECLARATION

This work contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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ACRONYMS

BME	Black/Minority Ethnic
CDO	Community Derived Organisations
CID	Certificate of Identity Document
ELR	Exceptional Leave to Remain
GYROS	Great Yarmouth Refugee Outreach and Support
ILR	Indefinite Leave to Remain
IND	Immigration Nationality Directorate
NASRF	Norwich Asylum Seeker and Refugee Forum
NASS	National Asylum Support System
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NNREC	Norfolk and Norwich Racial Equality Council
RCO	Refugee Community Organisation
SEF	Statement of Evidence Form

ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study of asylum seekers in East Anglia, UK, poses the following questions: how do asylum seekers adapt, cope and adjust to life in the UK when their future is so uncertain? To what extent do people seeking asylum relate to an asylum seeker identity? How do asylum seekers negotiate interactions with others as they await an outcome to their application for asylum? This study explores these questions in an effort to gain insight into the role of identity reconstruction during the process of asylum seeking.

This thesis is based on twelve months of fieldwork in the towns of Norwich and Great Yarmouth, and to a lesser extent in Peterborough and London, where asylum seekers had been dispersed by either the London Boroughs or the Home Office's NASS (National Asylum Support Service). During 2002 and 2003, I conducted fieldwork amongst asylum seekers, as well as amongst support workers working for various NGOs that offered a number of support services for asylum seekers.

The focus on asylum seekers' speech-acts is a method to observe the primary form of social action by which asylum seekers articulate a shared place, liminal immigration system and interaction with others. These elements shape asylum seekers' identity in the UK. Consequently, asylum seekers' predicament can be understood as a movement through the immigration system, but also an existential movement as each person tries to negotiate their existence.

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The exiled knows that in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory can also become prisons and are often defended beyond reason or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience.

Edward Said

From *Reflections on Exile* (2000:170)

PREFACE

SILENCE AND TALK: GENERATING MOVEMENT

It was an unusual sight for Norwich: four black Africans sitting by the River Wensum in the gardens of the Ferry Man Inn. They were Congolese asylum seekers; Miss H from Norwich, and Mr N along with two of his friends from Peterborough. My colleague and I were the only white people with them. It was a balmy summer's day and a pleasant time for relaxing and chatting over beer and a few glasses of pineapple juice. It had not dawned on me that this may be a strange sight to the locals walking over the nearby bridge or those cruising down the river. At this time there were only a few asylum seekers in Norwich and even fewer black Africans.

It was only a few months before that I had met Miss H. She was tall and lean with an obvious baby bump. Her appeal for asylum had been rejected, meaning that she would soon lose her housing, social security benefits and would be deported. Her predicament alone, pregnant and seeking asylum had pushed her to the point of being suicidal and to begin with she would barely eat or speak a word. Now, due to the kindness of a local to take her in and hide her from immigration for a short period of time, Miss H had improved because she was speaking to people. Sometimes, talk is needed, talk is necessary. It had created momentum for Miss H to work out what she could do next.

I had met Mr N and his friends during fieldwork in Peterborough. Fieldwork always meant driving great distances from one fieldsite to another. My Congolese friends had taken the trouble to visit my friends and I in Norwich. They could come for the day only. They needed to return to Peterborough in order to sign themselves in at

their accommodation or risk losing their housing and meagre social security benefits. In contrast, I had the luxury of free movement. I came and went as I pleased from one fieldsite to another. Along the way I passed picturesque English villages, pleasant places that my friends did not have the luxury to see. I drove such distances regularly - often Norwich to Great Yarmouth and back daily. Other times I drove to Peterborough or to London. I would most likely drive by myself, in silence, lost in my own thoughts. Travelling and moving.

I travelled routinely to the weekly drop-in centre for asylum seekers in Great Yarmouth. Sometimes we would all chat about political issues, sometimes about the mundane realities of day-to-day life. Sometimes we would sit in silence. It was a comfortable silence, a warm silence, just knowing that there were people around who were prepared to sit and wait for the asylum seeking to end. Cocooned in this silence, it did not matter if people were from Iran, Iraq, Kosovo, Guinea Bissau, Angola, England or Australia. This was not a static silence; there was energy and momentum to this silent camaraderie.

Some days I would travel to the Red Cross Refugee Project in Peterborough. I would walk along the driveway to the office to first meet with Mr I, before finding Mr N, among others, inside. Every time it was the same silent agreement. I would find Mr I outside the Red Cross, crouched by the doorway rolling a cigarette. I would sit beside him to wait for him to speak. Then he would begin his monologue, telling me about the way things were for him and his place in the world. I would listen in silence as he talked. He did not care for interruptions as he had plenty to say.

I sat on the banks of the river watching the boats, hearing my friends laugh and joke, translating from Congo-Swahili to English and back again. I could see the people, British people on their boats, moving, heading down the river, to their destination,

where they needed to go. The Congolese were here, onshore, confined to this space. Ironically, the Dutch Calvinist refugees had arrived in Norwich in the sixteenth century by way of the river, a different route than contemporary asylum seekers often take.

The people on the boats stared. So too did the people on the walkway bridge. They stopped and looked across the river, and stared at the Africans. More boats came past as people journeyed by and still people stared. The Africans remained still on the bank of the river. The people on the bridge and the people in the boats were separate from the Africans on the bank. There would be no talk between them. The Congolese could not join them on the bridge or in the boats; they were on the bank. They did not have the luxury of choosing where along the river they might stop, unlike the people in the boats. They could not join them in the boats or strolling across the walkway. They were separated, the Congolese and the people on the boats; stillness from movement.

I saw a man on a boat point out the Africans to his passenger and they both stared as they went past. Then the Congolese waved. They waved with such friendliness, enthusiasm and generosity that the people on the boat waved back. The simple act of waving had bridged that gap of silence. The Congolese on the banks were no longer still, but had their own kind of movement through waving.

It was then that I realised that there is movement in stillness. There always had been. It may seem that there is no way of crossing the bridge, or riding the boat. Nonetheless, these Congolese asylum seekers generated movement from stillness. Asylum seekers find a way to interact, to connect with others. It is needed. Talk is needed, but silence is not necessarily stillness. I may be able to journey distances to

meet people, but asylum seekers manage to generate movement through speaking, through interacting. This is how asylum seekers negotiate their existence.

CHAPTER 1

NEGOTIATING EXISTENCE

1. The illusion about the West
2. Culture shock
3. Confusion
4. Homesickness
5. Long wait
6. Contact difficulty
7. Lack of communications
8. Racism
9. Labourer exploitation by unscrupulous employers
10. Home office
11. Educational problems
12. Language barriers
13. Shortage of proper leisure and recreation
14. Poor and substandard accommodation
15. Poor living area
16. Fear and intimidation
17. Lack of understanding of the asylum system on the part of the police
18. Opportunistic accommodation managers

(List of issues, Mr Z, Iranian asylum seeker, Great Yarmouth 2003)

Seeking asylum in the UK is a lengthy and complex process. It can take between three months and seven years for an asylum seeker's application to be processed and considered by the Home Office. During this time many asylum seekers are sent to regional areas of the UK, housed together and barred from accessing higher education, employment and social security benefits equivalent to that of British citizens.¹ The process of seeking asylum permeates every aspect of asylum seekers' lives, from political to social, health, ethnicity, culture and identity. The list of issues shown above was compiled by an asylum seeker from Iran, Mr Z, as testimony to the pervasive force that seeking asylum is in his life. Mr Z

¹ NASS (National Asylum Support System) are an arm of the Home Office and responsible for the dispersal programs and social security entitlements of asylum seekers. Although asylum seekers are encouraged to access English language training courses and other classes available through local colleges, they are unable to access higher education.

constructed this list of the most significant issues which he feels affects him as he seeks refuge in the UK. This list reveals that asylum seekers' experiences are multifaceted and include aspects such as living in a new country, the immigration system and the asylum seeker's homeland. What is also evident in this list is the difficulties of social and bureaucratic interactions, from which physical and existential movement arise, as I explain below.

Throughout this thesis, I will use the notion of movement that incorporates both physical and existential characteristics. Movement is physical in terms of asylum seekers' journey from another country and their journey through the dispersal process. Movement is also existential, evident in their struggle to make sense of their experiences, their identity and their 'being in the world' (Heidegger 1967: 263; Merleau-Ponty 1968) – the realm of what Jackson calls the 'inter-existence' where a person's interactions with other actors figure more than their 'individual essence' (Heidegger 1967:263; Jackson 1998:28). Movement both propels and is generated by asylum seekers. Movement is fundamental to asylum seekers' ability to negotiate their existence.

By negotiating, I do not refer to a process whereby disputants try to work out a solution to their problem (see Lewicki *et al.* 1999:5). Rather than being a confrontational and bargaining process, my use of negotiation refers to individuals' ability to 'generate an effective strategy of action' (Palomba 2006: 83). Negotiating existence requires energy and momentum in order to implement this 'strategy of action'. I use the term 'negotiating existence' rather than 'negotiating identity' in order to emphasise the liminoid period of struggle and survival of a person's sense of self, community and day-to-day existence that is inherent in seeking asylum, rather than of identity *per se*. Consequently, movement is the fundamental thread throughout this thesis.

Asylum seekers' reflexivity of the difficulties they experience in seeking asylum in the UK, such as that which Mr Z lists above, generates movement in a time of liminality² of immigration status and isolation of place. Movement challenges the notion of the suffering and helplessness of asylum seeker most common in humanitarian literature and in the discourses provided by support agencies, in that it generates actions, ideas and possibilities of change (Malkki 1995:9-12; Rajaram 2002:247).³ Movement is complex in that it is not a singular unidirectional process. Movement is dynamic in the strength of self that it generates; non-linear in the temporal changes evident in one's speech-act; multiple, layered and shifting between the physical and existential; and involves a kind of oscillation between thoughts, points of view, beliefs and meanings (Amit and Rapport 2002:148). This thesis, then, is primarily an *ethnography of movement*.

Movement is largely evident in the speech-acts of asylums seekers. This thesis explores the speech-acts of people seeking asylum who are confined both by isolation of place and the constraints of the British immigration system. Asylum seekers' speech-acts are a discursive coping mechanism used to develop their continued existence during this period. Negotiating existence is also the ability of a person to adapt and adjust their identity in the context of their changing status and surroundings. Negotiating existence is evident in asylum seekers' speech-acts as they actively rework their identities with local Britons, support workers and other asylum seekers. This is actualised through a hierarchy of need that privileges their current and future existence over past experiences, despite a consistent sense of ontological insecurity, that is, an unstable sense of self (Laing 1960; Giddens 1990; Mitzen 2004: 2).

² Liminality has a specific meaning in this context. It is the transitional phase of the immigration process experienced by asylum seekers as a movement through time. A comprehensive definition will be forthcoming on p. 17.

³ See Chapter 4 for a discussion of the ways in which support organisations produce a discourse about asylum seekers.

Throughout this thesis, I refer to a number of people who are seeking asylum: fifteen people are from Iraq, Iran, Kenya, Albania, Guinea Bissau, Armenia and Kosovo living in Great Yarmouth; six people are from Congo, Kosovo and Zimbabwe living in Norwich, Norfolk; ten people are from Iraq, Iran, Congo, Kosovo, Lebanon and Senegal living in Peterborough, Cambridgeshire; and six people are from Kenya, Iran and Afghanistan living in London. Of the thirty-seven informants, eight are couples with children, while seven asylum seekers have children but have been either widowed or have lost contact with their partner. Fifteen of the thirty-seven asylum seekers are single, having arrived in the UK independently. All of the asylum seekers in this study are aged between eighteen and thirty-five and are at various points in the immigration process, from waiting for a decision to appealing against a negative decision. The majority of these asylum seekers had been smuggled into the country without the visa documents required. My interest in asylum seekers derived from an awareness of the changing demographics of the region of East Anglia due to British immigration legislation, which called for a dispersal of new arrivals to regional areas. In this case, asylum seekers in this region tend to form a diverse mix of ethnic groups, none of which hold enough numbers for a substantial community of a specific ethnic origin to form.

Ethnographies from the general field of 'refugee studies' have tended to focus on a particular ethnic group: Hutu refugee narratives of violence and displacement explored through the notion of 'mythico-history' in order to gain an understanding of Hutu and Tutsi identity reconstruction (Malkki 1995); Tamil refugees and effects of national suffering and alienation (Daniel 1995,1996); Tamil asylum seekers in Norway and long-distance nationalism shared throughout the diaspora (Fuglerud 1999); the asylum policy in Switzerland and Sri Lankan Tamils (McDowell 1996); Somali refugees and identity transformation in London (Griffiths 2002); Somali returnees to Ethiopia (Zarowsky 2004); an increased sense of 'community' amongst

Sudanese refugees residing in North America (Abusharaf 2002); the construction of identity by Asia Minor refugees in Greece (Hirschon 1989); the everyday lived-experience of Cambodian refugees in North America (Hopkins 1996); and a comparative study of Kurdish refugees in Finland and the UK (Wahlbeck 1999). However, this thesis is a non ethnic-specific study of asylum seekers (see Gilad 1990), which is still an emerging and generally under-theorised field. The work undertaken here is built on an exploration of refugeeness as outlined in the above studies, but turns to the implications of a decreasing divide between the global and the local. Transnational flows of asylum seekers are becoming even more of a localised issue, as host countries must regulate and respond to these flows. This intersection between asylum seekers consisting of multiple ethnicities and relatively monocultural host communities is where this thesis departs from many of the studies outlined above.

While the distinction between asylum seeker and refugee is often overlooked in the media and in general discourse, the distinction is an important one. According to the Home Office, UK legislation adheres to Article 1 (2) of the UN convention of 1951, which defines a 'refugee' as someone who:

Owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

(Article 1 (2) UN Convention of 1951)

In contrast, a person is an asylum seeker whilst they are waiting for their application to become a refugee to be considered by the government (Refugee Council 2002a).

The legislation *Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 (c. 41)* states:

18 Asylum-seeker: definition

- (1) For the purposes of this Part a person is an 'asylum-seeker' if-
- (a) He is at least 18 years old,

- (b) He is in the UK,
 - (c) A claim for asylum has been made by him at a place designated by the Secretary of State,
 - (d) The Secretary of State has recorded the claim, and
 - (e) The claim has not been determined.
- (2) A person shall continue to be treated as an asylum-seeker despite subsection (1) (e) while-
- (a) His household includes a dependent child who is under 18, and
 - (b) He does not have leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom.
- (3) A claim for asylum is a claim by a person that to remove him from or require him to leave the United Kingdom would be contrary to the United Kingdom's obligations under-
- (a) The Convention relating to the Status of Refugees done at Geneva on 28th July 1951 and its Protocol, or
 - (b) Article 3 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms agreed by the Council of Europe at Rome on 4th November 1950.

(Ministry of Justice 2006)

As exiles of their homeland placed in the margins of the host society, asylum seekers occupy a period of intense liminality⁴ as they struggle to reconcile the strange with the familiar (Turner 1982). The bureaucratic label 'asylum seeker' designates them within a distinct period of political, legal, and social isolation or liminality (Turner 1969). Throughout this thesis I use the term 'asylum seeker' in order to refer to a person's positioning within this liminal period of waiting for a response by the British Government to their application for refugee status. However, I must make very clear this external labelling does not necessarily reflect one's own perception and, consequently, the majority of asylum seekers may perceive themselves to be intrinsically refugees.

In this introductory chapter, I will show how the movement of negotiating existence infiltrates intersubjective experiences, place and space, liminality and liminoid, speech-acts, a hierarchy of need, identity and relational identities. I will argue that asylum seekers form an intersubjective experience whereby they re-work their identities relationally and through their interactions with the world around them.

⁴ I will discuss my use of this term shortly.

Asylum seekers share the experience of the immigration system, and of the UK as a place. This context of seeking asylum, I will argue, is most notable in a consideration of place as movement through space and liminality as movement in time. The social relations experienced within this context give rise to evocative speech-acts produced by asylum seekers (Tyler 1986:129). These speech-acts reveal a particularly interesting aspect: that the hierarchy of need in an asylum seekers' life often prioritises their current circumstances and future existence in the UK over their past experiences. In prioritising circumstances and as a strategy to negotiate existence, hierarchy of need also shapes their identity. In doing so, the influence of locals, support organisations and other asylum seekers all contribute to re-working relational identities. I will then describe the ways that Jackson's work (1996, 1998, 2002) has influenced this thesis. In particular, his observation that stories and speech-acts are journeys that 'transform our experiences' resonates strongly with my own findings (Jackson 2002:138). Next, I will discuss the methodological aspects of conducting fieldwork: how I located the field, the approaches I took for collecting data and also a consideration of my own positioning as anthropologist.

Intersubjective Experience

This introductory chapter positions an ethnographic study of asylum seekers from an experience of place and also from a shared experience of the British immigration system – rather than from an ethnically based and individualised perspective. The speech-acts of asylum seekers within this context are a result of their engagement with the spatial and temporal dimensions of their positioning. The in-betweenness of being an asylum seeker is felt through geographical place (living in East Anglia) and the confines of the immigration system (being away from home, friends and family). These combine to create a context of in-betweenness – and of a longing for the day when their application for asylum is finally resolved. The notions of intersubjectivity

and liminality⁵ are vital concepts that can help map the ways in which movement facilitates the re-working of asylum seeker identities. Their social relations are formed through movement, as they share experiences of a bureaucratic process and shared experience of place and time. It is not just the geographical place of East Anglia that they share, but they also share the same type of accommodation, living in hotels that are essentially substandard boarding houses.

Jackson's notion of intersubjectivity draws attention to the communicative and relational world which people inhabit. It is here that people strive to 'speak, act, and work toward belonging to a world of others' whilst they 'simultaneously strive to experience themselves as world makers' (1998:8). I point to two aspects of intersubjectivity which Jackson considers. Firstly, that identity is 'mutually arising [...] relational and variable' (Jackson 1998:7). This is a crucial aspect of asylum seekers' lives that I will refer to throughout this thesis. Interactions both helpful and threatening to an asylum seeker's well-being shape and instigate new forms of action as well as supporting their own beliefs. Secondly, intersubjectivity encompasses the inextricable link between the individual and the world around them in terms of 'abstract generalities such as society, class, gender, nation [...] that are subjects of our thinking but not themselves possessed of life' (Jackson 1998:7). It is this dialectic movement between asylum seeker and 'a world of ideas' (Jackson 1998:7) which both entraps, in terms of their liminal positioning within the immigration system, and yet offers alternative conceptualisations of a secure future. Indeed, Jackson says that 'in moments of crisis [people need to] to cross between human and extrahuman worlds, and thereby feel that they can imaginatively if not actually control the universe as a particular extension of their subjectivity' (1998:6).

⁵ I will discuss the concepts of liminality and liminoidity more thoroughly later in this chapter (see page 17). My inclusion of the term liminality here is simply to provide the context in which intersubjective experience can be discussed.

A shared sense of seeking asylum allows for alliances to be formed amongst people of different ethnicities, particularly in the absence of their own diasporic ethnic communities which are generally located in other larger cities such as London, Birmingham and Manchester. The shared asylum seeking context of experience, I suggest, creates an environment for negotiated existence. It is important not to assume homogeneity of past experience, but, rather, turn to the different tactics and coping mechanisms that each actor employs and which connects to a shared experience of seeking asylum. The context of shared experience is active in that asylum seekers are interacting with their environment, other asylum seekers, support workers and locals. Despite these contexts of shared experience, they are also being acted upon by the immigration process and other people who share the environment (see Jackson 2002: 13). We might turn to Cohen's notion of community as holding 'simultaneously both similarity and difference' (1985:12) to delineate what is at work in this context. My findings reveal a tentative camaraderie of being the ethnic 'other' in small towns which hold a majority white British population. It is how asylum seekers negotiate this context, the spatial elements of place and the temporal elements of the immigration system, that is of utmost importance here.

Place and Space

The concepts of space and place are another of the main concerns of this thesis because they form part of the context in which asylum seekers negotiate their existence. Space and place are contested terms because of the great deal of interest they have received by scholars (Kuper 2003:247: see also Casey 1997; Gregory 1996; Soja 1989; Tuan 1977; Wertheim 1999; Massey 2005). Throughout this thesis, I depart from these debates in order to use the terms space and place, through a reversal of the terminology⁶ employed by de Certeau.⁷ Space (in my

⁶ This is a tactic employed by Gray (2000) in order to extrapolate the configuration of place and space.

terminology) refers to the complexities, movement and contestation that arise in the intersubjective construction of place. Consequently, reworking de Certeau's terminology, place is practiced space (1984:117).

The bureaucratic construction of East Anglian space by the Home Office can be likened to de Certeau's notion of space as the 'strategy' imposed by institutions through 'classification, delineation and division' (1984:36; Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2003:32). East Anglia is actively constructed as a space by the Home Office by drawing on pre-existing geographic, demographic and economic constructs. In doing so, East Anglia is constructed as an appropriate space into which asylum seekers can be dispersed.

Over the past fifty years the British Government has provided refugee resettlement programs to Polish, Ugandan Asians, Chilean, Vietnamese, Bosnian and Kosovan refugees which have been logistical exercises in redistributing refugee populations (Robinson, Andersson *et al.* 2003: 180-121). The London boroughs also borrowed the idea of population redistribution from the Government dispersal program. In November of 1997, over forty asylum seekers were sent by the City of Westminster to Great Yarmouth in order to relieve the strain on the London borough (Norwich and Norfolk Racial Equality Council 1998:32-33). Interestingly, unlike the previous dispersal programs, this dispersal was not of an ethnic-specific group. No support mechanisms were put in place either before their arrival or at the time of their arrival, and only the police and the media were informed of their arrival (Norwich and Norfolk Racial Equality Council 1998:32). Mr D, founder of the support organisation GYROS (Great Yarmouth Refugee Outreach and Support), reflects on this period:

It started with one hotel, but particularly during the Kosovo crisis there was such pressure on UK and asylum seekers flooding in that meant there was ever more pressure on the South East, that we went from 1 hotel to 3 almost over night at one point. [...] and the numbers went up from 1 hotel with like

⁷ De Certeau himself is influenced by the work of Merleau-Ponty (1962) and the embodiment of space from a phenomenological perspective.

60 or 70 to 3 hotels and the other two were bigger ones, so we may have had approaching 500 asylum seekers at one point.

(Mr D, GYROS, Great Yarmouth, 2003)

The problems with this dispersal stemmed from the multiple ethnic and language groups inhabiting the same area. This was the environment in which communication between fifteen different language groups became very problematic, particularly as asylum seekers did not have the appropriate interpreters available when they arrived in Great Yarmouth. In 1999 a small number of asylum seekers made their way into Norwich, independently rather than via a government or borough dispersal. These people were mainly from Kosovo and were relatively well-accepted because the local Britons could relate to these people 'who looked and dressed like them' (Gibney 1999:30).

In 2000 the NASS (National Asylum Support Service) dispersal by the British Government became a massive logistical exercise to lift the weight off the south-east of the country, where asylum seekers tended to go to be in proximity to their own ethnic communities. Asylum seekers were dispersed to areas throughout England where accommodation was more readily available, and access to services could be localised. In doing so, many asylum seekers were dispersed to parts of the country which were not in close proximity to the supportive networks of their own ethnic communities. Despite the government's dispersal program beginning in 2000, it was only on June 4 2003 that the first formal government dispersal to Norwich actually occurred. Asylum seekers were dispersed to Norwich approximately seven days after applying for NASS support. At first, dispersal sites were intended to be language-based 'cluster areas'. These areas were to be chosen by NASS based on suitable factors of ethnic composition, community relations, community networks, school places, translation and interpretative services, legal support, employment opportunities and places of worship (Audit Commission 2000:49). However, this

never occurred due to Home Office concerns that language clustering may be detrimental to social cohesion, in that it may ‘contribute to an emerging “ghetto” of asylum seekers and refugees in highly deprived areas’ (Anie, Daniel *et al.* 2005:7). In fact, the first asylum seekers to be dispersed to Norwich originated from Congo, Algeria, Pakistan and Iran, and did not have any established ethnic population networks in East Anglia.⁸ Consequently, the immigration system was largely responsible for shaping the demographic and social makeup of the dispersal towns. Equally, the geographical and demographic spatial constructs of East Anglia were a constant reminder for the asylum seekers of the influence that the immigration system had in their lives. Therefore, as I have explained in the discussion of intersubjectivity above, asylum seekers share the space of seeking asylum. This shared experience and their lived experience of East Anglia constitutes place-making.

De Certeau’s analogy best sums up of the construction of space by immigration officials and the experience of place by asylum seekers. De Certeau uses the analogy of city planners and cartographers who design a city space. He argues that it is not until one walks the streets of the city that one practices space and in doing so imbues it with meaning of a lived place (de Certeau 1984:110). Indeed, walking and ‘trampling underfoot’ generates ‘internal alterations of the place’ (de Certeau 1984:110). This embodiment of space that manifests as place-making is what is of interest here. Asylum seekers’ spatial experience is shared and relational and, as Rodman argues, fundamentally social (2003:205). Consequently, the notion of space is useful in that it refers to the complexities, movement and contestation that arise in the intersubjective construction of place. It is helpful, then, to think of place (in my terminology) as practiced space (de Certeau 1984:117). Throughout this dissertation, I will use the concepts of space and place from this perspective.

⁸ Although the ethnic groupings were not public knowledge, I was made aware of the ethnicities of new arrivals during Norwich multi-agency meetings.

In discussing the spatial elements of a distanced place that asylum seekers must negotiate, it is also vital to consider the liminal phase of the immigration system which positions them. Together, the spatial and temporal elements form a dialectic relationship with their relational speech-acts.

The Liminality of the Immigration System and the Liminoidity of Experience

The other important context of this thesis is the liminal phase of the immigration system as a movement through time which asylum seekers must contend with. I noted previously that the spatial dimensions of East Anglia and asylum seekers' place-making inform the context of asylum seeking. So too does the impact of the immigration process. For asylum seekers the dispersal is another protracted step within the immigration system, and one which seems to taunt their position of in-betweenness as distinctly separate from British society and yet entangled in a makeshift coexistence. I suggest that the journey an asylum seeker takes through the British immigration system can be likened to Turner's concept of liminality. This is a journey through time, an encapsulated period 'when the past is momentarily negated, suspended, or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun' (Turner 1982:44).

In explaining the notion of liminality, Turner draws on Van Gennep's (1960) interstitial stage of transition in the rite of passage, following separation and prior to incorporation (Turner 1969:94). Turner refers to transition as liminality, a 'period and area of ambiguity, a sort of social limbo' (1982:24). Liminality, Turner defines, is only appropriate in reference to 'relatively stable, and cyclical, and repetitive [tribal] systems' (1982:29). However, other theorists have applied the concept of liminality to the contexts of asylum seekers and refugees (see Malkki 1995; Agier 2002; Harrell-Bond 2002; Coker 2004a; Gross 2004; Becker, Beyene *et al.* 2000). Turner

himself points to the transformation of betwixt and between' from 'what was in tribal society principally a set of transitional qualities' to what is now an 'institutionalised state' a 'permanent condition'. In fact, Turner points to the monastic and mendicant states in the great world religions as being prime examples of the institutionalisation of liminality (1969:107). In doing so, I suggest he is opening up his use of liminality to alternative interpretations. Therefore, liminality is a structured process that is an apt concept in explaining the situation of asylum seekers within the immigration system.

Having said this, the immigration system may be a liminal process – a structure to which an asylum seeker is bound and integrated within – but the asylum seeker's experience of the immigration system is of a liminoid process and therefore "closer to the personal-psychological than to the "objective-social" typological pole" (Turner 1982:54). As Turner professes, the liminal and the liminoid coexist (1982:55). While the liminal refers to structural functions and processes, the liminoid is innovative and individualised and more flexible. Turner differentiates between the two terms by suggesting that the liminal is analogous to 'work' while liminoid is more akin to 'play'.

The frustration and anguish that asylum seekers experience that I have referred to as the liminoid is also alluded to by Crapanzano through his concept of 'waiting' that he observed amongst white South Africans. The notion that the whites were desperately 'waiting for something, anything to happen' (1985:43) is a preoccupation very much like that of asylum seekers in East Anglia and analogous to this process of liminoidity. Like liminoidity, the concept of waiting is embedded in the dimensions of time, anticipation, evokes feelings of helplessness, powerlessness and desire of possibility (Crapanzano 1985:45-46).

Asylum seekers are embedded within a liminal phase in the immigration process. Neither citizens nor residents of the UK, they are, as Turner puts it, 'assigned and arrayed by law' (1967:97). Asylum seekers occupy an indefinite period of statelessness. Liminality assumes that the prospect of achieving refugee status cannot occur without first having experienced the nadir of seeking asylum. Their social positioning shifts within the liminal phase as they become exiled from society to reside amongst asylum seekers who share this liminoid experience. These asylum seekers 'submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders' (Turner 1969: 96), or in this case, the immigration officials, in individualised potentiality of attaining refugee status that the liminoid position affords the asylum seeker. In fact, as I will argue in Chapter 7, it is coming to terms with what Heidegger (1967:68) calls *authenticity* – that is, the 'uncoverdness' of certainty and uncertainty, security and insecurity – that liminoid asylum seekers must achieve as a 'precursor of innovative forms' (Sutton-Smith 1972:18-19) . In working toward the incorporation phase, away from the liminal and temporal restraints of the immigration process, asylum seekers' speech-acts bring about opportunities to trial possible forms of identities. The security of a known geographical, cultural, political and social form are largely absent, which impacts heavily on the emerging constructs of one's sense of self within these new and changing contexts.

Speech-Acts

As I have just discussed, the spatial elements of the shared place and the temporal elements of the shared liminality of the immigration system are central to this thesis. However, so far I have described the context, but not how asylum seekers respond to this context. By focussing on the speech-acts of asylum seekers it is possible to reach an understanding of the dialectic movement between the social relations with locals, other asylum seekers and support workers, and the spatial and temporal

shared experiences as these are reflected upon. Speech-act is a term that applies to the asylum seeker talk that I witnessed during my fieldwork. It is a useful concept because it encompasses the various modes of expression that asylum seekers employ, including accounts, conversations, monologues and stories. These speech-acts are intended to be communicative and are meaningfully employed as a dialectic between social relations and context (Green 1969:112).⁹

Although theorists use the term *narrative* a great deal, it is not appropriate for my purposes here. Narrative generally refers to a presentation of a story that contains a ‘sequence of events [...] involving characters’ (Jahn 2005:1). In this thesis, I move away from the notion of narratives in order to communicate the numerous different ways that asylum seekers have of ‘talking’ about their situation. The concern of this thesis is not just with story, but also with the speeches, remarks, arguments, and monologues of people. Equally important here are the contexts within which such speech-acts are announced, and also the intentions and limitations of what was said. We must not take speech as narratives, but a collection of speech-acts which are inextricably enmeshed within a socio-political framework that is invested in beliefs, values and categories.

This thesis is concerned with the way in which asylum seekers cope with their liminal predicament and how speech-acts are central to this process of seeking asylum. Consequently, rather than to only portray the content of such asylum seeker speech-acts or the ‘what’ that asylum seekers utter, the purpose of this chapter is to endeavour for some understanding of the function of such speech-acts – the ‘why’ and the ‘how’ (Prince 1982:5). Exploring speech-acts and examining the context in which they are constructed furthers our understanding of what it means to negotiate and cope with the process of seeking asylum (Prince 1982:164). In doing so, I suggest that the speech-acts of asylum seekers contribute to the reworking of a

⁹ In fact monologues attests to this. See chapter 7 for a discussion about monologues.

sense of self and operate as a way of conveying, negotiating and coping with their experiences (Linde 1993:3).

Austin developed speech-act theory whereby the use and conditions of an utterance must be examined. Searle, following Austin (1962), suggested that the production and performance of a speech-act is of significance (1969:16-17). Nordenstam, reiterating Austin, defines speech-acts as the utterance of 'certain words within a vocabulary and grammar' which are perceived of in a certain way, producing 'consequential effects on the feelings, thoughts, actions of the listener' (1966:141). Similarly, Searle considers Austin's (1962) breakdown of speech-acts as 'utterances which are sayings [locutionary act] and utterances which are doings [illocutionary act]' (1968:405). Searle agrees that speech-acts may include both meaning and force rather than being distinctly separate (1968:408).

This thesis draws on the work of Austin (1962), Searle (1968) and Nordenstam (1966) by encompassing the characteristics of use, conditions, production, performance, meaning and force when referring to speech-acts. In this way, I account for the multi-faceted nature of asylum seekers' speech-acts that encompass a range of temporal moves – speaking of past, future or current circumstances. Such speech-acts may involve different contexts of storytelling, monologue, conversation, or textual representations. Speech-act is a suitable term for the majority of utterances, except where I may be specifically referring to a story or communicating a textual representation. Consequently, narrative is not a term that neatly describes the wide array of such talk.

Speech-act theory receives persistent interest from other ethnographic works. Finnegan's (1988) study of performative utterances among the Limba led her to the conclusion that such speech-acts are essentially a form of social action and therefore should be considered as an interaction between the 'many-layered nature

of human expression' (Finnegan 1977:51). Ong, in his study of the relationship between oral cultures and literacy, came to the conclusion that 'the spoken word is always an event, a movement in time [...] an action [...] an ongoing part of an ongoing existence' (1977:21; see also 1982). Ervin-Tripp (1996; 1997) argues for speech-acts having social meaning and being dependent on context, roles and associations. Geis (1995) also emphasises the social rather than the linguistic qualities of speech-acts. He coined the term 'dynamic speech-acts' in order to emphasise the 'dynamic nature of conversations, the fact that the successive utterances that comprise a conversation alter belief-states' (Geis 1995:96). Rosaldo's analysis of Ilongot speech-acts finds that speech-act theory does not allow for individual action that is 'independent of its reflexive status both as consequence and cause of social forms' (1982:204).

This interplay between social and individual motives within speech-acts leads us to consider the purpose of speech-acts. Simply as spoken words without meaningful intentions, emotions and attitudes, speech-acts cannot alter one's understanding of experience, but Allwood's (1978) conception of 'evocative' speech-acts can generate new understandings. Allwood points to evocation as 'the intention to influence another person through communication' in an effort to understand '*emotions, attitudes* (including beliefs) and *behavior*' (1978:9). I agree with Allwood here, but at the same time I argue that in the context of asylum seeker's speech-acts, evocation also operates to make sense of one's *own* experiences. Drawing on Tyler, evocative speech-acts neither present nor represent one's experiences; rather, through this absence of representation, evocative speech-acts make available new possibilities (1986:129):¹⁰

When we say something evokes, it is not necessary to suppose that what is evoked has to be there as a former experience or as a memory brought back into presence by whatever does the evoking. Evocation needs no prior

¹⁰ Tyler's explanation of 'absence' in describing evocation is very similar to Derrida's (1974) notion of arche-writing, which he describes as occurring in 'dead time'. See Chapter 3.

originating circumstance in the manner of representation. It does not necessarily re-present, even though it might also perform this function. The whole point of evocation is that it provides an escape from representation.

(Tyler 1987:341)

It is through evocation that speech-acts mobilise possibilities that are beyond time and place, and aid in negotiating place and the liminal immigration system. It is the evocative properties of speech-acts which produce possibilities that generate meaning and transformation. Speech-acts evoke an intensity of emotion which can give rise to an understanding of one's experiences of seeking asylum (Blumenreich 2004:82). Thus, shared experiences are shaped and reworked during the interactions between asylum seekers, because evocation provides the possibility of transforming experience.

Speech-acts are a way of exercising potentiality – 'a possibility that exists' (Heller-Roazen 1999:14). The notion that one cannot 'go back' to one's previous existence leads us to consider the notion of 'potentiality.' Agamben describes potentiality as arising from one's own deficiency, in that to have potential is 'to be in relation to one's own incapacity' (1999:182): 'the simple fact of one's own existence as possibility or potentiality' is articulated through asylum seekers' speech-acts (Agamben 1993:43). For asylum seekers, potentiality of a speech-act means speaking of possibilities beyond the psycho-social positioning that confines and restricts. Speech 'is an actualization of a style which unfolds what is always uncertain' in the future (Elias 2005:42). Potentiality within speech-acts reveals 'an attempt [...] to accommodate potentiality using repetition and resolution as devices for the construction' of a future (Elias 2005:42). Agamben argues for a more complex understanding, in that potentiality must engender the goal of potentiality:

In the potentiality to be, potentiality has as its object a certain act in the sense that for it *energein*, being-in-act, can only mean passing to a determinate activity [...] as for the potentiality to not-be, on the other hand, the act can never consist of a simple transition *de potentia ad actum*. It is, in other words, a potentiality that has as its object potentiality itself, a *potentia potentiae*.

(Agamben 1993:34-35)

The majority of asylum seeker speech-acts I encountered during my fieldwork were evocative accounts of their current experiences, including the conversations they had with others, the frustrations of seeking asylum, or the strangeness of living in a new country. Take, for example, an Iranian asylum seeker's speech-act:

I pray to God for help out of this situation and then I pray for somewhere to live. Sometimes my prayers they have been answered and some things they happen. Now only I pray for a positive decision. Now this is my big problem and this is why I worry. And I am not sure that this happens because only we are on appeal.

(Mrs Z, Iranian asylum seeker, Great Yarmouth, 2003)

In this case, this evocative speech-act links Mrs Z's current fears with past problems which had been overcome, she believes, through prayer. Therefore, in making this link through her very speech-act, the potentiality is generated that her current fears may be overcome just as her past fears had. I suggest that evocative accounts such as this have meaningful intentions as a critical mode to share information, a kind of coping mechanism, and a way of exercising potentiality, revealing survival and an attempt to connect with adaptive and dynamic possibilities amidst chaos and disarray.

My own observations strongly resonate with the explanations offered by Jackson, who draws our attention to the fragmentation, dislocation and chaos of asylum seeking which frames the speech-act flow. Thus, the disclosure of one's story offered in a series of fragmented speech-acts means that 'the very unities of space, time and character on which speech-act coherence depends are broken' (Jackson 2002). Similarly, Daniel says that where violence and trauma create speech-acts the net results are 'contradictions, slippages and lacuna' (1996:133). Indeed, this thesis will explore the extent to which ontological insecurity reigns as one struggles to find a sense of self which meshes with one's experiences. Indeed, the different intentions of a speech-act operate to reveal different aspects of one's identities

according to what I term a hierarchy of need.

Hierarchy of Need

Asylum seekers hold hierarchies of aspects of their life-worlds which act as a kind of coping mechanism. Seemingly powerful speech-acts of trauma may be at a lower hierarchical level, simply because the need for a focus on current survival is more pressing and therefore operates at a higher level. As asylum seekers explore different aspects of identity, this hierarchy of current need comes into play.¹¹ As Pittaway notes, asylum seekers might not wish to address painful issues until their 'basic survival needs have been met' (1999:3).

Hierarchy of need refers to the competing needs in one's life-world, and how one shifts between aspects of one's identity that, Jackson suggests, 'enter[s] into and figure[s] in, rather than completely determining and delimiting, the strategic field of social interaction and intersubjective experience' (1998:153). Jackson's description can assist us in explaining that asylum seekers' interactions with others as well as situation and context are influential in how an individual's identity is reworked. Hierarchy of need is a way of trialling different modes of identity, a way of exercising potentiality, revealing survival and an attempt to connect with adaptive and dynamic possibilities. The different intentions of a speech-act operate to reveal different aspects of one's identity according to a hierarchy.

The following speech-act illustrates the significance of the present, the current situation of seeking asylum. It clearly illustrates the hierarchy of need, acknowledging a struggle and a focus – in terms of suffering, time, sanctuary and belonging – to a future in the UK. The specific words used in such a speech-act are

¹¹ Here I do not refer to Maslow's (1943) theory of a hierarchy of need, which comes from a psychology perspective. His work refers to a structured series of linear steps which assume a universal need.

highly significant, as I discovered when I went to the Peterborough Red Cross Refugee Project. I met a Senegalese refugee, Mr S, and we talked for a while about Australia. He asked me:

‘when are you going’, he paused, looking for the right word,

I finished the sentence for him ‘...back?’

‘No! Never say that word!’

‘Why?’

‘Because it is not a nice word to use.’

‘Why, what don’t you like about it?’

‘When people say “back”, It is a very pejorative word.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I mean that it is like someone saying “what are you doing in this country?” It is like saying “you should not be here, when are you going to leave because you do not belong.” Never say you are going “back.” You can never go “back.”’

(Mr S, Senegalese asylum seeker, Peterborough, 2003)

I was intrigued by the importance of such a little word and the significance of it to Mr S. To him, the word ‘back’ denied the effort and experience of seeking asylum. It could be argued that his difficulty with ‘back’ refers to a duality in meaning. ‘Back’ may refer to a lack of rights and belonging to ‘here’. It may also refer to an inability to revert to a previous time and place. Therefore, it could be argued that Mr S’s protest reveals the in-betweenness of seeking asylum and also the significance of the present and future in his hierarchy of need.

Being able to exercise a hierarchy of need is imperative as it validates the decisions that one has made, such as leaving one’s homeland and therefore reassuring one’s sense of self. Asylum seekers’ hierarchy of need is largely in response to the asylum system and the rhetoric of locals, which together repudiate, resist and question their right to seek asylum.¹² Given this, I suggest that the majority of asylum seekers are fundamentally preoccupied by their current situation of awaiting an outcome to their

¹² The relationship between asylum seekers and the immigration system will be explored in the next chapter, while the relationship between asylum seekers and indigenous Britons, or locals, will be discussed in Chapter 5.

application to seek asylum. Placing current circumstances at the top of the hierarchy of need was referred to by one informant who worked in a refugee support organisation. He had arrived in the UK in the 1970s as a refugee from Chile. He said to me that the most important thing to an asylum seeker is their immigration status; not their past, but their current situation. This conclusion is supported by my observations of the everyday life of people seeking asylum. The asylum process pervaded the discussions, rhetoric and thoughts of people in this situation. There is a future orientation to their privileging the present, in that a secure and safe future as a refugee may one day be granted. However, this is not to say that people do not provide speech-acts about experiences in their homeland that led to their journey to England.

An asylum seeker may give an account of a traumatic past if it meets their immediate needs – for example, an interview with the Home Office may present an appropriate context. Thus, an asylum seeker can present a speech-act about their experiences according to need. The more one has the need, the more likely they will defer to producing such speech-acts in order to gain a sense of ontological security. Ontological security refers to the need of the individual to ascertain a whole and stable sense of an identity and self (Mitzen 2004:2; see also Laing 1960; Giddens 1990). Giddens points out that if ontological security is disrupted even the very minor routines of day-to-day life become shattered and the ‘personality of the individual may become stripped away and altered’ (1990:23). If one is ontologically insecure, then deferring to a hierarchy of needs becomes the only method of survival:

Ontological insecurity is the deep, incapacitating fear of not being able to get by in the world, not knowing which dangers actively to ward off versus forget about. When you are ontologically insecure, all your energy gets bound up in immediate need-meeting, because you cannot organize your threat environment.

(Mitzen 2004:3)

Asylum seekers are ontologically insecure and their immediate needs of survival are evident in their speech-acts. Rather than asylum seekers' speech-acts focussing on past traumatic events, they are much more likely to discuss aspects of their current immigration situation, hopes and fears of their future life in the UK, cultural differences, and family in their homeland. Similar to Daniel's findings amongst displaced persons in Sri Lanka, for asylum seekers the present situation dominates, so that speech-acts are constructed as 'both present-driven and present-stifled' (2000:336).

My informants rarely discussed details of their journey to the UK and the events or decisions which led to them leaving their homeland. For example, during my fieldwork, an asylum seeker remarked to me that being seated next to British people on train trips to London provides an opportunity for curious locals to ask all about her, and even to ask why she left her country. Laughing, she declared, 'I am not going to tell a complete stranger!' Here I want to make it quite clear that I am not arguing that there is an absence of asylum seekers' speech-acts of trauma and flight.¹³ Each of my informants told me their story of how they came to be in the UK. These stories were rarely repeated. It was understood by my informants that such haunting stories were unlikely to fade from my mind.

Shuman and Bohmer's work within a support service for asylum seekers revealed that initially asylum seekers 'do not describe the trauma at all, or do so only in the most general terms' (2004:396). Linde describes a life story as fundamentally a social exchange 'rather than being a treasured solitude in the caverns of the brain' (1993:4). However, Daniel points out that sometimes silences can be more poignant than speech-acts (1996:121). Sometimes experiences are so traumatic it takes a great deal of time before a person can even begin to articulate them. Silences may

¹³ Such stories are present throughout this thesis, but to a lesser extent than present and future orientated speech-acts.

also indicate a pause for consideration – time taken for reflection as a person attempts to make sense of their situation.¹⁴ I suggest that considering the occurrence of speech-acts in response to a hierarchy of need, it is possible to reconcile both the presence and absence of speech-acts about past and traumatic events. Asylum seekers in East Anglia emphasise current and future aspects of their situation a great deal more than the events that led to their fleeing. So, this vacillation between telling and silence and a greater emphasis on current and future events reveals the relationship between speech-act and identity, seeking asylum and identity reworking. As Linde points out, ‘they must be able to give some account of how they came to be in this predicament, because people’s identities are defined by this predicament’ (1993:11). Consequently, the focus on current and future aspects of their situation can be understood as the order of priority in a hierarchy of need.

As I explained earlier, in my field sites there were no communities of asylum seekers from the same ethnic background, and, consequently, there was not a shared past experience. This point can be contrasted to Malkki’s (1995) work with Burundian Hutus in a refugee camp in Tanzania. Malkki found that collective speech-acts occur when shared past experiences are socially sanctioned by a community and then repeated. These collective histories ‘flourish where they have meaningful, signifying use in the present’, that is, where they are needed (Malkki 1995:241). Therefore, in East Anglia, this lack of ethnic community history, contextual basis of ontological insecurity and a hierarchy of need contributed to the individualised and ad-hoc telling of stories of past experiences. In any case, versions of self are reworked through speech-acts in inconsistent and ambiguous ways.¹⁵

¹⁴ In Chapter 7 I will explore silence through the notion of stillness.

¹⁵ This ambiguous self will be explored in later chapters via the reiteration of intersubjective ambiguity and monologues. See Chapters 6 and 7.

Identity

Speech-acts and identity are inextricably linked. Speech-acts are significant in making sense of the social world and in reworking self-identity (See Abrahams 1986; Linde 1993; Widdershoven 1993; Neisser 1994; Somers 1994; Wikan 1995; Ochs & Capps 1996). The asylum seeker 'self' occupies a liminal position on a number of levels, in terms of suspension of political status, as not belonging, an indefinite state of waiting, and as not being placed, as being displaced (Walker 2003a:8).

However, cultural and ethnic factors which influence a sense of self, although integral to identity, are not of immediate interest here due to the multiplicity of ethnicities and cultures of my informants. Rather, the reworking of identity is the focus, through speech-acts stemming from those seeking asylum which are experientially, socially, and historically constituted. Speech-acts establish an identity of self in relation to others through the very act of talking and communicating – 'speech-acts requires social interaction of at least one addressee' (Linde 1993:112). The identity of asylum seekers must take into consideration the diversity of each asylum seeker's background, experiences, agency and circumstances. Asylum seekers do not discard the identity they had in their homeland. Rather, their identity is reworked over time, allowing for aspects of both their homeland and the UK to be accommodated.

My understanding of identity is that it is not fixed and concrete. Neither is identity completely fluid and shifting, and thus lacking points of anchorage, as Banks suggests (1996:151). Nor is it a set of reified terms encapsulating a common feeling of sameness (Handler 1988:15; Malkki 1995:2). Asylum seekers, like everyone, have an identity that is hierarchical, intersubjective and therefore multifaceted. This is what Eriksen refers to when he explains the tension between identity as '*being the*

same as oneself as well as *being different* [his emphasis]' (1993:60). These facets of asylum seeker identity incorporate the diversity of their experiences, beliefs and language. As such, asylum seekers seek a 'fit' within aspects of the UK and their homeland which may be involuntarily or subconsciously expressed. Some facets of identity may be shared with others, so that identity is not entirely solitary for each agent, thus providing a sense of 'togetherness'. Moreover, an asylum seeker does not inhabit one facet of identity at a time, but may inhabit multiple facets of their identity at different times, and with different variations. This also reflects the hierarchy of need that asylum seekers may adjust to in order to negotiate their survival.

From this perspective we can recognise that asylum seekers are not objects waiting for their identity to be reconstructed by a greater external force. It is an asylum seeker who is experiencing the here and now, in the spatial and temporal sense, and the immediacy of his/her situation in the form of mental and emotional feelings and ideas (Anderson 1980:26). Asylum seekers possess a measure of agency in the sense that they are relatively autonomous, with 'purposes, expectations and motives', while working with a society consisting of a 'constraining environment of institutions, values and norms' (Abrams 1982:7). Miles argues that rather than people being passive victims, they are in fact active agents 'because of their own beliefs and behaviour which can have some impact on their destiny' (1982:65). Asylum seekers constantly rework facets of identity in response to interactions with others, changing circumstances, decisions made by themselves and external influences such as the immigration process. An asylum seeker gradually reworks his/her identity in the UK by incorporating facets of the new circumstances and altering facets of previous existence. Consequently, identity is neither static, nor formlessly fluid, but processual, temporal, spatial and relational.

Relational Identity

The relational aspect of identity has been the subject of much discussion since its conception by James in 1890 (See also Cooley 1902; Mead 1934; Goffman 1959; Gilroy 1991; Linde 1993; Somers 1994; Jackson 1998; Sedikides & Brewer 2001) and provides a conceptual alternative to the largely Western notion of identity as individualised.¹⁶ As Ewing argues:

In all cultures people can be observed to project multiple, inconsistent, self-representations that are context-dependent and may shift rapidly.

(1990:251)

Rather than being completely individualised, people interact and present different versions of themselves depending on the context and with whom they are interacting. One informant, Mr Z, articulated this tension between individual and collective:

Identity is like a pine tree, the roots determine who you are. You may have many branches, but you will always be a pine tree.

(Mr Z, Iranian asylum seeker, London, 2004)

This statement is helpful in that it provides an example as to how identity can be explored. Mr Z is suggesting that he holds a core individual identity, his roots, despite the interactions he may have with others. However, although he may argue that the roots determine his sense of self, the roots are always in contact with the earth, with water, with nutrients, and depend on the branches, the leaves and the sunlight for the sustainability of the pine tree as a whole. One is always in contact with others and an environment that effects and shapes (and prunes) one's interactions, perceptions, beliefs, thoughts and responses. Facets of identity are constantly adjusted and reworked in response to one's interaction with others and the environment within which others are encountered (Pasic 1998:4). Consequently, one's presentation to others – therefore one's relational identities – may pose a different aspect of self to that of one's inner thoughts and feelings of what

¹⁶ For further discussion on Western individualised notion of identity, see Edge (1995:48).

constitutes one's perception of self.

In a study of residency and migration amongst people in the north of England, Mason found that the majority of speech-acts refer to identity and agency in a way that is relationally constituted (2004:177). She argues that the construction of relational identity is evident in the way that a speech-act 'centred upon "what mattered" more widely to the narrator, and upon what had constrained or enabled action and change in their life' (Mason 2004:177). Similarly, Barnett refers to identity as 'not personal or psychological' but 'fundamentally social and relational, defined by the actor's interaction with and relationship to others' (1999:9). Equally, Tajfel describes an individual's identity as deriving from 'his [*sic*] knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership' (1978:63). Therefore, I turn to the notion of relational identities to provide an explanation for the influence of interaction with others in determining a sense of self. Consequently, in this thesis I will be exploring the different interactions from which asylum seekers develop their relational identities.

Theoretical Persuasions

Jackson's work on intersubjectivity, discussed earlier, has been influential in shaping the direction of this thesis. Indeed, his focus on storytelling is so eloquently positioned. Poetically, Jackson achieves for the reader what he sets out to explore in his writing: 'stories are journeys' and 'stories change our experience of the way things are' (2002:30). Thus, Jackson has a remarkable ability to immerse the reader in the complexities and ambiguities of people's lives in a way which engenders a sense of growing understanding of the world.

Jackson's *Politics of Storytelling* (2002) is an exploration of the intersubjective

storytelling that one creates in order to make sense of the world. His particular ethnographic context is refugees. He draws our attention to the lack of interest amongst academics to 'give voice to and work from the lived experience of refugees themselves' (Jackson 2002:80). Throughout this thesis, I have endeavoured to address this marked inequality.

The title of this thesis, *Negotiating Existence*, has also been influenced by the work of Jackson. I use this phrase to refer to a process of interpretation and bargaining of one's potential to retain a sense of self, which is evident in people's speech-acts. One's existence 'is seldom a matter solely of ourselves, but of our relations with others' (Jackson 2005:xxviii). Existence, therefore, refers to a perceived sense of survival of one's notion of self. As Jackson says, we are governed by two spheres:

On the one hand there is the immediate sphere of family and friends, of our local community, the world of which we have complete and intimate knowledge, where our words carry weight and our presence makes a difference. Then there is the wider world of which we know little, in which we account for nothing, where our voices are not heard and our actions have next to no effect. Every human life is a struggle to strike some kind of balance between those two spheres, to feel that there are things that one decides, chooses, governs and controls that offset things over which one has no power. Stories help us negotiate this balance.

(2002:102)

Negotiating one's existence within these spheres is apparent in the speech-acts of asylum seekers. Asylum seekers need to believe that their 'life belongs to a matrix greater than oneself, and that within this sphere [...] [their] own actions and words make a difference' (Jackson 2002:14). An asylum seeker may survive their ordeal of seeking asylum if they can situate their need and adjust their identity within this hierarchy. Thus, the basic principle behind negotiating existence is the struggle to maintain a sense of self, and the movement generated in order to do so.

This thesis reveals layers of movement. Indeed, this thesis is about movement, and it is influenced by the movement generated through Jackson's journey. It becomes a movement itself, a journey following the journey of asylum seekers in East Anglia. At

the same time, undergoing fieldwork and writing this thesis is another kind of movement. Fieldwork is a movement in itself, and a liminal phase in the process of creating ethnography (Hastrup 1990:50).

Locating the Field

Entrance into the world of asylum seekers and support organisations in East Anglia was not an easy process as I had to negotiate gatekeepers (see Scheyvens & Storey 2003; Campbell, Silver *et al.* 2006). I had organised my entry into the field before I left Australia by applying to volunteer with the British Refugee Council. However, shortly after my interview at the Ipswich office in East Anglia, I was informed apologetically that, because of my research interests, my application to volunteer had to be declined. At the time, this seemed like a terrible setback. However, I persisted, trying every organisation who worked with asylum seekers who could grant me entry into this world. These workers acted as gatekeepers and were extremely suspicious of my research interests and were resolute about their appointment as guardians of the 'vulnerable'.

My first trip to Great Yarmouth I undertook as a 'scouting' exercise to get a feel for the town that I would become very familiar with by the end of my research. I sat in the bustling market square and watched as people hurried about their daily lives – shopping, laughing with friends, or avoiding school. I knew that there was an asylum seeker population here, but where were they? Finally I got my break, when I was invited by Mr D, founder of GYROS (Great Yarmouth Refugee Outreach Service), to attend an evening at the drop-in centre for asylum seekers. This was the beginning of a fruitful relationship with asylum seekers and also with GYROS. The asylum seekers were not the vulnerable nervous group that some workers had depicted them to be. Rather, they were people who needed other people to rekindle a sense of community and friendship amidst extraordinary circumstances.

I began volunteering with GYROS, attending the weekly drop-in centre and working closely with a family from Kosovo. I also attended the Great Yarmouth multi-agency meetings, which led me to learn of other meetings being held in Norwich. I first attended NASRF (Norwich Asylum Seeker and Refugee Forum) in 2002. It was an exciting time for me, research-wise, as there was talk of the first asylum seekers to be dispersed by the Home Office to Norwich. It was fortuitous that discussions of much-needed research into the current and future support available to asylum seekers ultimately led to me receiving an internship with the Refugee Council, despite their initial resistance to my volunteering.

The internship consisted of working closely with NASRF and the Refugee Council to carry out research for a needs analysis of Norwich – to see what services were available to new arrivals, how these services could be improved and what problems needed to be addressed. This research gave me immediate access to organisations that had previously been hesitant about my interests. The research also involved a comparison of the experiences of asylum seekers in Peterborough and initiated new links with individuals in this city. At the same time, I became very much involved in the unfolding of the first NASS dispersal to Norwich, as well as continuing to work with GYROS and my informants in Great Yarmouth.



Figure 1: Map showing location of field sites in East Anglia in red dots.

The majority of my time was spent in Norwich and Great Yarmouth (see Figure 1). These two sites are situated approximately 30 kilometres apart from each other. I visited Peterborough only half a dozen times, usually travelling by train. And when some of my informants relocated to the north-east of London, I would travel by car to visit them. My ability to travel freely between these towns brought into stark contrast the inability of my informants to travel for more than a day from their government-designated housing without receiving permission to do so. They were more or less confined to this locale.

Great Yarmouth was built on its fishing industry but now holds one of Norfolk's most

economically deprived wards. There is a consistent flow of Portuguese-speaking migrant workers who are drawn to seasonal work available in the agricultural industry. Great Yarmouth comes alive in the summer months, as it is a popular destination for holiday-makers. This can be clearly seen on Marine Parade (see Figure 2) that runs beside the sea front and has a 'Las Vegas casino' feel.

NOTE: This figure is included on page 38 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Figure 2: Photo of Marine Parade, Great Yarmouth (Great Yarmouth Borough Council 2004).

Great Yarmouth used to be quite grand, as can be seen by what were once beautiful facades on buildings which have now deteriorated. Since the population of asylum seekers was decreasing in 2002-03 (after peaking in 2000) many of the hotels housed migrant workers or reserved the rooms for the annual boom of tourists in the summer.

I made several trips to Peterborough to conduct interviews with asylum seekers at the Red Cross Refugee Project (Figure 3) as part of the research for the needs analysis carried out for the Refugee Council and NASRF. The experiences of asylum seekers in the more established dispersal city of Peterborough were considered to be an example of what some of the issues new arrivals in Norwich might face.



Figure 3: Peterborough Red Cross Refugee Project (Photo: Sophia Corfield)

With the arrival of asylum seekers into this environment, the Red Cross established a refugee orientation project to assist asylum seekers settle into the area by assisting with problems concerning ‘benefits, healthcare, clothing, completing forms and housing benefits’ (Aldridge, McLoughlin *et al.* 2005:25).

Of the half a dozen or so times I visited the centre, the waiting area was always full of asylum seekers in need of assistance. With usually only one or two paid workers running the centre, there were usually two to four asylum seekers and refugees who regularly volunteered their services as interpreters and caseworkers. In this extremely busy environment, my visits always entailed pitching in and providing assistance to as many asylum seekers as I could, and arranging my own interviews in between.

Approaches for Data Collection

In all of my field sites, the majority of information collected was based on

spontaneous speech-acts. Interviews were not conducted with asylum seekers until the end of my research when I felt that such a recording of information would be unobtrusive. I was always starkly aware of the layers of interviewing and questioning that forms the interaction with the bureaucracy of the immigration system. And, as such, I felt that it was unreasonable to apply what may have been construed as a similar approach.

My focus on people's speech-acts made having access to the spontaneous speech and events of asylum seekers highly desirable. I was determined to give room for people's agentic utterances, and to reduce the directive questioning that would give rise to speech-acts that may otherwise not take place. Consequently, I left it to the discretion of my informants to determine the content of their speech-acts. I am starkly aware that many of the quotations that I use throughout this thesis are approximations of what was actually said, rather than literal quotations. This is because I recorded many of the speech-acts shortly after they were spoken rather than noting them at the time they were said. In order to respond appropriately and ethically to this dilemma, I have chosen to use pseudonyms to conceal all of my informants' identities.

Like interviewing, note-taking was something I felt was inappropriate to do in front of asylum seekers. Instead, I memorised any speech-act which I found to be significant. As soon as I was alone, travelling home, or at a local library, I would recall the speech-act and write it as accurately as possible. There were some times when I did directly write into my notebook. For instance, this was possible when conducting interviews amongst asylum seekers in Peterborough for the NASRF and Refugee Council needs analysis. Here, my entry was rapid due to the timeframe for the needs analysis and fostered by my association with the Refugee Council. This provided both immediate offers of assistance by some asylum seekers, and reservations about contributing by others. At the end of my fieldwork, I interviewed

key informants and was both disappointed and relieved to find nothing that I had not already heard. This gave me confidence in the legitimacy of my research methods.

Fieldwork amongst support workers and NGOs engendered an entirely different set of methodological tactics. During meetings and seminars I openly took notes and recorded as much as I could. Only on a few occasions were comments made indirectly about my research interests, in the form of a need for discretion. At these points I either omitted sensitive material from my notes, or took great care in adjusting my notes. My immersion into the world of support organisations also gave me an abundance of information and spontaneous speech. Most of the time I openly took notes. However, some informal conversations produced what seemed to me to be highly useful comments, and on such occasions I was more likely to record later so as not to reinforce a tendency for self-conscious speech-acts. Working as an intern for the Refugee Council gave me cultural capital in the asylum seeker support world, allowing for immediate entry into organisations where previously I had been dismissed. Research for the needs analysis took the form of in-depth semi-structured interviews with both agencies and some asylum seekers, all of which I gained permission to use in supplementing my own research.

My methods for participant observation were as diverse as the context called for. I spent a great deal of time simply 'hanging out' with asylum seekers. Regular volunteering at the GYROS drop-in centre allowed me to form firm relationships with many of the asylum seekers and support workers there. I regularly visited people in the hotels and places that accommodated them. I also frequently went window-shopping or food shopping with my informants. Having a car meant that I was often asked to drive people to shopping expeditions or on excursions. I had been advised before I left for the field that driving with someone in a car was an excellent opportunity to gather information, and I found this to be a very helpful and true

comment. I also photographed particular places of interest within the field, as well as of those people who I was working with. Having a digital camera enabled me to take photos of the asylum seekers, and then give them copies which they could send to their families.

I assisted some asylum seekers with filling out forms, accompanied them to social security appointments to advocate on their behalf, made informal referrals to childcare, playgroups, schools and medical appointments. I was often asked for advice on points in relation to the British Government's NASS (National Asylum Support Service) system that I myself was unfamiliar with. I soon got a reputation for being able to find out required information due to my fluency in English, confidence and the fact that I cared. In this regard, I was in a relationship of mutual assistance with my informants.

I also gathered considerable information via e-mail and the Internet. I hoarded as many newspaper articles, speeches and press releases on my topic as possible, to keep myself abreast of the latest happenings in this field. I also subscribed to a daily group e-mail called *Asylum Policy* (EXILE 2002-2003) as well as the Voluntary Sector Refugee Network East of England (VSRN-EE) e-mail network. This was another useful avenue for alerting me to more local news, events and information.

My insight into the support world made me privy to the intensive networks of meetings and conference within the 'refugee industry'. I attended every meeting, workshop, training and conference that I possibly could about asylum seekers and refugees in East Anglia and several in London. I regularly attended the NASRF meetings, GYROS meetings, Norfolk regional meetings and Steering group meetings for the needs analysis. I spent some time 'shadowing' at the Ipswich office of the Refugee Council, and sat in on policy meetings at the Refugee Council headquarters in London. All in all I developed a wide network of contacts that

spanned NGOs, private companies, government agencies and university colleagues, all of who assisted me in negotiating my way through the industry.

The Positioning of the Anthropologist

My positioning as researcher created both personal experiences and relational interactions. In fact, I found it a constant struggle to attempt to maintain my own positioning as researcher, friend, participant, observer and analyst. Several aspects of my identity, and the position from which I interacted with people, influenced the nature of the research and the kind of information I was able to collect. The fact that I was Australian and not British instantaneously brought me closer to my informants, who considered me to be a new arrival. This was despite my clear admittance that because my parents were both originally from the UK, I was able to obtain dual nationality, and that my partner, Mark, who accompanied me on the trip, was British and had immigrated to Australia where we had first met. Surprisingly, this did not interrupt their perceptions of me as Australian, and I attributed this to my open comments about the differences that I myself was experiencing. Throughout my fieldwork, I lived with Mark's family rather than my informants, out of financial necessity and convenience. This was also considered to be appropriate by my informants. As a young unmarried woman, living away from my own family, it was deemed appropriate by many of my informants that I live with my future family.

The fact that I do not have blonde hair and blue eyes also separated me from a stereotypical view of an Australian/English woman. Many of my informants asked after my ethnic origins, and commented that I did not look completely 'Western'. Explaining that my grandmother was a Czechoslovakian refugee, who was born and raised in Egypt, furthered a perception that I was, like them, an 'outsider'. In addition, being in my mid-twenties at the time of my fieldwork put me in close proximity to the ages of my informants. My position as anthropologist and

postgraduate put me in good stead with many of my informants, who regarded education highly.¹⁷ This made it easier for me to work with both men and women, although on advise from support workers I did intentionally avoid working alone with single young men.

Language, whilst being a point of interest, was something that I managed to work around. Many of my informants had been in the UK for at least 3 years, and had a good grasp of English. Considering the numerous different language groups amongst asylum seekers in East Anglia, it would have been very difficult to 'choose' one language to attempt to engage with. To my advantage at least, English was the common language spoken. More importantly, however, had I set out to learn another language it would have been taken as quite offensive by informants who spoke a different language again. Indeed, I was already conscious of comments of disappointment if an informant had heard that I had not dropped in to visit them and had instead been visiting another family. Friendship and trust were highly valued amongst people who had had cultural norms of community intimacy disrupted.

I was conscious of my own privileges of holding both an Australian and British passport. One informant told me that she had once seen a film in which the character said, 'If I ever find out who invented the passport, I will kill them!' She put her hand on her heart and said, 'It is so close to my own heart'. I found it quite absurd that my informants, who were so desperate for such a document, were restricted, whereas I — who despite my British heritage did not feel a strong connection to my 'roots' — was able to receive a passport through little effort. Although this did weigh on me, my informants seemed untroubled by my luck of birth. This irony of my nationality and the privileges it allowed me, I suggest, further emphasises the notion of identity and existence of asylum seekers' liminal positioning.

¹⁷ See Malkki (1995) for a similar response to her positioning as 'university student'.

The Structure of the Thesis

This thesis, as a kind of journey, reflects the constant movement of asylum seekers' identities as they interact with others through space and through a liminal immigration system. The following chapter, Chapter 2, explores further the notion of movement through space by exploring the field sites in England and the reason for shared experience amongst asylum seekers. In doing so, it sets the unique geographical, political and social context of a distanced place. Chapter 3 takes a closer look at the temporal and liminal characteristics of the immigration process that many of my informants had experienced prior to my entrance into the field. This chapter reveals the way in which people become liminal entities through the reworking of their story onto a case matrix. It is through this interaction that one can see that asylum seekers' identities are relationally constructed, and that asylum seekers are most preoccupied by their positioning within the immigration process.

Chapter 4 examines the construction of asylum seekers through the speech-acts of workers in the asylum seeker support 'industry'. This chapter explores the paradox of an organised system of support, working to assist asylum seekers to be independent, and yet in doing so excluding asylum seekers from the decision-making process and perpetuating isolation.

Chapters 5 and 6 explore in greater detail the types of intersubjective shared experiences through speech-acts that are elicited by asylum seekers in interactions with others. Each chapter presents interrelations with a group of people, local Britons and other asylum seekers respectively, that are influential in the relational identities produced. Chapter 5 explores the tensions in (dis)locating speech-acts that reflect the disruption and rupture to one's known or assumed sense of self. This kind of speech-act involves a constant positioning and repositioning of the relational

identities of asylum seekers vis-à-vis British locals. Such speech-acts occur in response to tensions arising from the portrayal of the 'other' in the media, a fear of violence and the role of the state. Interactions between asylum seekers form the focus of Chapter 6. I suggest that asylum seekers' speech-acts reveal a vacillation between an individualised and a collective identity as well as between a sense of collaboration and distrust.¹⁸ I draw on Jackson's notion of intersubjective ambiguity to explore the way that these speech-acts act as a coping mechanism for asylum seekers as they negotiate existence.

Chapter 7 turns to the notion of movement and stillness to explain the physical and existential movement of seeking asylum. The *Myth of Sisyphus* reflects this tension experienced by asylum seekers in the stillness of occupying a liminal position, and the movement to free oneself from such a predicament, as articulated through their speech-acts. This chapter explores how one might contend with this ontological insecurity by considering the Heideggerian notion of authenticity and inauthenticity (1967:68 & 261). This chapter suggests that speech-acts largely operate to come to terms with the predicament of seeking asylum.

The concluding chapter suggests further areas of research with regard to immigration policy, refugee settlement and ethnic relations in the UK. This chapter outlines aspects of asylum seeker settlement which need further research. I also suggest the benefits of a more inclusive and humanitarian stance in addressing issues pertinent to asylum seeking in the UK. I make the critical point of the inclusion of direct interaction and discussion with asylum seekers in order to explore ways of addressing issues of welfare, work, health and race relations in the UK. I provide a postscript about the current status of the asylum seekers who took part in this study, many of whom are now refugees. This leads to the suggestion of future research about refugeeness, with the question, 'When do you stop being a refugee?'

¹⁸ In fact, 'mistrust' is the topic of Daniel and Knudsen's edited book, *Mistrusting Refugees* (1995).

In doing so, I suggest that further consideration be given to the relationship between the refugee and the citizen, and the point at which the settler becomes a native (Ahluwalia 2001:72; Mamdani 1998). This line of inquiry between an asylum seeker becoming a refugee, or a refugee becoming a citizen, or the settler becoming a native, reflects the notion of movement that is predominant throughout this thesis. Ultimately, for asylum seekers, the issue at hand with regard to movement is the difference between being and nothingness (Sartre 1957). Asylum seeking is, therefore, about negotiating one's very existence.

CHAPTER 2

THE PLACE OF REFUGE

In the UK, asylum seekers are dispersed to parts of the country where they no longer live within close proximity of supportive networks of their own ethnic communities. These dispersed asylum seekers form a diverse mix of ethnic groups, without the numbers from which a substantial community of a specific ethnic origin can form. However, what emerges is a sense of tentative camaraderie amongst asylum seekers as they share the conditions of place-making. In this chapter I will look at geographical, demographic and economic dimensions of space in East Anglia. I will show that shared experiences of cohabitation, solidarity and sociality are all evident of place-making in East Anglia.

The concepts of space and place have received a great deal of interest amongst scholars, but these terms are often used in ambiguous ways (Massey 1993:143; Kuper 2003:247). I draw on de Certeau, who refers to space as the effect of the 'strategy' imposed by bureaucratic institutions through 'classification, delineation and division' (1984:36; Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2003:32). My usage of the term space refers to a pre-existing geographic, demographic and historical construct of East Anglia by the Home Office and the London boroughs. The immigration system draws upon the demographic, economic and geographical aspects of East Anglia in order to 'orientate it, situate it, temporalize it' within a bureaucratically approved space into which asylum seekers are dispersed (de Certeau 1984:117).

Once in East Anglia the relationship amongst asylum seekers is mediated by their common place-making. Richardson explains that 'people are no longer simply there

physically; they are also in-the-world' (1982:423). Asylum seekers experience East Anglia physically as a place and existentially through the 'sensory dimensions' of the 'reality of place', as well as through social interactions (Richardson 1982:434; Low & Lawrence-Zuniga 2003:5).¹⁹ Consequently, the notion of embodied space encompasses physical, existential and social properties. This embodiment of space manifests as place-making whereby asylum seekers' experience of space is shared and relational. Throughout this chapter, I draw on this construction of place as practiced space (in my terminology) (see de Certeau 1984: 117).

Space

East Anglia's low population density relative to London makes it an ideal dispersal space. It is a space which can socially engineered (see Boyle, Halfacree *et al.* 1998; Robinson, Andersson *et al.* 2003) to include asylum seekers of multiple ethnicities within a region populated predominantly by people of Anglo-Saxon origin. The immigration system isolates asylum seekers from their ethnic communities by dispersing them to this space. At the same time, the immigration system confines them by their legal status. Consequently, asylum seekers must contend with an understanding of East Anglia which is largely influenced by these spatial factors prescribed by the immigration system.

The experience of East Anglia for my informants began when they were dispersed from London to places such as Great Yarmouth in Norfolk. From the mid-1990s asylum seekers were dispersed by London boroughs to different parts of the country, such as Great Yarmouth (see Figure 5), to be accommodated whilst their asylum application was being processed.²⁰

¹⁹ Although Richardson and Low and Lawrence-Zuniga are not speaking of asylum seekers, their notion of place is appropriate in this context.

²⁰ The time it took to process applications differed from case to case, but took between three months and seven years. This is based on the Home Office target of three months, and an informant who applied in the mid-1990s who was still waiting for an outcome seven years later.



Figure 4: Map of East Anglia showing field site locations.

In 2000 the British Government's NASS (National Asylum Support Service) began a dispersal of asylum seekers out of London and into regional areas. This massive logistical exercise was an effort to reduce the burden of service provision borne by London boroughs. Many asylum seekers were dispersed to areas throughout England where accommodation was more readily available, and access to services could be localised.

Norwich and Great Yarmouth are dispersal sites which were intended to be language-based 'cluster areas'. These sites were supposed to be chosen because of suitable factors of ethnic composition, community relations, community networks, school places, translation and interpretation services, legal support, employment

opportunities and places of worship (Audit Commission 2000:49). However, this was never implemented by the Home Office or borough-initiated dispersals in sites like Great Yarmouth:

The aim was that you'd identify cluster areas and that you'd decide on a language group to go to that cluster area. I don't know if that's ever happened [...] It was nothing to do with NASS, but there were discussions that obviously went on about the difficulty of sending so many nationalities to these hotels and whether you could actually group nationalities. [...] but there seemed to be such pressure on accommodation that those finer points and the niceties of having a bit of slack in the system where you could shunt people around and get it right, never seemed to be there.

(Mr D, GYROS, Great Yarmouth, 2003)

According to Anie *et al.* (2005:7), the language clustering never occurred because of Home Office concerns that language clustering may 'contribute to an emerging "ghetto" of asylum seekers and refugees in highly deprived areas'. The Home Office, in sending asylum seekers to East Anglia, knowingly isolated them from their ethnic communities. This isolation forms the context into which asylum seekers entered this space. However, despite this sense of isolation, the shared experience of East Anglia draws asylum seekers together. In having a similar relationship to this space, asylum seekers share the conditions of place-making.

Place-Making

East Anglia is a space bureaucratically informed by the Home Office (through the immigration system) prior to asylum seekers' arrival in it. Once asylum seekers are dispersed to East Anglia their lived experience of it and investment in it can be understood as place-making. Asylum seekers have an overall similar experience of this space; they also share the conditions of place-making. Despite the difficulties of adjusting to this isolating space, asylum seekers nonetheless 'set about making [...] such a place to ensure stable habitation' (Casey 1993:109). This place-making entails multiple interactions and constructs of space and people. Indeed, Soja comments:

To be alive is to participate in the social production of space, to shape and be shaped by a constantly evolving spatiality which constitutes and concretises social action and relationship.

(1985:90)

Through social interaction, place-making occurs. Place can then be understood as movement through space. People have a 'multiplicity of attachments [...] to places through living in, remembering and imagining them' (Malkki 1992:38). Place is therefore a practiced space in the sense that asylum seekers seek out a feeling of 'being at home' in East Anglia (de Certeau 1984:117).

However, sustaining a sense of 'being at home' is difficult when asylum seekers' place-making is contested by locals. Although one might create a place where one can find comfort in the 'rhythms of familiar places, one must also be able to confront the new', the strange and the unknown (Lorraine 2005:162). Multiple constructions of place become evident when some groups have inscribed different meanings of place (Low & Lawrence-Zuniga 2003:13). For example, locals in Great Yarmouth have a strong sense of belonging to the town. This was evident at the asylum seeker drop-in centre in Great Yarmouth when a local contested the use of the space for asylum seekers. When she was told that the old army drill hall was now being used as a drop-in centre for minority groups, she angrily replied: 'Don't you tell me about minority groups, I come from London!' This response reveals layers of spatial inscription where one can be a local in relation to asylum seekers, but not in relation to people who may have longer connections to their place. Indeed, Goheen argues that people 'create meaningful public places by expressing their attitudes, asserting their claims and using it for their own purposes' (1998:498). Therefore, differing claims to place are contested and negotiated. In their life-worlds, these negotiations arise as asylum seekers interact and interrelate with other asylum seekers, service providers and locals. As much as a sense of solidarity may form with other asylum seekers, it is increasingly difficult to forge a sense of place in an

unfamiliar society. As Jackson says:

one's [...] understanding of others is never arrived at in the neutral or disengaged manner, but is negotiated and tested in an ambiguous and stressful field of interpersonal relationships in an unfamiliar society.

(Jackson 1998:5)

Place-making in this environment occurs within a 'configuration of positions' (de Certeau 1984:117). In turn, these contestations increase a sense of isolation shared by asylum seekers through an intense feeling that:

he or she has no place in the polis, no confidence or right to enter the public sphere – neither the communal space he or she is forced out of, nor the communal space into which he or she is obliged to seek refuge.

(Jackson 2002:68)

This sense of isolation draws asylum seekers together in a shared sense of solidarity. Ilcan refers to this space of isolation as generating 'movements of populations, of struggles, of ideas—that unsettle and resettle relations within, between, and beyond its borders' (2002:3). Place-making occurs in the midst of the experience of movement. Therefore, contested places are an aspect of the shared experience which asylum seekers occupy.

The question remains: how do asylum seekers make a meaningful place if they are 'strangers' in a region that is culturally unlike their homelands? It may seem as though asylum seekers are theoretically free to engage with the communities of the geographically isolated towns simply because they are not confined to a detention centre, as in Australia.²¹ However, as I will demonstrate shortly, their asylum status isolates them politically, economically and culturally from locals, as they are confined within these geographically isolated towns and surrounded by farming land.

²¹ However, detention centres for asylum seekers are used in the UK. In fact, the capacity of UK detention centres has increased from 250 people in 1993 to over 2000 people in 2005. Asylum seekers who have arrived illegally can be placed in detention centres at the discretion of an immigration officer (Bacon 2005:5).

Geographical Space

I will now focus on how East Anglia is spatially constructed through people's social interactions and differing perspectives. East Anglia is a contested geographical space in which asylum seekers, migrants and locals negotiate alternative constructions of place-making. Asylum seekers in East Anglia share the experience of living in a geographically isolated town, which is quite a contrast to the temporary period spent living in London experienced by many of my informants. It is important to understand the geographical positioning of East Anglia in order to comprehend how physical distance is also spatial. The geographical isolation of East Anglia seems apparent to anyone who travels on the main road to Great Yarmouth, the Acle Straight (see Figure 6), where the flat and windswept Broads stretch for miles.²² In fact, several asylum seekers commented to me that they had been sent to Great Yarmouth as a punishment, because they were so isolated from their ethnic communities and the rest of the country.

East Anglia supports a thriving agricultural industry, which has enticed migrant workers into the region to provide a much-needed workforce. Many of these migrants are engaged in manual labour such as fruit and vegetable picking. Ironically, these migrants, while filling a labour void, are simultaneously perceived as a threat to the homogeneity of the locals.²³ The region is primarily a rural farming area, producing wheat, sugar beat, winter barley, and potatoes as well as pigs, sheep and cattle (Rampton 2006:21 & 28).

²² The Broads are a series of rivers and waterways stretching for over 200 miles which originated from excavations made in the Middle Ages by people digging peat to fuel their fires (NorfolkBroads.com 2006).

²³ By 'locals' I refer to the Britons who consider themselves indigenous to the area. I will explore in greater depth the relationship between asylum seekers and locals in Chapter 5.



Figure 5: Acle Straight – the road that cuts through the Broads to Great Yarmouth (Photo: Sophia Corfield).

At the time of my fieldwork, Norfolk was seeing a growth in migrant workers in agricultural employment. Many of these migrant workers were ‘Portuguese, Chinese, South Asians, Albanians, Kosovans, Americans (North and South)’ or ‘from the Eastern European communities (the Ukraine, Lithuania, Estonia, Belarus, Latvia and Russia) and the Commonwealth countries (India)’ (McKay & Winkelmann-Gleed 2005:23-24). The large number (approximately 1500) of Chinese workers has been linked to ‘the involvement of mafia-style gangs in their immigration and employment status’ (Taylor & Rogaly 2004:29; McKay & Winkelmann-Gleed 2005:24). In fact, the Triad Gangs are responsible for bringing in these economic migrants and then withholding their visas and extorting money from them (Taylor & Rogaly 2004:28).

Asylum seekers, in contrast, are not permitted to work. If illegal employment is secured, it is invariably undertaken ‘in low skilled, low paid jobs, not dissimilar from

the position occupied by migrant workers' (McKay & Winkelmann-Gleed 2005:16). Consequently, East Anglia is perceived as a geographically distant space, an agricultural space and a work space by many. The social intersection of these diverse perspectives also forms contestations as to who should share this geographical space.

The geographical space of East Anglia is also socially constructed by locals through the perceived threat of 'strangers'. This can best be illustrated by the conviction of Norfolk farmer Tony Martin for murdering a sixteen-year-old traveller named Barras in August 2000 (Vanderbeck 2003:363).²⁴ Barras was breaking into Martin's farmhouse in Norfolk, when Martin gave no warning shot and killed him 'using an illegally owned shotgun' (Vanderbeck 2003:363). The local public response was overwhelming support for Martin, who was deemed to be defending his home against this threatening stranger (Vanderbeck 2003:363). According to Vanderbeck, the 'Martin Affair' reveals 'social anxieties about 'dangerous youth', the 'underclass' and 'social exclusion' which 'emphasise the moral failings of the excluded' (2002:363).

As Garland and Chakaboti argue, the idyllic representation of rural England is predominantly white homogenous and 'quintessentially English' (2004:385). Their study of geographically isolated communities in the UK, including Suffolk in East Anglia, found that 'outsiders' was a term attributed by locals to anyone who did not originate from the area by birth and could even apply to people 'from the next village' (Garland & Chakraborti 2004:390). Country life is 'constantly contested by actors who have invested both financially and emotionally in the "construct" of the country life, and who seek to defend it from alternative constructions' (Woods 1998:321). Consequently, the geographic isolation of East Anglia emphasises the

²⁴ By 'travellers' I refer to the nomadic communities of traveller-gypsies (see Okely 1983). Although I am not speaking of asylum seekers here, travellers and asylum seekers are equally considered as 'strangers' by locals.

presence of strangers. This leads us to consider the extent to which asylum seekers must engage with a population in East Anglia that is ostensibly ethnically monocultural.

Demographic Space

The presence of asylum seekers in Peterborough, Norwich and Great Yarmouth seems to represent a dramatic change to the demographics of the towns. However, let us first consider the demographics of London in comparison the East Anglian towns, before turning to the history of refugee settlement in East Anglia which dates back to the sixteenth century. According to the 2001 Census, London's population was 7,172,091 people, compared to 90,810 people living in Great Yarmouth (National Statistics 2003b). In London, the largest population was described as 71.2 per cent white British.²⁵ The ethnic community populations are larger than in East Anglia, with 6.1 per cent being Indian, 5.3 per cent black African and 4.8 per cent black Caribbean (National Statistics 2003b).

Peterborough began receiving asylum seekers through the dispersal program in 2001 (Peterborough City Council 2004). Although the city had a number of ethnic communities,²⁶ the 'dispersal brought [in] many different nationalities at one time' (Makiwa 2006). Peterborough is somewhat more multicultural than Norwich and Great Yarmouth, with a white British population of 89.7 per cent (National Statistics 2003c). According to the 2001 National Census, 98.6 per cent of the population of Great Yarmouth are described as white British, while only 0.2 per cent are defined as mixed white and Asian (National Statistics 2003a). The white British population in Great Yarmouth is therefore greater than the average population of white British in

²⁵ 'White British' is the terms used by National Statistics to refer to people of Anglo-Saxon origin. The 2001 census uses two other categories of 'white' – 'white Irish' and 'white other' to describe people who may be considered to be 'white' but who are from a non-Anglo-Saxon background (for example, Irish, Welsh, Scottish or European) (Bosveld *et al.* 2006: 9).

²⁶ In Peterborough, the Pakistani community is 4.5 per cent and the Indian community makes up 1.8 per cent of the total population (National Statistics 2003c).

England and Wales, which stands at 91.3 per cent (National Statistics 2003a). Norwich has a slightly lower percentage than Great Yarmouth of white British population (96.8 per cent). However, this census does not take into account the population of asylum seekers and the seasonal fluctuation of migrant workers in the region.²⁷

Norwich has a small number of dedicated organisations to assist the settlement of asylum seekers and refugees, including Norwich International Youth Project assisting unaccompanied minors, British Red Cross, Norwich Asylum Seeker and Refugee Forum (NASRF), and the Refugee Council. Organisations supporting asylum seekers, refugees and ethnic groups settling in Norfolk include the Norfolk and Norwich Racial Equality Council (NNREC), Norwich Education and Action for Development (NEAD), and MENTER, a regional network linking black and minority ethnic groups.

Norwich has a small number of ethnic communities of Bangladeshi, Chinese and Greek Cypriots. There are seven ethnic community organisations based in Norwich that operate Norfolk-wide. These include the Norfolk Philippine Support Group, Bangladesh Islamic Forum, Norwich Muslim Association, the Irish Society of East Anglia, West Norfolk and Districts Chinese Society, Norfolk African Community Association (NACA), and Norwich Black Women's Group.²⁸ Of these groups, only the latter two have close contacts with asylum seekers in Norwich. The creation of these groups is indicative of the need for solidarity and a sense of belonging within a town that is generally ethnically monocultural. It also reveals the need for formal ethnic community bodies to act as mediators between emerging communities and

²⁷ National Statistics gather their data on migrants from the International Passenger Survey and data on asylum seekers from the Home Office. However, this data is used in the census section 'International Migration' rather than specifically relating to each region in Britain (National Statistics 2005). Therefore, asylum seekers are not included in the census data for Great Yarmouth, Norwich, Peterborough or London.

²⁸ One year after my fieldwork was completed, Mr G, a Congolese asylum seeker, formed the Norfolk French Speakers Association (NORFRESA) (1993).

the wider white British society (Zetter, Griffiths *et al.* 2005b:2).



Figure 6: Norwich (Visit Norwich 2007).

It is not often understood or recognised by locals that refugees have played a major role in the construction of the East Anglian identity for hundreds of years. Norwich (see Figure 7) in particular has a history of receiving refugees that dates back to the sixteenth century. In 1565, Queen Elizabeth I provided the first settlement plan for refugees, by granting 300 Dutch Calvinist communities leave to settle in Norwich (Yungblut 1996:30).

At this time, Strangers' Hall (see Figure 8) welcomed the Dutch refugees, who the locals called 'Strangers' (Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service 2006). By the late sixteenth century, the population of refugees had grown to over one third of the total population of Norwich (Yungblut 1996:30). In fact, the growth of new settlers in Norwich was such that it became 'second only to London in number of resident aliens' (Yungblut 1996:52). However, the rapid growth of 'strangers' changed the attitudes of locals 'from eager invitation and warm welcome to bitter disputes and

deepening hostility' (Yungblut 1996:53). The hostility was largely due to the migrants' economic success and a fear that continued migration flows would overwhelm the local populations (Yungblut 1996:53).

NOTE: This figure is included on page 60 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Figure 7: Strangers' Hall (Photo: Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service 2006).

In the sixteenth century, Great Yarmouth did not receive the number of 'strangers' that were settling in Norwich. Great Yarmouth was once a thriving herring fishing town and was a major trading and key defensive port on the east coast. In the seventeenth century Great Yarmouth obtained a parliamentary act to stop foreigners becoming 'freemen of the town', such was the harsh opposition to foreigners (Gauci 1996:124). However, there remained 'firm links between the Dutch and Yarmouth merchants', which was 'evident from the assimilation of Dutch architectural styles by local builders' (Gauci 1996:124).

Despite the fact that today Norfolk is monocultural in comparison to other cities in England, its history is one of migration bringing with it an increase of multi-ethnic groups. Four hundred years after the arrival of the Dutch refugees, in June 2003, Norwich again became the recipient of a government-administered settlement

plan.²⁹

Today, there is a continual flow of migration, incorporating both asylum seekers and a seasonal population fluctuation with an increasing number of Portuguese-speaking migrant workers. This is the demographic space into which the Home Office has sent asylum seekers. Another dimension of space, the economic space of Norwich, Peterborough and Great Yarmouth, also has an enormous impact on asylum seekers.

Economic Space

Asylum seekers experience economic deprivation in two ways: they share the experience of living in an economically deprived town, but they also experience the poverty that goes hand in hand with their immigration status of being an asylum seeker. Norwich, Great Yarmouth and Peterborough are areas which are listed in the top 37 per cent of most economically deprived cities in the UK. The Index of Multiple Deprivation ranks the level of deprivation against six domains: income, employment, health deprivation and disability, education skills and training, housing and geographical access to services. The scores for each town are calculated against these domains and are then summarised by a ranking in relation to the UK overall (Norfolk County Council 2004). Great Yarmouth is characterised by significant deprivation – it is ranked the number one ‘hot spot’ of significant deprivation within Norfolk. When weighted against other towns ranked most deprived in their region, Great Yarmouth ranks fifth in the national Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000, making the town one of England’s most economically deprived (Department of the Environment Transport and the Regions (DETR) 2000:31). On the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000, Peterborough ranks sixty-first most deprived nationally (IMD 2000). Norwich City ranks sixty-sixth most deprived nationally out of

²⁹ In Chapter 5 I will take a closer look at the response of locals to the arrival of ‘strangers’.

three hundred and fifty-four Council areas, making it the least deprived in relation to Great Yarmouth and Peterborough. However, on the basis of the concentration of low income and unemployment measures, Norwich is the most deprived in Norfolk (Norfolk County Council 2001:4). For asylum seekers, the economic deprivation is compounded by the Home Office through NASS welfare payments.

The amount of welfare payments that asylum seekers receive makes it very hard for them to subsist on a day to day basis in the UK. Although they receive NASS benefits comprising free housing and utilities, they are only provided with 70 per cent of the income support rate that is given to British citizens (Robinson, Andersson *et al.* 2003:124; Refugee Council 2006). Consequently, support organisations working with asylum seekers witness the daily struggle for asylum seekers to survive living in the UK:

- 85% of organisations reported that their clients experience hunger
- 95% of organisations reported that their clients cannot afford to buy clothes or shoes
- 80% of organisations reported that their clients are not able to maintain good health

(Refugee Council 2002b:4)

The British government awards the full income payment for children. However, asylum seekers are not able to receive additional benefits such as the Family Premium, and so the overall family income is reduced 'back down to 70 – 80 per cent of income support rates' (Refugee Council 2002b:20). Asylum seekers are able to claim a '£50 supplement to buy additional items like clothing' (Refugee Council 2002b:20). However, this is only awarded after six months on arrival in the UK, and it is up to each person to find out about the award and to pursue their right to claim it. Meanwhile, for asylum seekers arriving from a country where the climate is much warmer, the cost of living in the UK, together with their lack of English language skills or lack of knowledge about the British immigration system, can make it very

difficult to live. Indeed, one asylum seeker from the Congo reported to me his experiences of when he first arrived in the UK and was placed in accommodation in Peterborough:

I'm an asylum seeker no clothes at all, two or three T-shirts, but you got no jumpers, it's winter – no jumpers, no jacket. It stayed like that for two days. I thought they'd use the heaters. But we had as well nothing to eat. [...] We didn't know where to go!

(Mr T, Congolese asylum seeker, Peterborough, 2003)

The British government argues that asylum seekers receive a lower level of payments because it is only for a short period of time while their asylum claim is being processed (Refugee Council 2002b:23). However, the period of time that asylum seekers may have to wait can be much longer than the estimated three months. Indeed, many of my informants in Great Yarmouth have spent three years waiting for an outcome and one person has been waiting for seven years. The financial difficulties experienced by many asylum seekers are reflected by the state of the hotels in which they have no choice but to occupy. In fact the term 'hotel' must be understood as a glorified term for the substandard conditions which asylum seekers must endure while place-making.

Cohabitation

The asylum seekers of Peterborough, Great Yarmouth and Norwich all shared the experience of being assigned housing. However, I will use Great Yarmouth as a prime example of the type of conditions that asylum seekers share. In the winter of 2002, I made my first visit to a hotel in Great Yarmouth which was specifically run to house asylum seekers. Here is my account of the visit as I reported it in my field diary:

It was one road back from the promenade and paralleled the sea and the casino-style buildings that seemed as though they would be more at home in Las Vegas. The road was quite dilapidated. I parked my car in the only space available – a vacant lot – a spacious area it seemed on such a narrow street, if it had not been for the two burnt out trashed cars. The houses

looked as though they were once quite grand places but which had now fallen into disrepair – I could still see the beautiful yet deteriorating facades. The Ivanhoe hotel which I was visiting was one such place. The carpets were now faded and worn with age, the wallpaper was torn and the paintwork was peeling. Instead of guests of leisure, the hotel now had asylum seekers designated to each room by an identifying number.

Mrs Z came rushing down the once-elegant stairs to meet me. She greeted me warmly and I got the impression that she did not often receive visitors. She showed me into the room which she and her husband and their nine month-old baby had been sharing for the past 2 years. She had already told me of their cramped conditions, but it had to be seen to be believed. There was room for a double bed with a small amount of room to the side, which was not even an extended arms width. The one window looked out at a brick wall which blocked the chance of any direct sunlight. The bathroom doubled as a kitchen, except for cooking and water for tea which had to be made in the communal kitchen three floors below – an awkward task when she is also caring for her baby.

In a hotel such as this, asylum seekers were randomly grouped together, so that each hotel housed people of many different ethnic groups. In the Ivanhoe Hotel there lived Iranians, Iraqis, Armenians, Romanians, a Sri Lankan, Albanians, and Kenyans (see Figure 9).

NOTE: This figure is included on page 64 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Figure 8: Photo of Great Yarmouth Arch on Wellington Road. A hotel that houses asylum seekers is located behind the archway (Photo: Woodcock 1995).

This was the situation for asylum seekers who from 1997 were sent by the City of Westminster and the Newham Council to live in Great Yarmouth (Norwich and Norfolk Racial Equality Council 1998:32-33). Asylum seekers were being incorporated into Great Yarmouth and into Bed and Breakfast hotels through a

dispersal process. Mr D, founder of GYROS (Great Yarmouth Refugee Outreach and Support), explains the extent of the dispersal which organised asylum seekers into a particular location and yet lacked the provision of basic resources needed to assist a sudden growth of a population in need of specific and often specialised assistance:

[...] we may have had approaching 500 asylum seekers at one point. And work then got seriously out of hand, we could manage supporting some guys in one and some in the other, then there were families coming, there were more nationalities and 3 hotels and it just kind of spiralled then into a very difficult situation.

(Mr D, GYROS, Great Yarmouth, 2003)

The Home Office had developed a policy to disperse asylum seekers of a 'limited range of nationalities' so that they were able to form communities based on language clusters (Robinson, Andersson *et al.* 2003:136). But the idea of language-based cluster zones was never implemented through the borough-initiated dispersals in places like Great Yarmouth.

For asylum seekers, being referred to as a number, and having no choice as to where they can live, reinforces a feeling of being reified. That is, they 'literally appear as things rather than the active agents of economic activity and historical change' (Macey 2000:326). One asylum seeker in Great Yarmouth illustrates this:

[...] asylum seekers are treated like herds of cattle in the hotels. When Newham [Borough Council] ring up the hotel to move people around, instead of saying move so-and-so to room whatever, they say move room 2 to room 4, so we're not people anymore, we're numbers.

(Mrs K, Kenyan asylum seeker, Great Yarmouth, 2003)

Another asylum seeker supported this statement by commenting:

You can't go anywhere unless you get permission and you have to tell them where you are going. You can't go away for more than a week. You may be free to leave where you live, but not free here [he points to his head].

(Mr T, Congolese asylum seeker, Peterborough, 2003)

As Mr C suggests, space becomes a pervasive experience affecting asylum

seekers' everyday lived experiences. The hotel is at the heart of interactions amongst asylum seekers. It is the reality of the restriction which these asylum seekers must endure and share. In so doing, asylum seekers are forging a place of lived experience despite their isolation from their own ethnic communities and from the local community. This was never more apparent than when an asylum seeker from the Montague Hotel in Great Yarmouth was murdered.

Solidarity

The response to the murder of one of the asylum seekers from the Montague Hotel emphasised the sense of shared experience amongst the asylum seekers but also their isolation from the wider community of locals.³⁰ The reaction by asylum seekers to the murder was one of a sense of community amongst asylum seekers who share the experience of being socially excluded (Jackson 1998:4)³¹, therefore producing a sense of solidarity.

The presence of asylum seekers in Great Yarmouth became very visible to locals following the death of Mrs G, an asylum seeker from Guinea-Bissau, who had been strangled and then her body dumped in the local river (Crown Prosecution Service 2004:7). Mrs J (an asylum seeker from Armenia) and Miss P (an asylum seeker from Angola) were talking about the day when they went to see Mrs G's body in the morgue. Mrs J told me that 'We all went', meaning all of the asylum seekers that knew Mrs G. I asked her:

'Why did you have to go?' Wondering why they had been summons for a formal identification of her body.

Mrs J looked at me in surprise and said:

'I didn't have to go, I wanted to. We all went together.'

(Mrs J, Armenian asylum seeker, Great Yarmouth, 2003)

³⁰ See Chapter 5 for a more in-depth discussion about the relationship between asylum seekers and locals.

³¹ Jackson is not speaking of asylum seekers here, but his argument that intersubjectivity involves both 'compassion and conflict' remains relevant (1998:4).

It seemed that despite the past trauma that each person may have experienced, there was a sense of connectedness and solidarity amongst these people. Sharing the same place and experience of seeking asylum in Great Yarmouth formed a solidarity which became firmer in response to local accusations as to who had committed the murder. Miss P told me that the locals were suspicious of her because she was black and from Africa, as was Mrs G. But she explained to me that they were from two different countries. She used me as an example:

[...] it would be just like if you did something, everyone would say that all Australians are like that. It really affected all of us, because all the locals are suspicious.

(Miss P, Angolan asylum seeker, Great Yarmouth, 2003)

Miss P remarked that this is a problem throughout the UK; when something happens it is always reported in the media as 'asylum seekers', never a white person, or a British person. Here Miss P is referring to not just a racial construction of difference, but one which relates to a local/outsider division. One could say that in the minds of the locals, these suspicions were confirmed when Mrs G's husband was arrested and put on trial for her murder.³² Towards the end of my fieldwork, many of the asylum seekers were called to testify in court. For these asylum seekers the trial emphasised a divide between themselves and the locals:

I could not believe the jury. The only black person in the courtroom was Mr G. The jury stood out – they looked so 'Norfolk' – you can tell if someone is from Manchester or London or wherever, but they were *so Norfolk* [her emphasis]. What good is that going to do having Norfolk people? That's not fair.

(Mrs L, Kenyan asylum seeker, Great Yarmouth 2003)

³² In October 2003 Mr G was convicted of murdering his wife and sentenced to life imprisonment in Norwich Prison (BBC News 2003).

The trial represented more than simply establishing who had murdered Mrs G.³³ Rather, it was about the asylum seekers' relationship with the local community and their positioning within this space which excluded them as citizens, and which in turn caused them to exclude the locals by perceiving them as a white homogenous group.³⁴ However, it is not the exclusion per se which I wish to focus upon here. Rather, I emphasise that the asylum seekers' reaction to the trial and the jury was one which emphasised the unified space in which they reside. The shared experience of living together in a hotel, despite suspicion and the tragic event of the murder that isolated them further from the local community, also drew them together. This support was evident at the drop-in centre where once a week asylum seekers chose to spend time together, creating a sense of solidarity.

Sociality

Asylum seekers share the sociality of temporary solidarity based on current status amongst people sharing the same geographical location. In Great Yarmouth, the drop-in centre, or 'gym' as it is called by the asylum seekers who attend it, can be understood as facilitating the closeness of asylum seekers, both spatially and socially. The drop-in centre is called the 'gym' by asylum seekers not so much because the old army drill hall where it is held is used as a sports centre but because it conceals their asylum seeker identity if they speak of the 'gym' in public.³⁵ The drop-in is run by GYROS (Great Yarmouth Refugee Outreach Service) and is open to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. It offers activities for children and

³³ I have chosen not to include greater detail about the context of the murder in this thesis. I believe that emphasising the murder would sensationalise this tragic event. Providing more detail may also mislead the reader into assuming that murders within asylum seeker populations are a common occurrence. Furthermore, providing more detail about the murder and its aftermath would detract from the point that I am trying to make here – that a tragic event created a sense of solidarity amongst asylum seekers.

³⁴ This relates back to the earlier discussion about geographical isolation and the fear of the stranger. However, I will discuss the prevalence of fear of the 'other' amongst asylum seekers and locals in Chapter 5.

³⁵ At the same time, using the term 'gym' reduces a sense of dependency they have on an NGO (see Chapter 6). However, I will continue to use the term 'drop-in'.

adults, as well as support, advice and a community atmosphere. Held in an old army drill hall, it provides activities for children and a place for people with shared experiences to meet. The drop-in also provides asylum seekers with a central place from which they can be signposted to other services and provided with important information relating to welfare rights and immigration law.

NOTE: This figure is included on page 69 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Figure 9: The role of the drop-in (Wren 2004:30).

As the diagram in Figure 10 shows, the drop-in centre is a hub of social interaction and a place from which links to supports and services can be developed. It is also, I suggest, the pinnacle of space, where all aspects of possible relational interactions

can develop. Networks among asylum seekers incorporate experiential similarities which may not exist within ethno-specific community groups. The drop-in allows for the habitation of a space of perceived solidarity. In this case, the relationships between the ethnically diverse asylum seekers is more appropriate than a relationship with those who share the same ethnic group because their shared experience of seeking asylum takes priority over ethnic identification. This creates relative support and solidarity amongst people, as I noted in my field diary:

Mrs Z and Mrs H were watching their children as they played in the drop-in.

Mrs H – When I first arrived in this country, we were staying with some people we know, and I was told that the water here is very different to the water at home. It will make you lose your hair. For months, whenever I washed or brushed my hair, I looked but no hair came out. But now it does. When I brush my hair, there is so much hair on the brush!

Mrs Z – Yes, I understand! My hair has grey coming through, and Mr Z's used to be dark all over and now there are grey bits as well. It is stress!

Mrs H agreed. Then they began to talk about their situation of having to wait so long within the asylum process, and the problem of correspondence of documents with the Home Office.

The solidarity gained in discussing physical changes associated with stress is available amongst asylum seekers within the setting of the drop-in. This form of solidarity amongst asylum seekers of different ethnicities occurs because similar interactions with members of one's own ethnic community may not necessarily occur, or cannot be accessed. It is important to understand that membership of an ethnic group does not automatically presume solidarity. In his study of perceptions of Tamil migratory patterns into the UK, Daniel finds a lack of solidarity amongst Sri Lankan Tamils. Daniel argues that Tamil refugees arriving in parts of the UK create tensions amongst already settled Tamil migrants, who 'found it difficult to come to terms with the fact that they were seeing "Tamils as refugees"' (1995:244). Tamil refugees became competition for employment, and a threat to the caste/class expectations. For Tamil migrants, the Tamil refugees 'shattered the illusion of the "dignified Sri Lankan Tamil"' (Daniel 1995:246). Similarly, Fuglerud finds that familial

networks amongst Tamil asylum seekers are paradoxically marked by simultaneous 'assistance and fragmentation', so that seldom do relatives 'reside together in exile' (1999:125).

Consequently, we can see that residing within one's ethnic community provides its own set of problems and tensions. I suggest, though, that the drop-in is a fascinating locale because asylum seekers, despite living with the tensions of multiple ethnic groups in hotels, choose to meet in the social and collegial setting of the drop-in. The drop-in, therefore, is an alternative context in which shared experiences and relationships are forged, where they otherwise may never have had the opportunity to arise.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that it is useful to consider different aspects of space in which people share the experience of seeking asylum. Asylum seekers share place-making in East Anglia as a movement through space where they are caught between a sense of wanting to create a life for themselves in the UK and having no control over the restrictions placed upon them in a town isolated from their ethnic communities. Place and space then become - amongst other factors - central focal points in the daily existence of asylum seekers and an integral part in the interactions that asylum seekers experience with other asylum seekers, service providers and locals alike. However, as I have argued, these interactions incite both a sense of solidarity and isolation. In this movement and struggle of space, asylum seekers must contend with economic deprivation, a geographically isolated town void of their ethnic community, locals who form a majority white British population and life in a hotel consisting of other asylum seekers from different ethnic backgrounds. At the same time, the hotel provides a climate of solidarity amongst people who share the experience of place-making.

In later chapters, I will discuss just how the interactions with asylum seekers, support workers and locals are negotiated through the speech-acts of asylum seekers. However, in the next chapter, I will explore a different kind of movement: the movement through time in the liminality of the immigration system where individual stories are reworked onto a case matrix by the immigration officials. All of my informants had already undergone the process of interviewing and questioning by the Home Office several years prior to my arrival in England. All were either still awaiting an outcome to their application, or were in the process of appealing a negative decision. Although I have no direct fieldwork experience of this process, the effects of designating an asylum seeker label resonates throughout my interactions with asylum seekers. The asylum seeking process, for people still immersed in this period of liminality, thus remains pervasive.

CHAPTER 3

NEGOTIATING THE CASE MATRIX

The previous chapter explored the spatial context of asylum seekers' positioning within East Anglia. Employing the phrase 'place as practiced space', a reversal of de Certeau's terminology (1984:117), I considered how isolation and community form solidarity. In this chapter, I will outline the temporal context of asylum seekers' positioning within East Anglia: that of the immigration process as a liminal phase. This will provide an overarching context within which I explore the way that immigration officials fashion an asylum seeker's story into a case.

This chapter is an analysis of the construction of the immigration case in the UK and not an ethnographic exploration of an asylum seeker's experience of the immigration interview. The reasons for this particular focus are two-fold. Firstly, I had met the asylum seekers in this study at least three months to several years after they had undergone the interview process. Consequently, the ethnographic data on interviews was not available. Secondly, in addition to Chapter 2, this chapter provides the context of the liminality of the immigration process, providing the foundation on which the later chapters are formed.

In this chapter I introduce the idea of a case matrix. When people claim asylum they enter a series of complex interactions with the immigration system as they aim to reach refugee status, the most significant being when an asylum seeker recounts their story of persecution. It is at this point that their entry into what I call the 'case matrix' begins and so too does the construction of 'relational identities'. The case matrix is the grid of bureaucratic intelligibility through which the stories, history and

origins of asylum seekers are investigated (Butler 1990:151).³⁶ Building a case engenders a process of making many 'assessments and professional definitions in and around that person', after which a person's life-world can be constructed into a case by 'segmenting and reducing [those definitions] into knowable pieces in order to define them as a whole' (Barrett 1996:39). Case matrix is the complex process whereby an asylum seeker's story of persecution is transformed into a case by the immigration process, using a series of tools. Verbatim, hegemony, and truth are the tools which provide the interface between story and case and therefore influence the structure of the case matrix. These tools are employed by immigration officials and contribute further to the liminal positioning of asylum seekers.

In this chapter I will draw on several different theorists in order to extricate the way in which story is fashioned into a case. I employ Turner (1969) to explore how liminality is an appropriate way of describing the immigration process and the construction of a case. I draw on Ricoeur's (1973) characteristics of speech which assists in identifying the points of a story which can be adapted into a case. Barrett's (1996) work is also instrumental in outlining the nature of a case versus a story. I then draw on Derrida (1974) to unpack the notion of verbatim through arche-writing. And later, when discussing hegemony, I employ the work of Gramsci (1957) and Foucault (1980; 1977), and again Foucault (1972), when discussing the notion of truth. The incorporation of these theorists' arguments underpins my own argument, while reflecting the complexity, multiplicity and segmentation of professional interventions that an asylum seekers' story receives as it is reworked into a case.

There has been a great deal of interest in the relationship between immigrants and the immigration process of the state (see Freeman 1992; Hein 1993; Benmayor and Skotnes 1994; Daniel & Knudsen 1995; Harris 1996; Ong 1996, 1997; Ucarer &

³⁶ Butler uses the concept of 'heterosexual matrix' to show how gender is naturalised through the cultural grid (1990:151).

Puchala 1997; Faderman & Xiong 1998; Fuglerud 1999; Freilich 2002; Griffiths 2002). In this chapter, my interest differs from these various scholars because of my focus on the case matrix. When exploring the immigration interview the literature often overlooks the impact of the context of liminality and the case matrix tools of verbatim, hegemony, and truth. The concept of case matrix is significant because it reveals a complexity of interrelations as it encompasses the development of story into case. In this process an asylum seeker's story is represented, analysed and dissected into easily identified parts by British immigration officers so that the asylum seeker can be redefined as an understandable and intelligible whole (see Barrett 1996; Coker 2003). The consistent tension between part and whole in the case matrix reflects the tension between self and other in the construction of relational identities.

Here, I focus on one specific phase of the immigration process: the SEF (Statement of Evidence Form) substantive interview, which I examine through an analysis of Home Office documents. Again, it is important to emphasise that my interest is not in asylum seekers' stories per se, but on the process and context within which these stories are elicited and reworked by the case matrix transforming them into a case.³⁷

Liminality

Before I explore the characteristics of story and case and the relationship between the two, I first consider the notion of liminality. As I discussed in Chapter 1, Turner's (1969; 1982) concept of liminality derives from Van Gennep's (1960) rite of passage (separation, transition and incorporation) and refers to the transitional stage. Turner describes liminality as a phase of 'ambiguity' and 'social limbo' (1982:24).

Whilst Turner uses the term liminality in reference to the rites of passage of

³⁷ This is an analysis based on documentary evidence because my informants had already completed the interview process and were awaiting outcomes when I began fieldwork. However, the immigration process remains central because my informants were still firmly embedded within the process.

‘relatively stable, and cyclical, and repetitive [tribal] systems’ (1982:29), I suggest that it can be legitimately applied to the asylum phase of the immigration system.³⁸ Therefore, asylum seekers’ positioning within the immigration process can be understood as occupying a liminal phase in a rite of passage. The asylum determination process (Refugee Arrivals Project 2006) can be understood as a complex liminal phase which itself has a three-phase structure similar to a rite of passage. It marks the movement through time of a rite of passage, of one status (asylum seeker) to another status (refugee or deportee).

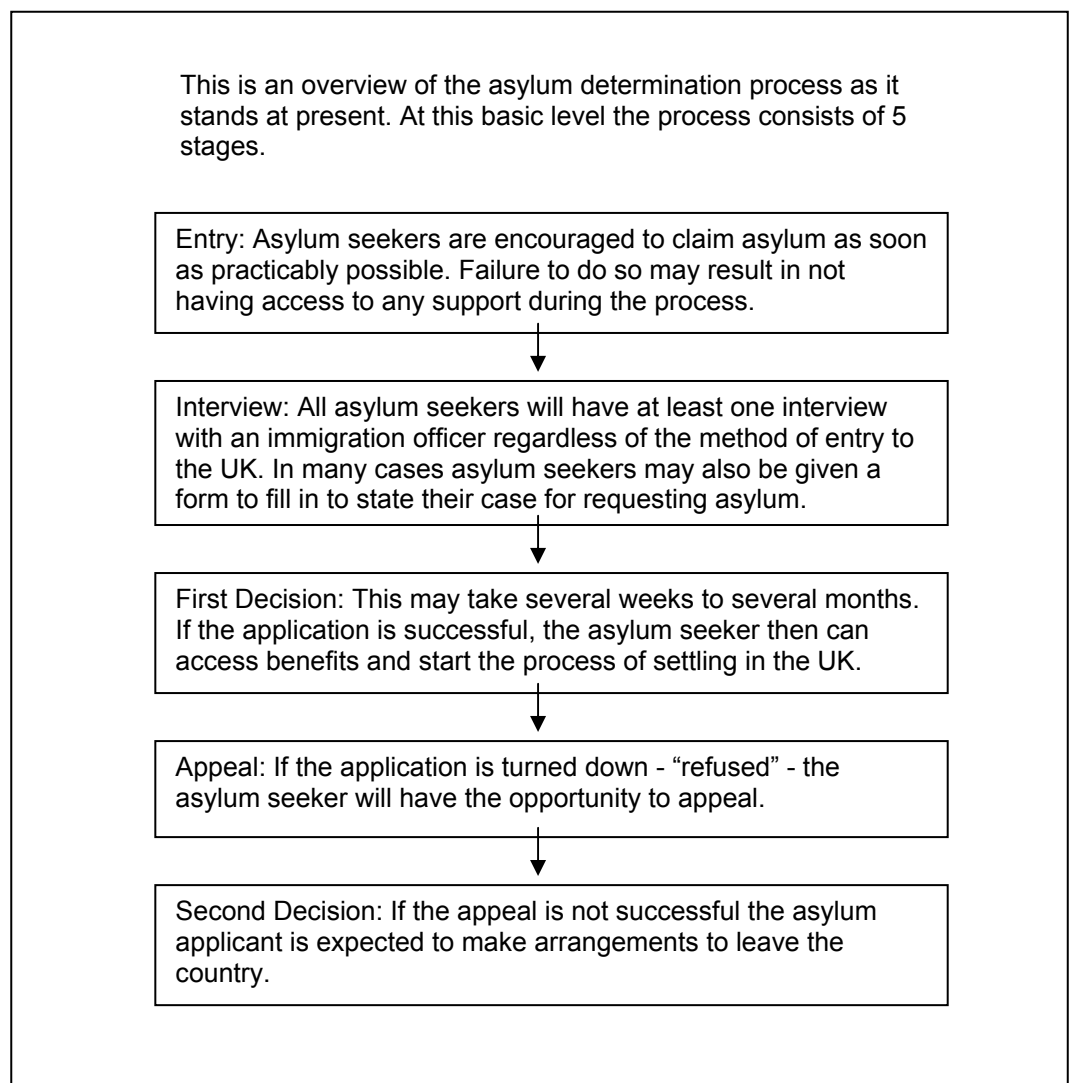


Figure 10: Asylum determination process in the UK (Refugee Arrivals Project 2006).

³⁸ The concept of liminality is used in a wide range of applications (Morgan, Gelsthorpe *et al.* 2003:55).

This is evident in the asylum determination process outlined in Figure 11 whereby separation can be equated to 'entry', transition or liminality to 'interview' and 'appeal', and incorporation can be likened to the final decision where an asylum seeker may receive refugee status or be deported to their homeland.

At the very beginning of the immigration process, asylum seekers are interviewed by immigration officials of the IND (Immigration and Nationality Directorate), which is the immigration arm of the Home Office. The SEF substantive interview is usually preceded by the issuing of a SEF form which requires a new arrival to give evidence of an asylum claim in writing. However, the substantive interview is of greater interest here because it allows an asylum seeker space in which to voice their story fully. Their story is then inserted onto the case matrix by immigration officials so that it can then be reworked into a case.

However, the immigration system may be a liminal process – a structure to which an asylum seeker is bound and integrated within – but the asylum seeker's experience of the immigration system is of a liminoid process and therefore "closer to the personal-psychological than to the 'objective-social' [...] 'typological pole' (Turner 1982:54). As Turner professes, the liminal and the liminoid coexist (1982:55). While the liminal refers to structural functions and processes, the liminoid is innovative and individualised and more flexible. Turner differentiates between the two terms by suggesting that the liminal is analogous to 'work' while liminoid is more akin to 'play'. Turner uses the example of a bar as being an example of a permanent liminoid setting and space. Such settings allow for a degree of flexibility and 'play'. He suggests that if a bar becomes 'exclusivist they tend to generate rites of passage, with the liminal a condition of entrance into the liminoid realm' (Turner 1982:55). Considering entrance into the UK as an exclusive privilege suggests that the condition of entrance is also liminal. The process through which an asylum seeker is bound is also liminal, but the asylum seeker's experience of the entrance and the

process is a liminoid one where the asylum seeker chooses their response and reaction to the immigration process as an individual and as the reversal of the collective representation even though they share a 'mass, collective character' (Turner 1982:54).

Liminality is an appropriate term to apply to the positioning of asylum seekers within the immigration system. Asylum seekers are 'neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed' to British citizens or refugees (Turner 1969:96). Asylum seekers are no longer residents of their home country, nor are they refugees assigned the same rights as permanent residents in the UK. The IND dissect and analyse the life-world of the asylum seeker in order to rework the story onto a case matrix so as to make a determination. The immigration process as a structured process is run by its own time – the time it takes to record, interview, process and consider an application for asylum. This is what Turner refers to as 'movement in and out of time' (1969:96), whereby the immigration process operates both within and outside of the ordinary passage of time. This is because liminality constructs a 'time out of time' where '[t]hings are not as they were, and they are not yet what they are to become' (Hogue 2006:5). Asylum seekers, within this period of liminality, 'submit together to the general authority' (Turner 1969:96) of the immigration officials. In doing so, asylum seekers must recount their stories to an immigration official who dissects, analyses and reworks their life-worlds onto the case matrix. So, in the following section I will examine the characteristics of an asylum seeker's story.

What is a Story?

In the situation of storytelling, asylum seekers recall the events and the experiences which have led them to leave their homeland and seek asylum in the UK. Here I

specifically use the term 'story' rather than 'speech-act' because a 'story' clearly refers to a sequence of events told within the context of the immigration interview. A story can be generally understood as a socially defined occurrence in which a person pieces together a series of events to bring meaning to a sequence of actions (Georges 1969:317). A story has several characteristics that one might recognise as being typically a story as opposed to a narrative or a case. I employ four characteristics of story – meaning, author, context and audience – which I have adapted from Ricoeur's (1973) analysis of speech. I do so by recognising that a story is a language event, and that story is a form of speech (Riessman 1993:9).

Firstly, a storytelling event is always fleeting and transitory in that it 'appears and disappears' (Ricoeur 1973:93). The meaning of the event is therefore confined to the moment in which a story is told. A 'storytelling event only occurs once in time and space' and is unique to the social interactions within a social environment (Georges 1969:319). This means that a story, as an oral event, will never be repeated exactly the same again, or within the exact same context. A story's content has a temporally linear structure of events – beginning, middle and end – and yet its performance is unique of time and space.

Secondly, the storyteller's 'subjective intention and the meaning' of the story overlap (Ricoeur 1973:95). A story told by an asylum seeker is an oral performance that is 'rooted in culturally defined scenes or events – bounded segments of the flow of behaviour and experience that constitute meaningful contexts for action, interpretation and evaluation' (Bauman 1986:4).

Thirdly, the speech-act is contextually based. The storytelling event may have a social use – to elicit a sense of empathy from the story listener. So, the socially communicative aspect of a story must also engender a performative characteristic.

Fourthly, a story addresses a specific audience. Its performative character allows for

the manipulation of social relations, as asylum seekers may recast themselves in an agentive vantage point through the very utterance of a story steeped in self-preservation (Bauman 1986:4). There is always a storyteller and a story listener(s), so that the message of the story can be transmitted and received (Georges 1969:317). The communicative characteristic of the storytelling event creates a social connectivity between the storyteller and the listener(s). This self-identification within the story structure establishes a purpose and social uses and functions within the story. Consequently, when we consider an asylum seeker's story, in the interview context, the story possesses all of these characteristics which impact on the complexities of the case matrix. These characteristics of story are also useful in mapping the complexities of asylum seeker identities and reveal that interactions with others is a fundamental aspect of relational identities.

Considering that Riceour's four aspects of speech can be applied to any speech-act, it is important to identify what is unique to a story. It is not simply a matter that stories help us to make sense of our lives, although this is particularly evident when we consider an asylum seeker telling their story to an immigration official within an institutional setting. Following Jackson, storytelling is an opportunity to symbolically restructure one's experience of an event in a way 'that subtly alter[s] the balance between actor and acted upon' (2002:16). Consequently, through a story, an asylum seeker plays an agentive role in a 'world that for a moment seemed to discount, demean, and disempower' (Jackson 2002:16). This is the stark difference between story and speech, and also between story and case. However, it is not just story that operates to give meaning to action and to elicit an agentive role. Case involves the same characteristics that operate to give meaning to an asylum seeker, albeit in different ways.

What is a Case?

To use Barrett's definition, a case is 'a way of constructing a person' (1996:13). A case is a method of deconstructing and analysing a person's life-world and then to rework the person within a predefined structure. The characteristics of case are evident in different types of case – from immigration case, to criminal case, to medical case. I suggest that here it is important to make a distinction between story and case by attributing speech-act to story, and text to case. Canter and Alison (2003) draw our attention to the various ways that data is collected in order to compile a criminal case. They refer to the retrieval of witness and suspect statements, the documentation of personal histories, and the collection and analysis of information captured at the crime scene. Data is also recorded in detailing the life-world that surrounds the suspect – in terms of the recording of a suspect's patterns of behaviour, lifestyle and interests, and their associations with other people (Canter & Alison 2003:152). Consequently, every aspect of the suspect's life-world is carefully dissected and analysed in the search for clues that might throw light on the 'truth' of a person's claims. The person's life-world is questioned, probed and dissected, with the aim of every aspect of a person becoming known. The collected clues, documentation and elaborations are then pieced back together and remodelled onto a case matrix. Finally, the person under suspicion is either released as an innocent person who may re-enter society, or found guilty and banished from society.

The purpose of a case is to render the person as known and intelligible. For Barrett, the psychiatric term 'fully worked up case' refers to the reconstruction of the person as a whole, so that the individual has been diagnosed (1996:19). This is the shift from the objective (the unknown person) to the subjective (the known person) and the possibility of an 'intersubjective understanding' whereby the person is able to re-enter communications with others as an autonomous and intelligible person. In

terms of an immigration case, the diagnostic element determines the suitability of an asylum seeker to be granted refugee status. This outline is very similar to Susko's term, the 'caseness approach', which reveals the structure of a case within the medical field:

- 1) Identify target symptoms
- 2) Make diagnosis
- 3) Intervene, control or manage

(Susko 1994:2)

In an immigration case the instructions given to immigration officers by the Home Office generally describe the process of constructing a case (see Figure 12):

3.2. Process for considering asylum claims

In general terms the process to be followed when considering asylum claims is set out below:

- Read through all the information available on file and on CID
- Gather and collate any additional evidence needed, including by interview, where appropriate
- Assess the objective evidence
- Assess credibility issues
- Decide the asylum claim
- Consider human rights issues and decide whether a grant of Humanitarian Protection or Discretionary Leave is appropriate
- Record consideration of claim and decision that is reached

Figure 11: IND process for considering asylum claims (Immigration & Nationality Directorate 2006b).

An immigration officer must read through previous gathered data on the Certificate of Identity Document (CID) (passport or travel document), conduct interviews and gather further information in order to identify target symptoms. Then the immigration officer makes a diagnosis by 'assessing the objective evidence' and 'credibility issues' (Immigration & Nationality Directorate 2006b). They are then able to intervene, control or manage by deciding the type of visa to grant or if the claim should be rejected. Therefore, the example of an immigration case follows a structural process that relates closely to Susko's (1994) definition. However, within

this structure one can see the same four characteristics that are shared with the characteristics of a story, but which are largely transformed to the textual representation of a case. These are meaning, author, context and audience (Ricoeur 1973:93).

First, text incurs the problem of fixing meaning (Ricoeur 1973:93). As much as one attempts to fix the exact temporal dimensions of a speech-act to text, 'what we want to fix disappears' because a speech-act is fleeting (Ricoeur 1973:93). So, in a case 'meaning is never an *a priori*' but the textual inscription 'is necessary for meaning to manifest' (Geisler 1985:73). Consequently, a case encompasses temporal elements as the construction of a case history situates a person in relation to past events, movements and experiences. From Barrett's observations of a psychiatric case:

When a person is rendered into a case format, a particular temporal format is invoked. The person is shaped into a case history. He or she becomes an evolving narrative that [...] proceeds through each stage of a person's life – gestation, neonatal period, childhood, adolescence, adulthood – culminating in the onset of the psychiatric illness.

(Barrett 1996:13-14)

In an immigration case, 'genetic endowment' might better be placed with 'ethnic' or 'cultural' endowment to reflect the preoccupation with a political and social history of an asylum seeker's home country in determining a case outcome. At the same time, a person is co-located on a temporal case trajectory depending on the status of the case and the credibility of an asylum seeker's story (Barrett 1996:159). Another temporal element attests to the durability of a case. In sharp contrast to the ephemeral characteristic of an asylum seeker's oral performance in storytelling, the material evidence of a case firmly plants it in an enduring concreteness, so that meaning is established.

Second, the author's intention and the meaning of the text no longer coincide as they had in a storytelling event (Ricoeur 1973:95). The author of the speech-act is no longer the author of the case as it is constructed from privileged and acquired

knowledge within an institution such as the medical, police, legal or immigration authorities. At times a case may encompass aspects of several different bodies (Barrett 1996:44). For example, an immigration case requires the input of legal knowledge. This privileged knowledge is encompassed by structures of power that are recognisable through a specialised use of language (for example, 'considering asylum claims' (Immigration & Nationality Directorate 2006b)) and a particular application of specialised terminology (for example, humanitarian protection).

Third, in the telling of a story the asylum seeker communicates his/her context, but a case allows for an external context to be applied. In fashioning a story to a case, the creator and the reader rework and interpret the story within a context which makes it meaningful to them. Barrett describes a case as 'a segmented object', a person whose life-world context is deconstructed and 'carved' into 'various components', but who is conversely and simultaneously constructed through layers of assessment and 'professional definitions in and around that person until he or she is made into a case' (1996:39). This is particularly evident in the SEF form that segments an asylum seeker's case claim into, for example, race, ethnic origin, or nationality (see Figure 13).

Consequently, at the same time as constructing a case by piecing together the attributes which make up the person, the asylum seeker's life-world is being dissected into pieces to be analysed. This deconstruction and reconstruction is synonymous with the tension between the objectification and subjectification of the asylum seeker's context.

PART C – THE BASIS OF YOUR CLAIM	
<u>You must complete Part C1</u>	
You should then complete one or more of the following sections, C2 to C5, according to the basis of your claim for asylum.	
If you need more space for any of your answers you may attach additional sheets of paper, each of which should be marked with your full name and HO reference number, if known.	
The table below shows the areas covered by each of sections C2 to C5.	
Your race, ethnic origin or nationality	Complete C2
Your religion	Complete C3
Your political opinions	Complete C4
Any other reasons including possible membership of a particular social group	Complete C5

Figure 12: SEF – Part C – The basis of your claim – Instructions given to asylum seekers when completing as SEF application. (Immigration Law Practitioners' Association (ILPA) 2003:102).

Fourth, the case now addresses an audience created by immigration. In the context of making an asylum claim, telling one's story to an audience is fundamental to the process of seeking asylum. The reason why the audience is so significant takes us back to Jackson's point that it provides an opportunity to reconfigure the relationship between 'actor and acted upon' (2002:18). Indeed, storytelling is significant in that 'it is a supplement, to be exploited when action is impossible or confounded' (Coker 2003: 907). In the interview context, an asylum seeker telling their story, in spoken or written form, may be their only form of agency if their personal efforts to acquire refugee status seem out of their immediate grasp.

Having explored the terms 'story' and 'case', in the situation of asylum seekers and

their immigration counterparts, I now turn to the transformation of a story to a case matrix when placed in the context of an SEF interview.

Story / Case Interface

Case and story are inextricably linked, as are asylum seeker and the state. In a study of a psychiatric ward in Egypt, Coker finds stories firmly embedded within the case record (2003:909).³⁹ Similarly, asylum seekers' stories are entrenched within the case file at the point of their very enunciation. To follow Coker's argument, the case cannot exist without the story that informs it (2003:909). This point is addressed by Arendt (1958), who says that one does not solely author one's own life. This is also true of identity in that it is always reworked in relation to and in interaction with others. Arendt argues that storytelling always encompasses an interface (a matrix-like form) of both private and public interests rather than a simple construction of personal or social meanings (Arendt 1958:182-184; cited in Jackson 2002:11). This is a particularly relevant point in understanding the case and story. To illustrate this point, let us look at the story, in written form, of an Algerian asylum seeker, which actually forms the basis of an immigration interview (see Figure 14).

This page from an immigration interview, handwritten by an immigration official, provides the official context within which the story lies. It is only when asylum seekers' stories are written down as case notes that their story becomes more easily 'collected, stored, examined and analysed' (Chafe & Tavern 1987:383).

³⁹ Here Coker is speaking of the way a story is produced within case notes by a psychiatrist.

adults, as well as support, advice and a community atmosphere. Held in an old army drill hall, it provides activities for children and a place for people with shared experiences to meet. The drop-in also provides asylum seekers with a central place from which they can be signposted to other services and provided with important information relating to welfare rights and immigration law.

NOTE: This figure is included on page 87 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Figure 13: Excerpt from an interview record sheet. (Immigration Law Practitioners' Association (ILPA) 2003:129).

In this case, the Algerian asylum seeker provided his story in response to specific questioning based on what the Home Office had already gathered from the SEF

form, the initial screening and various other documents.

I now present a notion of case matrix which encompasses the entire process of fashioning a story into a case, where story as spoken and story as written merge. Case matrix highlights the movement generated in such interactions. It is within this movement that the tools of the case matrix – verbatim, hegemony, classification, and truth – can be seen to both reveal and obscure processes of power. This is the basic premise of dialogical theory in which Bakhtin (1981) refers to the fruition of understanding which can only occur within the interaction of speech-acts.⁴⁰ He says, ‘understanding and response are diametrically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other’ (Bakhtin 1981:280). The fashioning of a story onto a case matrix therefore is generated through speech that is relationally constituted, such as in a question and answer context:

The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer’s direction. Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. Such is the situation in any living dialogue. This orientation towards an answer is open, blatant and concrete.

(Bakhtin 1981:280)

Asylum seekers’ identities are reworked by immigration officials overtly through their status and covertly through processes of power. Consequently, in this next section, I turn to the case matrix tools. It is these tools that reveal the reworking of story into a case during the liminality of seeking asylum.

Verbatim

Story becomes rearticulated and constructed as a case when the asylum seeker’s story is written verbatim in the interview setting. However, the story/case collision occupies a schism in which context, space and time are reformulated within the

⁴⁰ My use of Bakhtin here is to emphasise the movement generated in the interaction of an interview.

interview context. But before expanding on this I assess the Home Office's position on the use of verbatim in the interview setting.

Verbatim, in which 'exactly the same words as were used originally' are recorded (Compact Oxford English Dictionary 2006), is a tool used by the Home Office to rework a story onto the case matrix. The Home Office argues that verbatim allows for the precise documenting of an asylum seeker's story (see Figure 15):

12. RECORDING OF THE SUBSTANTIVE INTERVIEW

12.1. The written record - verbatim account and legibility. It is essential that that the interview record is legible. The interview must be recorded in direct speech, in question and answer format and must be recorded verbatim. [...] The use of abbreviations is limited to country abbreviations and those that are nationally recognised. The names of people, places and organisations should be written in block capitals and underlined. For a list of acceptable abbreviations see Annex I. Country codes, nationality codes and country titles can be found on the Knowledge Base. No spaces should be left between the sections of the interview record. If, for any reason there are gaps, these should be crossed through.

Figure 14: IND Recording of the Substantive Interview (Immigration & Nationality Directorate 2006c).

The emphasis on the importance of an asylum seeker eliciting their story suggests that speech holds great value and that verbatim for immigration officials provides a facsimile of speech into the written form. The link between speech and writing remains an area of contention (see de Saussure 1959; Ong 1982; Goody 1987). Logocentrist theory states that the signifier is exterior to the signified in terms of the structure of language. This theory shows that writing is exterior to speech in that writing is a product of speech and speech is a product of language. In other words, speech is directly linked to language whereas writing has a less immediate link. For de Saussure, writing is considered to be contingent upon speech:

Language and writing are two distinct systems of signs; the second exists for the sole purpose of representing the first. The linguistic object is not both the written and the spoken form of words; the spoken forms alone constitute the object.

(de Saussure 1959:23)

However, this privileging of speech over writing is a highly contestable argument (see Derrida 1974), and is not of assistance when considering the power structures surrounding the case matrix. As Bleakley suggests, the 'rationality' for privileging speech does not allow for a questioning of what happens in between the speech to writing process (2000:18-19). Rather, for immigration to rework story onto the case matrix, story becomes speech and case becomes text. Consequently, having introduced de Saussure's perspective, I argue that instead it is more useful to consider the intersection of story and case, which occurs in a schism of time, space and context.

The term 'schism', I suggest, is better explained by Derrida's (1974) notion of *différance*, which refers to the hinge or space between speech and writing. *Différance* is equally the space of silence and the space of a different kind of language that Derrida calls *arche-writing*, which is free of the constraints of speech and writing (1974:60). This different kind of language refers not to the actual written inscription, but the general notion of writing and the schism between what is intended and what is actually conveyed (Derrida 1974). This perspective of language helps us to recognise that during the interview the story/case interface becomes blurred and the two become inextricably linked. It is this schism, or *différance*, between story and case that is most significant because this is where issues of context influence their interconnectivity, albeit in obscured ways. Take, for example, the context of the substantive interview, where the very questioning influences the way in which an asylum seeker will articulate their story (see Figure 16).

2. The purpose of the substantive asylum interview

Interviewing is a fact-finding exercise that assists the decision maker in making a well-reasoned and sustainable decision on the application. The purpose of the asylum interview is to obtain details about why the claimant has made an application for asylum and/or leave to remain on human rights grounds. It is an opportunity for the interviewing officer to find more out about the claimant's fear of return to their country of nationality, and an opportunity for the claimant to elaborate on the background to his claim and introduce additional information. The interview will provide the interviewing officer with a chance to test or probe the information provided, and where necessary, ask the claimant to explain any apparent discrepancies in evidence previously given in support of the claim.

Figure 15: IND The Purpose of the Substantive Interview (Immigration & Nationality Directorate 2006c).

So, when an asylum seeker's story is recorded verbatim, the interviewer's prompting and questioning influences its very conceptualisation and therefore the speech-act.

Barrett also demonstrates this in reference to a psychiatric case:

For patients, an interview was an encounter with a clinician who referred to the case records, put questions to them in light of what was already documented, and then made further notes in the record. By repeating exposure to this cycle of reading, talking and writing, patients learned what was germane to the record and amiable to documentation. Thus the written definition of the case influenced how patients articulated an account of themselves and their illness.

(Barrett 1996:110)

Barrett is referring to an interview context whereby the interviewee learns the appropriate way of answering questions which in turn shapes the answers. The influence of the questioning and the transformation of the answers remain unremarked. This is the space of the interaction between story and case which cannot be articulated (Derrida 1974:38). Consequently, the notion of 'space' in relation to speech and writing during the substantive interview is significant in the sense that it is 'becoming'. Derrida says that arche-writing occurs within time and space:

Spacing (notice that this word speaks the articulation of space and time, the becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space) is always the unperceived, the non-present, and the non-conscious. [...] Arche-writing as spacing cannot occur *as such* within the phenomenological experience of a *presence*. It marks *the dead* time within the presence of the living present, within the general form of all presence. [his emphases]

(Derrida 1974:38)

Derrida's discussion of arche-writing as spacing can be likened to the schism between story and case the point where the two intersect. However, I disagree with Derrida's description of this spacing occurring in 'dead time' because it discounts the dynamic potential at the point of interaction. Bakhtin refers to this as a 'loophole out of time' which allows for alternative interpretations and therefore takes us back to the notion of potentiality (1990:97; see also Sullivan & McCarthy 2004:6). One might also consider that spacing occurring in a 'loophole out of time' suggests silence 'which is characteristic of liminality' (Turner 1969:103). My argument is that although in the interview setting the movement from story to case is orchestrated onto the case matrix verbatim, there is a schism between the two that remains unremarked by the interviewing officer or the asylum seeker. This schism occurs not just in time and space, but in the context of story to case.

Context, that is, the circumstances that form the setting, is a subtle and arbitrary notion which is always present and yet absent from the present because it also resides in the space and time of *différance*. Consequently, a full representation of the context in which an interview takes place cannot be captured verbatim: 'To hope to represent a speech-act in writing, we need not just the spoken words but the fullness of context in space and time' (Jackson 2003:128). Jackson is correct in highlighting the importance of context within writing gained from verbatim. However, the articulation of context remains absent from the immediacy of the present, during immigration interviews. Liminality is inherent in the context of the interview setting, as the movement from story to case can be considered a transitional phase. Liminality is an intensive experience for asylum seekers rather than for immigration officers, which is perhaps why this aspect of the context is disregarded. The immigration officers, instead, are more preoccupied with re-establishing order and the 'transformational operations that control or have power over it' (Turner 1977:62).

In the very context and setting of the interview room, the questions asked and the visual performance of the interviewer writing down the asylum seeker's story word for word, 'shapes what is spoken' (Barrett 1996:109) within that space. The context, not just the presence of others at the interviews but their location within the interview room, can impact heavily on the interview:

There have unfortunately been some cases reported to ILPA where IND has attempted to ensure that the clerk and independent interpreter are seated at a distance from the interviewing officer, applicant and IND interpreter. Any attempt to suggest such an arrangement should be strongly resisted.

(Immigration Law Practitioners' Association (ILPA) 2003:154)

The context of whether or not the asylum seeker has their representatives sitting in close proximity, to aid and act on their behalf, may have immense implications for the direction of the interview. This suggests that asylum seekers are not merely uttering their story, but that the very storytelling event is largely shaped by the context:

Ideally, the clerk should be seated between the independent interpreter and your client. The interviewing officer and official interpreter should be seated opposite your client.

(Immigration Law Practitioners' Association (ILPA) 2003:154)

In their training manual, the ILPA points out that asylum seekers will be very nervous during the interview, and that their legal representatives should provide them with as much explanation 'about the practicalities of the interview' in order for them to 'give a good and coherent account of what has happened' (2003:148). Consequently, in the very process of story to case, where an asylum seeker tells their story and it is transferred to text, influencing factors include space, time and context, and yet these are not overtly recognised in speech and writing. Therefore, it is apparent that verbatim as a method in the reworking of story to case disregards the influencing factors of context, space and time.

Hegemony and Classification

I now move away from arche-writing but remain to some degree in the vicinity of unarticulated space when referring to the pervasive nature of power. I argue that the tools of hegemony and classification during the SEF interview process operate to clearly rework story into a case. In doing so, asylum seekers' identities are also constructed in relation to the processes administered by the state. Another of the tools, hegemony, allows the Home Office to rework an asylum seeker's story into a case through the process of classification. According to Gramsci, hegemony, as espoused by the state, is a complex system of processes that functions to create 'spontaneous consent by the great masses of the population to the direction imprinted on social life' and to coerce through legal disciplining the consent of those who might otherwise disagree (1957:124). Hegemony therefore infiltrates lived experience, and is 'always in process,' consisting of highly complex structures which subordinate and dominate through 'active, formative and transformative processes' (Williams 1977:113).

I suggest that this notion of hegemony elucidates the role of the state in the construction of asylum seekers. For example, Tyler (2006) argues that the current political hegemony does not allow for a debate about immigration policy. Rather, the immigration system produces 'the imaginary figure of the asylum-seeker as an "illegal"', which must therefore be managed (Tyler 2006:190). This political hegemony coerces British citizens to respond defensively against the arrival of asylum seekers. At the same time, the pervasiveness of this political and social hegemony engages asylum seekers within the immigration system. This is particularly evident in the Immigration and Nationality Directorates 'Interviewing Protocol', which outlines, 'the conduct of substantive interviews and the roles of interviewing officers, representatives and their interpreters' (Home Office 2006a). It reveals the process which asylum seekers must engage in and in doing so become

consensual in the legal disciplining and reconstruction of their story. Asylum seekers also consent to the attribution and assertion into a classificatory process which reworks their identity and renders them liminal asylum seekers. In Figure 17 from the IND Interviewing Protocol, it is evident that the asylum seeker, when giving his/her story, is bound by hegemonic power that pervades the interviewing context:

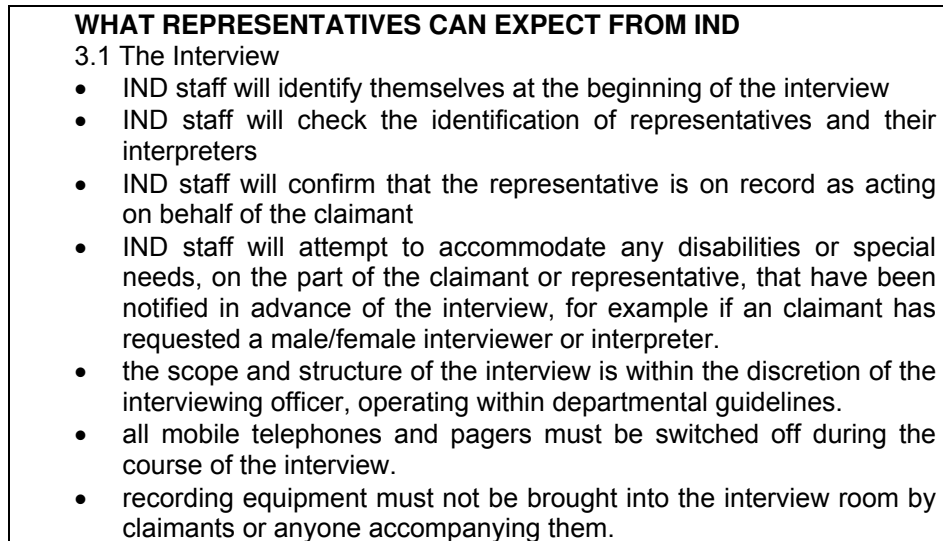


Figure 16: IND: What Representatives can expect for IND (Home Office 2006a).

The language used in the interviewing protocol reveals, I argue, an authoritative and structured context. In being bound by such a protocol, the asylum seeker is infused into a system of hegemony that is able to permeate the story even prior to its actual enunciation. I suggest that the kind of power wielded by the state further disciplines, monopolises, stations, subordinates and renders docile the asylum seeker during the interview process. The state is, as Foucault describes, similar to the eighteenth century capillary-like regime of power. This kind of power:

[..] reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts into their actions and attitude, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives. The eighteenth century invented, so to speak, a synaptic regime of power, a regime of its exercise within the social body, rather than from above it.

(Foucault 1980:39)

Like Foucault's docile bodies, asylum seekers enter the state, 'a machinery of

power', and their life-worlds are explored, dissected and rearranged through the classificatory system (Foucault 1977:138). Each classificatory step relates to an immigration process; thus, labelling and the classificatory system disciplines the relation that the asylum seekers must have with the immigration process (Foucault 1977:152-153). The asylum seeker is therefore manipulated into a manoeuvre which 'constitutes a body-machine complex' (Foucault 1977:153). It is in this way that hegemony dominates an asylum seeker. This is evident in IND's protocol *D9. Controlling an Interview*, which states that 'the interviewing officer should always remain in control of an interview at all times' (Immigration & Nationality Directorate 2006c).

In the IND's document, 'Assessing the [Asylum] Claim', section 2.2 provides a 'Checklist of Points to be Considered in an Asylum Claim' (Home Office 2006c). This document (see Figure 18) reveals a system of power which dissects, analyses and normalises an asylum seeker's story into a classificatory process.

The power 'normalises' because it applies British social behaviours, understandings and common knowledge to the asylum applicant (Lynn & Lea 2003:427). The dissecting of an asylum seekers' story through the consideration of their credibility and extent of their reasonable behaviour, outlined in Figure 19, allows for the story to be reworked onto the case matrix. Hegemony is evident in questions such as, 'Are the statements made by the claimant credible?' because they are not merely politically pertinent questions, but form socially and even publicly accepted points for investigation.

- 2.2 Points to be Considered in an Asylum Claim**
- i) Has the claimant expressed a fear of return to his home country?**
- ii) What is the harm feared?**
- How serious is it? [...]
 - Is the harm of sufficient gravity to constitute persecution or is it something less serious? [...] Does the cumulative effect of lesser prejudicial actions or threats amount to persecution? [...]
- iii) Is the harm related to one or more of the five Convention grounds? [...]**
- iv) Who are the agents of persecution? Do the authorities of the home country conduct the persecution? [...]**
- Do the authorities support persecution committed by others? [...]
 - Does the state knowingly tolerate persecution, e.g. by members of state forces abusing their position? [...]
 - How far is the state able to provide protection from persecution caused by others? What laws are in place and are they enforced effectively? [...]
 - Has the claimant sought the protection of the authorities? If so, what was the outcome?
 - If not, why not? [...]
- v) Is the fear well-founded? [...]**
- Are the statements made by the claimant credible? [...]
 - Are the actions of the claimant credible? [...]
 - Has the claimant been persecuted in the past? [...]
 - Have their friends or relatives, or others sharing the same characteristics, suffered persecution? [...]
 - Has the claimant demonstrated a reasonable degree of likelihood of being persecuted should they return home in the future? [...]
- vi) Is the fear well-founded as to the whole of the claimant's home country?**
- Is there a region within the claimant's home country in which they do not have a Convention fear and in which they could reasonably be expected to stay? [...]
- vii) Should the claimant be excluded from international protection by operation of the exclusion clauses of the Convention? [...]**

Figure 17: IND: Points to be Considered in an Asylum Claim (Home Office 2006c).

Constructions of labelling as techniques of categorisation and control have been explored previously by various scholars (see Wood 1985; Zetter 1991; Hein 1993; Keely 1996; Torpey 1998; Fuglerud 1999; 2001; Lacroix 2004). Labelling restricts and bureaucratically frames a person's story which can then be reworked onto the case matrix (Zetter 1985:87 & 39). After the questioning process, immigration officers dissect an asylum seeker's story to find a possible 'fit' within the following classificatory system:

- 7. WELL-FOUNDED FEAR**
- 7.1 Objectivity
- 7.2 'Reasonable likelihood'
- 7.3 Considering Past and Present Events
- 8. Persecution**
- 8.1 Human Rights Violations
- 8.2 Human Rights violations which amount to persecution
- 8.3 Acts of discrimination or ill treatment which might amount to persecution
- 8.4 Assessing persecution in individual cases
- 8.5 Agents of persecution and the sufficiency of state protection against their actions
- 8.6 Prosecution
- 9. CONVENTION REASONS**
- 9.1 Race
- 9.2 Religion
- 9.3 Nationality
- 9.4 Membership of a particular social group
- 9.5 Political opinion
- 9.6 Persecution for a non-Convention reason

Figure 18: IND: Classification of Asylum Claim (Home Office 2006c).

Figure 19 reveals how the classificatory process can re-construe an asylum seeker's story into the case through a classification process in order to determine whether an individual holds a well-founded fear of persecution. Labelling creates possibilities of generating new kinds of knowledge, practices and objects (Hall 1997:261). Labelling is dynamic in that it has a power which 'constrains and prevents' and 'it is also productive' (Hall 1997:261). In this way it functions to 'dis-organise' an asylum seeker in terms of his/her identity within a story, but simultaneously it also, 're-organises interests around the solidarities which the labelling might itself engender' (Wood 1985:22).

It is evident that the classificatory process and submission of asylum seekers to the structure of the immigration system all constitute the liminality of seeking asylum. This is apparent because asylum seekers are considered 'stateless' and constructed as 'crises in social processes' (Turner 1982:97&54). The classificatory process also clearly defines asylum seekers as 'other'. Asylum seekers and refugees are placed within mechanisms of power which seek to render them 'known', but contradictorily,

also simultaneously render the asylum seekers as the 'other' and the stranger. The other 'emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests' (Cohen 1972:28). As Ahmed explains, the stranger is created 'as the "origin" of the very question of national identity' (2000:101).⁴¹

The process of transforming asylum seekers into the known can be understood as the relationship between classification and the United Kingdom government's attempt to obtain the 'truth' of a story. Before asylum seekers are classified as refugees, they must undergo a series of scrutinising processes for as long as it takes for the Home Office to process the application and to make a decision. Asylum seekers are immersed in the mechanics of power within which knowledge, through country of origin information, is produced in an effort to elicit the facts of an asylum seeker's identity.

Truth and Country of Origin Information

Another tool utilised in the transformation of story to case is the emphasis on truth and fact in relation to an asylum seeker's story. Here I employ a Foucauldian notion of truth that sees it as produced by regimes of power:

Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth; that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.

(Foucault 1980:32)

Such a regime of power 'gets us to agree and concur in the name of truth' and in doing so legitimises the categorisation from which truth is assessed (Taylor 1984:174). By emphasising the notion of truth, immigration officials are able to successfully rework asylum seekers' stories onto the case matrix. As the IND points out, the purpose of an asylum interview is:

⁴¹ I will look at the question of British identity in Chapter 5.

[...] essentially a fact finding exercise and the interviewing officer will probe any answers given and investigate unsupported statements. If there is reason to doubt a certain element of a claim it is important that the claimant has the chance to address the points of contention [...] Caseworkers should ensure that if any discrepancies arise between what is on the SEF and on other papers and what is said by the claimant at interview these discrepancies are thoroughly probed at the interview. An explanation should be sought for any discrepancies in the account given by the claimant. We should also explore discrepancies between what is in the papers and is said at interview and known country information.

(Immigration & Nationality Directorate 2006d)

This recalls my earlier examination of the way in which reworking a story incurs a dissection of the story and consequently a person's application of truth. I suggest that the IND use the notion of truth to refer to a 'template' of facts which are deemed concrete and universal. This dismisses the historical context and modes of production of meaning within which this notion of truth resides (Foucault 1972:133). Throughout IND documents, the 'truth' of a story, and acquiring the 'facts' of a case, were central to determining an asylum claim.

Fact-gathering operates to identify key aspects of an asylum seeker's background which leads to the acquisition of information. An asylum seeker is thoroughly analysed onto a case matrix as a method of checking for possible threats:

48.1 The Recording and Dissemination of Intelligence Material

Code of Practice

The Code has been adapted to meet the needs of IND, but briefly, collection, handling or dissemination of intelligence information about living individuals by IND staff must be for one of the following reasons:

- in the interests of national security;
- the prevention of crime and disorder;
- the economic well-being of the country.

Figure 19: The Recording and Dissemination of Intelligence Material – Code of Practice (Home Office 2006b).

As Figure 20 shows, intelligence material gathering and dissemination is allowable if it falls within the reasons of national security, prevention of crime and disorder or the economic well-being of the country, reasons which are quite easily applicable to any

asylum seeker. The use of such intelligence material by immigration officials is an effort to elicit information which might reveal asylum seeker's true identity and experiences. The interview is prepared for by the interviewing officer. Country of origin information is gathered along with further evidence which is deconstructed and analysed in readiness for the interview – the test to catch the asylum seeker:

There is very little point in doing asylum interviews unless you have information. They can dumbfound you ... If you knew information on little things like the main parties, and the principles of the main parties, it'd be useful. You could quiz them more. ... The more facts you have the better. If you can say 'I know x as a matter of fact happens' and their story doesn't fit with that then they have really got to justify why it doesn't. It gives you the confidence to challenge it at the initial stage. Because at the moment, people can say anything and it can be hard to disprove it because of a lack of information we have.

(Morgan, Gelsthorpe *et al.* 2003:47)

Here the interviewing officer's statement evokes a battleground of truth and rhetoric which requires being armed with country of origin information as ammunition. Note the language used: information, quiz, facts, challenge, disprove, justify. Note also the preconception of a story and how it is supposed to fit within a series of IND-founded truths. I argue that the immigration officer presupposes the possibility of asylum seeker guilt and misdemeanour. The interviewing officer therefore becomes the bearer of what s/he considers to be the truth of an asylum seeker's story and consequently holds a greater degree of authority as to the meaning behind an asylum seeker's story than does the asylum seeker. Truth is inextricably linked to power, as one 'cannot exercise power except through the production of truth':

We must speak the truth; we are constrained or condemned to confess or discover the truth. Power never ceases its interrogation, its inquisition its registration of truth [...]

(Foucault 1986:230)

Foucault leads us to recognise the effects of power in the IND's quest to discover the truth, despite the lack of reflexivity that such an institution may have as to 'gaps, voids, absences, limits and divisions' in the construction of truth and meaning (1972:134). Instead, when faced with inconsistencies, the IND's notion of truth

becomes even more dependent on the interview process. Deciphering the truth from an IND perspective might be deemed necessary by an interviewing officer when faced with a tale that might seem fictitious to many. Take, for example, Mr M's rather dramatic story as recounted to me by an NGO worker:

Mr M had been a taxi driver in Baghdad, and he had been driving one night when he suddenly came across a convoy of cars which were driving without headlights. Because he had not seen them he hit one of the cars which happened to be holding a government minister. The next thing he knew, he was in hospital with an armed guard and accused of attempting to assassinate a government minister. Fearing for his life, he drugged the guard with a sleeping tablet, and climbed out of the window and escaped – eventually to the UK.

(Anonymous, asylum seeker support worker, Great Yarmouth, 2003)

The IND's search for truth within an asylum seeker's story can also be attributed to 'the collation of personal secrets' (Barrett 1996:45). Take, for example, Mr X's story:

The Serbian soldiers came to my village one night in February 1999. They drove the people from their homes and searched the houses. The men were separated from the women and their houses burned. I tried to stay with my mother and sister. A Serbian officer saw me and tried to take me away. There was a struggle and my mother and sister were bayoneted. I was terrified and I ran away. Later I returned to find both my sister and my mother dead. I fled my village and was told to leave Kosovo with the other men. We walked for two hours and then we were fired upon by Serbian soldiers. I saw my neighbours killed. I ran into the forest where I met my brother. In the morning we went back to where the shooting happened to see if we could find our father, but he was not among the bodies there. My brother and I walked to Macedonia where we spent seven months in a refugee camp. We arrived here in September 1999.

(Immigration Appeal Tribunal 2001)

Personal secrets and events that may have previously been too traumatic to repeat must now be told to an immigration officer. Stories such as that of Mr M and Mr X, once heard, become open for investigation as to the presence and absence of IND's perspective of truth. Amongst asylum seekers, stories become tools used to negotiate the immigration process. Often a 'good' story that has been accepted by immigration as the 'truth' is shared amongst asylum seekers who originate from the same region, to try to ensure they receive a positive decision. Consequently, truth is

not the point amongst the holders of the shared story.⁴²

We can map the relevance of truth in the construction of a case if we take note of Barrett's (1996) observations as to the method entailed in diagnosing a patient with schizophrenia. In the construction of a psychiatric case, the divided segments of an individual are located at different depths, from the outside to the inside, from surface expressions to inner mental events. The outcome of being deemed schizophrenic is dependant on such location of voice (outside) and hallucination (inside) (Barrett 1996:131). In a similar way, in order to arrive at the case diagnosis of 'refugee' the segmentations are located outside and inside, but in reverse order – inside to outside. So, asylum seekers' inner expressions of traumatic events, which are transmitted through story, are dependant upon the external gauge of country of origin events by immigration officials. Consequently, if truth can be located in the outside segment, by confirming the believability of a story through country of origin questioning, then the case diagnosis will be 'refugee'. Consequently, the use of country of origin information by the immigration officer becomes a powerful tool.

The acquisition of country-specific information from the Country Information and Policy Unit (CIPU) occurs not just at the time of the interview but in the preceding preparatory time for an interview with an asylum seeker. Interviewing officers make use of the information gathered by the CIPU. This information is collated based solely on data already compiled by 'academics, human rights organisations and journalists' on each country from where asylum seekers originate (Morgan *et al.* 2003:xii).

⁴² For more discussion about these shared stories, see Chapter 6.

NOTE: This figure is included on page 104 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Figure 20: IND's Country of Origin questions (Kosovo) (Immigration Law Practitioners' Association (ILPA) 2003:145).

NOTE: This figure is included on page 105 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Figure 21: IND's Country of Origin answers (Kosovo) (Immigration Law Practitioners' Association (ILPA) 2003:145).⁴³

⁴³ According to a Home Office research study into the use of country of origin information, immigration officials are becoming concerned about the leaking of country questionnaires to asylum seekers prior to their interview (Morgan *et al.* 2003).

The interviewing officer may also utilise a questionnaire relating to the country of origin which has been compiled by the Country Information and Policy Unit (CIPU). The country of origin questions attempt to determine whether an applicant is being truthful about their origin and consequently their asylum claim. Then, the interview can be likened to Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor 'argument is war':

We can actually win or lose arguments. We see the person we are arguing with as an opponent. We attack his positions and we defend our own. We gain and lose ground. We plan and use strategies. If we find a position indefensible, we can abandon it and take a new line of attack. Many of the things we do in arguing are partially structured by the concept of war. Though there is no physical battle, there is a verbal battle, and the structure of an argument - attack, defense, counter-attack, etc.- reflects this. It is in this sense that the ARGUMENT IS WAR. [their emphasis]

(Lakoff & Johnson 1980)

The interview becomes an arena of struggle, a battle where pieces of information are elicited by the asylum seeker and countered by general country knowledge held by the immigration officer. For a story like Mr X's, the Kosovo questionnaire (Figures 21 and 22) seems to resemble a 'pop-quiz' and attempts to test his knowledge of his country of origin and, consequently, his nationality:

I suggest that the questioning of Mr X's story represents the second step in the segmentation of a person. This form of questioning allows an immigration officer to externally locate the individual in relation to the truth of their story. A person's claim of truth to their story must correlate with the ability to provide the correct answers to certain questions. The IND clearly states their purpose as being to 'explore discrepancies between what is in the papers and is said at interview and known country information' (Immigration & Nationality Directorate 2006d). By cross-examining an asylum seeker, the answers to these questions may prove or disprove nationality, therefore rearranging asylum seekers' nationality 'into a shape that fitted

the categories of the case' matrix (Barrett 1996:130).

Consequently, I suggest that the IND's notion of truth is used as a tool in the transformation of story into case. The purpose of an immigration official's probing is to relocate the fragmented information and to rebuild a known asylum seeker's story onto a case matrix. This is exactly the purpose of the case that Barrett refers to when he speaks of constructing the whole person from segments (1996:39). And yet, the notion that immigration officials may not be able to piece together a reworked whole understanding of an asylum seeker will be reason enough for the immigration officers to build a case against granting refugee status. Consequently, truth as a useful tool of case explains why an interviewing officer becomes so focused on discovering the truth within an asylum seekers' story, as it is a means to also construct an asylum seeker's identity.

Conclusion

The liminal phase of the immigration system is a movement through time which asylum seekers must negotiate. The act of seeking asylum requires participation in the immigration process, through the presentation of one's story to immigration officials from which the officials may make a judgment on whether the basis of their claim is sufficient to be granted refugee status. However, this process engenders a great deal more than claim and assessment. The process of reworking an asylum seeker's story into a case reveals a complexity of interactions based on an intensive examination of the 'other' through the notion of the truth. We have explored the various ways that an asylum seeker's story is reworked onto the case matrix using the tools of verbatim, hegemony and classification and the IND's notion of truth. I suggest that what is perhaps of most interest throughout this process of segmentation is that it reveals a negotiation and struggle over the control and construction of relational identities.

The interface between story and case parallels the interface between the national identity espoused by the government and the identity of asylum seekers. It is only through their interaction that asylum seekers' identities are negotiated. It may seem from the outset that the immigration process is responsible for the reworking of an asylum seeker identity. However, as I will argue throughout this thesis, it is a mutual engagement. During the reworking of story, an asylum seeker both wrestles with the vacillation between a 'known' identity and an imposed asylum seeker identity, while at the same time seeking confirmation of their asylum seekerness. This is consequently a period of intense liminality for asylum seekers.

Zetter argues that labelling refugees, or asylum seekers for that matter, is a process that strips them of power and participation, by emphasising, 'the extreme vulnerability of refugees to imposed labels [...] and most fundamentally of all, the non-participatory nature and powerlessness of refugees in these processes' (1991:39). Ostensibly, this may seem accurate. As I have argued in this chapter, the state is the major player in constructing asylum seeker identity for it is the state who designs and designates a person's position vis-à-vis the state and the immigration process. It is the state who labels and shapes a person's experience, situates the liminality and transforms story to case, and therefore classifies a person's identity as 'asylum seeker'. However, identity construction, as I have just alluded to, can only occur in relation to the perception of others and the perception of one's self in the eyes of others. Of course, the positioning of asylum seekers within the mechanism of the state does reduce their agency to act within a set of bureaucratic processes. However, asylum seekers simultaneously resist this external construction. So far, in this thesis, this has been evident in the way in which asylum seekers represent the story of their past experiences in relation to the context in which they speak. They also adjust their current experiences in relation to external influences. This is a point which Zetter himself makes when he says, 'dependency [...] is assertively employed

to maintain independence' (1985:88). Although overtly it may seem as though asylum seekers are completely powerless and entirely at the mercy of the state, there are somewhat subtle ways in which asylum seekers constantly re-adjust to their circumstances.

After having told their story, and it being reworked onto the case matrix, asylum seekers then wait within a liminal period of uncertainty until an outcome of their application is announced. This is the context within which my informants who are seeking asylum reside, and this will be the context for the remaining chapters of this thesis. We can now see the purpose of these initial chapters has been to show how all-consuming the asylum process is, and how critical it is to understand the experience of the process for asylum seekers. All of this reveals the intricate and inextricable linkages of asylum seekers and the state. Consequently, with this knowledge of the dynamics of the asylum system, I will move to a more in-depth look at life in the UK for asylum seekers and the various different strategies and coping mechanisms that are formed in an effort to negotiate existence. But first I will turn to the next major player in the lives of asylum seekers in East Anglia, and that is the role of NGOs in shaping asylum seeker identity.

CHAPTER 4

SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS AND THEIR CONSTRUCTION OF ASYLUM SEEKER DEPENDENCY

The immense support and assistance that asylum seekers receive from refugee support organisations make this interaction highly significant. In the previous chapter I explored the immigration process within which an asylum seeker's story is reworked into a case. In this chapter, examining the way that support organisations talk about asylum seekers provides a better understanding of the way asylum seekers are constructed within the support 'industry' (Hardy, Phillips *et al.* 2001:541). Asylum seekers are constructed as problematic and vulnerable dependents by support organisations. The purpose of this is to ensure that their services are exclusive and necessary and therefore their demand for government funding is justified. This relationship can be understood as one of mutual dependency whereby asylum seekers are reliant on the interventions and assistance of the support organisations while the support organisations also need the custom of asylum seekers. I explain this fundamentally dependent relationship between support organisations and asylum seekers through an adaptation of the concept of 'dependency theory' (see Harrell-Bond 1986; Knudsen 1991; Gardner & Lewis 1996; Horst 2001; Laó-Montes 2001).

In constructing asylum seekers as vulnerable and problematic the support organisations assume an exclusive position of expertise and knowledge of asylum seekers' predicaments. This exclusivity can be understood as the 'official explanation' (Spivak 1987:114). The official explanation is put forth by organisations

in order to ensure that they maintain a degree of influence in government policy, as well as ensuring a competitive edge in the arena of service provision. Asylum seekers may be incorporated into the discourse of this production only to the extent that they might aid in its reproduction and consistency – that is, asylum seekers understand the politics of presenting to an organisation as vulnerable and isolated. Thus, support organisations construct asylum seekers as dependent on their support in order to survive, and in doing so rationalise and ensure their own sustainability.

Here my intention is not to discredit the dedication and commitment of support workers. In fact, the majority of support workers have entered the asylum support industry as a personal dedication to supporting those struggling to find a safe haven in the UK. From my observations in the field these people work within a highly stressful, outcomes-based and greatly under-resourced environment. What I am trying to do, however, is to highlight the dependency structure of asylum seeker support in the organisations that I came across in East Anglia. It is in building and applying these structures of intervention and support that issues of sustainability, vulnerability and commodification inadvertently arise.

Sustainability does much to perpetuate social exclusion of asylum seekers. Knowledge about asylum seekers' situation is controlled and regulated; this is evident in debates as to whether asylum seekers should be considered as dependent or as independent. Therefore, this chapter explores the paradox of an organised system of support that works to assist asylum seekers to be independent and yet in doing so excludes asylum seekers from decision-making processes, assuming knowledge and perpetuating isolation.

The support organisations decide the ways that asylum seekers are supported, and also the way that the organisations themselves can be sustained. The decision-

making process, consultation with asylum seekers and the development of refugee community organisations (RCOs) are three ways in which this emphasis on dependency is evident in the speech-acts of support organisations. In emphasising dependency, support organisations have made the isolation of asylum seekers more pronounced. However, the support provided by community-derived organisations (CDOs) has a greater impact in attempting to alleviate the isolation of asylum seekers.

Dependency

Dependency theory originates from the field of economics (see Prebisch 1950; Frank 1967, 1970, 1971, 1975; Prebisch & Marco 1972; Wallerstein 1979; Harrell-Bond 1986; Knudsen 1991; Gardner & Lewis 1996; Horst 2001; Laó-Montes 2001) and is now largely applied within the field of development studies in order to refer to, for instance, the treatment of refugees in the refugee camp setting (see Harrell-Bond 1986; Knudsen 1991; Gardner & Lewis 1996; Horst 2001). The term 'dependency syndrome' refers to 'social behaviour' in the refugee camp context. Horst describes dependency syndrome as:

[...] the provision of assistance [...] on external aid [...] when refugees accept handouts without taking any initiatives to attain self-sufficiency. The syndrome is characterized by symptoms of excessive and unreasonable demands, frequent complaints, passivity and lethargy.

(Horst 2001:9)

Dependency syndrome, Harrell-Bond (1986) argues, is referred to by the support organisations in explaining group behaviours, thereby ignoring personal and individual experiences and needs. Harrell-Bond (1986) and Knudsen (1991) point out that dependency is encouraged by the support organisations themselves because of the way they depict refugees as a vulnerable commodity. Knudsen suggests that organisations treat a refugee as a stereotype rather than in response to 'the person's real self' (1991:35). In doing so, the refugee subscribes to the

stereotypical notion that the support organisation wishes to promote, such as poor and vulnerable, in order to receive assistance (Shepler 2005:203).

While attending the majority of meetings addressing asylum seeker dispersal and settlement in Norfolk, I found that the rhetoric of vulnerability transpired in different ways: support workers deemed asylum seekers to be vulnerable in relation to locals; economically vulnerable and in need of welfare; and innately vulnerable in that they were considered voiceless.⁴⁴ For example, there was a concern amongst service providers that ensuring adequate housing for asylum seekers may actually increase their vulnerability with regard to the threat posed by disgruntled locals. In fact, in a NASRF meeting it was reported that racial attacks had increased by 20 to 35 per cent due to the tensions relating to the war in Iraq. This constructed asylum seekers as highly vulnerable in relation to locals. During another NASRF meeting the private housing company Clearsprings emphasised the necessity for asylum seekers to be deemed destitute in order to receive housing assistance. This is an example of how asylum seekers are constructed as vulnerable in order to receive assistance from the government and support organisations. Asylum seekers were also explicitly depicted as vulnerable through such comments as 'we need to give a voice to those who don't have a voice' (support worker, NASRF meeting 2003). These comments reveal how asylum seekers are depicted as being innately vulnerable.

The production of vulnerability has consequences that are two-fold. On the one hand the perceived vulnerability of asylum seekers justifies interventions by support organisations (Stewart 2005:499). On the other hand, the perceived vulnerability of asylum seekers provides an ideal context in which they can be easily commodified (See Dos Santos 1971:226). Commodification involves the 'reauthentication into the right way of being an' asylum seeker (Laó-Montes 2001:418). Playing the 'ideal'

⁴⁴ My point is not to discount the vulnerability of asylum seekers, but to point out the rhetoric of support organisations that asylum seeker vulnerability requires interventional methods that can only be provided by support organisations.

asylum seeker is very much understood by asylum seekers themselves. In a humorous moment, Mr Z, an asylum seeker who was in the process of moving out of the hotel to return to London, reflected on this point. He said that he and his family looked like refugees with all their possessions with them and not knowing where they were going: 'all we need now is a blanket around us', he joked. However, Mr Z and his family required the intervention of support organisation in assisting them to find accommodation and to transport them. Therefore, it was necessary to be perceived as vulnerable and in need of assistance.

Asylum seekers are inadvertently drawn into this process of commodification, becoming a standardised product from which government funding can be obtained. The commodification of asylum seekers by support organisations is one way in which further funding can be sought, pressure can be put on both domestic and international political agendas and asylum seeker 'issues' can be lobbied further (Rajaram 2002:263). For example, support workers highlighted the issue of increasing incidents of racism in Norfolk. In providing numbers of these incidents they were able to produce an argument that asylum seekers were at risk in the wider community. They were therefore successful in acquiring funding to promote equality in schools (NASRF meeting, 2003). Consequently, an emphasis on asylum seeker vulnerability provides support organisations with an authoritative position from which they can commodify asylum seekers to further ensure their stake in the asylum seeker industry.

Sustaining Dependency within the Official Explanation

I use the term 'official explanation', adapted from Spivak (1987), to refer to the account given by support organisations of asylum seeker problems and needs. I explore the idea of an official explanation in order to highlight a particular point about the relationship between asylum seekers and support organisations: that support

organisations greatly depend on the official explanation about asylum seekers to ensure their own subsistence. This point not only gives a greater understanding of the complexity of the relationship of dependency between asylum seekers and support organisations, it also provides a deeper insight to the notion of sustainability.

The official explanation assumes that asylum seekers are fundamentally dependent. The official explanation polices the entire field of knowledge concerning asylum seekers, whilst producing 'the official ideology, the structure of possibility of knowledge whose effect is that very structure' (Spivak 1987:108). Support organisations are bearers of the official explanation, which determines that asylum seekers are fundamentally dependent. Consequently, and despite support organisation's efforts to empower them, this precludes any possibility that asylum seekers could become independent and autonomous beings. In turn, this ensures that support organisations retain the control and regulation of asylum seekers.⁴⁵

Most support organisations, such as the Refugee Council, play a large role in defending the rights of asylum seekers by lobbying the government. However, the government is able to restrict the force of their power to a great extent by contracting them to provide government-funded services to asylum seekers (Fisher 1997:451). Consequently, at times, the type of relationship that a support organisation has with the government may dictate the extent to which asylum seekers are referred to as dependent or independent. This is because the official explanation is also greatly influenced by the issue of sustainability. During my fieldwork, the conflation of asylum seekers' needs with the sustainability of support organisations inadvertently became a point of contention during one meeting amongst support organisations in

⁴⁵ Spivak's (1987) question 'can the subaltern speak?' is worth considering here. As Ashcroft argues, this phrase does not mean that the subaltern, or, in this case, asylum seekers, are entirely voiceless. Instead, asylum seekers cannot speak within the dominant discourse because their 'otherness' is 'mediated in a language which situates it, which makes it comprehensible' (Ashcroft 2001:46). In other words, the discourse of asylum seekers does not hold the social or cultural capital for it to be valued or comprehended independently by the dominant discourse of the support organisations.

Norwich. A representative from the Ipswich branch of the Refugee Council came to the NASRF meeting to discuss a leaflet which listed all Norwich support organisations in health, education and so on. He was preparing this information to give to newly arrived asylum seekers in Norwich. He had come all the way from Ipswich to confirm that the members of NASRF were in agreement with his list. At first the response was positive, but then it became quite heated.

Clearsprings, a private housing company, had secured the Home Office contract to organise housing for dispersed asylum seekers in Norwich. Clearsprings became the liaison between the government and the service providers. For service providers who had been assisting asylum seekers locally for many years, finding that they would need to negotiate and work alongside a private company initially caused some friction. This was because the mandate of the private company was largely based on profit and streamlining services and therefore commodified asylum seekers essentially as stock. This perspective differed enormously to the humanitarian stance of the NGOs, whose commodification of asylum seekers, in this instance, was based on 'gatekeeping' (see Kagan 2006). Clearsprings had provided their own information pack to new asylum seekers who were being dispersed by the government directly into their care, and were determined that they would be the sole provider of such information.

The representative of the YMCA reminded the group that there were seventy-six asylum seekers arriving in Norwich per week and not all of these people were being dispersed by the government. In other words, he argued that there were different avenues for arrival and consequently Clearsprings did not have a monopoly over them. The conversation continued:

Red Cross representative: Asylum seekers need to feel empowered and to do things for themselves! People need some of their independence back!

Clearsprings: But the reality is asylum seekers have no idea where to go therefore *they need clear direction* [my emphasis].

Red Cross representative: It's about personal choice – widening the scope a little bit

Norwich College representative: Yes, asylum seekers need as much information as possible!

Clearsprings: We provide our own information to asylum seekers otherwise if there are others available *we lose total control! It undoes what we're doing!* [my emphasis]

(NASRF Meeting, Norwich, 2003)

The above debate draws attention to the importance that support workers place on retaining control of information and its provision. Despite their disagreements, this debate reveals the official explanation as espoused by the support organisations: that asylum seekers need information, and that there should be defined and delineated ways of providing it. In sum, it is the support organisations who determine the asylum seekers' access to information. Negotiations surrounding empowerment are largely within and amongst the support 'industry', and have no input from asylum seekers themselves – hence their dependency. In order to maintain this relationship of dependency the dissemination of information within the support industry must then be carefully managed. If information becomes too freely available amongst organisations, then there is the possibility that they could lose their stake hold.

Consequently, at the same time as providing an explanation as to the needs of asylum seekers, the workers also must maintain their own needs to ensure their sustainability. As one support worker succinctly explained to me:

Survival is also important for organisations. They [the methods of assistance] can't work or there will be no work.

(Anonymous, asylum seeker support worker, Norwich 2003)

This comment highlights the underlying issue of sustainability. Various support organisations' sustainability depends on asylum seekers being problematic, and on maintaining control of the official explanation of the issues and how they should be addressed. This is not to say that methods of assistance are sabotaged by the workers and their organisations. In fact, resources are so far stretched that it is often

impossible for support programmes to function to their full potential. Reliant on government funding, these organisations are constituted largely on the problems and difficulties of asylum seekers and also the success of the assistance which they provide. For example, one support worker described the new grant his organisation had just secured to provide much needed educational services to asylum seekers:

We have secured £100,000 to provide these classes. We will now be able to provide different vocational courses each term, like business and catering. Adult education will have a Portuguese bilingual worker and adult education can offer one to one classes for asylum seekers and refugees. Also this gives me a post for another year!

(Support worker, NASRF meeting, 2003)

As this worker exclaims, it is not just the asylum seekers who are able to benefit from funding. His own job security is reliant on the support he is able to secure for asylum seekers.⁴⁶

I suggest the relationship between dependency and sustainability can be found in the speech-acts of support workers: in decision-making processes, through consultation with asylum seekers, and in the development of refugee community organisations (RCOs). In the following sections I reveal the extent to which the notion of dependency is emphasised in the speech-acts of support workers. I then point toward the way that the social exclusion, stemming from this notion of dependency, is addressed by support organisations through an emphasis on empowerment.

The Decision-Making Process

Attempting to empower asylum seekers at the same time as constructing them as fundamentally dependent can be instrumental in forming social exclusion as well as creating difficulties for support organisations. This is very much evident in the decision-making process. To illustrate this point, consider the context — and one

⁴⁶ This quote also reveals how tenuous support workers' job security is when working for organisations that lack core funding.

meeting in particular – of the NASRF in Norwich, which facilitates collaboration on the provision of support to asylum seekers. A drop-in centre which could provide a central point of contact for asylum seekers did not exist in Norwich. Instead, asylum seekers arriving on their own accord, or literally off the back of a lorry, would access places such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau, the college, local churches, and the Red Cross Refugee Project based outside of the CBD.

The streets of Norwich circle the old castle at the centre of the city. The streets are busy: it is a confusing place for a new arrival, particularly if they do not know into which part of the country they have arrived.⁴⁷ In 2002, asylum seekers were about to be dispersed to Norwich through the government's national dispersal programme. Although Norwich had received asylum seekers in the past, these were mainly unaccompanied minors that Norwich Social Services were required to assist, and other asylum seekers who had found their own way there.⁴⁸ Now that asylum seekers were about to be dispersed to Norwich in an 'organised' and official way, the number of asylum seekers in the city was about to increase dramatically. The main 'stakeholders' – the NGOs, as well as local and national government bodies – put in months of preparation. Every month, NASRF met in order to share information and plan strategies of assistance.

During one of the first meetings that I attended, six months before the official arrival of dispersed asylum seekers, the input of asylum seekers and refugees was discussed. The meeting was held in the Norwich City Hall, an impressive building that looms over the marketplace (see Figure 23).

⁴⁷ Here I am referring to asylum seekers who smuggle themselves into the country in the back of a lorry. Often at the end of their journey they do not know which part of the country they are in and sometimes which country they are in (Police Officer, Great Yarmouth, 2003).

⁴⁸ Often asylum seekers arrive in Norfolk because they have heard that there may be work available on the farms.



Figure 22: View of the Norwich City Hall from the castle (Photo: Sophia Corfield).

This positioning captured the centuries-old class division that separated the workers from the decision makers and which seemed to be reconstructed inside the formal boardroom that was the location for these monthly meetings. This location could be intimidating for asylum seekers and refugees who might attend.⁴⁹ In any case, the attendance of asylum seekers was considered inappropriate by most members. The group of twelve representatives sat around a very large boardroom table on dark red leather chairs surrounded by paintings of former mayors of the city and huge windows framed by heavy velvet curtains that looked out on the bustling marketplace below. The members were representatives of Norwich Constabulary, Catholic Women's League, Clearsprings Housing, the Diocese of Norwich, Refugee Council, Norwich City Council, Norwich City College, Citizen's Advice Bureau, Jobcentre, Adult Education, and Norfolk and Norwich Racial Equality Council.

Given the imminent government dispersal of asylum seekers, the meeting's concern was with the information protocol, the impact on the community, and the development and implementation of an action plan. The group discussed strategies

⁴⁹ Many asylum seekers fleeing political persecution find government officials and buildings extremely intimidating (Lange *et al.* 2007:36; Stern 1988:1470).

of informing both the locals and the asylum seekers about their rights and events as they unfolded. It was suggested that members of the asylum seeking community be trained as 'signposters' – that is, individuals who could relay specific information to their communities. It was also suggested that local shops and other places could hold updated information on services for asylum seekers.

At this point I suggested that there needed to be drop-in centres where asylum seekers and the police could meet on friendly terms and that refugees who had gone through the asylum seeker process, and who had the interest, could become involved in meetings such as this. The consensus of the group was that they did not wish to be patronising, but involving asylum seekers and refugees at the meetings would not be appropriate. After the meeting, I was approached by one of the local police representatives who explained to me why the group had come to this consensus:

[...] there is a difference between what this multi-agency group is trying to do and what a community group would be. You have to remember that all the people here work with asylum seekers in their everyday jobs and actually are dealing with these issues daily. If you turn this meeting into a community group it would become a different thing altogether. You can't have both together; it has to be one thing or the other. There is a place for a community group, but it is not what this group has set out to be.

(Police representative, NASRF Meeting, Norwich, 2002)

In saying this, the police representative clearly delineates asylum seekers as a 'community group', completely separate from the decision makers who are deemed to have a greater understanding of the issues pertaining to asylum seekers than the asylum seekers themselves. Here one can see how asylum seekers are excluded and objectified within the decision-making process in order for support workers to retain their position and identity as authoritative. This is the basic premise of Spivak's concept of 'official explanation' whereby the official ideology of the support industry as the knowledge bearers is reproduced, allowing the entire field of asylum seeker support to be 'policed' (1987:108). I suggest that such meetings stigmatise

asylum seekers as a problem to be addressed through the decision-making process. Social exclusion is inadvertently employed by support organisations who, in asserting the official explanation, must continually emphasise the dependency of asylum seekers and in so doing cannot include them in the decision-making process. In addition, support organisations cannot afford any kind of criticism of the action plan by asylum seekers. If this were to occur, it would threaten the action plan and the way in which support workers' had planned to assist asylum seekers (Knudsen 1991:29). Asylum seekers are therefore demarcated as vulnerable due to their needs, which sets them apart from the rest of society. Burchardt *et al.* also suggest that one is subject to social exclusion if:

(a) he or she is geographically resident in a society and (b) he or she does not participate in the normal activity of citizens in that society

(Burchardt *et al.* 1999:230)

However, Schuster more specifically relates exclusion to the dispersal program which disrupts kinship and social networks as well as freedom of choice (2004:3). Discussions of social exclusion have shown the extent to which it is experienced by asylum seekers. In the UK, the Home Office developed the Social Exclusion Unit in 1997 to tackle such problems as 'unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, ill health and family breakdown' (Cabinet Office 2006). Schuster is rather more cynical in her view, suggesting that asylum seekers experience exclusion by the British Government 'because there is no desire to include those who will subsequently be obliged to leave' (2004:16).

So, this exclusion from decision-making of asylum seekers by the support organisations constructs their dependency. I concur with Malkki who argues that organisations who work with asylum seekers 'share the premise that' asylum seekers are 'an anomaly requiring specialized correctives and therapeutic interventions' (1995:8). Thus the 'problem' is regarded as internally constitutive of asylum seekers very being, which is also reflected in the placement of asylum

seekers on the periphery of society, the periphery of self-governance and the periphery of self-knowledge (see Spivak 1987).

Consequently, asylum seekers and refugees could not take part in the decision-making process. They had to remain in their subaltern role as the subject onto which assistance and benevolent support could be handed down (Spivak 1987). As Tomlinson and Egan (2002) say, the identity of asylum seekers is largely reliant upon the discussions in which asylum seekers 'are able to participate, with whom they can engage, and the nature of the discourses drawn upon in these conversations'. In the case of asylum seekers in Norwich full engagement and participation was not possible, ultimately affecting the construction of self (Tomlinson & Egan 2002:1025).

However, although the input of asylum seekers within the discourse of support organisations is largely absent from their considerations, this is not to say that these organisations are simply paternalistic in attitude. Rather, it is a more complex issue. Asylum seekers are able to feed into the decision-making process, but only when support workers specifically seek their input through a consultation process. This is another example of the relationship of asylum seeker dependency that inadvertently isolates asylum seekers further.

Selective Consultation

What is fascinating about the consultation process with asylum seekers is that they are only consulted when their input will reinforce the official explanation. Consultation with asylum seekers reinforces the notion of the official explanation and therefore inadvertently further constructs asylum seekers as dependent. This is because asylum seekers are included in the production of knowledge through

consultation.⁵⁰ The decision of whether or not to consult is often made on behalf of asylum seekers. This controlled or restricted consultative approach is bound by the official explanation.

Few asylum seekers and refugees play an active role within the support industry in East Anglia.⁵¹ However, there are some organisations such as the Red Cross, GYROS and the Refugee Council who may rely on asylum seekers in consultative roles. It is through selective consultation that some asylum seekers are included. Mr X is one of these people who became a member of the board of directors at GYROS after playing a consultative role. I noted in my field diary his explanation of why he was consulted:

Mr X was telling me that he is going to the community cohesion conference in June and that he had been to the one last year and that it was really good. He says that he goes to the police constabulary meeting every so often and they ask his opinion about different issues. He also said that he had been to a meeting with Mr D and a government minister. He told me that he has also been invited to give a talk at a housing conference held in Norwich by the council. Mr X says that he has got a lot out of it. He has gained much more confidence and the ability to speak in front of people. He said that once he asked Mr D why he takes him and not Mr A. Mr D said that it was because Mr A was too political and wanted to relate his experiences to the asylum system, Blair and the government, whereas people just want to know about the life of an asylum seeker, and this is what he saw himself as offering.

Although Mr X was satisfied with his consultative role, what he told me highlights the strategic selection process to find suitable asylum seekers with which to consult. If Mr A had been consulted, his voice would have diverged from the intended outcome of the consultation process. Therefore, those who are consulted often have been strategically chosen, in that they are not politically motivated and can convey their experiences in relation to the official explanation. As I discussed previously, asylum

⁵⁰ Support organisations need not be concerned with the legalities of incorporating asylum seekers into the decision making process because the Home Office stipulates that asylum seekers are able to engage in voluntary work.

⁵¹ In fact, I was only aware of a small number of asylum seekers who played an active role at GYROS, Peterborough Red Cross and NNREC. Mr A volunteered as an interpreter and Mr X as a public speaker and board member of GYROS; Mr R (a refugee) is employed as a race equality officer at NNREC; and a small team of asylum seeker and refugee interpreters volunteer at Peterborough Red Cross.

seekers are largely absent in discussions at the NASRF meetings in Norwich.⁵²

The notion of dependent asylum seekers, and the mandate of support organisations to empower them, contributes to the debate of whether or not to consult. Generally, supporting organisations are concerned about taking advantage of vulnerable asylum seekers. Ironically, the decision of whether or not to consult is made without consulting in the first place. Thus, often decisions are made on behalf of asylum seekers.

An example of this is evident when, during my fieldwork, I was recruited as a researcher for the NASRF.⁵³ It was during one of the steering group⁵⁴ meetings that the question of consultation, and whether or not this was a viable option for the research, was raised. The steering chair voiced her concerns about consultation and argued:

I am really concerned about consulting. You know that this was one of the findings of the Fleming report! You can't expect to ask asylum seekers their opinions about things that would probably not even make any sense to them and they wouldn't necessarily understand. You have to remember that asylum seekers have been interrogated by immigration, they are frightened and vulnerable, and consultation would be just as bad.

(Chair, NASRF steering group meeting, Norwich, 2003)

This quote clearly shows the difficulty that support workers have in combining the construction of the 'vulnerable' asylum seeker with the 'empowered' asylum seeker. Ultimately, the worker makes the decision on behalf of those asylum seekers they consider to not have the adequate knowledge and confidence.

This discussion about consulting asylum seekers was very much centred on an

⁵² However, there are some organisations that do include asylum seekers on a practical level, for example, as interpreters.

⁵³ My work with the Norwich multi-agency was also in association with the Refugee Council to carry out a needs analysis of services available to asylum seekers in Norwich.

⁵⁴ Here I make a distinction between support workers who are involved in a day-to-day level of supporting asylum seekers through casework, and those within support organisations who work at a regional/policy level who do not have consistent contact with asylum seekers. Caseworkers are not necessarily in a position whereby they are able to directly influence policy. And, as much as the asylum seekers generate opinions and perceptions on a day-to-day basis when interacting with caseworkers, they cannot provide input without the express request from a caseworker to do so.

occidental perspective of the 'other', that is, a group which must be kept, protected, and vigilantly supervised and indoctrinated into the ways of the Western world. Said describes Orientalism as a 'systematic discipline' whereby the 'other' is produced 'politically', 'sociologically' 'ideologically' and 'imaginatively' by the occident (1978:3). Such is the authority of the occident that 'the whole network of interests is brought to bear on [...] any occasion' that the Orient is even mentioned (Said 1978:3). In much the same way the support organisations determine what can be said or done about asylum seekers. Support organisations make 'statements about' asylum seekers, 'authorising views' about asylum seekers, 'describing' asylum seekers, 'teaching' asylum seekers, and 'settling' asylum seekers (Said 1978:3). The rhetoric that I witnessed stemming from many of the support workers was authoritative, and constructed asylum seekers as a singular homogenised ethnic grouping, whereby 'we' had to decide how 'they' would be kept, approached, included/excluded. Even talk about how to include asylum seekers via a reference group was determined during such meetings – according to whether it was feasible, necessary, possible, or allowable.

However, my point here is that the issue for asylum seekers is not primarily the sphere of rhetoric, language or action about asylum seekers, but the 'relative powerlessness of the recipient vis-à-vis the helper' (Harrell-Bond 1999:3). Or, to be precise, it is about the positioning of the asylum seeker vis-à-vis the official explanation, which has repercussions for asylum seekers' access to networks of support.

While the discussion with the steering group was taking place, isolation was increasing and was fast becoming the major problem amongst asylum seekers entering Norwich. Asylum seekers were to a great extent dependant on a network of support in order to navigate their way into an asylum seeker community. One can then see that through consulting with asylum seekers, support organisations

identified social inclusion and integration as the solution to isolation. However, social inclusion and isolation were not necessarily addressed. This was the findings of the Guild report:

[...] to date, within the East of England, it [integration] has been a haphazard process from which refugees themselves have been largely excluded, despite the growing focus on social inclusion that is stressed by policymakers.

(Fleming 2003:5)

It seems that the Guild report finds that social exclusion is recognised as a major issue. In order to address a problem such as isolation, organisations often approach consultation as a way of reinforcing what they already perceive to be a foregone conclusion. In fact, this comment was made to me by one worker during the gathering of data for the needs analysis: 'I already know what the findings will be.' As Arce and Fisher (2003) point out, much of the information gathered from participants is often done so with the outcome already in mind.

Spivak argues that the centre requires some marginal inclusion in order to better define the marginal:

The putative center welcomes selective inhabitants of the margin in order better to exclude the margin. And it is the center that offers the official explanation; or, the center is defined and reproduced by the explanation that it can express.

(Spivak 1987:107)

Spivak's argument can also be applied to the power structure employed by the support organisations. In assisting and addressing the needs of the asylum seekers, support organisations further position asylum seekers on the periphery as vulnerable and excluded. Silverstone and Georgiou point out that for a group to have a voice, they must be able to participate and have the 'capacity to contribute' as well as 'gain a presence on one's own terms' (2005:436-437). The only way for asylum seekers to take part in such discussions is to 'bring' them into this sphere under their own terms, conditions and perspective. Consequently, it seems that consultation is the key factor in recognising and therefore addressing issues such as

isolation and support. And yet, if consultation is not incorporated as a knowledge component for the official explanation, then isolation is not addressed. However, one would assume that asylum seekers have more input through the emergence of Refugee Community Organisations (RCO). However, paradoxically, RCOs are largely conceptualised by an assumption of knowledge maintained by the official explanation.

Refugee Community Organisations and Integration

RCOs are formally constituted and registered organisations that provide social and cultural support to people of different ethnic backgrounds. RCOs are primarily formed to assist refugees, but asylum seekers also form part of their membership. The formation of these groups are encouraged by the Home Office as well as many other support organisations with the aim of providing better links between cultural groups and wider society essentially encouraging integration. However, RCOs are not necessarily an appropriate source of assistance to asylum seekers who are not considered to be members of wider society. Consequently, RCOs further perpetuate the marginality and exclusion of asylum seekers. RCOs are a point of some contention amongst some support organisations, in part because they are believed to be artificially constructed through the impetus, or at least partial funding, of the Home Office. And yet other support organisations, such as the Refugee Council, publicise RCOs as promoting independence and combating isolation.

I attended a workshop in London run by the Refugee Council on 'community development' where a discussion on RCOs took place. As I will argue in Chapter 6, asylum seekers have established their own informal networks of support. And yet the desire to formalise these networks is often made by support organisations rather than the refugees or asylum seekers themselves. This is evident in the following conversation which took place between two support workers. The first worker

explained that there was a difficulty creating an RCO because there was a diversity of asylum seekers rather than specific ethnic groups:

Worker 1: The women are not keen to work together.

Worker 2: An RCO doesn't have to be made up of one ethnic group and it can be made up of a diverse group.

Worker 1: I understand this, but that is just the problem: the women are reluctant to work together as one group.

This discussion highlights the fundamental problem of a support organisation attempting to externally construct an RCO that does not 'fit' with the realities experienced by asylum seekers themselves. In other words, some RCOs are artificially constructed by support organisations, rather than originating from asylum seekers and refugees themselves.⁵⁵ Thus, the criteria for RCO membership might differ greatly from those who access informal networks which asylum seekers and refugees create for themselves. And yet these informal networks assist in facilitating social movement, drawing on the formal networks with which they interact and 'cross-appropriate' (Escobar 2001:168). For example, asylum seekers in Great Yarmouth have formed their own informal network that interacts with the formal network of GYROS. So, along similar lines to GYROS, RCOs may become the vessel from which such informal social movements might stem, but their conception and design largely originates from support organisations.

In Norwich the 'Norwich Black Women's Group' was artificially constructed by support organisations to reach an increasing group of people with multiple disadvantages (not just 'asylum seeker', but 'black', female' and 'isolated'). One support worker who was instrumental in the formation of this group told me about the women's initial reluctance to form such a group. She told me that, 'Sometimes they [the women] don't know that it would be good for them until they are given it' (Asylum seeker support worker, Norwich, 2003).

⁵⁵ There is an exception to this in Norwich. In 2004 after my fieldwork had been completed, a Congolese asylum seeker, Mr G, formed the Norfolk French Speakers Association (NORFRESA).

The formation of this group was externally constructed through an assumption of what was needed and how it should be implemented. This assumption is constructed from an imposed construction of asylum seeker and refugee identity. Gershon and Raj somewhat harshly describe support organisations as ‘evok[ing] ignorance to fashion communal identities’ (2000:4). The suggestion that decisions must be made on behalf of asylum seekers who are ‘black’ throws light on the relation of power in the positioning of asylum seekers onto manageable frameworks of support. The ‘black’ category becomes one of convenience, when in Norwich and Great Yarmouth people of African origin are varied both in ethnicity (i.e., black British, Zimbabwean, Somali, Portuguese, French, Congolese), populations and status (i.e., British, migrant, asylum seeker, refugee). If derived from a grass roots level, this categorisation would be more likely based on ethnicity.⁵⁶ This ‘black’ category has been externally provided in response to the absence of a large population of refugees or migrants of a particular ethnicity which can organise support to a growing number of asylum seekers of similar ethnicity in their community.

The construction of RCOs and the place of integration was always a topic of contention among support workers. Mr D from GYROS explained that the Refugee Council was conducting research into the possibility of establishing RCOs based on ethnicity. The idea behind this is that encouraging ethnic communities to actively support each other will greatly facilitate the integration of people into the community. However, Mr D argued that from his experience, when people have separated into groups based on ethnicity, suspicions into equality of the distribution of goods and services always arise. He told me that he is very much in favour of integration, but from his perspective it would be better for people to integrate directly into the local

⁵⁶ Some RCOs in London, for example, include the Association for Sierra Leonean Refugees, the Iraqi Community Association, and the Horn of Africa Community Group.

community rather than separating into ethnic groups.

From the support organisations' point of view, the argument for the construction of RCOs emphasises the important roles of social capital, inclusion and integration that RCOs would hold, but from differing perspectives regarding the ethnic construction of such groups. And in fact, this could be considered a response to the perceived lack of the asylum seekers' input into the decision-making process. However, I concur with Zetter *et al.* that RCOs do little in the way of integration for asylum seekers, when in fact their role is essentially gap-filling for those asylum seekers who fall outside NASS support (2005a:176). The welfare role played by RCOs is partially recognised by the Home Office in the document, *Integration Matters: A national strategy for refugee integration*, whilst emphasising the notion of integration that applies to refugees rather than asylum seekers:

The enormously valuable work of RCOs in helping refugees to acclimatise to life in the UK [...]. Based on the self-help principle, and usually run on slender resources, *they build links between refugees and the wider community* [my emphasis] [...] We want to boost the capacity of RCOs to undertake this work, particularly through the carefully targeted use of the government funding available for refugee integration work.

(Home Office 2004c:20)

This very role of support supplement reinforces RCOs position on the margins of the support system (Zetter, Griffiths *et al.* 2005b:7). Asylum seekers are further isolated, their liminal status perpetuated by governmental restrictions based on the buzz words of bureaucracy such as 'community cohesion', 'social inclusion' and 'integration':

By 'integration', we mean the process that takes place when refugees are empowered to achieve their full potential as members of British society, to contribute fully to the community, and to become fully able to exercise the rights and responsibilities that they share with other residents.

(Home Office 2004c:6)

Consequently, the role of RCOs is bureaucratically integral to integration, as it supports the official explanation that produced by the Home Office. It is in this way that asylum seekers are further marginalised, more so than refugees. This is evident

in the Home Office document:

1.6 It follows that this integration strategy [as presented in this Home Office document] does not cover asylum seekers whose applications are either still being considered or have been rejected. While the Government does accept that the experiences of asylum seekers before they are recognised as refugees will affect their later integration in a number of ways, it believes that integration in the full sense of the word can take place only when a person has been confirmed as a refugee and can make plans on the basis of a long-term future in the UK.

(Home Office 2004c:10)

This Home Office document points to the exclusion of asylum seekers from the notion of integration and RCOs (Refugee Council 2004a:3). I argue that asylum seekers are discriminated against in government decisions about funding opportunities for RCOs. All of the asylum seeker support organisations are reactive to Home Office legislation and seek to secure sustainability but are very dependent on external funding. Organisations such as the Refugee Council are dependant on core funding from the Home Office to do so (Immigration & Nationality Directorate 2006a). Consequently, funding as well as retaining one's stake within the industry remain imperative to their existence. This creates a great deal of competition amongst support organisations. Therefore, asylum seekers are institutionalised and marginalised as the 'restricted other' from the very community support networks, the RCOs, which are ostensibly the major source of social inclusion for asylum seekers. Therefore, asylum seekers must seek assistance from those organisations that have the capacity to assist them. Community-derived support, although often lacking in core-funding, is perhaps the next best thing to an RCO. I now turn to community-derived support in comparison to other NGOs in explaining how the notion of dependency might be lessened.

Community-Derived Support

Community-derived support affects asylum seekers' access to services in different ways than do national NGO strategies. This is due to the type of organisation and

the way that knowledge is produced and disseminated. These organisations are much more flexible in the kinds of support they can provide because they are able to manoeuvre in a way that those organisations with government contracts cannot. This can be illustrated by an example from a volunteer induction day at the Refugee Council's Ipswich office in East Anglia. Although support organisations actively work to relieve the isolation and social exclusion that is experienced by asylum seekers, many support organisations are largely unable to combat isolation on their own. Support organisations must rely heavily upon community-derived support and the use of volunteers. In this case, the participants were offering their time to meet asylum seekers and assist them with orientation into British society. The purpose of this induction was to clearly demarcate what it means to be an asylum seeker, and to clearly define the volunteers' relationship to the asylum seekers they would be assisting. During the course of the day, a hypothetical was produced from which we were asked to extrapolate the appropriate response:

You bump into an asylum seeker in the street who you have got to know quite well. He tells you that he is worried about his wife and children (who remain in his homeland) and wants to phone them. However, he tells you that he does not have any money, so he asks you for some money to make the call. What do you do?

The majority of volunteers in the group said that their first reaction was to give some money, but that they did not know if the Refugee Council was able to provide financial assistance. Therefore, they decided that their action would be entirely dependent on the Refugee Council's policy on the matter. However, one of the volunteers in the group, Mr M, was an asylum seeker from Iran, and he had a different perspective from that of his British-born colleagues. He told the group that he would take this person to his home to make the call, and if the Refugee Council was closed for the weekend he would allow him to stay in his home and then take him to the Refugee Council on Monday. On hearing his suggestion, the response from the rest of the group was gasps of surprise and horror, and stifled laughter. Mr

M was clearly quite embarrassed by people's reactions. The inductor gave him a kindly but firm explanation of why this was entirely unprofessional and inappropriate behaviour for a volunteer. The inductor explained that the service provided by volunteers was just as important as that of any (paid) support worker. He said that it was crucial that volunteers, like staff, maintain their boundaries, the reason being that the relationship between asylum seeker and volunteer is not based on friendship. Should such a boundary be breached, he explained, it would most likely lead asylum seekers to a false sense of hope or belief that the volunteer will be able to assist them more than is actually possible or appropriate. Crehan refers to this perspective as 'professional distancing', the boundary a professional must draw between themselves and their client (2002:2). Breaching this relationship, he believes, is considered unacceptable as the boundaries within which impartiality and non-exploitive interactions occur become compromised (Crehan 2002:2).

Community-derived support tends to be less structured than a national body such as the Refugee Council, because often the emergence of community-derived support has been from direct social response to asylum seekers within their own community. However, individual local actors posted in positions within national bodies such as the Red Cross may impart more informal relationships due to their more inclusive attitude toward volunteers, asylum seekers and the local community. In East Anglia, community-derived support, the Refugee Council and the Red Cross employ unpaid volunteers from the wider community to undertake various roles such as English tuition, assistance with the provision of basic information, and short-term befriending.

For larger organisations such as the Refugee Council, befriending, or social support, is often mediated through volunteers, allowing the agency to maintain a more distanced and perceived professional structure of support. In doing so, the Refugee Council continues to impart boundaries of the official knowledge. Volunteers cannot

overstep their role as they largely lack, the Refugee Council believes, the specialised skills and the cultural capital that the Refugee Council officially holds. The notion of short-term befriending denies the space for long-term friendships to develop. This can be attributed to the professionalism and structure that is assumed by the official explanation and has been developed in response to the core funding provided by the British government. However, for the community-derived support in Great Yarmouth, GYROS, friendship is a highly valued aspect, as it forms the basis of the very beginnings of the organisation. Mr D, a founding member of GYROS, recounted to me that Social Services had suggested that GYROS workers be provided with personal alarms and to give careful consideration to their personal safety when working with asylum seekers. Mr D said to me that his response was, 'But these are our friends!' In Great Yarmouth, the support workers have constituted assistance from the willingness within the Great Yarmouth church community, rather than being externally appointed by government agencies or other boards. These workers have direct contact with the asylum seekers on an ongoing daily basis. Consequently, the support workers have invested a greater amount of *personal* interest (Stevens & Morris 2001:152).

Generally, I suggest, the result is that asylum seekers in Great Yarmouth experience relatively less isolation due to their ability to approach GYROS directly for assistance with a range of services. GYROS does not necessarily support the construction of RCOs as encouraged by the Refugee Council, because they feel that integration is more likely to be achieved within the current structure of support. And yet, asylum seekers had much input in the production of support.

Norwich provided immediate and organised assistance to dispersed asylum seekers through a much more structured approach. There is no central place for asylum seekers to receive assistance, no drop-in service or organisation such as GYROS. Instead NASRF provides a collaborative point for support organisations to work out

together how to best address the needs of the growing number of asylum seekers in their city. This is a one-way interventional process of assistance to asylum seekers that bypasses the ability of asylum seekers to approach NASRF directly. The lack of a central point allowing asylum seekers to approach NASRF directly resulted in an increased exclusion (Stewart 2005:502) and a more clinical approach to assistance. There was also a strong push for RCOs, which was believed necessary in order to overcome isolation, a lack of a feeling of community and one-to-one support (Fleming 2003). In Norwich, asylum seekers had very little input in the decision-making process and were rarely encouraged to participate. This can be attributed to the focus on the construction of the basic infrastructure to support newly dispersed asylum seekers. This great burden on Norwich support systems tended to overshadow efforts to alleviate social isolation (The Parekh Report 2000:216).

Consequently, to a great extent the differing responses of these two cities must be understood as largely due to the specific organisations, the networks of people involved, the local actors, and the methods of support which are largely historically, geographically and locally constituted (see Weber 1947). As Fisher states, support organisations must be understood less as a set of organisations, but as a 'fluid web of relationships' involving 'flows of funding, knowledge, ideas and people that move through these levels, sites and associations' (1997:450). Given this, one must recognise that East Anglia, Norwich and Great Yarmouth are each unique to the kind of support that is constructed, the way that it is supplied and applied. Thus it is important to recognise that individual actors within community and official organisations affect asylum seekers' access to services in different ways. From this perspective, then, we may see how, in the cases of Norwich and Great Yarmouth respectively, due to past and current political and social circumstances, support is initiated from within the community and yet is externally constructed and applied. Individual support workers are nonetheless deeply embedded within the

relationships and structures of local development and power relations (Pink 1998:11).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed another of the major interactions that asylum seekers have with others in the UK – support organisations. I have shown that from the inside such a relationship seems to be very much dominated by the support organisation vis-à-vis the construction of asylum seekers as contradictorily vulnerable and yet capable individuals. The support industry and asylum seekers are embroiled in a relationship of mutual dependency in order to sustain their respective existences. Support organisations must construct knowledge about asylum seekers' predicament in order to form the 'official explanation' 'the official ideology, the structure of possibility of knowledge whose effect is that very structure' (Spivak 1987:108).

As part of the representation of asylum seekers, support organisations put forward a conflicting notion of asylum seeker identity as being simultaneously dependent and independent. Acting as gatekeepers in the construction of asylum seekerness can perpetuate the social exclusion of asylum seekers. I have demonstrated how carefully the extent of asylum seeker interaction is regulated within the decision-making process. However, there have been attempts to address the problem of social exclusion through consultation, construction of RCOs and the contribution of community-derived support.

In this chapter I have drawn attention to the complexity of the asylum seeker/support organisation relationship. It is vital to recognise that asylum seekers are not solely the vulnerable recipients of aid in the UK. Rather, asylum seekers agentively respond to a stereotype that may prove to assist them throughout their predicament. Equally, support organisations are dependent upon the engagement and response

of asylum seekers in order to construct an official explanation that will ensure their own sustainability. In saying this, I do not discount philanthropic motives, but point to the context of asylum seeker support as an emerging industry in this political and historical juncture. As we have seen in this chapter, the construction of asylum seeker identity is reworked from interactions with others. In the next chapter, I will draw upon the interactions that asylum seekers have with local Britons through their (dis)locating speech-acts — a coping mechanism applied by both asylum seekers and locals to position difference vis-à-vis the 'other'.

CHAPTER 5

(DIS)LOCATING SPEECH-ACTS: THE NEGOTIATION OF RELATIONAL IDENTITIES BETWEEN ASYLUM SEEKERS AND LOCALS

A few weeks ago in all the newspapers and TV news it was about asylum seekers and how they could be terrorists. People believe this and then it creates problems. I have experience of this felt from local people who are very careful of me. I will not go [...] anywhere at night because people may get violent because they are afraid of who I might be. I feel this everyday.

(Mr I, Iraqi asylum seeker, Great Yarmouth, 2003)

This statement highlights a tension between asylum seekers and locals; it also demonstrates the ways in which relational identities are negotiated. In this chapter, I refer to the negotiation of such tensions as (dis)locating speech-acts. I use the term (dis)locating speech-acts to refer to talk that reflects the disruption and rupture to one's known or assumed sense of self. These acts involve the constant positioning and repositioning of individuals vis-à-vis others (Laclau 1990; Edwards & Usher 1997). By disruption I refer to the force of change in the usual status that upsets, disarranges and throws into confusion or disorder. Mr I's (dis)locating speech-act recognises the positioning of himself by locals – one where he is constructed as a problem, a terrorist, with potentially violent behaviour. His saying 'it creates problems' and 'I will not go anywhere', repositions him in contrast to the perceptions of others. At the same time, in saying 'people believe this', 'people who are very careful' and 'people might get violent', immediately positions these others in contrast to his own location.

There were several manifestations of tensions apparent in the (dis)locating speech-acts of asylum seekers and locals. Many of these tensions arose from violence, from media portrayal, and from gossip and rumour (Rosnow 1976; Rapport 2002). In

Great Yarmouth, the provisions of hotels were seen as an extravagant gesture toward peoples who were considered outsiders, despite them actually being substandard boarding houses and unsuitable for long-term occupancy.⁵⁷ Wider community fear of asylum seeker violence escalated when an asylum seeker from Guinea Bissau was murdered by her husband.⁵⁸ This contributed to the already existing tensions about the possibility of violence from terrorists posing as asylum seekers. Another fear of violence was the belief amongst some locals that asylum seekers were operating in gangs and had control of some parts of Great Yarmouth. And yet such fears of violence were just as much present in the everyday lives of asylum seekers. This fear of violence and aggression was to a great extent influenced by the media and the state, together with gossip and rumour.

(Dis)locating speech-acts which refer to a fear of violence are particularly prominent in the context of heightened sensitivity and attitudes toward asylum seekers when ‘the war on terrorism’ was gathering momentum in 2002-03. The points of everyday interaction were also partly informed by the context of the impending war in Iraq and social demographics of the area where the white population stood at 98.6 per cent (National Statistics 2003a) and where the region ranked fifth in the national index of multiple deprivation 2000 (Department of the Environment Transport and the Regions (DETR) 2000:31).

Throughout this chapter I will look at the (dis)locating speech-acts of asylum seekers, locals, the state and the media and how they relate to each other. I employ Cohen’s term ‘situational identity’ to explore the ways asylum seekers’ simultaneous internalisation and rejection of their asylum seeker label in order to address a hierarchy of need (1994:205). I then turn to the general context of the then

⁵⁷ In fact one support worker lobbied publicly for one hotel in particular not to be closed, when in fact the asylum seekers living in the hotel were eager for it to be shut down because of the substandard conditions.

⁵⁸ See Chapter 2 for a discussion about the murder and its effects on the asylum seeking community in Great Yarmouth.

impending war in Iraq and the fear of violence that enmeshed asylum seekers and locals.

Next, I will look at the role of the media in the construction of (dis)locating speech-acts. This fear generates moral panics, or what Beland calls 'collective insecurity', which the national media perpetuates via (dis)locating speech-acts (2005:2&6). This exploration of the media leads to a consideration of the kinds of (dis)locating speech-acts that are espoused by asylum seekers. As much as the media has done a great deal in influencing local perceptions (Robinson, Andersson *et al.* 2003:10), asylum seekers also respond to, as well as generate their own, (dis)locating speech-acts.

Next, I will explore the (dis)locating speech-acts of the state. Here, the ambiguous nature of (dis)locating speech-acts is apparent when the state portrays asylum seekers as innocent and simultaneously guilty of threatening national security. This can be understood as building on the media's depiction of asylum seekers, and disseminating a notion of paranoid nationalism (Hage 2003:3). Consequently, the state perpetuates a notion of asylum seekers as a homogenous group that is always mentioned in discussions of border protection and terrorism.

Locating (Dis)locating Speech-Acts

The term (dis)locating speech-act stems from Edwards and Usher's notion of '(dis)location' (1997), in turn derived from the term 'dislocation' coined by Laclau (1990). Following Edwards and Usher's conceptualisation, I refer to *(dis)locating* rather than *dislocating* because the bracketing 'signifies that location and dislocation are simultaneous moments always found together, a positioning with simultaneously one and many positions' (1997:255). (Dis)locating speech-acts are dynamic and temporally significant. '(Dis)locating', rather than 'dislocated', reveals a process that

is still occurring. This is an important analytical distinction because the use of the term as a verb denotes an action or a process.

(Dis)locating speech-acts have key characteristics relating to disruption and relational identities: they are dynamic (Laclau 1990:44) and multidirectional, they disrupt an assumed norm, they disrupt a sense of security, they disrupt stereotypes, they reinforce difference, and they generate situational identity. The concept of (dis)locating speech-acts is useful because it allows for a tension between stability and disorder. (Dis)locating is an appropriate prefix to this type of speech-act because it refers to a number of subtle movements that one may see as resulting from interactions and exchanges between asylum seekers and locals. The study of these (dis)locating speech-acts is a valuable way of teasing out these tensions between local communities and asylum seekers. For both asylum seekers and the small East Anglian communities, (dis)locating speech-acts are disruptive. (Dis)locating speech-acts disrupt a person's ontological security, that is, one's 'stable mental state derived from a sense of continuity and order in events' (Bilton 1996:665). (Dis)locating speech-acts also disrupt a sense of belonging and reveal mutual mistrust and fear. (Dis)locating speech-acts reflect the disruption and a rupture to one's known or assumed sense of self. Here, I draw on Hall's (1993a) notion of identity as a positioning of differences which operates to 'locate only to dislocate one another'. Hall's notion stems from the preface that identity is relational and that 'identities are constructed through, not outside, difference' (Hall 1996:4; see also Said 1978). Consequently, a dynamic space of movement is generated (Laclau 1990:42).

(Dis)locating speech-acts are dynamic in that when one is dislocated, it must be re-located. So, the identity of asylum seekers might be externally dislocated as non-local at the same time as being relocated as 'other'. This shifting through relational identities becomes a useful coping mechanism, as asylum seekers may hold a

certain amount of agency in defining their sense of self. This possibility of shifting identities might give room for asylum seekers to move between various facets of identities. Consequently, coping mechanisms and adjustment to identity are evident as a response to such speech-acts.

Mutual Fears of Violence

If we look at the temporal context in which my fieldwork is based, we can see that the war in Iraq incited (dis)locating speech-acts which destabilised both asylum seeker and British identity and sense of security. But what is perhaps most useful about the term (dis)locating speech-acts is that it applies to locals as well as asylum seekers. The speech-acts I heard from locals during my fieldwork held the paradoxical assumption that asylum seekers were either taking what little work that was available to locals, or 'draining the system' of its meagre financial resources. I was told by locals of the presence of 'no-go areas' or ghettos in Great Yarmouth that were controlled by large gangs of asylum seekers and refugees. I was warned to be careful because it was very dangerous. Some locals even asked me if I felt 'frightened' working with asylum seekers. These types of questions and comments dominated the public realm of rhetoric surrounding immigration in the UK.

And yet despite the fact that speech-acts of asylum seekers in mainstream discussions went largely unheard, (dis)locating speech-acts were nonetheless prevalent amongst asylum seekers. One Congolese asylum seeker spoke of his Iraqi friend's treatment by locals:

I mean, they [the locals] see the faces you see? [...] When they don't feel like you're different, they treat you alright. But where I was living, I was living with Iraqis. And when they see the Iraqis, they know that they are asylum seekers. For them Iraqis just means straight asylum seekers. So, they just do their best to get the Iraqis in trouble. Or to make their life harder, you see... [...] And I feel sorry for the guy because I know [...] how difficult it is.

(Mr C, Congolese asylum seeker, Peterborough, 2003)

Here this asylum seeker positions himself in contrast to Iraqi asylum seekers and

also in contrast to locals. At the same time he acknowledges the self-location of locals as fluid depending on their perception of 'others'. The fear of terrorism in East Anglia meant that 'foreigners'⁵⁹ were watched with caution, and frequently abused in the street. Iraqi men began to limit their time out in public as they were aware of the local unease and threats of violence. An Iraqi man described an attack he had experienced:

...a friend of mine was punched by a group of men. He was punched badly. I was attacked by a group of teenagers. When the police finally came they said that they are only young. The teenagers were across the road shouting 'yes it was us' and the police did nothing.

(Mr L, Iraqi asylum seeker, Great Yarmouth, 2003)

Here the (dis)locating speech-act is evident in the way that this asylum seeker positions himself as victim, positions the teenagers as the perpetrators of violence and the police inaction as condoning the violence. A young Congolese asylum seeker commented about the danger of racist attacks:

There are areas in Peterborough where you don't go because you will be attacked. I am always aware that I might be attacked. There was a pregnant woman being harassed and had her windows broken. The police were called and arrived about eight hours later. In the end the priest from the church went to the station himself to complain.

(Mr M, Congolese asylum seeker, Peterborough, 2003)

Mr M locates himself at the outskirts of local society for fear of retribution. At the same time he locates locals as racist and also refers to the police's inaction as indifference. Mr M had himself suffered a violent attack from locals. He had been walking out on the street when three people punched him and then kicked him when he was on the ground because, he says, he looked like a foreigner.

These (dis)locating speech-acts of asylum seekers highlight the rupture between their identity as asylum seekers seeking safe haven, and an imposed identity, that of violent terrorist or 'foreigner', which renders them a potential threat. Each party —

⁵⁹ I use the term 'foreigner' here and elsewhere because it is the term used most frequently by locals to describe someone who looks and sounds 'different' to a local.

asylum seeker and local – is dislocating the other from identities which encompass a notion of *communitas*, and relocating identities to one which alienates, stigmatises and differentiates (Turner 1969). Much of this imposed stigmatisation on others is a response to a feeling of alienation and fear. A police community liaison officer in Great Yarmouth conveyed to me that the local community was becoming increasingly concerned about the threat of terrorism. She told me that the impending war in Iraq was having very noticeable repercussions in Great Yarmouth:

I check the custody and crime records everyday and I'm surprised to see no Iraqis there. Usually there are Iraqis with driving offences [...] They're all keeping their heads down. I suppose I would react in the same way if I were living in Iraq, I would do the same [...] We've had a few calls from locals asking us how they would recognise a terrorist.

(Police Officer, Great Yarmouth, 2003)

She told me that the locals felt insecure and feared an imminent terrorist attack. And yet, at the same time, the Iraqis were beginning to feel fearful of the locals, to the point that they tended to go straight home after work and not to go out anywhere else.



Figure 23: Great Yarmouth – Iraqi asylum seekers have now abandoned the central marketplace where they would once meet, for fear of local repercussions (Photo: Sophia Corfield).

Iraqis in Great Yarmouth had abandoned their usual meeting place in the marketplace (see Figure 24) since January 2003 when the threat of war began. However, it was not just Great Yarmouth which was experiencing such incidents. The rest of Norfolk was also responding to the events in Iraq.



Figure 24: Graffiti in Norwich CBD (6 June 2003) (Photo: Sophia Corfield).

This photograph of graffiti in Norwich (Figure 25) conveys the intensity of emotion during the lead up to the war in Iraq. The simultaneous momentum of the impending war in Iraq and the imminent arrival of asylum seekers in Norwich created an unnerving atmosphere. It was initially unclear if the dispersal would go ahead quietly without much of a commotion, or if it would receive enough media attention for people to take notice of four hundred perceived ‘foreigners’ in a relatively low socio-economic area.

Only a few low-key articles appeared in the local newspaper, the *Eastern Daily Press* (EDP). The chairman of NASRF gave a statement to the EDP that the new

arrivals would not impinge on the local population:

‘People in Norwich won't see very much and it won't affect them any more,’ he said. ‘We're trying to make things as smooth as possible and it is now up to the local population to get involved and help make people welcome.’

(Redhead 2003:1)

This was an attempt to downplay the imminent arrival of asylum seekers in the area and to encourage a positive and inclusive attitude from locals. The EDP was, on the whole, particularly supportive of asylum seekers in their stories. In a study of local and national newspaper reports about asylum seekers, ICAR (The Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees in the UK) found that the reports in local newspapers showed a great deal more thoughtfulness in their reporting on issues which may ‘affect [...] their local community, than that of the national media’ (2004b:103). Indeed, some of the EDP reporters were known to be supportive of the NASRF members.⁶⁰ However, this was in stark contrast to the exposure given to asylum seekers by the more popular national media as well as the local television reports.

Media and Moral Panic

The relationship between asylum seekers and locals is often mediated by the media. In fact, the depiction of asylum seekers in the national media has done a great deal to influence local perceptions (Robinson, Andersson *et al.* 2003:10). In 2004, ICAR published a report finding that ‘large and powerful newspapers, officials, local audiences, political groups’ and asylum seekers can be understood as ‘different communicators’ ‘who respond to one another interactively’ (2004b:11). These communications amplify collective insecurity or moral panic when determining the other’s position (ICAR 2004b:9) through their (dis)locating speech-acts.

Moral panic has been a long-time topic of interest for scholars (See Cohen 1972;

⁶⁰ In fact, one EDP reporter in particular had a long standing professional relationship with many of the main players of NASRF and this was evident when she was invited to a few of the agency meetings.

Jenkins 1992; Goode & Ben-Yehuda 1994; Thompson 1998; Welch 2000; Beland 2005). Cohen describes moral panic as when 'a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests' (1972:9). Beland argues that the notion of moral panic is limited by its episodic nature. Consequently, he suggests that the term 'collective insecurity' is more conducive to the 'nature of the threat' as 'more structural rather than episodic' (Beland 2005:2,6). However, in keeping with recent works on the media portrayal of asylum seekers, where the term moral panic is given precedence (Thompson 1998; Cullen 2000; Speers 2001; ICAR 2004b), I will continue to employ it here.

Moral panics operate in response to a perceived threat to the social order (Thompson 1998:8) and 'portray an uncontrollable situation' (ICAR 2004b:9). It is the media, Thompson points out, who represents the threat 'in an easily recognisable form' (1998:8). This threat must be responded to by 'severe and exceptional remedies' (ICAR 2004b:9) aimed at highlighting and delineating difference to a definable location – the resultant speech-acts being (dis)locating. British people apply (dis)locating speech-acts when they refer to asylum seekers in a derogatory manner. They may also apply these speech-acts to themselves to disassociate themselves from the 'other' and to make distinct their own sense of Britishness (Said 1978, 1993). In relation to locals, (dis)locating speech-acts relocate asylum seekers as outsiders. They are rejected from a notion of Britishness through fear and mistrust. Locals emphasise the otherness of asylum seekers and extol a negativity that seeks to dislocate asylum seekers from a sense of belonging to a perceived sanctuary of Britishness.

The kind of language used within the media portrayal of asylum seekers can be understood as evident of (dis)locating speech-acts contributing to moral panic. Indeed, Cohen points to the role of mass media in presenting a stereotype that incites moral panic (1972:7). ICAR's report highlighted the extent to which

provocative language against asylum seekers is used within national newspapers:

Words and phrases	Headline	Text
Genuine, real, successful (in terms of application), accepted	0	8
Bogus, false, illegal, failed, rejected	5	103
Scrounger, sponger, fraudster, robbing the system	5	30
Criminal (unspecified or non-violent)	10	28
Criminal violent	2	25
Arrested, jailed, guilty	14	35
A threat, a worry, to be feared (terror, but not terrorism)	4	23
System is collapsing, chaotic, out of control, in crisis	5	22
Refugee community organisations meeting community needs	1	1
Experiencing harassment/attacks/racism	0	2

Figure 25: ‘Categories of words and phrases used for analysis of language of three-month sample of articles, with number of occurrences’ (ICAR 2004a:15).

The report (Figure 26) reveals that the majority of rhetoric surrounding media descriptions of asylum seekers involved terms such as ‘bogus’, ‘false’, ‘illegal’, ‘failed’ and ‘rejected’, all of which conjure perceptions of criminal activity (ICAR 2004a:15). During my fieldwork, the national newspapers frequently produced headlines such as ‘*One in 20 is a Migrant*’ and ‘*As Blunkett warns of menace from asylum gangs, shock new figures for the capital ...*’ (Doughty 2002:1). Another headline was ‘*Asylum: it just gets worse*’ and, ‘*As record numbers pour in*’ (Hickley 2002:1). The *Daily Mail* also produced two-page spreads such as ‘*Travesty of the Law*’, which included this:

Well-heeled lawyers paid by the taxpayer, asylum seekers spinning improbable stories and, of course, judgments which make not the slightest difference - everyone stays anyway... Welcome to the crazy world of asylum

tribunals.

(Harris 2003:28-29)⁶¹

This is an example of the media as amplifying deviancy and leading to moral panic of 'illegal immigrants' 'flooding in'. Robinson *et al.* argue that in particular the print media 'deny asylum seekers a voice but allow extremists to express their views without any form of censorship' (2003:11). However, the media's positioning of asylum seekers in relation to illegality was dealt with by the Press Complaints Commission. In an embargo on 23 October 2003 the Press Complaints Commission ordered that:

[...] editors should ensure that their journalists covering these issues are mindful of the problems that can occur and take care to avoid misleading or distorted terminology. By way of example, as an 'asylum seeker' is someone currently seeking refugee status or humanitarian protection, there can be no such thing in law as an 'illegal asylum seeker'. [...] An asylum seeker can only become an 'illegal immigrant' if he or she remains in the UK after having failed to respond to a removal notice.

(Press Complaints Commission 2003)

Such an embargo does not end the media interest in asylum seekers. In fact, the media's use of asylum seekers in high profile articles is a common occurrence. Merely the emphasis by the media on asylum seekers in small communities perpetuates recognition of 'foreigners' as asylum seekers. In doing so it informs both asylum seekers' and locals' views of each other and sparks their subsequent (dis)locating speech-acts. For example, in a television news report in 2003, the reporter said of the locals in Great Yarmouth: 'Many of the people we spoke to here thought that asylum seekers were causing problems in the town and in the country at large' (Channel 4 2003). He then interviewed locals who proceeded to reinforce the stereotypical image of the asylum seeker as the 'foreigner', thus reinforcing a sense of fear perpetuated by the media:

'The younger ones at night time on the weekend, cause a lot of problems with the local people. There's been a lot of muggings and it's obvious it's them, because in the papers it's always Latin people and foreign looking and

⁶¹ This two-page spread is an extract of Myles Harris's book, *Tomorrow is another country* (2003), which is sharply anti-asylum.

things like that...'

(Channel 4 2003)

This is the (dis)locating speech-act of the local, who starkly situates asylum seekers as the deviant other; 'a mass and unstoppable phenomenon analogous to the forces of nature' (Robinson, Andersson *et al.* 2003:11). The perpetuation of moral panic may be seen as at odds with the Independent Television Commission (ITC) programming code which Channel 4 must adhere to:

1.8(i) Ethnic Minorities

No programme should be transmitted which is intended to stir up racial hatred or, taking into account the circumstances, is likely to do so: where appropriate, schedules should give a fair reflection of the contribution of all races to society.

Racist terms should be avoided. Insensitive comments or stereotyped portrayal may cause offence. Their inclusion is acceptable only where it can be justified within the context of the programme.

Careful account should be taken of the possible effect upon the racial minority concerned, as well as the population as a whole, and of changes in public attitudes to what is, and is not, acceptable.

(Independent Television Commission (ITC) 2002:11)

Channel 4 was able to avoid this by ensuring that asylum seekers were included in the story's reportage: 'Mahmoud escaped and although he has a successful asylum application, judging by the atmosphere here, it's one of many struggles he must face' (2003). Despite this inclusion, the very concept of the story indicates a cause for concern. Exactly this point was made during the report by Mr D, founder of GYROS:

'No there isn't a problem [with asylum seekers in Great Yarmouth]. We have, as everywhere, an ongoing level of insidious prejudice against them, much of which is whipped up by the national press and tabloids and doesn't come from real experience with asylum seekers in Great Yarmouth.'

(Channel 4 2003)

The media creates a sense of collective insecurity which is evident in the (dis)locating speech-acts that the locals produce. Asylum seekers are quite obviously a politically contentious issue in the UK. The state is very cautious as to how it might articulate new arrivals in the context of issues of national security.

(Dis)locating speech-acts are useful in their ambiguity, because they are able to portray asylum seekers as innocent and guilty simultaneously. In doing so, Hage's term 'paranoid nationalism' becomes a useful definition of this state-driven outcome (2003:3).

Asylum Seekers and the State

Perceptions and attitudes toward asylum seekers must be understood within the context of contemporary political and world events. Terms such as 'protecting our borders', 'immigration control' and the 'threat of terrorism' are often state constructs which are picked up and perpetuated by the media (Kundnani 2001:4). I concur with Kundnani who argues that this fear cannot be simply attributed to 'competition over local resources or by a natural fear of strangers'. Rather, he suggests it is the United Kingdom government discourse surrounding asylum seekers which perpetuates these prejudices (2001:4). Specifically, he argues that the state generates racism through the logic of suspicion. He suggests that the logic of suspicion equates asylum seekers with illegal activity. When the state reduces the percentage of asylum claims, those remaining are assumed to be 'bogus', and when the state restricts entry into the country more asylum seekers turn to human traffickers and are therefore considered to be 'guilty by association of being a criminal': 'It means that the "asylum problem" looks more like a law and order problem, of managing bogus claims and restricting illegal movement, than a humanitarian problem' (Kundnani 2001:4).

The war in Iraq and the perceived increased threat of terrorism became the catalysts for such beliefs. Faist argues that migrants were considered a threat prior to the events of September 11 2001 but that it was only after this date that Western governments began to respond, 'dramatizing a publicly convenient link between international migration and security' (2002:7-8). Hage suggests that such

perceptions generated by the state can be described as paranoid nationalism, deriving from a 'defensive society' which 'suffers from a scarcity of hope and creates citizens who see threats everywhere' (2003:3). I suggest that paranoid nationalism is an appropriate term that is generated from the construction of moral panic. The speech-acts stemming from the state generate (dis)locating speech-acts that disassociate from 'other' and reinforce difference.

The term paranoid nationalism assists us in understanding an increasing sense of British nationalism at the expense of fearing all else. The Home Secretary said about meeting the threat of terrorism, 'it is as much about creating a sense of identity and a sense of belonging to the United Kingdom as it is about the security and administrative measures necessary to track and identify threats from people in our country' (Home Secretary 2002:2).

This is particularly true for the United Kingdom at this time, when 'terrorists', 'Muslims' and 'asylum seekers' were terms commonly used in the same sentence (see Hage 2003:20). As Faist puts it, 'securitizing migration reinforces the very stereotypes about cultural fears and clashes that politicians publicly deny' (2002:8). Thus, public perceptions about asylum seekers were stimulated by the Home Office, who argued that although it was damaging to social cohesion to link asylum seekers with terrorists it was possible for terrorists to pose as asylum seekers (Home Secretary 2002:2). The Home Office launched a website dedicated to public information about terrorism awareness:

Continue to go about your day-to-day business in the normal way, but remain alert and vigilant. For example, keep an eye out for suspect bags, packages or vehicles, or people acting suspiciously at stations and airports, and report anything suspicious to the police or the appropriate authorities.

(Home Office 2004b)

This statement from the Home Office points to a construction of Britishness as an 'imagined community of resistance at those points where divisions of ethnicity

threaten to break through' (Cohen 1992:73). McLaren calls this symbolic prejudice, where cultural symbols of Britishness are perceived to be threatened by unfamiliar religions and customs (2003:916-917). The (dis)locating speech-acts disrupt assumed norms. I agree with Kaapanda and Fenn that the dislocated subject is the result of disruption to 'values and knowledge systems which used to structure our existence' (2000:26). It is in this way that (dis)locating speech-acts reveal a rupture in the notion of a past or known self. The speech-acts that circulate around such fears are clearly (dis)locating in the re-positioning of asylum seekers as the 'other' (Said 1978). When the state and the media position asylum seekers as a homogenous other, it can be understood as the new racism.

The New Racism

The (dis)locating speech-act perpetuated by the state and the media and adopted by mainstream British society, bears two simultaneous acts of positioning of asylum seekers vis-à-vis others. It demarcates asylum seekers as a homogenous community, and at the same time it attempts to define a British identity.

In my earlier investigation of the media portrayal of asylum seekers, the notion of asylum seekers as a homogenous group was evident. Following the work of a number of theorists, this construction can be described as 'the new racism' (Gilroy 1992:53; Mullings 2005:677; see also Barker 1981; Balibar & Wallerstein 1991; Donald & Rattansi 1992; Rattansi 1994; Taguieff 1999). The new racism describes 'asylum seekers' as an overarching category within which groups of bounded cultures reside. The new racism has no overt reference to 'race' and rather than relying on ideas of biological supremacy it identifies race with the terms 'culture' and 'community' (Gilroy 1992:53; Mullings 2005:677; see also Barker 1981; Balibar & Wallerstein 1991; Donald & Rattansi 1992; Rattansi 1994; Taguieff 1999).

Alleyne describes the meaning of 'ethnic culture' as members sharing a common culture which is recognised both by members and non-members (2002:615). The new racism attempts to assert blame onto 'ethnic minorities' and their reified 'cultures' for the 'social problems' facing 'the nation' (Baumann 1996:10). The result is the production of hegemony (Gramsci 1957). According to Baumann, 'this dominant discourse [that we might call the new racism] equates ethnic categories with social groups under the name 'community', and it identifies each community with a reified culture' (1996:188). The idea of ethnic community may have a political purpose and 'serve to reinforce historically and theoretically untenable notions of immutable difference between things unreflexively and historically imagined as cultures, communities, ethnic groups and races' (Alleyne 2002:608; see also Anderson 1983). Alleyne goes on to explain that 'the idea of "community" as a self-evident and distinct collectivity and self-collectivity of like persons, becomes an obstacle to sociological understanding of the complexity of social relations in which non-whites are enmeshed in Britain' (2002:619). Similarly, Baumann suggests that this use of 'community' within the dominant discourse 'has become a polite term for "ethnic minority"' (1996:15):

It makes no sense, for instance, to call Muslims in Britain an ethnic group, although they are widely called a 'community' defined by a 'shared Muslim culture', as the dominant discourse would suggest.

(Baumann 1996:17)

'Muslim community', for example, covertly becomes the title of an assumed singular ethnic group, regardless of the diversity of ethnicity within.⁶² This is perpetuated by the dominant discourse, and in particular by the Home Office. Instead I argue for, as Alleyne puts it, the subjective vantage of community rather as an objectified and commodified notion (2002:622). So, rather than referring to asylum seekers directly as an ethnic group, asylum seekers are categorised as a 'minority group' or as the

⁶² This is not to discount some Muslims who may, in the absence of ethnic or national ties, perceive themselves as members of the Islamic community called the '*ummah*'. Roy argues that the aim of fundamentalist Islamists is to 'delink Islam from ethnic cultures' (2004:25). However, he is referring to a specific minority within the Islamic community who have a political agenda.

asylum seeker 'community'. This alters the constitution of an ethnic community, because, like Baumann's findings, the dominant discourse in Norfolk reifies asylum seekers as a group, but simultaneously making and remaking and thus changing it (1996:13).

The positioning of Britishness must begin by differentiating between 'British' and 'English'. This is visible in the following statement by a local from the EDP's online forum:

The new council houses that were built near St Catherine's church on Mile Cross Road were built to house the new Asylum Seekers. Absolutely disgusting, when other people who are ENGLISH have been on Norwich housing waiting list for 2 years. Typical soft touch Britain!!! Lets just let Johnny Foreigner come and take from our wallets and purses.

(Eastern Daily Press 2003:1)

One can see that at the same time as identifying asylum seekers as 'Johnny Foreigner', as the 'other' (Said 1978), the discourse demarcates an 'identifying aspect of themselves' (Cohen 1994:198). 'English' rather than 'British' becomes the identifiable feature in that it further excludes Scottish, Irish, and Welsh.⁶³ Consequently, the national identity is confirmed and revealed through these very 'processes of exclusion and rejection' (Cohen 1994:198).

British (or English) national identity is constituted by the very presence of the 'other'. Subsequently, asylum seekers and locals are embedded in a constant interaction which becomes increasingly strengthened the more that one group may attempt to distance themselves from this interaction. Therefore, we can see that the external categorisation and construction of asylum seekers as a group may have less to do with defining the ethnic other, and more to do with defining British identity (Said 1978).

⁶³ I was told by NNREC and Norfolk Constabulary of incidents of discrimination against Irish within East Anglia.

Asylum Seekers Responses to the Media

However, I also suggest that asylum seekers are themselves very aware of the media's negative construction of asylum seekers. And in response to the media, asylum seekers generate their own (dis)locating speech-acts that aim to position locals in relation to themselves. Asylum seekers may use (dis)locating speech-acts to disrupt a sense of self or to disrupt a sense of Britishness, perhaps by discussing what they think of local people. Asylum seekers are very aware of the headlines, articles and reports such as those which we have just investigated. However, asylum seekers often do not have a platform from which to voice direct responses to media accusations or community insecurities because they are largely discounted by support organisation, locals and the media. Consequently, the media plays a significant role in asylum seekers' perceptions of both themselves and of the British in general. This is the multi-directional characteristic of (dis)locating speech-acts.

The media affects asylum seekers' subjective stance on the asylum seeker component of their identity. One asylum seeker reflected on the impact of the media:

I don't really have a good opinion about the media. I don't really have a good opinion. It's like [...] everybody think that an asylum seeker [...] is good for the people, so they are right to write about it and they even make it worse than [would otherwise] happen. See? But good things, we don't even know good things about asylum seekers. They don't know, we don't, you don't, they don't talk about it. There have been a lot of asylum seekers who have been successful, who have created jobs and stuff. We don't hear about them, because we don't know them, you see? I don't really have a good opinion about the media.

(Mr L, Iraqi asylum seeker, Peterborough, 2003)

This (dis)locating speech-act that Mr L elicits strongly draws on a distinct relationship between Britons and asylum seekers. This relationship clearly defines a positioning of Britons as 'they'. At the same time, Mr L positions himself within the ambiguity of his (dis)locating speech-act by both identifying and distancing his identity as an asylum seeker. It is this awareness, and his strong opinion about the media, that experientially informs his asylum seeker identity.

The ICAR report on the media found that asylum seekers were more likely to experience harassment and violence as a result of the negative media portrayal (2004:101). Mr I told me that he had his story recorded by a journalist who, against his wishes, revealed Mr I's name and photograph in the article. He told me that this caused him great distress when acquaintances began to recognise him as an 'asylum seeker'. The situation worsened when he received abuse and violence from locals due to the article. However, as McLuhan points out, 'real news is bad news' (1994: 210).

The need for the media to focus on the good qualities of asylum seekers was also of importance to a Somali asylum seeker who described his personal reactions to the media's portrayal. He was concerned about the public's perceptions of asylum seekers, as this affected people's current situation and day-to-day interaction with locals. He recognised a growing rift between those who supported and those who condemned asylum seekers and described his reaction to it as 'this depression that I am feeling now'. He said that the public must be aware of the success stories in the refugee⁶⁴ community – of those who contribute to society, such as doctors and lawyers. His perspective was that 'until we tell these shining stories, we will always be trodden upon'. This supports the argument that the very 'hostile images of asylum seekers' are perceived as a 'form of harassment' by asylum seekers themselves, and in doing so form an equally negative opinion about Britons generally (ICAR 2004b:99). Mr L, an Iraqi, commented that the perceptions of the media also influenced his own perceptions of the British:

I saw a few months ago that the papers had bad things about asylum seekers every day. There are good things and bad things about asylum seekers, but the papers only pick out the bad things. British people who read them believe it all. I think British people are very racist. They're not only racist about skin colour and where you come from, but also against old people.

⁶⁴ He specifically refers to refugees rather than asylum seekers because refugees have the same work, social and education rights as British people (one exception being citizenship).

(Mr L, Iraqi asylum seeker, Peterborough, 2003)

Harris argues that the asylum debate discounts entirely the economic benefits of migration and instead is steeped in xenophobia and racism (2002:7). However, I suggest that both locals and asylum seekers hold racist and xenophobic perceptions. So, the media is also contributing to perceptions held by asylum seekers of British as generally discriminatory. This is because asylum seekers experience the effects of racism, which they see as stemming from negative media perceptions. Consequently, at the same time as the British community construct stereotypical images of asylum seekers, the asylum seekers themselves construct negative images of the British as discriminatory and racist.

(Dis)locating reflects a wider process of identity and culture in that it is always moving, changing and adapting, rather than being static and concrete. So, when I speak of (dis)locating speech-acts, this implies that someone is mirroring an evolving and dynamic process in speeches about the space of cross-cultural interactions. (Dis)locating speech-acts are also dynamic in that they break down notions of stability and permanency, and re-build and re-locate to a new point. In this way, an asylum seeker may be seen to disrupt the negative stereotype that attempts to fix their identity and position:

I watched, I think it was before Refugee Week, they interviewed some people and they said the reason there is crime is because we have asylum seekers and Mr D from GYROS spoke and said that's just complete ignorance, you know? And it's amazing because most of the foreigners here are to work, really! ... And almost all of them are at work, at college, whatever, so they're productive elsewhere. Any country, any nation, has homeless people, burglary, whatever problem, that will always be there.

(Mrs K, Kenyan asylum seeker, Great Yarmouth, 2003)

Consequently, the multidirectional and dynamic nature of (dis)locating speech-acts is evident in the responses of asylum seekers to their portrayal in the media. Asylum seekers respond to the positioning of their own identity by the British 'other', and in doing so they relocate the British 'other' as estranged from a comprehensible

identity. As I have discussed previously, it is not the media who solely perpetuates this fear. I am in agreement with Beland who argues that political actors, not just the media, orchestrate the 'perception of collective threats' (2005:3). I suggest that this fear can also be attributed to the government's dissemination of information surrounding immigration and security. Consequently, it can be argued that a paranoid nationalism is actively espoused by the state. Nevertheless, the media's role has been one to perpetuate such paranoid nationalism.

Negotiating Locals

I now turn to a discussion of how asylum seekers might transcend a fixed identity as prescribed by the majority British. In response to the external labelling and attitude toward 'asylum seekers', many asylum seekers employ coping mechanisms that attempt to transcend a fixed identity by shifting between many identities based on a hierarchy of need. Cohen calls this situational identity, whereby a person may embody 'any one of a number of possible social identities, depending on the situation' (1994:205).

(Dis)locating speech-acts allow asylum seekers to shift in and out of an asylum seeker identity according to a hierarchy of need. For example, in response to negative perceptions of asylum seekers in relation to alleged threats of terrorism, asylum seekers may emphasise another aspect of their identities which may be far removed from Britishness. (Dis)locating speech-acts provide a way of subverting aspects of an asylum seeker identity. Consequently, coping mechanisms and adjustment to identity are evident in response to such speech-acts. The purpose of the rest of this chapter is to see how disturbance and disruption impacts on the negotiation of relations and identity.

Identity consists of several 'axes of difference' which form multiple rather than

singular positionings (Gillespie 1995:11). Consequently, 'differences are gendered and sexual, class based and regional, as well as ethnic and "racial"' (Gillespie 1995:11). Hall's discussion is useful here in understanding that identity is 'not an essence but a positioning', as differences 'locate only to dislocate one another' (1990:226; 1993a). This is exactly as Laclau argues: 'every identity is dislocated insofar as it depends on an outside which both denies that identity and provides its condition of possibility at the same time' (1990:39). It is through interactions with others that one is positioned and located through differences that simultaneously position and disrupt (Said 1978:7). Furthermore, within the space of disruption and ambiguity 'new spaces of contestation' are opened up, affecting 'a momentous shift in' relations (Hall 1993b:2).

The relationship between asylum seekers and locals can be correlated to Fuglerud's understanding of Tamils in the Norwegian community, in that it is very difficult for asylum seekers to engage with locals without 'giving weight to their cultural background or ethnic normative standards' (1999:105). To locals then, an outsider has 'no social markers other than [their "otherness"] and the fact that they are understood to be "asylum seekers"' (Fuglerud 1999:105). In a similar way to Malkki's description of Hutu refugees in the town setting of Kigoma, asylum seekers can also deny 'that they were' asylum seekers, 'a pose made credible (or at least hard to disprove) by the plurality of identities available in their complex urban context' (1995:156). While in the case of Norfolk the urban areas are not 'complex' and ethnicity is visually obvious, asylum seekers can nonetheless rely on other assumptions of labels such as 'migrant worker' or 'student'.

There are some situations, however, where an asylum seeker identity cannot be avoided. For some asylum seekers, this identity is the embodiment of difference that is experienced. As one asylum seeker attending a course at college was starkly aware:

It was the students, you see, we were asylum seekers, you got no clothes, you got a lot of things missing, and you get to a class where they're alright, they feel okay, they are confident. You don't feel confident.

(Mr L, Iraqi asylum seeker, Peterborough, 2003)

This comment is typical of a (dis)locating speech-act where one feels distanced from the kind of identity that would prefer to engage with – one where acceptance and confidence prevail. Instead, there is an intense feeling of dislocation of the self from a stable and normalised environment. Thus, the asylum seekers constantly attempt to negotiate and contest their asylum seeker label despite the lived-reality that binds them during this liminal period. The interaction with locals is one of suspicion and difference. For example, Miss P was starkly aware of this despite her efforts to move beyond the constraints of an asylum seeker identity:

The college wants me to be in their newspaper as someone because they say I am an asylum seeker who has achieved so much at college. I don't want to be known as an asylum seeker! They can say I'm a black woman, an African immigrant who is at college, but not an asylum seeker, innit! Why should they say that?

(Miss P, Angolan asylum seeker, Great Yarmouth, 2003)

Miss P was outraged that her success was attributed to her asylum seeker identity, rather than other aspects of her identity which she felt were more congruent to her sense of self. But in situational circumstances not all locals will recognise an asylum seeker or refugee.

There are two ways that asylum seekers can negotiate the perceptions of locals and thus the constraints of being an asylum seeker through social practices that are evident in their (dis)locating speech-acts. Firstly, by blending in and drawing on positive relationships with locals and avoiding disclosure of their asylum seeker identity. In which case, this sense of (dis)location perforates a person's sense of self through their interactions with others. Secondly, by keeping a low profile and having little contact with locals.⁶⁵ Consequently, this is the ambiguous nature of (dis)locating

⁶⁵ There is a noticeable paradox in the internalization and simultaneous rejection of the category – this can be paralleled with intersubjective ambiguity, as I will discuss in Chapter 6.

speech-acts.

Blending in

Asylum seeker's engagement with the local community is something that is tentative unless the constraints of 'asylum seeker' can be concealed. One example of this is to immerse oneself into the local community. I was told with great enthusiasm by one young woman from Angola, Miss P, about how she takes pride in using the Norfolk greeting of 'You alright?' She said that when she goes to London to get her hair styled, she likes to think of herself as a Great Yarmouth girl from Norfolk. Miss P said she likes to go to the pub with her (local) girlfriends and call out 'Alright?' to the boys and they will call back 'Alright, darl'n?'

Such a tactic is what de Certeau refers to as a 'way of operating' in the space and 'terrain imposed' on the other (1984:xix,37). In which case such a 'tactic is an art of the weak', that is, an asylum seeker or refugee has to adapt to the situation and 'make do'. However, in 'using the constraining order of the place', tactics allow 'within it a degree of creativity' (de Certeau 1984:37,30). Scott (1985) also points to the everyday forms of resistance in peasant communities which he refers to as 'weapons of the weak'.⁶⁶ Such social tactics operate in forms that follow the 'line of least resistance' and that create a constant dialogue between forms of resistance and their intent (Scott 1985:35,38). Consequently, Miss P's tactic is 'dialogical in nature' (Voloshinov 1986 [1929]:102). She is orientating herself to the cultural perspective of the locals through her very speech-act. Miss P's use of the expression 'Alright?' also strengthens her understanding of the local British identity. Miss P is aware of the significance of this greeting as a colloquial expression with working class origins. Thinking of herself as a 'Yarmouth girl' does two things.

⁶⁶ Although Scott cautions an over-reliance of the phrase 'weapons of the weak' as he points out that those who are marginalised do not have a 'monopoly on these weapons' (1985:29-30).

Firstly, it is a spoken expression of the embodiment of an identity that transcends an asylum seeking identity. Participation in this banter also emphasises her sexuality and allows for an acceptance into the local community that negates her refugeeness. Secondly, it localises an identity to a regional area and recognises a set of relations and meanings that are specially localised and unique, therefore reinforcing her identity when outside her local district. By participating in the banter and exchange of localised expressions, this makes her feel part of an in-group, and a local. Consequently, in her hierarchy of identities, drawing on Britishness over that of Angolan, African, or asylum seeker, is much more conducive to belonging to a British culture.

Mrs K is actively involved with a local church group. No one, except the church minister and his wife, are aware of her current status as asylum seeker. I discovered this when I attended a birthday celebration at the church. One of the local churchgoers asked me how Mrs K and I had met. I said that we met at the 'gym', the asylum seekers' word for the drop-in centre run by the refugee support organisation GYROS. Mrs K overheard me say this and I saw the flicker of concern cross her face that I may have revealed too much. Fortunately the churchgoer assumed my meaning of gym to be that of the local fitness centre. Later, ironically, the conversation happened to turn to the popular topic of 'asylum seekers', which led me to realise he had no knowledge of Mrs K's predicament. Later, I asked Mrs K if she tells anyone that she is an asylum seeker:

I don't think I say it if it's not necessary [...] I think it's comfortable to say I am, [when] I am among other asylum seekers or immigrants for that matter. That's the way I look at it. [...] People, all people are affected by immigration in one way or another, whether that it's a student here, or working permit, or asylum seeker, you're affected by immigration. So it's easier to understand that. So if it's not necessary, no I don't. Unless maybe you work with asylum seekers then I will feel more comfortable to discuss that.

(Mrs K, Kenyan asylum seeker, Great Yarmouth, 2003)

Feeling 'comfortable' in any given situation is paramount to one's behaviour – it is

about feeling at ease. Blending in is a tactic used by many asylum seekers. I noticed that, unlike in cities with larger populations of ethnic communities such as London, newcomers to Norwich and Great Yarmouth discard the clothes worn in their homeland and tend to wear similar clothing to the locals. So, in Norfolk, obvious differences which may distinguish a person as an asylum seeker are avoided. Incorporating the local clothing and dialect becomes another opportunity to attempt to blend in and remain inconspicuous. In doing so, an asylum seeker feels less *apart* from the local community, and begins to feel *a part* of the local community.

Low Profile

However, for some asylum seekers avoiding interaction with locals is one way of avoiding stigmatisation. The external categorisation makes many asylum seekers sensitive to interaction, therefore causing them to limit and control such contact. As Fuglerud points out, 'It is when someone *has* to speak...that conflicts flare up' [his emphases] (1999:105). For example, when I asked Mrs Q if she thought that people in Great Yarmouth were friendly, she seemed to think that this was a silly question. She said it was the same anywhere. But when she elaborated, I realised that she was able to remain on good terms with locals by keeping a low profile:

I think that some friendly and some are not. But mostly friendly. Always I am quiet and smile and say 'thank you', then there is no problem. Some refugees only want to make trouble. I no make trouble if I am quiet and smile and say only 'please' and 'thank you'. I do not want trouble so I say, 'no, sorry my English is not good', or 'I no speak English' because I only want to say 'hello, you alright?' And 'goodbye'!

(Mrs Q, Kosovan asylum seeker, Great Yarmouth, 2003)

One day, I observed Mrs Q's behaviour to be distinctly altered when speaking to a Zimbabwean student from when she had been speaking with a local. I observed the local speaking in English, very slowly and carefully to Mrs Q in a manner that emphasised her English as a marked point of difference. In response, Mrs Q indicated that she could not understand what the local was saying and avoided interacting. Later, I observed Mrs Q chatting away very easily in English with the

student, who even commented on her excellent use of English. Mrs Q had no difficulty in understanding the student who spoke to her in a relaxed and casual manner, and yet she chose not to understand the local at all.

Consequently, Mrs Q employs a low profile for the majority of the time when interacting with people who reinforce her asylum seeker identity through their communications with her. Her identity becomes situational, moving within a hierarchy of need depending on the particular way that she is communicatively approached. So, Mrs Q's situational identity can be attributed to the perceived external concretisation of an asylum seeker identity (Cohen 1994:205). A Kurdish Iraqi, Mr J, and a Congolese asylum seeker, Mr E, discussed the use of such labels:

Mr J - if you say that you are a refugee or an asylum seeker, they will treat you differently.

Mr E - Differently.

Mr J - Yeah, we either say we are you know like immigrating to here, or we are students. That's all. So we don't say 'oh we have student visas', that's all.

Mr E - But people can be good. But, they'll be treating you like you were poor, and they'll always want to help you and stuff. I want to...

Mr J - ..which is quite annoying.

Mr E - It is annoying! Because I want to live normal, you know.

Mr J - Yeah.

(Mr J Iraqi asylum seeker and Mr E Congolese asylum seeker, Peterborough, 2003)

When attending a local college, calling oneself a 'student' is one way of avoiding the negative connotations and concretisation of the label 'asylum seeker'. Other people tend to avoid the label as much as possible when interacting with locals, and only communicate this identity with selected people. The example of the exchange highlights asylum seekers' efforts to either blend in or to keep a low profile work to avoid an asylum seeker label. Cohen points out that although it is 'relatively easy to change a religion or one's clothes', there are 'limits to the manipulative use of situational identity' (1994:205). Therefore, considering the context of the war in Iraq, the fear of terrorists by Britons and the impact of the media and the state,

(dis)locating speech-acts hold a crucial purpose.

Conclusion

Identities are not entirely self-defined, but rather relational and dynamic: (dis)locating speech-acts reveal this process of positioning difference. This is why the context of mutual fears is particularly interesting, because it heightens the degree of interactions and therefore tensions. It is because of this context that (dis)locating speech-acts are far more pronounced, with an air of insistence and urgency. Asylum seekers were the subject of much interest by locals in East Anglia and in the UK generally at the time of my fieldwork. As we have discussed, the war in Iraq and a fear of terrorists posing as asylum seekers greatly heightened negative attitudes toward asylum seekers. This must be understood as additional to the already contentious immigration debate in the UK at the time. On the whole, these speech-acts inciting moral panic and fear are mediated by the media.

The positioning of difference within (dis)locating speech-acts is evident on a number of fronts in relation to asylum seekers and their interactions with locals: in the context of mutual fears, in the moral panic sparked by the media, in the paranoid nationalism of the state, within the new racism extolled by locals, and within the constraints of an asylum seeker identity. As we have explored, asylum seekers assert the coping mechanism of situational identity within a hierarchy of need in order to manage these interactions. Consequently, asylum seekers too assert (dis)locating speech-acts. Depending on their circumstances, asylum seekers shift between a pluralistic identity which may reaffirm or reject the asylum seeker aspect of their identity. It is this strategy which allows them to negotiate their interactions with locals and to ensure that they maintain the ability to navigate this period of seeking asylum.

What is apparent in this chapter is the constant movement and positioning of

relational identities revealed through (dis)locating speech-acts. If we consider the liminal period of seeking asylum, we can see that relational identities through (dis)locating speech-acts generates movement. I suggest that such movement holds potentiality – the possibility of negotiating identity and perhaps surpassing a negative identity altogether. This is much more easily recognisable in the next chapter, when the relationship between asylum seekers themselves is explored through the exchanging of information.

CHAPTER 6

INTERACTIONS BETWEEN ASYLUM SEEKERS

Brer Rabbit keep on axin' 'im, en de Tar-Baby, she keep on sayin' nothin', twel present'y Brer Rabbit draw back wid his fis', he did, en blip he tuck 'er side 'er de head. Right dar's whar he broke his merlasses jug. His fis' stuck, en he can't pull loose. De tar hilt 'im. But Tar-Baby, she stay still, en Brer Fox, he lay low.

"Ef you don't lemme loose, I'll knock you agin", sez Brer Rabbit, sezee, en wid dat he fotch 'er a wipe wid de udder han', en dat stuck. Tar-Baby, she ain'y sayin' nuthin', en Brer Fox, he lay low.

"Tu'n me loose, fo' I kick de natal stuffin' outen you", sez Brer Rabbit, sezee, but de Tar-Baby, she ain't sayin' nuthin'. She des hilt on, en de Brer Rabbit lose de use 'er his feet in de same way. Brer Fox, he lay low. Den Brer Rabbit squall out dat ef de Tar-Baby don't tu'n 'im loose he butt 'er cranksided. En den he butted, en his head got stuck.

(Harris 1982 [1881]: 88-59)

This excerpt from the *Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby* tale, first told by Harris in 1881, illustrates an important point that forms the basis of this chapter. That is, that the interaction between asylum seekers incites an effort to both communicate and differentiate themselves from each other, just as Brer Rabbit attempted with the Tar Baby. However, the more that asylum seekers attempt to distance and differentiate themselves from the collective and shared identity of asylum seekers, the more entangled they become within a collective asylum seeker identity. It is their inevitable interaction that binds them, just as Brer Rabbit stuck to the Tar-Baby as he tried to push her away.

This chapter establishes the complexity of asylum seeker interactions as they negotiate the shared experience of place and the liminality of the immigration system. Speech-acts are the primary form of social action through which this relationship is reflected upon. Distrust is a common theme presented in such speech-acts, particularly those interactions borne from close association whilst

sharing residency in the hotels of Great Yarmouth. These asylum seekers share a common and competitive goal of attaining refugee status, and subsequently there is a sense of distrust which is evident in the way they talk about each other. There is also tension and anger generated by people who are forced to live in an inter-ethnic community and who share the strain of liminal immigration status and place. And yet this same forced co-existence has forged strong friendships, alliances and collaboration amongst asylum seekers. In Great Yarmouth there is a drop-in centre where asylum seekers of mixed ethnic backgrounds meet weekly and form a solidarity of shared experience. Many of them live together in the same hotel and choose to also meet socially in this manner. It is in taking into account these seemingly contradictory interactions that marks another interlinking concern of this chapter.

There are two aspects to the interactions amongst asylum seekers, each containing a paradox. First, there is a vacillation of an asylum seeker's strategic possibility of a collective or an individual identity. Second, asylum seekers see interactions between them as a vacillation between collaboration and distrust. An affiliation with the collectivity of asylum seekers is referred to in speech-acts as being comparable to *I am like them*, indicating a similarity and a closeness. An affiliation with an individualised sense of identity is referred to in speech-acts as comparable to *I am not like them*, indicating a differentiation and a distancing. At times these two aspects may be articulated within the same speech-act. Take, for example, the following comment made by an asylum seeker in Peterborough:

I understand why people get fed up with asylum seekers. There are some people who take advantage of the system, they don't use their head and work things out. I always think it is possible to make the best of a situation even though I am an asylum seeker...

(Mr H, Lebanese asylum seeker, Peterborough, 2003)

This comment reveals a vacillation between a collective and an individualised identity as well as a vacillation between distrust and collaboration. All of this marks a

competitive element amongst asylum seekers in relation to the asylum process and future possibilities in securing refugee status. The speech-acts of asylum seekers reflecting on exchanges between asylum seekers reveal a struggle for autonomy that is free of the collective asylum seeker identity. However, as this chapter endeavours to show, the more that an asylum seeker struggles to escape the asylum seeker trappings, the more entangled in the collective identity they become. As asylum seekers struggle to differentiate themselves from the collective whole, they do so from within an encompassing collectivity of asylum seekers, thus becoming more entangled. This tells us a great deal about how asylum seekers employ different strategies to negotiate this encompassing collective identity.

In this chapter I begin by exploring Schutz and Luckman's we-relation and how intersubjectivity is formed from meaningful speech-acts (1989:63). This is a useful preface to Jackson's concept of intersubjective ambiguity whereby the vacillation between the differentiated self and the collective whole is considered (1998:8-10). I then explore in more detail the distrust and collaboration within asylum seekers' speech-acts which reflect the extent to which asylum seekers attempt to distance themselves from, or relate to, a collective asylum seeker identity. Finally, I consider the purpose of these speech-acts and find that their paradox generates movement and the potential for new beginnings as a refugee. Thus, it is only through interaction, or in Brer Rabbit's case punching the Tar Baby, that one confronts how one must rework one's identity within the context of the collectivity.

From We-Relation to Intersubjectivity

In order to extrapolate the way in which the interactions between asylum seekers become so paradoxical, I first explore the fundamental relationship between them – what Schutz and Luckmann call the 'we-relation' (1989:63). Schutz and Luckmann say that the 'everyday reality of the life-world includes' the individual experience of a

person, 'but also the social and cultural world' in which they find themselves (1989:5). We-relations are fundamental to interhuman relations, and consequently people 'cannot "choose" whether or not to relate to each other; they are always "already" related' (Magnus 2006:94). According to Schutz and Luckmann, a problem arises when, within the we-relation, we do not have access to another's intentions or objectives. Therefore we have to elicit some way of understanding and interrelating with others. One can only attempt to interpret another's actions through meaningful social and communicative action, or intersubjectivity (Schutz & Luckmann 1989:63; Knoblauch 2002:7). Intersubjectivity refers to the 'procedural infrastructure of interaction' (Schegloff 1992:1299), shared meanings and 'common experience' (Schutz & Luckmann 1989:68) between the subjective self and other people, whether it be a relationship of collaboration or suspicion.

According to Fuglerud's observations of Tamil asylum seekers, the intersubjective relation with other asylum seekers evident in 'the mutual offer and expectation of assistance,' acts as a lifeline (1999:84). Indeed, for asylum seekers in East Anglia, intersubjective interactions are apparent in the exchange of information between each other:

Well, it [finding information] was just talking with friends, they told me. We were all asylum seekers, so those who could, who found, or who helped the other people, because most of the people [...] and they had friends around here, so [...] they told me.

(Mr Q, Iraqi asylum seeker, Peterborough, 2003)

Such an exchange of information aids in strategising alternative routes to negotiating the immigration system. According to Schegloff (1992), intersubjectivity is vital for ensuring the continuation of understandings. Should misunderstandings cause the failure of we-relations, then 'disorganization' might prevail in the form of 'conflict between groups with divergent "understandings of the world"' (Schegloff 1992:1296). Consequently, because asylum seekers reside in a social world, their 'everyday life-world is therefore fundamentally intersubjective' (Schutz & Luckmann

1989:16). If asylum seekers are to negotiate with other asylum seekers when they live together and socialise together they must explicate the meaning of the exchanges (Schutz & Luckmann 1989:16).

Speech-acts of asylum seekers are an intriguing reflection of identity being relationally reworked. Reflections on interactions and speech-acts between asylum seekers reveal that such interactions constitute a duality of both distrust and collaboration of a collective identity. As I mentioned earlier, asylum seekers' vacillation between distrust and collaboration reflects their vacillation between 'I am like them' and 'I am not like them'. This vacillation is what Jackson calls intersubjective ambiguity and is an effort to find some equilibrium 'between the countervailing needs of self and other' (1998:19).

Intersubjective Ambiguity

Speech-acts operate as a primary form of social action through which the vacillation between the individual and the collective is played out. Asylum seekers' struggle between self and the collective is evident when they talk about a combination of perceptions about asylum seekerness within the same speech-act. So, an asylum seeker may describe collaboration with asylum seekers and then talk about their distrust of asylum seekers:

Mr D thinks that I am against other asylum seeker but I don't care what religion people are or what their skin colour is – we're all the same. I saw the interview on the television with the asylum seeker in Yarmouth. They didn't show his face but I know who he is. He say people in Yarmouth are racist, but he is wrong. It's his behaviour in public that is not good – that people don't like.

(Mrs K, Kenyan asylum seeker, Great Yarmouth, 2003)

Such speech-acts reflect Jackson's notion of intersubjective ambiguity, whereby 'intersubjectivity moves continually between positive and negative poles [...] I and Thou are similar yet separate, one yet not the same' (1998:8-10). Speech-acts spoken within this space are 'steeped in paradox and ambiguity' (Jackson 1998:8-

10), so that intersubjective speech-acts can involve both solidarity and suspicion amongst asylum seekers. Jackson's intersubjective ambiguity refers to a range of vacillations of different combinations as asylum seekers attempt to reach some sort of self-understanding. These vacillations might include:

First person ↔ third person
 Collective ↔ individual
 Distrust ↔ collaboration
 Asylum seeker ↔ British
 Ethnic group ↔ Other
 I am like them ↔ I am not like them

Different combinations may also occur in the same speech-act resulting in:

Asylum seeker → third → collaboration → I am not like them → distrust →
 collaboration → I am not like them → other → third → first

Let us now turn to an example of an asylum seeker producing such a speech-act. An asylum seeker from Lebanon, Mr H, spoke of his initial difficulties in the UK as an asylum seeker and how he overcame these problems and began assisting others in similar circumstances. Then he began to reflect on his relationship with another asylum seeker:

[..] some asylum seekers just have good stories. There is one other Lebanese guy in Peterborough who I was friends with but I don't really see him much anymore. He expected me to do too much for him. Some asylum seekers just don't try to work things out for themselves. I got a bank account straight away. He wanted one as well, but they had refused, so I went with him and sorted it out. His attitude was he couldn't overcome anything, people who have problems just don't try hard enough. I will stand by asylum seekers, but I'm not going to be used.

(Mr H, Lebanese asylum seeker, Peterborough, 2003)

In this account, I suggest that Mr H has moved from the position of 'I am like them' to one of 'I am not like them'. In saying 'I will stand by asylum seekers', but then saying that he was not going to be 'used', he reveals a strategy to evoke an autonomy that is distanced from the collective identity of asylum seekers. This vacillation is characteristic of several of Jackson's seven types of intersubjective

ambiguity which are useful in understanding the complexity of such speech-acts by considering their multifaceted nature (1998:9-10):⁶⁷

1. The movement between negative and positive poles;
2. People become both subjects for themselves and objects for others;
3. Existential dependence on and beholden to the other – the mutual need for recognition;
4. Although intersubjectivity is dyadic in nature, it is mediated by something outside – a third party, shared idea, common goal;
5. It has habitual as well as conscious elements – i.e. the ability to lie;
6. The instability of human consciousness – the way our awareness continually drifts or oscillates between an ontologically secure sense of self and an unstable sense of self;
7. A problem of knowledge – I and thou are similar and yet separate, the same and yet not the same.

The type of intersubjective ambiguity evident in a speech-act may be as infinite as the multi-faceted nature of identity. Ultimately, these seven types of intersubjective ambiguity culminate in the question of 'human coexistence: I and Thou are similar yet separate, one yet not the same' (Jackson 1998:10). I suggest that Jackson's seven types of intersubjective ambiguity accounts for the random and ad hoc nature of interactions. The possibility that intersubjective speech-acts might incur one or more of these seven types of intersubjective ambiguity reflects the vacillation and movement inherent in the quest for balance between self and other. I will now provide an example from my fieldnotes of the type of intersubjective ambiguity that may occur within a speech-act:

Mr O [a Senegalese asylum seeker] was telling me of his experiences with British people. He spoke of an acceptance amongst his British friends of his

⁶⁷ I have adapted Jackson's seven types of intersubjective ambiguity into a numbered list.

status. Then he said that he understands why people get fed up with asylum seekers:

'I have many British friends, they all know that I am an asylum seeker, and this does not change their friendship toward me. When I first arrived here as an asylum seeker, I met [...] who invited me to a party. I said, "Does this mean that we are friends?" and he said, "Of course!" But I understand why some people, they are not happy with asylum seekers...'

He continued on to discuss asylum seekers in a very distanced manner. It was as though suddenly he did not characterise himself as such. But a moment later he spoke again, this time emphasising his experiences as an asylum seeker.

In this speech-act we might recognise several of Jackson's types of intersubjective ambiguity operating concurrently. There is a definite movement between positive and negative poles of Mr O's speech-act as he conveys the positive experiences of being an asylum seeker and making British friends but also recognises that asylum seekers are subject to negative reactions. Mr O's speech-act is evident of the subjectification of self and the objectification by other people. This awareness of the effects of his asylum seeker status upon other people inadvertently creates a relationship of uncertainty. Although the uncertainty felt within this dyadic relationship can be alleviated to a certain extent by a shared notion of friendship. At the same time, this speech-act very much points toward the instability of his sense of being in the world as Mr O displays the vacillation between an ontologically secure sense of self and an unstable sense of self. These speech-acts also reflect the difficulty in combining the co-existence of sameness and difference of self and other. Consequently, elements of the seven types of intersubjective ambiguity are evident in such speech-acts and assist in drawing out the significance of the relationship between self and other.

Grima (1993) also finds speech-acts to be highly reflective of the relationship between self and other. She finds a shift in speech-acts from the individual to the collective among Paxtun women and calls this the 'depersonalisation of self'. This is because during a story told by the women, a shift occurs 'from a personal to a social and cultural mode' (Grima 1993:131):

It is no longer the 'I' of her personal life story, but the 'they' of 'They say' and finally, 'we', the collective voice of the community.[...] It serves to solve the conflict, or inner turmoil, of her own emotion by depersonalising the event and transforming her response into a culturally moulded one.

(Grima 1993:132)

Grima's observations show that Paxtun women rely on a shared understanding in order to overcome individual suffering. This strategy might also be employed by an asylum seeker in order to convey a sense of collaboration. However, more frequently an asylum seeker will begin a speech-act with a shared notion of asylum seekers and then attempt to move toward an individualised 'I' in order to protect herself/himself from an all-encompassing asylum seeker label that threatens to dissolve a sense of self and to permanently affix an asylum seeker label. Returning to Mr H's comments: 'I understand why people get fed up with asylum seekers', 'I always think it is possible to make the best of a situation even though I am an asylum seeker', signifies a sharp contrast between the self and the collective, which culminates in an admittance of an asylum seeker identity. This speech-act leads us to consider the motives and purpose behind the vacillation between 'I' and 'they'. In the following sections I will explore speech-acts conveying perceptions of distrust and collaboration.

Distrust

Distrust⁶⁸ is an aspect of exchanges between asylum seekers — perhaps the most significant — because of the threat other asylum seekers may pose to their application for asylum. Speech-acts which convey a sense of distrust toward other asylum seekers assume that another may be capable of wrongdoing — therefore caution and suspicion prevail. Here is an example of a perception of distrust which Mrs Z related to me following a conversation that occurred between herself and another asylum seeker, Mrs M:

⁶⁸ The term distrust has also been used by Agger (1994), Daniel and Knudsen (1995), Behnia (1997), and Arcel (2002) when referring to the difficulties that many refugees and asylum seekers have in trusting people they do not have a close association with.

Did you know Mrs M is moving to London? I asked her, how are you able to move there? – what did you have to say [to the Home Office for them to approve the move]? But you know, only she tells me nothing. When I see her I ask how is it going and what is it that you are doing, something like that – and she will not speak about it. I don't know why this is that she will not share this with me. It is good to move to London, to be closer to the Home Office, and maybe for job, something like that – I don't understand why only she says nothing.

(Mrs Z, Iranian asylum seeker, Great Yarmouth, 2003)

Several months later Mrs Z had finally acquired this information elsewhere and was making this very move herself. She was now in the position that Mrs M had been in, and now Mrs C was asking her for information:

I don't like to speak to Mrs C. She is always phoning and she asks lots of questions – 'how are you moving, where are you going?' – only she keeps asking questions. If she speaks to you and asks you about where it is that we are moving, please say nothing. It is only that she will cause problems for us. Only we move to London and don't speak to her because we don't want any trouble.

(Mrs Z, Iranian asylum seeker, Great Yarmouth, 2003)

Mrs C then tried to gather information from Mrs K, asking her about what she said to Newham Borough Council in order to acquire a house, this time in Great Yarmouth. Mrs K did not want Mrs C to know either, in case it caused a problem for her. Eventually Mrs C's persistence paid off and she was discreetly given this information.

Information, such as how to move to London, or receive a house in Great Yarmouth rather than live in a hotel, is seen as a loophole to asylum seekers. Therefore, this kind of information can be empowering in the sense that there is the possibility that it can be used to improve one's circumstances – it is a source of potentiality.⁶⁹ And yet, speech-acts amongst asylum seekers are paradoxically both vital for exchanging information and dangerous insofar as how that information may be used. Individuals need to be very discreet about sharing such information. If a loophole is discovered, there is a concern that the more people who know about it the more chance the gap will be closed. Jackson suggests that 'avoidance is not

⁶⁹ I will discuss why some kinds of interactions may be perceived as empowering when I discuss the purpose and potentiality of ambiguous speech-acts later.

only a way of countermanding relations that have become too close for comfort; it is a pre-emptive way of averting confrontation' (1998:160). So, avoidance allows for time to assess the potential danger of sharing this information with another person. In the case of Mrs M and Mrs Z, avoidance gave time to consider the dangers and then the much sought after information was provided.

During my fieldwork, these speech-acts seemed to always occur during discussions about other asylum seekers. These other asylum seekers are viewed by the speaker as problematic in that they may be taking advantage of some situations, or may be perceived as victimising themselves. When asylum seekers recount such speech-acts, they try to convey their perception of mistrust. For example, if an asylum seeker is the holder of a piece of information that may assist them through the immigration process, they become suspicious as to the motives of other asylum seekers' interactions with them. They must act with caution so that another asylum seeker does not take the information. Jackson explains such cautious and suspicious reaction toward another can be understood as avoidance – as a coping mechanism for 're-establishing respectful physical and social distance' – or as 'a way of countermanding relations that have become too close for comfort' (1998:160).

Even when speaking of asylum seekers of the same ethnicity, distrust is commonplace. Mrs Z and I sat together in the living room of their rented flat in London, where Mrs Z and her husband and child had moved to from Great Yarmouth. Mrs Z began to tell me of an acquaintance from Iran, who had, with her husband, pretended to be from Afghanistan in order to gain exceptional leave (refugee status):

Many people say that they are from one country when really they are from another. I have heard that she and her husband are not living together anymore. But I cannot believe – only I can think that this is not true and really they are living together. This is what happens. People say this so that the Council will give them another flat and then they rent this one and they

live together in the other flat. I know this because we speak the same language and I understand if she is lying. I made sure that she will not lie to me because I say to her 'this must be good to have some extra money' and she answer me 'yes it is'. The person who told me that they are apart did not know this because they cannot speak the language.

(Mrs Z, Iranian asylum seeker, London, 2003)

Here I am not concerned with the truth of such speech-acts, of whether an asylum seeker is telling the truth about their circumstances. My interest concerns the way that speech-acts are used strategically against forces which may be perceived as threatening one's ontological security, a stable sense of identity and self (Mitzen 2004:2; see also Laing 1960; Giddens 1990),⁷⁰ by 'cultural invasion, bureaucratic subversion, and personal forces that work against an individual's sense of integrity and well-being' (Jackson 1998:154). When asylum seekers of many different ethnicities are housed in a hotel together it may be useful for the exchange of information and strategies, but there is also confusion and distrust. For example, there may be concern that perhaps someone may alert the authorities to the fact that they are working illegally. The more information that is revealed, the more distrust is ignited. As Mrs Z said to me:

I do not want to speak with Mrs H, if she calls me on the telephone I do not pick up. Only she will cause trouble for us. If I see her on the street only I will try not to see her – she will make problem for us.

(Mrs Z, Iranian asylum seeker, Great Yarmouth, 2003)

Often individuals were unable to tell me exactly what it was that they felt was threatening about the person. Instead, there existed a belief that another asylum seeker may jeopardise their application for asylum, regardless of the likelihood of this actually occurring. Nonetheless, distrust operates across the ethnic divide as their positioning is essentially competitive. Asylum seekers often told me of their distrust of another asylum seeker's story, or they often suspected fraudulent activities, particularly if the person was from a different ethnic background.

⁷⁰ For a more in-depth explanation of 'ontological security', see chapter 1.

The distrust as to another asylum seeker's genuineness is often compounded by the unshared intimate details about their own suffering. Knudsen suggests lying to be a necessary coping strategy because 'personal data may have undergone modification not merely as a strategy to secure their right to asylum but also as a strategy for identity management vis-à-vis the compatriots one is forced to associate with' (1995:23). It seemed as though there was a kind of strange comfort in knowing that other people lie – it asserted a sense of ontological security for one's own story and identity maintenance (Mitzen 2004:2; see also Laing 1960; Giddens 1990). Fuglerud also found lying to be a shared understanding:

The idea that Tamils in exile tend to give each other away is part of the current self-understanding, a situation which prevents a communicative sharing of life-histories. Most of my informants asked me not to tell their stories to other Tamils. One person asked me to keep secret the fact that he was receiving welfare money on two separate identities, not because he feared I might report him to the authorities but because if I told other Tamils *they* would report him ... 'We all lie to each other', one informant said to me. ... '*Lying is our only security. Even if we know that others are lying and they know that we are, we don't want to be caught telling the truth.*' [my emphasis]

(Fuglerud 1999:77-78)

Lying relates to one type of Jackson's intersubjective ambiguity that has habitual as well as conscious elements (1998:9-10). The intersubjectivity between asylum seekers might encompass a shared expectation and understanding that lies are inherent within their speech-acts, thus creating distrust. Consequently, lying explains why some information, often life stories, remain private amongst asylum seekers, because there is a large element of distrust in that they will be 'used' by their fellow asylum seekers.

I do not want to imply that distrust prevents people from exchanging information or interacting, particularly if we heed the moral of the Tar-Baby. Rather, interactions occur regardless of feelings of distrust, and the speech-acts which I heard are testament to this because of the feeling of distrust that was conveyed to me. In fact, distrust should be understood as a vital aspect of such interactions because distrust

acts as a kind of safety checkpoint, so that in part an asylum seeker's survival depends on being cautious of interactions and exchanges with other asylum seekers. So, if information exchange still occurs, asylum seekers' interactions might vacillate between distrust and collaboration.

Collaboration

The majority of exchanges, interdispersed with distrust, are centred on collaboratively acquired information – a method of retrieving information and ensuring that one can gain information that may ultimately lead to achieving a goal. For instance, Mrs Z described to me how she saw other ethnic groups colluding to ensure refugee status:

People, only they make up stories to get money or something like that. Asylum seekers, they talk to each other and they find out the best way of how to tell their story to the Home Office or whoever. I tell you what they do is that one person may have good story and tell the Home Office and then it is success [successful] and will tell the other people who are from the same country 'say it like this' or 'do not mention that'. You understand? They tell only people who come from their own area – for example, someone from Northern Iraq will only help people who also from there, but not from Southern Iraq because they are different. It is this way because it is the region and the story is given support by facts of geography and region that are passed from one person and passed to another. You understand? These are used for a group of people and then when they use this story it works because the Home Office see that this is happening to many people and so it must be true.

(Mrs Z, Iranian asylum seeker, London, 2003)

And by these facts being used by a group of people, each story was then further supported by this collusion because it was then observed by authorities to be commonplace. Therefore, different versions of the same situation meant it was a shared truth. Information exchange as a unifying function has also been documented in other works. Fuglerud suggests that information exchanges amongst Tamil asylum seekers in Norway operate 'as a kind of "proto-ideology" in terms of how people's position vis-à-vis Norwegian society is framed' (1999:130). This notion of asylum seekers as a collaborative group in contrast to the host society is an

aspect of collaboration that I will come to shortly. Collaboration is also a way of navigating bureaucratic and political confinements. In a similar way, Malkki suggests that exchanges create a mythico-history that represents, 'a collective discursive practice, a vital form of social action, configuring and morally weighting virtually all domains of everyday life in the refugee camp' (1995:105). In the case of asylum seekers in East Anglia, information exchanges operate to find alternative strategies which circumvent the standard routes of negotiating the immigration and bureaucratic system. When asylum seekers exchange and act on such information, the greater both the collective and individual benefits. Take for example the speech-acts between three asylum seekers, Mr and Mrs Z and Mrs K, as I documented it in my field diary:

I went to visit Mr and Mrs Z, after some time Mrs K dropped by to meet me so that we could travel home together. She was asked by Mrs Z to stay for tea and during which the conversation centred on one commonly experienced topic – housing and the treatment of asylum seekers by Newham Council and the Home Office. They all have much to say on the topic and I was happy to sit and listen. It was interesting to observe that the most important aspect discussed was not how they came to be in this predicament, or what might happen to them, but their current situation. The general speech-act tone was one of surpassing this through a greater understanding of the system. Mrs K said:

You do not get rightful treatment unless you know your rights and you fight for them. Now, when I walk into Newham, I will not speak to or even see a clerk. I will go straight to the manager! The big wigs! And if that does not work, the press!

This statement reveals the kind of collaborative speech-act that is of great value amongst asylum seekers. Mrs K had secured employment in the housing sector in the United Kingdom seven years earlier, before asylum seekers lost their right to work. Mrs K had seen the system change over the years and was by now very familiar with it. Mrs K brought into play personal experiences, a 'stock of knowledge' as well as 'temporal, spatial and sociobiographically differentiated perspectives' (Schutz & Luckmann 1989:65). Mr and Mrs Z, who had been in the country for only two years, were confounded by their position within the immigration process. Therefore, receiving information that had been 'tried and tested' by another asylum

seeker was of immense value to them. The information exchange between Mrs K and Mr and Mrs Z provided an opportunity to 'actualise [...] goals' and offer different approaches in either resisting or yielding within these interactions (Schutz & Luckmann 1989:6). Therefore, I suggest that speech-acts involve a struggle but also strategies for making sense of the life-world.

Mrs Z and Mrs K also discussed the asylum seekers who were mutually known to them:

Mrs K – Do you know Mrs M?

Mrs Z – Oh, you know her? She was still in great Yarmouth when you arrived? I think she is living somewhere here in London....

Mrs K – She is also with Newham isn't she? You know, she had organised to meet with Mr S [representative from Newham]...

Mrs Z – Really? I think perhaps this is also the same for Mrs C...

Mrs K – Oh yes, did you hear that she had met with Mr S previously...

The purpose of such a speech-act is to find out who moved where, why and how. In doing so, the women are able to work out and compare their own position and evaluate possibilities which have been tried and tested by others. Particularly having the opinion of another asylum seeker aids in the development of informed assessment of other asylum seekers strategies. It is also empowering for asylum seekers to deduce that the bureaucracy of the asylum system is not immutably fixed. Rather, the system is malleable to some extent, because an asylum seeker's immigration situation does not necessarily reflect the reality of his/her situation, but asserts one possibility or one of many interpretations. Consequently, asylum seekers do not always perceive their case as definitive, rather, there is always the possibility of change.

Information freely exchanged amongst asylum seekers might not only be in relation to building a greater understanding of the immigration system. Rather, collaborative speech-acts might also consist of a comparison of British identity vis-à-vis their own

ethnic identity. These frequent speech-acts give safety and security to a notion of shared experience and membership to a group that identifies itself as ethnically diverse and also diametrically opposed to British. Consequently, personal suffering within the restrictions of place, immigration status, ethnic diversity and a feeling of alienation may be abated to some extent through a group understanding. As Jackson puts it, 'it is always easier to bear personal suffering if one can experience it as something shared by many others' (1998:142). Take the interaction between Mrs K and Mrs J as I noted in my field diary:

One spring day I dropped in at the hotel. It turned out to be perfect timing, the kitchen was alive as a communal area of preparing and eating lunch, and much conversation. Mrs K commented that in Kenya, offering someone food, verbally, is considered extremely rude. 'You don't offer, you just give! If you offer food, it is as though you want someone to say no, or make them feel like they should only have a little.' Mrs K said that she did not understand British behaviour. Mrs J agreed. Mrs K explained that when she and her son had been housed in Essex, she invited an English friend to dinner. She was going to cook a nice meal, with dessert. The friend could not make it and instead invited Mrs K around to her own house. Mrs K said that she was horrified to find that her friend was, 'serving kids mini pizzas, not even the nice pizza from Sainsburys! And I was going to cook a whole meal! When it was time to leave, my friend said for me to take the unopened drink that I had brought but they hadn't used!'

Mrs K said that she was completely offended, but not lacking in humour! She said it is this English way of taking back gifts, or being given back something you have given someone, that she could not understand.

Mrs J agreed and then began to speak about whether British people were warm or reserved. She said, 'Some British people may take offence at their Armenian manners which are very direct, as there is no word for thank you or please. This may be seen as rude by some people'. She said, 'But British people are also direct! When you go on a train trip to London, the people you sit next to want to know all about you, and even ask you why did you leave your country!' Mrs J laughed at this and said, 'as if you're going to tell a complete stranger!'⁷¹

This discussion reinforced a sense of shared experience of being ethnically diverse in a British society where customs and behaviours of hospitality, gift-giving and social and cultural sensitivities at times conflicted with their own. Mrs J and Mrs K's own cultural perspectives did not, in this instance, create a sense of distancing from each other. Instead, their cultural and ethnic differences united them in their

⁷¹ Mrs J is referring to the train trips that she and other asylum seekers must take periodically to meet with their immigration lawyers about their case. These trips are only for a day as they must return to the hotel unless they have special approval to remain overnight in London. This may occur if they are visiting friends and family.

experience of the British and their positioning within the 'social divide of insiders and outsiders' (Jackson 1998:145). So, the unity of Mrs J and Mrs K formed a kind of segmentary logic whereby their relationship of distrust was overridden by a unity in response to the British (see Evans-Pritchard 1940). Therefore, their respective Kenyan and Armenian background 'entered into and figured in, rather than completely determining and delimiting, the strategic field of social interaction and intersubjective experience' (Jackson 1998:153). In other words, collaboration provides an agentive position from which their ethnic identity plays as much of a role in interactions with their host society as does the impact of Britishness on their own lives. These speech-acts allow asylum seekers to share aspects of home as well as to negotiate the emerging place of the host, the British, in their lives. Despite an underlying sense of distrust which protects their interests, these interactions of solidarity are immensely important for renewing vitality and hope in securing a future.

Cultural loss and grief is shared through the reaffirmation of cultural differences that in turn reinstates one's culture as a fundamental aspect of one's identity (see Davis 1979; James 1979; Loizos 1981; Morris 1991). In other words, through inter-ethnic group discussions and comparisons of British customs and habits, asylum seekers are reinforcing the strength of their own identity as culturally and ethnically distinct and thus ensuring a continued connection to home and an enduring identity. So as asylum seekers get to know British ways better and better, this actually draws them closer to – instead of this distancing them from – their homelands.

Movement and Potentiality

Having discussed intersubjectivity and the influences of distrust and collaboration, it is necessary to question whether or not all speech-acts contain inherent ambiguity, or if ambiguity suggests a lack of purpose and motivation toward a goal? I suggest

that such speech-acts cannot necessarily be described as ambiguous, hazy or vague. There is a degree of purpose within such a speech-act, a kind of testing and searching for something. What I have been describing as a vacillation points toward the movement in an asylum seeker's speech-act. The intersubjective movement of speech-acts indicates the extent to which asylum seekers wish to relate to a collective or differentiated identity. This is evident when they reflect on the interactions between themselves and other asylum seekers, which they might consider inherently distrustful or collaborative.

Movement, in terms of geographical movement, interaction between people, as well as existential movement of a 'being' endeavouring to make sense of his/her world, is a central aspect of speech-acts and one which I will return to in greater detail in Chapter 7. In Chapter 5 we explored the dynamic nature of dislocating speech-acts – the movement generated between the two opposing collectivities of locals and asylum seekers. Speech-acts generate movement through such interactions (see Rapport & Dawson 1998). The approach refers to the space between people, where relational identities are formed. 'Intersubjective or interactive approaches' occur within what Walker calls 'creative space,' referring to the scope a person has to generate potentiality (2003b:6). It is the space of interaction within which intersubjective speech-acts arise and give room for 'pure potentiality', or distinct possibilities (Jackson 1998:176).

Intersubjective movement and the vacillation between suspicion and collaboration represents what Josselson describes as a 'node of change', which occurs in moments of crisis where an 'individual becomes other than he or she was' as they rework their identity and, further, endeavour toward a new potentiality (1995:37). Vacillating between various nodes of being generates movement and the possibility that alternative scenarios may be produced.

Potentiality as a product of movement is generated in the creative space of interactions and is a much sought-after outcome for asylum seekers. Potentiality refers to possibilities, such as obtaining refugeeness, that are only reached through struggle and effort. The notion of intersubjective movement is particularly relevant to the speech-acts of asylum seekers, as a sense of community and individuality becomes 'constructive, destructive and reconstructive' (Jackson 1998:176). This is the 'pure potentiality' that Jackson finds in movement in recitations of myths:

[...] the way people slipped in and out of the first person when reciting myths, unself-consciously intermingling reminiscences of their own experiences at certain places with ancestral events of which they had no immediate experience. In this way, travelling any track or road tends to mediate connections between immediate and nonimmediate lives and set in motion a process that effectively fuses embodied and immediate experience with the etherialized and nonimmediate world that lies about it as pure potentiality.

(Jackson 1998:8-10)

In Jackson's case, immersing oneself in a myth is a way of reclaiming a sense of intersubjectivity with one's ancestors in order to embody the possibilities held in esoteric worlds. In doing so, the intersubjective relations of a myth brings order and understanding out of chaotic and inaccessible worlds (Levi-Strauss 1977:224; see also Leach 1970). Therefore, pure potentiality through intersubjective movement is the reconstructive element arising from destruction.

A somewhat unusual analogy of potentiality is the use of narrative fiction in adventure computer games in order to emotionally involve the player through interactive text. Such games draw the player into a world which they are able to manipulate and construct. Punday gives the example of the game *Myst*, in which the player must search 'a deserted world' to discover, through puzzle-solving, the reasons why there is no one there (2004:99). This game conjures a feeling of immense isolation and 'the player encounters only objects left behind by characters whose absence' the player is 'invited to mourn' (Punday 2004:99). This is the deconstructive effect that places the player in a state of 'quasi-otherness' where

they remain inextricably linked to the game:

[...] it comes to them from the outside and is imposed upon them, but they are unable to distance themselves from it and treat it merely as an instrument that can be evaluated. It is precisely because the reader [player] is caught within a machine that cannot be treated metaphorically or placed at a distance that these melancholy narratives seem to evacuate reader [player] agency and create a sense of frustration and loss.

(Punday 2004:99)

However, the player continues to play the game in the hope that they may triumph and reconstruct the world to one in which they can claim some agentive control. Punday's description can be likened to the imposition of asylum seekerness isolated in a world in which they must continue searching for an understanding of their predicament through speech-acts. This searching is movement, a need to control the extent to which s/he is subjected to a category and label and held and constrained by it. Jackson's 'pure potentiality' becomes the possibility of a future existence outside the realm of asylum and asylum seekerness, a way of reinstating one's own sense of self and history above a label and predicament that had been inflicted. And in so doing, it asserts an individualised identity and a sense of agency which in turn reinforces a sense of self that is simultaneously pre-asylum seeker and post-asylum seeker in that the possibility of existence beyond the current situation of asylum seeker may be overcome. It is, as Fuglerud maintains:

[...] about gaining sense of who one is through an intersubjectively founded story of how one has become and where one is going. Self-identity, therefore, requires the communicative sustaining of a biographical speech-act which makes a continuous, reflexive self-understanding possible.

(1999:78)

Consequently, the ambiguity inherent in such speech-acts is subconscious, in the sense that the speaker is unaware of the spoken ambiguities, and yet reflexive of a greater self-understanding and awareness of the significance of interactions with other asylum seekers. The purpose of the vacillation of intersubjective movement is the strategic possibility of securing a collective or individualised identity which is more likely to avoid asylum seeker status and obtain refugee status. This assists us

in understanding the motivations that form the basis of such speech-acts according to a hierarchy of need. Take, for example, an intersubjective movement within Mr C's speech-act: 'You find out information from each other, this is how you learn what is what, but at the same time you are careful not to get involved with others'. Mr C's comment about how he became aware of how to survive in Peterborough as an asylum seeker, succinctly demonstrates the point that one cannot avoid getting involved with other asylum seekers if one also seeks to gain information from them. And yet in his comment, Mr C mentions the need to distance himself from other asylum seekers. This speech-act distinctly highlights the movement within a speech-act from the collective to the individual, reflecting a search for survival that is riddled with distrust. This again supports the struggle of autonomy within the collective and encompassing context of an asylum seeker identity and is indicative of the moral of the Tar-Baby story whereby the mistrust directed toward other asylum seekers entangles rather than differentiates.

Conclusion

The Tar-Baby tale elaborated on at the start of this chapter is useful in that it leads us to consider the interactions between asylum seekers as complex and seemingly paradoxical. I have argued that although asylum seekers seek to differentiate themselves from the collective asylum seeker identity, they always do so from within the collectivity. Inevitably, speech-acts are the medium through which intersubjectivity can be achieved. This is important to acknowledge because it forms the basis of interactions between asylum seekers and refers to the way in which asylum seekers try to explicate the meaning behind another's intentions. I then explored intersubjective ambiguity and how it refers to the way in which an asylum seeker vacillates between a similar and a differential notion of a collective asylum seeker identity.

What is interesting about the interactions between asylum seekers in East Anglia is that they are bound together despite efforts to distance themselves which inevitably binds them further. So, within this context, asylum seekers must negotiate such interactions through distrust and collaboration, rework their identities strategically by shifting between a collective and differentiated notion. The responses of distrust or collaboration and the vacillation between the two, as well as the vacillation between similarity and differentiation, are strategic processes which asylum seekers use to negotiate such interaction and consequently rework their identity.

Asylum seekers rely on a shared experience with other asylum seekers to delineate knowledge of the asylum system, but also to reveal future possibilities, rework their identity and establish the importance of home and host in their lives. Understanding the importance of these seemingly contradictory interactions is vital as it highlights the significance of the collective asylum seeker identity. For asylum seekers, the escape from their homeland and the search for safety does not necessarily end upon arrival in the UK. Suspicion of other asylum seekers reinforces a sense of certainty and belief in one's own journey. Ultimately, speech-acts amongst asylum seekers reveal the negotiation of an asylum seeker identity and the extent to which they are able to interact with others who share the same label without having to conceal this aspect of their identity. This is the context within which speech-acts are negotiated amongst asylum seekers.

Movement continues to be the interlinking theme throughout this thesis as asylum seekers negotiate their existence. In the next chapter, I will explore the journeying through storying within asylum seekers' speech-acts. Storying reveals a tension between movement and stillness, of being confined to a place and an immigration status and of making sense of this through speech-acts and envisaging future possibilities. This is an existential movement, the search for an understanding of

how order and chaos, security and insecurity, can co-existence.

CHAPTER 7

MOVEMENT AND STILLNESS

NOTE: This figure is included on page 193 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Figure 26: Titian's (1549) interpretation of Sisyphus (New York University 2007).

The gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labor. You have already grasped that Sisyphus is the absurd hero. He is, as much through his passions as through his torture. His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted toward accomplishing nothing.

Albert Camus (1955)

During my fieldwork an informant, Mr Z, drew my attention to Camus's essay.⁷² This excerpt from the *Myth of Sisyphus* is a striking and powerful metaphor of the perceived futility of seeking asylum. It is somewhat confronting in that, according to Mr Z, it reflected his sense of despair at the time. I suggest that what Mr Z was

⁷² Mr Z is an asylum seeker from Iran.

experiencing, and relating via Camus's essay, might best be explained through the notion of movement and stillness. The *Myth of Sisyphus* provides a useful signpost from which we can use the notion of movement in terms of literal physical action, and speech-acts recalling and reflecting such movement, as well as existential movement of a 'being' endeavouring to make sense of his/her world. In this chapter, I argue that like the stillness experienced by Sisyphus, asylum seekers are trapped in a liminal period, but movement, evident in their speech-acts, assists them in affixing ways to overcome such a predicament. For asylum seekers, their predicament is one in which they struggle to negotiate their existence of 'being' rather than 'nothingness' (see Sartre 1957). Movement in a seemingly motionless context is itself enough to generate the possibility of future happenings. Therefore, this extract from Camus's interpretation of the Sisyphus myth might introduce us the sense of movement and stillness which is an intrinsic part of seeking asylum.

In this chapter, I will explore the ways in which movement and stillness are mediated by a sense of journeying as expressed through speech-acts. Speech-acts that recount traumatic experiences work as a way of reconciling a past that can no longer be accessed, with a new sense of being in the world. I will explain that through speech-acts, movement is a reflection of the existential journey. Stories about journeys are journeys in themselves which, through the telling, change our perception of experiences (Jackson 2002:30). Stories are therefore coping strategies – they assist one in coming to terms with one's experiences, 'making words stand for the world, and then, by manipulating them, changing one's experience of the world' (Jackson 2002:18). This is also the case of the myth as described by Evans-Pritchard (1968). Reworking experiences through stories is a way of understanding the coexistence, or what Heidegger calls *authenticity*, that is,

the ‘uncoverdness’ of certainty and uncertainty, security and insecurity (1967:68).⁷³ Recounting stories is a search for meaning, or a ‘truth’ of Being-in-the-world. I employ Heidegger’s outlook in explaining asylum seekers’ tussle with making sense of their predicament through speech-acts. Jackson, who also incorporates a Heideggerian perspective into his work, reminds us that when people experience ‘desperate’ and ‘overwhelming situations [they] seek imperatively to wrest back control, to reassert the right to govern their own lives, to be complicit in their own fate’ (1998:30). It can be argued that for asylum seekers, movement is the search for authenticity, and, equally, the struggle in doing so.

I explore this movement through strategies of speech-acts. The first is an exploration of speech-acts of past experiences with an emphasis on the Heideggerian perspective. Then I turn to a more in-depth analysis of my usage of the terms ‘movement’ and ‘stillness’. I then explore the most commonplace speech-acts that I observed during my fieldwork, the monologue, before turning to heroic stories which operate to emphasise one’s abilities to survive terrifying ordeals and give confidence in overcoming the current predicament of seeking asylum. Finally, I explore an example of the chaotic intensity of movement and stillness, as place, identity and nostalgia collide in the form of an asylum seeker’s speech-act.

I endeavour to problematise the notion that stillness permanently concretises and binds the identity, label and related experiences of ‘asylum seeker’ so that one may never overcome the experience. As Camus (1955) inadvertently shows us, movement is the eternal toil to overcome such a static existence. Speech-acts then become the arena in which one searches for understanding and authenticity of one’s predicament. This can only be found in the acceptance of both stillness and

⁷³ Here I acknowledge Heidegger’s affiliation with the Nazi party. In doing so, I also point out his relationship with Hannah Arendt, a remarkable philosopher herself as well as being a Jewish refugee. Their relationship continued after the war. I believe that this highlights the point that I am trying to make – of accepting contradictions.

movement.

Speech-Acts of Past Experiences

I begin with an entry from my field diary in which Mrs Q, a refugee⁷⁴ from Montenegro, confided in me part of her experience of fleeing her country:

Mrs Q and her family were about to go on their first trip to see her parents since they had received refugee status. I had brought an atlas with me and I thought I might ask Mrs Q to show me the where she would visit her parents in Albania. It was a great idea. As soon as I found a map of Europe, she leaned over to point where she had lived 'on the frontier', the border of Montenegro. I gave her my pen so she could draw a dot exactly where. Then I flipped through the book to find a more detailed map of the Balkans. Mrs Q showed me where the plane would land in Tirana, Albania, and then the route of their 8-hour journey to her parent's home. But she was more interested in tracing their journey over when they had fled Kosovo 3 years ago. She pointed out the Ionian Sea saying they crossed there. I flipped through the book and found a detailed map of Italy.

'Aah, the Adriatic Sea!' she said. 'We crossed there and landed in Bari and then caught a train to Milan. Where's Bari? I think it's up north?'

She searched the map – 'Milan is north?'

She couldn't work it out. She said that it was an 8-hour train trip, and yet she was sure they landed north. We searched the map together and found Bari on the south of the country. Mrs Q was shocked!

'Bari is down there?' She muttered in Albanian to herself, something the equivalent of *mama mia!* 'Bari is all the way down there, it's so far from Milan!'

Then she looked at me in surprise and said, 'This is the first time I've seen where we went, it is a long way!' Mrs Q was enthralled.

'And we crossed the Adriatic Sea.'

I said, 'That must have been dangerous?'

'Yes very dangerous, many people died ...'

Then Mrs Q's voice changed as she recalled the crossing. It was as though she was there.

'The water came in like this into the middle of the boat and went BAM! BAM! BAM! BAM! BAM! BAM!' She shouted and clapped her hands together emphasising the violence of the waves. 'The water went all over me. It was so cold.'

'Did you fall in?'

'No, I held on.'

She paused and then lowered her voice in horror.

'There was a woman there who lost all three of her children to the sea – she was doing this [tearing her hair out]. This woman had a girl and two boys, she said, "Now what have I got?" If I had a child I wouldn't have gone. There

⁷⁴ Although Mrs Q is no longer an asylum seeker, her story remains relevant here regardless of her status.

was a woman on the boat who was five months pregnant and she lost her baby.'

'Weren't you scared?'

'No, not scared. I was happy to go. I had to leave. If I didn't leave I would kill myself. I wasn't scared because I didn't care if I died. Now I don't want to die because I have a life now.'

'You were very brave.'

'We went through Belgium and France and ... 'ay, I can't think about it or I go crazy...'

In our life-worlds we seek out and maintain a sense of security, order and certainty. Some asylum seekers' speech-acts are often about terrifying events and ordeals, which are re-authored and reconstrued to create a sense of agency over events. Solomon calls this 'magical compensation' (1987:267). For asylum seekers, such speech-acts are a coping mechanism that operate to change one's experience of the world (Jackson 2002; Stone-Mediatore 2003). As Basso points out, places and experiences are 'animated by the thoughts and feelings' of people's speech-acts (1996:109).

People seeking asylum are seeking security, safety and assuredness from dangerous and uncertain events that produce insecurity. Thus, stagnation and immobility of their situation coexists with the movement of struggle, persistence, and communication. Constant struggle of legal status, multiple traumas of movement, danger and housing all reflect a contradiction of movement when no movement is possible. Mrs K illustrates this point:

I actually think when you say asylum seeker in Britain, it's like, it's like, it's more like a statistics thing. It's like when you say a prisoner, you don't care about the number, the name, or you care about the number but not the name, I think it's the same. [...] If you call the particular social services that takes care of me, you just give your reference number. They don't ask for your name. They just say what's your reference number...what is it to do with and then they'll ask somebody. The worst was when in the hotel if you ask to move from one room to the other they are going to say room 5 go to room 4. They just say is room 5 a family of 4, yes. Move room 4 to room 5. And that's the worst case.

(Mrs K, Kenyan asylum seeker, Great Yarmouth, 2003)

Government legislation strictly controls asylum seeker movement within regions,

whilst paradoxically asylum seekers are moved from house to house. Reason is suspended and yet sought, and uncertainty is accepted and yet challenged. This is the existential condition.

It is, in Heidegger's terms, an existential journey of 'disclosedness' in which one may find truth or meaning (1967:264). The search for meaning within such speech-acts is a quest for truth of being-in-the-world. Heidegger describes this movement through the use of his concept of *authenticity* and *inauthenticity* (1967:68). Authenticity is steeped in potentiality, of possibilities (Heidegger 1967:184) arising from 'creative self-realization' (Martens 2005:2). Inauthenticity is the distracted self, 'fully scripted' within a social construct – 'more absorbed in "they"' (Martens 2005:2) than in 'mineness' (Heidegger 1967:68).

When an event or experience occurs which unveils a sense of uncertainty and insecurity, it is a violent movement of uncoverdness (*unheimlich*). Heidegger calls this revealed concealedness, or truth of being-in-the-world (1967:263). Truth is an acceptance of the co-existence of certainty and uncertainty, security and insecurity. This is not to say that one can find a middle ground somewhere between the two. Rather, it is a coming to terms of two separate entities. Consequently, truth is found in movement, when entities are taken 'out of their hiddenness and letting them be seen in their unhiddenness [their uncoverdness]' (Heidegger 1967:262).

Although Heidegger's argument is coming from a more general philosophical stance, I believe that his notion of authenticity is useful in understanding the movement generated through speech-acts which are a discovery of asylum seeker's sense of self. What I am arguing is that an asylum seeker, oscillating between certainty and uncertainty, is experiencing the search for authenticity. Through speech-acts, and the movement and searching for understanding of uncertainty and certainty, that uncoverdness, occurs. This conception becomes a kind of truth

when the perceived conflicting binaries are brought out into realisation, 'first by opening up a world and then by pointing out things in it' (Dreyfuss 1991:270). But it is only in the acceptance of the coexistence of certainty and uncertainty, security and insecurity, that one can find truth and meaning for oneself. Asylum seekers are constantly fluctuating between this sense of stillness and movement, which paradoxically also occur at the same time. This is the consequence of being and becoming – an ongoing process. Speech-acts articulate this sense of searching for being rather than nothingness (see Sartre 1957). Asylum seekers will speak of their safety and freedom from the oppressive regime in their homeland and yet experience alienation, uncertainty and discrimination in the United Kingdom.

Movement

Movement, in the context in which I use it, is a predominant aspect of people's speech-acts. Movement must be understood in both physical and existential terms.⁷⁵ It encompasses a sense of journeying and a sense of stillness through a struggle within a liminal existence. I also refer to movement as a kind of oscillation between thoughts, points of view, beliefs and meanings (Amit & Rapport 2002:148). Movement is multiple and layered; it is the process of physical movement which also is the result from the recounting of experience. Movement is expressed through asylum seekers' speech-acts through stories of journeys and their current movement restrictions. For asylum seekers, movement may be existential in the sense that there is movement of the mind when physical movement is impossible. Yet asylum seekers may also experience restriction in *feeling* free. Returning again to Mr T, he described this lack of freedom in the asylum system, which requires all asylum seekers to report to the authorities and to remain under surveillance:

We have to sign in every week. Why? We are not allowed to go anywhere unless we are given permission and you have to tell them where you are

⁷⁵ When I speak of movement I am not referring to the mind/body problem.

going. You cannot go away for more than one week. You may be free to leave where you live, but you are not free here [points to his head].

(Mr T, Congolese asylum seeker, Peterborough, UK 2003)

Foucault calls this the 'surveillance based on a system of permanent registration' (1977:200-201). His explanation of the panopticon can also be attributed to asylum seekers who are 'in a state of constant and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power': '[they are] seen, but [they do] not see; [they are] the object of information, never a subject in communication' (Foucault 1977:200-201). In short, this surveillance gives 'power of mind over mind' (Foucault 1977:206). I agree with Foucault to a certain extent, in that he offers an explanation of the pervasive nature of power. However, I suggest that this undermining of a phenomenological perspective overlooks an actor's agentic power in determining their own positioning. It is, as Allen describes, a 'very bleak kind of cultural and social determinism' (2000:116). Indeed, Foucault's outlook is at odds with aspects of his later work, where he argues for the coexistence of resistance with the exercise of power (Foucault 1990 cited in; Allen 2000:117). Consequently, my use of Foucault here is to point out the external influencing powers and then to highlight that within such confines asylum seekers are endeavouring to come to an existential realisation from which movement is generated.

Note that Mr R speaks of an oscillation between physical and existential movement. This is intrinsic to the movement between the actor and the acted upon. Every person moves between being an actor and being acted upon and must negotiate this in order to overcome being reduced to an object (Jackson 2002:13). Objectification through the governmentality of the body by the state is experienced by most asylum seekers such as Mr R. However, this is not to say that asylum seekers do not experience a sense of freedom and agency despite this constant surveillance. Rather, cognitive and physical movement occurs despite and because of this surveillance. As Mr R says, to a certain extent you are 'free to leave where

you live' – there is continual movement and strategising through boundaries (Jackson 2002:14). So, in effect, the very suppression of movement produces movement, because movement can be a reaction of defiance against the frustration and stoicism of liminality.

The question remains: what is the essence of movement to asylum seekers? Jackson speaks of movement in terms of being as 'an existential imperative [that] underlies all these strategies and movements' and 'a potentiality that waxes and wanes' (2002:14). Solomon says that when one feels alienated 'from the world and other people, one constitutes himself as a hero, as an offence, as a prophet or Antichrist, as a revolutionary, as unique' (1987:239). In doing so, 'the world becomes more threatening, so one attacks the world, discovering, with despair and joy, that its threats are themselves without ultimate meaning' (Solomon 1987:239). What Solomon is leading us to consider is the search for the authentic self, rather than futile and hopeless labour.

But this is not to say that, for asylum seekers as for Sisyphus, all movement is futile. Rather, I suggest that the movement of the liminal self is constructive and opens up possibilities through the very chasing of certainty (Haraway 1988:586; Green 2002:307). Therefore, survival is dependant on the search for certainty that occurs when ambiguity produces fear (Green 2002:307). Thus, movement is the constant struggle and strategising of one's sense of Being and the endeavour to find security and safety in an uncertain world. Above all, movement is a struggle to overcome the stillness of the liminality of asylum.

Stillness

At one of the jewellery shops there was a china bird in a gold cage. Mrs Z pointed it out. 'Look', she said. 'It is me in Great Yarmouth – I am also trapped in a cage!'

Seeking asylum also implies a sense of stillness. Mrs Z – as with Mr Z’s outburst of, ‘I am a prisoner in this country!’ – expresses stillness from the geographical containment to the restraints of an asylum seeker identity. Contained by their status which renders them visible to others (see Chapter 5), many asylum seekers are fearful of the reaction of locals, isolated from their ethnic communities and aware of the ‘limitations of shared understandings’ amongst other asylum seekers (Barth 1969:15; Coker 2004a:31).

The movement of the mind is in sharp contrast to the concreteness of stillness, and yet stillness is an almost violent contrast to movement – so much so that it has an intensity about it that implies movement. Returning to Mr R’s description of containment, ‘You may be free to leave where you live, but you are not free here’, he refers to the perceived lack of freedom he has in his mind due to the profound influence of his asylum seeker status. Yet his very acknowledgement of this sense of control through his speech-act generates movement. Movement becomes the result of stillness, inspired by the impatience and frustrations of place. But stillness is also a result of the invisibility and loss of community.

For asylum seekers, movement is about being in the world and stillness is a symbolic death of a former self, life and possibilities. For Mr Z, stillness is encapsulated by a kind of social death. As we walked up the main street one day Mr Z told me that it was such a shock to come to the UK, where people are more reserved. He said:

[...] if I were to have a heart attack and collapse here on the street, people would just walk straight past. If I collapsed on the street in Iran, people would rush to my side to assist me. [...] That is what a society is, people interact. I am not used to people who are reserved and cold, I am used to interacting with people.

(Mr Z, Iranian asylum seeker, London, 2003)

The suffering that one is experiencing 'may come to be thought as the most vibrant example of what it is "to have certainty"' (Scarry 1985:4). For Mr Z, then, stillness through a hypothetical collapse on the street symbolises the loss of community. His view that 'people would just walk straight past' symbolises the movement around him from which he remains alienated and dislocated. The revealedness of the heart as the source of communication with others, as a link to one's community and representation of all one's thoughts and being, is starkly contrasted with the stillness of loss and alienation. Stillness in this case is borne from social isolation. One may align Mr Z's feeling of the symbolic death of his heart as analogous to a return to the invisible and the loss of knowledge of oneself.

De Haan describes social exclusion as a multidimensional concept that 'implies a focus on the relations and processes that cause deprivation' (1999:8). Deprivation from the social sphere, personal contacts and respect, all contribute to social isolation and exclusion. Social isolation can also present through "psychosomatic symptoms' (Low 1985:188). The term *nervios* or 'nerves' is understood as a 'culturally acceptable mode of presenting psychosocial distress' (Low 1985:187). It denotes the embodiment of struggle and of knowledge, whereby the body becomes a refuge from speech (Farnell 1999:346). Taylor uses the term percepticide to explain consequences upon the self if one sees violence and is unable to respond to such violence:

[S]eeing without the possibility of admitting that one is seeing further turns the violence on oneself. Percepticide blinds, maims, kills through the senses.

(Taylor 1997:122-123)

One can associate percepticide and *nervios* with a kind of social isolation borne through silence and the inability to speak (see Spitz 1978; Green 2002). The problems associated with seeking asylum may also manifest as *nervios* in the minds and bodies of asylum seekers. This is what I recorded in my field diary:

Mr Z told me that because they'll be in London [rather than Great Yarmouth], he will be able to fight for their case a lot easier. He said he'd be able to go to immigration and argue for his rights. Mrs Z had also told me that this was their plan. However, later Mrs Z confided in me that when the official had come from Newham Borough Council (London) to discuss their housing situation Mr Z had gone silent.

She said, 'When the person came, Mr Z...' and made a mouth zipped gesture. 'Only I speak and argue not Mr Z, only he say nothing!'

This surprised me because before the official came, Mr Z was talking about how he was going to tell them exactly what their housing was like, and that they demanded to be rehoused just like he was talking about immigration today. Mr Z seems so confident and assertive about what he thinks. I wonder if this is because of what had happened with officials in his homeland?

The notion of *nervios* is a term culturally-specific to the patient, to explain symptoms that do not fit within standard constraints of medical systems. The notion of *nervios* is found within many different cultural and ethnic groups: *nervios* amongst Hispanic communities (de Snyder, Diaz-Perez *et al.* 2000), *nerva* within Greek communities (Davis 1989; Dunk 1989), and *nerves* in relation to people from Newfoundland (Low 1985). Each notion of *nervios* is culturally interpreted and refers to both an individual and a socially and culturally constituted form of suffering. This suffering manifests in psychological, physical and emotional symptoms which reflect social deprivation and an individual's positioning within. For many of my informants, *nervios* manifests itself in feelings of tiredness, depression, alienation and isolation.

Asylum seekers can become systemically depressed. The majority of asylum seekers I knew were being prescribed anti-depressants. British medical reports find that two thirds of asylum seekers are suffering from depression. One report into the health problems of asylum seekers finds:

People may show symptoms of depression and anxiety, panic attacks, or agoraphobia. Poor sleep patterns are almost universal but may not be described spontaneously. Some may be anxious and nervous or may develop behaviors to avoid stimuli that remind them of past experiences. Problems with memory and concentration may hinder learning.

(Burnett & Peel 2001:545)

This report goes on to suggest that the cause of this is due to past and current

experiences, including social isolation. Mr Z alludes to the idea that the feeling of alienation has such intensity to it that it cannot be addressed by medical means. He explains that alienation, as a form of social isolation, is in fact incurable:

This feeling of alienation cannot be fixed. If I have a toothache that is causing me suffering, if I go to a councillor or psychologist who can help me to control the pain, this will not get rid of the problem of the toothache.

(Mr Z, Iranian asylum seeker, London, 2003)

Mr Z's comment suggests that alienation is a form of *nervios* that afflicts one in a form of stillness that is unresolvable. On another occasion, Mr Z eloquently described to me the social isolation which he equates with alienation and suffering:

Exile means suffering. Because exile means being sent to a land that is foreign to you, where the culture is not your own, where you feel alienated. So if you feel alienated you are suffering, therefore exile is a form of torment.

(Mr Z, Iranian asylum seeker, London, 2003)

Mr Z's torment of exile can be related to Sisyphus's torment of exile in the suffering of futile toil. It is a sickness that feels as though it is terminal. The experience of suffering, which Heidegger calls uncanny (*unheimlich*), has a feeling of 'indefiniteness' about it, not unlike liminality itself. It is a feeling of 'not-being-at-home' (1967:233).

Does this mean that Mr Z, and all asylum seekers in his situation, will suffer a torment like Sisyphus that can be akin to stillness? I suggest not, because it is the very articulation of the torment, through speech-act, that creates movement out of stillness. If one says 'it's not going well' one has inadvertently announced the possibility of redemption (Derrida 2002:243). So, everyday Mrs Z finds for her husband a task, a purpose, to keep him moving: to purchase a bag of apples, to write a letter, to research an immigration point on the internet.

I now take the notion of stillness further by looking at it within the context of the story

of an asylum seeker's past experience. During my fieldwork there were several cases where individual asylum seekers could not utter their stories. It was as though a person may be subjecting themselves, yet again, to an experience they could not yet reconcile. Instead, they would ask me to read immigration documents statements which had been recorded during their application for asylum. Mr X had spoken to me about the death of his mother and sister on a few occasions, but he was more comfortable to show me his scrapbook containing newspaper articles about him. He also presented his experiences as a whole by way of an official document which had been recorded at the Asylum and Immigration Appeal hearing:

[...] The Serbian soldiers came into his village at night in February 1999. They drove the people from their homes and searched the houses. The men were separated from the women and the houses burned. When the sexes were separated the appellant tried to stay with his mother and sister. A Serbian officer noticed he was with the women and tried to take him away. A struggle ensued and both his mother and his sister were bayoneted. He was terrified and ran away. Later he and his brother returned and found both his sister and his mother dead.

(Immigration Appeal Tribunal 2001)

For Mr X, in a way, the story had been rearticulated by someone else and had somehow been rendered less dangerous and more distanced. The official story had become a symbolic recognition of an experience rather than a recreation of Mr X's experience. However, reading Mr X's appeal also reveals another aspect of recorded experiences. In his appeal, the psychiatrist's evaluation of Mr X's initial inability to recall his experiences reveals the way that 'some experiences are too intense to talk about' (Renard 1996:238). In Islam this is called *ishara*, 'a form of intimate knowledge that becomes more obscure the more one attempts to express or explain it' (Renard 1996:238). This is an appropriate term to relate to Mr X, a Kosovan Muslim who in his homeland had been training to become an Imam. Thus, the appeal presents his psychiatrist's evaluation, which I suggest is consistent with *ishara* in medical terms:

He does not mention the killing of his mother or sister or of finding them dead in either his SEF or his interview. He [Mr X's psychiatrist] explains this

failure on the basis of post-traumatic stress disorder [...] He [Mr X's psychiatrist] suggests that the failure of the appellant to describe the killing of his mother and sister for some 17 months is a typical symptom of avoidance which is to be expected in a case such as the appellant's. He suggested that as the appellant feels more secure he is able to access the memories which he has been avoiding.

(Immigration Appeal Tribunal 2001:2 & 4)

Suarez-Orozco speaks of a movement from the unspeakable to the speakable through the phases of denial, rationalization, internalisation and elaboration of terror can only occur 'when the imminent danger subsides' (1990:366). Eventually, the stillness of silence subsides to a gradual disclosure of experiences. As Jackson so eloquently puts it, 'telling stories is like our need to breathe or defecate'; it is 'as necessary as it is pedestrian' (2002:93). Mr X's case, then, is one of a movement out of stillness. From the unspeakable, the recording becomes a symbolic recognition of an experience. It is also recognition of the disclosure of traumatic events. Although it took time before Mr X could express these traumatic events, movement through the speech-act nonetheless gradually mobilised. Speech-acts represent the existential self, a being who oscillates between meanings and understandings, whose authorship denotes the movement of self and whose silence speaks of a disrupted sense of movement and of stories which will eventually be uttered.

The Monologue

I now turn to the monologue – the extended speech-act – and in particular I focus on the most important aspects of the monologue, its exploratory and repetitive characteristics which instigate movement. During my fieldwork, monologues seemed prevalent amongst asylum seekers. Perhaps I was more aware of their presence because such speech-acts were particularly useful to an anthropologist with a thirst for such material. During this kind of speech-act, a long uninterrupted form of speech, there was no expectation for me to comment or to be incorporated into the

speech in any way. The monologue was a speech-act shaped by feelings, events and mediated by a stream of consciousness that was directed to no one in particular. Monologues made by asylum seekers in reference to their situation of seeking asylum were most common. Take Mr I's monologue, for example:

You know, English people, they are clever. You know why? Because English people. ... In Sweden, when Iraqi or Iranian people when they arrive there and they claim asylum, they put you in a camp. They don't put you in a house between people. What they do, this person, they put you in a school to learn language. When he is speaking Sweden language, after this, he is came out from the camp, they give him a house and he is free to get a job. But here opposite. And this is good in Sweden rules. Why? Because they separated asylum from the citizen. You are a citizen, a little bit far from asylum, can't understand everything asylum because they are collected in one ... place. ... Afterwards you will get a good education, came out and involving with the people and citizens he can speak language fluently. And that time citizen they don't mention that he has asylum because he is speaking good. But England it is opposite. When asylum come straight away they put him in ... in housing. And the asylum, he doesn't know about country England ... and might be doing something incorrect and he came from a difficult situation ... are stressful, depression, you know? And the people they see he is asylum. You can know it that that's asylum. And that's why ... and smashing window. ... That's why government are putting people because government here are clever. They want to understand people who's asylum. That's asylum seeker! The way they pay, the way they life [live], the way they have been in this old country, hungry, needs food, needs water, they don't see any civilisation. You know?

(Mr I, Iraqi asylum seeker, Peterborough, 2003)

All of the asylum seekers with whom I spent time conveyed monologues such as these. What is of particular interest about these monologues is their repetitive and exploratory character and their self-conversational nature, that is, the way that the addressee was not expected to reply but to listen.

Rapport writes that in weaving these sections or aspects from self-conversational speech-acts, which he calls conversational nodes or con-themes, the speaker strives to resolve inherent problems and contradictions through their repetition (2000:8). In his monologue, Mr I is searching for an explanation for his feeling of isolation. So, asylum seekers producing these kinds of monologues are constantly reinterpreting events and reiterating their situation as though searching for some kind of clarification. It seems that through their very speech-acts, 'the intensity of the

copying, the re-iteration, will itself somehow will being and self into existence, retrieve it from the abyss of not-being' (Walker 2003a:31). This is evident of a speech-act within which reinterpretation and reconstruction are continual, 'because the current explanation of events is unsatisfactory' (Kirkman 2002:33). In this way, the monologue of asylum seekers seems to be circular in form, as if testing at every opportunity for some kind of reprieve or intervention previously overlooked.

Within the context of the speech-act the monologue incorporates the aspect of 'plot' in which the central role, played by the immigration system, becomes apparent. These monologues are often critical dialogues made in response to the British asylum system to which asylum seekers are bound indefinitely. Speech-acts of the current status of asylum seekers who are awaiting a decision are persistent and convey a sense of desperation, anxiety, anger, which finds its nucleus at the heart of the period of liminality in an open, in-between space of revised time (Knaller 1999:11). Seeking asylum 'constitutes a major component of their understanding of their lives' (Linde 1993:4). Consequently, they must be able to give some account of how they came to be in this predicament, because as we will see in the next section, people's identities are in part defined by this predicament (Linde 1993:4).

Asylum seekers can use this plot, in which the central role is played by the immigration system, as the crux which links events and people, without which the monologue of asylum seekers would be dislocated and disorientating (Kirkman 2002). Take one of Mrs Z's monologues, for example:

It is very good living in London now and in this flat. In the hotel was very hard because Mr Z and I, always in the same room. We never could get away from each other. But now it's different. Mr Z, he can stay up until very late and watch TV, but now I can go to bedroom and go to sleep. This I cannot do in Ivanhoe [hotel in Great Yarmouth]. Also, in Ivanhoe there were young men who take fruit and vegetable and food from the fridge that was not theirs and eat them. They did not try to hide and if someone catch them, only they laugh and still they eat. This was very difficult for me – I write on my food so that they see which food is ours, but still they take and eat. And I did say nothing because you know I don't want to make any trouble for me and Mr Z and we have baby. Now I have my own fridge and it is very good.

In the Ivanhoe I was always going up and down the stairs to go to the kitchen and then I forget something and need to go back up the stairs to the room and then downstairs. I prayed to God to help out of this situation and find somewhere else to live. Now my prayers are answer and I leave Ivanhoe. Now only I pray for positive decision. Now only I worry about this. But you know, I am very worried that we don't get good decision. Because we are on appeal, and maybe we only get negative decision again. If we get negative decision then what can I do? If there is negative decision there is nothing to help because my Uncle, he cannot be sponsor because he cannot afford. He say he help us anytime, but I cannot ask him, you understand?

(Mrs Z, Iranian asylum seeker, London, 2003)

The exploratory aspect of the monologue allows us to observe asylum seekers' speeches as flowing from their current status, and exploring the possibilities of the future, alternatives of their current predicament, opinions, objections and analyses. In this monologue memories and speech-acts of the past and present are in reference to their current predicament and how it may affect the future (Kirkman 2002:33). Thus, the monologue is a strategy of asylum seekers to push the boundaries of their predicament and to negotiate a possible future. As Kirkman says, people have 'the crucial ability to envisage alternatives, and to conceive of other ways of being or acting' (2002:32).

It is possible to see how the monologue through its exploratory nature becomes inextricably linked to repetition, as the monologue delves into the intentions and possibilities (see Mills 1991; Grima 1993) of the immigration system, of other asylum seekers and the British community. In this way the monologue is like sonar, using sound to navigate, communicate and pick up bits and pieces of information to fashion and weave into a speech-act of understanding of the asylum process and life in the British community. In doing so, an asylum seeker hopes to discover various ways of securing a future. These monologues reveal potentialities:

[...] they take on the form of subjunctives, dispositionals, and contrary-to-fact conditionals. That is, they are concerned with what would be the case were certain conditions to be actualised. [...] Insofar as it is future-oriented, it nurtures the hope that when inquiry is pursued long enough, a picture will have been painted in whose truth a community of inquirers will have concurred.

(Daniel 1996:52)

Consequently, we may understand the monologue as a technique engendered by asylum seekers to seek to secure a future and find the essence of reason behind their predicament. But, in doing so, we may also realise that the very production of a monologue shapes identity (Rapport 2000:8). Through the reiteration and exploration of possibilities and understanding, an asylum seeker is seeking to locate a sense of self.

Heroic Stories

Mr I, an Iraqi Kurd, recounted his attempt to flee Iraq:

'Many people died crossing the border, many people. You have to cross the border at night and go so quietly otherwise you will be shot. I crossed the border with a group of people, and we got shot at, so everyone ran in different directions. I was left with my friend and we hid for 3 hours. There was a terrible smell. It was of something dead and rotting. We looked behind us and there was a body, an Iraqi man. We think that maybe he was sinking in the water and someone must have pulled him out and just left him on the beach by the river. But animals had been eating his face and body, there were bits out of him. We think he was from Iraq but it was hard to tell. The only thing left intact was his shoes.'

Q: So what did you do after you were hiding?

'We waited until just before dawn and then we went across the border into Turkey and went straight to the police. The police pinched [punched] us and sent us back to Iraq, where we were put in prison. But after that I kept trying'.

(Mr I, Iraqi asylum seeker, Peterborough, 2003)

Heroic stories convey a sense of triumph, when one finds one has survived a horrendous and dangerous journey. Re-telling such a story emphasises one's survival and the loss of life for others. It highlights one's ability to overcome the strange and alienating experiences of flight, and suggests the possibility of future triumphs. Metraux calls this an 'adventure myth' whereby one represents oneself as courageous and curious and 'experiencing unknown ways of living and hidden human resources' (1991:9). Telling and re-telling one's story of flight gives a sense of mastery over one's experiences. In recounting a story, one sees oneself as both the victim and the hero; the victim struggles through torturous experience, the hero

defies danger and death. But in such a heroic story, one is re-inserted into that journey and one re-experiences it again and again as if to make sense of one's survival, when others have perished.

The heroic story re-articulates fragmented events. The hero is able to identify the body of the Iraqi man – a faceless victim (as 'animals had been eating his face') who did not survive the journey. The hero, through the retelling, identifies the identifiable. The hero survives and thus his identity, within the context of the journey, can remain intact. To fail is to lose one's personal identity – as does the faceless man. The faceless man's heroic story cannot be told. In this way, the recounting of this journey is a discovery of courage. This is evident in Mr I's persistence: 'After that I kept trying', he says, meaning after everything that he had suffered and experienced. This persistence is found in the articulation of danger, the self and what Schwartz calls 'acting well' or one's ability to cope with such an experience (2004:1).

Unlike Camus's accusation of Sisyphus, Mr I is not the absurd hero. His fate is not sealed. His speech-act attempts to 'render coherent a complex of boundless continually evolving phenomena' (Stone-Mediatore 2003:165). His heroic storying reveals a multiplicity of movement – of physical journeying, cognitive movement, remembering and retelling. As Mr I has shown us, even the hero seeking asylum encompasses multiple traumas experienced through movement. Out of this multiplicity, two movements become the crux of experiences to come, and these are the move out of one's own country (Iraq) and into another country (such as the UK). Thus, someone like Mr I experiences difficulties both leaving and entering, so that the heroic struggle to seek asylum is as much to as it is from a country. It is as much into as it is out of, both physically and emotionally.

Heroic stories are snatches of movement and encompass a sense of no beginning and no end. Mr I did not start his story at the very beginning nor end his story. The

outcome is unspoken, it is self-evident – he finally escaped Iraq and arrived in the UK. Thus, the self has become its own story that has not ended – his very being is a tangible embodiment of his journey. Almost by default, a person becomes both the hero and consumed by terror. But fear is not just held by the individual, but by a group. This shared fear can break social unity, networks of social support and security because of distrust and/or trauma (see Silove 1999; Schweitzer *et al.* 2002; Coker 2004b). Asylum seekers attempt to reinstate social support through transference whilst telling a story.

Telling a powerful and shocking story of one's journey to one who is uninitiated in such experiences (such as myself) takes the experience out of the extraordinary through its repetition. Through the movement of its reiteration, the dangerous power of such an experience is reduced by transferring it onto another through a normalising practice. By transference, I refer to the placement of 'unconscious and archaic images, thoughts and feelings' of the asylum seeker onto the listener during the recitation of an experience (Tobin 1986:122-123; see also Freud 1900 [1953]; LeVine 1981). Bruner describes this as speech-act self-banalization (1991:9). In such a case, the storyteller both transfers a painful experience, which relieves the burden, and incorporates a social response.

Asylum seekers in East Anglia experience the severe loss of their immediate and extended families, as well as isolation from their communities and ethnic groups (Metraux 1991; Knudsen 1995). In hearing these stories, I realised that the intention was not simply a question of them telling me their stories, but of a need to share the burden, to reinstate social unity and to bestow upon me a 'political stake of making me adopt their truths' (Robben 1996:84). As Mr Z said to me:

No one can know, really know what it is like, except for those who experience it. You know what it is like because you are on the inside to a certain extent.

(Mr Z, Iranian asylum seeker, Great Yarmouth, 2003)

As an anthropologist, I was entrusted with the task of relaying their current immigration crisis, and in some cases also providing some remittance for the telling of stories through the provision of information of services available to asylum seekers (see Malkki 1995:50). This is the exchange that occurred between myself and Mr I, as I recorded it in my field diary prior to the telling of his heroic story:

I asked Mr I if he had managed to get a group together for us to speak with. I had asked this of him last time. He said, 'No I have not' – just like that, no excuses or apologies or anything. It was then that I realized that he was never going to arrange anything! Mr I reiterated that he was quite happy for me to interview him anytime. A focus group just wasn't going to happen. For one thing, Mr I seemed to me to be the kind of man who demanded attention on himself. It was then that Mr I said to me, 'If I do this for you, you have to do something for me in return'. Okay, I thought, fair enough. When I asked him what it was he wished me to do he said, 'Find if anyone in Norwich needs an interpreter'. I said I'd ask some contacts, but that I couldn't promise anything. I wasn't at all surprised that he asked me this. He is a clever man, confident, and knows how to work around situations.

Movement is then exchanged between the storyteller and the listener through the process of transference. As Jackson describes, stories are actively reworked 'both in dialogue with others and within one's own imagination' rather than being passively re-experienced (2002:15). Through telling the story of one's journey, the individual has transferred the storied experience to the community, reinstating social unity and support which had previously been disrupted.

The Movement of Place, Identity and Nostalgia

I now turn to consider the notion of the chaotic ambiguity of movement and stillness within the context of place, identity and nostalgia. What follows is an extract from my diary of a discussion during the lead up to the Iraq war when Mr A, a Kurdish Iraqi, conveyed the intensity of his feelings to those discussing the conflict. It illustrates the way in which past experiences, future possibilities and current status may collide with indistinct and confused notions of self and arise in the form of a speech-act. The GYROS drop-in centre became an arena for such discussions drawn from

varied real-life experiences of conflict, persecution and terror – from Kosovan, Angolan, Armenian, Iranian and Iraqi perspectives. But although these discussions were of intellectual and emotional interest to everyone, it was the Iraqi asylum seekers who held the greatest investment in such discussions. What follows is an extract from my field diary of one such discussion:

The discussion began with Mr D, a support worker, asking Mr A, an Iraqi asylum seeker and Mr X, a Kosovan refugee with a keen interest in politics, whether he was going to attend an anti-war demonstration in London. Mr X ‘ummed’ and ‘ahhed’. Mr D began to fondly tease him, saying that he was actually pro the war and that he believed that the Iraqi regime should be bombed. Mr X said that it was not that he wanted them to bomb, rather, that they need to get rid of Saddam and that the bombing would be the way to do it – any necessary measures. Mr A, a Kurdish Iraqi asylum seeker, said that he was not sure as to whether he would attend and that he was in two minds about it. Mr X said to Mr A:

‘So, Mr A, what are we going to do? Are we going to this protest or not?’

It was here that Mr A made his thoughts very clear.

‘I am in two minds about it. Saddam regime needs to end, but bombing would kill innocent people...’

Mr X began to put forward his argument as to why a war was necessary, but Mr A began to get very upset about what Mr X thought and ended up shouting and was shaking with emotion. As he spoke, a few times he slammed a pen he was holding down on the table. Everyone had been discussing the war with quite light humour, suddenly we all realised that what we were talking about was Mr A’s home, his life and his situation. We did not really understand it as Mr A did. Mr X acknowledged this to Mr A. Everyone in the room fell silent and listened with quiet respect to Mr A’s protest.

Mr A was arguing that Saddam is responsible for murder and genocide and that all the United States were concerned about was the oil. At one point Mr A raised his voice and said that when he was a small child his mother had put him on her back and ran for their lives to avoid the bombs being dropped around them by Saddam. He slammed the pen on the table, the corner of his lip quivered.

‘This has been going on for years, so why then had the US not intervened then? Because they are more concerned with obtaining oil rather than protecting people like me!’

The room was very quiet while he was speaking. So, Mr A decided that no, he would not go to the protest, because really it would be like supporting Saddam’s regime. Mr X asked Mr A what his answer to the situation would be. Mr A said that:

‘What the US should do is compile documents which prove all the human rights atrocities that Saddam has committed, take them to the UN, say “here is the proof” and then arrest him!’

Soon after his outburst Mr A made his excuses and left the room. Those remaining returned quietly to discussions which did not relate to the war or Mr A’s outburst.

This conversation provides an insight into the kind of movement generated by an asylum seekers' speech-act. Asylum seekers such as Mr A have a focus that is multi-layered: on homeland, host country, who they were and who they are becoming. Clifford's notion of rootlessness disrupts the implicit notion of placedness and rooting of cultures (1988:338). Malkki points out that it is assumed that 'violated, broken roots signal an ailing cultural identity and a damaged nationality' (1992:34). Asylum seekers as a category are problematic in that they do not adhere to distinct categories of bounded culture. Rather than being fixated on a sense of nationalistic and 'categorically distinct collective identities' they straddle multiple facets of their identities depending on the extent to which they are restricted from envisaging a future (Malkki 1992:36).

This aspect of asylum seekers may seem chaotic, particularly in light of Appadurai's statement that there is also an assumption that 'natives are not the only persons who are from certain places, and belong to those places, but they are also those who are somehow incarcerated, or confined, in those places' (1988:37). When asylum seekers become confined in other places, as is our interest here, we have another range of movement between place of incarceration to place of memories and future ideals. At this point, one might consider whether the notion of nostalgia is appropriate to apply to asylum seekers, such as Mr A, who makes a case from tormented experiences, or Mr I who tells a heroic story of his past.

Nostalgia comes from the Greek verb *nostos*, meaning to return home, and *algia*, meaning a painful condition (Davis 1979:1). Nostalgia can range from homesickness for family, missing friends, traditional religious meetings, and home-cooked meals, to a nostalgia of nationalism in terms of politically motivated memory (Daniel 1995:241-242). Nostalgia can assist in explaining the present as well as holding a temporary escapee and refuge from the present situation. Nostalgia is generally

'practiced in diverse ways' to exercise one's attachment to 'appropriate feelings towards their histories, products and capabilities', as well as, 'their detachment from and active resistance to disempowering conditions' (Battaglia 1995:77; see also Seremetakis 1994). Nostalgia can act as a coping mechanism for the past, as we saw with Mr I's recollection (Trotter 1999:21). Rosaldo contends that nostalgia is an emotion that can evoke an innocent and tender way of remembering a previous existence and way of life. It can also assist in communicating a sense of loss, or what has been destroyed in the very process of leaving the homeland (1989:70-71).

As much as these kinds of memories did occur, I suggest that the kind of nostalgia that was far more prevalent was a focus upon what went 'wrong' and the future possibilities of what could be. Nostalgia for asylum seekers is more of a yearning for stability that they may have once possessed. But at the same time, nostalgia is also apparent in the yearning for future possibilities, and a way out of their current predicament. As I have argued throughout this chapter, movement is evident where it may seem unfeasible. For asylum seekers in East Anglia, I suggest that nostalgia, evident in speech-acts, seems more of a vehicle (Battaglia 1995:77) used to surpass a Sisyphusian scenario.

In his outburst, Mr A reveals a fractured self – no longer a 'categorically pure' (Malkki 1992:3) Iraqi, nor a settled refugee. He is at once rootless and unbound to his 'native' home and yet incarcerated within the confines of the UK and the immigration system. This blurring of categories, rootlessness, and nostalgia all point toward a kind of movement. In general, I suggest that the greater the sense of stillness, the more intensive the speech-acts were employed. Mr A resides in a space that is fractured and fluid, and where movement and stillness tussle the ultimate quest for authenticity.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the idea that movement and stillness are mediated by a sense of journeying as expressed through speech-acts. Often speech acts are a way of making sense of previous experiences or future possibilities. In the form of stories, such speech acts are coping strategies. I have argued that reworking experiences through stories is a way of understanding the coexistence, or what Heidegger calls *authenticity*, that is, the ‘uncoverdness’ of certainty and uncertainty, security and insecurity (1967:68). Recounting stories is a search for meaning, or a ‘truth’ of Being-in-the-world. Movement can be found in the strategies of speech-acts, such as the monologue, and heroic stories. I have also explored the chaotic intensity to movement and stillness, as place, identity and nostalgia collide in the form of an asylum seeker’s speech-act. I have argued that most asylum seekers perceive a kind of containment and stillness within the place of seeking asylum.

The suffering is predominant in speech-acts, and can be equated to the suffering of Sisyphus. However, Camus was correct in pointing out the moment of consciousness during the pause that Sisyphus experiences:

At the very end of his long effort measured by skyless space and time without depth, the purpose is achieved. Then Sisyphus watches the stone rush down in a few moments toward the lower world whence he will have to push it up again toward the summit. He goes back down to the plain. It is during that return, that pause, that Sisyphus interests me. A face that toils so close to stones is already stone itself! I see that man going back down with a heavy yet measured step toward the torment of which he will never know the end. That hour like a breathing-space which returns as surely as his suffering, that is the hour of consciousness. At each of those moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks toward the lairs of the gods, he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock.

(Camus 1955)

Movement is borne from stillness – it is one of the coping strategies of asylum seekers in the ultimate quest for authenticity. Despite the sense that, like Sisyphus, their suffering will be eternal, asylum seekers are constantly producing movement. Thus, stillness and movement can occur at the same time and uncertainty/certainty,

insecurity/security, loss/hope all highlight the ambiguity of seeking asylum. For example, certainty is often sought in truth and understanding, but I argue that certainty can only be sought in the acceptance of uncertainty and the movement between the two. In which case, in the search and acceptance of chaos and truth, understanding is gradually revealed. And yet stillness remains the propellant of movement and indicates the search for authenticity.

This struggle is articulated through speech-acts and stories which are movement in themselves, as well as being about movement. Thus one may observe through the examples of the monologue, heroic stories and past experiences, that storying and speech-acts transform the stoicism of one's predicament. Consequently, speech-acts become coping strategies of understanding and becoming.

The practical consequences of movement and stillness within speech acts, I believe, are yet to be appreciated. A focus on movement and stillness highlights the immense importance of perspectives and experiences of the asylum seeker. This lived experience mediated through speech acts challenges their interlocutors – government bodies, NGO's and researchers alike – to value the breadth of agentic knowledge and future possibilities.

Had Sisyphus given up all hope? Or, like asylum seekers, was he still searching for a 'way out' – in stillness and reflection, as much as in movement. For him, perhaps the stillness was in the movement and the movement was in that stillness of reflection while the rock again rolled down the mountain. For asylum seekers, this is the predicament of being as well as not being-in-the-world, a reflection of the existential journey.

CHAPTER 8

EPILOGUE: WHITHER REFUGEE?

In this thesis I have tried to do two things. First, I have highlighted the interactions and context within which asylum seekers must negotiate their identity – one which constructs and constrains people. Second, I have endeavoured to show that a greater understanding of asylum seeker issues and multi-ethnic relationships need to be explored through direct communication with asylum seekers themselves.

In the previous chapters I have followed the movement of asylum seekers through their speech-acts. It is a movement through the immigration system, and also an existential movement as each person tries to negotiate their existence. In so doing, this thesis highlights the notion of movement as an underlying propellant of an asylum seeker's ability to negotiate their status. By revealing the assumptions of a voiceless and vulnerable group of people, I am then able to raise the issue of policy changes which complement a more inclusive and humanistic involvement of asylum seekers with a greater Home Office support for the refugee support industry.

The theoretical critique presented in this thesis has focussed on the core un-reflexive assumption that asylum seekers occupy a position of both vulnerability and a potential threat to a perceived notion of Britishness. In doing so, locals virtually perceive asylum seekers as a singular ethnic grouping. This is reinforced by the media and the Home Office. There is a failure within the general public to consider the relationship between the political construction of asylum seekers as a potential threat, and the corresponding negative attitudes toward asylum seekers. The Home Office's social policy unit, in deliberately segregating asylum seekers from the notion

of integration, I suggest, further reinforces the notion of distinction of visible minorities. The theoretical aspect of this thesis has pointed toward the way in which asylum seekers and the broader community are inextricably tangled in construction of self and other. This is particularly relevant if one considers those asylum seekers who do obtain refugee status.

In this concluding chapter, I will reflect on the major findings of this thesis, before considering further directions for research in this field. I will then explore the positioning of refugees through a consideration of my informants' new status as refugees.

The Journey's Conclusions

This thesis has been a journey in itself, following the journey of asylum seekers and exploring the interactions between asylum seeker and the main players with whom they must interact – the immigration system, locals, other asylum seekers and support workers. I suggest that these connections and the perspectives and struggle from the asylum seekers' point of view have been largely overlooked in mainstream literature.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, writings on asylum seekers have tended to focus on a singular ethnic group, such as Hutu refugees in Tanzania (Malkki 1995), Tamil refugees (Daniel 1995, 1996), Tamil asylum seekers in Norway (Fuglerud 1999), Tamil refugees in Switzerland (McDowell 1996), Somali refugees (Griffiths 2002; Zarowsky 2004), Sudanese refugees in North America (Abusharaf 2002), Asia Minor refugees in Greece (Hirschon 1989), Cambodian refugees in North America (Hopkins 1996) and Kurds (Wahlbeck 1999). In contrast, literature on the experiences of asylum seekers based on shared experiences rather than shared ethnicity is scarce (Gilad 1990).

Particular attention to refugee issues within the industrialised Western world context also demands far more attention. And while the state of refugee camps and internally displaced people requires attention, a focus on the issues of asylum seekers and refugees within Western countries is also of importance. By readdressing the way in which asylum seekers and refugees receive our attention in countries such as the UK, Australia and the US, a greater understanding of refugee needs elsewhere may be generated. This is understandable given that a formalised and protracted dispersal system to place asylum seekers in remote and geographically isolated areas has had its beginnings only relatively recently (since 2000). What is also lacking in refugee studies, I suggest, is a perspective that encompasses the lived experience of asylum seekers within an increasingly globalised and multicultural context. This is the starting point for the analysis presented in this thesis. The research itself has looked at the lived and shared experience of asylum seekers and the interaction with others and the major findings are four-fold.

Firstly, asylum seekers negotiate their day-to-day lives by employing coping mechanisms based on a hierarchical system of need. As was noted in Chapter 5, asylum seekers may adjust their situational identity according to the context (Cohen 1994:205). For example, an asylum seeker may draw on his/her ethnicity rather than his/her asylum seeker identity in order to avoid the stigma associated with seeking asylum. Therefore, in the hierarchy of need, an asylum seeker's past experiences may be lower down on the hierarchical scale due to more pressing needs of immediate survival. Secondly, rather than asylum seekers being voiceless and not wishing to communicate, as some gatekeepers in the UK informed me, instead many asylum seekers isolated from family, friends and community are desperate to reinstate communications. Consequently, my informants were so bound up by their

liminal status that this occupied the majority of their speech-acts. Thirdly, speech-acts reflect the positioning of asylum seekers vis-à-vis themselves and others: asylum seekers are an integral part in the shaping of British national identity. Finally, movement is a strategic counter to the notion of the vulnerable asylum seeker. It works in opposition to the stereotypical notion of the asylum seeker.

Future Journeys

Strategies could be developed to work towards the resolution of some of the difficulties experienced by asylum seekers identified throughout this thesis. Future research into the topic of asylum seekers in Western states needs to take a broader, more comparative approach. Such research would also assist in developing changes in policy. I identify eight key directives for policy-based change that, I argue, would greatly benefit both the host country and the asylum seekers and refugees who reside within its borders. Firstly, there must be an acknowledgement of the changing shape of the political, social and economic landscape that is influenced by an increasingly globalised world and population flows. Secondly, the connectivity of country and individual crises on the local landscape – for example, the war in Iraq – has implications on individuals in the UK. Thirdly, the Home Office must set an example as to the kind of rhetoric used in discussing issues pertaining to asylum seekers. Part of this requires a recognition that asylum seekers are being largely equated to a single ethnicity. Fourth, consideration should be given to reinstating work rights to asylum seekers whose application remains under consideration for an excessive amount of time. This will ease the burden on social security and reduce the stigma associated with participation within the immigration process. There is a need to recognise that a lack of work rights forces some individuals into the underground economy (Reyneri 2003). Fifth, support organisations should rework the notion of consultation as a one-way process and

instead develop it as a constructive process that provides space for asylum seeker input and addressing of individual needs. This would open a channel of communication with asylum seekers in a way which is mutually beneficial. Sixth, considering the ongoing issue of asylum seeker assistance, NGOs with a proven track record of asylum seeker assistance require core funding. This will remove the degree to which asylum seeker assistance might be engineered merely to chase funding. Seven, further research on the journey from asylum seeker to refugee to citizen would be of immense use. Here, the notion of movement could be further explored as a comparison between the different categories and the extent to which these reflect a changed notion of one's place in the world. Finally, Norwich is set to be a prime location in which further research can be carried out. In December 2006, Norwich became the first city to receive the initial intake of twenty Congolese humanitarian entrants via the UNHCR through the Home Office's Gateway Protection Programme (EERA-CARI 2007). This new era in directly receiving refugees designated as such by the UNHCR could provide a fascinating comparison to the Home Office treatment of refugees who have previously been asylum seekers in the UK. In participating in the Gateway Programme, Norwich is paving the way for new and potentially successful policy directions within the refugee industry.

Refugeeness

The majority of my informants have ended their journey of seeking asylum only to begin another journey as refugee. However, this was not the case for Mr A. The appeal process again rejected his claim, and in not choosing to accept this decision forced him underground without security benefits, housing, or legal work and in constant fear of being caught by the immigration authorities and being returned to Iraq.

In 2003, Mr and Mrs J won their appeal and were granted refugee status. The day

that they told me this news, I was still in the UK and visited them in their small room of the Montague Hotel. We all sat down and Mr J searched for the court document which he wanted to show me. It had their solicitor's letter stapled to it, and the Home Office document. Mr J showed me the end of it which said, 'I hereby declare that the defendant be granted refugee status'. Then Mr J handed me the most sought after document, a document which freed them from the asylum seeker journey – grant of refugee status.

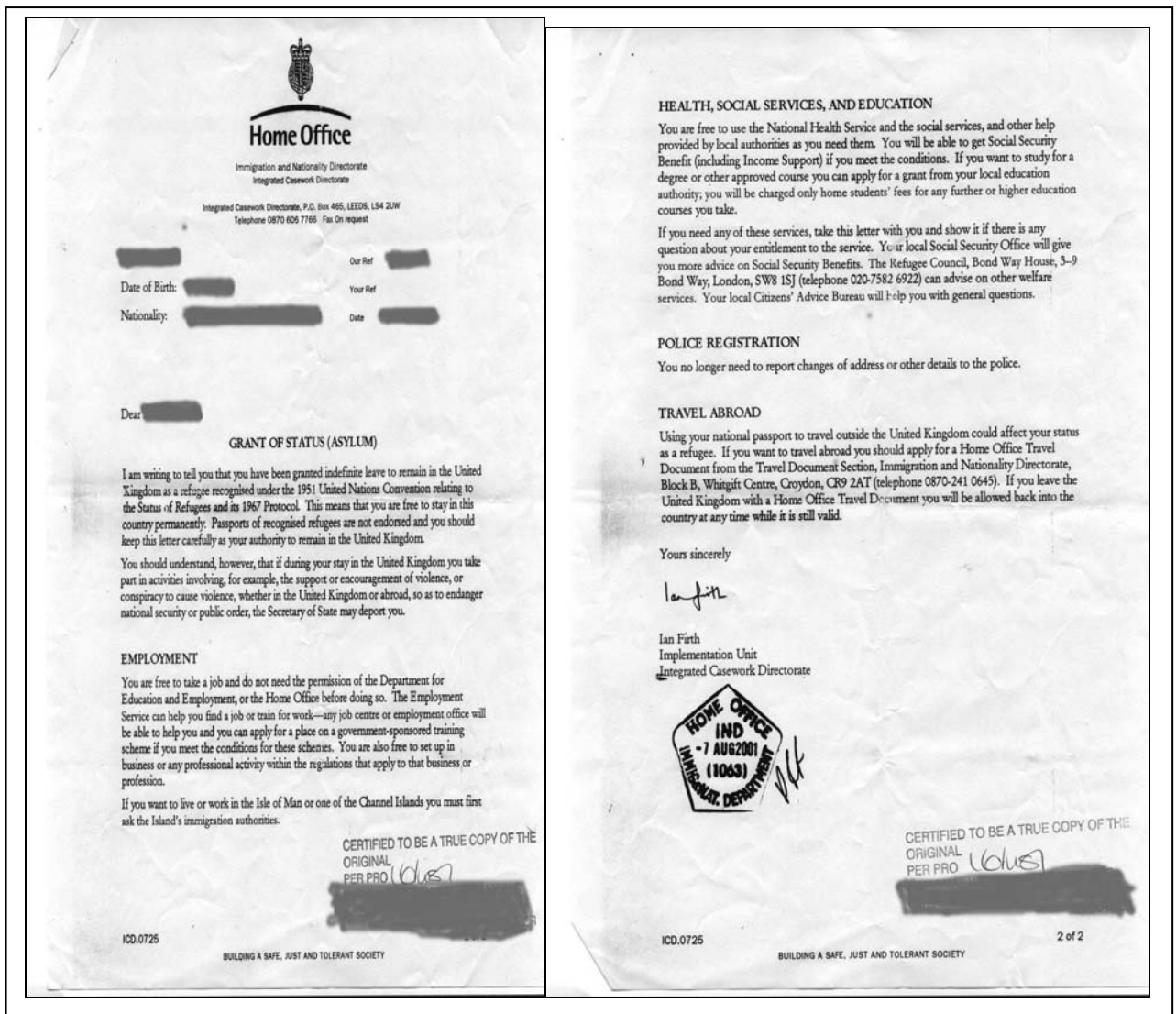


Figure 27: Example of a letter from the Home Office granting asylum (Home Office 2003).

Mr and Mrs Z also finally received refugee status (see Figure 28). In October 2003,

the Home Office announced an amnesty for families who had sought asylum prior to October 2000 (Home Office 2004a). Mr and Mrs Z were eligible for the amnesty because their child had been born in the UK between October 2000 and October 2003 (Refugee Council 2004b:1). For Mrs K this amnesty also provided an immediate end to her seven-year wait for a decision on her claim for asylum. Mr X had been awarded an ELR (Exceptional Leave to Remain) which provided temporary refugee status for three years. During that time Mr X studied at college and then entered the health profession. The significant contribution he had made to society ensured him ILR (Indefinite Leave to Remain) or refugee status, and in 2007 he was awarded British citizenship.

For the few asylum seekers who fell into the quota of asylum seekers to receive refugee status, such as Mr X, Mrs and Mrs Z, Mrs K and Mr and Mrs J, this was a momentous event that would see the end to a period of intense anguish. However, it also meant the beginnings of refugee status that was still significantly distanced from the sense of belonging that many British locals experienced.

Final Remarks

The movement from asylum seeker to refugee always intrigued me. Would this be a significant shift in how people saw themselves? Or was it just another bureaucratic definition, particularly as I had been told time and time again by asylum seekers that they considered themselves to be refugees despite their immigration status. I posed the question to Mr N and Mr I: When do you stop being a refugee? Mr I said that it would be when he had a British passport and British citizenship. However, Mr N said that perhaps you do not see yourself as a refugee anymore when others do not perceive you as one – when you are accepted. This is what Ahluwalia means when he refers to the ‘transformation of the settler to the native’, which he sees as being ‘fundamentally based on consent’ (2001:72). One has to be accepted in order to feel

a sense of belonging to a community. However, Ahluwalia also suggests that becoming a part of a community is 'a process that is firmly embedded within the imagination' (2001:72). It is in this way that identity is not fixed but moving between perceptions of self and locals or self as a local.

Movement continues in different forms as one struggles to find one's place in the world. Moving between being and nothingness is confronted by asylum seekers in an effort to confound it (see Sartre 1957). Nothingness, Jackson describes, 'arises out of an inability to act' (1998:17). Speech-acts challenge nothingness into being – one acts instead of being acted upon (Jackson 1998:123). Asylum seekers, I conclude, are continuously negotiating their existence, of being, rather than nothingness.

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